



SELF REALISATION
Shradha Kapoor says it was the lockdown phase when she could learn the spiritual meaning of 'zero'
LEISURE P2



EU FOR GREENER TRADE
The European Union put reform of the WTO at the heart of its trade strategy for the next decade, Thursday
INTERNATIONAL P10



MORRIS BREAKS RECORD
South African Chris Morris becomes the costliest buy in IPL history with RR buying him for ₹16.25 crore
SPORTS P12

Stormy start to Budget session

THE OPPOSITION STAGED A WALKOUT DURING GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS TO THE HOUSE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: The Budget session of the state Assembly started on a stormy note Thursday as Opposition Congress and BJP members staged a walkout during Governor Ganeshi Lal's address to the House.

The Governor said, "Despite the severe impact of COVID-19 on revenue, the state has been able to achieve positive growth in revenue which is an indication of recovery in economic activities in the state." The government has been able to collect revenue amounting to ₹38,760 crore by the end of January 2021, which is about 7.3 per cent more than the collection during the corresponding period in the previous year, he said.

He further said the state government was able to plough back about ₹2,800 crore by mopping up government money parked in bank accounts. One Time Settlement (OTS) schemes have been introduced for the realisation of revenue arrears, he said.

Noting that the COVID-19 pandemic posed a unique challenge to Odisha's



public finances, the Governor said, the crisis resulted in shrinkage in fiscal space which compelled the government to reprioritise its public spending to meet the higher demand for spending on COVID management, thereby creating livelihood opportunities, promoting agriculture as well as the industries and MSME sector for employment generation.

As a temporary measure, the corpus of the Contingency Fund was enhanced from ₹400 crore to ₹2,000 crore to provide the required fiscal space for an aggressive response to the pandemic, Ganeshi Lal said.

GOVERNOR TALK

- Despite the severe impact of COVID-19 on revenue, the govt has been able to collect revenue amounting to ₹38,760 cr
- The state government was able to plough back about ₹2,800 crore by mopping up government money parked in bank accounts
- The government has undertaken several strategic steps towards a farmer-centric development in the state, which include a separate agriculture budget

The government also adopted an innovative way to avail cheaper sources of financing from surplus cash balance in dedicated funds, like Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) and Odisha Mineral Bearing Areas Development Corporation (OMBADC), to maintain the required liquidity during the crisis.

Further, the government has undertaken several strategic steps towards a farmer-centric development in the state, which include a separate agriculture budget, a dedicated agriculture Cabinet for faster processes and sectoral growth, the introduction of Kalia and Balaram schemes, he added.

The Congress members led by its whip Taraprasad Bahinipati raised slogans and urged the Governor to stop reading out his speech in praise of the BJP government. The BJP members also followed suit and walked out of the House.

The Budget session started with strict adherence to COVID-19 guidelines and all members had to produce corona

Self-immolation bid near Assembly zone

BHUBANESWAR: Despite the tall claims by the Commissioner of Police about beefed up security, a lady Thursday attempted self-immolation before Jaydev Bhavan near the highly sensitive state Assembly area. On Wednesday, One Maguni Sahoo of Mancheswar police limits tried to commit suicide by pouring some inflammable liquid on his front of the state Assembly building.

According to sources, alert cops deployed near the Assembly area foiled the immolation bid by the lady identified as Jyotshna Rani Jena of Kujanga in Jagatsinghpur. She was trying to pour kerosene on her in front of Jayadev Bhawan Thursday.

negative reports for entering the House.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, who had attended the previous two sessions of the Assembly in virtual mode, was physically present in the House during Governor's speech. Later, he participated in the proceedings from his residence virtually.

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Opposition targets govt on Kotia issue

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 18: The Opposition parties in the state Thursday attacked the state government over its weak stand on the Kotia controversy and paddy procurement issue.

Following the delivery of the Governor's speech in the Assembly, the Congress and the BJP claimed that several important issues did not find place in the Governor's address to the House. Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Pradipta Naik said that the government claims that all is well in the paddy procurement process, but the BJP objected to such claims.

"In many mandis, paddy stocks have not been lifted. The token system is not working properly. We have raised the demand in the House. We have objected to the Governor's speech on the same," Naik said.

"We also spoke on the Kotia issue and tried to raise other issues concerning the people there. The Andhra Pradesh government has been intruding into Odisha and holding gram panchayat elections there without any opposition by our government," he said.

Congress leader

HOLDING POLLS SINCE 1952: AP TELLS SC



NEW DELHI: The Andhra Pradesh government has submitted its response in the contempt plea filed by the Odisha government against the neighbouring state for alleged violation of status quo in the disputed Kotia region of Koraput district stating that it has taken over certain villages belonging to Odisha. After the apex court served a notice to AP to file a response in this regard, the district Collector of Vizianagaram in AP, through an affidavit, stated that there is no question of contempt by Andhra Pradesh as no direction was passed by the court.

Narasimha Mishra said that Andhra Pradesh had forcibly captured Kotia and exerted power there under the nose of the government. "They have also conducted elections there and sarpanchs from the area have also been selected. Those issues were not mentioned in the speech of the Governor," he said.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Credit for our victory in local body elections goes to our top leaders. They never campaigned here.

3 men, 40 cows killed

Jaleswar: In a tragic incident, three men and around 40 cows were killed after a cattle-laden truck overturned on NH-60 near Basta bypass square in here Balasore district Thursday morning. Two other persons, believed to be the staff of the vehicle, have been trapped beneath the overturned truck. The incident took place when the vehicle carrying around 100 cattle was moving towards West Bengal from Bhadrak.

Disha Ravi moves HC

New Delhi: Climate activist Disha Ravi Thursday approached the Delhi High Court seeking a direction to the police not to leak any investigation material in relation to the 'toolkit' case to the media. The 21-year-old activist was arrested from Bangalore last week in connection with allegedly editing and sharing a 'toolkit' on social media related to the farmers' protest and was remanded to five-day police custody.

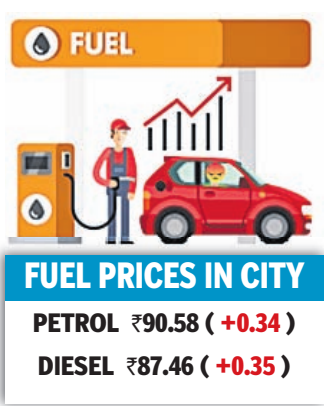
As prices in India spiral, fuel smuggling from Nepal rises

AGENCIES

Patna, Feb 18: While the prices of petrol and diesel touched ₹100 at some places in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, this situation is turning out to be a money making business for mafias active on the borders of India and Nepal.

The smuggling of petrol and diesel is taking place in areas adjoining the Nepal border with people going to Nepal on bikes and bicycles, and coming back with gallon cans filled with fuel to villages in West Champaran district.

Reports of smuggling of fuel emerged from over two dozen villages like Bhiritarwa, Basantpur, Semarwari, Bhaluwahiya, Bhagha etc located on the India-Nepal border. These are unchecked places due to the open borders between the two countries. The prices of petrol and diesel are much lower in Nepal compared to India.



FUEL PRICES IN CITY

FUEL PRICES BREAK INTO NEW HIGHS

NEW DELHI: Petrol and diesel price continued to rally northward Thursday, the 10th consecutive day when its retail prices rose across the country. In Sri Ganganagar town in Rajasthan, normal petrol price has shot up over ₹100 per litre to stand at ₹100.49 a litre. The global oil market remained firm and prices of both crude and products saw a big spike. Accordingly, oil marketing companies raised the pump price of petrol by 34 paise and diesel by another 32 paise per litre in Delhi. With this increase, petrol is now priced at ₹89.88 a litre and diesel ₹80.27 a litre in the national capital. In the last 10 days (since February 9), the price has gone up by ₹2.93 per litre for petrol, while diesel rate has risen by ₹3.14 a litre. Across the country as well, the petrol and diesel price increase ranged between 30-35 paise per litre depending on the level of local taxes on the two petroleum products. In Mumbai, petrol prices are just ₹4 per litre short (₹96.32 a litre) of touching the three-digit mark of ₹100 per litre for the very first time ever. Diesel prices in the city are closing on ₹90 a litre (₹87.32 a litre). In all other metros, petrol is over ₹90 a litre mark while diesel is well over ₹80 a litre.

According to an official, the price of petrol in Nepal is ₹111.20 (Nepalese Rs) which is equal to ₹69.50 in Indian currency. Similarly, the price of diesel in Nepal is ₹94.20 (Nepalese Rs) equivalent to ₹58.88 in Indian currency.

In Bihar the price of petrol is ₹92.51 and ₹85.70 for diesel. Interestingly, India exports petrol and diesel to Nepal.

Due to such illegal practices, the sale of petrol and diesel at petrol pumps located at these places in India has declined sharply. Hence, petrol pump owners are complaining to the district administration about smuggling of fuel.

"As the border is open in these places, villagers often go there carrying gallon cans on bikes and cycles to buy petrol and diesel. They generally operate at night and sell it to individual buyers," said Rajiv Sharma, manager of a petrol pump, in Iranwa village.

Another employee Ibrahim Khan said: "The local administration knows about the smuggling. We have informed the local police also but they are not taking any action. The mafias are strong in these villages and that probably is the reason for inaction from the police department."

Kundan Kumar, the SHO of Iranwa police station said: "We have received complaints about smuggling of fuel. Accordingly, we have taken measures. We have enhanced night patrolling in these areas to nab the smugglers. The process of identifying individual smugglers is underway through local informers."

'Metro Man' to join BJP

NEW DELHI: E Sreedharan, the legendary "Metro Man" of India, is set to join the BJP months ahead of polls in Kerala. The 88-year-old is likely to join the party during its Vijay Yatra in Kerala from Sunday and may also contest the Kerala election, due by May, although there are questions about the BJP's cut-off point of 75 years for elections, applied previously to veterans like LK Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi. "I have decided to join the BJP, just official formalities remain," Sreedharan confirmed told the media from his hometown Malappuram. "I have been living in Kerala for the last 10 years, since my retirement. I have seen different governments and they are not doing what can be done for the people. I am joining the BJP to be able to do my part, using my experience," he said.

AGAINST FARM LAWS



Members of various farmers' organisations block a railway track during a four-hour 'Rail Roko' demonstration across the country, called by Samyukta Kisan Morcha, as part of their agitation against Centre's farm reform laws, in Amritsar, Thursday (Story P9)

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	51324.69 ↓ 379.14
NIFTY	15119.00 ↓ 89.90
DOLLAR	72.93 ↓ ₹0.19
EURO	87.69 ↑ ₹0.04
GOLD	₹46,322 ↑ ₹85.00
SILVER	₹68,920 ↓ ₹250

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	33.7°C	33.6°C
MIN	18.0°C	17.0°C
Humidity	75%	71%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Mainly clear sky

NASA rover faces '7 minutes of terror' before landing on Mars

ENTRY, DESCENT, AND LANDING (EDL) BEGIN WHEN THE SPACECRAFT CARRYING PERSEVERANCE STRIKES THE MARTIAN ATMOSPHERE AT NEARLY 20,000 KMS PER HOUR

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Washington, Feb 18: Seven months after blast-off, NASA's Mars 2020 mission will have to negotiate its shortest and most intense phase on Thursday: the "seven minutes of terror" it takes to slam the brakes and land the Perseverance rover on a narrow target on the planet's surface.

Entry, Descent, and Landing (EDL) begins when the spacecraft carrying Perseverance strikes the Martian atmosphere at nearly 20,000 kilometers per hour.

It ends around seven minutes later with the rover at rest on the surface. Touchdown on the Jezero Crater is scheduled for 3:55 pm US

eastern time (2055 GMT).

"This is one of the most difficult maneuvers that we do in this business, and almost 50 percent of the spacecraft that had been sent to the surface of Mars have failed," Matt Wallace, the mission's deputy project manager said.

Atmospheric entry

Ten minutes before entering the Martian atmosphere, the spacecraft sheds its cruise stage that supplied the fuel tanks, radios and solar panels on the voyage. It's left with just a protective aeroshell, carrying the rover and descent stage, and it fires thrusters to make sure its heat shield is forward facing. At about 130 kilometers altitude, it careens into the atmosphere and



things start to get hot: peak heating occurs about 80 seconds in when the heat shield surface reaches about 1,300°C. Perseverance is tucked away safely in the aeroshell, only experiencing room temperature. The craft might need to fire thrusters to stay on course as it hits air pockets. Parachute deployment

Once the spacecraft has slowed down to less than 1,600 kilometers an hour, it's time to deploy the 21.5 meters wide supersonic parachute at an altitude of 11 kilometers. Perseverance is deploying a new technology called Range Trigger that decides the precise moment to deploy, based on the craft's position relative to the landing site.

Asked to name the single most critical event, NASA's EDL lead Allen Chen said: "Obviously there's a lot of concentrated risk in supersonic parachute opening." To try out its new design, NASA had to carry out extensive supersonic parachute testing from high altitudes here on Earth, a field of research that had been dormant since the 1970s.

HEAT SHIELD SEPARATION

Next, the spacecraft jettisons its heat shield, around 20 seconds after the parachute has been deployed. The rover is exposed to the atmosphere for the first time, and uses landing radar to bounce signals off the surface and calculate its precise altitude.

The mission will also see another technology deployed for the first time: the "Terrain Relative Navigation" (TRN) system that uses a special camera to identify surface features and compare them to an onboard map where engineers pre-programmed the safest landing sites.

"That gives our vehicle eyes, and the ability to really see where she's going and figure out where she is," said Chen.



KIM SHOWCASES 'FLOWER POWER'

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian has covered herself with just peonies for her latest picture post on social media. The star is also seen flaunting her iconic contoured face with smokey eyes and dark lips. Alongside the image, which currently has 1.5 million likes, she wrote: "Flower Power".

PARIS WAS ABUSED AT SCHOOL

Model Paris Jackson, daughter of pop king Michael Jackson, says she went through similar abuse at school as Paris Hilton. Jackson attended a reformatory school in Utah and she shared that she identified with the treatment endured by Hilton, who recently testified in court about the physical and emotional abuse she suffered during her time at school.



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ARIES
You may cause some heart-breaks today, so be careful! Apart from this, Ganesh says, your love life is stable and you are ready to make a commitment to your loved one. If you are married, your relationship will become more intense and attachment will strengthen.

TAURUS
Unless you mind your moods and manners today, you are likely to hurt, and lose, a lot of friends, fears Ganesh. Your thoughts and feelings will be unduly unsteady and unpredictable. It may not always be possible to maintain your calm, to stay in control.

GEMINI
You will be bound by the bonds of love with your friends today. Deep introspection will provide the much-needed balm to your fragile state of mind. You need to keep your temper in check, says Ganesh.

CANCER
Today, you may get to spend a wonderful time with your loved ones, foresees Ganesh. Besides pleasure, the day will also fare well for business. As an entrepreneur, you may be able to see important deals and ventures coming through. You may go on a tour for business purposes in the later half of the day.

LEO
It is always a small world till you dream big! Ganesh foresees chances of you transcending your regular boundaries as you combine forces with people and conceive interests larger than what most people dream of. This route is not the easiest, in that it may be hard to convince people who see differently, especially conservative bosses.

VIRGO
The way you feel today will bring about many changes in your behaviour, says Ganesh. You will probably make some choices that will involve some high expenditure. In the afternoon, you may entertain relatives and friends at home, says Ganesh.

LIBRA
For all purposes intact, Ganesh foresees chances that today you may have an overwhelming urge and desire to renovate your home. It may be the small things, but even a new showpiece can go a long way in adding to the general décor of the house.

SCORPIO
Today will be a favourable day to conclude transactions in houses or vehicles, foresees Ganesh. On the business front, you will possibly get lesser profits than expected. At work, your negotiating skills will save your money from being swindled by others.

SAGITTARIUS
Ganesh foresees signals of you being calm and in control to safeguard the sentiments of your dear ones. The afternoon is scheduled to be either the time for a business meet or for some fun and frolic. However, the evening may be heavy on your pocket as you may spend a lot to improve your appearance.

CAPRICORN
Ambitions give direction to life. You will harbour quite a few today, says Ganesh. At work, you will strive for perfection and watch out for every minute detail that can ruin the expected results. Also, you will be brilliant with executing ideas and ensuring coordination among team mates.

AQUARIUS
Wake up! Things are moving quickly and you want to keep pace. Today, your ideas find a place in the sun, and you will bask in all the attention you garner. You need to decide quickly about certain matters, but leave the big decisions for now, says Ganesh.

PISCES
Your honesty is your hallmark, and it will reap bountiful rewards for you today, both at the workplace on account of your integrity, and in relationships on account of your sincerity, says Ganesh. Financially also, it promises to be a good day.

When Shraddha understood value of 'zero'

Mumbai: Actress Shraddha Kapoor describes the lockdown phase of last year as one of her crucial phases for self-realisation. It was a period when she could learn to unlearn and redefine the value of zero, the spiritual meaning of 'shunya', she says.

"As an actress, being a part of show business, we have to look in a certain way and that changes also with every film that we do, every character I play. Recently I invested in a beverage project in which I really do not have to count my calories while having my favourite drinks. In a way, during lockdown, I have understood and redefined the value of 'shunya', and now I know the brand of product or even brand of cinema I would like to associate myself with," adds the *Baaghi* actress.

Shraddha has been around in the industry for around a decade, and she has faced success, failure, praise and criticism. Her debut film *Teen Patti* fared below expectation, her third film *Aashiqui 2* was a musical superhit, followed by *Ek Villain*.

IAN5



Loyoleans embark on a publishing journey

Students bitten by the writing bug were taught composition techniques to create and publish their own e-Books

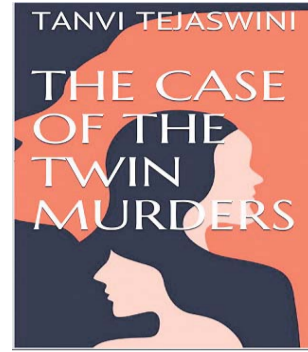
POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: At a time when mobile and iPads are an integral part of the lives of millennials, Loyola School authorities here have adopted a unique way to enhance the creative writing skills of their students.

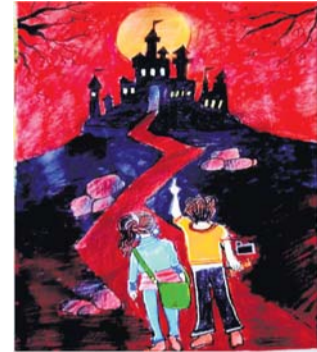
In a joint venture, principal Father Victor Misquiths, SJ, conceptualised 'K12 Writing Fest' in collaboration with Shaon Mitra, the director of Future Learner K12, a well known publishing house to bring students' talent to the fore.

Result: The first e-Book of a five book series, comprising four stories of supernatural genre, all authored by the students, has been published recently. The illustrations in the book have also been drawn by the students.

The writers are Sanidhya Jena of Class 7 (*The One in the Façade*), Simran Sahoo of Class 8 (*Talent Brown*), Swastik Padhy of Class



Cover of Tanvi's e-Book



An illustration by Tapasi Patnaik

7 (*Mystery Case De Earl*) and Archita Samantara of Class 7 (*Fearing The Unknown*). Tapasi Patnaik, Spandan Dash, Anmol P (All of Class 10) and Sushree Tamanna worked as illustrators in the e-book.

The Loyoleans wrote their stories and poems and the FLK12 team presented the work of the students on the global Amazon Kindle platform. Titled *Loyola Achieves and Logs*, is a five part series covering

a wide range of genres. It is to give ambitious new authors and poets a rare chance to be published. "VITANTS L.BSR: FLK12. FILE 1" is the first e-Book of the series.

A second module e-Book was simultaneously introduced in which individual students bitten by the writing bug were trained on composition techniques to create and publish their own e-Books. Tanvi Tejaswini of

Class 6 is one such success story. Her e-Book *The Case Of The Twin Murders* was the first book to go on The Amazon Kindle platform and it is a matter of great pride that she reached the second position in the Children's Crime & Thriller Category on the Kindle Store during the first week of its release. "Quite a few of my children have been brooding over the enforced home confinement of the last few months. A winner as the saying goes is someone who does things differently. Tanvi is one among a winning breed of Loyoleans who has been able to change adversity into an opportunity for creative writing," said the excited principal.

"It has given talented and ambitious new authors and poets a rare opportunity to become better communicators and enhance their leadership skills," said Mousumi Jena, a teacher of English department who joined as the project coordinator for the first book.

Neha Kakkar donates ₹5 lakh to veteran lyricist Santosh Anand

Mumbai: Singer Neha Kakkar will donate Rs 5 lakh to veteran lyricist Santosh Anand during an upcoming episode of *Indian Idol 12*, after the lyricist speaks of how he is battling a tough financial situation and has incurred debts.

Neha is a judge on the show, and Anand will appear as a guest with musician Pyarelal of the legendary composer duo of Laxmikant-Pyarelal. The duo had worked with Anand in classics as Prem Rog, Roti Kapada Aur Makaan and Shor in the past. An emotional Neha says: "I would like to give you Rs 5 lakh as a small gesture and would also like to request the Indian entertainment industry to give Santosh ji some work as he has been such a crucial part of our industry. It's our duty to help our colleagues in their bad times."

Her co-judge, composer Vishal Dadlani, then asks Anand to share a few of his songs with him. Vishal will help Anand release the songs. IAN5

Prachi to make OTT debut with murder mystery



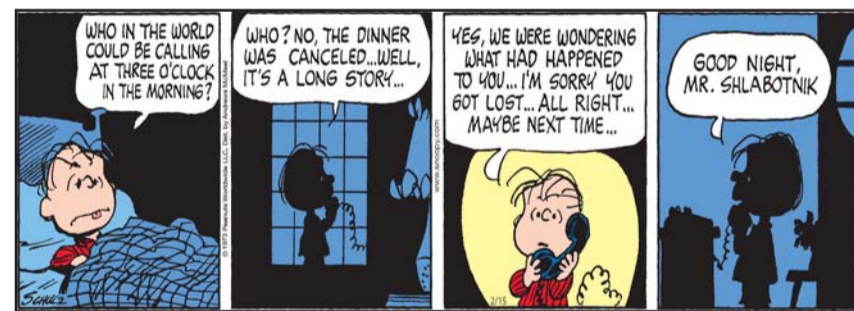
Mumbai: Actress Prachi Desai is all set to make her debut in the web space with the murder mystery film, *Silence Can You Hear It*, starring Manoj Bajpayee.

"This is all too exciting for me and I feel blessed to be making my digital debut with such an incredible film. My experience of filming with the extraordinary cast and crew of the film has really been a phenomenal one and I can't wait for the audience to witness the movie on their screens," Prachi said.

The film also features Arjun Mathur, and Sahil Vaid, and is slated to release in March 2021 on Zee5. The film tells the story of the mysterious disappearance of a woman.

IAN5

PEANUTS



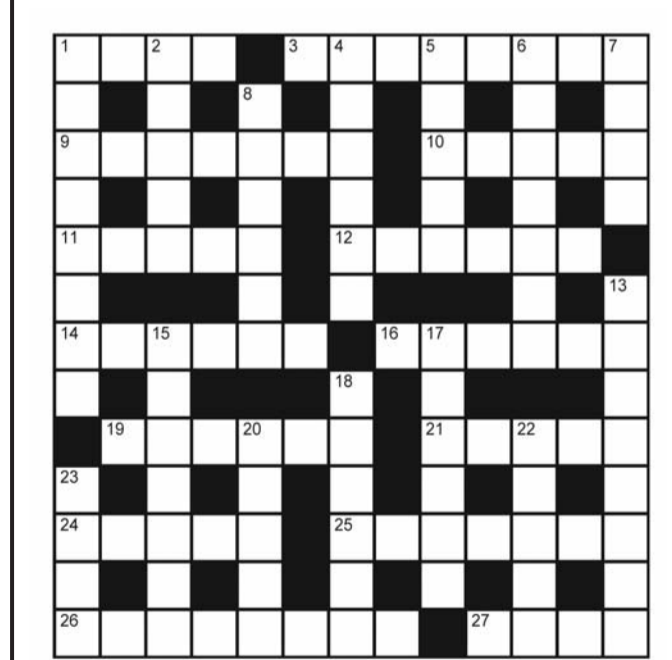
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY

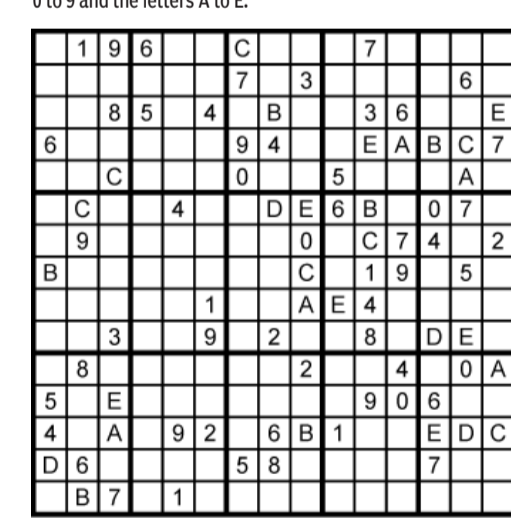


FUN post CROSSWORD

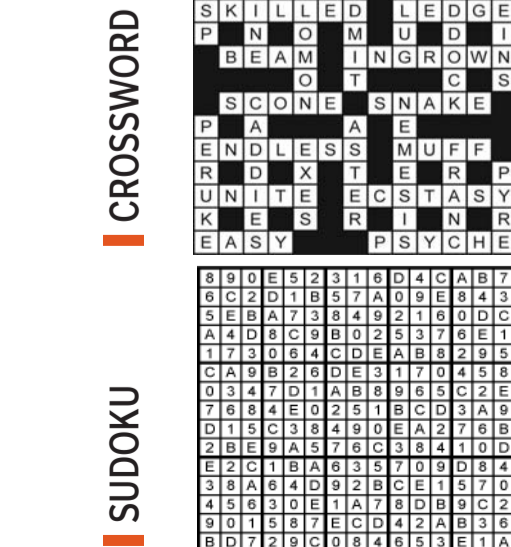


- Across**
- 1 Burlap fibre
 - 3 BB gun (3,5)
 - 9 Tosses in horseshoes
 - 10 Fish-eating diving birds
 - 11 Raw fish dish
 - 12 Sniff out
 - 14 Summer cooler (3,3)
 - 16 Road crew machine
 - 19 Track event
 - 21 Stroll
 - 24 Correspond
 - 25 Spotted wildcat
 - 26 Cause to be immobile
 - 27 Open carriage
 - 6 Like cupcakes, usually
 - 7 Sunrise direction
 - 8 Make changes
 - 13 Amiable
 - 15 Kind of penguin
 - 17 Sanity
 - 18 Corn holders
 - 20 Perfect
 - 22 Where to find sand
 - 23 Light source
- Down**
- 1 Dinosaur era
 - 2 Prongs
 - 4 Shoe part
 - 5 Museum piece

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

SRI AUROBINDO



Changes in the offing

Even as India's GDP has been shrinking month after month, stock markets are rising to newer heights with every passing day. This dichotomy has been in full glare right since the second quarter of this financial year. An investor who put half their savings in equities in March last year would have surely doubled his corpus by now — an over 100 per cent return. In fact, the dynamics of the stock markets have decoupled from economy. As economy shrinks, jobs come down and so does the demand. As demand dries up, companies fail to find buyers for their products and services. Once sales of services and goods fall, companies incur losses and revenues come down. Dividend payouts by companies to investors also thin out. In normal situation, it would seem that stock prices will be less pricey. The relentless rise in stock prices now is a very dicey scenario. It looks like a massive bubble is building up, only to burst in our face before long. Why such exact opposites are happening? Are the investors so naïve? Not exactly. These questions and many more like these are coming to mind. One reason for the unexpected rise in stock prices could be the falling wage bills of companies during the pandemic leading to a corresponding increase in the income of business owners. The returns to owners of businesses have gone up sharply while real wages have dropped. So the health of the economy may have gone down, but the returns to the owners have gone up — something that drives the stock prices of companies. We can assume that share prices go up when companies announce that they have reduced their wage bills. Stock markets across the world have been rallying in the midst of the global recession worsened by the coronavirus pandemic. The slump caused a drop in sales of companies because demand has evaporated. Yet, the returns to owners of businesses went up sharply while real wages dropped. The easy money policy by the RBI has also helped in good measure to sustain the market rally. There is enough money for people to borrow and invest in stocks and shares. Another reason why share prices are going up is the accumulated capital of corporates. As demand drops, corporate houses do not make fresh investment in their businesses. Therefore, they return a part of their retained profits to shareholders by giving them higher dividends or through share buy-backs. High dividends push the demand for shares, pushing up prices. Share-buy-backs also reduce the float (supply) size of the shares in the markets, causing stock prices to go up. At present, real interest on term deposits offered by banks is negative if we factor in over six per cent retail inflation in the December quarter. The rate of interest on a term deposit in any Indian bank does not fetch 5-6 per cent. Therefore, the only instrument that gives positive returns is the investments in stock markets. Availability of easy money by banks, lack of avenues to grow money and allure of stock markets have combined to drive investors to equities markets. Will this rally sustain for long? Not likely. In the medium to long run, this is headed for a bust-up. The earnings of companies are likely to come down as wage bills are headed for a markup. If the tax projections of the government in this year's budget are any indication, we will see that the size of tax projections is relatively smaller in the Q3-Q4 of the current fiscal. In such situations, markets are bound to get into a phase of correction.

FOCUS DEFENCE MODERNISATION

BOOST TO ARMED FORCES

The Union Budget 2021-22 has come in the backdrop of a severe economic crisis induced by Covid-19 pandemic. The Indian economy whose growth was already decelerating in 2019-20, seems to be witnessing a major contraction of by 7.7%, as assessed by the Economic Survey. The CMIE has assessed the unemployment figure as 122 million, including 12.8 million in the organised sector. China has been making belligerent moves on the border. The Defence Services have been clamouring for more funds to upgrade its combat capability. In this backdrop, defence outlay in the general Budget was keenly watched.

An analysis of MoDs overall expenditure during 2011 to 2021 would reveal that it has increased at a compound annual growth rate of 9.2%, of which the hike in pension and pay and allowances contribute 71%. On the contrary, the capital Budget has increased by a mere 13%. The FM has made an allocation of \$65.6 billion to the MoD, accounting for an increase of 1.4% over the last year's Budget and around 2.38% of India's GDP and 14% of CGE.

However, the major surprise has been accepting a major recommendation of the 15th Finance Commission to create a Non-lapsable Defence Capital Outlay Fund. This has been a recurring demand by the Defence Services, in view of a perception that the requirement of modernisation for the three Services has not kept pace with the allocation made by the Ministry of Finance. Army is the biggest spender (54%), followed by IAF and Navy. DRDO spends around 6% of defence expenditure for building prototypes and improving India's capability for producing major weapon system.

Capital expenditure accounts for nearly 35% of total defence Budget unlike the general Budget where it is of the order of only 15%. IAF is most capital intensive with a share of 44%, followed by the Navy and Army. It is a matter of satisfaction that there is a significant increase in capital expenditure by IAF and Navy at the RE stage. However, a comparison of the funds asked for by MoD and approved by MoF would reveal that India is the second highest importer of conventional arms.

The SIPRI report (2020) brings out how the global share of five major countries ploy out in terms of global share of export and imports. Of the total world military expenditure of \$1917 billion, USA has the largest share (43%), while China accounts for \$261 billion and India around \$70 billion. It works out to 2.2% of world GDP. As against this India's defence expenditure is around 2.3%. Import of military hardware results in the country losing out on the multiplier effects on the economy and spin offs in terms of technology and innovation.

In July 2019 the government had tasked the 15th Finance Commission to address the severe resource constraints being faced by the Defence and Home Affairs ministries in their modernisation efforts. It had also asked the Commission to examine if a "separate mechanism for funding of defence and internal security ought to be set up and if so, how such a mechanism could be operationalised". In view of the charter,



Army is the biggest spender (54%), followed by IAF and Navy. DRDO spends around 6% of defence expenditure for building prototypes and improving India's capability for producing major weapon system. Capital expenditure accounts for nearly 35% of total defence Budget

It would be pertinent to observe that the manpower cost, the major elements of which are salaries and pension, has increased significantly from less than 50 per cent of the MoD's budget to over 60 per cent in a time span of 10 years ending 2020-21. During the same period, the share of modernization expenditure has declined from 27 per cent to 19 per cent.

The 15th Finance Commission has also urged the MoD to reduce dependence on defence import. In this respect, the Commission has recommended to the Ministry of Finance to incentivise the MoD to work on a time-bound action plan for progressive increase in the share of indigenous arms in India's defence procurement. The Commission hopes that a calibrated roadmap should enable the MoD to source not more than 30 per cent of its arms requirement from the foreign vendors by the end of 2025-26. This brings to memory the Kalam Committee report of 1993, which enjoined upon the India's Defence manufacturing complex to improve Self Reliance Index (SRI) from 30% to 70%, in a decade's time, which has remained a pipe dream.

Victor Hugo, the celebrated French poet wrote, "No force on earth can stop a moment whose time has come". Despite stubborn opposition by MoD mandarins, CDS is now a critical component of MoD's decision making. Similarly providing a non-lapsable fund for modernisation of the Defence Services is a major structural reform which will ensure that the services are no longer starved for funding modernisation plans. However, it needs to mesh up with Long Term Defence Capability Plan and our indigenous capability plans, duly factoring the capability of our belligerent neighbours. Besides, the services need to tighten and shorten their cycle time for acquisition, cut down on interminable delay in time taken for trials and drawn up realistic QR.

While suggesting the creation of the non-lapsable fund, the Commission has also urged the MoD, the bigger beneficiary of the proposed MFDIS, to "take immediate measures to innovatively bring down the salaries and pension liabilities". In this connection

The writer was an Addl. Financial Advisor with MoD.

WISDOM CORNER

- Don't limit yourself. Many people limit themselves to what they think they can do. You can go as far as your mind lets you. What you believe, remember, you can achieve. **MARY KAY ASH**
- The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. **CHINESE PROVERB**
- Work like there is someone working twenty four hours a day to take it away from you. **MARK CUBAN**

WORDSWORTH

Bull in a china shop

It's still common, though rarely meaning reckless destruction of a physical kind. More usually, it's a way to express a metaphorical clumsiness. The damage is caused by want of diplomacy or tact or through mindless aggression that falls short of actual violence. It's on record from the beginning of the nineteenth century. It's one of those idioms that seem to have arrived fully formed without anybody having to go to the trouble of creating it. Was there ever a real bull that rampaged through a real china shop, leaving chaos and destruction behind him, so giving rise to the simile? Perhaps not, though an open-fronted shop in a market town might easily have had such an encounter with an escaped animal. But if you wanted to form a phrase that suggested uncontrolled and uncaring actions with disastrous results, to set a bovine rampaging through a porcelain emporium would be as good as you could wish for. As a linguistic curiosity, related expressions occur in many European languages — among them Russian, Latvian, Polish, Dutch, German, French, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish — though all of them feature an elephant, not a bull. The last two, however, prefer to place him in a glassware store rather than a china shop. English is the odd one out in using the homely bull. There's probably a story in there, if one could only tease it out.

Bulldozer

The word is definitely American. The earliest sense had nothing to do with machinery, but referred to a severe punishment, in particular one applied with a bullwhip. Detailed explanations appear in several US newspapers in the latter months of 1876, the earliest I've found being the day before the presidential election of 1876, which historians suggest may have been the most hard-fought, corrupt and rigged election in the history of the Union. All say that it came into being as a result of a determined attempt by Democrat supporters in the Southern states to stop blacks from voting Republican. This is the way the origin of the expression was explained in the Gettysburg Compiler of 11 January 1877: In very obstinate cases the brethren were in the habit of administering a "bull's dose" of several hundred lashes on the bare back. When dealing with those who were hard to convert, active members would call out "give me the whip and let me give him a bull-dose." From this it became easy to say "that fellow ought to be bull-dosed, or bull-doized," and soon bull-doze, bull-doizing and bull-doizers came to be slang words. Several articles use bull-dozers for the individuals who were doing the intimidation, as in this item from the Janesville Gazette of Wisconsin in November 1876.

LOL

NOT A MEMBER

During an impassioned sermon about death and final judgment, the pastor said forcefully, "Each member of this church is going to die and face judgment!" Glancing down at the front pew, he noticed a man with a big smile on his face. The minister repeated his point louder. "Each member of this church is going to die and face judgment!" The man nodded and smiled even more. This really got the preacher wound up. He pounded the pulpit emphatically when he came to the ultimatum: "Each member of this church is going to die and face judgment!!!"

Though everyone else in the congregation was looking somber, the man in front continued to smile. Finally the preacher stepped off the platform, stood in front of the man and shouted, "I said each member of this church is going to die!" The man grinned from ear to ear. After the service was over, the preacher made a beeline for the man. "I don't get it," the preacher said in frustration. "Whenever I said, 'Each member of this church is going to die', your smile got bigger. Why?" "I'm not a member of this church," the man replied.



SPECTRUM THE UNITED STATES

Tackling racial disparities in science



Esther Ngumbi
ACCORDING TO A 2018 PEW RESEARCH CENTER REPORT, 62% OF BLACK STEM WORKERS SAID THEY HAD EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION. OTHER STUDIES SHOW THAT RACIAL BIAS CAN ALSO DEVALUE BLACK STEM STUDENTS' RACIAL IDENTITIES

Kamala Harris made history earlier this month by becoming the first woman, and the first Black person and South Asian American, to serve as Vice President of the United States. But despite these occasional big wins, America is far from achieving racial and gender parity in many fields, from government to science, the field in which I work.

According to UNESCO, just 30% of science researchers globally are women, and Black women account for only a small proportion of that number. Similarly, one US study last year revealed that science textbooks feature only a small number of scientists of colour, including Black women, thus providing few role models for the diverse range of students who use them.

This disparity reinforces the status quo. In 2016, students of colour received just 22% of US bachelor's degrees in science and engineering and 9% of doctorates in those fields. After graduating, their numbers dwindle further: Black people account for less than 10% of America's scientific workforce.

When people of colour do choose to study and work in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, they may face both implicit and explicit discrimination and biases. According to a 2018 Pew Research Center report, 62% of black STEM workers said they had experienced discrimination. Other studies show that racial bias can also devalue black STEM students' racial identities.

Socioeconomic inequalities in education, coupled with inadequate policies, hamper efforts to achieve gender and racial balance in the STEM disciplines. Moreover, the Trump administration's restrictive immigration policies during the last four years have discouraged and limited inflows of STEM talent to the US.

This must change. At a time when it is more crucial than ever that science attracts the best minds, the underrepresentation of women and people of colour in STEM fields has significant consequences for America and the world. We must do better at giving aspiring black girls and women role models who look like them, so that future trail-blazers can, like Harris, thrive and shatter more glass ceilings.

So, how can America's racial disparities in science be addressed? First, we need sustainable policies that target affordability, starting at the college level. To boost enrollment and encourage women and students of color who are already pursuing STEM majors to finish their degrees requires ensuring that they are able to bear the financial burden. The evidence suggests the importance of making financial aid and Pell Grants available to students of color and other minorities from low- and moderate-income families. Indeed, given that many students currently must juggle school and work commitments, financial aid and other assistance available to students of color in STEM fields should be doubled.

But financial aid alone is not sufficient. Mentoring at all levels — for secondary school and college students, and for early and mid-career professionals — can be critical to helping improve academic retention rates and ensuring that people of color thrive in STEM jobs. The good news is that some institutions are establishing and funding such programs. In 2019, for example, the University of California, Davis, received over \$1 million to set up a mentoring scheme for 15,000 girls with the aim of closing the STEM gender gap.

Research shows how mentoring can help women to remain in the sciences by boosting their sense of belonging and confidence. To lock in positive change requires individuals, universities, US federal

agencies, and private STEM-focused firms take a proactive approach to the task.

Third, the US needs a federal government that is committed to science and empowering women, especially those of color. Fortunately, President Joe Biden's administration has a bold agenda for women. Specifically, it proposes to make historically black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions tuition-free for students whose family incomes are below \$125,000 per year. Biden also plans to enforce Title IX protections to ensure that women and girls receive financial aid and other educational opportunities to realize their full potential.

Lastly, we need more research to generate data-based evidence about the best ways to reduce racial disparities in science. Compared to research on gender biases in academia, racial biases remain understudied. Funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation should therefore earmark funds exclusively for such research.

The writer is Assistant Professor of Entomology and African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Letters

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

OrissaPOST
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Ban diesel-driven car production

Sir, This refers to regular increase on daily basis in prices of petrol and diesel. Procurement prices of petrol, diesel and kerosene are almost same. However, kerosene is sold at highly subsidised prices because it is mainly used by the poor. Diesel is priced lower than petrol because diesel is mainly used in transportation. But now prices of diesel are regularly increasing, thus resulting in price rise of goods. The motto should be to keep diesel prices in control by allowing its use mainly for commercial transportation and not for running cars. It is not proper that even super-costly cars used by elite rich are now-a-days having diesel engines. This is evidently misuse of the policy of keeping the price of diesel lower than petrol. Production of diesel-driven cars should be altogether banned. It will also help in reducing pollution because diesel causes more pollution than petrol. It is noteworthy that in Delhi, diesel-cars are allowed to be used for ten years, while petrol cars are allowed to be used for 15 years. Ban on production of diesel cars will enable the Central government to restrict price-rise of diesel which, in turn, will keep prices of public-transportation and goods under control.

Subhash Chandra Agarwal, NEW DELHI

More foreign Consulates needed

Sir, The Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and the Vienna Convention of Diplomatic Relations mandate the establishment of Honorary Consulates and full-fledged foreign embassies across cities globally. The Honorary Consulates and embassies function effectively to bridge educational, scientific, cultural and trade ties of the home country with the foreign country. India should now take a surge in leading from the front to foster new and strong diplomatic relationships with more number of its counterparts in the European Union, ASEAN countries, Asia Pacific countries, the Middle East nations, African and American countries. There is a need to take forward this relationship with the establishment of new Honorary Consulates and full-fledged embassies in New Delhi and across other popular cities such as Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Mumbai. Many cities such as Bengaluru (the IT Hub) does not have enough diplomatic representations through full-fledged Consulate offices of countries such as the United States of America, Australia, Singapore, New Zealand, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand etc to name a few.

Varun Dambal, BANGALORE



BJP promises 33% quota for women in govt jobs in WB

Shah made the announcement while addressing supporters in Namkhana of the South 24 Parganas district and kicked off the fifth and final phase of 'Poribortan Yatra' in Bengal



AGENCIES

Namkhana (West Bengal), Feb 18: In a bid to woo women-voters in poll-bound West Bengal, Union Home Minister Amit Shah Thursday announced 33 per cent reservation for women in government jobs if the party is voted to power.

Shah made the announcement while addressing a huge crowd of supporters in Namkhana village of the South 24 Parganas district and kicking off the fifth and final phase of 'Poribortan Yatra' in Bengal. "If we come to power we will provide 33 per cent reservation for women in the government jobs," the Home Minister said.

This was not the only sop that Shah promised at the public meeting. He also said in case the BJP comes to power, it will work towards implementing the Seventh Pay Commission.

Shah said the economy of the state is in such a precarious position that the Seventh Pay Commission is not given to employees of the state government.

"If we are voted to power, I promise we will implement the Seventh Pay Commission benefits to all the employees," Shah said. He also highlighted the plight

of teachers in the state and said that the party will be fighting for their rights and proper remuneration. "After coming to power, the BJP government in West Bengal will form a committee to give right remuneration to teachers in the state," he said.

Shah also emphasised on the upliftment of the fishermen community in the state, "For welfare of fishermen, after coming to power, we will give Rs 6,000 as fishermen 'Samaan Nidhi' like 'Kisan Samman Nidhi' to four lakh fishermen in the state," he said.

"To ensure the right price for their produce, the BJP government will create a ministry at the level of state minister. A seafood hub will be developed in the area of 24 Parganas," he said.

He further said that Gangasagar will be developed as a tourism and cultural hub. "The fair held at Gangasagar on the occasion of Uttarayan on January 14 will be given the status of international fair to bring tourists from across the globe," said the union home minister.

The BJP is giving a tough fight to the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal. Assembly elections in the state are scheduled later this year.

First fight Abhishek, then me: Didi dares Amit Shah

AGENCIES

Pailan, Feb 18: Hitting out at Union Home Minister Amit Shah's 'Didi-Bhaipo' jibes, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday challenged him to contest an election against her nephew Abhishek Banerjee and then think of fighting her.

Addressing a party rally in Pailan in the South 24 Parganas district, Banerjee said that Abhishek could have taken the easy route of being an MP by choosing to be a Rajya Sabha member but he fought the Lok Sabha election and got the people's mandate.

"Day and night they are talking about Didi-Bhatija. I challenge Amit Shah, contest against Abhishek Banerjee first and then me," she said, amid a loud cheer from supporters.

Banerjee said that she has neither made Abhishek the deputy Chief Minister nor the chief minister and he is just an elected MP.

"My family will not do anything which will bring disrepute to you," Banerjee told the TMC workers, claiming that she feels anguished that the BJP has been making accusations against Abhishek for being her nephew.

BJP leaders, including Shah, have often accused Banerjee of dynasty politics, alleging that her



'Bhaipo' or nephew has received preferential treatment and will eventually be made the chief minister of the state.

"How come your son became a part of the cricket administration and made hundreds of crores of rupees?" Banerjee said, in a direct attack at Shah. She also challenged the home minister to get him into politics.

"I challenge Amit Shah, get your son into politics and ask him to toil hard to rise through the ranks," she said.

Banerjee exuded confidence that her party will break all records of past elections in the state, get most of the votes and win the highest number of seats in the upcoming polls.

"Amit Shah should know that in 2021, we will break all records and will get the highest votes and win the most seats," she asserted. The TMC supremo, questioning

Shah's observation that the Gangasagar mela site at Sagar islands in the district was not in good shape, said, "I haven't seen any home minister of the country speaking this much falsities."

Shah was also in the district during the day for a host of political programmes, including a rally and a roadshow in Kakdwip - around 65 km from Pailan where the chief minister was addressing TMC's booth-level workers in the evening. Banerjee alleged that attempts were being made to threaten people and coerce them to vote for the BJP with the help of the central police forces.

"Remember, central police will be here for a month after that it will be Didi's government. So, don't worry and whenever they try to threaten, the women of the house should go out and guard the family with 'khunti' (cooking spoon)," she said.

CID investigates bomb attack on WB minister

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Feb 18: The CID Thursday started a probe into the bomb attack on West Bengal Minister Jakir Hossain, who along with 21 others was seriously injured in the blast at Nimtita railway station in Murshidabad district Wednesday night. A team of forensic experts visited the railway station Thursday and collected evidence.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday visited the SSKM hospital, where the Minister of State for Labour department and the other injured are under medical treatment. The Chief Minister said that she handed over the investigation to the Criminal Investigation Department, who immediately went to the blast site and began their probe. "It was a planned conspiracy," Banerjee said and raised questions about the role of the security personnel of the Railways.

The incident took place at Nimtita railway station at around 10 p.m. Wednesday night when the Minister accompanied by the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) workers was on the platform to board a Kolkata bound train to attend a party meeting in the state capital.

In all 22 persons including the Minister were injured in the blast and 10 of them have been shifted to Kolkata hospitals. Hossain was seriously injured after the "unidentified attackers" hurled a crude bomb at him.

Minister Firhad Hakim, who also visited the SSKM hospital, said that a medical board has been constituted for Hossain. He is stable now but has injuries on his fingers and foot, Hakim added.

Bharatiya Janata Party leaders alleged that the incident was due to the infighting in the ruling party before the Assembly elections while the Congress accused the state government of having failed to main-

In all 22 persons including the minister, were injured in the blast and 10 of them have been shifted to Kolkata hospitals

Hossain was seriously injured after the 'unidentified attackers' hurled a crude bomb at him

tain law and order. "The incident proves that Bengal is not safe even for ministers. The TMC government has failed to manage law and order," West Bengal BJP president Dilip Ghosh said. The ruling TMC workers Thursday blocked National Highway-34 for several hours to protest the bomb attack.

This is the first such attack on a minister in recent years in West Bengal, which will go to the polls along with other states in April-May this year.

It's a conspiracy, alleges Mamata Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has pointed out towards a "conspiracy" behind the bomb attack in West Bengal's Murshidabad district that left her Labour Minister Jakir Hossain seriously injured.

Without taking names of any particular party or individual, Banerjee levelled allegation that some people were "pressurizing" Hossain to join their party.

Banerjee held even the Indian Railways responsible for the incident since it took place on its premises as crude bombs were hurled on Hossain by unidentified people Wednesday night while he was walking towards Nimtita Railway station in Murshidabad to board a train for Kolkata.

"Railways are to be blamed for the blast at Murshidabad where Minister Jakir Hossain was injured. It was a planned conspiracy to kill him. Not a responsibility of state government, Railways and Centre are to be blamed," Banerjee said.



Without taking names of any particular party or individual, Banerjee levelled allegation that some people were "pressurizing" Hossain to join their party

Curb tobacco sales near schools: Karna kids

AGENCIES

Bangalore, Feb 18: The Consortium for Tobacco Free Karnataka (CFTFK) has demanded the Karnataka government to expedite the process to introduce a vendor licencing system to sell tobacco products in the state.

As part of the CFTFK's campaign, students from schools had also participated in the programme to appeal to the state government to expedite the vendor licencing process in the state.

Aditya Hari, a Class 12 student from Delhi Public School, Bangalore North, told the media that although they are well aware of the harmful effects of tobacco yet the tobacco industry flourishes.

"This is a result of a sheer marketing strategy with the youth as a target audience. Introducing vendor licencing will be a major shield against this exploitation and is necessary for the constructive future of this country," he said.

Hari also appealed to parents, teachers and students from across the state to write letters to state Urban Development Minister Byrathi Basavaraj urging him quick implementation of vendor licencing norms across the state.

He added that already 3,000 parents, teachers, and students have written letters demanding the implementation of this new system to address the minister.

Hari also pointed out that the Union Health Ministry in its advi-



sory to states September 21, 2017, had called for regulating the sale of tobacco products through proper authorisation and registration of tobacco vendors.

"This has remained a mirage since then in Karnataka. But I am happy that the vendor licencing system has come into effect in states like Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and West Bengal, at least our friends in these states are safe," he quipped.

While Class 8 student, Mokshit from Nava Bharatha Nirmana Vidya Mandira appealed to parents to act responsibly in front of their children. "Parents should stop sending their children to buy cigarettes or tobacco products besides completely stop smoking in front of their children," he said.

He added that this is the first

step where a child gets attracted to smoking and he will know where that item is available for his consumption, so, I want parents to act more responsibly.

According to renowned Oncologist Ramesh Bilimappa, who is also the Advisor of CFTFK told reporters that with more than 14.6 per cent of youth between the age of 13 to 15 years are using some form of tobacco in India.

"The easy access to tobacco products is luring the youngsters to experiment with tobacco and eventually get addicted to it. This is very dangerous and there is an immediate need to keep the younger generations away from tobacco products. Vendor licencing is one of the bold steps of the state government which will ensure that the tobacco sale is monitored, regulated and keeps youngsters out," he argued.

The oncologist added that easy ac-

cessibility of tobacco products especially around educational institutions is one of the main reasons for tobacco consumption and addiction by youngsters.

"It has been proven that tobacco companies target children as addiction formation takes place in adolescence and they further take advantage of the inability of children to make rational decision making to experiment with their products and get addicted to them. As a result of this, every day more than 5,500 children are initiated into tobacco use," he explained.

The CFTFK convenor, S.J. Chander said that in absence of strict regulation, tobacco products like cigarettes, bidis and chewing tobacco items are being sold at every nook and corner of the state by petty shops, retail stores, milk parlours, tea shops and bakeries.

"Tobacco industries illegally advertise products with lighted up boards and posters. The points of sale (POS) of tobacco products use a strategy pushed by the tobacco companies which is placing tobacco products next to the common eatables such as biscuits, candies, chips etc. that children are accustomed to purchasing regularly from these POS," he alleged.

He contended that the tobacco industry has been projecting that the livelihood of farmers and vendors would be affected with the introduction of vendor licencing, which is not true. Chander added that those vendors who wish to sell tobacco products should obtain a 'special license', apart from their regular 'trade license' from their respective Urban Local Bodies.

"This will help the ULBs to check violations by the tobacco vendor which is a common phenomenon and it would not affect their livelihood in any which way," he said.

LUKEWARM RESPONSE TO 'RAIL ROKO' IN KARNATAKA

AGENCIES

Bangalore, Feb 18: Barring a few stray incidents of stone pelting on moving trains, the nationwide 'Rail Roko' call given by the farmers Thursday evoked lukewarm response in Karnataka with the police detaining farmer leaders across the BJP-ruled state, stopping them from entering the railway station premises.

The ongoing farmers' protest on the borders of Delhi against the three Central farm laws has been going on for over three months now. The farmers have held 11 rounds of talks with the Centre, but they have failed to break the deadlock with the farmers sticking to their main demand of repealing the three farm laws.

Thursday, the Karnataka police detained several farmer leaders from outside the railway stations in Bangalore, Belagavi, Raichur, Hubballi and Kalaburgi districts. Even as the farmer leaders gathered in front of various railway stations in the state, the police prevented them from entering the station premises by putting up barricades.

Several farmer leaders, including state president of the Confederation of Farmers' Associations, Kuruburu Shanthakumar, were detained along with their supporters from outside the Yeshwantpur railway station in



When we arrived at the railway station, we weren't allowed to demonstrate by the police. Why should we wait for the police to give us permission when the 'Rail Roko' was nationally announced by the farmers' unions

A PROTESTING FARMER

Bangalore after Shanthakumar declared that farmers had gathered there in support of the protesting farmers in Delhi. "We will support them in their endeavour," he said before being detained by the police.

Although there were reports from other parts of the state where farmers tried to break the police security ring in front of various railway stations, they were eventually overpowered by the police.

should we wait for the police to give us permission when the 'Rail Roko' was nationally announced by the farmers' unions," a farmer leader at Raichur railway station said.

Meanwhile, there were reports about stray incidents of stone pelting on moving trains from some parts of the state. One such incident was officially reported near the Kengeri railway station on the outskirts of Bangalore.

However, the authorities are tightlipped on the matter, stating that it is yet not known if the protesters were behind the incident, or some anti-social elements were involved.

The Bangalore railway police have registered a case and investigation is underway.

This is a result of a sheer marketing strategy with the youth as a target audience. Introducing vendor licencing will be a major shield against this exploitation and is necessary for the constructive future of this country

Parents should stop sending their children to buy cigarettes or tobacco products besides completely stop smoking in front of their children

MOKSHI | CLASS VIII, NAVA BHARATHA NIRMANA VIDYA MANDIRA

international



We are learning about malware attacks, some coming from states as part of new conflicts between nations, others coming from mafias. Some attacks have criminal or lucrative motives, others are used to destabilise countries
EMMANUEL MACRON | FRENCH PRESIDENT

GEORGIAN PM STEPS DOWN

Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia announced his resignation Thursday. Gakharia said that he decided to step down because he could not reach an agreement with the ruling party over the arrest warrant issued against Nika Melia, a Parliament member



of the day quote

It is clear that the virus has affected all parts of the country and all sections of society but it is also clear that there are particular challenges faced in particular sections of our society, especially in some ethnic minority communities



CHARLES | PRINCE OF WALES

We still expect recovering demand, low mortgage rates and a shortage of supply to support a healthy rate of new home construction and the risk may be for there upsides surprises



NANCY VANDEN HOUTEN | LEAD ECONOMIST, OXFORD ECONOMICS

I completely transformed and united the party into a well-oiled, pro-Trump machine that won conservative victories and advanced an America First agenda at every level — and that delivered a second victory for President Trump in our state



JANE TIMKEN | US POLITICIAN

SHORT TAKES

US reporter in Syria released

Beirut: An American journalist, living in northwestern Syria for nearly a decade, has been released, six months after he was captured by an al-Qaida-linked militant group, Syrian opposition media reported. Bilal Abdul Kareem, a native of Mount Vernon, NY, has been living in the rebel-held Syrian northwest since 2012, reporting on the Syrian government military campaigns against areas in opposition hands. He had been detained last August, following a report he did about torture in the prisons of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the al-Qaida-linked group that dominates the area.

'Must reveal country of origin'

Berlin: A German court ruled Thursday that online retail giant Amazon has to tell consumers the specific country of origin of fresh fruit and vegetables that it sells. The Munich regional court rejected Amazon's appeal against a lower Bavarian court's ruling on the issue last year, which had said the company needed to provide full details of the source of the goods to protect consumers with transparent product information.

Hungary seeks citizen input

Budapest: Hungary's government launched an online questionnaire Thursday asking citizens to give their opinions on lifting pandemic restrictions as weeks of declining Covid-19 cases have started to rise again. The government calls the set of seven questions a "national consultation," an informal, non-scientific poll that officials say is meant to gauge public sentiment.

40 injured in Iran quake

Tehran: At least 40 people were injured in a 5.6-magnitude earthquake that shook Sisakht city in Iran's western Kohgiluyeh va Boyer-Ahmad province Wednesday night, media reports said. The quake has caused a lot of damage to buildings, structures as well as roads in the city, and cut off the electricity and water network, the Xinhua news agency reported. The epicenter, with a depth of 10 km, was determined to be at 30.890 degrees north latitude and 51.566 degrees east longitude.

Covid infections 'fallen significantly' in England: Study

The reduction in prevalence from our last REACT round is very welcome, particularly the very large reduction in London. But it's important that we continue following all the measures that the government has set out
KELLY BEAVER | MD, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, IPSOS MORI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, Feb 18: The interim findings of a new UK government-backed study released Thursday shows that COVID-19 infections in England have "fallen significantly" since January, reflecting the im-

part of the strict lockdown measures. The Imperial College London led Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission (REACT-1) research swab tested over 85,400 volunteers in England between February 4 and 13 to examine the levels of infection in the general population and found infections have dropped by two-thirds since lockdown began, with London showing an 80 per cent fall. "The findings show infections in England have fallen significantly since the last report in January," the latest report noted. But the findings indicated coronavirus levels are still high, with one in 200 testing positive during that same period. "These findings show encouraging signs infections are now head-



ing in the right direction across the country, but we must not drop our guard," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock. "Cases and hospital admissions remain high — over 20,000 COVID-19 patients are in hospital — so it is

vital we all remain vigilant and follow the rules as our vaccination rollout continues at pace," he said, reiterating the current lockdown message of staying at home and maintaining social distance. The figures offer some hope for

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who is preparing to present a roadmap on Monday for gradually lifting stringent lockdown restrictions in place early last month. He has repeatedly warned that any unlocking will be "cautious" and has refrained from setting any firm dates for when specific sectors of the economy can reopen. The main findings from the REACT study, ninth since the pandemic began last year alongside Ipsos MORI, show infection prevalence fell from 1.57 per cent to 0.51 per cent, or 51 per 10,000 infected. The R number, or the rate at which the infection spreads, remains below one at around 0.72 and regional prevalence fell in all areas and across almost all age groups compared to the last report.

Facebook 'unfriends' Australia

The social media giant wiped out pages from Australian state governments and charities as well as from domestic and international news organisations, three days before the launch of a nationwide Covid-19 vaccination programme

REUTERS

Sydney, Feb 18: Facebook faced a worldwide backlash from publishers and politicians Thursday after blocking news feeds in Australia in a surprise escalation of a dispute with the government over a law to require it to share revenue from news. Facebook wiped out pages from Australian state governments and charities as well as from domestic and international news organisations, three days before the launch of a nationwide Covid-19 vaccination programme. Though the measure was limited to Australia, denunciations came from far afield, with politicians elsewhere describing it as an attempt to put pressure on governments that are considering similar measures around the world. "Facebook's actions to unfriend Australia today, cutting off essential information services on health



and emergency services, were as arrogant as they were disappointing," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison wrote on his own Facebook page. "These actions will only confirm the concerns that an increasing number of countries are expressing about the behaviour of Big Tech companies who think they are bigger than governments and that the rules should not apply to them." The dispute centres on a planned Australian law that would require Facebook and Alphabet Inc's Google to reach commercial deals to pay news outlets whose links drive traffic to their platforms, or agree a price through arbitration. Facebook said it had blocked a wide swathe of pages because the draft law did not clearly define news content. It said its commitment to combat misinformation had not changed, and it would restore pages that were taken down by mistake. "The actions we're taking are focused on restricting publishers and people in Australia from sharing or viewing Australian and interna-

tional news content," a company spokesman said. "As the law does not provide clear guidance on the definition of news content, we have taken a broad definition in order to respect the law as drafted." The head of the British parliamentary committee overseeing the media industry, Julian Knight, was among politicians abroad who thought the message was aimed far beyond Australia. "This action - this bully boy action - that they've undertaken in Australia will I think ignite a desire to go further amongst legislators around the world," Knight told Reuters. "I think they're almost using Australia as a test of strength for global democracies as to whether or not they wish to impose restrictions on the way in which they do business," he said. "So, we're all behind Australia in my view." News publishers saw Facebook's tactics as evidence that the company, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp, cannot be trusted as the gatekeeper for their industry.

EU to push for greener trade policy, reform at WTO

REUTERS

Brussels, Feb 18: The European Union put reform of the World Trade Organization (WTO) at the heart of its trade strategy for the next decade on Thursday, saying global rules on commerce must be greener, take more account of state subsidies and be enforced. The 27-nation bloc's executive body also said it would seek to work with President Joe Biden's U.S. administration to address a crisis of confidence in the WTO, where settlement of trade conflicts and negotiations are deadlocked. "A key driver of the crisis is that China's accession to the WTO has not led to its transformation into a market economy," the European Commission said in a communication. "The WTO has not been able to negotiate new rules to tackle this." The Commission, which oversees EU trade policy, is making combating climate change a central part of its new "open, sustainable and assertive" strategy. It wants to incorporate green action into trade deals and also wants a more environmentally conscious WTO. This could include liberalisation of trade in certain green goods and services, or agreements to reduce fossil fuel subsidies. The Commission said it was en-



The Commission, which oversees EU trade policy, is making combating climate change a central part of its new "open, sustainable and assertive" strategy

couraged by Monday's appointment of Nigerian Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the first woman and the first African to head the WTO. The EU executive said it would propose a set of WTO reforms focusing on sustainable development, which also includes gender and labour rights, and launch negotiations on new rules to avoid distortions to trade from state-owned enterprises. It would also seek to restore the WTO's Appellate Body, the ultimate arbiter on global trade, which was paralysed by the previous U.S. administration.

'More than 11,000 Ebola vaccines will go to Guinea'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dakar, Feb 18: The World Health Organization says it will be sending more than 11,000 Ebola vaccines to the West African nation of Guinea in the coming days to combat the recent epidemic of the deadly hemorrhagic fever that has been declared in the country's southern N'Zerekore region. WHO regional director for Africa Dr. Matshidiso Moeti said Thursday that 11,000 Ebola vaccines are being prepared in Geneva and are expected to arrive in Guinea over the weekend. An additional 8,600 doses will be shipped from the United States, she said. The vaccination cam-

paign could start as early as Monday. "Thirty vaccination experts have already been mobilized locally and are ready to deploy as soon as Ebola vaccines arrive in the country," she said. The WHO has called on six African countries to be on high alert for Ebola infections after both Guinea and Congo recorded cases in recent weeks. "The sub-region is on high alert and surveillance in neighboring countries is ongoing," she said. "Our collective, quick action is crucial to avert an uncontrolled spread of Ebola amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which has already pushed health workers and health facilities to the edge."



A person walks in front of a fire during a protest in support of Catalan rap singer Pablo Hasel, after he was given a jail sentence on charges of glorifying terrorism and insulting royalty in his songs, in Barcelona, Spain

US life expectancy plunged in 2020, most since WW II

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, Feb 18: Life expectancy in the United States dropped a staggering one year during the first half of 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic caused its first wave of deaths, health officials are reporting. Minorities suffered the biggest impact, with Black Americans losing nearly three years and Hispanics, nearly two years, according to preliminary estimates Thursday from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "This is a huge decline," said Robert Anderson, who oversees the numbers for the CDC. "You have to go back to World War II, the 1940s, to find a decline like this." Other health experts say it shows the profound impact of Covid-19, not



just on deaths directly due to infection but also from heart disease, cancer and other conditions. "What is really quite striking in these numbers is that they only reflect the first half of the year...I

would expect that these numbers would only get worse," said Dr. Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, a health equity researcher and dean at the University of California, San Francisco. This is the first time the

COVID IMPACT

Minorities suffered the biggest impact, with Black Americans losing nearly three years. Health experts say it shows the profound impact of Covid-19, not just on deaths directly due to infection but also from heart disease, cancer and other conditions. As a group, Hispanics in the US have had the most longevity and still do. CDC has reported on life expectancy from early, partial records; more death certificates from that period may yet come in. It's already known that 2020 was the deadliest year in

US history, with deaths topping 3 million for the first time. Life expectancy is how long a baby born today can expect to live, on average. In the first half of last year, that was 77.8 years for Americans overall, down one year from 78.8 in 2019. For males it was 75.1 years and for females, 80.5 years. As a group, Hispanics in the US have had the most longevity and still do. Black people now lag white people by six years in life expectancy reversing a trend that had been bringing their numbers closer since 1993. Between 2019 and the first half of 2020, life expectancy decreased 2.7 years for Black people, to 72. It dropped 1.9 years for Hispanics, to 79.9, and 0.8 years for white people, to 78. The preliminary report did not analyze trends for Asian or Native

Americans. "Black and Hispanic communities throughout the United States have borne the brunt of this pandemic," Bibbins-Domingo said. They're more likely to be in front-line, low-wage jobs and living in crowded environments where it's easier for the virus to spread, and "there are stark, pre-existing health disparities in other conditions" that raise their risk of dying of Covid-19, she said. More needs to be done to distribute vaccines equitably, to improve working conditions and better protect minorities from infection, and to include them in economic relief measures, she said. Dr. Otis Brawley, a cancer specialist and public health professor at Johns Hopkins University, agreed.

'Disengagement in eastern Ladakh going smoothly'



AGENCIES

Beijing, Feb 18: China Thursday said the disengagement process of the Chinese and Indian frontline troops at the eastern Ladakh border was progressing smoothly and expressed hope that both sides will make concerted efforts to achieve the goal. On February 10, China's Defence Ministry spokesman Senior Colonel Wu Qian announced that the Chinese and Indian frontline troops at the South and North banks of the Pangong Lake in eastern Ladakh started synchronised and organised disengagement. "To my knowledge, things are progressing smoothly in general. We hope both sides will continue to move towards each other, strictly comply with the consensus reached and agreements signed, and ensure the smooth completion of the disengagement process," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said when asked how the disengagement process is proceeding.

