



FATIMA HAILS MEGHNA

Actor Fatima Sana Shaikh, who recently joined the cast of Meghna Gulzar's *Sambahadur*, hailed the latter as a maverick

LEISURE P2



SHOCKING US REPORT

There were 66 known Indian-origin fighters affiliated with terrorist group Islamic State, a latest US report said

INTERNATIONAL P10



SRIKANTH, SEN ADVANCE

Shuttlers Kidambi Srikant and Lakshya Sen assure themselves a medal each at the World Championship

SPORTS P12



Cong MLA in soup for 'enjoy rape' remark

Bangalore /New Delhi: Karnataka Congress MLA KR Ramesh Kumar's "enjoy rape if it is inevitable" remark caused a furore Friday, with the BJP, the National Commission for Women (NCW) and some women Congress MLAs taking umbrage to the statement made on the floor of the Assembly, even as the former Speaker apologised for the comment. The BJP in New Delhi targeted top Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra over their party colleague's controversial remarks, questioning their silence on the matter.

MORE P7



Amarinder, BJP form poll pact

New Delhi: The BJP Friday formally announced that it will contest the upcoming Assembly elections in Punjab in alliance with Amarinder Singh's Punjab Lok Congress. Singh Friday called on the BJP's Punjab in-charge and Union Minister Jagendra Shekhawat at his residence here. After the meeting, they officially announced the alliance between the two parties. "Today, I want to make it clear that the BJP and Amarinder Singh will contest Assembly elections in Punjab together and we are working together," Shekhawat told the media, Singh by his side. Singh said, "The alliance will definitely, 101 per cent win the elections."

MORE P7

₹1-trn steel plant in K'para

■ CM-led High-Level Clearance Authority approves ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel's integrated steel plant project, claimed to be the largest project in India's manufacturing sector



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The state government Friday approved an investment proposal of ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel (AM/NS) to set up an integrated steel plant in Kendrapara district.

The High-Level Clearance Authority (HLCA) of the state government, headed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has approved the project. The company has proposed to set up a 24 million tonne per annum (MTPA) integrated steel plant in Mahakalapara block of Kendrapara district.

This mega project will generate direct employment opportunities to 16,000 persons and create significant indirect employment opportunities through ancillary and downstream industries and services, the government said in a statement.

Claiming it to be the largest project in the manufacturing sector in the country, the government said

AM/NS will produce 24 MT of various grades of steel with its latest green steelmaking technology. It will also produce high value added steel downstream products.

This facility will produce 18.75 MT of cement annually, making it one of the largest cement manufacturing plants in the country and will boost infrastructure development in the region, the government said.

Along with the steel complex, the company will also develop a downstream industry park to promote MSMEs and help import substitution. A large number of ancillary manufacturing companies are expected to put up their units in this region to support the huge steelmaking facility.

Through this investment, the state government will give push to extensive socio-economic development across the region. As per the statement, the mega project will get completed in seven years in different phases.

To provide logistics infrastructure, power and water utilities and all the clearances for the project in a time-bound manner by the government agencies, the state has constituted a high-power committee led by the Chief Secretary.

Odisha is the largest steelmaking state in the country. Such projects will further enhance the state's production to cross the 100 MT steelmaking capacity by 2030, said the government.

Cold wave grips state, likely to intensify further

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Cold wave conditions gripped Odisha Friday, affecting normal life in the western and southern parts of the state with the weather office advising people to stay indoors.

Daringbadi recorded the lowest temperature of 6.5 degrees Celsius, followed by 7.5 degrees Celsius in Phulbani, the weather office said. Koraput recorded a minimum temperature of 9 degrees Celsius, followed by Titilagarh (9.3), Jharsuguda (9.6), Keonjhar (9.6), and Sundargarh and Bhawanipatna at 10 degrees Celsius each. The mercury dipped to 12 degrees Celsius in Cuttack and 12.2 degrees Celsius in Bhubaneswar.

The cold wave conditions will aggravate further between December 19 and 24 due to a combination of the north-westerly wind flow in the lower and upper atmosphere along with clear sky conditions for radiational cooling from the surface of the earth, weather scientist SC Sahu said.

The cold condition might decrease slightly due to change in wind direction and western disturbance in the north-west part of India from the Christmas day, he added.

Row over PMO summoning EC

■ Commissioners never call on ministers as part of protocol since the EC is an independent Constitutional body. Former CEC calls incident 'absolutely shocking', while Congress alleges the government was treating the EC as its 'subservient tool'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra and fellow Commissioners Rajiv Kumar and Anoop Chandra Pandey recently held an 'informal interaction' with the Prime Minister's Office to bridge gaps in understanding of key electoral reforms between the poll panel and the Law Ministry, triggering a row with the Congress alleging the government was treating the EC as its 'subservient tool.'

EC sources, however, insisted Friday that the question of propriety does not arise in doing so.

The commission had been pushing for reforms in electoral laws and related issues, and the virtual interaction in November was held to "bridge the gaps in understanding the points of views of the Law Ministry and the Election Commission (EC)," they said.

Responding to a news report published Friday that the Law Ministry had sent a letter to the EC



saying that the principal secretary to the PM will chair a meeting on common electoral roll and 'expects the CEC' to be present, the sources said the three commissioners did not attend that formal meeting.

Responding to the news report, former CEC SY Quraishi said it was 'absolutely shocking.' When asked to explain his remarks, he said his words have summed up everything.

The sources said senior EC officials attended the formal meeting, besides officials from the Law Ministry. The Legislative Department in the Law Ministry is the nodal agency for EC-related matters.

The sources said the result of the informal interaction with the PMO resulted in the Union Cabinet Wednesday clearing various electoral reforms that the EC had been insisting be brought in the ongoing Winter session of Parliament.

One of the reforms is linking Aadhaar with electoral rolls on a voluntary basis. The other will allow eligible young people to reg-

ister as voters on four dates every year. Usually, law ministers and legislative secretaries have been meeting the commissioners on various issues at the Nirvachan Sadan. The commissioners never call on the ministers as part of protocol since the EC is an independent Constitutional body.

The Congress Friday hit out at the government, alleging that it was treating the EC as its 'subservient tool.' Congress general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala charged that the government has fallen to a new low in destroying institutions in the country.

"Cat is out of the bag! What was whispered till now is a fact. PMO summoning ECI was unheard of in independent India. Treating EC as a subservient tool is yet another low in Modi Government's record of destroying every institution," Surjewala said on Twitter tagging news reports in this regard.

Congress leader Manish Tewari Friday submitted a notice to move an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha on the 'summoning of the EC for a meeting in the PMO.'

In the notice, he raised questions on the autonomy of the poll panel, but the Lok Sabha was adjourned amid uproar over the Lakhimpur Khari violence. The former I&B minister said he will submit the notice to move the adjournment motion again Monday.

WHO nod for Covovax

NEW DELHI: The World Health Organisation Friday issued emergency use listing for anti-Covid vaccine Covovax produced by Serum Institute of India under licence from Novavax, expanding the basket of jabs validated by the global health body against the viral disease. Adar Poonawalla, the CEO of Serum Institute of India, hailed WHO's decision as 'yet another milestone' in the fight against COVID-19.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Since the road cracked instead of coconut, I only lay foundation stones and avoid inauguration!

MARTIAL SKILLS

The capital city Friday witnessed a rally with a difference, when members of 'Paika' community exhibited their martial skills with traditional swords and other weapons, while demanding recognition of their ancestor's rebellion, called the 'Paika Bidroha' against the British as India's First War of Independence. The 'Paikas' were the farmer-soldiers who made up the army of the Khurda king and fought against the British in 1817, under the leadership of Bakshi Jagabandhu, some 40 years before the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The community has been demanding the rebellion be recognised as India's First War of Independence and has found support from the state government in this demand. Odisha Assembly during its recently concluded winter session passed a resolution authorising the state government to make demand on behalf of the 'Paika Bidroha' movement.



OP PHOTO

No detailed proposal for Orissa HC bench pending, says Centre

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Dec 17: The Union government Friday said that no detailed proposal for setting up of a bench of Orissa High Court has been pending with it. The Union government said in the Lok Sabha that the Odisha government has not sent details of proposed bench of the Orissa High Court.

Union Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijju, in response to a question asked by BJP MP Basanta Panda and Congress MP Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, said that the state government has requested for setting up of Orissa High Court Bench in western and southern region of Odisha.

"The Central government has requested the Odisha government to work out details of proposed Bench including its location in consultation with High Court of Orissa. However, no response has been received yet," the minister said. The minister further said that no complete proposal regarding setting up of bench of Orissa High Court is pending with the government.



Significantly, it is a long standing demand of Odisha government and the people of the state for setting up of Orissa High Court bench in western Odisha. There had been several strikes by lawyers in Odisha for the same in past. The BJD MPs have also been raising this issue in the Parliament for many years. In the current session of the Parliament, the BJD MPs had requested the Centre to take steps for setting up of the bench of Orissa HC in western Odisha as it would make access of justice possible to people living in that part of the state.

Amazon fined ₹202cr, deal with Future suspended

■ This comes amid a bitter legal battle between Amazon and Future Group over the latter's proposed ₹24,713 crore deal with Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 17: In a significant development, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) Friday suspended its more than two-year-old approval for Amazon's deal to acquire stake in Future Coupons Pvt Ltd and also imposed a ₹202 crore penalty on the e-commerce major for certain contraventions. In a 57-page order, the regula-

tor said the approval for the Amazon-Future Coupons deal shall remain in abeyance.

Citing certain contraventions, CCI said those have arisen from a deliberate design on the part of Amazon to suppress the actual scope and purpose of the combination and that it finds no mitigating factor. Consequently, fines totalling ₹2 crore have been imposed on Amazon.

"For failure to notify the combination in the requisite terms," the watchdog has also slapped a penalty of ₹200 crore. The parties involved in the combination were Amazon.Com NV Investment Holdings LLC (Amazon) - a direct subsidiary of Amazon.Com Inc -



and Future Coupons. "We are reviewing the order passed by the Competition Commission of India, and will decide on next steps in due course," an Amazon spokesperson said in a statement.

November 2019, CCI had also mentioned the order shall stand revoked if, at any time, the information provided by the acquirer was found to be incorrect.

"This approval should not be construed as immunity in any

manner from subsequent proceedings before the Commission for violations of other provisions of the (Competition) Act," it had said.

November 29, the Supreme Court gave two more weeks' time to Amazon to appear and argue before the CCI which had declined adjournment of hearing in a case related to revocation of approval given to the e-retailer for the deal with Future Coupons.

In August 2019, Amazon had agreed to purchase 49 per cent in unlisted Future Coupons, which owns 7.3 per cent equity in listed Future Retail through convertible warrants, with the right to buy into the flagship Future Retail after a period of 3 to 10 years.

MARKET WATCH	
INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	57011.74 ↓ 889.40
NIFTY	16985.20 ↓ 263.20
DOLLAR	76.33 ↓ ₹0.11
EURO	86.36 ↑ ₹0.33
GOLD	₹48,639 ↓ ₹7
SILVER	₹62,174 ↑ ₹23

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP	MAX 26.5°C	27.6°C
	MIN 12.2°C	12.0°C
Humidity	71%	76%
Rainfall	Omm	Omm
	Forecast: Dry weather most likely	

leisure



ISABELLE TO RECEIVE BERLIN FILM FESTIVAL'S HONORARY GOLDEN BEAR

French actress Isabelle Huppert is set to receive the Berlin Film Festival's Honorary Golden Bear in February. Her films will also be honoured as part of a special Homage section. Huppert will be awarded the prize for lifetime achievement.

SEX AND THE CITY ACTOR CHRIS NOTH DENIES SEXUAL ASSAULT ALLEGATIONS

Actor Chris Noth has insisted two sexual assault allegations made against him are 'categorically false'. Two women have alleged they were attacked by the 67-year-old actor in 2004 and 2015 respectively, but the *Equalizer* star has insisted any sexual contact between them was consensual.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

You will desire absolute freedom in whatever you do today. A lot of entertainment is on the cards for teenagers, like window shopping or going for a movie. Kids may demand a treat from you. Generally, family affairs dominate today.

TAURUS

Your unflinching punctuality, your insistence on following time schedules is due to be noticed and appreciated today. Your colleagues and superiors will be singing praises as soon as you arrive for work. If you are in an artistic or a creative profession, such as designing, journalism, multi media, you have a remarkably eventful and gratifying day ahead.

GEMINI

You will make a reputation for yourself as a leader in your social circle. You yearn for something in your heart, and need to concentrate your energies upon attaining it. Your creative mind will come up with solutions today, to certain questions that have been perplexing you for quite some, says Ganesha.

CANCER

With Ganesha's grace, whatever you think or perseue will be successful. Students will excel and finish pending work. You can display your imagination excellently. In short, a day of happiness and variety.

LEO

You will relentlessly try to find means to progress at the workplace today. You will remain steadfast in your resolutions. You will not allow those working under you to slack. You will need to let go of your inhibitions and fears to be happy in life. You will receive the benifice of highly placed superiors, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

Emotions that have been locked in the inner recesses of your heart might just surface today. You may develop an emotional attachment with your material possessions. However, Ganesha says, if you don't find your surroundings conducive, you will feel extremely restless.

LIBRA

Ganesha says today will be an auspicious day for starting any new work. In the office you will be assigned new positions and you shall excel in the same. Whatever work is undertaken by you will see you attain success in it. Today is a lucky day for you Ganesha says

SCORPIO

You are a visionary and today you work towards building a successful future. But, expecting an instant result would be unfair. You need to have patience to bring in those dynamic changes in your life. Wait and watch, the patience would reap sweet fruits!

SAGITTARIUS

It's time for invitations and grooving all night long. And even eat like a glutton. But, for a change you are not on a mood to party, though it is unlike you. You reject the idea of socialising and hitting the dance floor. And your friends do not like your changed avatar, says Ganesha.

CAPRICORN

You'll kick start the day in high spirit which will take everyone by surprise. You will shift gears at work so that you can perform more efficiently and productively. Such a change will boost your confidence as you will see the positive results for yourself.

AQUARIUS

Meeting people from the different walks of life, having a good conversation with them and widening the horizon of your knowledge - this will be the highlight of today for you. At work, you will have a busy day with plenty of meetings, discussions, planning and execution, feels Ganesha.

PISCES

Today you will get attention from the opposite sex and this will play an important role in your success in the near future. Due to the favourable alignment of the planets you will receive more than your expectations.

Genelia turns cheerleader for hubby

Mumbai: Actor Riteish Deshmukh turned a year older and it's his wife-actor Genelia D'Souza who has the sweetest birthday wish for him.

Dropping an adorable video featuring Genelia with Riteish, the actress penned down a long note. She wrote, "Dearest Partner, I truly genuinely believe for every person on this earth there will always be that one special person to love.. I'm so glad for me that one will always be you..."

Talking about the special day, she continued, "Your birthday is that time to tell you that I can never and will never do LIFE without you.. You are my today, my tomorrow and my forever and no matter how many times I crib and grumble about how things should be, there's nothing I would change about lives.. Happy Birthday to the most amazing, selfless, incredible man ever @riteishd May all your dreams come true Love Your Cheerleader for life."

On the work front, Riteish is all set to star in the horror-comedy *Kakuda*. The film also stars Sonakshi Sinha and Saqib Saleem.



2021 was great year for Alaya F

Mumbai: As 2021 draws closer to an end, actress Alaya F, who made her debut opposite Saif Ali Khan in *Jawani Jaaneman*, looks back at the year as she calls it a professionally rewarding year.

The actress has been busy with shoots throughout this year and she now opens up on how that feels.

Talking about her busy year, Alaya shares: "2021 was a very special year for me because I finally got the opportunity to really work and be on sets non-stop after a long break that the pandemic forced upon us!"

Working her way through lockdowns in projects one after the other, he says: "I was constantly shooting films back to back and even though it was very exhausting at times, it was so rewarding because all through the lockdowns that happened post my first release all I

could think about was getting back to work. So finally being able to do what I had been dreaming of was incredible!"

Shedding light on her learnings, the actress says: "In between all of this I also learnt important lessons on how to balance my time and conserve my energy and take breaks when necessary. Which is something I never used to do!"

"That's why this year was great, because it was incredibly productive but at the same time it taught me a lot about balance. I hope 2022 is full of new learnings, lots of new opportunities and just a lot of success, love and happiness! I can't wait to see the work of this year translate into 2022", she concludes.

Ekta Kapoor's *U-Turn* and *Freddy* starring Kartik Aaryan are some of the projects in her pipeline. IANS



Meghna Gulzar is maverick director: Fatima

Mumbai: Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh, who recently joined the cast of Meghna Gulzar's *SamBahadur* along with her *Dangal* co-star, Sanya Malhotra, has hailed the latter as a maverick director and feels blessed to be directed by her.

Talking about



Fatima shares: "I feel truly blessed to have bagged this opportunity to work with Meghna Gulzar. She is a maverick of a director, whose work I have admired and followed since very long (sic)."

Calling the opportunity a milestone, the actress says, "I consider working with her a personal milestone. I'm super pumped to start shooting with her and I hope we have a blast on the sets of *SamBahadur*."

In the film, which stars Vicky Kaushal in the titular role of Field Marshal and one of India's greatest war heroes, Sam Manekshaw, Fatima will be seen playing the role of Indira Gandhi, India's only female Prime Minister. This will be her third film with Sanya Malhotra after *Dangal* and the Anurag Basu directorial *Ludo*. Fatima will also be seen sharing the screen with Anil Kapoor in another project. IANS

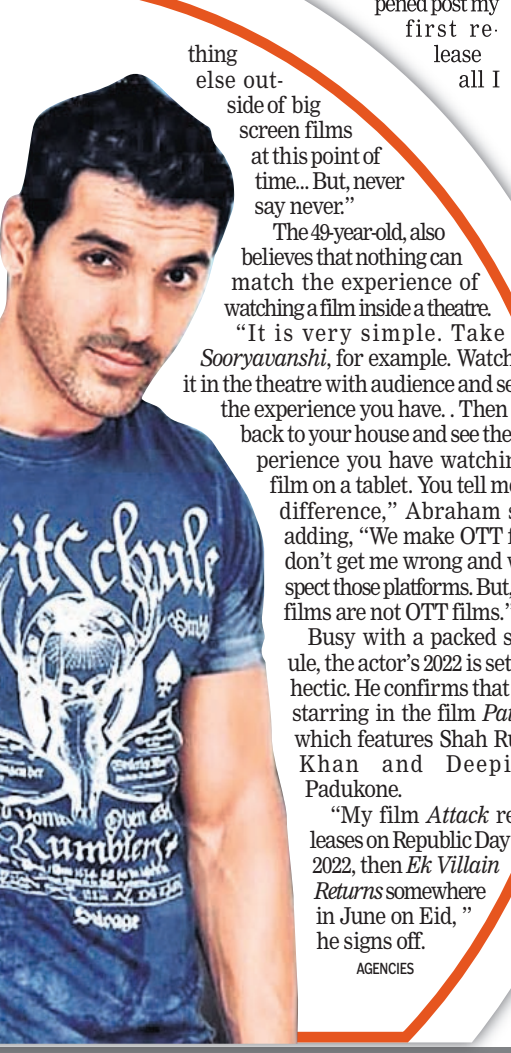
'I am a big screen hero, can't see myself on OTT'

Mumbai: Actor John Abraham talks about why he would not be okay with his films in the near future releasing directly on OTT platforms.

Actor John Abraham doesn't believe in crafting answers to please other people.

He would rather say what he truly feels, and that reflects when a news portal asks him whether he would follow in the steps of his contemporaries and release a film on OTT platforms for any reason.

"I believe, in my head, I am a big screen hero, and I will come on the large screen," he continues, "At this point, I can't even visualise myself coming for a subscription fees, it is difficult. All my films have been designed for the big screen for the next three years. So that is the way it is going to be for the next few years at least. I don't have the time to do any-



thing else outside of big screen films at this point of time... But, never say never."

The 49-year-old, also believes that nothing can match the experience of watching a film inside a theatre.

"It is very simple. Take *Sooryavanshi*, for example. Watch it in the theatre with audience and see the experience you have. Then go back to your house and see the experience you have watching a film on a tablet. You tell me the difference," Abraham says, adding, "We make OTT films, don't get me wrong and we respect those platforms. But, some films are not OTT films."

Busy with a packed schedule, the actor's 2022 is set to be hectic. He confirms that he is starring in the film *Pathan* which features Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone.

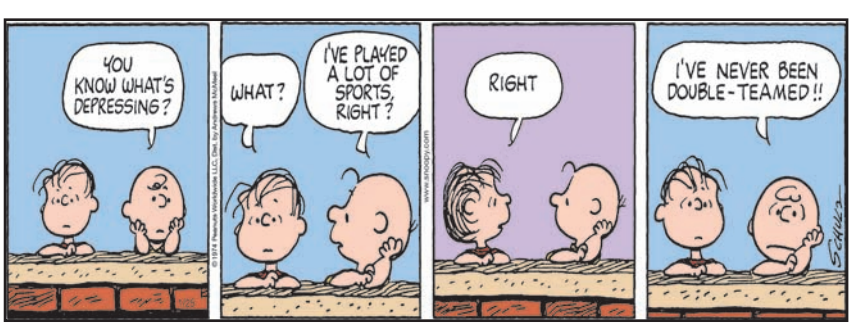
"My film *Attack* releases on Republic Day 2022, then *Ek Villain Returns* somewhere in June on Eid," he signs off.

AGENCIES



FUN post

PEANUTS



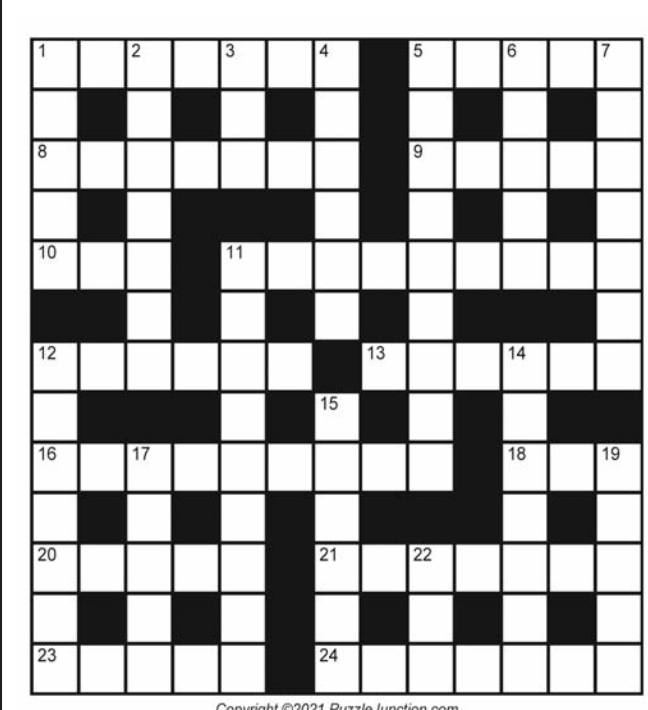
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



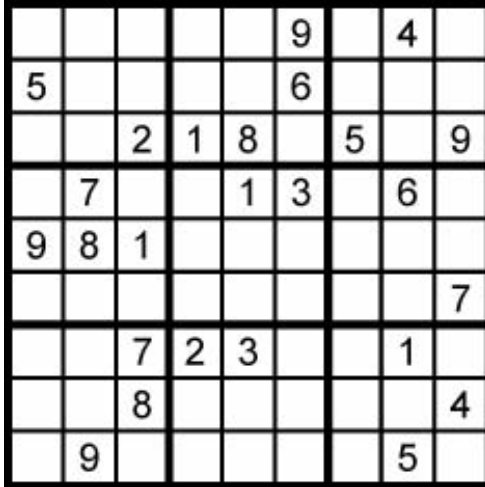
CROSSWORD



- Across
- 1 Rustic
 - 5 Cut
 - 8 Learned
 - 9 Proclamation
 - 10 Lady lobster
 - 11 Blusterer
 - 12 Partner of above
 - 13 Silver-white metallic element
 - 16 Political theory
 - 18 North Sea diver
 - 20 Harden
 - 21 Kind of negotiator
 - 23 Dusk to dawn
 - 24 Contrived
 - 4 Bill of exchange
 - 5 Sauna (5,4)
 - 6 Gallic goodbye
 - 7 Virtuoso
 - 11 Realtor (4,5)
 - 12 Citadel
 - 14 Inflexible
 - 15 Leotards
 - 17 Adhered
 - 19 Work, as dough
 - 22 Hit the slopes
- Down
- 1 Large
 - 2 Relish type
 - 3 Floral necklace

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

The sensational missing and then murder of 24-year-old Mamita Meher, a schoolteacher of Kalahandi, kept the BJD govt on the back foot right since the news broke. The alleged involvement of junior Home Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra in the case supplied continuous fodder for the opposition's unity. Alleged sexual harassment of inmates at Mahaling's Sunshine Public School where Mamita worked made the case even more serious. The arrest of Gobinda Sahu- the prime accused in the case- and his dramatic escape from the police custody and his filmy style rearrest made the case all the more juicier. The heat generated by the case washed out the complete Winter Session of the Assembly. The Mamita case even echoed in Parliament with Congress and BJP MPs seeking the scalp of Mishra and justice for Mamita. Violent scuffles between the police and opposition activists kept the issue on the boil. We will wait for the next year to hear the last word on the case

MAMITA BLAZE



DIGGING OUT: The body parts of Mamita Meher being exhumed from an under-construction stadium at Mahaling in Kalahandi district

The official further stated that the body was chopped into pieces with an intention to burn it easily. Because of these angles, the police suspected involvement of more people along with the prime accused Sahu. During interrogation, Sahu confessed to have killed Mamita. A detailed investigation is underway to find out others involved in the case.

RADHE JOINS GOBINDA

The second arrest came October 21 when Radhe, believed to be a close aide of Sahu, was taken into custody and forwarded to the SDJM court. During interrogation, Sahu had revealed about Radhe's role in the pit digging that was meant to bury Mamita's body. Reports said the trench was made ready 48-hours before Mamita was killed. It is believed that Radhe has been in the knowhow of Mamita murder, and both were working in tandem to destroy the evidence.

Bolangir bandh

Alleging involvement of Minister of Home (MoS) Dibya Shankar Mishra in the incident, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) October 20 called a 12-hour bandh in Bolangir district October 21 seeking removal of Mishra as a minister and his arrest. The saffron party alleged that Mishra was hand in glove with Gobinda Sahu, the main accused in the disappearance and murder of the lady teacher. The bandh paralysed normal life with several commercial establishments remaining shut in the district. The bandh started at 6am. The saffron party has also demanded a CBI probe into the kidnapping and murder of the 24-year-old lady teacher.

The Mamita Meher abduction and murder case, though happened in the second half of the year, overshadowed all other crimes due to its political ramifications. As soon as allegations started pouring in that the school president Gobinda Sahu was operating sex racket in the educational institution and two ministers of Odisha were frequent visitors to the school, it got the spin to snowball into a major political issue.

GRUESOME MURDER

As per reports, 24-year-old Mamita of Jharni village under Turekela block of Bolangir district was working as a teacher at Sunshine Public School of Mahaling in Kalahandi district. The teacher went missing October 8 following which her family had lodged a complaint with the police, alleging Gobinda Sahu's involvement behind her disappearance.

On the basis of the complaint, Sahu was detained at Titlagarh police barrack. However, he escaped from the po-

lice custody October 17.

On October 19, decomposed body parts of a woman were exhumed from an under-construction stadium at Mahaling. An excavator was used to dig up the area to trace the body parts. The ground was dug 8 ft which took 3 hours. Ash remains, vanity bag, gold chain, anklets and rings were recovered from the spot. Some burnt pieces of wood and tyres were also recovered from underneath. The seized articles were identified as that of Mamita's by her family.

Subsequently, Bolangir police had announced an award of Rs 1,00,000 for the person who would share information about Sahu.

However, the same day, Sahu was arrested from a sugarcane field located behind his sister's house at Budhipadar village under Bangomunda block.

The forensic team discovered that Mamita's body parts were chopped into pieces before being burnt and buried. This startling revelation was made October 20 which sent shockwaves across the state.



Prime accused Gobinda Sahu

POLITICAL SLUGFEST & STREET FIGHT



High drama inside Assembly over Mamita kidnap and murder

Opposition BJP and Congress staged a series of protests seeking resignation of Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra. They alleged that Mishra used to visit the school set up by Sahu. Moreover, they claimed that Mishra was trying to shield the prime accused. A three-member central team

of BJP comprising party's Mahila Morcha national president Vanathi Srinivasan, MP Sumita Duggal and West Bengal MLA Sreerupa Mitra met Mamita's parents and expressed their condolence. The team

cast doubts over the police investigation into the case and sought the dismissal of Mishra from the Council of Ministers for a fair probe into the incident.

Similarly, a fact-finding team of Congress comprising AICC spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala and AICC in-charge for Odisha A Chellakumar met the victim's family and sought the formation of an SIT under the supervision of Orissa High Court Chief Justice. BJP leader Bijoy Mohapatra alleged that Mishra tried to resolve the issues between accused Gobinda Sahu and Mamita at the minister's Raipur residence. Congress

leader Bhakta Das also made similar allegations against Mishra. The women wing of BJP and the student wing of Congress made several unsuccessful attempts to gherao the CM's residence in Bhubaneswar in connection with the murder case. At least 20 people including the police personnel and activists of BJP youth wing were hurt in a clash during an attempt by the latter to gherao the Assembly over the issue December 9.

Similarly, a few activists of Congress student wing also sustained injuries when police resorted to baton charge during an agitation

over the murder case December 10. The police alleged that the protestors hurled eggs and tomatoes at the security personnel. Meanwhile, several incidents of egg hurling also came to the fore wherein BJP and Congress members targeted the BJD leaders including the minister. Eggs were also hurled at a BJP leader.

The ruling BJD accused the BJP of hatching a conspiracy to bail out the prime accused by engaging a party member as a lawyer. BJD spokesperson Pratap Deb claimed that Mohan Lal Sharma, a well-known BJP leader of Kantabanji, was appearing for Sahu in a court in Bolangir.



A scuffle between BJP workers and police in Bhubaneswar

Mamita heat in Parl

The BJP and the Congress raised the sensational murder case in the Parliament during the Winter Session. Raising the incident in the Lok Sabha, BJP MP from Bargarh, Suresh Pujari, expressed concern over the 'deteriorating' law and order situation in Odisha.

He urged the Union Home Minister to initiate a CBI probe into the incident.

"The law and order situation in Odisha is alarming. A teacher, Mamita Meher, was abducted and killed in October. She was chopped into pieces and buried by miscreants. The family members of the teacher and other people as well are alleging involvement of the state Home Minister in her killing," Pujari said in the Lok Sabha.

Congress MP from Koraput Saptagiri Ulaka too moved an adjournment motion in the Parliament and urged the Centre to constitute an SIT under the Chief Justice of Orissa High Court to investigate the murder case.

Minister rubbishes charges

After receiving flak from Opposition BJP and Congress for his alleged link with prime accused Gobinda Sahu, MoS Mishra broke his silence and issued a written statement October 29. In his statement, Mishra denied all allegations against him and challenged the Opposition to approach the police and judiciary if they have any evidence against him. Invoking Goddess Manikeswari, the presiding deity of Kalahandi, Mishra expressed his readiness to resign from his post and retire from public life if any evidence is found against him. Mishra alleged that certain media houses have launched a character assassination campaign against him. He clarified that as a people's representative and an ex-IAF officer he has attended functions at several educational institutions.

"Therefore, a crime happening in any one of these institutions cannot be attributed to him," pleaded Mishra. Expressing his anguish over the death of the lady teacher, the Junagarh MLA said, "I am a father and I can understand the trauma the family must be going through. The guilty must be given the strictest punishment as per the law."



Assembly washout

The Winter Session of Odisha Assembly that began December 1 witnessed frequent uproarious scenes and high drama as Opposition Congress and BJP stuck to their demand for resignation of minister Dibya Shankar Mishra over the murder case.

The Congress MLAs locked the Assembly gate to prevent Mishra from entering the House. The BJP legislators sprinkled Ganga Jal and cow urine outside the Assembly and swept the premises as part of their protests against the minister. Dressed as a priest, Congress MLA Taraprasad Bahinipati too sprinkled Ganga Jal at the Assembly claiming that Mishra's presence has damaged the sanctity of the House.

On the other hand, the treasury bench members also created uproar in the House targeting Centre over price rise and other issues. Speaker Surjya Narayan Patro convened all-party meeting several times for smooth conduct of the House proceedings, but in vain. Patro finally adjourned the House sine die December 10, at least 20 days ahead of the schedule. Out of 26 business days of the Winter Session, the House was assembled for only nine working days. However, it was unable to conduct business smoothly even for a single day. Except for the Appropriation Bill for the Supplementary Budget, not a single Bill was either introduced or passed in the Assembly during the nine days.

CM speaks...

Expressing anguish over the incident, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, "The death of Mamita Meher was a very sad and unfortunate incident and we are all deeply anguished and pained by this heinous crime."

She was a young and bright daughter of Odisha. Her death is a terrible and irreparable loss. My heart goes out to the family of the victim." Making a statement in the Assembly December 3, Patnaik said his government is committed to ensure justice to the victim. "My government will ensure that no stone is left unturned to see that the perpetrators of the crime are brought to justice as per law in the shortest possible time," Patnaik said.

He also criticised the Opposition for politicising the sensitive incident. The Chief Minister revealed that the state government had written to the Orissa High Court urging it to appoint a sitting or retired HC or district and sessions judge to monitor the investigation. "The HC has been pleased to appoint a retired district judge to monitor the probe. Now the entire police investigation will be subjected to judicial scrutiny," Patnaik said while rejecting the Opposition's demand for a CBI probe into the mur-

High Court's take

Mamita's family had approached the High Court seeking its intervention in fast-tracking the probe. The court took up the petition and directed the state government to submit a status report on the investigation.

The Bharatiya Vikash Parishad also filed a PIL in the HC seeking a CBI probe into the murder case. Besides, it had sought Rs 50 lakh compensation to the victim's family. The outfit also filed an interim application and urged the court to direct the police to include MoS for Home, DS Mishra, Sambalpur DIG and Bolangir SP in the investigation. The HC entrusted the responsibility of supervising the probe to retired district judge ABS Naidu after the government urged the court to nominate a sitting/retired HC judge or district and sessions court to monitor the probe.



A Congress worker, who was injured in lathi-charge by police, being taken to hospital

₹51.92cr infra boost to industrial estates

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: In yet another step towards development of industrial infrastructure in Odisha, the state government Friday approved four infrastructure development projects worth Rs 51.92 crore for different industrial estates.



Representational image

CHIEF SECRETARY SC MAHAPATRA APPROVED THESE PROJECTS WHILE PRESIDING OVER INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE MEETING ON INDUSTRIAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND HELD ON DIGITAL MODE FRIDAY

MAHAPATRA DIRECTED THE OFFICIALS TO ENSURE BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE LIKE GOOD ROAD, QUALITY POWER SUPPLY, PIPED DRINKING WATER AND DRAINAGE SYSTEM AT ALL THE INDUSTRIAL ESTATES IN THE STATE

protection embankment-cum-road from PPT gate to Idco land and construction of main entrance road and cross drainage work to Kholadwar industrial estate in Khurda.

Out of these five projects, four were completed and work for the fifth one is in the advanced stage, sources said.

Similarly, the projects approved in the second phase include construction of high level bridge on two-lane external approach road from the National Highway to the plastic park, construction of external approach road and molten metal road to aluminum park at Angul, and external water supply to industrial estates at Jayamngal, Ramdasapur, Chhatabar and Bamuni.

The estimated cost of these projects was Rs 40.95 crore. Out of these projects, the high level bridge project and the external approach road project were completed.

The laying of pipeline and construction of 33 KV power supply network for the external supply project were at the final phase of completion, sources added.

The Chief Secretary directed the officials to expedite work for the ongoing projects.

estates and making those more attractive for the investors.

The Chief Secretary also reviewed progress of the infrastructure development projects which were approved in two phases. In the first phase, projects worth Rs 48.29 crore had been approved.

These projects include construction of an approach road from IOCL side to the Paradip plastic park, construction of external two-lane approach road from NH-5(A) to the plastic park, external power linkage to plastic park, construction of surge

water supply to different industrial estates at Balasore (Rs 27.45 crore), external wide approach road for heavy vehicles and containers to the seafood park at Deras from Barang-Pitapalli road (Rs 4.43 crore), external water supply to textile park at Dhamnagar from Akhuapada barrage on Baitarani river (Rs 9.04 crore) and laying of water pipeline and commissioning of water supply to Andharua bio-tech park (Rs 11 crore), sources added.

Approving the new proposals, the Chief Secretary directed the officials to ensure basic infrastructure like good road, quality power supply, piped drinking water and drainage system at all the industrial estates in the state. He asked the Industries and MSME departments and the Idco to jointly work out the details of the requirements with estimated cost.

Presenting the proposals for new projects, Industries secretary Hemant Sharma said these projects are essential for furthering industrial activities in the concerned

THIRD WEEK OF WINTER SESSION

Odisha MPs raise Naxal & other key issues

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Dec 17: The third week of the Winter Session of Parliament saw multiple adjournments in both Houses as the Opposition parties intensified their protest seeking resignation of Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra over Lakhimpur Kheri case in the wake of an SIT report terming the incident a pre-planned conspiracy.

Amid continuous din in both Houses, MPs from Odisha drew attention of the Centre towards various issues including the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas in the state and urged the government to take steps for complete eradication of Red menace.

Rajya Sabha MP Sasmit Patra told the Centre that there is a need for raising the economic standard of the people living in LWE-affected areas.

He urged the Centre to provide banking facilities in affected areas and to ensure that the students of LWE-affected areas get admission in institutions like IIT, NIT and AIIMS.

Lok Sabha MP Chandra Sekhar Sahu also raised the issue and urged the Centre for helicopter services in LWE affected areas for

rescue mission during natural calamities. Sahu also pleaded for waiver of the deployment charges of Central Armed Police Forces in Odisha.

BJD MP Achyuta Samanta requested the Centre to share 60 per cent of the clean energy cess collected from Odisha with the state.

The MPs also raised the long standing demand of establishment of a permanent bench of Orissa High Court in western Odisha.

The parliamentarians posed as many as 135 starred and unstarred questions on various state specific as well as national issues in both Houses.

They asked 41 questions in the Rajya Sabha and 94 questions in the Lok Sabha.

Notably, the Opposition parties intensified their protest in both Houses seeking resignation of

Adulterated food served under Poshan: Sarangi

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Pratap Chandra Sarangi Friday alleged that the Poshan scheme that aims at improving the nutritional status of children (0-6 years), adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating women has been adulterated in Odisha as adulterated food is being served to the children.

Speaking during Question Hour in Lok Sabha, the Balasore MP also alleged that the state government is promoting companies that supply adulterated food to Anganwadi centres. He claimed that there was a misappropriation of over Rs 1.6 lakh in food purchasing under the scheme in Nilgiri block of Balasore district. Though the issue had been raised with the Chief Secretary, no

action was taken in this connection, he alleged.

The BJP MP urged the Centre to take action against all food supply agencies involved in corruption and claimed that these agencies are responsible for compromising with the quality of food under the nutrition schemes.

In her response, Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Zubin Irani said that her Ministry will write to the state government to take appropriate action on the issues raised by Sarangi.

"The charges made by the Honourable member are very grave in nature. It is a cause of great concern for me as a minister. The member is aggrieved with the fact that the adulteration was caught by him in the state that he represents. I will convey this to the state government. The state government is constitutionally and administratively responsible for implementation of the project," Irani said.



ODISHA IN PARLIAMENT

Union Minister Ajay Misra as his son is the prime accused in

Lakhimpur Kheri case, in which eight people were killed.

Full faith on CB, says Palai's wife Subhadra

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, Dec 17: The Crime Branch (CB) which has been probing the mysterious death of Chittaranjan Palai, a personal assistant of senior BJD leader and Deputy Chairman of State Planning Board Sanjay Das Burma, Friday conducted a search at the rented accommodation of Palai's friend Jagannath Sarangi at Mattiapada here.

The CB team has reportedly sought Puri superintendent of police (SP) KV Singh's assistance to collect the clippings of a few CCTVs installed near Sarangi's residence. The investigating agency has met Palai's family.

Sources said Palai's wife Subhadra, who had earlier claimed Das Burma's involvement in her husband's mysterious death, however, reportedly took a U-turn, saying she has full faith on CB and Das Burma as well. Subhadra has requested not to politicise Palai's death.

On Thursday, the team inspected the Gadampuragisra bridge site and examined the Chittaranjan's belongings recovered from the spot and the place at the Nuanai river where his body was found afloat.

State logs 154 new Covid cases, one more fatality

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The state Friday recorded 154 new Covid-19 cases, 19 less than the previous day, with the caseload increasing to 10,52,472, a Health department bulletin said.

The death toll rose to 8,441 as one more person succumbed to the disease in Kalahandi district, it said. Fifty-three other coronavirus patients have died due to comorbidities so far, according to the official data. Khurda reported the maximum number of fresh cases at 79, followed by Cuttack at 20.

Twenty-six children were among new patients, the bulletin said.

Odisha now has 1,976 active cases. At least 166 people recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 10,42,002, it said.

The state conducted 59,733 sample tests during the period, and the positivity rate stood at 0.26 per cent.

Nearly 2.86 crore people have received the first jab of Covid vaccines, and more than 1.83 crore beneficiaries have been administered the second dose, the bulletin added.



NSS RALLY

Students participate in a national integration camp rally organised by Regional Directorate of NSS in collaboration with SOA deemed to be university from Master Canteen Square to Exhibition Ground in Bhubaneswar, Friday OP PHOTO

Speed up GSSY execution, Collectors told

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The Higher Education secretary Friday directed the district Collectors to take immediate steps for expediting the implementation of Gopabandhu Sikhya Sahayata Yojana (GSSY) for 2021-22 through scholarship portal.

In a letter to all the Collectors, Higher Education secretary Saswat Mishra said, "As you must be aware that the Gopabandhu Sikhya Sahayata

Yojana is a state plan scheme to extend financial assistance to students of underprivileged sections of the society for pursuing graduation courses. It is being implemented through state scholarships portal from this year. As the district Collector, you have a vital role to play in smooth implementation of the scheme."

As per information available in the scholarship portal, 3,443 applications have been forwarded to the district officers concerned for examination, but

till date not a single application has been recommended to the department.

"You are therefore requested to take immediate action to speed up the process so that benefit of the scheme can flow to the eligible students of underprivileged section of the society," Misra said.

The objective of the scheme is to extend financial assistance to the students of under privileged sections for pursuing graduation and post-graduation courses in the state.

IIT-Bhub develops ultra-low-power IC for biomedical data transmission

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The researchers at Indian Institute of Bhubaneswar IIT-Bhubaneswar have developed an ultra-low-power integrated circuit (IC) for energy-efficient biomedical data transmission, as per a statement.

The indigenously developed ultra-low-power CMOS (Complementary Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor) data conversion IC will help in energy-efficient secured biomedical data transmission via the Internet of Medical Things (IoMT) and Wearable Body Area Networks (WBANs) to edge or cloud computing devices, it added.

The first batch of the IC was fabricated by the researchers at the Semi-Conductor Laboratory (SCL) in Mohali.

The IC was developed with the support of the Special Manpower Development Programme for Chips to System Design (SMDP-C2SD)

of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the statement said.

Another team of researchers of the premier institute developed a digitally intensive sub-sampling short-range low-power RF (radio frequency) front-end IC, which will help in IoT (Internet of Things) applications.

It includes several design innovations.

The chip is being fabricated at TSMC, Taiwan, and likely to be received soon, the researchers said.

"These semiconductor chip developments are the result of four years of unstinted efforts of the institute," said IIT-Bhubaneswar director RV Raja Kumar.

The developments are part of IIT-Bhubaneswar's vision to create a sustainable chip design and fabrication echo system at the institute and its hinterland, he added.

The innovations will help put Bhubaneswar on the map of this technology, the statement said.

Follow 5T mantra, CM tells electrical AEEs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has urged the newly appointed assistant executive engineers (electrical) to adopt the 5T mantra of governance and serve people with dignity while following Mo Sarkar norms.

Addressing the orientation programme of the newly-recruited 30 assistant executive engineers (AAEs), Naveen said electricity being the prime mover of the economy, the state government has given top priority to development of power sector. The state has now become power surplus, he said.

He further stated that energy conservation and energy efficiency measures are given a central role in state's Energy Policy. More than 3.8 crore LED bulbs have been distributed under 'Ama Ghare LED' scheme.

The state has been conveniently meeting the peak demand of around 4800-5000 MW power round the year

without load shedding, he said.

The Chief Minister advised the AEEs to keep on updating themselves about the technological developments and serve the people with dignity and professionalism.

Energy Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra, joining from Kalahandi, encouraged the engineers to work dedicatedly for the state. He said that the Energy department has given top priority to 5T principles bringing in rapid changes in the energy sector.

The programme was coordinated by Secretary to CM (5T) VK Pandian. Chief Secretary SC Mahapatra and Energy secretary Nikunja Bihari Dhal among others spoke on this occasion.

These engineers received their appointment orders here at the Convention Centre, Lok Seva Bhawan. With the induction of these 30 engineers, the strength of AEEs (electrical) has gone up to 116. They will work in Works, RD and Energy departments.

Minor girl steals purse

Bhubaneswar: Alert locals Friday captured a minor girl who was trying to flee after snatching a woman's purse at Rasulgarh Square here. The minor was later handed over to Saheed Nagar police. The victim, Laxmipriya Samal, was waiting at Rasulgarh when the girl snatched away her purse. However, an auto-rickshaw driver present there informed the bystanders who collared the girl after a brief chase.

WASSUP TODAY CUTTACK

- Concluding event of Tribal Art Expo, Maritime Museum, 10am
- Postage stamp expo concluding, Cuttack Philatelic Bureau Association, Buxi Bazar, 11am

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

Now, sector maps in garbage collection vans

THE SAFEI GADIS WHICH ARE ALREADY EQUIPPED WITH PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM WILL NOW HAVE AN ADDED FACILITY OF 'SECTOR MAP' WHICH WILL DISPLAY THE ROUTES OF EACH LOCALITY



micro composting centres (MCCs) in the city partitioned vehicles specially designed for collection of dry and wet waste are covering the identified areas. Sources said the safei gadis which are already equipped with public address system will now have an added facility of 'Sector Map' which will display route of each locality.

"The facility of displaying the sector map in safei gadis serves as an information tool for the households of a particular area/sector. Community members can support monitoring the vehicle movement and waste collection activities of their respective sectors. Such participation will strengthen sanitation activities of the Capital city," said BMC Commissioner

Sanjay Kumar Singh.

As per sources, the map contains route of a sector from which the particular vehicle collects wet and dry waste. It also displays timing of arrival to a particular lane from which households giving waste to the vehicle can see the marks over the map. Besides, one can know how many households have been covered in a given time and how many are left.

"On an average, each ward has about 3,000 to 4,000 households. One ward is divided into sectors that have 600 to 800 households. Out of 41 MCCs planned 23 are functional and others are in progress. A particular ward is also attached to one MCC and route maps of all sectors of a ward are displayed here. As on Friday, 175 vehicles have the maps out of 185 vehicles engaged and 18 out of 23 MCCs have also displayed the route maps of the wards coming under it," said BMC's Deputy Commissioner, Sanitation, Suwendu Kumar Sahoo.

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BJP men vandalise Gangadhar's statue

Junagarh: In a shocking incident, hours before unveiling of a statue of Swabhab Kabi Gangadhar Meher at Chicheguda under Junagarh block in Kalahandi district, local BJP workers allegedly vandalised the statue, Friday. The name of Minister of State for Home Dibya Shankar Mishra was etched on the plaque under the statue. Opposing it, local BJP workers broke the statue. Tension flared up in the area over the incident that led to BJP and BJD workers coming to blows. On being informed, a team of police officials including Dharmagarh SDPO Dhiraj Kumar Chopadar and Junagarh IIC Uttam Kumar Sahu rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Sarpanch Sudhira Meher condemned the act by the BJP workers and termed it as an insult to the legendary poet. After this incident, the statue unveiling programme was cancelled.

Missile tests to hit Ridley's arrival at Gahirmatha

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Dec 17: The DRDO carried out a test-firing of supersonic missile Torpedo from the Wheeler Island December 13. In the last two months, the DRDO has conducted several missile tests. Bright light and fumes that emanate from tests of high power nuclear missiles are leaving adverse impact on endangered Olive Ridley turtles coming for nesting to Gahirmatha inside the Bhitarkanika National Park, a report said.

Environmentalists expressed concern over repeated tests of missiles, saying repeated missile tests may also impact arrival, mating and nesting of the marine turtles at Gahirmatha this year.

Wildlife activist Biswajit



FILE PHOTO

Mohanty said that biodiversity of the Bhitarkanika National Park is getting disturbed. "Apart from natural disasters, various human activities are harming its biodiversity. Eco retreat was kicked off on Pentha beach since

December 15. After the end of the festival, the area will be littered with heaps of polythene and plastic material which is more dangerous to the turtles. Besides, repeated missile tests were conducted near the Wheeler Island

when thousands of turtles are now headed for the coast for mating and nesting. Missile tests will definitely disturb their usual migratory trajectory," he observed.

He said environmentalist late Bankabihari Das had requested Dr Abdul Kalam not to carry out missile tests during the breeding season of the turtles. After discussion in this regard, Dr Kalam had assured Das that the DRDO would not conduct missile tests at that time - from arrival of turtles till departure of the baby turtles into the sea.

However, after the death of Dr Kalam, missiles are still being test-fired from the Wheeler Island without care and concern for safety of turtles during their breeding, Mohanty lamented.

Hemant Kumar Rout, president

of 'Samudirka Jiba O Olive Ridley Kaincha Surakhya Samiti', said that natural calamities harm the environment of Bhitarkanika. Cyclones and high waves have been damaging the coast as well as the nesting places of the turtles. "Back-to-back tests of missiles will also affect migration of turtles in the area this year," Rout said.

Environmentalist Jagannath Das said while prawn gherries have been polluting the coastal environment, missile tests are not good for safety of the endangered marine turtles.

Gahirmatha range officer Debasish Bhoi said the DRDO authorities have been intimated through a letter about arrival of turtles. There will be a discussion on the issue with the DRDO soon, he added.

10 injured, 3 critical as tourist bus overturns in Kalinga Ghat



POST NEWS NETWORK

G Udayagiri, Dec 17: At least 10 tourists travelling in a private bus sustained injuries after the vehicle overturned on Kalinga Ghat road under G Udayagiri police limits in Kandhamal Thursday evening. A source said the ill-fated bus was on its way from West Bengal. The injured were rescued by some locals and immediately admitted them to nearby government-run health facility here in the district. Later, three of the injured were shifted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital, Berhampur, after their condition deteriorated.

According to an eyewitness, the bus was carrying around 60 tourists from Haldia in West Bengal, who had come to visit Daringbadi. The tourist bus overturned after hitting a guard wall on Kalinga Ghat road following a brake failure while it was negotiating with a sharp bend near Andharkot. The bus was proceeding from Daringbadi to Puri in the evening. "Driver of a car travelling from Tikabali area to Bhanjanagar passing through the accident site first saw the ill-fated bus. With the help of some local residents and by breaking open bus's front windshield, he rescued the tourists trapped inside it," the eyewitness said. On being informed by the car driver, a police team of G Udayagiri reached the spot and started a probe into the mishap.

Nuapada: Maoists exchange fire with jawans; camp busted

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nuapada, Dec 17: Amid reports of Maoists trying to regroup in fringe areas of Chhattisgarh, security forces carried out a combing operation and busted a Maoist camp, leading to an exchange of fire with the ultras in Patadhara reserve forest area under Sinapalli police limits on Odisha-Chhattisgarh border Thursday.

Addressing a presser here Friday, Nuapada SP Pratyush Dibakar, said, "When a joint operation was being launched by SOG, CRPF and DVF personnel in the Patadhara reserve forest, an exchange of fire took place between Naxals and an SOG team." Dibakar said that Naxals on seeing the security personnel fired at them first, following which security personnel returned the fire. "Our teams fired around 49 rounds. The Naxals managed to



escape taking advantage of the hilly terrain and thick forest cover. During the search, our teams have recovered some articles," the SP said.

Security forces recovered five tarpaulin sheets, nine bags, nine blankets, eight umbrellas, two radio sets, a solar panel, three chargers, uniforms, knives, Maoist literature and rations. Operation is on and will continue in the fringe areas, the SP added.

Kotia: Admin focus on livelihood, social security

BRANCH OF A NATIONALIZED BANK TO OPEN AT PANCHAYAT HQRS SOON

POST NEWS NETWORK

Pottangi, Dec 17: With Andhra government continuing its nefarious designs on Kotia panchayat, the district administration has renewed its focus on successful implementation of various government schemes in the panchayat.

The government has become more active over last few months to ensure benefits of various schemes reach its residents. Following a directive from the Collector, officials of all departments are seen visiting the panchayat and trying to implement the government schemes to help people turn away from freebies being offered by the Andhra government.

The officials of the animal husbandry department are exploring ways to create livelihood for people. The officials have encouraged local residents to take



up goat rearing and poultry with loan linkage.

The department imparted training to 54 people on artificial insemination of goats. Local residents were encouraged to take up poultry and loan assistance. The officials said to make farmers self-sufficient, each will be provided with chicks along with loan assistance.

Earlier, the Andhra government provided pension of Rs 2,000 to Kotia people in a bid to win their support. Meanwhile, the block administration has focused on successful execution of its social security scheme like old age pension in the fringe villages. The administration has provided pension money to people in Kurudipadar,

Uperganjeipadar, Talaganjeipadar, Kotia, Janiguda, Ranasingh, Uperponiki, Talaponiki, Dhupadar, Upersembi, Talasembi, Suliamari, Talakanti, Salempadar, Kodiambe, Phulapadar, Katraguda, Madkar, Talabarabandha, Uparabarabandha, Thuria, Karanjaguda, Taupadar, Mathlamba and Gumelpadar.

As many as 657 people were handed out Rs 3.89 lakh as pension while Rs 3.79 lakh was credited into the accounts of 607 beneficiaries through DBT. Moreover, the administration has initiated a process to extend banking facility in the area. It has taken a step to facilitate opening of a national bank's branch at the panchayat headquarters so that beneficiaries would get their pension directly in their bank accounts.

Collector Abdaal M Akthar has directed officials to pay pension to beneficiaries at their doorsteps till the opening of the bank.

DSPL - 334




ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

ସଂଗଠିତ କୃଷକ : ସଶକ୍ତ କୃଷକ

କୃଷକ ଉତ୍ପାଦକ ସଂଗଠନ (FPO) ସମାବେଶ

ଓଡ଼ିଶା ୨୦୨୧

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ଡଃ ଅରୁଣ କୁମାର ସାହୁ

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କନଭେନ୍ସନ୍ ସେଣ୍ଟର, ଲୋକ ସେବା ଭବନ
ଭୁବନେଶ୍ୱର





୧୦୦ରୁ ଅଧିକ କୃଷକ ଉତ୍ପାଦକ ସଂଗଠନ ଅଂଶଗ୍ରହଣ ।

୨୪ଟି କୃଷକ ଭିତ୍ତିକ ବ୍ୟବସାୟୀ ସଂଗଠନ, ୫ଟି କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାତ୍ମକ ନିକାସୀ ସଂସ୍ଥା, ୩୦ଜଣ କ୍ଷେତ୍ରୀୟ ବିଶେଷଜ୍ଞ ଓ ଶିକ୍ଷାବିତ୍ତ ଅଂଶଗ୍ରହଣ ।

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OIPR-01001/13/0005/2122

FOCUS ECONOMY

GDP'S DAYS ARE NUMBERED



Ditching gross domestic product as the main gauge of prosperity was always impossible in the absence of broad agreement about what the alternative might be. But as economists and statisticians develop wealth and well-being approaches to measuring economic success, the direction of change is clear

How should we measure economic success? Criticisms of conventional indicators, particularly gross domestic product, have abounded for years, if not decades. Environmentalists have long pointed out that GDP omits the depletion of natural assets, as well as negative externalities such as global warming. And its failure to capture unpaid but undoubtedly valuable work in the home is another glaring omission. But better alternatives may soon be at hand.

In 2009, a commission led by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi spurred efforts to find alternative ways to gauge economic progress by recommending a "dashboard" of indicators. Since then, economists and statisticians, working alongside natural scientists, have put considerable effort into developing rigorous wealth-based prosperity metrics, particularly concerning natural assets. The core idea is to create a comprehensive national balance sheet to demonstrate that economic progress today is illusory when it comes at the expense of future living standards.

In an important milestone in March this year, the United Nations approved a statistical standard relating to the services that nature provides to the economy. That followed the UK Treasury's publication of a review by the University of Cambridge's Partha Dasgupta setting out how to integrate nature in general, and biodiversity in particular, into economic analysis. With the consequences of climate change starting to become all too apparent, any meaningful concept of economic success in the future will surely include sustainability.

The next steps in this statistical endeavour will be to incorporate measures of social capital, reflecting the ability of communities or countries to act collectively, and to extend measurement of the household sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how crucial this unpaid work is to a country's economic health. For example, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics intends to develop a more comprehensive concept of living standards that includes the

value of such activity.

Aggregate measures such as these can be useful for guiding important policy decisions in a manner consistent with familiar economic concepts. This approach also helps the conversation with finance ministry officials and business executives, whose support for a longer-term perspective regarding prosperity will be essential to bring about change.

But many advocate thinking about economic success and failure in terms of well-being, a broader and fuzzier concept. The idea that policy decisions should focus on what ultimately matters in people's lives is intuitively appealing. And a number of governments, from New Zealand to Scotland, have recently adopted explicit well-being policy frameworks.

This approach, however, raises even more difficult measurement questions. Well-being depends on many aspects of individuals' life circumstances. To be sure, there is a large body of research in psychology and economics concerning how to measure well-being and analyse the factors that influence it. Often, the measurement involves surveying people's satisfaction with their lives or their level of anxiety. For example, the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics has been tracking anxiety and depression

throughout the pandemic.

But while policy-makers need some top-down, aggregate statistics to facilitate their decision-making, such indicators have limitations. For example, whereas the links between well-being and factors identified by econometric analysis – such as being employed or in good mental health – are intuitive, the causal connections are not well understood. A depressed person may benefit from therapy, as well-being advocates often urge, but decent housing might be even more effective. Public policy based on well-being thus still lacks a theoretical underpinning.

Moreover, some policy-making contexts will require a more granular level of detail. Qualitative research – rather than large-scale surveys with predefined questions – points to a wider range of considerations affecting well-being. For example, one recent UK study, co-produced by researchers and people experiencing poverty, found that while basic material needs including health were important to well-being, autonomy and a sense of purpose mattered just as much. The top-down aggregate indicators devised by social scientists and statisticians cannot capture such findings.

While time-intensive ground-level research will not always be practical, it is important to keep in mind that the concept of well-

being is much richer than most other economic indicators. Importantly, the comprehensive wealth and well-being approaches outlined here are complementary: the assets measured by the former provide the means to achieve the latter. Indeed, New Zealand's policy framework makes this link explicit.

What is exciting about these alternative approaches to assessing and measuring the economic success of a community or country is the amount of practical progress already made in defining concepts, creating metrics, and building expert consensus about the direction policymaking should take. Ditching GDP as the main gauge of prosperity was always impossible in the absence of broad agreement about what the alternative might be. And it will take many more years of work at the statistical coalface to develop a framework as sophisticated and well-embedded as GDP and related economic indicators. But the direction of change is clear, and the impetus to bring it about is powerful.

The writer, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, is the author, most recently, of *Cogs and Monsters: What Economics Is, and What It Should Be*.

PROJECT SYNDICATE



Diane Coyle

IN AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE IN MARCH THIS YEAR, THE UNITED NATIONS APPROVED A STATISTICAL STANDARD RELATING TO THE SERVICES THAT NATURE PROVIDES TO THE ECONOMY

Consider the Divine Life as the most important thing to obtain.
THE MOTHER



Return of the prodigal

The appointment of former Finance Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pande as head of a three-member committee to appraise new standards for defining economically weaker sections (EWS) has put to rest the chatter that followed his exit earlier in 2021. At that time it was widely believed that Pande was out of favour with the political dispensation when he was allowed to retire in February 2021 without being given the normal extension given to Finance Secretary-designate if he is retiring on Budget-day. Instead, Tarun Bajaj was given the additional responsibility and Pande was let go off.

It is felt that Pande got the axe because he was believed to be responsible for the snafus in the new IT portal which did not function for months after his tenure ended. The government discovered that the glitches in the portal had less to do with Pande than the integration of the old and new operating systems and softened its stance on Pande.

His return as head of the committee, which also includes Principal Economic Advisor Sanjeev Sanyal and Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) member secretary VK Malhotra, is a sign that all is forgiven and that Pande still enjoys the trust of the government.

SC refrains Centre from acting against Bengal babu

Though the NDA government is now focused on the forthcoming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, it has not taken its eyes off West Bengal. The political rivalry apart, the NDA government is keen to take on West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee by taking disciplinary action against former state Chief Secretary Alapan Bandopadhyay.

The babu failed to attend a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had visited the state in May to review the destruction caused by a cyclone. Bandopadhyay was ordered by the miffed Centre to report to Delhi on deputation, but he chose to retire instead. Promptly, he was appointed special advisor to Banerjee, and the face-off drifted into the courts, first the Calcutta High Court, and now the Supreme Court.

The apex court however has asked the Centre not to precipitate disciplinary proceedings against Bandopadhyay, even as it hears an appeal by the Centre challenging the Calcutta High Court order that stayed the babu's transfer to Delhi. A small reprieve for Bandopadhyay but the issue is not likely to be resolved soon.



BABUDOM BYTES
Dilip Cherman

Kerala govt upsets IAS, IPS babus in pay scale row

The Kerala government has not only miffed the Centre with the transfer of Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer Bennichen Thomas (as reported in this column December 9), but also the IAS and IPS officers in the state by raising the basic pay of the recently created Kerala Administrative Service (KAS) officers. In a recent move, the Pinarayi Vijayan government fixed the salary scale and it is now equivalent to that of all-India service officers who have put in at least nine years of service.

According to the new scale fixed by the state Cabinet, an entry-level IAS officer draws a basic salary of ₹56,100. On the other hand, a KAS officer at the entry-level would draw a much higher basic pay of ₹81,800 with a 10% grade pay and other allowances.

Sources say that the IPS Officers' Association and the state chapters of the IAS and IFoS officers' associations have demanded the Kerala government to reconsider its decision. Dr B Ashok and MG Ramanickam, president and secretary of the state IAS Association respectively, have urged the government to rescind the order, claiming that "the disparity in pay structure would upset administrative equations". They further argue that since KAS is a feeder service, there is no logic in fixing the salary of KAS officers at a higher level.

The government, so far, is going ahead with the move, though critics claim that the decision was taken ignoring the recommendations of the state Finance Department. Guess the IAS and IPS officers will have to assert their claims more strongly to make the government listen.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherman@twitter.com](https://twitter.com/dilipthecherman). Let's multiply the effect.

WISDOM CORNER

- All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them. **WALT DISNEY**
- Write it. Shoot it. Publish it. Crochet it, sauté it, whatever. **MAKE. JOSS WHEDON**
- Happiness is not something readymade. It comes from your own actions. **DALAI LAMA XIV**

WORDSWORTH

Carry the can

This is another of those odd expressions that's best known in British English. If you carry the can for something you're bearing the responsibility for its having gone wrong, often with the implication that you're taking the blame for someone else. A good example appeared in the Times in 1957: "Senior officers who were forced to 'carry the can' because of the misdeeds of others". It's particularly relevant because we're fairly sure the expression derives from services' slang. The first recorded cases are from the Royal Navy in the late 1920s, though Eric Partridge, in his Dictionary of Historical Slang, says it had been around since the late nineteenth century. In his Dictionary of Forces' Slang he suggests that the idiom refers to "the member of a gang or party who fetches the beer for all and then has the melancholy task of returning the empty". The job of carrying the group's ration of beer was obviously one that laid you open to much unpleasantness if you spilled any or dropped the can. There's an older slang expression that's probably relevant: to carry the keg, also as to carry the cag. Cag and keg are variants of the same dialect word, meaning to offend or insult (cag or kag was also once British Navy slang for one of those arguments in which everybody is shouting and no one is listening).

LOL

All at the funeral

It's game 7 of the NBA finals and a man makes his way to his seat at center court. He sits down and notices that the seat next to him is empty. He leans over and asks his neighbour if someone is sitting there. He responds, "No, the seat's empty." "The first man exclaims, "What?!! Who in their right mind would have a seat like this for the



NBA finals and not use it?" The neighbor responds, "Well the seat is mine, but my wife passed away and this is the first NBA finals we haven't been together." The first man responds, "I'm sorry to hear that. Wasn't there anyone else, a friend or relative that could've taken that seat?" The neighbor responds, "No, they're all at the funeral."

SPECTRUM CURRENCY

Cryptocurrency Vs digital currency



Bharat Jhunjhunwala

THE PROBLEM OF THE CENTRAL BANK'S IMPRUDENCE CANNOT BE SOLVED BY TECHNICAL INNOVATIONS LIKE THE CRYPTO- OR DIGITAL CURRENCIES

A cryptocurrency is encrypted and not accessible to anyone other than the owner. A number of computer enthusiasts get together and solve a puzzle like the Sudoku. One who can solve the puzzle is granted a prize in form of a currency, such as Bitcoin. The control of the currency is not with any single person. All the participants collectively control the currency. A new game on solving a puzzle starts after the previous puzzle is solved and a coin is given to the winner. In this manner new cryptocurrency is manufactured just as new paper currency notes are printed.

The central banks have been averse to promoting cryptocurrencies. The first drawback, they say, is that the cryptocurrency can destabilise the economy. Let us say inflation is running high. India's central bank, the Reserve Bank of India, wants to control inflation and reduces the money supply. However, cryptocurrency can continue to be made in large numbers and nullify the reduction of money supply made by the Reserve Bank. In this manner the governments loses control over

the monetary policy. The second drawback is that cryptocurrencies can fail and again destabilise the economy. The third drawback is that of supporting crime. Recently, an oil company's computers in the United States were hacked. The hackers demanded and received ransom payment in cryptocurrencies.

Cryptocurrency is beneficial despite these drawbacks in situations where the central banks are irresponsible. Let us say the central bank prints paper currency indiscriminately and the prices rise is, say, 10 times in one year. Cryptocurrency can provide safety in such situations. Therefore, cryptocurrencies can act as a check on bad central banks. On the whole, then, cryptocurrency is harmful if the central bank is prudent and it is beneficial if the central bank is imprudent.

Next comes "digital currency." A digital currency is like the cryptocurrency in that it too is only a number stored on a computer. However, it is not anonymous like the cryptocurrency. It may be issued by a central bank like the Reserve Bank of India. The quantity of

digital currency issued is determined by the central bank. However, the value of the digital currency may be determined by the bidding process in the market similar to the determination of the price of paper currency by supply and demand. The Reserve Bank will be able to identify the owners of the digital currency and it can prevent use of this currency for crime, money laundering and other illegal purposes. Digital currency can be prevented from destabilising the economy because the Reserve Bank can control the amount of digital currency that is issued. However, a digital currency cannot help the people overcome the bad policies of the bank itself. The central bank can issue large amounts of digital currency indiscriminately as it may issue large amounts of paper currency. The digital currency, therefore, cannot control the bad policies of the central bank.

I would welcome the digital currency and vote against cryptocurrency. Indeed, a digital currency will not be able to combat the imprudent policy of a central bank. On the flip side, it will

also not be able to destabilise the economy. This aspect is, therefore, evenly balanced. The other advantages of digital currency are that it cannot be used for crime like cryptocurrencies; it can be stored safely at a nominal cost; and the cost of transaction is less compared to paper currencies that involve printing of notes etc. However, digital currency does not solve all the problems and can be called a halfway house. In any event, as far as cryptocurrencies are concerned, we are caught in a Catch-22 situation. If we opt for cryptocurrency then we invite instability. On the other hand, if we reject cryptocurrency then we do not make available an alternative to the people against the imprudent central bank. Let us face it; the problem of imprudence of the central bank cannot be solved by technical innovations like the crypto- or digital currencies. It requires improvement of governance.

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

Boost to chip manufacturing

Sir, India finally took a giant leap towards getting semiconductor manufacturing into the country through ₹76,000-crore incentive package. Chips are to this century what oil was to the last. Semiconductors are the life-force of the ongoing tech revolution. The move came at a time when global chip shortage has severely affected production of smartphones, personal computers, game consoles, automobiles, and medical devices. While this mega move is expected to attract top semiconductor manufacturers such as Mediatek, Intel, Qualcomm, Samsung and Texas Instruments, the much-needed incentive can help India to become an electronics hub and broaden the scope of manufacturing and export. However, establishment of Semiconductor Wafer Fabrication (FAB) units in India has long been a challenge not only because of the shortage of resources in the country, but also due to the stiff competition from China and Vietnam. According to the domain experts, in addition to the enormous investment in terms of billions of dollars, it takes hundreds of gallons of pure water to produce even a single chip and needs uninterrupted electricity supply – both are challenging for India. Apart from the huge initial investment, they have very high operating costs because of high failure rate – and the technology usually needs to be replaced every 3-4 years. In this context, it remains to be seen, how the country can overcome the formidable challenges to make India a crucial global player in chip universe.

N Sadasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Traffic umbrellas

Sir, It is really heartwarming to know that taking into consideration the well-being of traffic police personnel, the Kochi city police has come out with a 'traffic umbrella project'. The project launched recently ensures that traffic police personnel are offered with umbrellas that could give them cool shade as well as protect them from the scorching sun. The hi-tech umbrellas have been designed in such a way that it provides not only shade but also gives cool air provided by a small fan inside that runs on solar power. Most often we find traffic police personnel really struggling in the scorching sun directing the vehicles and disentangling heavy traffic blocks and snarls and often feeling completely exhausted due to the heat. The umbrella provided will definitely help them get some relief during their duty. The police department is planning to expand the project to other places soon. The project is one worth emulating and can be implemented in other towns and cities.

M Pradyu, KANNUR

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST
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national



I don't respond to leaders of other political parties. All that I would like to reiterate and emphasise is that if you wish to defeat the BJP, either in a state election or in a national election, the non-BJP parties must come together

P CHIDAMBARAM | CONGRESS LEADER

AAP TO LAUNCH UP POLL CAMPAIGN JANUARY 2

After announcing that it will contest the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls on its own, the Aam Aadmi Party will launch its election campaign January 2 with a rally in Lucknow



of the day quote

If the common has an understanding of the Constitution's preamble, fundamental duties and the basic elements of Constitution, many problems of the country including class discrimination will end automatically

ASHOK GEHLOT | RAJASTHAN CM

The BJP is creating new political parties in the Valley to ensure a majority in the legislative assembly by passing a resolution in favour of the abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status and its bifurcation into union territories

OMAR ABDULLAH | NATIONAL CONFERENCE LEADER

People are here for experiment. They want to conduct experiment of their own (political) parties in Goa. But Goans are wise enough to understand all this. Goans know who will be with them and who will fly away after the election

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | BJP LEADER

SHORT TAKES

Parliament passes Surrogacy Bill

New Delhi: Parliament passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2019 Friday, with Lok Sabha passing it with voice vote amid a protest by opposition members demanding the removal of Ajay Mishra as Union minister in connection with the Lakhimpur Kheri violence. Last week, Rajya Sabha passed the bill after amendments, and returned it to Lok Sabha on December 14. The bill aims to constitute a National Surrogacy Board and state surrogacy boards, and appoint appropriate authorities for regulation of the practice and process of surrogacy.

3 students killed

Chennai: Three students were killed and three others grievously injured after a bathroom wall of a Government school in Tirunelveli collapsed Friday. According to police, the incident took place at 11.30 a.m. in the school located next to the Tirunelveli corporation office building. Police and fire force rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation.

Woman fined ₹8L for feeding dogs



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thane, Dec 17: A woman living in a housing complex in Navi Mumbai has alleged that the management committee of her residential society has imposed a fine of over ₹8 lakh on her for feeding stray dogs inside the premises.

The management committee of the NRI Complex, which comprises over 40 buildings, has imposed the fine. Talking to media, Anshu Singh said that the housing society imposes ₹5,000 per day fine on those found feeding the stray dogs inside the complex. "It is imposed as littering charges. My cumulative fine amount till now is over ₹8 lakh." The society's managing committee took a decision to fine those found feeding the canines inside the premises. This practice

started in July 2021, she said, adding that a number of stray dogs are found roaming inside the complex. The cumulative fine amount imposed on another resident is ₹6 lakh, she added. Another resident, Leela Varma, said that the society watchmen follow those members who are feeding the dogs and note down their names. It is then reported to the managing committee, which in turn calculates the fine. However, Vinata Srinandan, secretary of the housing complex, told the media that children run after the stray dogs while going for tuition and senior citizens cannot move freely due to the fear. "Then there are issues related to cleanliness and hygiene as these dogs soil the parking space and other areas and create a nuisance. The residents cannot sleep properly at night as the dogs keep howling throughout," she said. The housing society has created an enclosure for dogs, but some of the members still feed these animals in the open, she alleged.

OMICRON SCARE

Avoid unnecessary travel, says govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: India's Omicron COVID count crossed the 100 mark Friday after recording the highest single day rise of 24 fresh cases of the new variant, even as the Centre advised people to avoid non-essential travel and mass gatherings and keep New Year celebrations at low intensity. As the Omicron tally from 11 states and union territories stood at 111 exactly 15 days after the first case of the potentially more contagious COVID variant was detected in Karnataka, 20 new cases were reported from Maharashtra (8) and Delhi (12) to take their total to 40 and 22 respectively. Telangana and Kerala recorded two more cases each to take their tally to eight and seven respectively. The Centre also warned it is likely that the spread of the new variant will outpace the Delta variant where there is community transmission. Addressing a joint news conference in Delhi, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Health Law Agarwal said though daily COVID-19 cases are below 10,000 for the past 20 days, there is a need to stay vigilant in view of the new Omicron variant and rising cases in other countries. According to Central and state officials, Maharashtra has reported

40 cases, Delhi (22), Rajasthan (17), Karnataka (8), Telangana (8), Gujarat (5), Kerala (7), Andhra Pradesh (1), Chandigarh (1), Tamil Nadu (1) and West Bengal (1). While the country's first two cases of the Omicron variant were detected in Karnataka on December 2, this heavily mutated version of the coronavirus was first reported in South Africa on November 24. "As Omicron variant is spreading very fast across Europe and most parts of the world so need to avoid nonessential travel, avoid mass gatherings and it is time to observe low intensity festivities and ushering in New Year celebrations has to be at low intensity," said ICMR Director General Dr Balram Bhargava. Those districts which have more than 5 per cent positivity rate need to ensure restrictive measures until the test positivity rate comes below 5 per cent for at least 2 weeks, he stressed. Citing the World Health Organization (WHO), Agarwal said the Omicron variant is spreading faster than the Delta variant of the coronavirus in South Africa, where Delta circulation was slow. It is likely that Omicron spread will outpace Delta variant where community transmission occurs, he said quoting the WHO. Quoting the WHO DG, Agarwal said "Omicron is spreading at a rate we have not



seen with any previous variant. We are concerned that people are dismissing Omicron as mild." In response to a question on whether we are in community transmission of Omicron, Agarwal said, "We cannot at this point say that Omicron variant is widespread in India." He said most cases of Omicron have a travel history, or have contacts with travel histories. On a limited basis, there are one or two cases in which we have not been able to establish any such history but the process is still on to identify if there has been any travel or contact histories, he added. Agarwal said the sheer number of cases could once again overwhelm unprepared health systems. "Vaccines alone will not get any country out of this crisis. Masks, physical distancing, ventilation and hand hygiene should be followed along with vaccines. In most countries, those being hospitalized and dying are those who have not been vaccinated. So, the priority must be to vaccinate the unvaccinated, even in countries with the most access to vaccines." Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said 10 of the 22 COVID patients infected by the Omicron variant have been discharged. The minister had on Thursday said many international travellers are turning out COVID positive upon arrival at the Indira Gandhi International Airport.

K'taka Congress MLA apologises



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore/New Delhi, Dec 17: Karnataka Congress MLA K Ramesh Kumar's "enjoy rape if it is inevitable" remarks caused a furore Friday, with the BJP, the National Commission for Women (NCW) and some women Congress MLAs taking umbrage to the statement made on the floor of the Assembly, even as the former Speaker apologised for the comment. The BJP in New Delhi targeted top Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra over their party colleague's controversial remarks, questioning their silence on the matter. During an Assembly debate on

floods and related damages in the Karnataka Assembly on Thursday, many MLAs wanted to highlight the plight of women in their constituencies and Speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri, laughing, had said he had to say "yes, yes" for everyone, give up controlling the situation and take the proceedings in a systematic manner and that he should tell everyone to continue their talk. He explained that his only grievance is that the business of the House was not happening. Kumar had then intervened and said, "see, there is a saying- when rape is inevitable, lie down and enjoy it. That's exactly the position in which you are," remarks that prompted widespread criticism against him.

On Friday, Kumar told the House he made a statement on the floor of the Assembly on December 16, which people found outrageous. "However, my intention was never to demean the prestige of this House or behave in an inferior way. I will not defend myself. I tender my sincere apology for my utterance during the proceedings of the House if it has hurt people from any part of the country," he said. He also apologised to the Speaker for his statement, which made him laugh and thereby attracted him criticism. The Speaker accepted Kumar's apology and appealed to the members, especially women MLAs, not to drag the matter further and make it (a) big (issue) and proceeded with the Question Hour though some women legislators wanted to raise the matter. Earlier, Kumar in a tweet said, "I would like to express my sincere apologies to everyone for the indifferent and negligent comment I made in today's assembly about 'Rape! My intention was not to trivialise or make light of the heinous crime, but an off the cuff remark! I will choose my words carefully henceforth!" The former minister came under fire from various quarters including the MLAs from his own party for his statement.

Miss World 2021 event postponed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai/San Juan, Dec 17: The Miss World 2021 pageant finale has been "temporarily postponed" after several contestants, including India's Manasa Varanasi, tested positive for coronavirus, according to organisers. The organisers posted a statement on the official social media pages of Miss World and said the finale, which was scheduled to be at Coliseum Jose Miguel Agrelot in San

Juan, Puerto Rico, on Thursday (December 16), will now take place after 90 days. "After meeting with the virologists and medical experts hired to oversee the Miss World 2021 event and discussing with the Puerto Rico Health Department, the decision has been made by the organizers of the event to postpone the globally broadcast finale at the Puerto Rico Coliseum Jose Miguel Agrelot to be held within the next 90 days," the statement read.

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EAST COAST RAILWAY

File No. DRM/Egg/KUR/21-22/
E-Tender/83, Dt. 15.12.2021
(1) Tender No. e-tender-CEN-KUR-219-2021, Date: 10.12.2021
Description: PROPOSED ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT FOR 3 YEARS DURATION FOR MAINTENANCE OF TRACK OF MAHANADI COALFIELD LIMITED SIDING CONNECTING LINGARAJ SILO WITH CAPTIVE LINE (TALCHER NATIONAL THERMAL POWER CORPORATION) AND RAIL CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN DEULBERA SIDING WITH LINGARAJ SILO AND DB-2 SIDING AT LINGARAJ OF TALCHER COALFIELDS UNDER DEPOSIT SCHEME.
Approx cost of the work: ₹444.00 lakhs
(2) Tender No. e-tender-CEN-KUR-221-2021, Date: 10.12.2021
Description: PROPOSED REBUILDING OF BRIDGE NO. 580 AT SOUTH END OF BHUBANESWAR YARD BY MICRO TUNNELING SYSTEM OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹290.84 lakhs
Completion Period: 36 (Thirty Six) Months (for sl. no. 1) & 18 (Eighteen) Months (for sl. no. 2)
Date & time of Tender Closing: 31.12.2021, 1500 hrs (For both tender)
No manual offers sent by Post/ Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-Tenders, even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-Tenders is available in website <http://www.irgs.gov.in>
Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 10 (ten) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigendum issued for this tender.
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.)
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Khurda Road

Government of Odisha
Office of the Executive Engineer
Rural Works Division-II, Nabarangpur, Umerkote
e-mail: eerwukt@gmail.com & eerwukt@ymail.com
Date: 15.12.2021

Letter No.3859
No.O-1366-
e-Procurement Notice
1. Name of the work: Composite Building Work as per TCN. 2. Total No. of works: 01 (One) Nos. 3. Approx. estimated cost: Approx 57.76 lakhs. 4. Class of contractor : 'A' & 'B' Class of contractor. 5. Period of completion: As per TCN.

Procurement officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding		Last date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & time of opening of tender
		From	To		
Executive Engineer, R.W. Division-II, Nabarangpur, Umerkote	Online Tender / 10/RWD-UKT / 2021-22	16.12.2021 at 11.00 A.M.	23.12.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.	22.12.2021 at 01.00 P.M.	24.12.2021 at 11.00 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the Government website www.tendersodisha.gov.in
Sd./- Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Nabarangpur, Umerkote
OIPR-25103/11/0010/2122

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
Office of the Superintending Engineer
Kanupur Rehabilitation, Camps & Building Division, At/P.O. - Basudevpur, Dist.- Keonjhar, PIN-758047
e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
No.A-749-
Bid Identification No. SE, KRC & BD-08/2021-22
Email- eekrcbdbasudevpur@gmail.com

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approx. value of work (Rs. in Lakh)	E.M.D. / Bid Security declaration	Cost of bid document in Rs. (To be remitted online)	Period of completion	Class of contractor	Name & address of the Division under which the work will be executed
01	"Renovation of PD Office of Kanupur Irrigation Project at Basudevpur"	10.38	Nil / Bid Security declaration	6,000.00	06 (Six) calendar months	D & C	Kanupur Reh. Camps & Building Division, At/ P.O.- Basudevpur, Dist.- Keonjhar

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding		Date & time of opening of tender	Place of opening
		From	To		
Superintending Engineer, Kanupur Reh. C. & B. Division, Basudevpur, Dist.- Keonjhar	SE, KRC & BD-08/2021-22	20.12.21 from 10.00 hours	29.12.21 upto 17.00 hours	30.12.21 11.00 hours	Office of the F.A. & C.A.O. Kanupur Irrigation Project, Keonjhar

OIPR-32053/11/0011/2122
Sd./- Superintending Engineer, Kanupur Reh., C. & B. Division, Basudevpur

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, BHUBANESWAR
Ph. No.: 0674-2301787, Fax No.: 0674-2300965, E-Mail ID: eerw_bbsr@yahoo.co.in
No.- Tender Online-BBSR Divn.-53
Date: 16.12.2021

e-Procurement Notice

- Name of the work : Repair/Maintenance of road works
- Total No. of Roads : 1 No. of Road
- Class of contractor :
 - Estimated Cost more than Rs.40.00 lakhs & not exceeding to Rs. 1.50 Crore : "A" & "B" Class (of Odisha PWD) or relevant Class of other licensing authorities.
 - Estimated Cost more than Rs. 20.00 lakhs & not exceeding to Rs. 40.00 lakhs. : "B" & "C" Class (of Odisha PWD) or relevant Class of other licensing authorities.
 - Estimated Cost not exceeding to Rs. 20.00 lakhs : "C" & "D" Class (of Odisha PWD) or relevant Class of other licensing authorities.
- Estimated cost of individuals projects : Rs.38.25 lakh
- Time for Completion : 2 (Two) Calendar months
- Other details.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender Online for bidding		Date & time of opening of tender
		From	To	
Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division, Bhubaneswar	Tender Online - BBSR Divn.- 53	18.12.2021 at 11.00 A.M.	24.12.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.	25.12.2021 at 11.00 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the website: www.tendersorissa.gov.in.
Sd./- Executive Engineer, Rural Works Divn., BBSR
OIPR-25066/11/0035/2122

ODISHA LIFT IRRIGATION CORPORATION LTD.
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, LIFT IRRIGATION DIVISION, BOUDH
e-mail id: eoolicboudh@gmail.com

'e' Procurement Notice
No. 1231
Bid Identification No. OLIC-BOUDH-05/2021-22
Date: 16.12.2021

The Executive Engineer, Lift Irrigation Division, Boudh on behalf of OLIC invites Percentage Rate bids in the Single Cover System to be received in Online Mode only for the work Installation and Energisation of 60 Nos. New Lift Irrigation Projects under Kantamal Blocks in Boudh District as detailed in the table below. The bid should be submitted by the eligible class of contractors as mentioned below registered with the State Government and contractors of equivalent grade/class registered with Central Government/ M.E.S./Railways/C.P.W.D. for execution of Civil works with valid Electrical (H.T.) Licence issued by ELBO, Odisha through Online in the Govt. website www.tendersodisha.gov.in. The bidders should have necessary portal enrollment (with own digital signature certificate). The registered bidders from outside Odisha can also participate in this online tender process after necessary portal enrollment but shall have to subsequently undergo registration with appropriate authority of the State.

1. Name of the Works: Installation & Energisation of River Lift Irrigation Projects - 60 Nos. with supply of all materials on Turnkey Basis. 2. Total Nos of Package: 60. 3. Approximate Estimated Cost: Rs.22.63 lakhs to Rs.31.46 lakhs. 4. Class of Contractor: As mentioned against each package. 5. Period of Completion: 120 days for all projects from the date of issue of work order. 6. Other details as follows:

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding		Last date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & time of opening of tender in the Office of the Executive Engineer, L.I. Division, Boudh
		From	To		
Executive Engineer, L.I. Division, Boudh	OLIC/Boudh/05/2021-22	18.12.2021 at 11.00 hrs.	24.12.2021 at 17.00 hrs.	22.12.2021 at 17.00 hrs.	27.12.2021 at 11.00 hrs.

• Details can be seen from the website www.tenderodisha.gov.in.
• Any Corrigendum/Addendum will be displayed in the above website only.
Sd./- Executive Engineer, L.I. Division, Boudh

Furious protest calls for non-cooperation

Friday's gathering was significant because it signals a steady escalation of the Naga people's outrage

AGENCIES

Kohima, Dec 17: Furious protests over the killing of 14 civilians in Nagaland's remote Mon district earlier this month - during and after an Army counter-insurgency operation that went horrifically wrong - protests have now spread to state capital Kohima.

The influential Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has organised a massive rally in the city, which has seen thousands take to the streets to demand justice for those who died and the repeal of the controversial AFSPA, or Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Protesters stood with banners and placards that read "how many times must bullets be fired before repealing AFSPA", "AFSPA rears devil in the Indian armies" and "ban AFSPA, not our voice".

Friday's gathering was significant not just because it is the third straight day of protests, but also because it signals a steady escalation of the Naga people's outrage.

What began as a non-cooperation movement by the Konyak Union (the Konyak Naga tribe's top body) in Mon Wednesday, with the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation



Locals stage a protest demanding repeal of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Kohima, Friday

PTI PHOTO

taking up the fight Thursday.

The ENPO, like the Konyak Union, resolved to "abstain from any national celebrations", promised "non-participation in Army civic programmes" and said it would not allow recruitment drives in the area.

Thursday those protests in the eastern part of the state intensified - there was a dawn-to-dusk bandh in Mon district, government and private offices were shut, and vehicular traffic disrupted.

Apart from Mon district, protests hit Kiphire, Tuensang, Noklak, and Longleng districts in the eastern part of the state, where shops were shuttered and angry residents flooded streets.

Protests across the state have highlighted the immediate arrest

of the soldiers involved in the botched Army op as one of their demands. They have also demanded Home Minister Amit Shah withdraw a "false" and "fabricated" statement given in Parliament December 6.

Shah had said the Army unit opened fire because the truck carrying the villagers accelerated when ordered to stop. The soldiers, suspecting insurgent activity, opened fire, he said. The comments triggered more furious protests in Mon, where people burned effigies of Shah.

Either way, in the initial burst of murderous fire, six villagers were killed.

No arms or ammunition were recovered from them, or from the truck, and all those in the vehicle

were found to be coal miners. In violence over the next 48 hours, eight more villagers and a soldier died. The Army has expressed its regret over the killings and an internal investigation, led by an officer of Major-General rank, is underway, while the soldiers involved face a murder case filed by the police.

The killings have refocused the spotlight on AFSPA, which gives sweeping powers to military personnel in "disturbed regions". Protesters fear it will be invoked to protect soldiers involved.

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad Sangma have led calls for AFSPA to be repealed, both in their respective states and across the northeast.

NAGALAND KILLINGS

PEGASUS ROW

Setback for Mamata as SC stays Lokur panel probe

THE SC HAS ALSO ISSUED A NOTICE TO THE JUSTICE LOKUR COMMISSION, SEEKING A RESPONSE TO THE PLEA FILED BY THE NGO, GLOBAL VILLAGE FOUNDATION



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: The Supreme Court Friday ordered a stay on the inquiry into the Pegasus snooping case by the Justice Lokur Commission set up by the West Bengal government.

The Supreme Court bench, led by CJI NV Ramana, said that it was not happy with the constitution of the commission when the top court had ordered an inquiry by an independent committee. The SC was hearing a petition by an NGO that had earlier challenged the inquiry commission set up by the West Bengal government.

In October, the Supreme Court formed an expert committee to probe the Pegasus snooping row. While hearing the case, the Supreme Court said indiscriminate spying on individuals cannot be allowed.

The Mamata Banerjee-led

In October, the Supreme Court formed an expert committee to probe the Pegasus snooping row

Bengal government had set up the two-member panel headed by former SC Justice MB Lokur to look into the allegations of illegal surveillance using Israeli spyware Pegasus.

The SC has also issued a notice to the commission, seeking a response to the plea filed by the NGO, Global Village Foundation.

CJI Ramana, while hearing the petition, told the Bengal government's counsel, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, "What's this? Last time you stated on record that we were

not doing anything. Now, you started the proceedings."

To this, Singhvi replied: "I had said the state government does not control the commission. We had conveyed to the commission not to do anything till the judgment from SC comes out. The commission did not do anything till after the judgment was passed by this court."

Several reports by an international media consortium alleged that over 300 verified mobile phone numbers, including of two ministers, over 40 journalists, three opposition leaders, activists and one sitting judge in India could have been targeted for hacking through Israeli spyware Pegasus.

The Opposition has accused the Centre of not being transparent on the issue and demanded clarification on if the spyware was used to snoop on Indians.

STUDENT CREDIT SCHEME

Bengal asks banks to redress complaints

OVER 1,20,000 APPLICATIONS HAVE BEEN SUBMITTED UNDER THE INITIATIVE TILL MONDAY, AND OF THEM, 50,000 HAVE BEEN SENT TO BANKS FOR APPROVAL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Dec 17: The West Bengal government has asked banks to address students' complaints as they alleged that lenders are "harassing" them while processing loans under a state-run scheme, an official said Friday.

They accused several banks of "cancelling applications or delaying the processing of loans" under the Student Credit Card programme, he said.

Over 1,20,000 applications have been submitted under the initiative till Monday, and of them, 50,000 have been sent to banks for approval, the official said.

"Banks have so far accepted around 6,000 applications. Not only

that, some applications were rejected and returned to the district administrations. Chief Secretary HK Dwivedi has already directed officials to form a committee in each district to deal with the issue," the official said.

Students also alleged that lenders are "seeking information which is not required" to extend advances under the programme, he said.

The Chief Secretary had Wednesday held a meeting with officials of the state education department, district administrations and banks to address the issue.

"The higher education department has asked lenders not to harass students who are seeking loans under the Student Credit Card scheme. Bankers have also been requested to ensure that poor meritorious students are not deprived of it," the official said.

The state government had, in September, asked district magistrates to address students' complaints against private banks for allegedly seeking collateral from their parents in lieu of extending loans under the programme.

"The banks were directed to take necessary steps to give priority to poor students," he said.

KMC POLLS

TMC looks to maintain winning streak

Families of TMC leaders in candidate list; BJP lacks local faces, organisational strength

Kolkata, Dec 17: Close on the heels of the no-holds-barred Assembly elections of this year and the prestigious Bhabanipur by-poll that had Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee as candidate, West Bengal is headed for another high-stakes battle: for control of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

The Trinamool Congress is looking to retain its winning streak in the state in the December 19 election, particularly as the BJP is still reeling from the scale of its Assembly poll defeat, and the defections from its ranks to the TMC since.

However, unlike the 2019 Lok Sabha or this year's Assembly polls, the KMC elections will not be just a two-way contest. In fact, the CPM and Congress, which fought together in the Assembly polls and didn't win a single seat, may enjoy an edge over the BJP here because of the traditional support for the two parties at the grassroots level, especially in cities and towns. Despite the major strides it has made in the state where it had no presence, the BJP does not have a strong local face or organisational strength.



TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee with party candidates during a road show as part of party's campaign for the upcoming Kolkata Municipal Corporation elections, in Kolkata, Friday

PTI PHOTO

The TMC first won the KMC elections in 2010, even before it had come to power in the state in 2011, dislodging the Left Front. It won 95 of the 141 wards.

In 2015, the TMC retained the civic body, winning 124 of the 144 wards (the KMC strength was increased by then). The CPM won 13 and Congress 2. The BJP, a new entrant at the time after the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, surprised everyone by winning 5 wards.

The next election to the KMC was due in 2020, but was postponed

in view of Covid.

For Sunday's election, the TMC has dropped 39 sitting councillors but retained its heavyweight leaders, including former mayor Firhad Hakim, former deputy mayor Atin Ghosh, MLAs Debashis Kumar, Debabrata Mazumdar, Ratna Chatterjee and Pares Pal, and MP Mala Roy. Mamata Banerjee's sister-in-law Kajari Banerjee is a TMC candidate from Ward No. 73 in Bhawanipore, thus becoming the third member of the party to get a party ticket for polls.

8,640 arms deposited in Manipur ahead of polls

AN OFFICIAL OF THE MANIPUR GOVERNMENT SAID THAT THERE ARE AROUND 25,300 LICENSED ARMS IN MANIPUR

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Imphal, Dec 17: Responding to the instructions of the authorities, as many as 8,648 arms of various natures were deposited in Manipur ahead of the Assembly elections, likely to be held in February-March next year, an official said Friday.

An official of the Manipur government said that there are around 25,300 licensed arms in Manipur and the government is expecting that all the arms owners would deposit their arms in the nearest police stations at the earliest to prevent pre-poll violence. A Manipur Home Department official said that district magistrates of all the 16 districts recently issued separate notifications, asking people to deposit their arms immediately in the nearest police stations.

"Those who do not deposit their arms and ammunition, the licensee

is liable to be punished for violation of state government instructions under the relevant provisions of the Arms Act, 1959, read with Arms Rules 2016," the official said, quoting the notification.

In the past one month, many people were injured, including some with bullet wounds, in several incidents of violence as various political parties undertook campaigning in different parts of the northeastern state.

Unidentified miscreants detonated two powerful bombs in Imphal East District recently though none was injured as both the explosions took place early in the morning.

Security forces, including the Army and Assam Rifles, are on high alert in Manipur after a series of incidents, including the deadliest terror attack November 13 in which Assam Rifles Colonel Viplav Tripathi and four jawans of the para-military force were gunned down in Churachandpur district bordering Myanmar.

Colonel Tripathi's wife and their nine-year-old son were also killed in the ambush.

Elections to the 60-seat Manipur Assembly are likely to be held in February-March next year along with polls in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand and Goa.

It's high time AFSPA is repealed from NE: Irom Sharmila

IN THE NORTHEAST, AFSPA IS IN FORCE IN ASSAM, NAGALAND, MANIPUR (EXCLUDING IMPHAL MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AREA) AND SOME DISTRICTS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH BORDERING ASSAM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Dec 17: Rights activist Irom Sharmila, who was on a 16-year hunger strike against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), feels the recent killing of civilians in firing by security forces in Nagaland should be an eye-opener to repeal the controversial security law from the northeast.

Sharmila said the AFSPA is not only an oppressive regulation, it tantamounts to gross violation of the basic human rights.

The AFSPA empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without prior warrant. In the northeast, it is in force in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur (excluding Imphal Municipal Council Area) and some districts of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Assam.

"The Nagaland incident has once again shown why the draconian AFSPA should be with-

drawn from the northeast. It should be an eye-opener: Human lives are not so cheap.

"For how long will the people of the region suffer because of it? In the name of battling insurgency, you can't take away people's basic rights. There are other ways to tackle it," Sharmila, who ended her marathon hunger strike in 2016, told this news agency in a telephonic interview.

At least 14 civilians and a soldier were killed in a botched anti-insurgency operation and retaliatory violence on December 4 and the following day in Nagaland's Mon district.

"After the passing of the Act in 1958 and subsequent implementation in the northeast, did it achieve the desired purpose? If not, what is the use of thrusting it on the masses? It's high time the Centre and state governments sit together and take a relook at AFSPA," she said.



Critics maintain that the AFSPA has failed to control insurgency despite giving armed forces powers to act with impunity, sometimes leading to human rights violations.

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma have also demanded that the law be repealed. Asked if its withdrawal from

The AFSPA empowers security forces to conduct operations anywhere and arrest anyone without prior warrant

the northeast would worsen the law and order situation in the area, Sharmila replied in the negative.

"There are other ways to tackle insurgency. In Chhattisgarh, there have been several Maoist incidents; so did the government impose AFSPA there? The answer is no. The security forces are tackling it in that state, and they have been successful. The same can be done in the northeast," she said.

Claiming that people from the northeast have to face discriminatory treatment in other parts of the country, Sharmila, who un-

successfully contested the 2017 Manipur Assembly elections, said the "rampant violation of human rights in the name of AFSPA stems from that discrimination".

"We are harassed and humiliated... You have to change your mindset and treat the people of this part of India as your own," she said.

The 'Iron lady of Manipur' also said she has realised that her lengthy hunger strike did not achieve its purpose.

"All my life, I believed in the Gandhian principles of non-violence. My fast was a non-violent way of registering my protest and press for the people's demand. But after 16 years, when I ended my hunger strike, a lot of people misunderstood me. It failed to accomplish any purpose," she said.

Sharmila said she has nothing against the armed forces, but politics and political parties have failed the people of the Northeast.

Assam: KDLF chief Jackson Ronghang gunned down

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

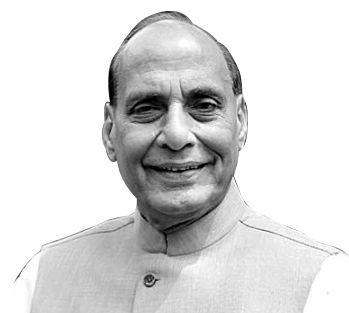
Diphu (Assam), Dec 17: Jackson Ronghang, the self-styled chairman of newly formed insurgent outfit Karbi Democratic Liberation Front (KDLF), which was allegedly involved in the recent abduction of three construction workers, was killed in an encounter with the police in Assam's Karbi Anglong district Friday, a senior officer said.

Additional Superintendent of Police Prakash Sonowal said that one person, identified as Amarjyoti Terang, was recently arrested from Rongmonwey in connection with the kidnapping of three workers from the construction site of a bridge in the village December 10.

Following his interrogation, three persons suspected to have been involved in the abduction were identified and one of the hostages was rescued, while the remaining two construction workers are yet to be traced, he said.

Acting on a tip-off about the presence of Ronghang in jungles near the village, police launched a search operation in the area, Sonowal said.

national



Roads and buildings in defence cantonment boards that are named after British soldiers and officers should be renamed after brave Indian soldiers and makers of modern India
RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

BHUTAN HONOURS MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday thanked Bhutan's king for according the country's highest civilian decoration on him, and said India will always cherish the country as one of its closest friends and neighbours and will continue to support its development journey in every possible way



of the day quote

Recognising the necessity of facilitating travel especially of workers, professionals, students, business people, tourists and those with families abroad has been a focal point of our diplomacy in recent months

As elected representatives, you too are responsible for fulfilling this mission of 'TB Mukh Bharat' by 2025. I encourage MPs, MLAs and gram pradhans to take regular district and sub-district level reviews to ensure a gender-sensitive approach to TB eradication

Various issues relating to trans-border rivers are discussed with China under the ambit of the institutionalized expert-level mechanism as well as through diplomatic channels

SHORT TAKES

Factory blast toll rises

Ahmedabad: With the recovery of one more body Friday, the death toll in a deadly blast-and-fire incident at a chemical plant in Panchmahal district of Gujarat increased to six, a senior government official said. A team of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) has been called in to clear the debris and search for another worker who was missing, said district collector Sujal Mayatra. Five workers were killed and 16 others injured in a huge explosion and subsequent fire at a plant of Gujarat Fluorochemicals Limited (GFL) situated near Ranjitnagar in Ghoghamba tehsil on Thursday morning.

3 teenagers thrashed in UP

Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh): Three teenagers were caught by locals, tied to a tree and thrashed for several hours as 'punishment' for allegedly molesting girls in the locality. The boys, all 19 years old, remained tied to the tree and were beaten for several hours until they were rescued by the police. The incident took place on Wednesday night, but the matter came to light on Thursday when one of the girls' father lodged a police complaint.

Man sentenced to death

Gandhinagar: A special court in Surat on Thursday awarded death sentence to a 24-year-old man convicted for the rape and murder of a 10-year-old girl in the Pandesara area in 2020 under the Protection of Children for Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act. Earlier, the Surat city police had filed the chargesheet in a record time of 13 days, following which the court ordered, Dinesh Dashrath Besane, the convict, to pay ₹15 lakh as compensation to the victim's family.

Six arrested

Ahmedabad: Gujarat police have arrested six persons allegedly involved in leaking a question paper of an exam held recently in the state for the recruitment of government head clerks, a minister said Friday. The written exam for the recruitment of 186 head clerks was held at different centres across the state on December 12 by the Gujarat Subordinate Service Selection Board (GSSSB), with nearly 88,000 aspirants appearing for the test.

Delhi riots: SC gives 3 months to HC on FIR against BJP leaders

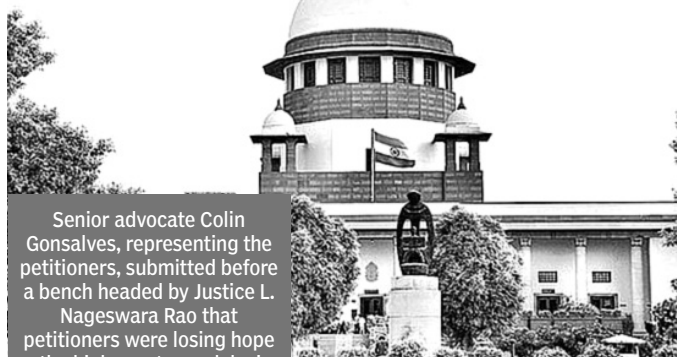
INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 17: The Supreme Court Friday asked the Delhi High Court to expeditiously decide, preferably within three months, a plea seeking registration of FIR against BJP leaders Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma, and Abhay Verma, for allegedly making hateful comments to incite during the last year's Delhi riots.

Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, representing the petitioners, submitted before a bench headed by Justice L. Nageswara Rao that petitioners were losing hope as the high court was delaying the proceedings, despite an earlier direction by the apex court to decide the matters in a time-bound manner. He added that in March last year, the apex court had asked the Delhi High Court to decide the matter in a time-bound manner.

The petitioners argued that there was a straightforward case for registration of FIR based on video evidence of speeches already in public domain. It was argued that the delay in deciding the matter is not justified. The counsel submitted before the bench that the hearing on their petition is yet to commence.

The bench replied that it can only ask the high court to hear



Senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, representing the petitioners, submitted before a bench headed by Justice L. Nageswara Rao that petitioners were losing hope as the high court was delaying the proceedings, despite an earlier direction by the apex court to decide the matters in a time-bound manner

this matter and that is the only relief, which it can grant. The counsel insisted on arguing the petition before the top court. The bench replied that it appreciated the counsel's concern and 'cannot do anything after the matter is sent back to the high court'. Gonsalves asked the top court to allocate the matter to another bench. However, the bench did not agree.

The bench said it is not inclined to entertain the petition filed under Article 32 of the Constitution and noted Gonsalves submissions that

no progress has been made on the petition, though this court directed the high court to decide the petition expeditiously.

The bench said: "We request the high court to decide the writ petition expeditiously, preferably within a period of three months." The top court was hearing a plea filed by Mohd. Nazim and others seeking FIR against Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma and Abay Verma for allegedly making hate speeches to incite people during the Delhi riots in 2020.

NEW CDS APPOINTMENT

List of probables to be submitted soon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: The government has started the process to appoint the next Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and a list of names based on recommendations from the three services will soon be submitted to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh for approval, officials said on Friday.

They said the government is finalising a panel comprising senior commanders from the Army, the Navy and the Air Force to choose the successor of Gen Bipin Rawat, who died in a helicopter crash near Coonoor last week.

The list is being finalised based on recommendations from the three services and it will soon be submitted to Singh for approval, two people familiar with the development said. Following the approval by the defence minister, the names will be sent for consideration by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet for taking the final decision to appoint a new CDS, they said.

It is learned that there is a strong possibility of appointing Army Chief Gen MM Naravane to the top post considering his overall experience. The Army Chief is due to retire in April. Gen Naravane is the senior-most among the three service chiefs.

IAF chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari and Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar had taken over their respective positions on September 30 and November 30.

'France can provide more Rafale jets'



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: France is ready to provide additional Rafale fighter jets to India if it requires, French Defence Minister Florence Parly said Friday while noting that the use of the same aircraft by the two strategic partners is a reflection of "real asset and strength" in their ties.

Parly, on a visit to India, also said that France is fully committed to supporting the 'Make in India' initiative and further integrating the Indian manufacturers into its global supply chains.

The French defence minister made the comments at an interactive session organised by Ananta Centre on India-France cooperation. "I am very happy that the Indian Air Force is satisfied with its Rafale and we are very proud that despite COVID, the 36 aircraft will be delivered on time according to the contract, it is a real achievement," she said in response to a question.

"Using the same aircraft is a real asset and strength. I am sure that there is room for new developments. We are ready to answer any additional needs of request that could be made by India," she said. The French embassy on Thursday said a total of 33 Rafale jets have already been delivered to India as per schedule despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

India had signed an inter-governmental agreement with France in September 2016 for the procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around ₹59,000 crore. The first batch of five Rafale jets, manufactured by French aerospace major Dassault Aviation, arrived in India on July 29 last year.

The French minister also referred to India's planned induction of a second aircraft carrier and indicated that France will be interested to supply the carrier-based jets. "We know that the aircraft

India had signed an inter-governmental agreement with France in September 2016 for the procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around ₹59,000 crore

carrier will soon be (there)... That aircraft are needed. We are open and ready to provide any other Rafale if this is India's decision," she said.

India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC) Vikrant is scheduled to be inducted into the Indian Navy by August next year. In her comments, Parly said France and India are both "viscerally committed" to national sovereignty and independence.

"I think that our industrial partnership is proof of that. France, more than any other country, understands the necessity of the Indian content. And we are fully committed to the 'Make in India' initiative, as well as to the further integration of Indian manufacturers into our global supply chains," she said.

Parly said 'Make in India' has been a reality for the French industry for several years, particularly for defence equipment such as submarines. Later, the French defence minister held wide-ranging talks with her Indian counterpart, Rajnath Singh, with a focus on further enhancing bilateral defence and security cooperation between the two countries. The defence and strategic ties between India and France have been on an upswing over the last few years.

It is learnt that France was pitching for starting negotiations for procurement of another batch of 36 Rafale jets by India.

SNOW FUN



Tourists visit Kufri following a fresh spell of snowfall near Shimla

PTI PHOTO

'TAMIL THAI VAZTHU' DECLARED STATE ANTHEM

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, Dec 17: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin Friday announced the "Tamil Thai Vazhthu" as the state anthem and all should stand up when it is being sung, said an official statement.

According to the statement, the anthem should be sung at the start of all functions in educational institutions, universities, state government offices and state government undertakings. However, the differently-abled persons have been exempted.

The DMK government has also ordered that instead of playing the recorded state anthem, it should be sung by those who are trained to sing the same. The government said it would encourage singing

of the anthem in private functions as well.

According to the government, time has come to codify the norms for singing it. Recently, the Madras High Court held that "Tamil Thai Vazhthu" is a prayer song and not an anthem and there is no order mandating people to stand when it is sung.

The court was deciding on a case filed after the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam Pontiff Vijayendra Saraswathi Swamigal did not stand up when the song was played resulting in a controversy. Notably, the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM) did not play the song during its convocation and the state government had written to the institute's Director Bhaskar Ramamurthi to play it at all its functions.

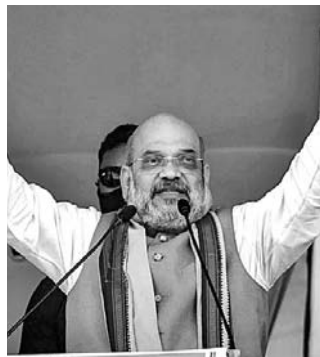
Shah asks Nishads to defeat SP, BSP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Dec 17: Union Home Minister Amit Shah Friday asked the Nishad community in Uttar Pradesh to ensure defeat for the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party and also make sure that the Congress does not open its account in the upcoming Assembly elections scheduled early next year.

"What have these parties done for you? Did they give you gas connection, water facilities and health cards? They ruled the state for years but did nothing for the backward and weaker sections of the society. They only worked for the welfare of their own families," Shah said while addressing the joint BJP-Nishad Party 'Sarkar Banao, Adhikar Pao' rally in Lucknow.

The rally was the first event after the BJP announced its al-



liance with the Nishad Party. Shah said that people gave majority to the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

He said that while other parties worked in self-interest, Modi worked for all with his concept of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas.

The rally was the first event after the BJP announced its alliance with the Nishad Party

He said that for the Nishad community, Modi had set up a separate fisheries ministry that has a budget of ₹3,000 crore.

"In 2019, the Nishad party was with us in the alliance. During that time world's biggest alliance of 'Babua and Bua' (read Akhilesh and Mayawati) was formed but we defeated them and got a huge majority. We are together again and you must give us more than 300 seats in Uttar Pradesh," he said.

Lauding Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, he said the CM is promoting fish farming in a big way. "Yogi government has reined in mafia and goondas.

The Chief Minister's Covid management has been the best and he has driven away the virus from here," said Shah.

In a surprise move, Shah praised Deputy CM Keshav Maurya and said that "we must not forget that when Maurya was state unit president, the BJP had won more than 300 seats". However, contrary to the popular expectations, Shah did not utter a word about reservation for Nishad community under the Scheduled Caste category.

Sanjay Nishad and other Nishad leaders have been demanding reservation since long, but Shah did not say anything on the issue. The votes of the Nishad community are expected to be decisive in around 160 Assembly constituencies in eastern and central Uttar Pradesh.

A total of 18 districts in Uttar Pradesh have a sizeable population of Nishad community.

UP Assembly polls: Shivpal wants 20 seats

ACCORDING TO SOURCES, SHIVPAL HAS ASKED FOR 20 SEATS WHILE THE SP IS IN A MOOD TO PART WITH ONLY FIVE

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Dec 17: Hours after Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav and Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party Lohia (PSPL) chief Shivpal Singh Yadav met and decided on an alliance for the upcoming UP elections, reports of seat sharing between the two have also started emerging.

According to sources, Shivpal has asked for 20 seats while the SP is in a mood to part with only five. "This is not going to be a major issue because Shivpal is even ready to let his candidates contest on SP symbol and this is acceptable to



Akhilesh. Winnability is the main issue for both the leaders," said a

SP leader who shares a good rapport with the two.

PSPL chief spokesperson Deepak Mishra said Shivpal's priority is to ensure BJP's defeat in the upcoming polls and Thursday's meeting was a step towards that. Seat sharing formula should not be a problem as both the parties have the common and only objective of defeating the communal forces.

Immediately after meeting Akhilesh, Shivpal Yadav had apprised him of the details of the meeting. Sources in SP said Akhilesh would be willing to let Shivpal and his aides contest the Assembly elections on SP symbol. "This does not necessarily mean that Shivpal Yadav's PSPL will

have to merge with the SP formally. At the same time, this does not mean that anyone in SP is opposed to the possibility of PSPL formally merging with SP," said a leader.

Meanwhile, it is evident that the meeting between Akhilesh and Shivpal has sent a sense of relief between their respective cadres. SP leaders crowded around Shivpal Yadav at a wedding function on Thursday night and chatted with him. "There is definitely a sense of relief because we have worked with both the leaders for years. We are happy that differences have been sorted out and there is new hope

in the party. No one can stop us from coming back to power now," said a senior SP leader.

The meeting between Akhilesh and Shivpal on Thursday ended a five-year-old family feud that had led to a split in SP with Shivpal floating his own party-the PSPL. This was the first occasion when Akhilesh formally visited Shivpal's home since the uncle-nephew battle that began before the 2017 Assembly elections and spelt a humiliating defeat for SP. In between, SP allied with Congress in 2017 and with BSP in 2019 but the party could not regain its lost glory.

international



Bangladesh has a special place in the hearts of Indians. Ours is a uniquely close relationship based on age-old ties of kinship, shared language and culture
RAM NATH KOVIND | PRESIDENT OF INDIA

GOOD NEWS

A drug used by ancient Greeks to treat gout may have the potential to reduce the risk of death from Covid by as much as 50%, claims a new study. The drug Colchicine is derived from the Colchicum family of plants, which was first used for its special healing properties by the ancient Greeks



of the day quote

We have a serious governance problem with respect to the prevention, detection and response to pandemics. And we have a serious governance problem in relation to the international financial system
ANTONIO GUTERRES | UN SECRETARY GENERAL

A productive and just multilateral action can be deployed to protect people's health and that Italy supports an approach based on solidarity and cooperation in the fight against the Covid-19 infection
SERGIO MATTARELLA | ITALIAN PRESIDENT

We are not talking about shutting down the whole country as we did last year to contain the spread of the coronavirus
METTE FREDERIKSEN | PM OF DENMARK

SHORT TAKES

Burns new US envoy to China

Washington: The US Senate has confirmed President Joe Biden's nomination of Nicholas Burns as the new Ambassador to China. The Senate voted 75-18 to confirm Burns, 65, a career diplomat who has served under both Democratic and Republican Presidents.

Japan may continue tough border curbs

Tokyo: The Japanese government might continue its tough border restrictions next month and a plan to promote the third vaccination shot due to fears over the global spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19, local media reported Friday. The government was striving to gather epidemiological knowledge about the Omicron variant but have yet to fully grasp the situation so far, a government official told a meeting of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party Friday, adding that the government has to brace for the possible spread of infections.

2 killed, 20 rescued from flooded mine

Beijing: Two workers were found dead and 20 others were rescued from a flooded coal mine in China's Shanxi Province Friday. The workers were trapped underground for more than 30 hours. The accident took place Wednesday at the quarry in Duxigou Village, Xiaoyi City. Illegal mining was blamed for the accident, according to a preliminary investigation, state-run Xinhua News Agency reported.

Lanka to grow more coconuts

Colombo: The Sri Lankan government has decided to provide 2.3 million coconut seedlings to the public next year to boost coconut growth, Plantations Minister Ramesh Pathirana said. Pathirana said that Sri Lanka's coconut industry had been a large foreign exchange earner in the export market over the years and the public sector alone was not enough to meet the coconut demand in the country, reports Xinhua news agency.

Happy b'day Pope

Rome: Pope Francis celebrated his 85th birthday Friday, a milestone made even more remarkable given the coronavirus pandemic, his summertime intestinal surgery and the weight of history: His predecessor retired at this age and the last pope to have lived any longer was Leo XIII over a century ago.

Despite Christmas truce, EU, UK still fight over Brexit deal

Brussels, Dec 17: One year after the Brexit trade deal was supposed to end acrimony between the European Union and the departed United Kingdom, both sides showed Friday that theirs is still a relationship tainted by bad blood and accusations of bad faith. They did postpone talks on their continued deep-seated differences into the New Year, a welcome respite since their trade negotiations last year slipped deep past countless deadlines and into Christmas Eve before an awkward compromise was found. But on a day when the

27-nation bloc was counting on some positive feedback for what it saw as a breakthrough proposal to regulate medicine trade in Northern Ireland — which is part of the United Kingdom but also part of the EU's trading system — it got a lukewarm response. Almost all other issues under discussion got a cold shoulder. In a 13-point statement rife with complaints about perceived EU foot-dragging, ill will and sleight-of-hand in Northern Ireland, UK Brexit negotiator David Frost concluded: "It is disappointing that it has not been possible to reach either a comprehensive or worth-

while interim agreement this year." His EU counterpart, Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic shot back from the bloc's Brussels headquarters that "if the UK would reciprocate our efforts, our energy and our ambition we bring to these discussions we could be much more advanced by now". Frost said that suspending parts of the Brexit agreement under the so-called Art 16 procedure was still very much on the cards. Experts say it would only be a small step from such a suspension to a full-blown trade war between the two sides. Making matters worse Friday, French authorities announced they will seek

EU legal action against Britain over a months-long, unresolved fishing dispute. The decision came after French President Emmanuel Macron met with a delegation of French fishers. That a tiny industry like fishing could claim such center stage in relations between the massive trade bloc and a historic ally only underscored the quick erosion of trust ever since Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016. Often a reluctant partner, even as an EU member, Britain finally agreed on a withdrawal deal, in which the compromise on Northern Ireland has proved unwieldy and impractical.

Northern Ireland is UK territory but effectively remained part of the EU's borderless trading market for goods when the UK left the bloc last year, causing practical problems for businesses and institutional wrangling over which side is in charge of what. The UK also is insisting the EU cedes final legal oversight by its top court of any disputes on Northern Ireland trade, and instead makes them subject to independent arbitration — something the 27-nation bloc is flatly rejecting. Governance in Northern Ireland, said Frost, "remains a fundamental issue of democratic accountability."

Angela Merkel's party chooses conservative Friedrich Merz as leader

Berlin, Dec 17: Members of Germany's biggest opposition party, the center-right Christian Democratic Union of former Chancellor Angela Merkel, chose prominent conservative Friedrich Merz as its new leader, the party said Friday. Merz, making his third run for the CDU's top post, won 62.1% support in a ballot of the party's membership, beating two centrist contenders. His share of the vote was easily enough to avoid a runoff ballot. Armin Laschet, the CDU's leader since January, is stepping down after leading the two-party Union bloc to its worst-ever election result in September. The bloc, which the CDU dominates, was narrowly beaten by the centre-left Social Democrats of new Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Merz, 66, has experience of being an opposition leader. He led the centre-right group in parliament from 2000 to 2002, when Merkel pushed him out of that job. He left parliament in 2009 and later practised as a lawyer and headed the supervisory board of investment manager BlackRock's German branch.

US reports 66 Indian-origin terrorists operating with IS

Washington, Dec 17: There were 66 known Indian-origin fighters affiliated with the global terrorist group Islamic State, the latest US State Department report on terrorism has said as it commended India's counterterrorism forces, including the NIA, for actively detecting and disrupting transnational and regional terror forces.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

Washington: Terrorist groups targeting India continued to operate from Pakistan and Islamabad did not take action against other known terrorists, including JEM founder and UN-designated terrorist Masood Azhar and the 2008 Mumbai attack "project manager" Sajid Mir, who remain free in that country, according to a latest report on terrorism by the US State Department. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in the 2020 Country Reports on Terrorism issued Thursday, said that regionally, terrorist groups continued to operate from Pakistan.

UNSCR 2309 and is enforcing compliance with the dual-screen X-ray mandate for cargo screening at airport locations. The UN Security Council Resolution 2309 calls governments to meet their responsibility to keep citizens secure while travelling by air. The report said that there were 66 known Indian-origin fighters affiliated with ISIS, as of November. No Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) were repatriated to India during 2020, it said. Highlighting the US-India cooperation, the report said that the United States continues to build its strategic partnership with the Government of India, including through bilateral engagements such as the 17th Counterterrorism Joint Working Group and Third Designations Dialogue in September, as well as the third 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in

October. It also commended the Indian counterterrorism forces, including the National Investigation Agency (NIA), for actively detecting and disrupting transnational and regional terror forces. "Indian counterterrorism forces, at the federal and state levels, actively detected and disrupted transnational and regional terror forces. "The National Investigation Agency examined 34 terrorism-related cases related to ISIS and arrested 160 persons, including 10 alleged al-Qaeda operatives from Kerala and West Bengal, in September," the report said. Giving details of the terrorists' arrests made by the NIA, the report said that the premier investigation agency arrested 10 alleged al-Qaeda-affiliated operatives from Kerala and West Bengal September 19 and 26.

JAPAN BUILDING FIRE

Suspected arson leaves 24 dead



AGENCIES

Osaka, Dec 17: A fire that spread from a fourth-floor mental clinic in an eight-story building in downtown Osaka in western Japan Friday left 24 dead in what police were investigating as a possible case of arson and murder. Police were searching for a man in his 50s to 60s who witnesses saw carrying a paper bag from which an unidentified liquid was dripping. He may have been among the 24 dead, or is one of the three people who were resuscitated and remain in serious conditions, or may have fled, a police investigator said on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorised to speak to the media. Fire officials who reached the building in the major business, shopping and entertainment area of Kitashinchi in Osaka found 27

people in a state of cardiac arrest, said Osaka fire department official Akira Kishimoto. One woman was conscious and brought down by an aerial ladder from a window on the sixth floor and was being treated in a hospital, he said. Later Friday, 24 people were pronounced dead, the fire department said. In Japan, the authorities customarily describe those without vital signs as being in "shinpai teishi," or a state of cardiac and pulmonary arrest, and do not confirm deaths until they are pronounced at hospitals and other necessary procedures are done. A doctor at one of the hospitals treating the victims said he believed many of them died after inhaling carbon monoxide as they had limited external injuries. Police said the cause of deaths could not be determined until the bodies were autopsied.

Over 93,000 Covid cases in UK, 3rd consecutive daily record



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

London, Dec 17: The British government Friday reported 93,045 new coronavirus cases, a third consecutive record daily tally, as the Omicron variant fuels a surge in infections across the country. The latest data brings the total number of infections during the pandemic to more than 11.1 million, while the UK also registered a further 111 deaths from the virus, taking the death toll to more than 147,000. Scotland First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said Omicron is now the country's dominant coronavirus strain, adding "the tsunami I warned about a week ago is now starting to hit us". And Welsh leader Mark Drakeford told citizens to brace for the "storm of Omicron" having announced the country's nightclubs will close after December 26 and social distancing reintroduced in shops and workplaces. Britain is currently rolling out a mass booster drive in order to vaccinate as many people as possible before the end of the year. Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the aim was on "trying to make sure that we not only have the fastest vaccine rollout in Europe" but also "to avert some of the more damaging consequences of Omicron". Johnson is under pressure to announce further restrictions, but minister Oliver Dowden said that the government has "the balance right".

Iran N-talks adjourned

Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China are still part of the agreement

AGENCIES

Vienna, Dec 17: Talks aimed at salvaging Iran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers adjourned Friday to allow the Iranian negotiator to return home for consultations after a round marked by tensions over new demands from Tehran. European diplomats said it was "a disappointing pause" and that negotiators in Vienna are "rapidly reaching the end of the road." However, they did point to "some technical progress" so far. Participants said they aim to resume quickly, though they haven't yet firmed up a date. China's chief negotiator, Wan Qun, said the talks will "resume hopefully before the end of the year." Enrique Mora, the European Union diplomat who

chaired the talks, echoed that, saying: "I hope it will be during 2021." The current talks in Vienna among the remaining signatories to the 2015 nuclear agreement — known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA — opened November 29, after more than five months, a gap caused by the arrival of a new hard-line government in Iran. There was also a short break last week as delegations returned home to consult with their governments. The United States has participated indirectly in the ongoing talks because it withdrew from the accord in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump. President Joe Biden has signalled that he wants to rejoin the deal. "For the eighth round, we have a lot of work ahead, a very complex task, I have to say," Mora said. "Difficult political decisions have to be taken." The accord was meant to rein in Iran's nuclear program in return for loosened economic sanctions.

TRAIL OF DEVASTATION



Ships run aground due to Typhoon Rai in Cebu city, central Philippines

Antibodies aren't the only defence against Omicron

ANTIBODIES HAVE MADE TOP NEWS RECENTLY BECAUSE COVID-19 SHOTS DON'T PRODUCE AS MANY OF THEM THAT WORK AGAINST THE HEAVILY MUTATED OMICRON VARIANT COMPARED TO PAST STRAINS -- AT LEAST, NOT WITHOUT A BOOSTER

Washington, Dec 17: In the fight against the coronavirus, one key component of the human immune system has hogged the limelight: antibodies. These Y-shaped proteins have made top news recently because Covid-19 shots don't produce as many of them that work against the heavily mutated Omicron variant compared to past strains — at least, not without a booster. Trained by both vaccines and infection, anti-

bodies grab on to the spike protein that studs the surface of the coronavirus, stopping it from penetrating cells and sickening the host. But while antibodies are rightly celebrated, they're not the only game in town. In fact, "there's a complex and coordinated response that is really beautiful from an evolutionary standpoint," Harvard immunologist Roger Shapiro explains. Here are some key points: "CARPET BOMBERS" OF THE INNATE IMMUNE SYSTEM:



In the minutes and hours after the virus first comes calling, signaling proteins send out alarms to recruit the tough-but-dim brutes of the "innate" immune system. First to the scene are "neu-

trophils," which make up 50 to 70 percent of all white cells and are quick to fight, but also to perish. Others include hungry "macrophages" that snarf down pathogens and spit out key bits to help train their smarter colleagues, menacingly named "Natural Killer" cells and "dendritic" cells that pass on their intel to more elite fighters. "It's sort of like carpet bombing the whole area and hopefully you damage the invader as much as possible... at the same time calling into the headquarters to get

your SEAL units ready to go," said John Wherry, an immunologist at the University of Pennsylvania. B AND T CELLS: INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS AND TRAINED ASSASSINS If the invaders aren't driven off, the "adaptive" immune system comes into play. A few days into a first infection, "B cells" wise up to the threat and start pumping out antibodies. Vaccination also trains B cells — mainly inside lymph nodes in our armpits, near the site of injection — to be primed and ready.

business

of the day quote

The internal rate of return (IRR) is very high and so there is no issue with economic viability (of infrastructure projects)

NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

Under our School Rejuvenation Programme, schools that were affected during the pandemic, we want to see how they can be brought back to the business

SANDEEP WIRKHARE | MD & CEO, ISFC

Ushering in a new era for climate change mitigation in the country, the new company will not only further EKI's current on-ground execution on nature-based solutions to a large scale but will also provide a much-needed impetus for climate actions in India

MANISH DABKARA | CMD AND CEO, EKI ENERGY SERVICES LTD

SHORT TAKES

Airtel prepays ₹15,519cr to DoT

New Delhi: Telecom operator Bharti Airtel Friday said it has paid ₹15,519 crore to the government towards prepayment of its entire deferred liability pertaining to spectrum acquired in the 2014 auction. The company had acquired 128.4 MHz spectrum (including Telenor spectrum) for a consideration of ₹19,051 crore in the 2014 auction, Airtel said in a statement. The company estimates that the prepayment to Department of Telecom (DoT) will likely result in interest cost savings of at least ₹3,400 crore over the residual life for fully substituted capital.

Forex reserves dip down by \$77mln

Mumbai: India's foreign exchange reserves inched lower by \$77 million during the week ended December 10. The Reserve Bank of India's forex reserves decreased to \$635.828 billion from \$635.905 billion during the week ended December 3. India's forex reserves comprise foreign currency assets (FCAs), gold reserves, SDRs, and the country's reserve position with the IMF. On a weekly basis, FCAs, the largest component of the forex reserves, edged lower by \$321 million to \$572.860 billion.

Adv tax collection rises 54%: FinMin

New Delhi: The finance ministry Friday said advance tax collection increased by 53.50 per cent to ₹4.60 lakh crore so far this fiscal year, indicating recovery in the economy. Direct tax collections for 2021-22, as December 16, show that net collections are at ₹9.45 lakh crore compared to ₹5.88 lakh crore over the year-ago period, representing an increase of 60.8 per cent, the ministry said in a statement.

Comviva adds two CoEs in City

Bhubaneswar: Comviva, the global leader in mobility solutions, announced its expansion in Bhubaneswar by adding two focused Centre of Excellence (CoE). This comes as a strategic move when the company is venturing into a journey for accelerated growth for its products and platform business and investing into growth marketing and digital financial solutions. After Gurgaon and Bangalore, Bhubaneswar facility will be Comviva's third Centre of Excellence in India.



“We are looking at new ideas along with the FTA with the UAE. We are also simultaneously in discussion with Australia and UK, we launch possibly next month. Canada we may launch by about March or April”
PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE MINISTER

RBI AUTHORISES RBL BANK TO COLLECT INDIRECT TAXES

The Reserve Bank has granted permission to RBL Bank to collect indirect taxes on behalf of the government, the private sector lender said Friday. The bank had recently been authorised to collect direct taxes on behalf of the Central Board of Direct Taxes



PM holds meeting with PE, VC investors

MODI SOUGHT SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS IMPROVING EASE OF DOING BUSINESS IN INDIA, ATTRACTING MORE CAPITAL AND FURTHERING THE REFORM PROCESS IN THE COUNTRY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: As preparation for next year's Budget gathers steam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Friday met with leading private equity/venture capital players to seek suggestions on making India a more attractive investment destination.

“He appreciated the practical suggestions received from the representatives and said the government is committed towards working to resolve the issues and challenges highlighted,” an official release said. During the meeting, Modi discussed the efforts undertaken by the government to bring in more reforms, future potential of initiatives like PM GatiShakti, and steps taken to reduce the unnecessary compliance burden.

He also mentioned the innovation happening in India at the grassroot level and the boost to the startup ecosystem.

Finance Minister Nirmala

Lauding the initiatives taken to boost the startup ecosystem in the country, Siddharth Pai from 3one4 termed Modi as the ‘Startup Prime Minister’

Accel's Prashant Prakash highlighted the opportunities that are present in the agri startups space



Rajan Anandan from Sequoia suggested working towards making India the global hub in education by leveraging technology

Blackstone's Amit Dalmia opined that India is among the best performing geographies for Blackstone funds globally

Sitharaman, who also participated in the meeting, is due to present February 1 the Budget for the next fiscal year that starts April 1, 2022.

The release further said the venture capital and private equity fund representatives also talked about the entrepreneurial potential of the country, and how it can be leveraged so that India's startups can attain global scale.

After the interaction, Munish

Verma from Softbank said the investment climate in the country has become much more positive. “So, overall I think it was a great interaction with the Prime Minister,” he said, adding that Modi gave some very good suggestions.

Sandeep Naik from General Atlantic said such interactions inspire funds to bring more capital to India and to back up the great startup entrepreneurs of the country.

“We plan to invest several billions of dollars in India. We already have about \$5 billion invested in India. And I wouldn't be surprised if in the next 10 years we invest about \$10 to 15 billion in India, because this is one of the most critical destinations for us globally,” Naik said.

Vipul Roongta from HDFC said it was his first personal interaction with the Prime Minister and praised the policy initiatives that have been taken by the government in the housing sector, especially in the affordable housing segment.

The release further said Shantanu Nalavadi from India Resurgent praised the reforms undertaken by the country in the last 7 years, especially the step to set up the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

“The representatives also discussed the opportunities that are emerging because of India's exemplary climate commitments including the ones in the sphere of energy transitions,” the release said.

HSBC fined \$85mln for UK anti-money laundering failings

AGENCIES

London, Dec 17: Britain's financial regulator said Friday it had fined HSBC 63.95 million pounds (\$85.2 million) for failings in its anti-money laundering processes.

The Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) said it had found that three key parts of HSBC's transaction monitoring systems in Britain showed serious weaknesses over a period of eight years from March 31, 2010 to March 31, 2018.

On Monday, HSBC's domestic rival NatWest was fined 265 million pounds by a British court for failing to prevent the laundering of nearly 400 million pounds. The fine comes amid a renewed crackdown by the regulator on money laundering failures.

GLOBAL RETREAT

Sensex tanks 889 points

INVESTORS' WEALTH TUMBLED BY OVER ₹4.65 LAKH CRORE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Weak global sentiments inundated domestic indices as markets are digesting the hawkish stance of major international central banks amid surging Omicron cases

VINOD NAIK | HEAD OF RESEARCH AT GEOJIT FINANCIAL SERVICES

Mumbai, Dec 17: The Sensex plummeted 889 points while the Nifty sank below the 17,000-mark Friday, in line with a selloff in global markets as hawkish central banks and rising Omicron cases sparked a retreat from riskier assets.

“Continued selling by foreign institutional investors put further pressure on domestic futures,” traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 889.40 points or 1.54 per cent to finish at 57,011.74. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty plunged 263.20 points or 1.53 per cent to 16,985.20.

IndusInd Bank was the top laggard on the Sensex chart, shedding 4.89 per cent, followed by Kotak

Bank, HUL, Titan, HDFC, Bajaj Finserv and SBI.

In value terms, Reliance and HDFC twins accounted for around half of the benchmark's losses. Only five index components managed to close in the green - Infosys, HCL Tech, PowerGrid, Sun Pharma and TCS, spurring up to 2.84 per cent.

During the week, the Sensex slumped 1,774.93 points or 3.01 per cent and Nifty tanked 526.10 points or 3 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors remained net sellers in the capital market on Thursday, as they off-loaded shares worth ₹1,468.71 crore, as per exchange data.

APY SCHEME

PFRDA eyes to add 3.25L citizens in FY'22 in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has set target to achieve about 3.25 lakh new enrollment in Odisha under Atal Pension Yojna (APY) scheme in current fiscal, said Deepak Mohanty, a whole-time member of PFRDA.

During an interaction, Mohanty said, “Since its inception, we have enrolled 13.7 lakh citizens in the state so far, now we are moving ahead to bring 3.25 lakh new enrollments under this pension plan in current financial year. However, now with the inclusion of APY under the Jan Suraksha Yojna, the centre target to enroll every eligible subscribers.”

Mohanty also said that since its inception around APY has made significant strides. “In slightly over 6 years 3.5 crore persons have been enrolled. Even in the peak of Covid-19 pandemic year 2020-21, nearly 80 lakh persons were enrolled. The target for the year 2021-22 is one crore; so far in the year around 58 lakh have already been enrolled,” he said.



The APY scheme helps to get monthly fixed pension in the range of ₹1,000 to ₹5,000 on attaining of 60 year age. The scheme says, “Any citizen of India between the age group of 18-40 years is allowed to join through the bank or post office branches where one has the savings bank account. For ₹1,000 monthly pension, an 18-year-old pays a monthly premium of only ₹42 as against ₹291 for a 40-year-old.”

“Around 77 per cent of citizens prefer ₹1000 pension scheme while only 15 per cent people go for ₹5000 pension plan. In Odisha, Keonjhar, Bhadrak and Mayurbhanj have achieved 100 enrollments under the scheme,” said Mohanty.

Nov YoY domestic air traffic rises over 65%

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 17: Easing Covid-related restrictions as well as lower infection rate and faster economic recovery accelerated India's domestic air passenger traffic growth by over 65 per cent in November on a year-on-year basis.

Besides, pent-up demand and low base too pushed the air passenger numbers higher during the month under review.

According to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the country's scheduled domestic flight operations ferried 1.05 crore passengers last month. In November 2020, the traffic numbers stood at 63.54 lakh.



Domestic flight services had resumed May 25, 2020 after the suspension of operations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in end-March. However, during the second wave of the pandemic in 2021, limited civil aviation operations were permitted.

“On a sequential basis, the sec-

Singapore Airlines set to resume Airbus A380

Singapore Airlines is set to resume the Airbus A380 Superjumbo aircraft's services to India, after a break of 20 months due to the pandemic-led restrictions. The services will start from January 10, 2022 between Mumbai and Singapore. The A380 will replace the Airbus A350-900 on the 'SQ 424/423 VTL' services on this route. Besides, the airline will operate the A380 in place of the Boeing 787-10 on the 'SQ 406/403 VTL' services between Delhi and Singapore starting February 14, 2022.

tor had ferried 89.85 lakh passengers in October this year. Passengers carried by domestic airlines during Jan-Nov 2021 were 726.11 lakh as against 556.84 lakh during the corresponding period of previous year thereby registering annual growth of 30.40 per cent and monthly growth of 65.50 per cent,” the DGCA

said in its November data report. Furthermore, the report said that the overall cancellation rate of scheduled domestic airlines in November was at 0.74 per cent.

The overall cancellation rate of scheduled domestic airlines for the month of November 21 has been 0.74 per cent.

Skoda to increase prices from January

BIZ BUZZ

New Delhi: Automaker Skoda Auto Friday said it will increase prices of its entire product range by up to 3 per cent from January 1, 2022. The company sells models like Kushaq, Kodiak, Octavia among others in the domestic market. “The decision to increase prices from January 1, 2022, is a result of the rising input costs and increased operational costs,” Skoda Auto Brand Director Zac Hollis said in a statement. Already, various carmakers like Maruti Suzuki India, Tata Motors, Toyota Kirloskar Motor, and Honda Cars have indicated to increase vehicle prices from next month.



Honda Amaze crosses 2L retail sales milestone

New Delhi: Honda Cars India Friday said the new Amaze has crossed two lakh retail sales milestone in the country. The company had introduced the second generation of the compact sedan in May 2018. The model is one of Honda's most successful models in India with cumulative deliveries of over 4.6 lakh units since the introduction of the first generation model in April 2013. “Amaze was specifically developed keeping Indian consumers in mind and the love and support it continues to receive from customers speaks volume for its wide acceptance,” Honda Cars India President and Chief Executive Officer Gaku Nakanishi said in a statement.



Credit card users spent ₹39K cr on digital payments in 2021: Report

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bangalore, Dec 17: As the adoption of digital payments and wallets grow significantly, credit card users spent more than ₹39,000 crore on wallets and digital payments, including ₹7,850 crore on travel alone in 2021, a new report revealed Friday.

Expenditure on food and utility bills remained consistent during all months while food and beverages saw high spending after the lockdown restrictions were eased from July to October, according to data provided by credit card bill management platform CRED.

As travel restrictions eased, more individuals packed their bags to venture out. Travel credit card expenditure was ₹1,103.11 crore in September - higher than any month in 2021. The spending remained on a high in October with ₹1,091 crore spent by members.

May and June saw 24 lakh transactions, amounting to a total of ₹675 crore. However, July saw a return of travel with credit card spends rising to ₹602.26 crore.

Maldives and Dubai, which opened borders to Indians, were the most picked international destinations this year. Within India, popular destina-



tions were Goa, Coorg, Jaipur, Udaipur, Bangalore and Mumbai for staycations and short trips. From March to May individuals

spent over ₹1,000 crore, collectively, on food and beverages when the pandemic restrictions were strict and online food deliveries were the

2021 can be defined as the year of self-care for CRED members. This was visible from the increased spend across categories such as travel, shopping and health and wellness. In 2022, we look forward to growing and providing more experiences to our members

KUNAL SHAH | FOUNDER OF CRED

eateries, cafes and bars. The months of August (Rs 1,750 crore) and September (Rs 1,727 crore) recorded the highest transactions and payments made on food and beverages, while October continued to see the rise with ₹1,427 crore spent. Expenditure on wellness and self care also saw steady growth with ₹44.96 crore being spent in September, compared to a combined total of ₹49 crore in June and July.

Fitness remained a popular trend amongst individuals, especially in January-March witnessing spends worth ₹1,152 crore, according to the CRED report.

History awaits Srikanth, Sen

INDIA THRASH PAKISTAN

HARMANPREET'S BRACE HELPS MEN IN BLUE BEAT THEIR ARCH-RIVALS 3-1 TO VIRTUALLY SEAL SEMIFINAL BERTH IN ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY HOCKEY

World Championship badminton to witness an all-Indian semifinal as the event to get first-ever finalist from the country in the men's singles category; Sindhu's title defense ends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 17: Vice-captain Harmanpreet Singh scored a brace as Olympic bronze-medallists India defeated arch-rivals Pakistan 3-1 to register their second consecutive win and virtually qualify for the semifinals of the Asian Champions Trophy men's hockey tournament here Friday.

Harmanpreet (eighth, 53rd minutes) converted two penalty corners, while comeback-man Akashdeep Singh, who couldn't make the Tokyo Olympics squad, found the net from a field effort in the 42nd minute for his second goal of the tournament. Pakistan's lone goal was scored by Junaid Manzoor in the 45th minute.

It was India's second win in the tournament after their 9-0 drubbing of hosts Bangladesh, while Pakistan are still winless, having drawn goal-less against Japan in their opening match. India had earlier drawn 2-2 against Korea in their tournament opener.

India are currently leading the points table with seven points from three games and will take on Japan in their last round-robin match of the five-team tournament Sunday. Pakistan, meanwhile, have just one point from two games.

India and Pakistan were the joint winners in the last edition of the tournament in Muscat after the final was washed out.

The Indians completely dominated possession in the first two quarters while Pakistan preferred to sit back. But they defended admirably save for Harmanpreet's lone strike.

The play was mostly on the Pakistan half in the first two quarters as Indians pressed hard from the onset and created a couple of chances but credit must go to goalkeeper Mazar Abbas who was brilliant overall.

But expectedly, it was India who



STAR OF THE DAY: Harmanpreet Singh is mobbed by his teammates after scoring a goal against Pakistan, Friday

took the lead in the eighth minute when Harmanpreet converted the team's first penalty corner with a powerful low flick to the left of the Pakistan goalie. Four minutes later, skipper Manpreet Singh's deflection from outside the circle was saved by an alert Abbas.

The second quarter continued in the same manner as India made numerous inroads but the Pakistan defence was up to the task.

While Pakistan defence stood out, the team's forward line looked unimpressive as it failed to register a single shot on the goal or secure a penalty corner.

Leading 1-0 at halftime, the Indians kept up the pressure on the Pakistan goal and increased their lead in the 42nd minute when Akashdeep slipped in Sumit's drive from the left flank with a reverse hit.

But the fighting Pakistanis didn't give up hope and upped their game from here on, reducing the margin 27 seconds from the end of the third quarter through Manzoor's diving deflection from

Abdul Rana's pass.

If the first three quarters belonged to India, Pakistan gave Manpreet and his men a run for their money in the final quarter, which produced end-to-end enthralling hockey.

Pumped up by the goal, Pakistan went on the offensive and secured their first penalty corner of the tournament in the 47th minute, which was rejected after India asked for the referral.

Pakistan didn't lose hope and continued to press hard and secured two more penalty corners in quick succession but young Indian custodian Suraj Karkera made two brilliant saves to keep his side's lead intact.

In between, India secured their second penalty corner and once again Harmanpreet was precision personified with his drag-flick.

India earned another penalty corner just three minutes from the final hooter but Varun Kumar's effort was saved by the Pakistan goalkeeper.



LAKSHYA SEN



KIDAMBI SRIKANTH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Huelva (Spain), Dec 17: In a historic first, India were assured of at least two medals and one finalist in the men's singles competition of the ongoing BWF World Badminton Championships after the seeded Kidambi Srikanth and young Lakshya Sen entered their maiden semifinals of the marquee event here Friday.

However, it was disappointment for defending champion PV Sindhu, who lost to familiar foe Tai Tzu Ying 17-21, 13-21 in the women's singles quarterfinals.

India are assured of at least a silver as Srikanth and Sen will face each other in the first semifinal Saturday.

It turned out to be a historic day for Indian badminton as first Srikanth, seeded 12th in the showpiece tournament, sent Mark Caljouw of the Netherlands packing with a 21-8, 21-7 win in a match that lasted just 26 minutes.

And then the unseeded Sen fought his heart out to get the better of China's Jun Peng Zhao 21-15, 15-21, 22-20 in an enthralling three-game encounter lasting one hour and seven minutes.

The two will join the legendary Prakash Padukone (bronze in 1983) and B Sai Praneeth (bronze in 2019) as the Indian medal winners at the showpiece.

Sindhu, who lost her quarterfinal match against Tai Tzu, has won five medals in the showpiece

while Saina Nehwal has two medals to her name. The women's doubles pair of Jwala Gutta and Ashwini Ponnappa had also won a bronze in 2011. The World No.14 Srikanth was ahead 11-5 at the first game's change of ends and from 14-8, he took seven straight points to pocket it in a jiffy.

The second game was no different as Srikanth completely outplayed his opponent. From 4-3, it was Srikanth all the way as he zoomed to another seven straight points. From 17-7, Srikanth pocketed another four points on the trot to win the match.

In the women's singles, Sindhu suffered a straight-game defeat to world number one Tai Tzu of Chinese Taipei to bow out of the

championships.

Sindhu found it difficult to match Tai Tzu's speed, court coverage and drop shots as has been the case many times earlier though the Indian produced some fine cross-court smashes.

Sindhu, who also stumbled to many unforced errors during the match, was always playing a catch-up game. She managed to do that in the second game at one stage but lost steam later on.

The world number seven and double Olympic-medallist Sindhu had also lost to Tai Tzu in the Tokyo Games semifinals earlier this year. Tai Tzu, on the other hand, avenged her defeat to Sindhu in the 2019 World Championships at the same stage.

ENGLAND LIMP TO 17/2 AT STUMPS ON DAY 3 AFTER AUSTRALIA DECLARES AT 473/9 IN THE SECOND ASHES TEST

Australia in driver's seat

Odisha FC aim to steady ship



Odisha FC's Jonathas Cristian de Jesus would look to get back into scoring sheet against Chennaiyin FC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Vasco, Dec 17: Odisha FC will look to bounce back from their comprehensive last game loss when they take

on Chennaiyin FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) here, Saturday. Chennaiyin saw their unbeaten record broken in the last game against Mumbai City. The Bozidar

Bandovic-coached side are fifth in the points table with eight points from five games and a win Saturday can take them to third place.

The team, with the best defensive record in the league so far, have struggled to find the back of the net and that is something Bandovic has to work on. Chennaiyin are creating a lot of shots but are struggling to put the ball in the back of the net.

Odisha FC, on the other hand, have been efficient in maximising the little they create. The presence of players like Aridai Cabrera, Javi Hernandez, who possess good shooting technique, helps the side.

Odisha, who suffered a 0-4 thrashing against Jamshedpur FC in their last match, are placed one rung above Chennaiyin at fourth position. It has been a dream start to the season for them after finishing rock-bottom last season. But a heavy defeat at the hands of Jamshedpur have laid bare their defensive woes.

The Kalinga Warriors conceded 44 goals in 20 ISL games in 20-21 season finishing with the worst defensive record in ISL. They have improved marginally under new coach Kiko Ramirez, but as seen against Jamshedpur, they still find it hard to cope against good attacking sides with their defence not holding their fort too well.

For Odisha, Aridai has grown into an important player despite not starting in Odisha's opening two games. Aridai has scored three times already and his impressive performances in the first two games made him a guaranteed starter.



SUPERB BOWLING: Mitchell Starc reacts after dismissing Rory Burns

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Adelaide, Dec 17: Marnus Labuschagne (103, 305b, 8x4) became the first player to hit three centuries in day-night Test matches while captain Steve Smith (93, 201b, 12x4, 1x6) missed out on a ton as Australia strangled England with a powerful total of 473/9 declared in the second Ashes Test, Friday.

After Labuschagne and Smith's splendid knocks, Australia's tailenders knocked off some quick runs against England's worn-out bowlers

and Australia declared after tea.

England limped to 17/2 in 8.4 overs - still trailing by 456 runs - before a massive flash of lightning took the players off the field and brought an early closure to the second day's play.

Michael Nesser (1/4) got a wicket off his second ball in Test cricket when he had Haseeb Hameed (6) caught at mid-on after Mitchell Starc (1/11) had Rory Burns (4) caught in the slips off a delivery which went across the left-hander and took the shoulder of the bat.

Starc (39 n o, 39b, 5x4) and Nesser (35, 24b, 5x4, 1x6) had earlier shared a rapid half century stand for the eighth wicket after England seemed to have contained the damage and had Australia on 390/7 at tea. Smith declared when Jhye Richardson was caught behind off Chris Woakes.

Ben Stokes, who dropped a hard catch of Starc off his own bowling, finished with 3/113 but Australia removed both England openers cheaply before play was called off early.

Smith and Alex Carey (51, 107b, 5x4) combined in a 91-run sixth wicket stand before Anderson removed both batsmen in successive overs just before tea. Smith shuffled back across the line and was

adjudged lbw and Carey chipped an easy catch in the covers.

Earlier, England took three wickets during an even first session after Australia resumed on 221/2. In a dramatic 40 minutes to start the day,

Bradman, George Headley, Herbert Sutcliffe and Mike Hussey have reached 2,000 runs faster than Labuschagne's total in 34 innings. Bradman achieved his 2,000 runs in 22 innings, Jamaica Headley in 32 and England's Sutcliffe and Australia's Hussey in 33. Labuschagne has now scored centuries in three consecutive day-night Tests at the Adelaide Oval, averaging almost 100 and with just one score below 40.

Brief scores: Australia 473/9d (Marnus Labuschagne 103, Steve Smith 93, Alex Carey 51, Mitchell Starc 39 n o, Michael Nesser 35; Ben Stokes 3/113, James Anderson 2/58); England 17/2 (Michael Nesser 1/4, Mitchell Starc 1/11). Match to continue.



STEVE SMITH

Labuschagne, resuming on 95, edged Anderson to third man for four to record the sixth century of his career and first in the Ashes.

Pointers Of the 3,068 players in Test cricket's 144-year history, only Don

Reds beat Newcastle, Blues held at home as EPL teeters

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Dec 17: If the Premier League (EPL) is to take an enforced break amid another surge in coronavirus cases, Trent Alexander-Arnold gave it quite a send-off.

The Liverpool full back has the perhaps the most dangerous right foot in English soccer and he used it to devastating effect with a late long-range strike to seal a come-from-behind 3-1 win over Newcastle Thursday. The victory meant Liverpool stayed on the shoulder of league leader Manchester City in what is shaping up to be an exciting title race. Chelsea couldn't keep pace, though.

A 1-1 draw at home to injury-hit Everton was Chelsea's latest disappointing result in the league and left the European champions four points behind City.

On current form, the title race is looking like a two-team race, even if it could soon be halted as

the league approaches a busy program of festive fixtures.

The growing number of infections among Premier League squads as the omicron variant spreads is being reflected in the number of matches being postponed, almost on a daily basis. Just before kick-off in Thursday's games, the league announced half of the weekend fixtures have been called off because of coronavirus outbreaks in many teams. There have now been nine postponements in a week.

Liverpool and Chelsea each had three players unavailable because of positive cases. Virgil van Dijk and Fabinho were among them for Liverpool, while Chelsea were without Romelu Lukaku and Timo Werner.

Everton was missing as many as 12 players, forcing manager Rafa Benitez to start a makeshift line-up containing three youngsters. Two of them combined for the 77th-minute equaliser.

Cash rewards for 237 state athletes

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: In recognition of the outstanding performance of athletes at the national and international level, Sports and Youth Services Department, Friday, honoured 237 athletes from across the state.

Minister for Sports and Youth Services, Tusharkanti Behera, felicitated the athletes with cash prizes in the presence of commissioner-cum-secretary, Sports and Youth Services Department, R Vineel Krishna and officials of the State Sports Department.

A total of Rs 1,08,83,000 was awarded across various sports disciplines. Out of a total of 237 athletes awarded cash prizes, 172 were in the general category, while 65 were in the PWD categories.

"Under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the Government of Odisha has come up with a number of schemes for the betterment of sports and



sportspersons. We have been able to build infrastructure for players to excel in their respective events," said Behera.

"We have built 11 HPCs in the state for the high performance of the players. Yesterday, the CM visited Kalinga Stadium and laid the foundation stone of 89 indoor stadiums and inaugurated a number of major sports projects.

"The cash award is in recognition

of your hard-work and outstanding achievement. You all are role models for the younger generation of sports and I wish you greater laurels in your sporting journey ahead," Behera added while congratulating the honoured athletes.

The annual cash award scheme of the Sports Department is aimed at encouraging and motivating the players and inspiring them for higher achievements.

Max handed over F1 trophy, Hamilton snubs FIA Awards

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris, Dec 17: Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff were the two most remarkable absentees at the season-ending FIA Awards gala that was held here.

Wolff had confirmed earlier that neither he nor Hamilton would attend the ceremony, despite the top three drivers in the World Championship standings effectively being required to be present and despite Hamilton being the FIA Personality of the Year.

Max Verstappen, who won the F1 title in the last lap of the last race of the season in Abu Dhabi last Sunday, was officially presented with the champion's trophy.

It was also the last gala attended by an emotional Jean Todt as FIA President after 12 years at the helm of the motorsport's world governing body.

