



WINNING HEARTS

Odia actor Varsha Priyadarshini, keeping her promise, has helped a visually challenged singer record his maiden song

LEISURE P2



QUAD SUMMIT

The Quad leaders pledged to be committed to an open, free, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific

INTERNATIONAL P10



GREAT FEAT

Mithali Raj became the first batswomen in the world to score 7,000 ODI runs during the game against SA

SPORTS P12

BMC threatens citizens

BHUBANESWAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION PASSED AN ORDER THREATENING TO SEAL PROPERTIES OF DEFAULTERS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 14: Even as the citizens of the capital city are yet to come to terms with the unprecedented rise in holding tax rates, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) passed an order March 12 threatening to seal the properties of defaulters against whom certificate cases have been initiated.

In a letter to all Zonal Deputy Commissioners (ZDCs) of the City, BMC Deputy Commissioner (DC), Revenue, directed them to lodge certificate cases against all defaulters under the provisions in the Orissa Public Demands Recovery (OPDR) Act, 1962. The DC further instructed that ward supervisors may be asked to file requisition before the ZDCs accordingly.

"It is to say that there are large numbers of defaulters who have not



HOLDING TAX ROW

Earlier, the BMC had revised benchmark value of land cost of different areas in the city. This had resulted in about 20 to 50 times increase in holding taxes for the residents

Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) has directed all Zonal Deputy Commissioners to lodge certificate cases against defaulters as per the Orissa Public Demands Recovery (OPDR) Act, 1962

paid the holding tax. Thus, it is requested that certificate cases under OPDR Act, 1962, may be immediately

initiated against all such defaulters. Steps to be taken to seal the buildings of the defaulters against whom cer-

tificate cases have already been initiated," the letter said.

It may be recalled that the BMC had earlier revised benchmark value of land cost of different areas in the city. This had resulted in about 20 to 50 times increase in holding taxes for the residents. The change in the tax rates amidst the COVID-19 pandemic came under heavy criticism from all quarters, including the residents. In fact, the Opposition parties in the state had demanded an immediate roll back of the new holding tax rates.

"The BMC wants us to pay heavy taxes despite COVID-19 taking a heavy toll on our incomes and revenues. I was earlier paying ₹700 as holding tax and now I am asked to pay ₹17,000 monthly. Moreover, the civic authority has now ordered the sealing of our properties for failing to pay the exorbitant taxes. This is not only over-

burdening on the common man, but also extortion in nature," said Sukanti Chand, a resident of Bomikhal here.

When asked about the BMC's plan to seal the residential properties of the defaulters, DC Srimanta Mishra told the Orissa POST that the order has been passed only against commercial and industrial establishments. "The OPDR Act is not against individual households. The order is only against big and old defaulters. No notice has been given to seal individual households. Furthermore, a case under OPDR Act takes about a year to be settled before the orders for final sealing of properties are issued," Mishra said.

Meanwhile, sources said the civic body has sustained a huge revenue loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic and now it hopes to compensate for the loss by collecting hiked holding tax from all residents.

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Naveen warns of lockdown situation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 14: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Sunday set a target of "zero infection" even as the COVID-19 tally in the state mounted to 3,38,192 with 71 fresh cases.

In a video message, Patnaik appealed to people to follow health safety protocols so that the state can achieve the goal and requested them not to be complacent with the daily number of new coronavirus cases remaining below 100.

"With your support, the COVID-19 situation is currently under control in Odisha. The World Health Organization (WHO) has praised our initiatives to fight against the coronavirus pandemic. Although the single-day spike in coronavirus cases is below 100, zero infection is our target," he said. The COVID-19 situation in Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh has worsened due to a significant rise in the number of new cases, he said.

"Normalcy has returned to Odisha. None of us wants lockdown to return. Wearing face masks is a must when going outside and hand washing should be practised after returning home. One must follow the social distancing norms," the Chief Minister said in his message. Patnaik also sought people's cooperation in the



NORMALCY HAS RETURNED TO ODISHA. NONE OF US WANTS LOCKDOWN TO RETURN

NAVEEN PATNAIK | ODISHA CHIEF MINISTER

ongoing vaccination programme.

"We have lost many lives in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. We will never let their sacrifice go in vain... All of us should be self-conscious," he said.

The CM also said he has already asked the civil administration and police to ensure strict implementation of the COVID-19 guidelines issued by both the state and the Centre.

Of the new cases, 43 were reported from quarantine centres and 28 detected during contact tracing.

Khurda district reported the highest number of fresh cases at 11, followed by Jajpur (7) and Mayurbhanj (6).

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



He is unhappy because he's got a ticket to contest an MLA seat. See, he is already an MP now!

Experiment with cryptocurrencies to continue: FM

AGENCIES

New Delhi, March 14: India will not "shut off all cryptocurrency" and allow "experiments" with the technology behind the alternative form of payment, said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Sunday, adding the country's central bank would decide finally.

Bitcoin, the world's biggest cryptocurrency, Saturday crossed a record high of \$60,000. Bitcoin has risen sharply this year, broadly outperforming conventional asset classes, partly due to broader acceptance as a form of payment. India's government is preparing a Bill on cryptocurrencies after an inter-ministerial panel proposed a ban and before that, the Supreme Court struck down the Reserve Bank of India's restrictions on lenders providing services to crypto trading platforms.

"From our (the Finance Ministry's) side we are very clear that we are not shutting all options. We will allow certain window for people to do experiments on blockchain, bitcoins, or cryptocurrency," said Sitharaman at an event.

Financial technology firms depend on blockchain, the backbone of cryptocurrencies, and they should have a window available. "We are not going to shut it off all," she said.

"A lot of fintech companies have made a lot of progress in it. We have got several presentations. Much works at some states level are happening. And we want to take it in a big way in IFSC or Gift City in Gandhinagar," she said, referring to a meeting being called in the Gujarat city.

SAVE BARABATI



Members of a charitable trust hold a demonstration seeking preservation of Barabati fort in Cuttack, Sunday

OP PHOTO

No evidence of attack on Mamata: EC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 14: The Election Commission Sunday concurred with its two poll observers that there was no pre-meditated attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram during her poll campaign, and that her injuries were the result of a security lapse.

Taking stern action over the "slack" bandobast arrangements, the commission ordered immediate suspension of IPS officer Vivek Sahay, who was in-charge of the CM's security, and Purba Medinipur SP Praween Prakash. It also trans-



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee along with TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee (R) and others during a rally on Nandigram Diwas in Kolkata, Sunday

ferred Purba Medinipur district magistrate. "Charges must be framed against him (Vivek Sahay) within

a week for grossly failing in discharge of his primary duty as Director, Security, to protect the Z+

protectee," the EC said in a statement.

It said the state chief secretary, in consultation with the DGP, is authorised to post a suitable director of security immediately.

The poll panel also decided that a committee comprising the chief secretary and the DGP will "identify within next three days the other proximate security personnel below Director Security who failed in their duties to prevent the incident and protect the Z+ protectee, and take suitable action for their failure..."

The EC also transferred Purba Medinipur district magistrate Vibhu Goel to a non-election post, replacing him with IAS officer Smita Pandey.

WOMAN HELD CAPTIVE, GANGRAPE FOR 3 DAYS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, March 14: In a shocking incident, a married woman was held captive and gang-raped for three days by two truck drivers at a house in Barbil town of Keonjhar district.

The accused drivers - Khudabaksh Ansari and Muhammad Naseer - have been arrested, police said Sunday.

According to the police, the victim, a resident of Bhadrashahi area here had a fight with her husband March 11. She left her house and was waiting for a bus at Roida Chowk to go somewhere.

Ansari and Naseer approached her and offered her a lift in their truck. Since she knew them, she accepted their offer.

The duo raped her in the truck itself and then took her to a house. They kept her there for three days and raped her several time during the period.

The woman somehow managed to flee captivity Sunday and went straight to the police station to lodge a report against Ansari and Naseer. Taking her report seriously, the Barbil police registered a case, launched an investigation and arrested the accused duo. The cops seized the truck and also sent the victim for a medical examination.

IIC Sushant Das said that the two accused belong to Singroli district in Madhya Pradesh and were produced in court Sunday.

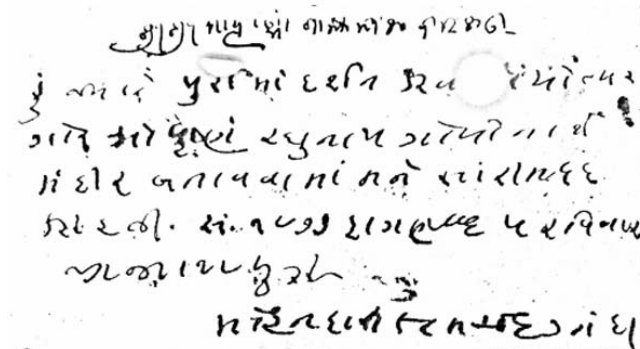
GANDHI'S ODISHA VISIT CENTENARY

Mahatma had visited Srimandir, reveals Puri priest's record

SISIR MISHRA, OP

Bhubaneswar, March 14: A long-cherished historical belief that Mahatma Gandhi never visited the Srimandir as the shrine discriminated against the untouchables was debunked by evidence obtained recently. A century-old document preserved with the family priest of the Gandhis in Puri revealed that the Father of the Nation had not only gone inside the temple March 27, 1921 (Sunday), but also recorded his appreciation of the visit in the Daskati (family dairy) preserved with the local priests of the Gujratias.

The visit took place



when Gandhi first visited Odisha in 1921, much before his Harijan Padayatra in Odisha took place in 1934. Gandhi's overt aversion to visiting Srimandir came in 1937 when he was at Belaboi near Delanga in Puri district. From Delanga, some

members of his entourage including Kasturba, Mahadev Desai and Mrs Desai came to Puri to pay their obeisance to the deities, which Gandhi later resented. Babu reportedly believed that Ba and others would go to Puri to see the sea

and come back without going to the temple.

Gopinath Gochhikar, grandfather of Raghunath Gochhikar, a serving priest at the temple now, had taken Mahatma inside the temple and helped him take a round of the shrine. It is mentioned in the Daskati that Babu had also gone inside the sanctum sanctorium and bowed down before the Lord.

Though a staunch Hindu, Mahatma never approved untouchability. He strongly advocated for entry of untouchables (Sudras) to temples. However, the Puri visit had taken place long before his Harijan movement took place.

History made us believe that the famous Jagannath temple at Puri was a 'no go' place for Mahatma as the latter was steadfastly opposed

to the shrine's policy that only orthodox Hindus are allowed inside. Babu came to Odisha eight times, but never visited the temple except for the very first time in 1921.

As Odisha is celebrating 100 years of Mahatma Gandhi's maiden visit to the state in March 1921, this little fact of his life has come to the public domain now. "We are the family priest of the Gujratias. My grandfather had taken Babu inside the temple and the Mahatma has recorded his appreciation of the system inside the temple in our family record," said Raghunath Gochhikar, grandson of Gopinath. Raghunath, however, was sure that this fact of history has not been properly recorded and generations of people still believe that Gandhi never visited Srimandir.



VIOLA TO BE AWARDED AAFCA ICON AWARD

Oscar-winning actress Viola Davis will be awarded the prestigious Icon Award from the African American Film Critics Association during the 12th annual AAFCA awards April 7.

LAURENCE FISHBURNE JOINS CAST OF THE SCHOOL FOR GOOD AND EVIL

Actor Laurence Fishburne will be seen in the film adaptation of *The School For Good and Evil*. He will be sharing the screen with Michelle Yeoh, Charlize Theron, Kerry Washington, Sofia Wyle and Sophia Anne Caruso. The actor will play the schoolmaster in the film.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
It is a sunny, sparkling day, and the stars spell success. If you're feeling creative, simply pick up a paintbrush or try a new recipe. However, care and caution should be the buzzwords if you are driving alone, suggest Ganesh.

TAURUS
You may feel let down as your folks may not extend the support you expected from them, says Ganesh. You should try to remain practical and not get swayed by emotions. It is highly likely that family feuds may erupt today. Ganesh advises you to avoid confrontations and keep smiling to emerge a winner.

GEMINI
If you are into retail business, planetary positions indicate today is a day for bumper sales. You will set records in making profits. After work, you may want to take your beloved out shopping.

CANCER
Ganesh advises you to watch your back today. However, he wants to make it clear that you may be at the receiving end of others' actions. Anyway, your cautious and watchful approach will save you from needless discomfiture.

LEO
The bourgeoisie feasted on cake, while the masses starved for want of a mere loaf of bread. Ganesh foresees something similar for you today, as you show the propensity to indulge in unwanted expenses.

VIRGO
You will be cool as a cucumber today. Nothing that happens will unsettle that composure, says Ganesh. Your loved ones will stand tall and strong behind you, and inspire you to overcome obstacles. Your work will reflect dedication, says Ganesh.

LIBRA
Sit back and think hard — think about what is it that you really want when it comes to your business enterprises, because there are many ways to go about things at work, and they all shall lead you somewhere different. The stars favour you today with a golden touch, so take it in your stride and make hay while the sun shines.

SCORPIO
Don't put off cultivating healthy eating habits, says Ganesh. You should do better to control over-indulging in food as it may lead to obesity. Ganesh advises you to stick to a healthy lifestyle, especially when it comes to meals.

SAGITTARIUS
Life is bubbling within you and you shall be in a hyper-elevated state of bliss today. Your high-spirits and energy will inspire you to perform at your best. Moreover, your inner voice will be loud and bellowing. Make the most of this superb day, says Ganesh.

CAPRICORN
Planning strategic moves will be done with, and all that will remain is execution. But Ganesh says there may be delays in implementing ideas that are crucial to the success of your project, and this may leave you disappointed and dismayed.

AQUARIUS
You need to think dispassionately and with clarity, says Ganesh. As always, sentiments may come in the way of your success today. Be careful, especially while taking decisions that will impact your future. You don't want to study law, just because your friends are doing it!

PISCES
Major expenses are coming your way, but the good news is a lot of them can be avoided simply by drawing a line between your needs and your wants. Exercising a little restraint now will go a long way in boosting your savings later on, says Ganesh.

I am who I am because of TV: Rohit

Mumbai: Actor Rohit Roy has been part of many successful shows on television, has worked in films and has also dabbled with the digital medium. At a time when actors in general seem to be gravitating from TV to the OTT space, Rohit says he will never forsake television, even if he continues working in other mediums.

"That day will never come," Rohit says, when asked if he consciously plans to move away from TV.

"I am a product of television. I am who I am because of television. Had *Swabhimaan* (1994) not happened to me in the beginning of my career, I would have not been here. But

when I do television, it has to be role that leaves an impact or an indelible mark on people's minds. I don't see myself doing run-of-the-mill characters just to be part of television."

Last seen on the 2019 show *Sanjivani*, the actor is currently gearing up for the release of his upcoming film *Mumbai Saga*.



Varsha keeps her promise

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: Odia actress and activist Varsha Priyadarshini kept her promise by helping visually challenged singer Abdul Samad Nizami record his first song - a devotional tribute to Lord Jagannath, Sunday. Nizami, fondly known as Sam Sir, came to limelight after clips of him singing a Jagannath bhajan went viral on social media.



Impressed, the Nimki actress visited Nizami at his home in Praharaipur, Cuttack and promised him to offer a platform to showcase his singing skills. Living up to her commitment, she arranged Nizami's first recording, composed by renowned Odia music director Premanand, at Cuttack's Prativa studio. She has also assured him of her continued support in future.

Nizami is thrilled to record his first song and has thanked Varsha for the break.

Varsha had earlier helped tribal singer Namita Meleka of Koraput getting her first singing assignment.

Like Nizami, she too was spotted by the actress on social media.

Kratika wants roles that allow her to experiment

Mumbai: Actress Kratika Sengar, who will be joining the cast of *Choti Sarrdaarni*, says that she makes sure to take on newer characters with every show. She says that she picks up roles which allow her to 'experiment' her craft.

"At this point in my career, all I look for in a role is how meaty it is. I want to play characters that help me experiment my acting abilities. I am very particular about not repeating my characters," she says.

The actress will essay the role of Sandhya Tomar, a friend of Meher, played by Nimrit Kaur Ahluwalia, in the show *Choti Sarrdaarni*. With her entry, the show is in for a series of twists and turns.

"My entry is going to arouse a lot of curiosity among the audience. I love the show's concept and hopefully my fans too love to see me back in a new character," she says.



How Sooraj broke ice with Isabelle

Mumbai: Sooraj Pancholi says working on the complex moves of Latin-ballroom dance is what helped him break the ice with co-star Isabelle Kaif, while working on their film *Time To Dance*.



This is the first time Sooraj was working with newcomer and Katrina Kaif's sister Isabelle, and the long hours of rehearsals helped them become buddies within three days, he said.

"The fact is both of us were learning a new dance form, and in Latin-ballroom form you are always holding the hand of your dance partner. Since we were not friends from before, it was initially awkward. On the dance floor, both of us were making mistakes, falling, and then we would start laughing at the whole situation! So yes, we laughed it off and realised we were on the same boat. It helped us to understand how we as dancers can support each other while doing steps. I would say, with the long hours of rehearsal, in three days, we became good buddies," added the *Satellite Shankar* actor.

5-DAY STATE-LEVEL DRAMA FESTIVAL BEGINS

Panchamaveda's comedy treats for city theatre lovers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar: The members of city-based theatre troupe Dynamic Platform presented a hilarious play to the viewers here at Bhanja Kala Mandap, Sunday.

Titled *Abhinetri*, the play was translated from Shailesh Guha Niyogi's Bengali play *Boudir Biye* by Diliswar Maharana and directed by Debabrata Patnaik.

The occasion was the inaugural evening of 17th State Level Natak Mahotsav, a five-day comedy play festival, organised by Panchamaveda, a well known theatre troupe of the city. The event is being held in collaboration with Srishti Theatre of Bhubaneswar, said troupe's secretary Prakash Maharana.

The story revolves around five



A scene from comedy play *Abhinetri* staged at Bhanja Kala Mandap, Sunday

bachelor brothers and how they manage to get their eldest sibling

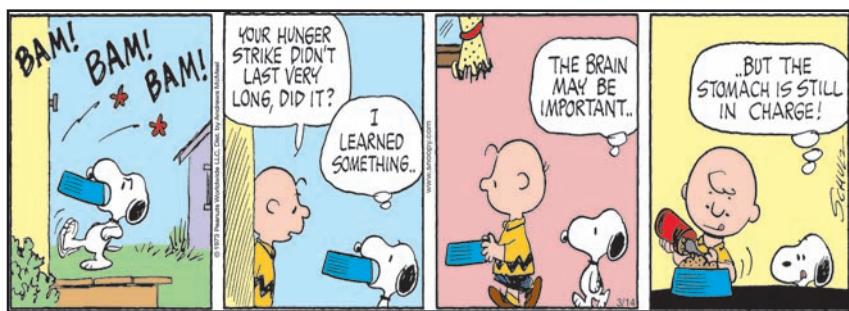
married. However, their joy is short-lived as the family disinte-

grates soon after the marriage. After several twists and turns, the lone woman of the family wins the hearts of all brothers by her love and affection.

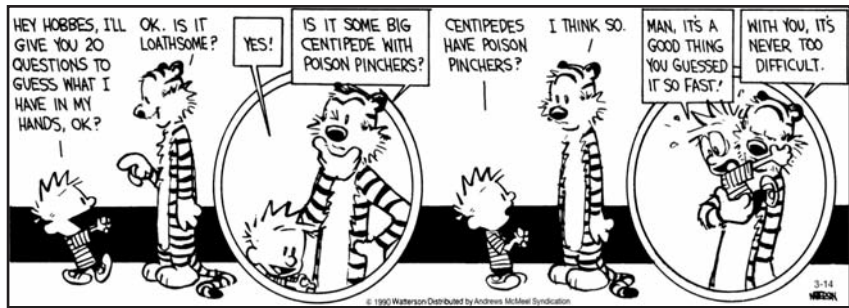
"There are a few stories which need to be re-told. Though this is a simple story, the message it conveys is still relevant for the society. I have also tried to bring some freshness in its style of presentation, acting and stagecraft," said play's director Patnaik.

The dignitaries who were present at the opening ceremony include Science & Technology Minister Ashok Chandra Panda, Bhubaneswar (Central) MLA Ananta Narayan Jena and Dillip Routray, OSD to the Chief Secretary. Troupe's working president Haren Sahoo conducted a short meeting before the play.

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

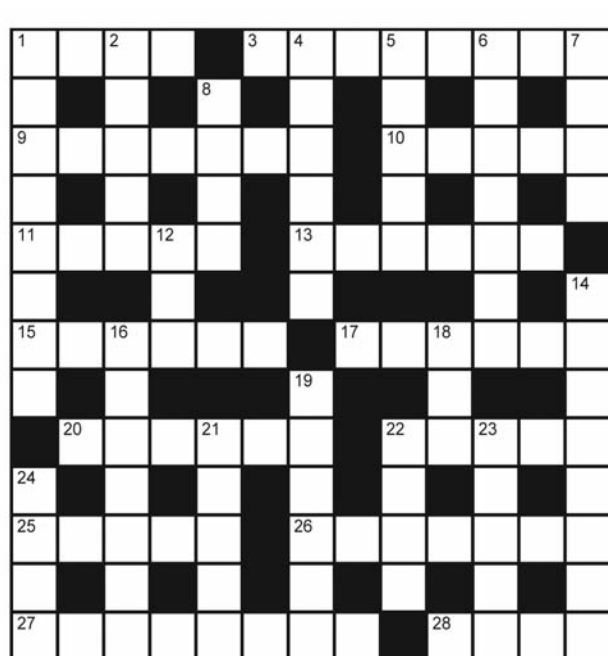


BREVITY



FUN post

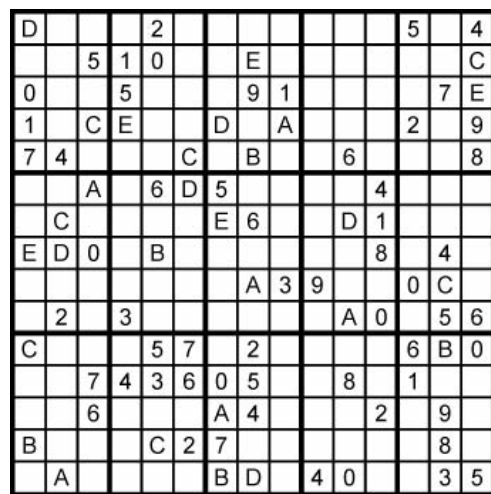
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Charity
 - 3 Kind of circus act (4,4)
 - 9 Ebbs
 - 10 Hangman's tool
 - 11 Panorama
 - 13 Lowlife
 - 15 Hardship
 - 17 Sweet shop
 - 20 Fall silent (4,2)
 - 22 Buffalo
 - 25 Throbs
 - 26 Flocks of geese
 - 27 Renounce the throne
 - 28 Pickle containers
 - Down**
 - 1 Anteater
 - 2 Ridicules
 - 4 Earwig, for one
 - 5 Door part
 - 6 Hero-worship
 - 7 Fencing sword
 - 8 Icelandic epic
 - 12 Chinese ideal
 - 14 Some athletes
 - 16 Knight in shining armor
 - 18 Ornamental carp
 - 19 Water source
 - 21 Melody
 - 22 Marshes
 - 23 Latin dance
 - 24 Molten rock

SUDOKU

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

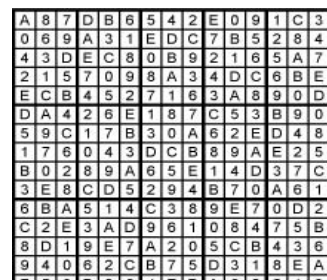


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



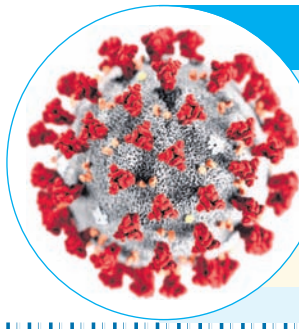
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



TEMPLE RITUAL

Srimandir servitors perform 'Benta Niti' at a pond inside Jagannath Ballav garden in Puri, Sunday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	12,02,48,072	9,68,10,243	26,62,342
India	1,13,59,048	1,09,89,897	1,58,607
Odisha	3,38,192	3,35,660	1,918

GOVT GOT ₹501CR AS DONATIONS FOR FANI

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 14: A Standing Committee report on General Administration and Public Grievances department submitted before the Assembly claimed that the government received around Rs 501 crore as assistance for restoration works post Fani, the cyclone that hit Odisha coast in May 2019.

The report claimed that some of the funds were spent on the restoration activities till December 2020 while unutilized money is still available for the related works.

"Donation to the tune of Rs 501,45,96,239 has been received from individuals, public and private organisations, banks and other state governments towards repair and restoration of infrastructure and others, damaged by the cyclone Fani," the report said.

It also added, "During the last financial year 2019-20, a sum of Rs 132,35,25,375 was spent towards various restoration and rehabilitation activities."

The department in the report also said that the state also received good number of donations to the tune of Rs 862 crore for COVID 19 management.

"Donation to the tune of Rs 862,90,12,570 has been received from individuals, Public and Private organizations towards management of Covid-19," the report said.

It also added, "Out of the said amount a sum of Rs 587,90,37,963 has been spent for the purpose during the current financial year 2020-21 up to December 2020."

LI projects hit by Covid

Bhubaneswar: A Water Resources department Standing Committee report said that the Community Lift Irrigation Projects (CLIPs) suffered a setback in 2020 owing to Covid-19 pandemic. "During the current financial year (2020-21) till January 2021, 573 CLIPs have been completed and handed over to Pani Panchayats against the completion target of 1,250 CLIPs," it said. "Since inception of this scheme, 15,655 CLIPs have been completed so far and additional irrigation potential of approximately 341.72 thousand hectares has been created."

EV IS WAY OUT TO CREATE CLEAN & EFFICIENT FUTURE: SAMAL

The pandemic has devastated the automobile sector and the industry is looking for a new ray of hope. In the meantime, the Centre has introduced a Scrappage Policy to promote electric vehicles (EVs) to create a pollution-free environment. During an interaction with **Orissa POST, Abinash Samal, Managing Director of Tata Motors (Commercial Vehicle Division), MG Motors, Jaguar and Land Rover, shared his views on the impact of the pandemic, benefits of the policy and the future of EVs. Excerpts...**



How has the pandemic affected the supply chain of automobiles?

The supply chain system has been greatly affected due to the pandemic – both sales and after-sales are suffering. Logistics have been affected adversely as three of our major brands are based out of India and there are shortfalls every month. We thank our customers for their understanding and we are trying to increase our efficiency and address the shortfalls in the coming months as things normalize.

Your take on the new Scrappage Policy?

We welcome the government's initiative to clear our roads of the unfit for road vehicles which is part of the new Scrappage Policy. We believe that the modern cars and engines today are much more efficient and environment-friendly having 20 years of ageing. Also, this is an organised method to ensure safe recycling of hazardous wastes.

How do you see the future of EVs?

As we often say in our team "The future is exciting, the future is electric". The way

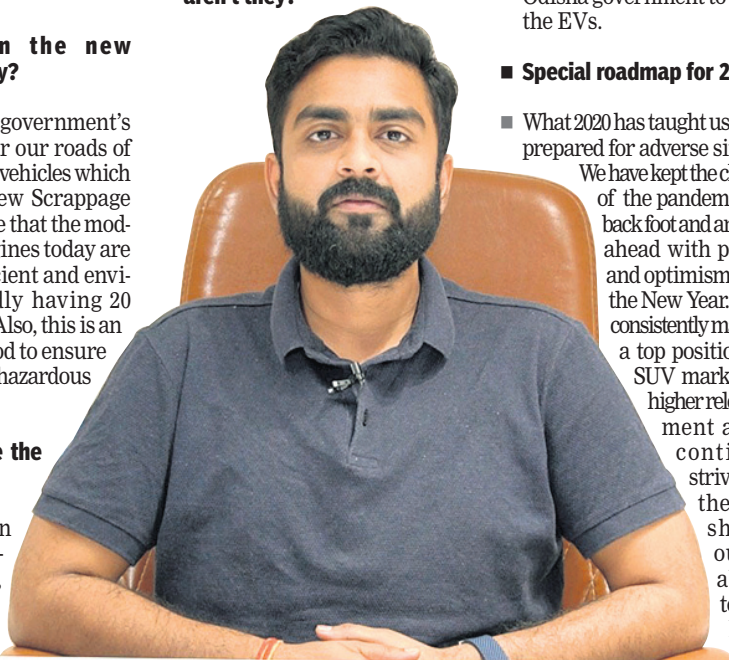
ahead for automobiles in a clean and efficient future is the electric way out. Our brands Jaguar and Morris Garages have both launched all electric battery vehicles in their product lineup. Both the vehicles boast of 400 plus kms of travel on a single charge with features equal to any ICE (Internal Combustion Engine) car that is available by any leading automobile manufacturer in the market.

Launching EVs and sustaining the ownership of an EV are two separate challenges today, aren't they?

Not really. Because, with each passing day, we see the Central government and state governments are rolling out new schemes for EVs. This is encouraging and it shows the seriousness of EV and its importance for a cleaner and efficient future. We are currently identifying locations within Odisha and the twin cities of Bhubaneswar & Cuttack to set up EV charging terminals. With states like UP, Goa and NCR waiving off registration charges for new EVs, we expect similar steps from Odisha government to promote the EVs.

Special roadmap for 2021

What 2020 has taught us is to stay prepared for adverse situations. We have kept the challenges of the pandemic on the back foot and are looking ahead with positivity and optimism towards the New Year. We have consistently maintained a top position in the SUV market in the higher relevant segment and will continue to strive to keep the leadership and our valuable customers happy.



SKILL AND EXPERIENCE ARE KEY MANTRAS FOR SUCCESS: RUCHI MD

Ruchi is a household brand for last 45 years. The brand has garnered love and trust for its uncompromised product quality. During an interaction with **Orissa POST, Managing Director of Ruchi Foodline, Sarat Kumar Sahoo, also known as the Masala King of Odisha, spoke about the mantra of success. Excerpts...**



Did you ever think that Ruchi would emerge as a big brand in the state?

Well, we never thought people would shower their love on us. But we were focused on our goal. Since Ruchi's inception, we have always looked forward. Reaching the pinnacle has been our only goal. Every staff at Ruchi industry is like my family.

What are the company's new plans?

State government has allotted us a land to set up a full-fledged plant at Ramdaspur, Odisha. We will set food processing unit by using international technology. Food and beverages will be packaged here. This plant will provide 2,000 direct employment opportunities. With the help of high-end technology, we will do food processing, production and sale. It will cater to the demands of next generation.

How many products are now being manufactured?

At present, we produce around 300 varieties of products. We also ensure good and hygienic packaging to maintain quality. We believe in offering products that are safe and of excellent quality. We also produce two kinds of food – ready to cook and ready to eat. We have made huge investments to encourage extensive research for qualitative development of our products.

Your opinion on adulteration

The population is increasing and so are demands for spices. State government is taking stern actions to stop adulteration and penalise the wrongdoers. The government has seized adulterated products in cities like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Berhampur. Such investigations will stop adulteration system in state.

Challenges the spice industry is facing in state

The pandemic has been disastrous for many industries all over the world. Ruchi has also faced challenges due to the same. We face natural calamities in our state every year. Therefore we have learned to move forward despite such adversities. Also, state government is coming up with various schemes for the benefit of entrepreneurs.

Your advice to the youth

Knowledge, skill and experience are key fundamentals for achieving success. The youth should follow this mantra. Those who want to be entrepreneurs should first conduct surveys on market demands. They should manufacture the products that consumers demand more. The youth should focus on manufacturing quality products. They should be self dependant rather than depending too much on others.



After Similipal, Barunei forests catch fire



An acre of Barunei forests was gutted while several wild animals are feared killed in the raging fire, said sources

Khurda forest ranger Asit Mishra said Forest department officials have been put on high alert to deal with the situation. "The situation is under control now. Our officials are inspecting various vulnerable points in the forests," he added.

Khurda Collector Sanat Mohanty also discussed the issue with the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) and stressed on coordinated effort to check similar incidents in future.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khurda, March 14: After Similipal and Kuldiha forests, a major fire broke out at Barunei forests here Sunday.

Forest department sources said two fire points were found at Barunei forests Sunday and the flames were doused after several hours of efforts by the fire brigade personnel.

According to sources, some locals spotted fire near Gadakhurda in Barunei forests around the noon. On being informed, fire brigade personnel rushed to the spot and tried to douse the blaze.

"It is suspected that some miscreants might have set the forest on fire. Several trees and plants have been gutted. Our personnel took around three hours to douse the flames," said Sarat Chandra Mallick, a fire brigade official. Similarly, fire was also spotted inside Barunei forests near Podapada village of Jatni block. Around 15 fire brigade personnel and two fire engines were deployed to contain the inferno.

"The exact cause of the forest fire is yet to be ascertained. An acre of Barunei forests was gutted. Several wild animals might have been killed in the raging wild fire," said a source in the fire brigade



Strict vigil on wild fire this summer: Govt

Bhubaneswar: The Forest department Sunday said that it is ready to tackle the forest fire in the ongoing summer.

A media statement released Sunday from the office of the Principal Conservator of Forests (PCCF) said, "Considering that the major fire season is still left and fire activity increases with the rise in the temperature after the onset of summer, the field officials have been directed to be on full alert and vigil to prevent any proliferation of fire in their areas."

The department said that the Regional Conservator of Forests and District Forest Officers have been asked to remain alert and work with the local communities and other Panchayati Raj Institutions to tackle any threat of forest fire. "The monitoring of fire fight-

ing efforts of field officials, including night patrolling is being monitored 24x7 by the PCCF office. The field officials upto beat guard has been directed to immediately attend to the real time satellite based forest fire alert points received from FSI, Dehradun and douse and upload the photos of the attended forest fire point," the PCCF office said in a statement.

The department said that the eight ODRAF teams with 25 members along with Fire Officials are being actively engaged in dousing forest fire along with forest staff.

It said the Central team, after their Similipal and Kuldiha WL sanctuary visit, Sunday visited Chandaka Wild Life Sanctuary along with the field officials and interacted with the government officials on the issues.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



2 held for duping man of gold bar

Cuttack: Purihat police Sunday claimed to have arrested two persons on charges of duping a man of a gold bar weighing around 800 grams here March 11. The police have seized a gold bar from accused Jitendra Sahu, 25, of Jajpur and Rajkishore Sahu, 40, of Bhadrak, said ACP Shubhanarayan Muduli. The market value of the seized gold bar would be around Rs 37 lakh, added the ACP. According to police, the accused duo had promised to provide 1.2 kg of gold jewellery to the complainant, Santosh Kumar Rana, of Remuna in Balasore in exchange of the gold bar. Upon his arrival in Cuttack, the complainant was taken to a hallmarking centre at Choudhury Bazar for testing of the gold bar. The accused duo had fled with the gold bar from the hallmarking centre and remained incommunicado.

Images of woman's skeleton sent for skull mapping

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, March 14: The images of skeletal remains of a woman found inside a seized vehicle at Janla police outpost under Jatni police limits in Bhubaneswar have been sent to Hyderabad for skull mapping.

Addressing the media here Sunday, twin city Police Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi said, "The human skeleton images have been sent to Hyderabad for skull mapping examination and the report is awaited." The experts of a software company in Bangalore will reconstruct the face of the lady using artificial intelligence for identification of the lady.

The death of the woman is still shrouded in mystery and an unnatural death case has been registered in this regard. Inspector In-Charge of Mahila police station, Banita Moharana, has been as-



POST-MORTEM REPORT REVEALS THAT THE DECEASED WAS SUFFERING FROM TUBERCULOSIS AND SHE DIED A NATURAL DEATH

signed to probe the incident and find out the cause of the death. The IIC has already started an investigation into the matter. Priyadarshi also informed the media that police have expedited the process to ascertain the identity of the deceased. While answering to queries by media persons over the recovery of a torn-up love letter from the spot

BODY AT JANLA OUTPOST

IIC of Mahila police station, Banita Moharana, has been assigned to probe the incident and find out the cause of the death

Police Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi says police are looking into all the angles of the case and pursuing the case seriously

Priyadarshi claimed that autopsy of the skeleton was carried out by a team of doctors at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar. The report revealed

that the deceased was suffering from tuberculosis and she died a natural death. On the suspension of Janla police outpost in-charge, the Police Commissioner said, "Since the incident occurred on the outpost campus and an investigation was underway, departmental action was taken against him for dereliction of duty a few days before."

The officer-in-charge (OIC), Satyabrata Grahacharya, of Janla outpost was suspended for dereliction of duty recently after the skeleton was found inside the vehicle. Rambha police in Ganjam had seized cannabis from the vehicle at a place under Janla police limits in 2019. The cops had followed the vehicle all the way from Ganjam to Bhubaneswar and seized the contraband. Later, the vehicle was taken to Janla police station. February 12, 2021, Rambha police reached Janla outpost along with the owner of the vehicle to release the vehicle spotted the skeleton inside the vehicle.

Severe water crisis looms large in Mahanadi, Brahmani river systems



POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, March 14: The Mahanadi and Brahmani river systems going dry ahead of the summer season has sparked concern over a looming water crisis in this district and in the Bhitarkanika National Park, a report said. The water sources generally originate from hills, hill-ranges and mountains.

Reports said, the construction of a barrage in Baitarani river might prove costly for the district. The Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary has been deprived of adequate water with the tributaries of Mahanadi and Brahmani river going dry before the start of the summer season. It is apprehended that the water crisis might acquire a serious turn if urgent steps are not taken. The construction of various projects on the upstream of the river has left the residents worrying.

Reports said that over seven tributaries under Mahanadi, Brahmani

and Baitarani river systems flows through the district. The river water is used for drinking purpose and also for agriculture. The fresh water of the rivers also flows into Bhitarkanika and protects its ecosystem. However, lack of effective management of the river systems has led to the crisis. Educationists Bhuban Mohan Jena, senior citizen Ganesh Chandra Samal, social activists Sanjay Kumar Behura, Khitish Kumar Singh, Srikanth Nayak apprehend that water will become costlier in the next three decades if urgent steps are not taken to address the Mahanadi water dispute between the Odisha government and Chhattisgarh government.

Kendrapara district which is at the downstream will bear the maximum brunt. The residents will need 3,000 cubic metre of excess water than the amount that will be flowing in Brahmani river in the next three decades. The water crisis will also affect the proposed

steel plant and the state's first riverine port project in the district.

Similarly, water flow from Baitarani to Bhitarkanika will be reduced after the proposed barrage on the river in Jajpur is completed. The construction of the Rengali project on the upstream of the Brahmani river will help in providing irrigation facilities to agriculture.

Similarly, over 10 industrial plants in Kalinganagar takes 110 cusecs of water from Brahmani and Kharasrota rivers. IDCO has constructed a high power pump house on the Brahmani river bank at Pankapal to lift the river water. Similarly, water of Kharasrota, which is a tributary of Brahmani is supplied to industrial plants in Marthapur.

The Odisha government has sanctioned drinking water projects on the Brahmani and Kharasrota rivers for supply to 280 villages under Binjharpur, Jajpur, Korei and Rasulpur blocks. Moreover, construction of a drinking water project in Kharasrota river at Barundiha under Rajkanika block for supply of drinking water to four blocks in Bhadrak district might result in severe water crisis in future.

The groundwater level is also at an alarming stage. This has been found during a survey by the Central Ground Water Board in 2017. All these taken together this will drastically reduce the water flow to the district and result in severe water crisis in future.

FOREST PROTECTION



Even as fires are raging in various parts of Athamallik and Kishorenagar blocks in Angul district, the forest department creates public awareness on protection of forests with help of pala artistes, Sunday

Maoist den busted after gunfight in Malkangiri



POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri, March 14: Security personnel busted a Maoist den in Swabhimani Anchal – formerly known as cut-off area – in Malkangiri district following an exchange of fire Sunday. Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of SOG and DVF jawans went into Pipalapadar jungle and district and result in severe water crisis in future.

Seeing the jawans marching towards them, Maoists opened fire from their hideout. In retaliation, the jawans too fired back at the ultras. The exchange of fire continued till the rebels abandoned their position. Subsequently, the jawans raided the hideout and seized a huge cache of explosives and Maoist literature. According to latest reports, the combing operation is continuing in the jun-

gle. Notably, a BSP jawan was wounded February 21 after a landmine planted by the Maoists went off at Kartanpalli under Mathili police limits in Malkangiri. One day later, the security forces recovered three improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and some other materials during an anti-Naxal operation near the Gopinathguda-Kadaliabandha village axis in Malkangiri.

Forest officials bust mineral-trading racket

DURING A RAID, THREE HYVA TRUCKS, EXCAVATOR SEIZED; THREE ARRESTED

POST NEWS NETWORK

Joda/Keonjhar, March 14: Amid allegations of illegal mineral mining, transportation and trade, the forest department has got its act together again. It has busted another racket involved in mineral trafficking in Keonjhar Saturday night.

According to the forest department sources, following directive from DFO Sayam Mallick, forest officials from Keonjhar, Champua and Barbil ranges seized three hyva trucks, an excavator complicit in mineral shifting and trade in Nayagad area. Three people involved in illegal mineral trade were arrested and are being interrogated about the involvement of others in the racket.

It was learnt that the three had illegally extracted iron ore from



forest areas with the excavator.

Reliable sources said that this group was bringing and extracting iron ore from various forests and stocking it at Nayagad area. Then they were transporting the iron ore to other localities.

It has been alleged that illegal trade of iron ore has been rampant in Joda and Barbil areas. In the

last one year, the forest department has detected many such cases in the district.

Various quarters have blamed the lethargy of the mines and police department. Such mineral loot has been happening despite formation of a district-level and a state-level task force of the mines department.

When asked about it, Joint Director of the Mines department Sailesh Behera said that he was not aware of the seizure and sought to know where it has happened.

It may be noted here that towards last week of January this year, a team of forest officials had seized a heavy vehicle carrying huge quantities of illegally mined manganese from Nayagad forest under Champua range.

Moreover, forest officials from Champua, Joda, Balibandh and Bamebari areas while conducting night patrolling in the night of January 12 had caught a truck with 35 tonne of high grade iron ore.

Before that, some local youths had spotted piles of manganese in a bushy area in Joda police station.

The illegally mined manganese weighing over 10 tonne was covered under palm leaves amid bushes.

Farmers sore over illegal prawn farming, seek action

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, March 14: Illegal prawn farming is allegedly taking a heavy toll on the farming and environment in Chandbali area of Bhadrak district, a report said.

Acres of farmlands are being used for prawn farming while water being released from fish ponds is affecting the fertility of the land in the areas like Aradi, Nuagaon and Jashipur panchayats, locals alleged.



FILE PHOTO

Hundreds of people from these panchayats recently met the Collector and submitted a memorandum in this regard. In the memorandum, they pointed out that the toxic water of the farm ponds in Pahana area is contaminating the water of Shivaganga, the pond of Lord Akhandalamani.

Though locals have apprised the tehsil authorities of the problem posed by the prawn farming, no step is being taken to remove the prawn enclosures.

Locals have demanded that the administration should halt prawn farming in Chandbali area.

ADM Arun Kumar Das assured that steps will be taken in this direction.

Notably, hundreds of farmers, upset over growing prawn farming, walked 55 km from Chandbali to the district headquarters February 28. They alleged that due to prawn farming, agriculture in the area is being affected.

Money minted from MGNREGS mess-up

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, March 14: The government has laid stress on effective execution of projects under the rural job scheme like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) so as to ensure jobs to poor rural populace. But massive irregularities have allegedly defeated the purpose of the MGNREGS in many cases in Jajpur district, a report said.

According to the report, lack of monitoring and slow pace of investigation in the cases of irregularities has allegedly encouraged contractors to mess up the projects and mint money. In most cases, machines are used while wages of job card holders are misappropriated in names of forged job card holders.

Even in some cases, funds have been sanctioned twice for one project. An MGNREGS project being executed in Tarakote and Dhaneswar panchayats under Korei block is such instance.

In 2018-19, Rs 2 lakh of Fourth Finance Commission has been sanctioned for desiltation of Hata Gadia pond (under MGNREGS)

in Tarakote panchayat. A plaque having such details is set up at the pond. Its work is being done by machines.

Surprisingly, another plaque has been set up near it. The plaque says, Rs 3 lakh has been sanctioned for the same project under MGNREGS in 2018-19. It also claims that job card holders are being paid Rs 303 per day. But there is mention of its date of start and deadline, project code. Even people do not know from where the fund Rs 3 lakh has been sanctioned. It was alleged that influential people of the panchayat are involved in the scam. Another scam was reported from Sanaputuli in Dhaneswar panchayat. Rs 3 lakh has been sanctioned for plantation around a playground in 2020-21. The fund has been misappropriated without any plantation, local alleged.

Many local organizations alleged that people and officials were involved in these irregularities from top to bottom and from file moving to making bills.

This correspondent tried to contact BDO Sweta Snigdha on her cell phone, but she did not pick up the call.

Power supply to Dashapur resumes from Karuguda grid

POST NEWS NETWORK

Junagarh, March 14: The long-standing problem over erratic power supply to Dashapur village under Golamunda block in Kalahandi district was resolved after the village got connected with a 132/33 KV grid at Karuguda under this block.



Energy Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra switched on a new feeder of Karuguda grid and resumed the power supply to the village. The move will help provide constant power supply to over 8000 consumers in the village.

Earlier, the villagers were getting power supply from a 33-KV feeder at Dharmagarh which often resulted in load shedding and other problems. Apprised about the problem, the energy minister made efforts following which power supply was available to the village from the new feeder of Karuguda grid.

OPTCL, DGM SK Mohanta, executive engineer Lokanath Dash, head operation Sumit Ghosh, SE Dhananjaya Rana, Junagarh SDO Manoj Pattnaik his Dharmagarh counterpart Bhagaban Sahu, Dinesh Bagarti, political secretary to the energy minister, former NAC chairman Mahesh Sahu were present at the function.

Fires damage 68 spots in Bolangir

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kantabanji/Boudh, March 14: Fires were reported from 68 places in various reserve forests under Kantabanji range of Bolangir district. The forest department has been making all-out efforts to douse the blaze, but their efforts are failing to make a dent.

The forest department has formed five squads including fire team (10 members), para-protection force (10 members) and members of Vana Surakhya Samitis.

Following a directive from the Bolangir DFO, ranger Shradhadev Badmali, deputy ranger Sadhucharan Pradhan and forester Binod Bihari Dharua have also joined the fire-fighting exercise in the district.



Reports from Boudh said, as some people are allegedly setting forests on fire. They are doing so as an act of revenge as personnel of the forest department had caught four people Saturday on a charge of

their involvement in igniting the fires. However, zilla parishad member of Zone-9 Abakash Sahu condemned the incident and alleged that the department is arresting innocent people. Some other intellectuals have demanded a thorough investigation into the cause behind the forest fires. Sahu informed that fires have been raging in five ranges in the district. However, the department has failed to find the real reasons behind the infernos.

Reports from Keonkunda said that forest officials have been trying to extinguish fires in four Balimela forest areas where scores of valuable trees and herbs have reduced to ashes.

Similarly, fires have destroyed sal trees in Phampuni forests near Jeypore of Korapur district.

Kuntala continues search for her elusive 'Dhudhu'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Telkoi, March 14: A woman with a silver bowl full of cooked rice is often seen wandering alone in the jungle near Purusottampur village in Telkoi area of Keonjhar district for last five days. As she roams around in the jungle, she can be heard calling in an affection-laced voice someone having the name 'Dhudu'. After some time, she returns home, with a sign of dependency writ large on her face. Her story has all essential ingredients required for making a movie.

Kuntala Kumari Penthei lives in Purusottampur village. She would frequent the nearby jungle under Bimala forest beat. Kuntala still remembers the day when a strange thing happened to her two years ago. Like any other day, she had gone to the jungle to collect



firewood. There she came across a baby boar roaming aimlessly. Assuming the shoot might have got separated from the herd and



fearing harm to the animal, she took it to her house. Kuntala looked after the animal with great care. Over the years,

HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND

■ Kuntala had gone to the jungle to collect firewood when she came across a baby boar roaming aimlessly

■ Kuntala looked after the animal with great care. Over the years, Kuntala developed an emotional bond with the boar. She would call it 'Dhudu'

■ Kuntala has since been visiting the jungle with cooked rice with the hope that her 'Dhudu' would return to her. But till date her cries have fallen on deaf ears only

Kuntala developed an emotional bond with the boar. She would call it 'Dhudu'. Whenever she would call 'Dhudu', the boar wherever it might be would come running to her.

But the man-animal friendship did not last long. Getting a complaint from the people, some forest department officials reached her house March 8 and took both Kuntala and the boar to the Telkoi head office.

There they briefed Kuntala about the punishment laid out in the Act for keeping wild animals as pet. Thereafter, they made arrangement for Kuntala to reach her village and released the boar in Kamalanga forest near Telkoi.

Kuntala has since been visiting the jungle with cooked rice with the hope that her 'Dhudu' would return to her. But till date her cries have fallen on deaf ears only.

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
RWSS DIVISION, RAIRANGPUR
INVITATION FOR BIDS**

E-mail-eerwss_rai@nic.in, eerwss_rai@gmail.com
e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
No. O-1249-
IDENTIFICATION No. 66RWSS/RRPUR-2020-2021 / Dated 09.03.2021

The Executive Engineer, RWSS Division, Rairangpur on behalf of Governor of Odisha, invites percentage rate bids to be received in online mode for the following works from the eligible experienced contractors in similar nature of work, registered with State Govt. & contractor of equivalent Grade/class registered with Central Govt. / Railways.

1. Nature of work : - a) Retrofitting of 40 LPCD PWS Scheme to 70 LPCD to village Basingi(JJM)under Bahalda Block of RWS&S Division, Rairangpur.
2. No. of work : - 1(One) no
3. Period of Completion : 04(four) month
4. Cost of tender : -Rs.6000.00
5. Estimated cost : - Rs.36.26lakhs
6. Class of Contractor : - (As mentioned in Tender Call Notice)
7. Date and time of availability of bid documents in Portal: -from 9 hours of 17.03.2021 to 17.00 to hours of 26.03.2021
8. Receipt of bid cost, bid security, documents: - Online only
9. Date & time of opening of technical bid: - Dt. 30.03.2021 at 11.00 hours onwards.
10. Other Documents: - (As mentioned in DTGN)
11. The bidders have to participate in on-line bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in>.
12. Any addendum / Corrigendum / Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.
13. Concession of 10 % will be considered to ST/SC contractors up to B class only on submission of an affidavit over the general category contractors failing which such concession will not be extended to him / her.

Sd./- Executive Engineer, RWSS Division, Rairangpur
OIPR-25010/11/0035/2021

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



Vaccine Vs Vaccine

The Quad virtual summit, attended by the heads of states of USA, Japan, Australia and India for the first time 12 March, came up with a new tactic to stop China. The four countries of the group have pledged to deliver a billion doses of Covid-19 vaccine throughout the Indo-Pacific region by the end of 2022, in what is believed to be an attempt to counter China's influence in the region.

The Quad vaccine, as against the Chinese vaccine, is expected to allow the group to play a role in the region that has been a major beneficiary of Beijing's so-called vaccine diplomacy. The promise of the vaccine, a major takeaway of the summit, follows the Biden administration's decision to make the region and competition with China a focus of its national security agenda. Southeast Asia has been a major recipient of Chinese-made vaccine doses in recent months, with hundreds of thousands of donations from Beijing being sent to Cambodia, Laos and the Philippines. Thailand and Indonesia have also received millions of doses through commercial deals.

Domestic considerations in the four countries also appear to be the reasons for formulating the vaccine strategy to take on China. Australia has had a relatively low number of cases while Japan is keen to ensure the delayed Olympics go ahead this year. The US has recorded more infections than any other country, touching over 29 million cases so far. The Biden administration has now pledged US\$4 billion over two years to support a WHO vaccination programme that Trump had refused to join.

India, being a global leader in vaccine production, will have to deal with the pressure of vaccinating its own citizens as well as providing for this new load. India's indigenous vaccine Covaxin, produced by Bharat Biotech, aims to produce 700 million doses from its four facilities by the end of the year. On the other hand, the Oxford-Astra Zeneca vaccine Covishield, manufactured by Serum Institute, claims to be producing over 50 million doses a month. India has by now exported 58 million doses of vaccines to 71 countries in Latin America, Caribbean, Asia, Africa, UK, Canada, Brazil and Mexico. Both the vaccines have been shipped in the form of gifts as well as part of commercial agreements.

The US, Japan and Australia have pledged to give at least US\$600 million to support the roll-out of vaccines throughout the Indo-Pacific, including last-mile vaccine delivery. The countries will also work with the WHO in its global vaccine drive.

The leaders also discussed maritime and other issues. It must be remembered that India's hope that a mighty military backing by the US, Japan and Australia would enable it to face the Red Dragon might not be fulfilled all that simply. The focus of the Quad leaders' discussion was, of course, luring the Indo-Pacific nations away from China by offering them vaccines. The US might offer technological support but is not in a position to ship out doses in millions from its ports. Its domestic requirements would be first priority. The other two nations, Japan and Australia, do not themselves have heavy requirement for vaccines nor can they produce big quantities to gift away.

Therefore, the onus and the burden have been put on the weak shoulders of India. With nearly a billion and a half population of its own, the vaccination programme in India is moving at a snail's pace. Lack of political will to deal with the internal crisis may have been due to a wrong impression of the Union government self created by disinformation. The intense desire to show bravado where none is required, has resulted in setting up too tall an order for production and delivery of vaccines. If India does meet the Quad demands, it will be forced to further neglect its own citizens in a time bound vaccination drive. On the other hand, if it shirks away from this responsibility, India could lose its importance within the Quad framework and may receive a lukewarm response in any emergency situation that might crop up in the future.

Indians eventually may be the losers in this game.

WISDOM CORNER

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.

MARK TWAIN

The mind is like an iceberg, it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water.

SIGMUND FREUD

To be without some of the things you want is an indispensable part of happiness.

BERTRAND RUSSELL

WORDSWORTH

Metagrobolise

If this word puzzles you, your response is appropriate. That's what the word means — to puzzle, mystify, baffle or confound. It and its relatives are notable by their extreme rarity. A diligent search is required to find any instances of it. Your broker is a real dipstick and slick as one too. You don't need to have your brains metagrobolized by his inscrutable statements to know that something's amiss (Sunday Star-News, 20 Jan. 1991). A previous generation might well have found metagrobolise in this once-famous school story: "It's the olive branch," was Stalky's comment. "It's the giddy white flag, by gum! Come to think of it, we have metagrobolized 'em" (Stalky & Co, by Rudyard Kipling, 1899). Some students of puzzles have adopted metagrobology to describe their pursuit, which makes them metagrobologists. Wikipedia says that the word was first applied to puzzlers in the early 1970s by Rick Irby, a well-known designer and constructor of wire puzzles. It's originally French, invented in the form matagroboliser in 1534 by the humorist and satirist François Rabelais in one of his tales about the giant Gargantua. To create it, Rabelais turned to ancient Latin and Greek, finding the first part in a Greek word that meant vain or frivolous and the rest in cribulum, the Latin for a sieve, which arrived much changed in French via Arabic and Italian as gabrelor, to sift (and later into English as garble, to sift the rubbish from spices, which later became our verb meaning to confuse or distort). By Rabelais's time, gabrelor had taken on a broader sense of examining something closely.

Metemptosis

Though this word is extremely rare, the situation it refers to is still very much with us, as it refers to one of the corrections that form part of the Gregorian calendar we all use. We need not worry that it will affect us anytime soon, however: the next metemptosis will occur in 2100. The problem for calendar creators is that the number of days in a year doesn't exactly fit the length of the year — there's about a quarter of a day over. The older Julian calendar from Roman times had a simple way to deal with this: it just added an extra leap day every four years to make up the numbers and get the calendar back into sync with the year. Unfortunately, over the next 1500 years it slowly became clear this wasn't good enough. In fact, the number of days in the year is very slightly less than 365¼, so the calendar was slowly gaining on the seasons. In the sixteenth century, advisors to Pope Gregory XIII told him that it was necessary to leave out some days to get things back in step and to change the calendar to omit three leap years in every 400 years. To do this, they suggested that century years should only be leap years if they were divisible by 400. So 2000 was a leap year, but 2100 won't be. Astronomers created metemptosis in the early eighteenth century for this second step, from Greek meta-, after, em-, in, and ptosis, a falling. It came into the language when the need to reform the British calendar was becoming very urgent (Catholic countries had implemented it in 1582; Britain only did so in 1752, though we weren't the last by any means). To be complete, there is proemtposis for the opposite process, adding a day to the calendar, in this case to keep it in step with the moon.



Harish Barthwal

UNSURE OF WHAT ONE ACTUALLY NEEDS, MOST PEOPLE ARE OBSESSED WITH ACQUIRING MORE AND MORE THAT IS WELL FANNED BY THE MARKETERS

The current scenario of material ambitions and show of ostentations driving people offers unending opportunities for the market to flourish and eventually acquire a commanding position. The market just does not suggest but gives no option, so you buy the products and services on the platter. The affluent, die-hard market forces expand their coverage and influence the corporate world and the governments in having policies suiting their designs. World over, capitalist forces exploiting the human urge to acquire ad infinitum are impinging not only on our lifestyle but also the core beliefs, the environment as also the ages old religious practices.

The other day, my friend happened to be in a meeting of real estate players in Delhi-NCR. The agenda was, working on a new, twin strategy to tide over the already dwindling property business exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. One, to impress and elicit the nod of residents of up to 4-storied complexes that a replaced multi-storied structure with more unit space, parking and cash incentive shall be a win-win affair; two, media may be any way taken into confidence to spread the word that conversion of existing residential complexes to high rise complexes is the only feasible modality to cope with burgeoning housing problem. In their plan, the builder doubles the number of floors, with ownership of the extra floors created, and mints money. Once the plan is through, imagine the possible damage to the environment with Delhi already in seismically risk zone.

Under the guise of treating the customer as God, as the buzzword goes, basic humanity towards customers is missing. Ask for a particular brand of detergent, cooking appliance, electric fan or whatever. Rather than informing that desired brand is available next shop, the shopkeeper shall count a hundred benefits of the

FOCUS CONSUMER

KING OR CAPTIVE



World over, capitalist forces exploiting the human urge to acquire ad infinitum are impinging not only on our lifestyle but also the core beliefs, the environment as also the ages old religious practices

brand in his stock and demerits of your choice. In their sheer profiteering pursuit, marketers have no compunction at playing havoc with the health of gullible people as witnessed in prompt caesareans without wait that fetch huge income, unwanted diagnosis and avoidable surgeries. Recall, what the attending doctor assesses promptly, especially in private hospitals when a patient approaches him: health condition of the patient or the quantum of cash the party can shell out? It is fine if one is covered by insurance, else depositing the advance is a condition. In either case a bunch of papers are marked with dotted lines to be signed — a travesty of 'informed consent'. Where are the choices?

The marketing people — that includes taxi and auto rickshaw drivers just outside railway stations, hawkers on streets, agents in wholesale markets, looking at you as currency all try to catch you physically compromising your privacy and cool. You don't want probiotic curd, but the nearby store has none else, again no option! In availing internet services you have to choose either of a cou-

ple of devils. At times, to attract more customers one will reduce the tariff or offer a new attractive plan, soon the others shall follow suit. As for improvement in services the customer is back to square root one: call dropping, no signal, heavy congestion. You are rendered a captive.

It is to secure rights to the customer who pays that World Consumer Rights Day is celebrated annually on 15 March around the world. Organised by Consumers International, an independent body founded in 1960, it was initiated on the inspiration of US President John F. Kennedy. In India, the Consumer Protection Act 1986 gives rights to choose the product, protected from hazardous goods, etc. The idea being, the customer should know what products and services one actually needs, the ingredients contained and modalities and also whether these are made ethically. About 40 per cent of all plastic is used in packaging and dumped after single use. Over 8 million tons of plastic enters our oceans every year and by 2050, our oceans shall have more plastic than fish. Considering rampant use of plastics in our

everyday life jeopardising health of people globally, particularly its carcinogenic nature, this year's theme of World Consumer Rights Day is, Tackling Plastic Pollution. Though highly useful material in our daily life, single-use plastic is impacting our ecosystems, and threatening human health. The year's campaign seeks to raise awareness to adopt and promote more sustainable practices.

Choice in products and services, an important component of consumerism, is replete with implications; unfortunately it is choice that is the first casualty in the market. The foods, medicines we take, products and services we use in our homes and workplaces have specific consequences. "Our personal consumer choices have ecological, social and spiritual consequences. It's time to re-examine our deeply held notions that underlie our lifestyles," said Canadian environmental activist David Suzuki. Apropos of the nature of toys flooding the children's segment that are becoming passion for young children, the impact of mechanism of these toys on the psyche of children is for anyone to see.

Unsure of what one actually needs, most people are obsessed with acquiring more and more that is well fanned by the marketers. Learning to retain the essentials is the key to blissful living. Those with long-term vision advocate for adopting minimalist approach in consumerism including the food we take; the basic premise is, we don't need a lot to live well. It is often said that more people today die of overeating and associated complications than starvation. Acquisitions of previous generation are a formidable problem for most youngsters. The minimalist concept is also in keeping with ancient Indian values. After all, isn't life a balance between what to hold on and what to let go?

The writer is a blogger who writes on social, health and self-help issues.

SPECTRUM GEOPOLITICS

Indo-Pak pirouette on Afghan talks

It is exactly a decade since President Barack Obama set the deadline to start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. Even then, Obama recalled how the 2001 Bonn conference had only "provisionally" installed Hamid Karzai in Kabul. We all know how long that "provisional" government lasted: 15 years. For Afghanistan, deadlines do not matter.

Are we about to witness Obama's third term in foreign affairs? The question arises because people fear Joe Biden may have inherited some of his previous bosses' instincts. No sooner had Obama's intention to withdraw been announced than qualifications were introduced: the date of withdrawal is not cast in stone. Reminding us of those days, again there is a deadline — May 1, for withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 troops. True, the deadline was set by the Trump administration. But Zalmay Khalilzad, veteran US diplomat and a Pushtoon to boot, is being continued for the time being. Is his earlier recommendation being set aside? Will he be shown the door soon?

Having served four Presidents as Ambassador to Kabul, Baghdad, UN and now trying to bring the Taliban, Kabul, Washington on a platform of lasting peace, it is Khalilzad who knows whether or not there is light at the end of this tunnel. But Secretary of State Antony Blinken has, in a letter, revealed a

divergent wish for Afghanistan. He may have to replace Ashraf Ghani with someone who the Taliban may be less averse to. This, Khalilzad may not like. Soon Biden will learn that two swords cannot be kept in the Afghan scabbard.

"Democracy" particularly during the 'sole superpower' moment was the cover for advancing American strategic and economic interests. To continue playing that sort of hand requires unbridled power. It vanished for a range of reasons but in popular perception worldwide what stayed were US brutalities in Iraq, Syria and Libya. The image of America as a destructive power gained ground.

When Trump sought Jimmy Carter's advice on what to do because "China is going ahead of US", Carter's response was sobering: "China has not been in a conflict since the 1979 war with Vietnam." Carter added: "We have never stopped being at war."

A realisation of decline may yet set the US on the path to recovery but in Afghanistan, as elsewhere, a certain fear lurks: a touch of Obama in Biden's make-up. Gen. Lloyd Austin elevated as Defence Secretary, for example, was during Obama years responsible for the entire project of training Syrian 'rebels' to fight Assad's forces.

He did not endear himself to the Senate Armed Services Select Committee who asked him tough

questions: what happened to the men he had trained? His answer was "three or four men are still fighting." The remainder walked away with the equipment and joined the terrorist group Jabhat al Nusra. Google for a clip of the classic Senate hearing. This \$500 million project was then discontinued. Obviously, Syria for Gen. Austin is 'incomplete' business. Little wonder, the administration's first military action were air strikes on Syria albeit on Iranian supplies to bolster Assad. The fact that the May 1 deadline for the withdrawal of the remaining 2,500 troops has already been changed to some future date, points to uncertainties ahead.

It is nice that the US is including India in the Afghan initiative. But on the Afghan process, Pakistan's centrality has been spelt out by everybody, including Austin. What pleases New Delhi is Austin's qualifier: Pakistan has not completely put an end to all its terror outfits. India being included in the process, significantly moved from Qatar to Turkey, has to be seen in perspective. Pakistan has excellent relations with Turkey, plus, there is universal acceptance of Pakistan's importance in the process. New Delhi has an opportunity to balance issues. This, ironically, is also where New Delhi may be seen to be placing the odd spanner in the works.

After travelling extensively in Afghanistan some years ago, I had

written a paper for the Observer Research Foundation in which I had praised India's low key diplomacy. This diplomacy had the effect of conferring on India heaps of goodwill among the Afghan people.

A country which has known conflict for 40 years found India's non-lethal, soft-touch soothing. Schools, hospitals, technical training institutes, hospitality to the injured by flying them to Indian hospitals — all of this found way to Afghan hearts. Visit parts of Hazrat Nani opposite Max hospital in Saket, and you have Afghan eating houses complete with Chapli Kebabs, giant size naans, and travel agents offering amazing rates for Delhi-Kabul-Delhi journey. Above all is the magic of Bollywood: India's most effective soft power. After evening prayers, every house in Kabul is watching an Indian movie. Whatever role Americans assign New Delhi, nothing can compare with the effectiveness of India's "Diplomacy by Default". Remember, in 2011, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, US Force Commander, had openly complained that India's soft diplomacy distracts Pakistan from being constructive in Afghanistan. Who knows, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa-Imran Khan duet may be inclined not to complain on that count.

The writer is a senior commentator on political and diplomatic issues.



Saeed Naqvi

A COUNTRY WHICH HAS KNOWN CONFLICT FOR 40 YEARS FOUND INDIA'S NON-LETHAL, SOFT-TOUCH SOOTHING

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

B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Srimandir facilities

Sir, The Srimandir was closed for devotees for 9-10 months. After it was opened for the darshan of Mahaprabhu Jagannath, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) developed the infrastructure for hassle-free visit to the temple. Queue system is in place at two places — entry to the Singhadwar and entry to the sanctum-sanctorum. Separate lines for senior citizens and persons with disabilities are great help to them. Drinking water facilities inside the temple complex and clean toilets just outside the north gate are better than earlier. Arrangements for keeping mobile phones and shoes free of cost in cloakroom are also better than before. Dry Mahaprasad rates are fixed, but the rate-chart for Anna Mahaprasad is yet to be implemented. AC and non-AC 'Mo Bus' route no. 50 from Bhubaneswar railway station to Puri bus stand is very convenient but crowded due to less frequency. Bus fare is more than private buses. The SJTA should give subsidy to CRUT for this route to promote tourism to Puri.

Gopal Mittal, BHUBANESWAR

Lanka bans burqa

Sir, The Sri Lankan government's decision to soon ban the burqa or face veil and shut down 1,000 madrasas must come as an affront to the country's minority Muslim community. Terming the attire as a symbol of religious extremism, Public Security Minister Sarath Weerasekara said the burqa directly affects national security. Sri Lanka will join a long list of European and African nations that have banned the burqa.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

Need of the hour

Sir, The decision to conduct the NEET in regional languages is a welcome move. The test will be held in 11 languages, including English, Hindi, Assamese, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Odia, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu through offline mode. The candidates must choose the option of the medium of question paper while filling in the application form. The new National Education Policy 2020 also emphasises education in regional languages. This will provide opportunities to students studying in Indian languages to attain higher education. Hope that the decision will prove helpful for the students. This is the need of the hour.

Amit Singh Kushwaha, SATNA (MP)

Assam Congress banks on anti-CAA, 5L job guarantee

The Congress, which ruled the state for 15 years before losing power in 2016 to the BJP, is hoping for a comeback on the back of a multi-party alliance

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi/Guwahati, March 14: In an aggressive campaign to put the ruling BJP in a corner in Assam, the Congress is making several promises, including five lakh jobs to the locals and non-implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

Calling the promises as 'guarantees', the Congress is leaving no stone unturned to unseat the BJP and come to power.

Jitendra Singh, who is in-charge General Secretary of the Congress in Assam, said Sunday, "This election is to save Assam, to save women of Assam, to give employment to the youth and specially to save culture of the state." The Congress has given five 'guarantees' for Assam if voted to power. The first is the Citizenship Amendment Act. Congress said they will ensure that the CAA is not implemented in Assam. The other guarantees include: Free 200 units of electricity, Rs 2,000/per month to homemakers, minimum wage of 365/day to Tea Garden Workers and generation of five lakh jobs in the state.

The Congress in its public meetings has been explaining how the party will enact the 5 lakh government jobs guarantee as it will



open new avenues for the people in the state. Bhupesh Baghel, Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, has also been campaigning in Assam.

He is describing his state's model in Assam to counter the Gujarat model, which he says has produced no results in five years. He also released a charge sheet in Dibrugarh Sunday against the state government and took potshots at who was running the government, was it Sarbananda Sonowal or Hemanta Biswa Sarma. Baghel alleged that "Syndicates are running the government in Assam, coal-sand-supari-cow smuggling syndicate are in the state, and the government was protecting them." The Congress has now pitched in campaigners for the three-phase Assam Assembly

elections, including party chief Sonia Gandhi, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, former party President Rahul Gandhi and party General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and several others.

The party has also named Rameshwar Oraon, Assam Congress chief Ripun Bora, Sushmita Dev, Gourav Gogoi, Debabarta Saikia, Pradyut Bordoloi, Rakibul Hussain, Bhupen Bora, Rana Goswami, Ranee Narah, Rupjyoti Kurmi, Roselina Tirkey and Pradip Nag, as star campaigners for Assam.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had last week visited the state for two days, and had addressed few public rallies besides meeting the Assam tea garden workers.

YSRCP sweeps Andhra civic polls

BARRING A COUPLE OF MUNICIPALITIES WHERE TDP COULD GIVE SOME FIGHT TO YSRCP, OTHER OPPOSITION PARTIES -- JANA SENA PARTY AND ITS ALLY BJP WERE WIPED OUT

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Amaravati, March 14: Andhra Pradesh's ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) Sunday scored a landslide victory in the urban local body elections by winning almost all the 11 municipal corporations and 70 municipalities.

The ruling party, which captured Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in all the districts, won majority of the divisions.

Barring a couple of municipalities where main the Opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) could give some fight to YSRCP, other Opposition parties -- Jana Sena Party (JSP) of actor politician Pawan Kalyan and its ally BJP were wiped out.

The ruling party bagged eight corporations and was leading in three others. It also won 67 out of 70 municipalities.

The landslide win for YSRCP came close on the heels of its massive victory in panchayat elections, where it won 80 per cent of seats.

YSRCP led by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy captured Visakhapatnam, Guntur, Chittoor, Tirupati, Kadapa, Ongole, Anantapur and Kurnool corporations. In the 98-member Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation, the biggest among corporations, YSRCP won 58 divisions while TDP bagged 30 divisions. JSP secured two 3 seats. Others including independents



won in seven divisions.

In the 64-member Vijayawada Corporation, YSRCP was racing ahead by winning 27 divisions while TDP bagged 12 divisions.

In the 57-member Guntur Municipal Corporation, the ruling party swept the polls by winning 44 seats. TDP managed to win nine divisions while JSP bagged two and others two. All eyes were on Vijayawada and Guntur corporations as the outcome will virtually be seen as a referendum on the contentious state capital issue.

TDP sought the votes in these corporations to reject YSRCP government's move to trifurcate state capital Amaravati.

It was YSRCP wave in all three regions of the state. In 50-member Tirupati corporation, YSRCP won 47 seats while TDP could secure just one. In Anantapur, YSRCP won 48 out of 50 seats. Two divisions went to others. Similarly in Chittoor, YSRCP won 46 out of 50 divisions.

As the results and trends from across the state show a clear sweep by YSRCP, celebrations broke out

at the party's office at Tadepalli in Amaravati. Party workers burst crackers, distributed sweets and danced to the drum beats to celebrate the victory.

The poll officials will be counting a total of 27,29,071 votes in 533 divisions of 11 corporations. Similarly, 21,03,284 votes will be counted in 1,633 wards in 71 municipalities.

Chief Electoral Officer Ramesh Kumar has directed the poll officials to complete the counting process by 8 p.m. He asked the collectors to order re-counting in divisions where the margin of victory is in single digit. Elections in 71 municipalities and 12 corporations were held on March 10. Counting was not taken up in Eluru corporation and Chilkaluripet municipality due to High Court orders.

As the municipal elections were held nearly two years after YSRCP came to power, the ruling party attributed the results to people's support to its governance.

YSRCP said the massive results in its favour is due to the implementation of welfare schemes by Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy despite corona pandemic.

Apart from implementing welfare schemes, the chief minister also paved way for development of the urban bodies. The Urban community also supported the policies of YSRCP government and blessed with landslide victory, it said.

BJP polarising Hindus by showing my face: Ajmal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 14: Asserting that unlike in 2016 there is "no Modi wave" in the Assam Assembly polls this time, AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal Sunday alleged that the BJP was attempting to polarise the Hindus by pointing at him, invoking the Mughals and portraying the Muslims as enemies, but said the ruling party will not succeed.

Dismissing as 'baseless' the BJP's charge of communalism against his All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), Ajmal claimed "no outfit was more secular" than his party in Assam, and cited the AIUDF giving substantial representation to non-Muslims in elections in the past.

In an interview with PTI, Ajmal said the Assam election would be a 'turning point' for the country as the BJP's defeat will begin from the state. The grand alliance, of

which it is a part of along with the Congress, is fighting hard for it, he said.

The AIUDF is secular and will always remain so. But since the BJP is itself 'communal' and plays communal politics, it looks at others through that lens, Ajmal said.

"The BJP doesn't have any development issue to talk about. They talked about jobs last time, could not provide any. At the national level, they talked about getting black money back, instead sent black money abroad," he alleged.

"Last time (in 2016) when Narendra Modi campaigned here there was a wave. But there is no Modi wave this time. He has visited five times, but has been unable to generate any wave," Ajmal claimed.

"By showing my face, by portraying Muslims as enemies, and making communal comments, the BJP wants to polarise Hindus, but unlike last time, they will not succeed," he said.

Last time (in 2016) when Narendra Modi campaigned here there was a wave. But there is no Modi wave this time. He has visited five times, but has been unable to generate any wave

BADRUDDIN AJMAL | AIUDF CHIEF



Spotlight on 10L tea garden workers in Assam

Tea tribe communities are determining factors in around 25 to 30 seats in 126-seat Assam Assembly

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Guwahati, March 14: As Assam goes to three-phase Assembly polls with numerous issues, the spotlight is on the 10 lakh tea garden workers.

Assam has over 10 lakh tea workers in the organised sector working in 856 tea estates producing around 55 per cent of India's tea. Tea tribe communities are determining factors in around 25 to 30 seats in 126-seat Assam Assembly.

The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government after coming to power in 2016 had increased the wages of the tea workers by Rs 30, and February 20 the state government decided to hike the daily wages to regular 7,46,667 tea garden workers by Rs 50 - from Rs 167 to Rs 217.

However, the implementation of the Rs 50 a day hike in wages for tea garden workers is likely to be delayed as a petition filed by the Indian Tea Association (ITA).

Hearing the petition of the ITA and 17 tea companies that own over 90 per cent of tea estates in Assam, Justice Michael



Zothankhuma recently asked the state government not to take any coercive action against the ITA and the tea companies until case challenging the state Labour Department's notification on the wage hike, is disposed of.

The High Court upheld the argument that the wage hike was "illegal" as no committee or sub-committee had been formed, as required under relevant sections of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. The matter is listed for next hearing March 15.

Accusing the BJP government for not increasing the daily wages of the tea garden workers, the Congress, which is contesting the

Assembly polls with six other parties, recently announced five "guarantees" for the people to be fulfilled if the party comes to power, including raising the tea workers' daily wages to Rs 365 from the existing Rs 167.

Congress alleged that Prime minister Narendra Modi had promised to revise the daily wages of tea workers in Assam to Rs 350 prior to 2014 Lok Sabha polls.

Renowned political commentator Sushanta Talukdar said the economic condition of the tea workers was very pitiable and they have been deprived of their due wages and other benefits.

"The political parties before

every election promises to increase their wages and various benefits, but after the polls nothing is fulfilled.

"Without empowering the workers, the tea industry cannot flourish. If the tea industry thrived, the economy of Assam would further prosper facilitating to deal with the growing unemployment problems," Talukdar told IANS.

All Assam Tea Tribes' Students' Association (ATTSA) have announced a shutdown of all tea gardens March 22 alleging neglectful attitude towards the tea workers of Assam.

AATTSA President Dhiraj Gowala said that all governments

have failed to address the problems of the tea workers.

"We, before the elections, would apprise the people how the injustice has been done to the tea workers by the incumbent BJP, previous Asom Gana Parishad and Congress governments," Gowala told IANS.

February 6, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had distributed Rs 3,000 each to 7,46,667 tea garden workers in Assam under the 'Chah Bagicha Dhan Puraskar Mela' scheme.

The scheme was started by the Assam government in 2017-18 and that year Rs 2,500 each was provided to 6,33,411 tea garden workers, while a similar amount was deposited in 7,15,979 bank accounts the next year.

According to the experts, drop in production due to Covid-19 pandemic, nationwide lockdown, besides governmental restrictions, caused loss of huge foreign currency earnings as India used to export tea to more than 30 countries.

According to economists and experts, delayed start of various works in the tea gardens, including plucking and processing, besides government enforced restrictions last year, are among the key reasons to give a blow to export of tea.

Assam, which roughly produces 55 per cent of India's total tea production of 1,389.70 million kg, has 856 large tea gardens and over a lakh small tea growers.

Active Covid cases keep rising in Andhra Pradesh

AGENCIES

Amaravati, March 14: The number of active coronavirus cases in Andhra Pradesh shot up to 1,400 as 298 were added afresh, the highest single day spike since January 8, that

took the gross to 8,91,861.

In 24 hours ending 9 am Sunday, 164 patients had recovered and two more succumbed in the state, a health department bulletin said. The total recoveries now touched 8,83,277 and toll 7,184, it said. The



state has now completed 1.45 crore tests that turned out an overall infection positivity rate of 6.14 per cent.

The cumulative positives in Chittoor district crossed 88,000, the third highest in the state, as it added 90 fresh cases in a day. It now has 479 active cases.

Guntur district added 48, Krishna, East Godavari and Visakhapatnam 32 fresh cases each.

Kurnool, which reported zero cases on Saturday, added 14 on Sunday while Kadapa added 12 and Prakasam 11. The remaining five districts reported less than 10 new cases each, according to the bulletin.

SPS Nellore and Visakhapatnam districts saw one fresh COVID-19 fatality each in a day.

The southern state is seeing a resurgence in the infection rate. East Godavari's tally has crossed 1.24 lakh, the highest among all Andhra districts, while the state's positivity rate fell to 6.15 per cent, which is still higher than the national average of 5.02 per cent.

Clamour grows against Centre's move to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant

AGENCIES

Amaravati, March 14: The clamour against the Union government's decision to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant has been growing. The Visakhapatnam Steel Plant conservation committee has intensified its movement against the Centre's decision.

The move to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant has been evoking strong opposition across the state. Both the ruling as well as the Opposition parties have been agitating for the rollback of the decision.

Earlier this week, BJP MP and maverick politician Subramanian Swamy had opined that privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is not a good idea.

He said this while interacting with the media after calling on Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Voicing his opposition to the Centre's privatisation plans for Visakhapatnam Steel Plant,



Swamy recalled that even in the past, he had opposed the privatisation of Air India.

Swamy opined that blindly privatising public sector companies is not a good thing, and said it should be attempted only if there are "sufficiently strong reasons".

Clarifying that he is in favour of market systems, Swamy felt the government should consider divestment on a case by case basis.

Following Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman vowing to 100 per cent privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, the Andhra Pradesh CM last week wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking an appointment to explain and convince him to stall the sale process.

"I request you to kindly give me an appointment to explain all the options as narrated above, to revive and put

RINL, Visakhapatnam back on track," wrote Reddy.

He offered to bring an all-party delegation including the representatives of trade unions to represent their concerns directly to Modi. Panicked by Sitharaman's categorical clarification in the Parliament, the CM sought the PM's early appointment and reminded his letter to him a month ago.

national

of the day quote

Rohingya Muslims have not come here on a personal invitation of anyone. They are allowed as per the UN resolution on refugees and their deportation to their homes or somewhere else will take place under international monitoring...we have no objections

Based on the feedback gathered, I can say that the wave of public support is in favour of the BJP in West Bengal this time, much stronger than the one which swept Uttar Pradesh during the 2017 Assembly elections

The Delhi government aims to further capitalise on the positive response received from several sections and now we will involve corporates to be a part of the campaign. I appeal to this segment to switch to EV cabs to facilitate the travel of their employees

SHORT TAKES

RS logjam likely to continue today

New Delhi: The Rajya Sabha may continue to witness a logjam between the opposition and the Centre over the fuel price hike and the contentious farm laws. The upper house will assemble Monday 11 a.m. after it was adjourned on March 10 due to repeated pandemonium by the Opposition seeking suspension of business and discussions on the issues.

Snow forecast in Kashmir

Srinagar: Dry, overcast weather occurred in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh on Sunday as the meteorological (MeT) department forecast light to moderate rain and snow during the next 24 hours. "Weather to remain overcast with light to moderate rain in plains and snow over the higher reaches of Kashmir towards the Sunday afternoon and generally cloudy weather in Jammu", an official said.

Militant killed

Srinagar: A militant was killed Sunday in an encounter with security forces in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation Saturday in Rawalpora area of the district following information about presence of militants there, a police official said.



In the upcoming Assembly elections, the block level organisation will play a significant role. This is a war of ideology and we will fight it with all our strength
PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

DMK MLA SARAVANAN JOINS BJP

Weeks before assembly elections, DMK legislator P Saravanan Sunday joined the BJP, which promptly named him the candidate from Madurai North constituency in southern Tamil Nadu



Experts fear a new nCoV wave

India Sunday recorded 25,320 COVID-19 infections, the highest daily rise in 84 days, taking the case tally to 1,13,59,048, according to Union health ministry data



New Delhi, March 14: For the fourth day in a row, Delhi on Sunday recorded over 400 cases of Covid-19, raising concerns among experts. The national capital reported 407 new cases in the last 24 hours, taking the infection tally to 6,43,696, while the positivity rate stood at 0.60 per cent, as per the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi Health Department.

The death count climbed to 10,941 with two more fatalities, the bulletin said. The capital logged 419 cases Saturday, a day after recording the highest single-day spike in over two months with 431 cases Friday while the count on Thursday was 409.

A total of 370 cases were reported on Wednesday and 320 on Tuesday. A total of 585 cases were reported on January 1 and 424 on January 3. However, the numbers had started to come down in February and had fallen below 100 on more than one occasion.

The number of active cases of the disease in the city rose to 2,262 from 2,207 on Saturday, while the positivity rate continued to stand at 0.60 per cent. However, the Delhi government does not find the incumbent rise alarming. Health Minister Satyendar Jain said Friday that the figures of over 400 per day were "not alarming", and asserted that the positivity rate was still below one per cent. In contrast to the statement, health experts cautioned

that the cases may soon turn into a wave if stringent measures are not taken.

Dr Lalit Kant, former head of the Epidemiological and Communicable Diseases Department at the ICMR, said that repetitive communication to make people aware that the pandemic is very much here is important. "Besides, the government must reinforce the strict measures of compounding on disregard of Covid appropriate behaviour," he added.

Dr Suneela Garg, advisor to the ICMR, said that contact tracing must be strengthened as well as micro containment strategy should be implemented to limit the infection spread.

"We need to test at least 30 contacts per case. Besides, micro containment would help in checking the spread pattern," she added. The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation. States like Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh are showing a steep rise in the daily new COVID-19 cases and have accounted for 87.73 per cent of the new instances of the disease reported in a day, the Union Health Ministry said on Sunday.

Farmers' stir may continue till Dec: Tikait

AGENCIES

Allahabad, March 14: The Bhartiya Kisan Union-led farmer agitation against the three central farm laws may continue till December this year, the outfit's national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait said here Sunday.

Tikait made the statement while talking to reporters here after his recent visit to the poll-bound West Bengal. "This agitation possibly will stretch up to November or December this year," he said.

Talking about his West Bengal visit, Tikait said during poll campaigning there, the central government people have been asking farmers to give them one fistful of rice. "I have advised Bengal farmers to ask grain seekers to fix an MSP of Rs 1,850 per quintal for paddy before giving them a single grain of rice," Tikait told reporters here. He said after Bengal, he was planning to visit other parts of the country to press for the enactment of a law guaranteeing an MSP for various crops. "In Bihar, the paddy is currently being bought by traders



at an abysmally low rate of Rs 750 to Rs 800 per quintal. I want a law guaranteeing the minimum support price for various crops," said Tikait. He said he was not going to sit in Delhi alone but was planning to visit all over the country, including Madhya Pradesh on March 14 and 15, Ganga Nagar in Rajasthan on March 17, Ghazipur's UP Gate border in Delhi March 18, Odisha on March 19 and Karnataka on March 21 and 22. During his visit here, Tikait also garlanded a statue of his late father and farmer leader Mahendra Singh Tikait at Tikait Park in Jhalwa near here. The BKU spokesperson claimed the three central laws will lead to the closure of all small-time neighbourhood shops, leaving only big commercial malls to survive. "These farm laws will ruin traders and lead to the closure of small

business utilities and the collapse of small industries. These laws will bring in big multinational firms like Walmart," claimed Tikait.

"Had this government belonged to a political party, it would have talked to farmers and resolved the matter," Tikait said. "But this government is being run by big business houses. It is bent upon selling the entire country," he alleged.

POLICE STOPS CONSTRUCTION: Haryana Police on Sunday stopped the construction of the 'pucca' houses at Singhu border, begun by the protesting farmers on Saturday in order to deal with the scorching heat. Apart from Singhu border, farmers are constructing pucca houses at Tikri, Shahjahanpur and Ghazipur borders also. Anil Malik of the Kisan Social Army confirmed the construction of permanent structures at Tikri border. Farmers had started the construction of brick and mortar structure at Sonapat GT Road and these houses can be easily seen when one moves a few kilometres ahead of the protest site at Singhu border.

AFTER A YEAR, DELHI HC TO RESUME PHYSICAL HEARING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 14: After a year, the Delhi High Court will resume from Monday its complete physical functioning, which was restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

From March 15, all judges of the high court would hold physical hearing of cases. Since March 2020, the high court has been holding proceedings through video conferencing and subsequently, a few benches started holding physical courts everyday on a rotation basis.

Some of them were also holding hybrid proceedings, wherein lawyers have the option to attend the hearing via video conference instead of appearing in person. According to a notification issued by the high court administration March 12, limited numbers of litigants who are appearing in person and/or required to appear in compliance of the court's order/directions be permitted in the court premises.

The high court March 2 had issued certain guidelines to be fol-



lowed upon resumption of physical court hearings from March 15, including that visitors and advocates shall maintain social distancing as per government norms. A circular issued by the administration branch of the high court earlier had said entry of litigants will be regulated as it was during the pre-COVID-19 pandemic period and facilitation counter/pass counter will also function in a normal manner.

"All the visitors, including lawyers, shall maintain social distancing as per norms/protocol issued by the government of India/ Delhi government and or this court," it had said. The functioning of the high court was restricted to urgent matters from March 16, 2020. Thereafter, from March 25 last year, the functioning of the high court and district courts was further restricted and no physical hearing was being conducted due to the spread of COVID-19 cases. An office order had said that all pending routine or non-urgent matters listed before it from February 22 to March 26 would be adjourned en bloc to dates between April 15 and May 20.

CONG ASKS GOVT TO SCALE UP VAX DRIVE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 14: Raising concerns over the recent surge in coronavirus cases, the Congress Sunday demanded that the government speed up the nationwide vaccination campaign and asked what was its strategy to complete the drive within 12 months.

Citing Chhattisgarh's demand of more Covishield doses, the opposition party also urged the government to decentralise the vaccination drive and provide adequate vaccines to the states.

India Sunday recorded 25,320 COVID-19 infections, the highest daily rise in 84 days, taking the case tally to 1,13,59,048, according to Union health ministry data. Also, the death toll increased to 1,58,607 with 161 new fatalities, the highest in 44 days. Congress spokesperson Shaktisinh Gohil raised concerns over the rising coronavirus cases and said experts have stated that another wave of COVID-19 is starting.

"The government is trying to hide facts by giving a maze of vaccination figures. If you look at the government's claim of total vaccinations till now it is 2,82,18,457. If you look at the 11 days of March, it is 95,90,594. Of the over 135 crore people in the country, only 1.5 per cent have got vaccines, including those who have got just the first dose," Gohil said. Only 47.29 lakh have got both doses of vaccines which means only 0.35 vaccination has been done, he said.

"By this rate 70 per cent people will get vaccinated in 12.6 years. For 100 per cent vaccination, it will take 18 years. We have vaccines, enough of it is there. Why is the government not giving it?" he posed and accused the government of being busy in elections and not caring for the people.

Raising questions for the Narendra Modi government, Gohil asked that with experts and scientists suggesting the emergence of various coronavirus mutants, has the government scaled up genome sequencing to identify newer variants.

Assembly polls: Cong releases Kerala list of candidates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, March 14: Congress Sunday announced its first list of candidates for the April 6 Kerala assembly polls, fielding former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy from Puthuppally and Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala from Haripad, as party workers protested in several places in the state over denial of tickets.

Mahila Congress President Lathika Subhash resigned from the post and tansured her head in protest, following denial of

the Ettumanoor seat to her. Vatakara MP K Muraleedharan, son of veteran Congress leader K Karunakaran, has been fielded from Thiruvananthapuram's Nemon constituency, the lone seat won by the BJP in 2016 assembly polls. Muraleedharan's sister Padmaja Venugopal has been fielded from Thrissur constituency.

The party had earlier decided not to permit sitting MPs contest the polls, but an exception was made in the case of Muraleedharan after Chandy

made it clear he was not prepared to leave Puthuppally, which he had represented for over 50 years in the state assembly.

Kerala PCC Chief Mullappally Ramachandran, who met the media at Delhi after deliberations with the screening committee and the Congress high command, announced the list of 86 candidates out of the 92 seats the party will contest. Ramachandran said the candidates list was an amalgamation of youngsters and those with experience. "There are 46 people in the

age group of 25-50 and 21 in the age group of 51-60. We have given importance to new faces in this election. Eighty six names have been finalised in the 92 seats in which the party is contesting," Ramachandran said.

The candidates for Kalpetta, Nilambur, Vattiyorkavu, Kundara, Thavanur and Pattambi constituencies will be finalised after more talks, he said. Cine actor Dharmajan will contest from Balussery in Kozhikode and Youth Congress president Shafi Pramabil from Palakkad.



Kerala Mahila Congress Chief Lathika Subhash gets her head tonsured in front of the KPCC office

MPs, economists, film stars – BJP fields big names

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, March 14: Union Minister Babul Supriyo, former Chief Economic Advisor Ashok Lahiri, Metroman E Sreedharan, film star Kushboo Sundar as well as five sitting MPs were among the BJP's star-studded list of candidates released Sunday for the upcoming polls in four states.

The BJP has fielded four MPs, including a Union Minister, in West Bengal, and two in Kerala, raising its stakes in these state polls by bringing its best-known faces from there into these electoral contests. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, party general secretary Arun Singh along with Union Ministers G Kishan Reddy and Debasree Chaudhuri released

the names of 63 candidates for West Bengal assembly polls, 17 candidates each for Assam and Tamil Nadu and 112 for the elections in Kerala.

Singh said the party will contest in 115 out of 140 assembly seats in Kerala and on remaining seats its allies will field their candidates. For the high-stakes battle for West Bengal assembly, the BJP has fielded a Union Minister, three sitting MPs, a noted economist and several Tollywood personalities.

Union Minister Supriyo is BJP's candidate from Tollygunge. Lok Sabha MPs Nishit Pramanik and Locket Chatterjee have been fielded from Dinahata and Chunchura respectively.

Senior journalist and Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta is the BJP's



nominee for Tarakeshwar assembly segment in West Bengal. Outgoing MLA of Singur and veteran leader Rabindranath Bhattacharya, who had crossed over from the Trinamool Congress after it denied him ticket,

has been fielded from the same seat by the BJP.

Besides Chatterjee, the party has given ticket to several Bengali film personalities, including Tanushree Chakraborty from Shyampur, Payal

Sarkar from Behala Purba and actor Yash Dasgupta from Chanditala in Kolkata.

In allocating tickets in West Bengal, the BJP has expanded its candidature beyond film personalities by nominating former Chief Economic Advisor Ashok Lahiri from Alipurduar.

Lahiri has also served as chairman of the Kolkata-based Bandhan Bank and was member of the Finance Commission from 2017 to 2020.

By fielding columnist Dasgupta and the economist Lahiri, the BJP has sought to impress the 'Bhadralok' sensibilities in the eastern state, political observers said, noting the Bengali intelligentsia had generally refrained from backing the saf-ron party in 2019 Lok Sabha polls

despite a large consolidation of Hindu votes around it. The similar trend was visible in Kerala as well, where the BJP fielded 'metroman' E Sreedharan from Palakkad and former Union Minister and sitting MP K J Alphon from the Kanjirappally assembly seat.

The party has also fielded another sitting Rajya Sabha MP Suresh Gopi from Thrissur.

The BJP's Kerala state unit president K Surendran will contest from two seats – Manjeshwar and Konni. For Tamil Nadu, the BJP announced actor-turned-politician Khushbu Sundar as its candidate from the Thousand Lights Assembly seat. The BJP's women cell chief Vanathi Srinivasan has been fielded against noted filmstar Kamal Haasan from Coimbatore South seat.

Huge protest against Shia Waqf ex-chief

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, March 14: Thousands of Muslims staged a protest at the Bada Imambara here Sunday against former Shia Waqf Board chief Waseem Rizvi who has filed a petition for removal of 26 verses from the Holy Quran.

Sunni and Shia clerics led the protest against Rizvi and demanded his immediate arrest. Rizvi has also been excommunicated.

Unprecedented security arrangements had been made in the old city on Sunday in view of the protests.

Barricades were set up from the Chhota Imambara to the Teele Wali Masjid and a strong police presence was evident at the spot.

Police personnel had also been deployed on the roofs of adjoining houses and buildings.

of the day quote

It should be our endeavour that forest dwellers remain an integral part of the modern development process while keeping their cultural heritage and identity intact



RAM NATH KOVIND | PRESIDENT

It is worrisome that in a state like Maharashtra, the Governor is acting in this fashion while the Central government is quietly watching



SHARAD PAWAR | NATIONALIST CONGRESS PARTY PRESIDENT

We would like to ask the Delhi BJP that why did a flyover that was supposed to be completed in a mere two years, took 24 years? And why did the final cost increased to ₹724 crore, against the estimated cost of ₹175 crore?



SAUROV BHARADWAJ | AAP LEGISLATURE

SHORT TAKES

3 firing incidents in 48 hours

New Delhi: A man was killed while two others seriously injured in three separate shooting incidents in north east Delhi within a span of 48 hours. A 47-year-old man was shot dead by a gunman in north east Delhi's Khajoori Khas on Saturday night. The deceased has been identified as Sohrab Ansari, and the police suspected personal enmity behind the cause of the murder. The incident was reported at around 8.40 p.m. on Saturday when the deceased was at his shop located in D-Block, Gali No.2, Shree Ram Colony of Khajoori Khas where he was shot by some unknown person.

Two leopards found dead

Pithoragarh: Two leopards were found dead in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh and Champawat districts, according to officials Saturday. Pithoragarh Forest Range Officer Dinesh Joshi said a five-year-old leopard was found dead in the forests of Gaina village. He said the autopsy revealed that the leopard died of hunger around 10 days ago. In another case, a 10-month-old leopard was found dead in the Pati range of the Champawat forest division.

Woman dies

Ballia: Police have registered a case against a 22-year-old woman's husband and in-laws after she died under mysterious circumstances in the Revti area here Sunday, police said. Police said Priyanka, a resident of Mangarh village here, died at her in-laws' place. It has been alleged that Priyanka's in-laws were harassing her for dowry. Following a complaint lodged by Priyanka's family, a case has been registered against her husband Pappu Chaudhary, mother-in-law Hirawati Devi and father-in-law Subedar Sahni. The victim's father-in-law and mother-in-law have been arrested.

Naxal killed

Raipur: A Naxal was killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) that he was planting on a road to target security forces exploded in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, a senior police official said Sunday. The incident took place on Saturday on the route of Bechapal-Hurepal villages under Mirtur police station area when rebels from the west Bastar division of Maoists were engaged in planting explosives, inspector General of Police (Bastar) General Sundarraj P told PTI.

Injured tiger more dangerous: Mamata

Banerjee was injured in her left leg, head and chest while campaigning in Nandigram March 10 after filing her nomination, an incident the ruling TMC claimed was a "BJP conspiracy to take her life"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, March 14: True to her street fighter image, Mamata Banerjee was back on the roads of Kolkata Sunday, four days after being injured at the hustings in Nandigram, leading a TMC march on a wheelchair and declaring an injured tiger is far more dangerous. Accompanied by senior TMC leaders, Banerjee was seen greeting the crowd with folded hands, with security personnel pushing her wheelchair. Banerjee joined the five km road show from Mayo Road to Hazra More as part of observation of Nandigram Diwas to commemorate the killing of 14 villagers in police firing during the anti-land acquisition protest in 2007. Banerjee is contesting the high-profile Nandigram seat for the first time against former confidante-turned-adversary Suvendu Adhikari. Addressing the gathering after the hour-long march, Banerjee said attempts to incapacitate her to stop her from campaigning have failed, and asserted she will canvass for TMC candidates across the state on wheelchair. "I have faced a lot of attacks in my life but I have never surrendered before anyone. I will never



bow my head. An injured tiger gets more dangerous," she asserted. The Election Commission, however, ruled out that there was any attack on the West Bengal chief minister and the ruling Trinamool Congress leader after reviewing the

HIT-AND-RUN ACCIDENT

Six farm workers killed, 8 hurt in AP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Amaravati, March 14: Six farm workers were killed and eight others injured in a hit-and-run accident near Nuzvidu in Krishna district in Andhra Pradesh early Sunday. The victims belonged to Lion Tanda, a tribal hamlet near Nuzvidu, about 55 kms from Vijayawada, and were on their way to a nearby village in an autorickshaw when an unidentified vehicle rammed into it, police said. While six workers died on the spot, eight were injured. The injured were rushed to hospitals in Nuzvidu and Vijayawada. Nuzvidu sub-divisional police officer Srinivasulu said they have registered a case and launched a hunt to trace the vehicle that caused the accident. Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister (Health) A K K Srinivas, Home Minister M Sucharita, TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu and Jana Sena chief K Pawan Kalyan expressed grief over the mishap. The Chief Minister announced an ex-gratia relief of ₹5 lakh each to the kin of the deceased, a statement from his office said. Srinivas directed the Krishna district medical officer to ensure better treatment to the injured persons. He promised government assistance to the kin of the deceased.

NSCN-IM asks Centre to resolve Naga issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kohima, March 14: Naga group NSCN-IM Sunday appealed to the Central government to resolve the decades-long insurgency problem of Nagaland, but made it clear that any solution outside the purview of the 2015 Framework Agreement will not be acceptable to it. In a statement, the NSCN-IM also asked the Centre to be "more positive and sincere" in finding a solution to their demands. The NSCN-IM said it has been more than five years since the signing of the framework agreement in 2015 between the group's general secretary Thuingalen Muivah and central government's interlocutor R N Ravi, who is currently Nagaland Governor, in presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. As agreed, the group said that within this framework agreement, both the parties are required to work out the details and execution plans for early implementation. "We call upon the Government of India to be more positive and sincere. We believe there is no human problem which cannot be resolved with mutual respect and equality as Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often quoted. We are for peace and progress," the statement said. However, the NSCN-IM made it clear that "any formulation or proposal from any quarter which is outside the parameter of the framework agreement shall not be acceptable to the NSCN in particular and the Naga people in general".

Cop 'forces' village head to rub nose on man's feet



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Pilibhit, March 14: In a shocking incident in Uttar Pradesh, a police officer, posted as a circle officer in Bisalpur police station, landed himself in a soup, for allegedly forcing the village head of Marauri Khas village, Sanjeev Awasthi, to rub his nose on the feet of an accused. BJP MLA Ram Saran Verma said that circle officer Vineet Singh, accompanied by Bilsanda SHO Ravindra Kumar, had come to the village Wednesday to resolve a dispute related to a temple's land. Guddu, the accused, has been living illegally on the temple premises. The police officer had come at the behest of Guddu, who Verma described as "a criminal involved in several nefarious activities". The MLA claimed that Singh called the village 'pradhan' and directed him to first touch Guddu's feet and then made him rub his nose on them thrice.

Gas, Diesel, Petrol have been heavily taxed, while PSU, PSB are sold to friends to snatch jobs and facilities of common man. The rule of PM is to sell the country and give benefits to friends (sic)

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

INDUS COMMISSIONERS OF INDIA, PAK TO MEET IN NEW DELHI

The Indus Commissioners of India and Pakistan will meet here on March 23 and 24 to discuss a host of issues, including Islamabad's concerns about the design of Indian hydropower projects on the Chenab River, a top official said Sunday



SUV CASE

Mumbai cop held, sent to NIA custody



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, March 14: Mumbai Police's Assistant Police Inspector Sachin Vaze - nabbed by the NIA minutes before Saturday midnight in connection with the case involving an abandoned SUV found near the home of industrialist Mukesh Ambani - was Sunday sent to the agency's custody till March 25. Arrested after nearly 12 hours of grilling by the NIA team, Vaze underwent the mandatory medical checkup and a Covid-19 test this morning before he was taken to the special NIA court under tight security. Vaze, 49, has been booked by the NIA in connection with the SUV and he is also being simultaneously probed by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorist Squad for the mysterious death of Thane businessman Mansukh Hiren - two cases which sparked off a nationwide political furore. Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said that the action in the case involving the planting of a SUV Scorpio with gelatin sticks and the subsequent death of Hiren "would be based on truth". "The matter of the gelatin sticks found in a Scorpio vehicle near Ambani's residence and the Hiren murder cases are being investigated by NIA and ATS. Action will be taken based on the truth that comes out of it," he said in brief comments this morning. While the ruling Shiv Sena slammed the Centre's moves to

unilaterally takeover important cases as demoralising for the Mumbai Police, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party launched a fresh attack on the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government. Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnavis said Vaze's arrest is merely the beginning and it is necessary to probe who are the people behind him, supporting him in the government, since the involvement of police officials in crimes will shake the people's faith in the police. Suspecting that it is not a small matter, but "a larger plot" in which the truth must come out, he said it is "a serious matter that the person who was the investigating officer has been arrested". Leader of Opposition in the Council Pravin Darekar demanded answers from Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray since he was seen defending Vaze last week. Demanding a narco-test on Vaze to unravel the names of the 'master-conspirators', BJP city spokesperson Ram Kadam asked whether the MVA government was worried that the policeman's revelations could create problems for the ruling dispensation. BJP leader and former MP Kirit Somaiya demanded the sacking of Home Minister Deshmukh and Mumbai Commissioner of Police Param Bir Singh in the wake of Vaze's arrest. "The Thackeray government is protecting Vaze. I expected arrest of more members of the Vaze 'gang'. What discussions did the CP (Singh) hold with Vaze for 3 days," Somaiya sought to know.

LOCKING HORNS



Black bucks (Kishnamruga) fighting inside the enclosure at Kittur Rani Channamma Mini Zoo in Bhootharamanatti, Belagavi



Shoot & scoot season

Recently, the Finance Ministry uploaded some data relating to cases of Income-Tax evasion launched after searches, surveys, and seizures or otherwise during the past ten years. The obvious purpose, perhaps, was to buttress the claim as to how the Modi government is going after the tax evaders and how black money is unearthed since PM Modi came to power in 2014. The data was made readily available since 2010 which showed that 1,377 prosecution cases were launched during 2010-14 by the IT department. Of these 1,377 cases, only 116 ended in conviction. The record of conviction was dismal at 8.42%. One would certainly feel that the record of the UPA poor in making cast-iron cases against the evaders. Hold your breath now!!! During the six years of the NDA rule between 2014 and 2020 the number of convictions was a whopping 11691 against the evaders. It was almost nine times more. How many ended in convictions during this 6 years' period? Imagine the numbers - just 292. What is the conviction rate during these six years - a dismal 2.49%. In fact, the largest number of convictions launched during 2017-18 after searches and seizures by the IT was 4,527 cases.

Dissidents at a crossroads

With Rahul Gandhi on his own trip and Congress interim president Sonia Gandhi looking the other way, the dissidents are at a cross road now. After the first display of strength by the dissidents at Jammu

where they donned saffron turbans and launched a blistering attack on Congress, they did not know what to do next. In fact, Ghulam Nabi Azad had crossed the Laxman Rekha by praising Prime Minister Modi publicly and this put the other Congressmen in an acute embarrassment. The dissidents comprising Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Kapil Sibal, Anand Sharma, Manish Tewari and many others do not know what they should do next. Though for the time being they have decided to call it a truce saying they would work for the victory of the party in five state assembly polls. But no one is calling them for the public meeting in any of the states and they have virtually no role to play. There was a time when BJP was keen on Anand Sharma, but not anymore as he doesn't add to their political base. In fact, BJP may like Ghulam Nabi Azad on its side and finding a way to utilize his services in the months to come. Gone are the days when these leaders were keen on Sharad Pawar to lead them. But not anymore. Basically, the dissidents are at a crossroads now.

Record NPAs written off

It is almost seven years since the Modi government is ruling the country. But there is no stopping in accusing the previous Manmohan Singh government for the mess in the banks NPA. For every ill, the Modi government's ministers blame the Congress for every wrong that has happened during the past seven years. Look at the reply given by the government in parliament the other day when it said that the massive NPAs of the banks happened because the UPA government resorted to aggressive lending to the tune of ₹68.75 lakh crores until March 31, 2014 compared to ₹25.03 lakh crore March 31, 2008. It means that during just 6 years, the lending shot up by nearly 44 lakh crores. The government said that this was the reason for the rise in the NPAs. However, there is no explanation so far as to why the NPAs of the private banks rose and why the private banks wrote off NPAs more than the PSU banks in terms of percentage. In fact, private banks set a new record of writing

off NPAs. If the PSU banks are performing somewhat better, the private sector banks are writing off NPAs more year after year in terms of percentage.

CCTV cameras in jails

The Supreme Court may have given a rap to the Centre and states for not installing CCTVs in interrogation centers of the CBIs, ED and other investigating agencies on the ground that they too have police powers and they are like Thanos. But the current status of installing CCTV cameras in jails is not as dismal. Interestingly, UP tops the country with 2,757 CCTV cameras in its jails followed by Gujarat (2314), Rajasthan (1529) and Odisha (1520). But West Bengal, despite being a large state, installed only 280 CCTV cameras. The states of Goa (17), Sikkim (2) and Pondicherry (8) have the lowest number of CCTV cameras while Mizoram and Lakshadweep have not installed any cameras. As many as 22,456 CCTV cameras have been installed in jails. The total number of jails in the country as of December 2019 was 1,350 and there are over 4 lakh prisoners.



The people of Mozambique urgently need our help to tackle the triple threat of conflict, the climate crisis, and the Covid-19 pandemic. ANTONIO GUTERRES | UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY IN EGYPT

Egypt's Tourism and Antiquities Ministry has announced the discovery of a number of ancient churches and rooms in the Bahariya Oasis, southwest of Cairo



of the day quote

FEMA will support a government-wide effort over the next three months to safely receive, shelter and transfer minor children who arrive alone at the US Southwest border, without a parent or other adult. ALEJANDRO MAYORKAS | US HOMELAND SECURITY SECRETARY

The Afghan security forces are fully capable of defending the capital and the cities and the territories that we are present in right now. MASOUD ANDARABI | INTERIOR MINISTER OF AFGHANISTAN

Every day we get more and more people vaccinated, which gets us closer and closer to a better protection. To pull back now prematurely would be ill-advised. ANTHONY FAUCI | WHITE HOUSE CHIEF MEDICAL ADVISOR

SHORT TAKES

China renews heavy fog alert

Beijing: China's national observatory Sunday renewed a yellow alert for heavy fog in many parts of the country. Thick fog is expected to hit parts of Liaoning, Jilin, Shandong, Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Hunan through Sunday morning, according to the National Meteorological Center (NMC). Visibility in some affected areas will be reduced to less than 200 metres, Xinhua news agency quoted the NMC as saying.

Ex-interim Bolivian Prez held

La Paz: Former Interim President of Bolivia Jeanine Anez has been arrested on charges of "terrorism, sedition and conspiracy" due to her role in the events of November 2019 that ended with the resignation of then President Evo Morales, authorities said. "I inform the Bolivian people that Jeanine Anez has been apprehended and at this moment she is in the hands of the police," Minister Carlos Eduardo del Castillo tweeted Saturday.

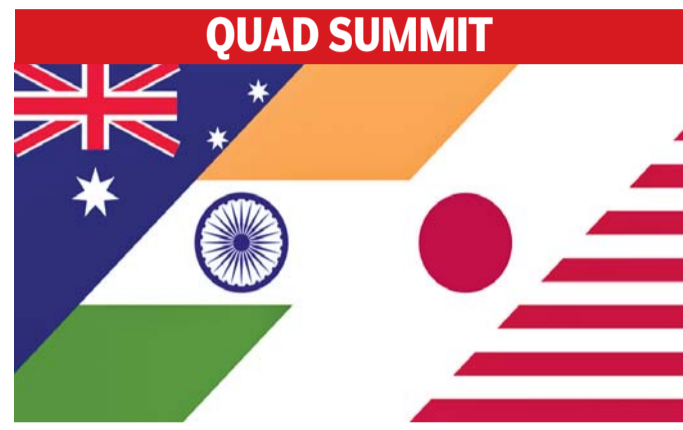
Kazakh plane crash claims 4

Moscow: A plane operated by Kazakhstan's state security agency crashed in the Central Asian country Saturday, killing four crew members and injuring two others, officials said. The ex-Soviet country's Emergencies Ministry said the two survivors were hospitalised. The ministry said the Soviet-built An-26 two-engine turboprop crashed while trying to land at the airport of Kazakhstan's largest city, Almaty. The plane had flown from the capital, Nur-Sultan, with only the six crew members on board.

2,000 flights called off

Denver: More than 2,000 flights have been cancelled over the weekend at Denver International Airport as a major snowstorm strikes the region. The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm warning, saying it expects 18 to 24 inches of heavy, wet snow to fall in Denver and Boulder from Saturday afternoon through Sunday night. Some areas along the Front Range foothills were expected to receive up to 30 inches. The Colorado Department of Transportation warned that road closures are highly likely and asked people not to make unnecessary trips.

'Committed to open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region'



Washington, March 14: The leaders of the four-nation Quad have reaffirmed that they are striving to ensure that the Indo-Pacific is accessible, dynamic and governed by international law and bedrock principles such as freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes, and free from coercion, sending a clear message to China which is flexing its muscles in the region and beyond.

The leaders said the cooperation, known as 'the Quad' was born in crisis

In an opinion piece in The Washington Post after holding the first Leaders' Summit of Quadrilateral alliance Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Joe Biden, Australian PM Scott Morrison and Japanese PM Yoshihide Suga asserted that all

5 EU nations call for debate on vax sharing

Brussels, March 14: Leaders from five European Union (EU) nations have called for a debate on the distribution of Covid-19 vaccines in the bloc.

In a letter sent Saturday to European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the five EU leaders underscored the significance of European solidarity, which guarantees that all EU members, big and small, will have equal access to limited resources such as the Covid-19 vaccines, Xinhua news agency reported.

The five leaders are Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis, Latvian Prime Minister Arturs Krisjanis Karins and Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa. They also recalled the conclusions of the January 21 video conference of the members of the European Council, according to which the vaccines should be delivered simultaneously and should be distributed proportionately to the size of the population in the EU member countries. They believed that, if the prin-

China, North Korea loom as Blinken, Austin head to Asia

Washington: Threats from China and North Korea will loom large over the Biden administration's first Cabinet-level trip abroad, part of a larger effort to bolster US influence and calm concerns about America's role in Asia. A senior administration said Saturday that US officials have tried to reach out to North Korea through multiple channels since last month, but have yet to receive a response, making consultations with the reclusive country's neighbours, Japan, South Korea and China, all the more critical. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin are heading to Japan and South Korea for four days of talks starting Monday as the administration seeks to shore up partnerships with the two key regional treaty allies.

Sea, Japan has maritime disputes with China. In the opinion piece after the summit, the leaders said the cooperation, known as "the Quad," was born in crisis. It became a diplomatic dialogue in 2007 and was reborn in 2017. The continental shelf off the coast of Indonesia shifted two metres December 2004, creating one of the largest tidal waves in modern history and a nearly unprecedented humanitarian crisis around the Indian Ocean. With millions displaced and hundreds of thousands killed, the Indo-Pacific region sounded a clarion call for help. Together, our four countries answered it, they wrote.

Lockdown in 7 Pak cities

Lahore, March 14: Amid the ongoing third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan, a major lockdown will be imposed in seven cities in Punjab province starting from Monday onwards.

The lockdown, which comes after a gap of one year, will remain in force for two weeks in the cities of Lahore, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Multan, Gujranwala and Gujrat, Dawn news reported Sunday. According to a statement issued Saturday by the Punjab provincial government, the major lockdown will restrict the movement of the people; there will be a complete ban on gatherings of all kinds for social, religious or other purposes at any place, public or private; marriage and banquet halls, community centres and marquees will remain closed; and also a complete ban on indoor and outdoor dining while only takeaway and home delivery will be allowed.

The statement also said that there will be a complete ban on all kind of sports, cultural and other activities and events throughout the province. Also Saturday, the Punjab government enforced a smart lockdown in 36 more localities of three cities, including Lahore.

CAPITOL CHORDS



Michigan National Guard member Sgt. Hannah Boulder sings while playing guitar in the US Capitol Rotunda in Washington

London police under pressure over clashes at women's protest

A serving Metropolitan Police officer was charged with the kidnap and murder of Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old woman who vanished March 3 while walking home in London. The case has sparked a national outcry and a heated debate on women's safety



ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, March 14: London's Metropolitan Police force was under heavy pressure Sunday to explain its actions during a vigil for a woman whom one of the force's own officers is accused of murdering. Hundreds defied coronavirus restrictions to gather and protest violence against women, but the event ended with clashes between police and those attending.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said scenes from Saturday's vigil in south London were "upsetting" and she is seeking a full report on what happened from the Metropolitan Police. The capital's mayor, Sadiq Khan, said the police response was "at times neither appropriate nor proportionate." Police were seen scuffling with some women at the event, and one woman was seen pinned to the ground by two officers. Several women were led away in handcuffs as other attendees chanted "Shame on you" at police. The force later said four people were arrested for violating public order and coronavirus regulations. Defending the force's actions, Assistant Commissioner Helen Ball said "hundreds of people were packed tightly together," posing a

8 injured in Nepal blast

Kathmandu, March 14: At least eight persons were injured Sunday when a "pressure cooker bomb" exploded at a crowded government office in Siraha district's Lahan in south-eastern Nepal, according to media reports.

The pressure cooker bomb exploded on the first floor of the Land Revenue Office, Assistant Chief District Officer Krishna Kumar Niraula was quoted as saying by The Kathmandu Post newspaper. Eight employees - five men and three women - of the land revenue department were injured in the blast, the paper said.

"Three of the critically injured are undergoing treatment at Saptarishi Hospital, Lahan while the others are admitted at Lahan Hospital," said DSP Tapan Dahal. The Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (Revolutionary), an armed outfit led by Jaya Krishna Goit, claimed responsibility for the blast, saying it was part of the outfit's "campaign against corruption." My Republica newspaper reported. "We detonated a pressure cooker bomb at 12:47 pm as an action against corruption," it said in a statement hours after the incident.

More stringent action will be taken if corruption continues, and the Government of Nepal and Provincial Government would be responsible for it, the statement added. The Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha is a group agitating for greater political and economic rights for the people of the Terai plains bordering India. Earlier, police recovered pamphlets published by the outfit from the site of the blast. Several pieces of pamphlets were found in such a condition that it is hard to read what is written on them, according to police. "We can, however, see the signature of Jaya Krishna Goit," a police officer said. Police has been investigating the case.

Novel coronavirus jumped from bats to humans with 'very little change'

RESEARCHERS SAID SARS-COV-2 CAME WITH A READY-MADE ABILITY TO INFECT HUMANS AND OTHER MAMMALS, WITH THESE PROPERTIES LIKELY EVOLVING IN BATS PRIOR TO IT JUMPING TO HUMANS

London, March 14: The progenitor of the novel coronavirus underwent "very little change" to adapt to humans from bats, according to a new study which suggests that for the first 11 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been very little 'important genetic change' observed in the coronavirus. However, it noted that some changes such as the D614G mutation



and similar tweaks in the virus spike protein has affected its biology. "This does not mean no changes have occurred, mutations of no evolutionary significance accumulate and 'surf' along the millions of transmission events, like they do in all viruses," explained study first author Oscar MacLean from the University of Glasgow Centre for Virus Research in Scotland. But the scientists said it was "surprising" how transmissible SARS-CoV-2 has been from the outset. "Usually viruses that jump to a new host species take some time to acquire adaptations to be as capable as SARS-CoV-2 at spreading, and most never make it past that stage, resulting in dead-end spillovers

researchers said SARS-CoV-2 came with a ready-made ability to infect humans and other mammals, with these properties likely evolving in bats prior to it jumping to humans. "While an undiscovered 'facilitating' intermediate species cannot be discounted, collectively, our results support the progenitor of SARS-CoV-2 being capable of efficient human-human transmission as a consequence of its adaptive evolutionary history in bats, not humans, which created a relatively generalist virus," the scientists wrote in the study. Although the novel coronavirus is still cleared by the human immune response in the vast majority of infections, the scientists cautioned that it is now moving away faster from the January 2020 variant used in all of the current vaccines to raise protective immunity. The current vaccines will continue to work against most of the circulating variants, but as more time passes, and the bigger the differential between vaccinated and not-vaccinated numbers of people, they said there will be more opportunity for the virus to escape vaccines.

The first race was to develop a vaccine. The race now is to get the global population vaccinated as quickly as possible. DAVID L. ROBERTSON | RESEARCHER, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

