



## NO CHAOS

Actor Rakul Preet Singh says she can't hear the chaos of life due to her thick hair

LEISURE **P2**



## COVID RETURNS

Beijing residents are asked to wear face masks before going out of their houses as the city logs new cases

INTERNATIONAL **P10**



## INDIA IN COMMAND

Jasprit Bumrah-led bowling attack helps India take control of the second Test against Australia in Melbourne

SPORTS **P12**

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 265 | www.orissapost.com

BHUBANESWAR | SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27 | 2020

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IRREGULAR by MANJUL



I am here to seek govt's permission to fall in love

## PARI MURDER CASE

## LAB 'FAILS' TO DETERMINE SEMEN STAINS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nayagarh, Dec 26:** The State Forensic Laboratory, Bhubaneswar has been unable to determine the semen-stain found on the frock of slain five-year-old girl 'Pari' of Jadupur village in Nayagarh district.

The authorities of the state forensic laboratory conducted the chemical examination of the frock and a jute sack but failed to determine the group of the semen and blood stains as it has been spoiled. This was stated in a report submitted by the laboratory.

The report adds that blood and semen stains could not be detected in the exhibits submitted before it for examination. The SFL report has led to the fear that it may not be admitted as evidence in the court. Legal experts claimed that such a report will help the accused get acquitted from the court.

The local police had recovered skeletal remains, one frock and a GI wire wrapped in a gunny bag from the backyard of the minor girl's house, 10 days after she had gone missing. The police had stored the items for many days before producing them in court.

Now, questions are being raised as to how the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the murder case, will prove that the semen belongs to Saroj Sethy who has been arrested by the SIT in connection with the case. The SIT started its probe in the case from December 1.

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	27.7°C	28.0°C
TEMP MIN	13.8°C	12.0°C
Humidity	80%	68%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast		
Fog/mist in the morning		

## Elephant deaths on the rise in Sambalpur

APART FROM POACHING, TRAIN MISHAPS ARE ANOTHER BIG FACTOR FOR JUMBO DEATHS

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, Dec 26:** A number of factors like loss of habitat mainly contributed by deforestation, poaching, man-animal conflicts, mishaps due to electrification and railway lines have led to sharp fall in elephant population in Sambalpur. In the last ten years, 154 elephants have died in the district, a report said.

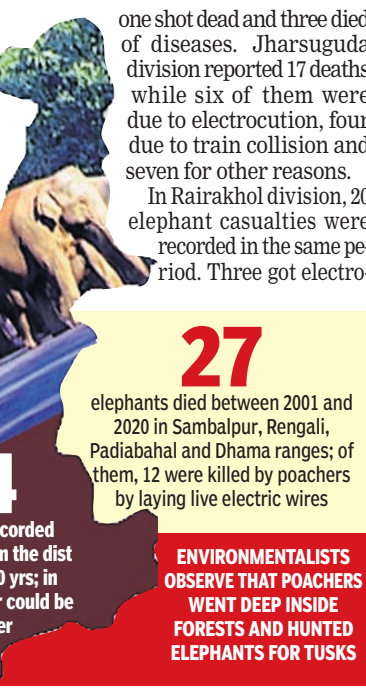
The number of jumbos has been dwindling while environmentalists blame the Forest department for its failure to protect the animals. In many cases, the department allegedly suppresses the real causes of the casualties to ward off the heat. In some cases, deaths are attributed to diseases or natural deaths, sources said.

According to official sources, the district has recorded deaths of 154 elephants in six ranges. In reality, the number of casualties is much higher, sources added.

According to an official report, 27 elephants died between 2001 and 2020

in Sambalpur, Rengali, Padiabahal and Dhama ranges. Of them, 12 were killed by poachers by laying live electric wires. Two died in train accident, four shot down and nine others died of sun stroke and other reasons.

In the same period, 30 elephants died in Bamara division. Six got electrocuted, three shot down by poachers while 21 died of sun strokes, diseases and other reasons. Bargarh division has recorded 11 elephant deaths while seven got electrocuted,



one shot dead and three died of diseases. Jharsuguda division reported 17 deaths while six of them were due to electrocution, four due to train collision and seven for other reasons.

In Rairakhol division, 20 elephant casualties were recorded in the same period. Three got electro-

cuted, two shot dead by poachers and four died due to unknown reasons. Around 11 died due to diseases. In Hirakud division, one elephant has died.

On the other hand, their census report is not encouraging. In 2010, there were 249 elephants in six forest divisions, but their number continued to decline. In 2012, the number came down to 229.

As per the 2015 Census, their number sharply came down to 137. However, the numbers increased to 192 in 2017.

It was said that 45 elephants were counted additionally in 2015 and 2017 Censuses. Due to Covid restrictions, Census has been stalled in 2020. However, the office of the RCCF claimed that the number of elephants has increased.

There are also reasons emanating from a failure of agreement between the Forest department and the Railways that eventually led to mishaps. Forest officials admit that caution had not been issued for the stretch where a train hit the tusker on the track on 33-km Jujumara-Haribari stretch.

# Govt-farmers talks to resume

Sixth round of talks Tuesday, repeal of 3 laws key demand by farmers

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** A group of 40 farmer union leaders Saturday announced that the government-farmers dialogue will resume with the sixth round of talks Tuesday.

The ongoing farmers' agitation entered its 31st day Saturday.

The group reiterated that the repeal of the three contentious farm Acts and the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2020 was their 'first and foremost' demand followed by all other issues.

The meeting will be held at 11 am at Vigyan Bhavan in Central Delhi—the same venue where previous rounds of talks were held. Past five rounds of talks have remained inconclusive with the farmers adamant on the repeal of the three farm laws and the government saying it can amend the laws but withdrawal is not possible.

The Union Agriculture Ministry in an official letter also confirmed the resumption of talks mentioning a four-point agenda of the meeting that includes 'modalities to be adopted for the repeal of the three Central farm acts; mechanisms to be adopted to make remunerative MSP (Minimum Support Price) recommended by the National Farmers' Commission into a legally guaranteed entitlement for all farmers and all agricultural commodities; amendments to be made and notified



Protest underway at Singhu border

in the 'Commission for the Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Ordinance, 2020' to exclude farmers from the penal provisions of the Ordinance; and changes to be made in the draft Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020 to protect the interests of farmers.'

All the farmers' associations under the banner of All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) reiterated that "they are and have always been open to a sincere dialogue."

After a meeting at Singhu border, the AIKSCC reiterated that the "first and foremost demand of the farmers of India is to repeal of three farm Acts and the Electricity Bill, 2020, every other demand only follows this."

Farmers have been agitating for years, under AIKSCC for 'MSP at C2+50% for all crops and all farmers and waiver of debts of all farmers and landless agriculture workers, adivasis'. Comprehensive Cost (C2) is the actual cost of production as it takes into account for rent and

interest foregone on the land and machinery owned by farmers.

"But instead of solving these problems, the Modi government came up with the three ordinances and the EB 2020, which erodes all current benefits and securities and creates legal structure for control by corporates over farming processes, input sales, machinery, crop purchase, storage, transport, processing and sale of food. This will indebt the farmers further; suicides will rise, crops will become cheap while food will become costly and hoarding and black marketing will rise," the AIKSCC said in a statement.

The Working Group of AIKSCC clarifies that all farmer welfare schemes are riddled with corruption and high non-performance.

In the ODF for example, AIKSCC said, 90 per cent of toilets made under the scheme are incomplete and in disuse and 95 per cent of all bank accounts created under Jan Dhan remain zero balance for most of the year.

The group alleged that PMKISAN is a pittance of ₹16.32 per day, worth 800 gms of wheat flour and that PMFBY is a surreptitious scheme for transfer of farmers contribution and government farmer funds to district wise allocated insurance companies having provided with captive premium markets to earn. They earned ₹2500 crores in 2017-18 and up to ₹10,000 later.

## Balaram scheme to cover more farmers

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** With a view to including more number of landless farmers under Balaram scheme, the state government has revised the operational guidelines of the agricultural scheme.

Now, the sharecroppers having marginal amount of land will get the benefits of Balaram scheme.

According to sources, if a farmer has a small piece of farmland and s/he wants to cultivate the lands of other owner, s/he will get credit under Balaram scheme. Earlier, the government had decided to include only landless sharecroppers under the scheme. **MORE P3**



The BJD supremo, Naveen Patnaik (R), addresses party workers

**“National parties remember women's empowerment during elections and commit in their manifestos only to conveniently forget after winning the elections...”**

NAVEEN PATNAIK | CM & BJD PRESIDENT

the BJD has been giving importance to women and has reserved 50 per cent seats for women in Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

"Empowerment of women is the empowerment of the nation. No household, no society, no state, no country has ever moved forward without empow-

erment of its women," he said.

The BJD president reminded that former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik in 1992 created history nationwide by enacting 33 per cent reservation for women in the Panchayats, urban bodies and government jobs in the state.

Notably, women have generously voted for the regional party in every election and the party is trying to consolidate its vote bank further.

BJD general secretary (organisation) Pranab Prakash Das said the government has achieved so many goals at national and international levels only due to the hard work and dedication of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.



## MP Cabinet clears anti-love jihad Bill

The Bill will be introduced in the upcoming Assembly session, and once passed will become a law



AGENCIES

**Bhopal, Dec 26:** The Shivraj Singh Chouhan Cabinet Saturday approved the 'Madhya Pradesh Religious Freedom Bill-2020' to check the rising cases of 'love jihad' in the state.

The Bill will be introduced in the upcoming Assembly session, and once passed will become a law.

Under this law, there is a provision of awarding a maximum of 10 years imprisonment and a penalty of ₹1 lakh for forceful conversion of any person under the pretext of marriage.

According to official information, in the cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister, the 'MP Religious Freedom Bill- 2020' was passed by a voice vote.

State Home Minister Narottam Mishra said no person shall directly or otherwise attempt to convert or convert to another religion in the name of inducement, threat, force, influence, under the pretext of marriage or in any other fraudulent manner. "No person would be able to indulge in abetment or conspire to carry forceful religious conversions."

As per this anti-conversion law, a provision has been made that in violation of the prescribed provisions, a person would be punished with rigorous imprisonment of one to five years and pay a fine of ₹25,000. At the same time, for the forceful religious conversion of a woman, minor, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), a rigorous punishment ranging from two years up to 10 years and a fine of ₹50,000 would be imposed on the accused. Along with this, there would be a fine of ₹50,000 and a jail sentence of three to 10 years would be imposed for indulging in religious conversions secretly.

As per the Bill passed in the state cabinet, indulging in collective religious conversion of two or more people would amount to punishment with rigorous imprisonment of five to 10 years and a fine of ₹1 lakh. On the other hand, the offence related to forceful religious conversions would be cognizable and non-bailable; the cases of such religious conversions would be heard in the Sessions Court only.

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**FORTUNE FORECAST**

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**ARIES**

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

**TAURUS**

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

**GEMINI**

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

**CANCER**

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

**LEO**

Karmic balance dictates an equitable distribution of joy and sorrow, says Ganesha. So if your day seems drab and depressing today, rest assured, your evening shall be all the more refreshing and exciting. Surround yourself with family and friends, as you will receive royal treatment from them.

**VIRGO**

Play dodge ball with prejudice today. Do not let intolerance find shelter in you today, advises Ganesha. Instead, chances are you will seek to find love, affection and goodwill among those around you. Stay away from negativity as it may bog you down. Ganesha counsels you to have the courage to stand by your convictions.

**LIBRA**

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

**SCORPIO**

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

**SAGITTARIUS**

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

**CAPRICORN**

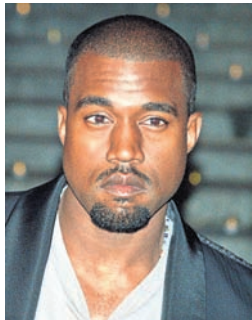
You want to enhance your knowledge by exploring foreign shores, but luck hasn't favoured you yet. Ganesha predicts today to be a favourable day for you to try again for higher studies. If associated with the Stock Market or speculation, you are likely to make profits.

**AQUARIUS**

The day is taxing. You may find that others have dumped their share of work on you. But you are not one to admit defeat, and will deal with the challenge squarely, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**

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



**KANYE WEST DROPS NEW EP AS CHRISTMAS GIFT TO FANS**

Rapper Kanye West surprised fans by releasing his new EP on Christmas. The Christian project, *Emmanuel*, is a 'celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ' and features the rappers' Sunday Service choir group, reports [thesun.co.uk](#).

**VINCENT HAS TAKEN TO WRITING MUSICALS FOR HER FAMILY**

Singer-songwriter St Vincent, who misses performing live, will feature her family in her version of *A Christmas Carol*. "I miss live shows so much. Now, I've taken to writing musicals for my family," she said.



**RAKUL SHARES HER YEAREND THOUGHTS**

**Mumbai:** Actress Rakul Preet Singh hits sultry mode in her new post on Instagram, and blame it on her hair that she is cut off from all the chaos of life.

In her new Insta pic, Rakul looks stunning in a sequined copper dress. She sports smoky eyes and has left her hair open.

"Sorry I can't hear the chaos over the volume of my hair

#yearendthoughts," she wrote alongside the image.

The actress had recently tweeted on her verified account that she has tested positive for Covid-19, adding that she had quarantined herself.

The actress had just started shooting for the film *Mayday*. She stars alongside Amitabh Bachchan and Ajay Devgn in the thriller drama. The film is directed and produced by Ajay Devgn. **IANS**



**Rajinikanth progressing well: Docs**

**Hyderabad:** Superstar Rajinikanth who was Friday admitted to a hospital here with severe fluctuations in blood pressure, is progressing well, doctors said Saturday.

"Mr Rajinikanth who was admitted in the hospital yesterday is progressing well. He has had an eventful night and his blood pressure is still on the higher side although under better control than yesterday," Apollo Hospital said in a statement.

According to the hospital, the 70-year-old actor's investigations have not revealed anything alarming so far. He is scheduled for a further set of investigations on Saturday, reports which will be available by the evening.

"His blood pressure medications are being titrated carefully and he will continue to be under close monitoring. He has been advised complete rest in view of his labile blood pressure and visi-

tors are not being allowed to meet him," it said.

Rajinikanth's daughter is with him in the hospital. Family and doctors have requested all well-wishers to avoid visiting the hospital.

The actor was shooting for Tamil film *Annaathe* in Hyderabad for the last 10 days. **IANS**



**Ananya turns floral beauty**



**Mumbai:** Actress Ananya Panday turned into a floral beauty in a picture she has posted on Instagram.

The image captures a stunning Ananya in an aqua ensemble with pink floral prints. She captioned the image with flower emojis.

Ananya's latest release on OTT was the film *Khaali Peeli*. She is now shooting Shakun Batra's untitled film, co-starring Deepika Padukone and Siddhant Chaturvedi. Ananya also has the action film *Fighter* coming up, alongside Vijay Deverakonda. **IANS**

**Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors is relevant but flawed**

It was billed as a courtroom thriller, but it ends up more like a bleak prison drama. The second season of *Criminal Justice* has its heart in the right place, highlighting a relevant issue that often takes shape of an ugly truth in homes across societal strata. Yet the show falters in execution.

Despite noble intentions, *Criminal Justice: Behind Closed Doors* is no 'Thappad' on the face of misogyny and marital rape, the primary issues it brings to focus.

Rohan Sippy and Arjun Mukerjee's eight-episode season starts off on a note of high drama,

**Cast:**  
Kirti Kulhari, Pankaj Tripathi, Jisshu Sengupta, Deepti Naval, Mita Vashisht, Ashish Vidyarthi  
**Direction:**  
Rohan Sippy and Arjun Mukerjee

with the crime in question established right at the outset. Vikram Chandra (Jisshu Sengupta), a hot-shot lawyer and seemingly the doting husband and father, is brutally knifed in bed by his wife Anuradha (Kirti Kulhari). The reason is amply made clear. Although the audience is witness to the fact that Anuradha's action



is an act of extreme despair; within the framework of fiction she is instantly stamped a pariah.

Vikram was popular, and a suc-

cessful face of the advocate community. No lawyer is willing to fight Anu's case. Vikram and Anu's daughter, closest there is to a wit-

ness, develops an aversion to her mother to begin with. As Vikram fights for his life in hospital, his mother (Deepti Naval), an influential figure, puts her weight behind the demand that Anu be punished.

That is when advocate Madhav Mishra (Pankaj Tripathi) is roped in, to defend Anu Chandra in court. Madhav takes the help of young lawyer Nikhat Hussain (Anupriya Goenka) to set up his game plan to

prove Anu's innocence.

Apurva Asrani's writing is hard-hitting while laying bare the nightmare that awaits Anu behind bars. However, despite those traits the storytelling fails to hold attention. Once the shock value of the jail scenes peters out, the narrative tends to get repetitive.

Kirti Kulhari seizes an author-backed role to deliver a career best performance. Pankaj Tripathi brings alive an interesting male prototype, too. Every actor is aptly cast, and succeeds in bringing alive their respective roles written with nuance. **AGENCIES**

**WEB  
SERIES  
REVIEW**

**PEANUTS**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

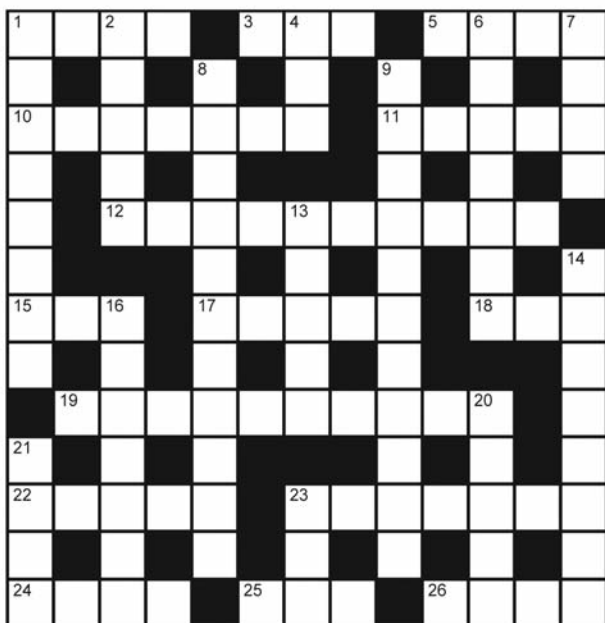


**BREVITY**



**FUN  
post**

**CROSSWORD**



**Across**

- 1 Remote button
- 3 Barbary beast
- 5 Verdi opera
- 10 Passion
- 11 Deadly snake
- 12 Letter closer (5,5)
- 15 Mythical bird
- 17 Goad (3,2)
- 18 Collector's goal
- 19 Mountain peak in the Alps

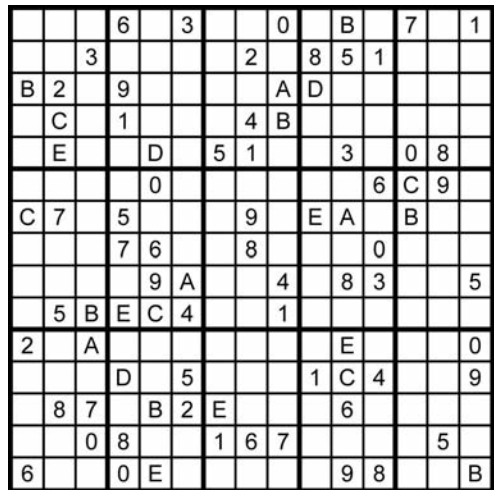
**Down**

- 22 Judicious
- 23 Words to a sad sack (5,2)
- 24 Paddles
- 25 Flowery verse
- 26 Cried
- 1 Scarves
- 2 Late
- 4 Average
- 6 African antelopes
- 7 Haywire

- 8 Film maker's offering
- 9 Again and again (4,3,4)
- 13 Some sweet lumps
- 14 Poker decision (5,3)
- 16 Before music or pot
- 20 Hospital figure
- 21 Capital on a fjord
- 23 Bounder

**SUDOKU**

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



**SOLUTIONS**

**CROSSWORD**



**SUDOKU**



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



# downtown

## City sees rise in suicides, robberies

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The Capital city witnessed a rise in suicide and snatching cases during 2020 as compared to the previous year.

This was revealed during a crime review meeting at Airfield police station here, Saturday. Bhubaneswar DCP Umashankar Dash Saturday released a comprehensive data on the crime scenario in the city.

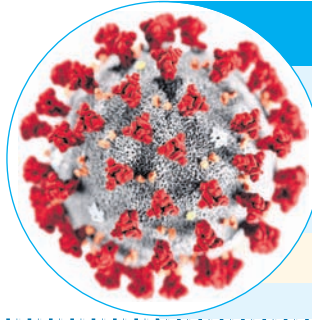
As per the data, 40 murder cases have been reported at various police stations in the city till November end this year as against 39 murder incidents in 2019.

Similarly, the robbery incidents rose significantly during the current



### 95-YEAR JOURNEY

CPI leaders participate in an event at Bhagawati Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Saturday, to observe completion of 95 years of the party



### COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	8,03,00,907	5,65,98,640	17,59,604
India	1,01,69,818	97,39,382	1,47,379
Odisha	3,28,201	3,23,749	1,857

## 1,092 cops to be promoted as ASIs

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, Dec 26:** A total of 1,092 constables, lance naiks and havildars of Odisha police would be promoted to the rank of assistant sub-inspectors (ASIs).

DGP Abhay has recommended necessary training for the policemen, who have been selected for promotion to the rank of ASIs. As many as 849 policemen from the unreserved category and 243 from the ST category have been selected for the promotion, said a press note.

# Balaram to cover more farmers

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** With a view to including more number of landless farmers under Balaram scheme, the state government has revised the operational guidelines of the agricultural scheme. Now, the sharecroppers having marginal amount of land will get the benefits of Balaram scheme.

According to sources, if a farmer has a small piece of farmland and he wants to cultivate the lands of other owner, he/she will get credit under Balaram scheme. Earlier, the government had decided to include only landless sharecroppers under the scheme.

Similarly, the government has decided to give priority to short-term crops and seasonal crops while long-term cropping activities will be avoided.

Defining family, the government said concept of nuclear family will be applicable and only one member of a family can be included to avail benefits of the scheme.



### CREDIT BOOST

Sharecroppers having marginal amount of land will get the benefits of Balaram scheme

If a farmer has a small piece of farmland and he wants to cultivate the lands of other owner, he/she will get credit under Balaram scheme

Banks can distribute the loan amount in a phased manner based on the progress of cropping activity

Banks can distribute the loan amount in a phased manner based on the progress of cropping activity

ity. Before releasing the second phase money, the bank will obtain utilisation certification from the

Krushak Sathi appointed for this purpose.

The state government in collaboration with Nabard had launched the Balaram scheme to provide loans to landless farmers. The Institute of Management & Advance Global Excellence (IMAGE) and Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) were designated as the nodal agencies at the state and district levels for implementation of the scheme.

Credit facility will be provided to the landless farmers on the basis of 'social collateral' through joint liability groups (JLGs). The rate of interest and interest subvention would be as per the existing norms of the state government.

Each bank has been asked to finance at least 10 JLGs in a year. Loan to each group could be extended up to Rs 1.60 lakh.

A target was set to cover around 7 lakh landless cultivators through 1.40 lakh JLGs within a period of two years.



Varieties of delicacies being offered to Lord Srikrishna on the occasion of *Byanjan Dwadasi* at Gaura Vihar ashram in Puri, Saturday

## Cong backs PM-Kisan, slams govt

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The Congress party Saturday criticised the state government for not supporting the Centre in rolling out of the benefits of the PM-Kisan scheme in the state.

Party leader Suresh Routray said that the state government failed to furnish the list of farmers to the Centre for which several farmers in the state failed to get the central aid.

“Under the PM-Kisan scheme, the poor farmers of the state could have got Rs 2,000. But due to the interference of the Naveen Patnaik government, many farmers are deprived of the benefits. This is a good scheme and laudable,” he said.

He also added, “However, under the KALIA scheme, the state gov-



ernment is clueless of the list of people whom they are allegedly helping. Many farmers in the state are deprived of the benefits while other states are getting it.”

Routray also said that Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is doing good works. “He recently went to different parts of the state and assisted the people of the state. He is doing a good job.”

# State govt vigilant on UK returnees: Health minister

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The state government, Saturday, claimed that it is ready with all prophylactic measures to avert any possibility of spread of Covid-19 and the new strain of the virus detected in the United Kingdom (UK).

Health Minister Naba Kishore Das Saturday said that all preventive measures have been taken by the Health department and the officials are on their toes to ensure that all required checks on UK returnees are done.

The minister also said that all airports have been alerted and special measures are at place in the airports to check the spread of the

**THE MINISTER SAID THAT SUSPECTED PATIENTS COULD BE KEPT IN ISOLATION AND THEIR SAMPLES COULD BE SENT TO NIV, PUNE**

disease via UK returnees. The minister also said that suspected patients could be kept in isolation and their samples could be sent to National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune.

“Our government is alert on fighting against Covid-19. We have issued instructions to all the airports

to scrutinize the passengers who returned from UK,” he said.

He also said that all such people would be sent for RT-PCR test which is made available at in the airports of Odisha. “If needed, the persons could be taken to isolation. Their samples will also be sent to Pune for more scrutiny,” the minister added. “I am sure that my department will be tackling the issue with full vigour. However, it is tough to predict anything when it comes to Covid-19 but we are all set to fight it to ensure it does not spread,” he said.

The development comes after the government ordered mandatory RT-PCR test of all UK returnees to Odisha.

## Mental care hosp opens at Choudwar Jail

**CHOUDWAR:** Director General (DG), Prisons, Santosh Kumar Upadhyay Saturday inaugurated a mental care hospital at Choudwar Circle Jail here. The 80-bed hospital has been set up with an expenditure of Rs 1.5 crore, jail sources said. At present, the jail has 924 inmates and of them 74 are suffering from mental illness, sources added. “Earlier, prisoners suffering from mental illness were being taken to SCB Medical College and Hospital for better treatment. Now, an expert is treating the prisoners on the jail premises,” said jail superintendent Shubhakant Panda. Upadhyay also inspected a food processing unit on the jail premises.

## D-brothers' ceilings leak guns & bullets

3 more guns, 175 bullets and ₹16.5 lakh were seized during the raid

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, Dec 26:** The Commissionerate Police Saturday seized three more guns, five magazines, 175 bullets and Rs 16.50 lakh from the residence of notorious Dhalasamanta brothers at CDA here.

Police found the arms and ammunition after demolishing the ceilings and other decorative structures at the residence of the gangster brothers.

“The gangster brothers were supplying firearms to several criminal elements in Cuttack and other places in the state. Aides of the two brothers were collecting extortion from liquor traders and leaseholders of sand ghats,” said Deputy Commissioner of Police Prateek Singh at a presser here.

A few days ago, the police had raided the residence of the gangster brothers and seized at least eight guns, 24 magazines and 1,095 bullets. They had also arrested several aides of the gangsters and seized seven guns from other places in state. Recently, police took the two brothers on remand and expedited probe into the illegal arms trade. “Dhalasamanta brothers were controlling their crime empire from the jails,” said a source in the Commissionerate Police.

# 7 places record below 10 degrees C

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** Cold-wave continued to grip many parts of the state with seven places recording a minimum temperature below 10 degrees Celsius, Saturday.

As per a bulletin issued by Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre, the lowest temperature of 5.5 degrees Celsius was recorded at Phulbani while Daringbadi recorded 6 degrees Celsius.

Koraput town in south Odisha witnessed a minimum temperature of 8.2 degrees, Sundargarh and Jharsuguda 8.5 degrees each, Bhawanipatna 9 degrees and Keonjhar 9.8 degrees. Boudh and



Baripada recorded a minimum temperature of 10 degrees Celsius each.

# Srimandir reopens for Puri residents with Covid norms

Biraja temple to welcome devotees from Dec 29

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Jajpur/Puri, Dec 26:** The Biraja temple, one of the major 'shakti peeths' in Odisha, will reopen for devotees from December 29 while the residents of Puri town were allowed inside Srimandir from Saturday, officials said.

The Biraja temple will reopen following a decline in the number of fresh Covid-19 cases in Jajpur, District Collector Chakravarti Singh Rathore said.

Rathore said that devotees will be allowed entry to the temple between 6 am and 5 pm every day.

“A standard operating procedure (SOP) for strict compliance of Covid-19 safety protocols will be issued very soon for the visitors as well as the temple servants,” the Collector said. The 13th century temple will remain closed from January 1-2 to avoid large congregation of devotees on New Year, he said.

Meanwhile, the district administration of Puri implemented the second phase of entry to Srimandir from Saturday morning for residents of the Pilgrim town in strict compliance with health norms, the



officials said. In the first phase that started December 23, only servi-

tors and their family members were allowed entry to the shrine. A total

**The Biraja temple will remain closed from January 1-2 to avoid large congregation of devotees on New Year**

of eight kiosks have been set up to assist devotees and 18 platoons of police personnel deployed to monitor the law and order situation.

The residents of ward no. 6, 9, 12, 15, 11, 2 and 3 in the Holy City visited Srimandir in three phases Saturday. The locals entered into the

shrine by producing the tokens issued by the district administration and their identity proofs. Besides, they had to undergo thermal screening as part of Covid-19 protocol issued by the administration.

The officials of the district administration took photographs of the devotees and registered their names at the shrine entrance.

“The administration has made all arrangements to facilitate Puri residents' visit to Srimandir. There was no untoward incident on the first day,” said Puri Collector Balwant Singh.

The temple will also remain shut for two days from January 1.



### FACT FILE

Sundargarh reported the highest number of new cases at 40, followed by Khurda (30) and Sambalpur (30)

The fresh fatalities were reported in Khurda, Balasore, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts

Khurda has so far reported the highest number of coronavirus fatalities at 319, followed by Ganjam (246) and Sundargarh (164)

The state has so far tested over 67.99 lakh samples for Covid-19, including 29,848 Friday

Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.83 per cent

Meanwhile, the Cuttack district administration has declared Nuasahi village in Kantapada block a new containment zone after 14 residents tested positive for the infection and one succumbed to the disease, another official said.

The containment measures will remain in force till January 4, the official pointed out.





## Listen to farmers

The prime minister says he wants farmers to double their income but does not want the government to do it. He believes that his laws favouring corporates will expand the market for farmers but does not explain how this will happen. Corporates are not going to make Indians eat more food than they already are at the moment. India is already a surplus producer of grain and milk. The problem is that we do not consume enough, because most Indians are poor and cannot afford more and better food. It is the Union government that must do that. But Narendra Modi has cut the amount of money that the poor get as food subsidy. In the 2020 budget this was slashed from Rs 1.8 lakh crore to Rs 1.15 lakh crore. If half of India's poor gets this, it is less than Rs 150 per month. How will farmers' incomes double if the government does not feed our poor by purchasing more produce? So much for the local market.

Corporates are not in charge of how much of its agriculture and dairy India can export. It is the government that will have to force other nations to open their markets to our farmers. But under Modi India's agricultural exports have actually declined. All nations seek to protect their farming communities and so agricultural exports are the toughest thing in trade negotiations but there is a way out. Vietnam has shown it by consistently increasing its export of value added goods. India has failed under Modi to do even what it was doing before.

Agriculture exports fell from US\$ 43 billion in 2013, before Modi, to \$38 billion last year. Imports of agricultural commodities in 2016-17 rose to \$25 billion from \$15 billion in 2013-14. Total agricultural trade around the world is over \$2000 billion meaning that India has not only a tiny share of the market but an insignificant one. This in turn means that there is great opportunity for India to grow.

However India, especially in the last seven years under Modi, has failed to create a market for its agricultural goods. We have no free trade agreements under which our farmers can send their output and the existing ones, such as with Korea and Japan do not help them expand their market. Modi is not good at implementation. He is not good at thinking through laws and policies. His lockdown produced chaos and misery and didn't stop Covid. His GST finished off thousands of companies and reduced the amount of tax government collects to such an extent that he cannot pay state governments any more. His demonetisation did not end black money, corruption or terrorism but it wounded the economy so much that Indians were consuming and eating less in 2018 than they were in 2013, according to the government's own data.

This is the record of our fine leader. Now he wants farmers to believe that his genius is sufficient for them to let go of their livelihoods and trust him. He has offered no explanation or apology for putting hundreds of millions of Indians through extreme trauma because of his half-baked ideas and implementation before. On what grounds does he assume that the farmers think he knows more about agriculture than they do? They are aware that there is neither a local market for their produce nor a foreign one because they have been producing this for generations. The only way out for them and for India's poor is for the government to legally guarantee MSP for all crops. To procure what is surplus (more than 80 per cent of our farmers do not have any produce to sell at all, consuming all that they grow on their little patch), and to distribute it among the poor. If Modi has the ability, which I doubt, to induce corporate India to invest heavily in food processing for export, this should be done before the Mandis and MSP are dismantled as the farmers fear that they will be.

It is difficult to see how Modi's laws will come out of this without being savaged or repealed. He has no defence of them other than to say that the farmers are being misled. A cursory look at the farmers' charter of demands, and listening to any of the farmers being interviewed by media tells you that this is not the case. These are people who know what they are doing and know what they want. They also know what is coming in case they do not act. This is why it is hard to see the farmers' movement either going away or ending soon.

### WISDOM CORNER

- “ Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect. ” MARK TWAIN
- “ There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self. ” ALDOUS HUXLEY
- “ Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. ” MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

### WORDSWORTH

#### ■ Whale of a time

If someone says they are having a whale of a time they mean they're enjoying themselves very much. It's one instance of the more general idiom a whale of a ..., an exceedingly great example — for good or bad — of a particular thing. Grammarians call this kind of usage an intensifier, since it adds a superlative to what follows. The idea behind it, of course, is that whales are big beasts. From the early years of the nineteenth century in the US — and also the UK — people were making the comparison in an idiomatic usage of the related word whaler: They fib by equivocation — they don't come plump out, with a tremendous whaler of a fib, but seek to do it by equivocation and confusion of words and ideas, but, in any way, it is all fibbing. (The Day, Glasgow, 28 Mar. 1832) It may have originally been a saying of the literal sort of whaler, as Maximilian Schele De Vere suggested in his Americanisms in 1872: “That the huge size of a whale should have led sailors, and after their example others also, to speak of any man or event of unusual and imposing proportions as a whaler, seems natural enough.”

### LOL

#### At a grocery store

A man observed a woman in the grocery store with a three-year-old girl in her basket. As they passed the cookie section, the little girl asked for cookies and her mother told her, “No.” The little girl immediately began to whine and fuss, and the mother said quietly, “Now Monica, we just have half of the aisles left to go through - don't be upset. It won't be long now.” Soon, they came to the candy aisle and the little girl began to shout for candy. When told she couldn't have any, she began to cry. The mother said, “There, there, Monica, don't cry - only two more aisles to go and then





# Distress sale hits cotton farmers

SANS MANDIS, MIDDLEMEN BUYING PRODUCE AT CHEAPER PRICE IN PARTS OF SONEPUR

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sonepur, Dec 26:** Farmers in Subarnapur district have got a bumper cotton harvest this year, but there are no takers for the produce. Some cotton farmers in the district are resorting to distress sale in the absence of mandis, a report said.

Farmers had hoped for handsome earnings from this farming, but their hopes are fading, causing a lot of resentment among the farmers.

Cotton, known as white diamond, is cultivated in majorly in Bairmaharajpur sub-division. As cotton does not need much water, farmers have been farming cotton over last few years even in unirrigated areas like Sonepur and Tarabha blocks. Cotton mandis are there in neighbouring Bolangir. Farmers have to go to CCI mandi at Bolangir. Owing to transportation cost for long distances, they are reluctant to go there.

A cotton mandi has been built by Badakhmar regulated marketing committee in Birmaharajpur, but it has not been made operational. In such a situation, they are forced



Farmers had hoped for handsome earnings from this farming, but their hopes are fading, causing a lot of resentment among the farmers

This year, cotton has been raised in 5000 hectares of land at Tentulimahada, Anadapur, Jatosingh, Bagbar, Mursundhi, Kenjhariapalli, Bhalpadar, Khandahata, Durjantaila, Kalapatha, Jaelaye and Ullunda

Cotton mandis are there in neighbouring Bolangir. Farmers have to go to a CCI-run mandi at Bolangir. Owing to transportation cost for long distances, they are reluctant to go there. Farmers sell cotton for ₹3000 to ₹4000 per quintal

to sell the cotton to middlemen, who take the produce at throwaway prices. As a result, cotton farmers have to face huge losses.

At many places, cotton has already been harvested while at some other places, harvesting is under way.

This year, cotton has been raised in 5000 hectares of land at Tentulimahada, Anadapur, Jatosingh, Bagbar, Mursundhi, Kenjhariapalli, Bhalpadar, Khandahata, Durjantaila, Kalapatha, Jaelaye and Ullunda.

Farmers sell cotton for Rs 3000 to Rs 4000 per quintal.

Gadadhar Panda, a farmer of

Anandapur, said that the Cotton Corporation of India and millers have formed a nexus that creates conditions for distress sale.

Although the government has fixed the price of Rs 5,400 per quintal, farmers are being forced to sell their produce at much cheaper rates. "As the government agencies are not buying our produce, we are forced to sell to the local traders," said a cotton farmer.

Farmers produce cotton worth Rs 60 to 70 crore alone in Birmaharajpur and Ullunda blocks. In totality, the district produces cotton worth Rs 100 crore.

Farmers like Kuber Mendalli and Birupakhya Barik said the regional office of the CCI is at Rayagada. The CCI officials are not coming to the district to buy cotton, despite repeated complaints. The CCI and millers are not working in co-operation, forcing farmers to sell cotton at cheaper prices, they observed.

On the other hand, the district administration says, it has been holding talks with CCI to buy cotton, but in reality nothing happens. The administration explains that as the district produces less cotton than other districts, millers are unwilling to come here.



Farmers harvesting pumpkins at MV-79 village in Malkangiri district. As the harvesting season is in progress, traders from various parts come to the doorstep of farmers to buy the produce

OP PHOTO

## 4-YR-OLD BOY GOES MISSING IN JAIPUR

**Jaipur, Dec 26:** A 4-year-old boy has been missing from near his house at Munda Sahi under Badachana police limits in Jaipur district for over 24 hours.

He was last seen Thursday afternoon playing near his house. The family members alleged that a rag picker abducted their son after luring him by offering some snacks.

"It was around 4 pm Thursday. My son was playing with other children near the house. I went into the house for some work. On

my return, I was shocked to not find him. We had launched a frantic search, but could not find him," the mother of the missing child said, crying all the while.

She further added that some local people when asked said they had seen a rag picker loitering at the place where the children were playing.

"They suspect he might have taken away our son," she added in a choked voice.

The family lodged a missing report at the Dhanmandal police outpost the same day. Police investigation is underway

## No use of Covid curbs at Bhitarkanika National Park

**Rajnagar, Dec 26:** Covid-19 guidelines were flouted at Bhitarkanika National Park in Kendrapara district Friday. On the occasion of Christmas, 1,852 visitors reportedly visited the park as against the per day limit of 500 visitors set by the BNP authorities.

This has raised concerns among local residents who are worried about the way the BNP authorities are handling the situation. "The New Year's day is just around the corner. More visitors are expected on the occasion and thereafter. If the Christmas crowd could not be handled, how the authorities will handle the crowd on New Year's day," they asked.

According to a source, the visitors came to the park Friday through different entry points. While 78 visitors came to the park in 11 boats from the Chandbali boat jetty, 535 came in 70 boats from Khola jetty. Similarly, 195 visitors reached the park in 21 boats from Chandbali Gupti jetty. A maximum number of 1,044 visitors entered the park through the main gate.

Owing to Covid-19 restrictions,



On Christmas day, 78 visitors came to the park in 11 boats from the Chandbali boat jetty, 535 came in 70 boats from Khola jetty. Similarly, 195 visitors reached the park in 21 boats from Chandbali Gupti jetty

the park was closed for seven months. As the situation returned

## 7-year-old raped by minor boy

**Kashinagar, Dec 26:** Police detained a minor boy on charge of raping a seven-year old girl at Gandhinagar village under this police limits in Gajapati district during Christmas celebrations, Friday.

The incident occurred when people were participating in a song and dance programme organised for Christmas. The accused working in a sound and light firm picked

up the survivor and allegedly raped her inside a toilet. The girl was rescued by one of her family members after she raised an alarm.

Later, the girl's father lodged a complaint at Kashinagar police station alleging rape of his daughter. He alleged that Ramakant Karad had organised the function in violation of Covid norms where people danced to the tune of music by consuming alcoholic drinks. Police registered a case and detained the minor in this connection.

## Minor girl kills granny in Bhadrak

**Bhadrak, Dec 26:** A minor girl beat her grandmother to death Friday night. This shocking news was reported from Lapang village under Bhandaripokhari police limits in Bhadrak district.

According to sources, the girl and the elderly woman entered into a quarrel over some issues Friday night. The scene turned uglier when the girl lost her cool. She picked up the pestle of a grinding stone and started beating her grandmother repeatedly.

By the time other family members came to her rescue, the elderly woman had already died.



On getting information about the incident, a team from Bhandaripokhari police station reached the spot and recovered the body. They detained the minor girl for interrogation.

While the exact reason behind the murder is yet to be known, family feud is believed to be the reason. A detailed investigation is underway.

## Sex racket busted, 8 held

**Malkangiri, Dec 26:** Acting on a tip-off, Malkangiri police arrested eight persons including two women on charge of their involvement in flesh trade running from various locations in the town, Friday.

The accused included the two women masterminds and six customers. This was stated here by Malkangiri SDPO Abhilash at the district police headquarters here, Saturday. The accused masterminds were identified as Mamuni Patnaik, 31 of Cuttack district and Seema Sarkar, 45, of MPV-1 village in the district.

The customers were identified

as Sudhanshu Sekhar Kurami, 28, Mahavir Galechha, Subham Biswas, 24, Ashok Kumar, 29, Sibananda Mandal, , 30 and Manesh Kumar Kuldeep, 30. Sex enhancing tablets, contraceptive pills, condoms, mobile phones, motorcycles were seized during the raids.

The two mastermind lures girls and women from various parts of the state and engaged them in flesh trade by housing them at different places in the town. A minor girl and two women from Kolkata were rescued and sent for medical examination. A case was registered in this connection and further investigation on.

## Differently-abled sells off goat for disability sop

**Korukonda, Dec 26:** There is no dearth of poverty alleviation programmes and the government never stops claiming that people get immense benefits from such programmes.

But none has ever tried to understand the problems and difficulties these poor people endure to avail these benefits.

This single case from Ghisingibeda village of Nakamamudi panchayat under Korukonda block in Malkangiri district is enough to show how the beneficiaries are running from pillar to post to get the purported benefits.

A 53-year-old tribal resident of Ghisingibeda village, Hari Golpeda,



had to sell off his goat to get his disability pension.

Hari stays with his family. He lost vision in his left eye when he was just three. Over this period all his attempts to get disability pension yielded nothing even as he has a disability certificate. He had done many rounds of panchayat office but

there was none to listen to him.

He then decided to meet the District Collector. But it was not possible for him to visit the district headquarters to meet the Collector. With no options left, he sold off his goat for Rs 2250 and set out.

He first visited the block office at Kudumulguma. There he was told Nakamamudi panchayat his village is coming under has been put under Korukonda block. Then he decided to meet the Collector.

Reaching at the district headquarters office December 24, he came to know that the Collector's office was closed. Meanwhile nine days passed since he left his home. So he decided to return to his village. On his way home, he came across Sarabu Bhatt, a resident of Alekhguda village. When asked,

Hari narrated his ordeal before Sarabu. Hearing everything, Sarabu allowed Hari to stay at his house for a night.

The next morning he took Hari along with him to Korukonda block and came to know that the block office was closed for Christmas. However, they somehow managed to meet social security officer Rajiv Pujari. Sarabu narrated the sufferings of Hari before Rajiv. After giving a patient hearing, Rajiv accepted the application for disability pension from Hari and assured him that he would receive pension from January, 2021. He also made arrangements for them to reach their villages safely.

It is yet to be seen whether the assurance is translated into action or not.

## Bear duo dies in road mishap

**Sambalpur, Dec 26:** A mother bear and its cub died in the wee hours of Saturday after a vehicle hit them on Podabalanda-Badamal road under Rairakhol forest division in Sambalpur district.

Aforest official said, the mother bear and its cub were crossing the road early in the morning when the vehicle ran over them.

Age of the mother bear is believed to be around 20 years and that of the cub around 2 years, the forest official said.

Rairakhol forest division officials reached the spot and recovered the carcasses. They were sent to a nearby veterinary hospital for post-mortem. The officials have launched a probe in this connection. A tusker was killed after it was run over by Puri-Surat Express near Bhabanipali recently.

## Protest over minor's death

**Angul, Dec 26:** Tension gripped Chhendipada Forest Range office in Angul district Saturday after angry locals staged a protest over a 13-year-old boy being killed by a wild elephant Friday.

The family members of the deceased and hundreds of co-villagers thronged the forest range office at around 9.00 am and staged a demonstration, demanding compensation. The demonstration was still going on at the time of filing this report.

### GENDER ISSUES



Women and girls taking part in an awareness drive on gender issues in Korukonda area of Malkangiri

OP PHOTO

## Bolangir boy, 7, youngest 'software developer' in India

**Bolangir, Sec 26:** Venkat Raman Patnaik, 7, from Bolangir district has obtained certificates in professional computer courses like Java, Python, JavaScript, HTML and CSS.

Venkat is said to be the youngest qualified software developer in the country. He has earned a certificate as a 'full stack web developer' from the software company KodNest Edtech in Bangalore.

Venkat is the son of Kuldeep Patnaik and D Pramila Kumari. To his credit, he has developed over 150 apps for mobile phones including a number of robotic games over last six months.

A full stack web developer is one who can develop client as well as



server software. Venkat has also developed several behavioural apps for children of his age group, the proud father expressed.

"Venkat has developed a safety tool to stop mishaps related to gas cylinders. This feat has earned him a place in the India Book of Records. My son wants to pursue his stud-

ies in space science, computer programming and robotics as well," Kuldeep said.

Notably, the boy had been studying for about eight to ten hours every day. After completing his professional courses, he also appeared for MTA examination and cracked it to obtain a merit certificate.

## Family robbed of 400gm gold at gunpoint

**Bhawanipatna, Dec 26:** In a bizarre incident late Friday night, armed dacoits robbed a family of 400gm gold, two mobile phones, a bullet motorcycle and an LED TV at gunpoint, in Moter village under Koksara block in Kalahandi district.

Five masked dacoits barged into the house of Jajati Pattajoshi by breaking open the lock. Later, they took two children at gunpoint and looted the valuables. They locked all adult members inside a room and decamped with the valuables, the source added.

After the robbery, the family somehow managed to contact co-villagers who rushed to their rescue. A team of police officials launched an investigation into the incident.



# A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER



A combo of portraits shot across India shows people using different ways to mask themselves during a nationwide lockdown in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. PTI PHOTO



A combo of nine images showing deserted roads at 10am, a rare sight at Monday morning rush hour, during the nationwide lockdown imposed in a bid to contain the spread of COVID-19, April 6. PTI PHOTO



Swarms of locust in the walled city of Jaipur, Rajasthan, May 25. More than half of Rajasthan's 33 districts were affected by invasion by these crop-munching insects. PTI PHOTO



Flamingoes were seen in huge numbers behind NRI colony in Talawe wetland, Nerul, during nationwide lockdown, at Eastern Express Highway in Mumbai, May 14, 2020. PTI PHOTO



A fallen tree lies in an area of the Amazon jungle that was cleared by loggers and farmers near Porto Velho, Rondonia State, Brazil, August 14. REUTERS



A koala licks rainwater off a road near Moree, New South Wales, Australia, January 16. REUTERS



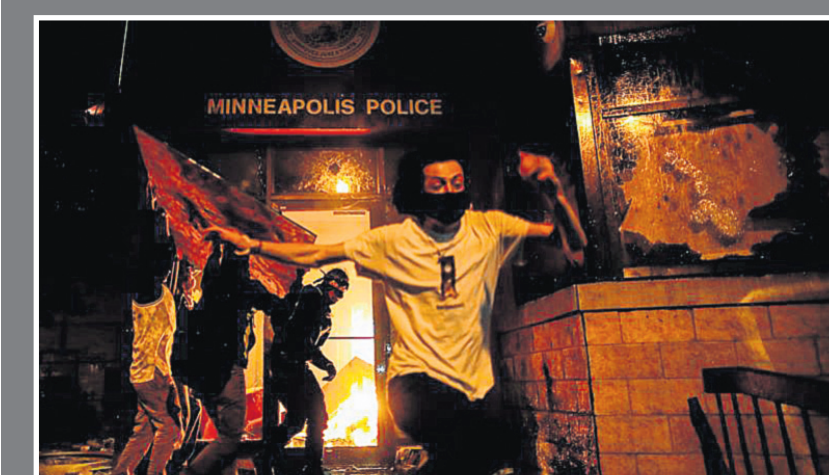
(Left) Democratic US presidential nominee Joe Biden and his wife Jill, and vice presidential nominee Kamala Harris and her husband Doug, react at their election rally after news media announced that Biden won the 2020 presidential election over President Donald Trump, in Wilmington, Delaware, November 7. (Right) President Donald Trump departs after speaking about the 2020 US presidential election results in the Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House in Washington, November 5. REUTERS



The outgoing year was one that none of us had ever witnessed and one could only wish that we never ever face anything like this. A pandemic of unprecedented scale locked down nations, devastated economies and had a great impact on our very psyche. The crisis taught us the importance of appreciating what we have rather than cribbing over what we don't and highlighted that our real heroes are doctors, paramedics and other essential workers who were at the frontline of our war against the virus. The year also saw natural disasters from bushfires to cyclones ravaging regions. People protested against oppressive regimes, countries fought wars and the world's oldest democracy elected its new president. **Orissa POST** catches glimpses from 2020 in a few frames



A general view shows the damage at the site of the August 5 blast in Beirut's port area, Lebanon. Lebanese rescue teams pulled out bodies and hunted for missing in the wreckage of buildings as investigations blamed negligence for a massive warehouse explosion that sent a devastating blast wave across Beirut, killing at least 135 people and injuring more than 5,000. REUTERS



Protesters react as they set fire to the entrance of a police station as demonstrations continue in the aftermath of the death in Minneapolis police custody of George Floyd, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 28. REUTERS



Anurak Jeantawanich, 52, pushes against police officers during an anti-government protest in Bangkok, Thailand, October 16. "I could sense danger coming," said Jeantawanich. "I looked each of them in the eye and told them not to come any closer, that there were a lot of young students and girls here." REUTERS



An unidentified man brandishes a gun during a protest against a new citizenship law outside the Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi, January 30. REUTERS



A security person baton charges on a farmer as protesters cross Singhu border during Delhi Chalo protest march against the new farm laws, in New Delhi, November 27. PTI PHOTO



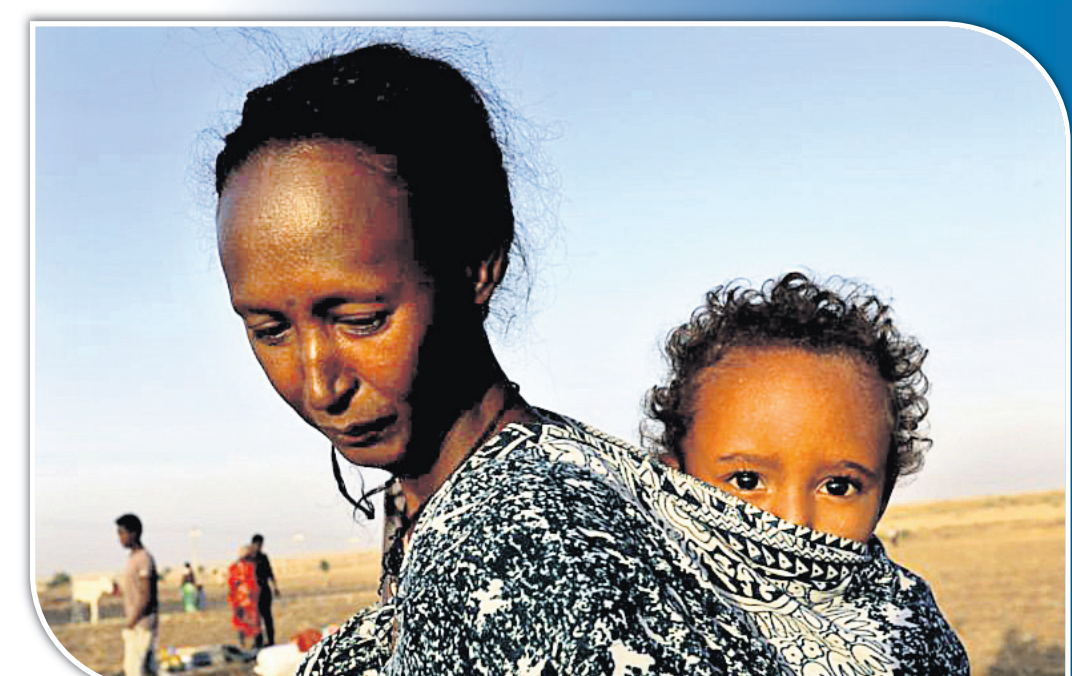
A makeshift memorial for Li Wenliang, the doctor who issued an early warning about the coronavirus outbreak before it was officially recognised, is seen after Li died of the virus, at an entrance to the Central Hospital of Wuhan, February 7. REUTERS



Medics and family members perform burial of a person who died of COVID-19 at ITO in New Delhi, April 14. PTI PHOTO



A physically challenged girl sits on a makeshift seat of a bicycle as she travels with her family to Uttar Pradesh, during the nationwide lockdown, in New Delhi, May 17. PTI PHOTO

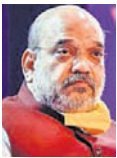


An Ethiopian woman, who fled the fighting in Tigray region, carries her child near the Setit river on the Sudan-Ethiopia border in eastern Kassala state, Sudan, November 22. REUTERS



## of the day quote

Neither MSP will end, nor can anyone snatch your land. I want to tell farmers that as long as Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister, no corporate can snatch away your land, this is BJP's promise to you



AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Leave Madhya Pradesh, otherwise I will bury you (the mafia) 10 feet deep into the ground and your whereabouts will not be known



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN | MADHYA PRADESH CM

There are 18,556 villages in Gujarat and we will cover each one of them. Our volunteers will contact every Hindu as part of the fund-raising drive for the Ram temple



SURENDRA JAIN | VHP JOINT GENERAL SECRETARY

## SHORT TAKES

### 2 militants killed in encounter

**Srinagar:** Two unidentified terrorists have been killed in an overnight encounter with the security forces in South Kashmir's Shopian district, officials said Saturday. On Friday the gun battle began after security forces cordoned off the Kanigam area and launched a search operation on the basis of specific information about militant presence. As the security forces zeroed in on the hideout, they came under a heavy volume of firing that triggered the encounter.

### 5 dead in T'gana road accident

**Hyderabad:** Five people died after the stationary auto-rickshaw in which they were sitting was hit by a lorry at a village in Vikarabad district of Telangana Saturday, police said. The five people, including four women and a man, boarded the auto-rickshaw Saturday morning to proceed to a cotton field for agricultural work, they said. The auto driver allegedly parked the vehicle at a wrong place and left for his home, situated nearby, to get breakfast. However, a speeding lorry hit the auto, resulting in the death of four on the spot, they said.

### 4 of family killed in UP house fire

**Banda (UP):** Four members of a family, including three children, died after their house caught fire in Duben ka Purva village in this Uttar Pradesh district, police said Saturday. The villagers saw smoke emanating from the house of Sangeeta Yadav (28) in the morning. Subsequently, the charred bodies of Yadav, her two daughters aged two and eight years and a six-year-old son were recovered. The house caught fire during the night, he said, adding that the cause of the blaze was not immediately known.

### Rajinikanth progressing well

**Hyderabad/Chennai:** Superstar Rajinikanth, who was admitted to the Apollo Hospitals in Hyderabad for severe blood pressure fluctuations, is progressing well, the hospital said Saturday. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami spoke to the actor over phone and enquired about his health, an official release here said, adding he prayed for the star's speedy recovery. The hospital said the actor's blood pressure was still on the higher side.



I personally know India's position and I personally request India to commit more to protect the free and open Indo Pacific region. We want a strong India. India is Asia's gravity point

YASUhide NAKAYAMA | JAPANESE DY MINISTER OF DEFENCE

# OXFORD VACCINE LIKELY TO GET APPROVAL IN INDIA FIRST

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** With preparations underway for a possible vaccine-rollout by January, the Indian drug regulator is looking at the UK, which sources believe may give its nod to the Oxford Covid-19 vaccine next week, before deciding on giving emergency use authorisation to the Serum Institute that is manufacturing the shots.

Once the UK drug regulator gives its approval to the Oxford vaccine, the expert committee on Covid-19 at the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) will hold its meeting and thoroughly review the safety and immunogenicity data from the clinical evaluations conducted abroad and in India before granting any emergency use authorisation for the vaccine here, official sources said.

The process of granting emergency use approval for Bharat Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine 'Covaxin' may take time as its Phase 3 trials are still underway, while Pfizer is yet to make a presentation.

"Going by this, Oxford vaccine 'Covishield' is likely to be the first to be rolled out in India," a source said. Serum Institute of India (SII) last week also had submitted some additional data required by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI), the sources said.

Amid fears about the mutated variant of SARS-CoV-2 detected in

Once the UK drug regulator gives its approval to the Oxford vaccine, the expert committee on Covid-19 will hold its meeting and review the safety and immunogenicity data from the clinical evaluations



The process of granting emergency use approval for Bharat Biotech's Covid-19 vaccine 'Covaxin' may take time as its Phase 3 trials are still underway, while Pfizer is yet to make a presentation

The application by the Indian arm of US pharmaceutical firm Pfizer was not taken up for deliberation as the company had sought more time for making a presentation before the committee

the UK, government officials recently said that it will have no impact on the potential of emerging vaccines that are being developed in India and other countries.

Bharat Biotech, Serum Institute of India (SII) and Pfizer had applied to the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) seeking emergency use authorisation for their COVID-19 vaccines early this month.

The subject expert committee (SEC) on Covid-19 of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) December 9 had sought additional safety and efficacy data for Covid-19 vaccines of SII and Bharat Biotech after deliberating upon their applications.

The application by the Indian arm of US pharmaceutical firm Pfizer was not taken up for deliberation as the company had sought more time for making a presentation before the committee.

As for Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, "after detailed deliberation, the committee recommended that the firm should present the safety and efficacy data from the on-going phase 3 clinical trial in the country for further consideration", the SEC had said.

The Pune-based SII, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, has collaborated with the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca to manufacture the vaccine.

The SII has already manufactured 40 million doses of the vaccine, under the at-risk manufacturing and stockpiling licence from the DCGI, officials recently had said.

## KASHMIR SHIVERS IN FRIGID 'CHILLAI-KALAN'

There was no let-up in cold wave conditions in Kashmir Saturday as the minimum temperature stayed below the freezing point, while the valley is likely to receive light rain and snow over the next few days



# CBI searches 19 locations

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Saturday said that it registered two separate cases over allegations of bank fraud to the tune of ₹67.07 crore by an Ahmedabad-based company and ₹64.78 crore by a Delhi-based company, and carried out searches at 19 locations in Mumbai and Delhi-NCR.

A CBI official here said that it carried out searches at 10 locations in Mumbai and Silvassa on the office and residential premises of Krishna Knitwear Technology Ltd and its directors.

The CBI has registered a case on the complaint of State Bank of India against Krishna Knitwear Technology Ltd, its directors, unknown public servants and unknown others on the allegations of cheating State Bank of India to the tune of ₹67.07 crore.

## During searches the agency sleuths recovered several of incriminating documents

The official said that it was alleged that the company was engaged in manufacturing of cotton yarn, knitted grey fabric and finished garments.

"During the period 2011 to 2015, the accused entered into a conspiracy to cheat SBI by way of 'forgery/falsification of accounts and diversion of funds. The company allegedly availed Fund-Based Working Capital (FBWC) with SBI, MCB, Vapi Branch," the official said.

It was further alleged that only around 20 per cent of its receipts and payments from its debtors and creditors respectively were routed

through banking channels, and the remaining amount was siphoned off.

The official said that during searches the agency sleuths recovered several of incriminating documents.

He said that second case was registered on a complaint from Punjab & Sind Bank against Delhi and Noida-based Alpine Realtech Pvt Ltd and others including its directors, two other private companies, un-

known public servants and others on the allegations that they cheated the bank to the tune of ₹64.78 crore by way of diversion or siphoning off bank funds, misappropriation, cheating etc.

The agency officials carried out searches at nine locations in Delhi-NCR at the office and residential premises of accused, including the borrower company.

## BANK FRAUD CASES

# Post DDC polls, 75 Kashmiri politicians held

AGENCIES

**Srinagar, Dec 26:** At least 75 Kashmiri political leaders and activists have been detained to forestall political unrest after an alliance of Kashmir's regional political parties won a local election, leaders and a police official said Saturday.

The District Council election, concluded early this week, was the first such exercise since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government last year revoked the special

status of J&K. New Delhi then cracked down on the opposition and rounded up hundreds of people to preempt protests and violence.

The new detentions, including separatist leaders and members of the banned Jamat-e-Islami group, were for preventive custody, said a senior police official, who asked not to be identified in line with official policy.

The detentions undermine the verdict of the people, said Imran Nabi Dar, spokesman for the National Conference, a regional party and a

key member of the alliance.

The alliance's victory shows that Kashmiris have not accepted Modi's decision to end Kashmir's special status, said Omar Abdullah, a former Chief Minister and head of the National Conference.

After their release from lengthy detention, Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, chief of the Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Party, announced the alliance in October to seek a peaceful restoration of Kashmir's autonomy.

## Woman transfused with HIV-infected blood, court orders compensation

AGENCIES

**Chennai, Dec 26:** In 2018, in a shocking incident, a pregnant woman was infected with HIV after a wrong blood transfusion. The woman from Sattur in Virudhunagar district of Tamil Nadu was anemic and had to undergo a blood transfusion.

Unfortunately, during the transfusion process, the woman became HIV positive but fortunately her baby tested negative for the virus in July 2019. Following this incident, several people moved the court asking directions for the government to provide adequate compensation to the poor victim.

Hearing the case, the Court ordered the government to pay a compensation of ₹25 lakh to the victim and also build a house for her.

The victim appeared before the Justices N Kirubakaran and B Pugalendhi bench and sought more assistance from the authorities. The woman said that she has been advised by her doctor to have nutritious food and fruits but unfortunately she could not afford it. The court hearing the appeal has now ordered the government to give the woman a monthly assistance of ₹7,500..

# BJP ally RLP quits NDA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Unhappy with the Narendra Modi government's stand on the new farm laws and its handling of the ongoing farmers' protest, BJP ally Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) today announced it is leaving the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) over issues concerning the new farm laws.

Declaring the move, RLP chief Hanuman Beniwal said, "I have left the NDA in protest against the three farm laws. These laws are anti-farmer. I have left NDA but won't forge alliance with the Congress."

The Rashtriya Loktantrik Party is the second BJP ally after the Akali Dal to leave the NDA over the new farm laws.

Speaking about his decision to



leave the NDA, Hanuman Beniwal alleged that his Covid-19 test report was "fudged" to keep him out of Parliament during the Monsoon Session when the farm laws were enacted. "The farm laws were brought in my absence. If I was present in the Lok Sabha when the farm laws were brought, I would have torn them apart and thrown them away," Beniwal said.

Beniwal, the Lok Sabha MP from Rajasthan's Nagaur, had given a call for two lakh farmers to move

towards Delhi in support of the farmers' agitation that has been on for the past one month.

Earlier in the day, Beniwal led farmers' movement from Jaipur, Nagaur, Barmer, Jodhpur and other parts of Rajasthan into Kotputli on the way to Shahjahanpur after earlier announcing that he will lead the agitation into Delhi in opposition to the three farm laws brought by the Centre.

"Decision on staying in or leaving the NDA will be taken after the meeting today in Shahjahanpur," Beniwal told this news agency.

Talking to the media, he said, "Despite the farmers' protests, the Narendra Modi government is not withdrawing farm laws because it has 303 MPs. Farmers from 1,200 kilometres away in Rajasthan are moving towards Delhi to be a part of the agitation."

# Shah blows election bugle in Assam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Guwahati, Dec 26:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah Saturday launched a project in poll-bound Assam to beautify the birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva, the 15th century cultural and religious icon of the state, and another programme to extend financial assistance to 8,000 "naamghars", traditional Vaishnavite monasteries that are more than 50 years old.

During his visit to the state, Shah also laid foundation stone of a medical college in Guwahati and nine law institutes across the state.

All the four projects were launched centrally from the Kumar Bhaskar Barman Kshetra at Amingaon here in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Sarabanda Sonowal, Union Minister for Food Processing Rameshwar Teli, state



Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and others.

Shah launched the development and beautification project of Batadrava 'Than' at Borduwa in Nagaon district, the birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva, at an estimated cost of ₹188 crore, officials said.

"The 'Than' or Vaishnav monastery will be developed as a centre of art, culture, research and spirituality, officials said.

"Srimanta Sankaradeva (1449-1568) "is a colossal figure in the cul-

tural and religious history of Assam. (He) had not only reformed the entire Assamese Society but also laid the foundation of Assamese culture with his contributions in the field of literature, dance, drama, music, painting etc.

"His literary and artistic contributions are living traditions in Assam today. The sect of religion he preached is practised by a large population and Sattras (monasteries) that he and his followers established continue to flourish and sustain his legacy," a website of the state government said.

"Shah also launched the third phase of the "Asom Darshan" scheme to protect places of worship of different faiths. In this phase, 8,000 'Naamghars' (Vaishnav prayer and community halls) which are over 50 years old will be given ₹2.5 lakh each, they said.

# FB, Twitter stir up hornet's nest in India in 2020

THE BIG TECH FIRMS HAD THEIR OWN IOTA OF CONTROVERSIES IN INDIA IN 2020, GENERATING ENOUGH POLITICAL HEAT IN THE PROCESS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** As we gloat over reports how the US and European countries have started to tame the social media platforms in regard to anti-trust market practices, users privacy and the spread of fake news, Big Tech firms had their own iota of controversies in India in 2020, generating enough political heat in the process.

The biggest controversy came in August when the Wall Street Journal reported on the blatant biases of Facebook India's team, headed by their public policy chief

for the country, Ankhi Das.

The report alleged that the top leadership at Facebook's India office refused to apply the company's own rules to politicians from the ruling party, despite clear violations of Facebook's policies against incitement to violence, hate speech and misinformation.

Following the report, the Congress raised the issue of what it calls "zunholo nexus" of the ruling BJP with Facebook and WhatsApp.

Shashi Tharoor, the head of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology (IT),

called on Facebook to respond to allegations of ignoring hate speech in favour of the ruling party.

Union IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also wrote a hard-hitting letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, blaming the Facebook India management of alleged bias against people

supporting the right-of-centre ideology. The minister

said that as a transnational digital platform, Facebook must not only be fair and neutral, but also "visibly seen to be so, to users of diverse beliefs and ideologies".

Later, deposing before the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on personal data protection Bill 2019, Das was asked how much funds are spent by the so-

cial media giant on data safety.

The Facebook executives were also questioned on the quantum of its revenue as well as the profit they are making in India.

A coalition of 41 civil rights groups also demanded that Facebook India should immediately place its public policy head Ankhi Das on a leave of absence pending a full audit of the company and an investigation into her statements as reported in The Wall Street Journal. The political heat resulted in Das quitting the company in October "to pursue her interest in public service". Another

WSJ report this month alleged that Facebook discussed banning Bajrang Dal and termed it a dangerous organisation but did not act considering the safety of the employees. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took to Twitter and said: "Further confirmation that BJP-RSS control Facebook in India."

However, no stern action was taken on Facebook.

Micro-blogging platform Twitter stirred a major controversy in the second half of the year when it showed Ladakh as part of China.

Twitter had to apologise to a parliamentary panel in a letter.





of the day quote

The decline of JD (U) is now certain. It has begun in Arunachal Pradesh and soon it will disintegrate in Bihar as well

TEJ PRATAP YADAV | RASHTRIVYA JANATA DAL LEADER

There is "no confidence" in the words of BJP-led government concerning talks on farm laws

SITARAM YECHURI | CPM GENERAL SECRETARY

The police and the administration in Jammu and Kashmir of facilitating horse-trading and defections following the announcement of DDC election results

OMAR ABDULLAH | NATIONAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

One dead in Delhi factory fire

**New Delhi:** A 45-year-old man died in a mask-making factory in Delhi early Saturday while two others remained injured, police said. "The Fire Department received a call at around 3.54 a.m. and six fire tenders were rushed to the spot," said Atul Garg, director of the Delhi Fire Service. The machines and raw materials on the third floor in mask manufacturing factory had caught fire. Three persons rescued by the DFS staff were rushed to the hospital, where Jugal Kishore succumbed.

Pak violates ceasefire again

**Jammu:** Pakistani Rangers violated the ceasefire by resorting to unprovoked firing at forward posts along the International Border (IB) in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said Saturday. Firing from across the IB in the Satpal Border Outpost area of Hiranagar sector started around 9.35 pm on Friday, prompting strong retaliation by the Border Security Force (BSF), they said.

22-year-old woman self-immolates

**Kaushambi (UP):** A 22-year-old woman has died after allegedly dousing herself with kerosene in a township here and setting herself alight, with her family claiming she was upset as the man she was in a relationship with had refused to marry her. Police said the incident took place in the Sirathu township under the Saini police station area Tuesday, and added that the couple were from different communities. The woman was initially rushed to the district hospital, and from there, referred to the SRN Hospital in Allahabad where she succumbed to injuries on Friday night, the police said.

JCO, soldier killed in wall collapse

**Kathua (J&K):** Two Army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer (JCO), were killed and another was injured when a wall of their barrack collapsed in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, officials said Saturday. A wall of the barrack collapsed in Machhedhi camp in Billawar area Friday evening, trapping three soldiers under the debris, they said. Two of them, JCO S N Singh (45) of Sonipat in Haryana and Naik Pervez Kumar (39) of Samba in Jammu and Kashmir, were declared brought dead, they said.



I feel really ashamed that I was part of that political party (Trinamool Congress) for 21 long years. It follows no discipline at all. It has become like a company

SUWENDU ADHIKARI | FORMER WEST BENGAL MINISTER

ALDABRA GIANT TORTOISE GOES MISSING FROM CHENNAI PARK

An Aldabra giant tortoise, one of the largest tortoises in the world, has gone missing from The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust in Tamil Nadu. A case has been filed with Mamallapuram police under Section 379 of IPC



Centre to revamp anti-drug agency

The govt plans to creation of 3,689 new posts, canine squads, cyber and intelligence units and creation of a dedicated prosecution wing for the organization



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** The Centre is planning to revamp its federal drug law enforcement and intelligence agency - Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) - with the creation of 3,689 new posts, canine squads, cyber and intelligence units and creation of a dedicated prosecution wing for the organisation.

The proposal aims at redesigning the governance architecture of NCB, its capacity of investigation and intelligence and making it more professional and effective. The bureau comes under Ministry of Home Affairs and is currently headed by 1984-batch IPS officer Rakesh Asthana.

The government has planned to create 3,689 posts in various grades up to level-15, thereby raising the strength of NCB from existing 1,107 to 4,751. There is also plan to create four new regional offices, thus raising the number of regional offices from existing three to seven.

Creation of 17 new zonal offices and upgrading all existing 12 sub-zonal offices into zonal offices thereby raising the number of field offices to 42, including 13 existing regional offices, has also been planned.

There are plans to set up a dedicated prosecution wing to provide for in-house expertise for legal advice and taking up all cases filed under Narcotic Drugs and

Psychotropic Substances Act, a Canine Wing to identify drugs and Drug Intelligence Unit.

Setting up of a Cyber Technical Cell is also planned to tackle the challenges arising out of modern technological methods used by drug traffickers.

The decision to revamp was taken after government found that the drug traffickers are increasingly using the Dark Net for trafficking and crypto-currencies for payment.

This was disclosed in a report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs headed by Congress Deputy Leader in Rajya Sabha, Anand Sharma, on the Demands for Grants of Ministry of Home Affairs placed in Parliament December 21.

The report stated: "The drug traffickers are increasingly using the Dark Net for trafficking in drugs. The medium offers complete anonymity because of the use of onion routing, use of Crypto Currency for payment and Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) encryption."

The committee stressed upon that NCB's expertise and capacity to deal with this "need to be augmented".

"Nonetheless, with available resources the NCB arrested a Dark Net vendor who was operating as an active vendor of Psychotropic Drugs in Dark Net markets. This network had international linkages spread across India, Singapore and USA. During the operation, approximately 135 kgs of different psychotropic tablets were seized and four persons were arrested," the report stated.

Keeping in view the constant changing pattern of drug trafficking and the need to develop skills of officers to respond to the challenges arising out of the same, the Ministry of Home Affairs has, in December, 2019 set up a Training Centre on drug law enforcement.

Ban on high-speed mobile Internet extended in J&K

AGENCIES

**Srinagar (J&K), Dec 26:** The ban on 4G Internet in Jammu and Kashmir has been extended till January 8, said an order issued by the Union Territory's administration.

"The Internet speed shall be continued to be restricted to 2G, except the districts of Ganderbal and Udhampur, where mobile internet connectivity shall be continued to be made available without any speed-related restrictions," said a statement issued by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The aforesaid directions shall be effective December 26, 2020, and remain in force till January 8, 2021, unless modified earlier," it further said.



There were credible inputs that a large number of terrorists were trying to infiltrate from across the border; the order said while adding that curbs on high-speed internet had obstructed the attempts.

The administration cited the re-

cently held Panchayat elections that saw participation by political parties, and said that it had gone down well with the "elements inimical to public peace and tranquillity".

"The successful conduct of the recently concluded election, which witnessed participation of political parties across the spectrum and large scale voter turnout, has not gone down well with the elements inimical to public peace and tranquillity; as apparent from the multiple incidents of hurling of grenades by terrorists since the conclusion of the election process, targeting civilians/police personnel/security forces and the encounter with security forces," the order stated.

35 arrests, dozen FIRs as UP 'love jihad' law completes one month

THE FIRST CASE WAS REGISTERED IN BAREILLY JUST A DAY AFTER THE LEGISLATION CAME INTO FORCE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, Dec 26:** Going full steam, the Uttar Pradesh police have made more than one arrest a day since the controversial anti-conversion ordinance came into effect a month ago, having apprehended about 35 people so far.

Nearly a dozen FIRs have been lodged since the Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2020, was notified November 27.

Eight arrests were made from Etah, seven from Sitapur; four from Greater Noida, three each from Shahjahanpur and Azamgarh, two each from Moradabad, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor and Kannauj and one each from Bareilly and Hardoi, officials said here.

The first case was registered in Bareilly just a day after the legis-

lation came into force.

The police cracked the whip following a complaint of Tikaram Rathore, the father of a 20-year-girl and resident of Sharif Nagar village in Bareilly. He alleged that Uwaish Ahmad (22) had become friends with his daughter and was trying to "coax, coerce and lure" her to convert.

An FIR was lodged at Deorania police station in Bareilly district and the accused was arrested December 3.

Acting swiftly after being tipped off about interfaith marriages, the Lucknow Police stopped a ceremony in the state capital, asking the couple to meet the legal requirements first.

In Muzaffarnagar district, one Nadeem and an accomplice were arrested December 6 for allegedly trying to force a married Hindu



woman to convert.

Nadeem, however, got reprieve when the Allahabad High Court directed the police not to take any coercive action against him.

Likewise, in Moradabad, two

brothers, arrested earlier this month under the anti-conversion law, were released on an order of a CJM court.

Rashid and Salim were arrested December 4 after they visited the registrar's office in Moradabad to

21-YEAR-OLD LIKELY TO BE NEXT MAYOR OF KERALA CAPITAL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 26:** Twenty one-year-old Arya Rajendran, who successfully contested the recent civic polls, is likely to become the next Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram, CPI(M) sources said Friday.

The Thiruvananthapuram district secretariat of the Marxist party, recommended her name for the post at its meet. The recommendation has to be ratified by the party state secretariat, which will be meeting in the city Saturday.

The state secretariat will soon make the announcements on five of the total six corporations, the sources said.



Arya Rajendran

Arya, a BSc Maths second year student at the All Saints College here, had won from the Mudavanmughal ward of the city corporation, bagging 2,872 votes, 549 more than the rival Congress candidate.

Thiruvananthapuram district secretariat of CPI(M) recommended her name for the post

An activist of the Students Federation of India (SFI), she is also the state president of Balasangam, the children's wing of the Left party. When contacted by the media about the recommendation, she said the party will take the right decision and that she had not been informed by anyone other than reporters.

Thiruvananthapuram Mayor K Sreekumar (CPI-M), had suffered a shock defeat in the polls.

IN MEMORIAM



People pay tribute to the victims of 2004 Tsunami to mark its 16th anniversary in Kanyakumari, Saturday PTI PHOTO

Lowest Covid-19 deaths in a day since June 8, recovery up to 98%

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** India Saturday reported a net reduction of 252 to bring its count of active coronavirus cases down to 281,667, the lowest since July 10 and 72.32 per cent lower than the September 18 peak of 1,017,754. With a continuous trend of daily reductions, India's share of global active coronavirus cases is down at 1.28 per cent (one in 78). The country added 22,273 cases to take its total caseload to 10,169,118. And with 251 new fatalities, its Covid-19 death toll reached 147,343, or 1.45 per cent of total confirmed infections.

The count of recovered coronavirus cases across India now stands at 9,740,108 - or 95.78 per cent of total caseload - with 22,274 new cured cases being reported Saturday.

With a daily increase of 22,273 in total cases, India's tally of coronavirus cases has risen 10,146,845 on Friday to 10,169,118 - an increase of 0.2%. Death toll has reached



India now accounts for 1.28% of all active cases globally, and 8.38% of all deaths (one in every 12 deaths)

147,343, with 251 fatalities in a day. The ninth-most-affected country by active cases, third by fatality, and second by total and recovered cases, India has added 164,519 cases in the past 7 days.

India now accounts for 1.28% of all active cases globally (one in every 78 active cases), and 8.38% of all deaths (one in every 12 deaths).

Backwards from here, the last 1 million cases for India have come in 33 days.

The count of active cases across India has seen a net decline of 252,

compared with 1930 on Thursday. The states that have reported the highest net increase in active cases include Maharashtra (1933), Kerala (875), Uttarakhand (179), Bihar (70), and Uttar Pradesh (60).

With 22,274 new daily recoveries, India's recovery rate has improved to 95.78%; the fatality rate remains unchanged at 1.45%.

The Indian states and UTs with the worst case fatality rates at present are Punjab (3.20%), Maharashtra (2.57%) and Gujarat (2.20%), the national average.

35,000 cops to man Mumbai streets on New Year's Eve

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 26:** Around 35,000 police personnel will be deployed on the streets of Mumbai to maintain law and order and prevent any untoward incidents on New Year's Eve, an official said Saturday.

The Maharashtra government has already placed restrictions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and imposed a night curfew from 11 pm to 6 am till January 5.

Around 35,000 personnel of Mumbai police will be on the streets to maintain strict vigil on New Year's Eve, joint commissioner of police (Law and Order) Vishwas Nangre Patil said.



In view of the night curfew, New Year celebrations can be held before 11 pm, but after that strict action will be taken against people who violate the prohibitory orders, the official said.

Hotels, restaurants and other recreational establishments have been asked to down their shutters at 11 pm sharp and action will be taken against owners who violate the norm, he said.

"As per the night curfew orders, gathering of more than five persons is prohibited. We don't have any problem if people step out with their families or in groups of four or less," Nangre Patil said.

Despite these restrictions, people may gather at Gateway of India, Marine Drive, Girgaum Chowpatty, Juhu, Gorai and Madh Island areas in small groups of less than four persons from evening onwards, but the police will not allow crowding at these places, he said.

Adequate police security will be in place at these locations, he said, adding that parties on boats and terraces are also not permitted.

Moreover, anti-eve teasing squads will be present at various locations to prevent incidents of harassment, the official said.



# international

## of the day quote

Iraq has become a victim to the US-Iranian conflict and has been greatly affected as if it is an arena for their conflicts



MUQTADA AL-SAYID MUHAMMAD AL-SADR  
| IRAQI SHIA CLERIC

We know that the antibody combination can neutralise the virus, so we hope to find that giving this treatment via injection can lead to immediate protection against the development of Covid-19 cases in people who have been exposed



CATHERINE HOULIHAN | VIROLOGIST, UCLH

Diligently following good public health practices can prevent a spike of Covid-19 cases in the next two months in the African continent



JOHN NKENYASONG | DIRECTOR, CDC, AFRICA

## SHORT TAKES

### Ethiopia death toll climbs to 207

**Addis Ababa:** The death toll from a recent armed attack in Ethiopia's Benishangul-Gumuz regional state has risen to 207, the country's federal rights group has confirmed. Among the victims were 133 adult men, 35 adult women, some 20 elderly persons as well as 17 children, one of them a six-month-old baby, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission said in a statement late Friday. The bloodshed took place on Tuesday night and was carried out by armed men who set fire and shot at residents while they were asleep.

### 3 UN peacekeepers killed in CAR

**Bangui:** Three peacekeepers from Burundi were killed and two others wounded in Central African Republic (CAR) in attacks by armed combatants, a spokesman for the United Nations secretary-general said. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned the attacks in Dekoua, Kemo Prefecture and Bakouma ahead of Sunday's presidential and legislative elections, according to a statement from spokesman Stephane Dujarric. Attacks against peacekeepers may constitute a war crime, the statement said, calling on authorities in CAR to investigate the "heinous attacks".

### Spain receives 1st batch of vaccine

**Madrid:** Spanish authorities say the first batch of the coronavirus vaccine to reach the country has arrived. The government said Saturday morning that a truck transporting the vaccine produced by Pfizer arrived at a company warehouse in the central city of Guadalajara after making the trip from Belgium. It is the first part of what the government says will be weekly shipments of an average of 350,000 doses.

### Israeli jets strike Gaza

**Gaza City:** Israeli aircraft struck several sites in the Gaza Strip early Saturday after Palestinian militants fired two rockets toward southern Israel. The airstrike targets included rocket manufacturing facility and training and military posts belonging to Hamas, the militant group ruling Gaza, according to the military. Palestinian media reported the airstrikes shattered windows in east Gaza City. There were no reports of casualties.



Turkey will bring in structural reforms to break the "triangle of evil" of interest rates, inflation and exchange rates  
TAYYIP ERDOGAN  
PRESIDENT, TURKEY

## JUDGE DELAYS EXECUTION

A federal judge in the US said the Justice Department unlawfully rescheduled the execution of the only woman on federal death row, potentially setting up the Trump administration to schedule the execution after president-elect Joe Biden takes office



# Millions lose jobless benefits as Trump refuses to sign aid Bill

REUTERS

**Washington, Dec 26:** Millions of Americans saw their jobless benefits expire Saturday after US President Donald Trump refused to sign into law a \$2.3 trillion pandemic aid and spending package, protesting that it did not do enough to help everyday people.

Trump stunned Republicans and Democrats alike when he said this week he was unhappy with the massive Bill, which provides \$892 billion in badly needed coronavirus relief, including extending special unemployment benefits expiring December 26, and \$1.4 trillion for normal government spending.

Without Trump's signature, about 14 million people could lose those extra benefits, according to Labor Department data. A partial government shutdown will begin on Tuesday unless Congress can agree a stop-gap government funding bill before then.

After months of wrangling, Republicans and Democrats agreed to the package last weekend, with the support of the White House. Trump, who hands over power to Democratic President-elect Joe Biden January 20, did not object



■ Trump refused to sign into law a \$2.3 trillion pandemic aid and spending package, stunning Republicans and Democrats alike

■ Without Trump's signature, about 14 million people could lose those extra benefits, according to Labor Department data

■ Democratic President-elect Joe Biden January 20, did not object to terms of the deal before Congress voted it through Monday night

to terms of the deal before Congress voted it through Monday night.

But since then he has complained that the bill gives too much money to special interests, cultural projects and foreign aid, while its one-time \$600 stimulus checks to millions of struggling Americans were too small. He has demanded that be raised to \$2,000.

"Why would politicians not want to give people \$2,000, rather than only \$600?...Give our people the money!" the billionaire president tweeted on Christmas Day, much of which he spent golfing at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida.

Many economists agree the bill's aid is too low but say the immedi-

ate support is still welcome and necessary.

A source familiar with the situation said Trump's objection to the bill caught many White House officials by surprise. While the outgoing president's strategy for the bill remains unclear, he has not vetoed it and could still sign it in coming days.

On Saturday, he was scheduled to remain in Mar-a-Lago, where the bill has been sent and awaits his decision. Biden, whose November 3 electoral victory Trump refuses to acknowledge, is spending the holiday in his home state of Delaware and had no public events scheduled for Saturday.

# You're not alone, says UK Queen in Xmas message

AGENCIES

**London, Dec 26:** In her message to the nation on Christmas Day, the UK's Queen Elizabeth II reassured anyone struggling without friends and family this year during the festivities due to the Covid-19 pandemic that they "are not alone".

The 94-year-old monarch's video message, recorded in mid-December with a pared-back film crew and in accordance with government guidance, was broadcast Friday, the BBC reported.

"Remarkably, a year that has

as they would wish for their festivals", she highlighted last month's Diwali celebrations in Windsor as an example of "joyous moments of hope and unity despite social distancing".

"Of course for many, this time of year will be tinged with sadness - some mourning the loss of those dear to them and others missing friends and family members distanced for safety, when all they really want for Christmas is a simple hug or a squeeze of the hand.

"If you are among them, you are not alone, and let me assure you of



The 94-year-old monarch's video message, recorded in mid-December with a pared-back film crew and in accordance with government guidance

necessarily kept people apart has, in many ways, brought us closer," the Queen said, adding that "even on the darkest nights there is hope in the new dawn".

She said that Royal Family has been "inspired" by people volunteering in their communities.

"In the UK and around the world, people have risen magnificently to the challenges of the year, and I am so proud and moved by this quiet, indomitable spirit."

While lamenting that "people of all faiths have been unable to gather

my thoughts and prayers," the BBC quoted the monarch as saying in the video.

The Queen acknowledged front-line workers, and "good Samaritans (who) have emerged across society showing care and respect for all".

"Let the light of Christmas, the spirit of selflessness, love and above all, hope, guide us in the times ahead."

The Queen and her husband, Prince Philip, have been living at Windsor Castle during the pandemic with a small household staff.

## CHRISTMAS AMID PANDEMIC

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Rome, Dec 26:** Families that usually reunite on Christmas over a hearty, lingering meal celebrated apart Friday, services shifted online, and gift exchanges were low-key in one of the most unusual and subdued holiday seasons in decades.

The coronavirus left almost no one unaffected.

Patricia Hager, 60, delivered home-made caramel rolls for breakfast to family and friends in Bismarck, North Dakota, a state that didn't get hit until later in the pandemic but was struck hard. It seemed every time she opened her door this holiday season, someone had left smoked salmon, baskets of nuts or cookies.

"This year Christmas love is expressed at the door," she said. "I'm glad that people will probably be with us next year with the vaccines. I can give up anything for that."

With a child due in February, Song Ju-hyeon of Paju, South Korea, near Seoul, said home is the only place she feels safe. The government reported 1,241 new cases Friday, a new daily record for the country.

"It doesn't feel like Christmas anyway, there's no carols being played on the streets," she said. "It's Christmas," the Daily Nation newspaper declared in Kenya, where a surge in cases led to doctors ending a brief strike Christmas Eve. Celebrations were muted in the East African hub as a curfew prevented overnight church vigils.

## Series of explosions target police in Kabul, at least four dead

AGENCIES

**Kabul, Dec 26:** A series of explosions hit the Afghan capital Saturday morning, killing at least four people including two police officers, officials said. The deaths were caused by a sticky bomb attached to a police vehicle detonated in western Kabul, police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz said. The explosion wounded two civilians.

Two other police officers were wounded when a bomb attached to their car exploded earlier Saturday in southern Kabul, Faramarz said.

Maooma Jafari, deputy spokeswoman for the health ministry, said that four corpses and four wounded people were taken to hospital following the two explosions. A third sticky bomb detonated in eastern Kabul but caused no casualties, he said.

There were reports of at least two other blasts elsewhere in the city but police had no immediate details. In a separate report from northern Balkh province, a senior army officer was killed when his vehicle hit a roadside bomb, said Arif Iqbal, a Sholgara district police chief.

Iqbal said that Mohammad Tareq, the garrison commander of the army brigade in Balkh was the apparent target who was killed in the attack.

## GIVING FINAL TOUCHES



Workers place an ice block onto an ice structure at the site of the Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival before its opening in Harbin, China

REUTERS

# British double agent George Blake dies in Russia aged 98

AGENCIES

**Moscow, Dec 26:** George Blake, a former British intelligence officer who worked as a double agent for the Soviet Union, has died in Russia. He was 98. Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, known as SVR, announced his death Saturday in a statement, which didn't give any circumstances of his death.

Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed condolences, hailing Blake as a "brilliant professional" and a man of "remarkable courage." Blake has lived in Russia since his daring escape from a British prison in 1966 and was given the rank of Russian intelligence colonel.



Born in the Netherlands, Blake joined British intelligence during World War II.

He was posted to Korea when the war there erupted in 1950 and was detained by the Communist north. He said he volunteered to work for the Soviet Union after witnessing relentless US Bombing of North Korea.

# China ramps up measures to control new Covid cases



Health officials are ramping up measures ahead of the upcoming Spring Festival

AGENCIES

**Beijing, Dec 26:** Beijing residents were Saturday asked to wear face masks before going out of their houses and advised not to travel out of the capital as the city has reported new COVID-19 cases while the Chinese port city of Dalian went into a war-time mode to deal with the new cases.

Health officials are ramping up measures ahead of the upcoming Spring Festival and Chinese New Year holidays following the emergence of new cases, official media reports said. China has controlled the pandemic after it emerged in Wuhan in December last year but new cases continued.

The Chinese mainland Friday reported 20 newly confirmed COVID-19 cases, including eight locally transmitted ones and 12 arriving from outside China, the National Health

Commission (NHC) said Saturday. Six of the locally transmitted cases were reported in northeast China's Liaoning province, while two were reported in Beijing, the commission said in its daily report.

Meanwhile, an official of Beijing's health authority has advised the residents to stay in the city before they get Nucleic Acid Test (NAT) results and not to travel outside Beijing or China if not necessary.

Pang Xinghuo, deputy director of the Beijing Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, said that residents should wear masks while going out and practice social distancing.

In May this year, Beijing health officials said that there is no need to wear masks as the virus has been brought under control.

## SL postpones airspace reopening for commercial flights

AGENCIES

**Colombo, Dec 26:** Sri Lanka has postponed the reopening of its airspace for commercial flights, scheduled for Saturday, to prevent the spread of a new variant of the coronavirus, officials said. The next date for resumption of flights will be announced later.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka (CAAASL) had announced last week that it will resume international flights operations from December 26, eight months after they were closed in view of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The decision to postpone the resumption of flights was taken in the wake of the new coronavirus strain, which is spreading fast in the UK, said GA Chandrasiri, Chairman of Airport and Aviation Services, Saturday.



According to Rajeeva Suriyarachchi, another senior airport official, due to the postponement, the flight carrying Russian tourists which was scheduled to arrive in Lanka on Sunday has been cancelled.

The flight was a part of the government's efforts to reopen the island nation to foreign tourists amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, a flight with a group of tourists from Ukraine will arrive in Lanka Monday as scheduled, Suriyarachchi said.

Several countries across the world have already closed their land and sea borders and suspended commercial flights over fears about the new coronavirus strain.

Francis said the development of COVID-19 vaccines shines "lights of hope" on the world. In a passionate appeal to leaders, businesses and international organizations, he said they must ensure that the most vulnerable and needy in the pandemic be first in line to receive the vaccine.

Bells rang out around Bethlehem as the traditional birthplace of Jesus celebrated. But the closure of Israel's international airport to foreign tourists, along with Palestinian restrictions banning intercity travel in the areas they administer in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, kept visitors away.

In Beijing, official churches abruptly canceled Mass after China's capital was put on high alert following two confirmed COVID-19

cases last week. Two new asymptomatic cases were reported Friday.

With economies reeling around the world, it wasn't a year of lavish gifts. Robin Synpiewski of Middlesex County, New Jersey, was furloughed twice from her job serving school lunches and is now on reduced hours as her husband retires next week as a trash collector and her daughter wrestles with student debt.

Synpiewski, 58, bought her daughter pajamas, compared to a diamond bracelet last Christmas. Her husband got a \$20 plaque describing his Polish heritage, compared to a tablet computer last year.

"The bills have to be paid this month and next month. With the reduced hours, it's tough," she said.





**Shipping freight rates have surged since July and companies are now finding it almost impossible to sustain normal trade operations**  
**RAJESH MENON** | DIRECTOR GENERAL, SIAM

**FOREX RESERVES SWELL BY \$2.56BN**

India's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$2.563 billion during the week ended December 18. According to the RBI's weekly statistical supplement, the reserves increased to \$581.131 billion from \$578.568 billion reported for the week ended December 11



## of the day quote

UAE's assistance to India comes in recognition of the profound and brotherly ties our two countries have shared throughout the years  
**AHMED ABDUL RAHMAN ALBANNA** | UAE'S AMBASSADOR TO INDIA



When your shopping is 100% online, you're probably ordering a couple extra (items) with the intent of returning  
**SRIRAM SRIDHAR** | CEO, LATESHIPMENT.COM



The (Japanese) government has set up ambitious targets to achieve a carbon neutral society in 2050  
**YUKARI TAKAMURA** | PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO



## SHORT TAKES

### Krishnamurthy appointed observer

**New Delhi:** Markets regulator Sebi Saturday said it had December 18 appointed Taruval Subayya Krishnamurthy as an observer to oversee the e-voting process for winding up of Franklin Templeton's six mutual fund companies. On Friday, Chennai Financial Markets and Accountability (CFMA) said it has filed an application in the Supreme Court alleging that despite the apex court's December 9 order, "no apparent steps" have been taken by Sebi to appoint an observer in the matter.

### Rajasthan to borrow ₹2,731cr

**New Delhi:** The Finance Ministry Saturday said it has permitted Rajasthan to borrow an additional ₹2,731 crore after the state successfully undertook ease of doing business reforms. Rajasthan has now joined the five other states namely, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana, which have completed the reform facilitating ease of doing business to be eligible for additional borrowing. These six states have been granted additional borrowing permission of ₹19,459 crore.

### Govt to provide 50 lakh jobs

**Lucknow:** The Uttar Pradesh government's special campaign "Mission Rojgar" launched on December 5, that aims at providing jobs to 50 lakh youth by March 2021, has so far employed 21,75,443 youth in the state. The campaign ranges from regular appointments to outsourcing, contracting, skill training, self-employment and creation of man-days.

### I-T department unearth ₹100cr

**New Delhi:** The Income Tax Department's search and survey action against three leading contractors of north-eastern India has led to the alleged unearthing of undisclosed income of nearly ₹100 crore so far. One of the groups is into hospitality business.

### No change in fuel prices

**New Delhi:** State-run OMCs kept the petrol and diesel rates unchanged for the 18th straight day Saturday, December 26. In the national capital, the price of petrol remained unchanged at ₹83.71 per litre, and diesel also remained constant at ₹73.87 per litre — the same level as Friday, according to IOC.

# China to become world's biggest economy in 2028

THE UK-BASED THINK TANK FORECAST THAT INDIA WILL BECOME 5TH LARGEST ECONOMY IN 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** India, which appears to have been pushed back to being the world's sixth biggest economy in 2020, will again overtake the UK to become the fifth largest in 2025 and race to the third spot by 2030, a think tank said Saturday. India had overtaken the UK in 2019 to become the fifth largest economy in the world but has been relegated to 6th spot in 2020. "India has been knocked off course somewhat through the impact of the pandemic. As a result, after overtaking the UK in 2019, the UK overtakes India again in

this year's forecasts and stays ahead till 2024 before India takes over again," the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) said in an annual report published Saturday. The UK appears to have overtaken India again during 2020 as a result of the weakness of the rupee, it said. The CEBR forecasts that the Indian economy will expand by 9% in 2021 and by 7% in 2022. "Growth will naturally slow as India becomes more economically developed, with the annual GDP growth expected to sink to 5.8% in 2035." "This growth trajectory will see India become the world's third largest economy by 2030, overtak-



ing the UK in 2025, Germany in 2027 and Japan in 2030," it said. The UK-based think tank forecast that China will in 2028 overtake the US to become the world's biggest economy, five years earlier than pre-

viously estimated due to the contrasting recoveries of the two countries from the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan would remain the world's third-biggest economy, in dollar terms, until the early 2030s when it would be overtaken by India, pushing Germany down from fourth to fifth. The CEBR said India's economy had been losing momentum even ahead of the shock delivered by the COVID-19 crisis. The rate of GDP growth sank to a more than ten-year low of 4.2% in 2019, down from 6.1% the previous year and around half the 8.3% growth rate recorded in 2016.

"Slowing growth has been a consequence of a confluence of factors including fragility in the banking system, adjustment to reforms and a deceleration of global trade," it said. The COVID-19 pandemic, the think tank said, has been a human and an economic catastrophe for India, with more than 140,000 deaths recorded as of the middle of December. While this is the highest death toll outside of the US in absolute terms, it equates to around 10 deaths per 1,00,000, which is a significantly lower figure than has been seen in much of Europe and the Americas.

## 'China's ban on Australian coking coal to benefit India'



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** The production cost of India's steel producers using the blast furnace route would remain contained in the near term due to China's ban on Australian coking coal, India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said. Accordingly, the Chinese move will lead to softer coking coal prices which shall directly support EBITDA per tonne accretion of around ₹2,600 over FY21 for companies using the blast furnace route. "Such companies are likely to have reduced cost of steel production by around ₹1,800 per tonne Y-o-Y in 2HFY21, supported by the reduced cost of coking coal per tonne of around ₹7,300," Ind-Ra said in a report. As per Ind-Ra, China's ban has led to negative bias on coking coal prices. It expects Australia premium hard coking coal (HCC) CNF prices would be around \$120 per tonne over remaining FY21, except for any weather-related supply disruptions in Australia. "Despite China's healthy steel production growth of 7% Y-o-Y in the first 7MFY21, its coking coal imports have significantly reduced by 12% as against an increase of 14% Y-o-Y in FY20, reflecting the country's increased reliance on domestic coking coal.

# Payment of 1% GST in cash only for 45K taxpayers: DoR sources

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** The government's decision on mandatory payment of at least 1% of GST tax liability in cash will impact only around 40,000 to 45,000 taxpayers but help the entire system curb the menace of fake ITC availment and operation of fly-by-night operators, sources in the finance ministry said Saturday. Based on the recommendations of the GST Law Committee, the government has notified new indirect tax rules that make cash payment of 1% of GST tax liability mandatory for businesses whose taxable supply value exceeds ₹50 lakh. This change will come into effect from January 1, 2021.

Sources in department of revenue (DoR) said data indicated out of the total GST tax base of 1.2 crore taxpayers only around 4 lakh taxpayers have supply value greater than ₹50 lakh, and only around 1.5 lakh out of these 4 lakh taxpayers pay less than 1% tax in cash. So, the changes would include only a small section of taxpayers. Moreover, the DoR sources said with exclusions around 1.05 lakh taxpayers get further excluded from these 4 lakh. Thus, the rule would apply only to about 40,000 to 45,000 taxpayers. This would be around 0.37% of the total GST tax base of



The government has notified new indirect tax rules that make cash payment of 1% of GST tax liability mandatory for businesses whose taxable supply value exceeds ₹50 lakh

Based on the recommendations of the GST Law Committee, the government has notified new indirect tax rules

Under the new rule cash payment of 1% is to be calculated on the tax liability in a month and not turnover of the month

1.2 crore taxpayers. "The data clearly indicates that a small fraction of taxpayers would need to pay 1% of GST liability in

cash. Moreover, the rule is clearly for businesses whose taxable value of supply exceeds ₹50 lakh, so the measure would not affect small businesses or increase their working capital requirement," sources said. Under the new rule cash payment of 1% is to be calculated on the tax liability in a month and not turnover of the month. For example, if the turnover of taxable supplies of a taxpayer is ₹100 in a month and he is required to pay GST of 12% on his output taxable supplies, then he will be required to pay 1% of ₹12, i.e., ₹0.12 (12 paisa) only in the month through cash under this rule. Therefore, the net requirement of cash payment will be only 0.12% of the turnover in such a case, Finance Ministry sources said.

# DLF rental arm to buy 52% stake of Hines for ₹780cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Realty major DLF's rental arm DCCDL has agreed to acquire the entire 52% stake of US-based Hines in a premium commercial project in Gurugram for ₹780 crore. In a regulatory filing late last night, DLF informed that its joint venture firm DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd (DCCDL) has "entered into a securities purchase agreement with funds managed by Hines for acquisition of their stake in Fairleaf Real Estate, which owns and operates 'One Horizon Center'."

The DCCDL is a joint venture

firm of DLF and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund GIC. DLF holds 66.66% stake in the DCCDL while GIC has the rest.

"The purchase consideration for this acquisition is approximately ₹780 crore, subject to customary closing adjustments," DLF said. Hines has nearly 52% stake in the One Horizon Center while the rest is with the DCCDL. DCCDL exercised the first right of refusal to acquire Hines' stake. The commercial tower 'One Horizon Center' has a leasable area of about 8,13,000 square feet, mainly high-end Grade A office spaces along with complementary retail space.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi/Kolkata, Dec 26:** State-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) is set to diversify into non-coal mining areas as well as make major investments in clean technology in 2021 after demand for the dry fuel remained muted for most of this year amid the coronavirus pandemic impacting economic activities. Against all odds, including the slump in coal demand, the government opened up the country's mining sector for private players by auctioning 19 blocks. Coal demand across the world is projected to fall by around five per cent this year compared to 2019 while various sectoral challenges are expected to persist in 2021, analysts said.



"In 2021, we will try to get Coal India Ltd (CIL) to diversify into non-coal mining-related areas. It (CIL) will make major investments in sectors other than coal mining so that it is well prepared to make the transition away from fossil fuel. "So, it (CIL) will make investments in renewable energy, get into aluminium and clean coal technology and will do a lot," Coal Secretary Anil Kumar Jain said. In the coming year, Jain said

CIL is also likely to go ahead with its agenda of achieving one billion tonnes of production target by 2023-24. CIL may also "go ahead with one billion tonnes agenda. It is getting approvals. It is gearing up to keep enhancing its production which was 603 million tonnes last year. It is taking upon itself bigger and bigger target. It will be able to achieve one billion tonnes (production target) in 2023-24," he said. Noting that CIL has taken upon itself an investment plan of ₹2.5 lakh crore, Jain said that out of the proposed outlay, a significant chunk would be spend on clean coal technologies and diversification. "The rest of it (the investment will be) to increase coal production," he noted.

# Market Outlook: Mutant Covid, thin volumes to dent equities

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, Dec 26:** An expected slowdown in foreign fund inflows along with expensive propositions and upcoming macro-economic data are likely to dent equities during the trade week ahead. Lately, FIIs inflows have powered the equities' rally and gave an appreciation push to the rupee. FIIs have so far this month invested over \$6 billion in equities and \$594 million in the debt segment. However, the ongoing holiday season is expected to lower the inflow volumes during the upcoming week. Besides, the new mutant strain of Covid-19 combined with high valuations might trigger bouts of profit bookings. The new Covid strain has caused

global anxiety with several countries suspending flight services to the UK, where it was discovered. Nevertheless, the Brexit trade deal announced late Thursday night and progressive rollout of anti-Covid vaccine is likely to arrest any major downside. "Institutional participation will be lower in the coming week due to year-end and Christmas considerations. Nifty has closed almost at the intra-day and intra-week high raising hopes of a better opening Monday," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities. "However, it could run into profit taking later in the week. After seven weeks of gain, Nifty has closed flat." Furthermore, the upcoming monthly F&O expiry next week could add to the volatility.



"Going ahead, market is likely maintain its positive momentum on the back of abundant liquidity, declining Covid cases in India and effective vaccine rollout," said

Siddhartha Khemka, Head, Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services. "However, emerging risk pertaining to new coronavirus strain

in UK may limit upside." In terms of macro-data, investors will look forward to the release of figures on Eight Core Industries, Fiscal Deficit, Current Account and External Debt. Additionally, automobile sales data and PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index) numbers, may give directional cues to investors during the upcoming week. "For the week ahead, concerns regarding the fresh cases of the virus will remain in the limelight along with development on Brexit deal," said Vinod Nair, Head

of Research at Geojit Financial Services. "Investors should stay focused on quality sectors and counters and also watch at the trend of FII inflows, which is the main factors of the recent rally." In addition, agriculture and allied industries' stocks are expected to attract investors after announcement of a new tranche of rural stimulus. "During the coming week we are hoping to see rural stocks gain traction after the sops announced during the weekend," said LKP Securities' Head of Research S Ranganathan. "Being the last week of the Calendar Year 2020, one cannot but mention the fact that the FIIs have reposed faith in India by investing over \$22 billion during CY2020."



# BOWLERS PUT INDIA IN CONTROL

Rahane’s captaincy, bowlers’ combined effort end Australian essay for 195; visitors reach 36/1 at stumps on the opening day of second Test in Melbourne

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Melbourne, Dec 26:** Jasprit Bumrah’s menace was matched by Ravichandran Ashwin’s guile as an inspired India led by Ajinkya Rahane shot out Australia for a sub-par 195 to dominate the opening day of the second Test here Saturday.

India then lost an out-of-form Mayank Agarwal (0) to Mitchell Starc but debutant Shubman Gill (28 batting) survived a hostile spell to hit some delectable boundaries in the day end score of 36 for one in 11 overs.

Giving him company was the seasoned Cheteshwar Pujara (7 batting). The line-up would look to exorcise the ghosts of the opening Adelaide game last week when India were shot out for their lowest ever Test score of 36.

As much as the day belonged to the Indian bowling unit for another fired-up show, new captain Rahane deserved equal credit for marshalling his resources to perfection during the 72.3 overs that Australia batted.

Bumrah (4/56) and Ashwin (3/35) were the stars but debutant Mohammed Siraj (2/40) also did his bit repaying the faith shown in him with wickets of Marnus Labuschagne (48) and Cameron Green (12) with the old ball.

However, the Test series is increasingly looking like Ashwin’s paradise as he once again made the opposition’s best batsman Steve Smith (0) look ordinary, exploiting the turn and bounce that the first day of the MCG track offered.

It was business as usual for Bumrah as he beat the bat and got those breakthroughs just when it mattered on a pitch that had retained moisture. As it turned out, Rahane didn’t lose a bad toss.

The Indian team looked way more galvanised despite being without regular skipper Virat Kohli, who is on paternity leave. Some great catches were taken and the intent was way more visible. Rahane’s first punt was introducing Ashwin inside the first hour of play after Bumrah had forced Joe Burns (0) to nick one to Rishabh Pant.

Ashwin, who varied the pace of his deliveries cleverly, got some turn and bounce straightaway as he drew Matthew Wade into coming down the track and skying one that jumped and turned beating Smith and Pant, Ashwin kept the next a tad straighter and the former Australian skipper’s glance was pounced by Pujara at leg gully. All this while, Bumrah was beating the bat at the other hand.

Interestingly, Rahane didn’t give the debutant a single over before lunch break as he knew that Siraj’s strength is generating pace and movement with semi-new and old ball.



ON A ROLL: Jasprit Bumrah appeals for the dismissal of Australian opener Joe Burns, Saturday

SCORECARD

AUSTRALIA 1ST INNINGS

Joe Burns c Pant b Bumrah 0, Matthew Wade c Jadeja b Ashwin 30, Marnus Labuschagne c Gill b Siraj 48, Steve Smith c Pujara b Ashwin 0, Travis Head c Rahane b Bumrah 38, Cameron Green lbw b Siraj 12, Tim Paine c Vihari b Ashwin 13, Mitchell Starc c Siraj b Bumrah 9, Pat Cummins c Siraj b Jadeja 7, Nathan Lyon lbw b Bumrah 20, Josh Hazlewood not out 4; Extras: 14 (b-10, nb-3, w-1); Total: 195 all out (72.3 overs). Fall: 1/10 (Burns), 2/35 (Wade), 3/38 (Smith), 4/124 (Head), 5/134 (Labuschagne), 6/155 (Green), 7/155 (Paine), 8/164 (Starc), 9/191 (Lyon), 10/195 (Cummins). Bowling: Jasprit Bumrah 16-4-56-4, Umesh Yadav 12-2-39-0, Ravichandran Ashwin 24-7-35-3, Ravindra Jadeja 5.3-1-15-1, Mohammed Siraj 15-4-40-2.

INDIA 1ST INNINGS

Mayank Agarwal lbw b Starc 0, Shubman Gill batting 28, Cheteshwar Pujara batting 7; Extras: 1 (nb-1); Total: 36/1 (11 overs). Fall: 1/0 (Agarwal). Bowling: Mitchell Starc 4-2-14-1, Pat Cummins 4-1-14-0, Josh Hazlewood 2-0-2-0, Nathan Lyon 1-0-6-0.



Ravichandran Ashwin is ecstatic after getting rid of Steve Smith

RAHANE PRAISED FOR CAPTAINCY

**SUNIL GAVASKAR:** Let's not jump into conclusions too quickly. If I say that his captaincy is outstanding, then again, I will be accused of backing a Mumbai boy and all kinds of things will happen. So I don't want to get into that because these are early days. From what I have seen in the last 2 Tests he captained and the one-day matches he captained, he has got a great sense of where the fielders should be kept. Having said that, it's very important for the bowlers to bowl to their field. If the bowlers bowl to the field, as they did today, then the captain looks very good.

**VIRENDER SEHWAG:** Outstanding bowling changes and really smart fielding placements from Rahane. And



the bowlers delivered. Ashwin, (Jasprit) Bumrah, Siraj were absolutely brilliant. Great effort to get Australia all out for 195 on the first day. Now for the batters to get a good first innings lead.

**RICKY PONTING:** (Rahane's captaincy) has been brilliant so far. We were all a bit worried about how they were going to pick themselves up after Adelaide. I think they looked potentially better today. Rahane's field placements, bowling changes have all been pretty much spot on. With captaincy, making bowling changes and changing the field, you need guys to be able to execute well. Some of the wickets they got today, even Smith at leg slip early on, I think that was

a set plan. Joe Burns' dismissal would have been exactly how they wanted it.

**SHANE WARNE:** What a terrific day of cricket at the MCG today. Congrats to the ground staff on preparing the best wicket at the MCG for a long time. More of these type of pitches please! The Indian bowlers were outstanding too & very well lead (sic) by @ajinkyarahane88! Can India bat all day? VVS Laxman: Excellent day's play for India. Bowlers were once again sensational, both the debutants looked confident, Rahane captained the side really well but most importantly they didn't carry the baggage of the loss from Adelaide.

## Matti saves SCEB the blushes



Matti Steinmann (No.6) celebrates one of his goals with his teammates

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Goa, Dec 26:** German midfielder Matti Steinmann emerged as the unlikely source of goals for SC East Bengal (SCEB) as the Kolkata side rallied to draw 2-2 with Chennaiyin FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the Tilak Maidan here Saturday.

Chennaiyin took the lead twice, through Lallianzuala Chhangte (13th minute) and Rahim Ali (64th). However, a brace from Matti Steinmann (59th & 68th) saw Robbie Fowler's side split honours in an exciting encounter.

It was SCEB who started the game

on a more aggressive note, winning a couple of corners in the first ten minutes. But an early goal for their opponents pegged them back.

Slovak striker Jakub Sylvestr did the initial groundwork, recovering the ball and diverting it into the path of Chhangte with a deft touch. But from there, it was all Chhangte as he used his pace to stay ahead of the defenders in pursuit.

So often this season, Chhangte has been guilty of getting into good positions and wasting them. But this time, his shot went under the on-rushing Debjit Majumder and crept into goal.

The goal destroyed whatever momentum SCEB had built up. But they slowly started creating chances again as the game neared halftime. Around the half-hour mark Jacques Maghoma found himself through on goal with Deepak Tangri trying to tussle him off the ball, but Chennaiyin keeper Vishal Kaith came out and got to it first. He briefly lost control of the ball after Tangri clashed into him, but regained it before any damage was done.

Seven minutes later, Mohammed Rafique wasted a golden opportunity to pull SCEB level. A long-ball from midfield found Rafique with only Kaith to beat. But the touch that he took to divert the ball past the keeper was too heavy and it allowed Tangri the time to slide in and put the ball out for a corner.

The game caught fire around the hour mark with three goals coming in less than ten minutes. In the 59th minute, Steinmann powered a header past Kaith off a corner to drag SCEB back on level terms. But five minutes later, Chennaiyin struck again. A defensive mistake from Bikash Jairu allowed Ali to score his second goal in as many matches.

Chennaiyin nearly increased their lead a couple of minutes later when Enes Sipovic directed a header on to the crossbar off a corner. But instead, it was SCEB who drew parity again with Steinmann scoring his second of the night. Kaith's punch off a header from Daniel Fox's header was weak and took the ball straight to Steinmann, whose shot bulged the net.

## Sahoo, Barman battle for crown

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** Debasis Sahoo and Subhranil Barman will face each other in the final of U-15 final of the Gurukul U-15 & U-19 Boys' Tennis Championships in Mendhashal, Sunday. In the semi-finals, Debasis beat Ronik Meher 9-1, while second seed Subhranil defeated Krushna Chandra Behera 9-4.

In the U-19 quarterfinals, Sangram Kumar Patra blanked Anusman Babu 9-0. Debasis outplayed Biranchi Behera 9-1, Aditya Mohapatra defeated Krushna 9-4 and Balabhadra Behera overwhelmed third seed Subhranil 9-4.

## MGM OCL T20 League begins today

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The MGM OCL T20 League will begin Sunday at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack. Odisha Cricket Association (OCA) is conducting the event, in association with TCM.

The TCM is a major sports management company of India. They have been a part and parcel of major BCCI events and they have been also involved in major events like IPL, ISL, Khelo India etc. The MGM Company has obtained the title sponsorship for this event.

This event is being organised in accordance to the government permission and a Bio Secure Bubble has

been created. All the players, officials have gone through the RT-PCR test and only COVID-19 negative will be allowed to participate in this event.

A total of 93 players, selected from the recently-concluded Senior Men Inter-District T20 League following their performances, have been divided in six teams – Odisha Panthers, Odisha Pumas, Odisha Tigers, Odisha Cheetas, Odisha Lions and Odisha Jaguars. Each team have two support staffs, one coach and a manager.

The teams will play matches in double leg basis, as such there will be 30 matches and the top four position holders will qualify to the semifinals. The top position holder

of this league will play against the third-placed side while the second semifinal will be played between second-placed and fourth-placed teams.

The Panthers will take on the Pumas in the tournament-opener while the opening day will also see the contest between Tigers and Cheetas. The league matches will be played from December 27 to January 10, with two matches-a-day. The semifinals will be played January 12, while the final is slated for January 13.

A total of 11 umpires will officiate the matches. Eight scorers have been appointed for conducting this prestigious event. All the matches will be live streamed in an app 'FAN CODE'.

## Vardy saves Foxes' day as they hold Man Utd

AGENCIES

**London, Dec 26:** Jamie Vardy help Leicester City steal a point from Manchester United as the Foxes ended the Red Devils' 10-game winning streak away from home in the Premier League with a 2-2 draw, Saturday.

United looked like they would equal Chelsea and Manchester City's record of 11 consecutive victories when Bruno Fernandes put them ahead 11 minutes from time after Harvey Barnes had earlier cancelled out Marcus Rashford's opener.

Vardy ensured a share of the spoils five minutes from time, though, turning home via a de-



flection off substitute Axel Tuanzebe, who was later credited with the own goal.

United remain one point behind second-placed Leicester and four behind leaders Liverpool.

Rashford broke the deadlock in the 23rd minute, though, coolly slotting home his 50th Premier League goal from 12 yards after Fernandes had diverted Daniel James' pass into his path.

Leicester restored parity eight minutes later; Barnes lashing past De Gea from outside the penalty area after Fernandes had given possession away cheaply.

United forged ahead in the 79th minute, Fernandes sliding past Schmeichel after being played in by substitute Edinson Cavani. Vardy had the final say; however, bundling home via Tuanzebe after he had been picked out in the area by Ayoze Perez.