

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



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UK Brexit Minister quits

LONDON: Brexit Minister, Lord David Frost, has resigned as the man in charge of overseeing matters related to Britain's exit from the European Union amid opposition to "coercive" lockdown restrictions due to a surge of the Omicron variant of COVID-19. "The Mail on Sunday" said in an exclusive that "Frost has resigned from Boris Johnson's government," due to his "disillusionment" with Johnson's government, including the imposition of tax rises and additional Covid-19 restrictions.

WEATHER	
	BHUB CTK
TEMP MAX	26.2°C 26.2°C
TEMP MIN	15.1°C 15.0°C
Humidity	86% 85%
Rainfall	NIL NIL
Forecast: dry weather most likely	

Second lynching in Punjab for alleged sacrilege bid

Another person was killed after being accused of disrespecting 'Nishan Sahib' at a gurdwara Sunday morning



Residents of Nijampur village in Kapurthala district had allegedly caught the man from a gurdwara early Sunday morning

A special investigation team has been set up to probe an alleged desecration attempt at the Golden Temple in Amritsar even as police are trying to ascertain the identity of the man

under DCP Law & Order had been constituted and it would present its report within the next two days.

He called the 'sacrilege' incident at Sri Darbar Sahib "most unfortunate" and promised that the police would get to the bottom of the matter. He added that the youth is yet to be identified.

"The accused slept outside the Akal Takht Sahib during his stay inside the Golden Temple premises, before committing the sacrilege. There must be something behind this incident. His death has made it difficult to attain information regarding the conspiracy but we will still investigate the matter. So far, he has remained unidentified," said the Home Minister.

Randhawa added, "It seems he had come with a target to pick up the sword. But the SGPC staff immediately caught him. But there is a sequence."

3 more samples sent for genome sequencing

So far, seven foreign returnees have tested Covid-19 positive, of whom four have been found negative for Omicron variant

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: The state government has sent samples of three more foreign returnees, who have tested Covid-19 positive, for genome sequencing, an official said here Sunday.

So far, seven foreign returnees have tested Covid-19 positive, of which four have been found negative for Omicron variant following genome sequencing, said state director of Health Services, Bijay Mohapatra.

Samples of another three persons have been sent to Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), Bhubaneswar, for genome sequencing, he said, adding, "Once the test completes, the ILS will inform us about the result."

Stating that surveillance is the only way to trace out such cases, Mohapatra said, "The same protocol that of Covid-19 is being followed for this new variant of the virus also. All symptomatic persons should go for Covid test. Those who are found Covid positive and if he/she migrated from the Omicron affected area, the sample will be sent for genome sequencing."

Though the state administration has surveillance units all across the state, the community has a major role to play, he said.

The director appealed to the community to come forward and inform the local healthcare authority, if they came to know about any person suspected to be infected with the new variant of the coronavirus.

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Back-to-back political murders rock Kerala

Following the killing of an SDPI state secretary, a BJP leader was hacked to death subsequently in 12 hours

Subsequently, police took into custody around 50 people, including anti-social elements, general public as well as workers of BJP, RSS and SDPI, IG Harshita Attaluri told reporters.

The officer said that not all the persons in custody are culprits and that the police were "examining and investigating" the two cases.

She said there has been no lapse or intelligence on the part of the police which had swung into action right after the assault on the SDPI leader and added that "we cannot give protection to every house".

The police will take action against those behind the crimes irrespective of whether they are political bigwigs, anti-social elements or members of the public.

A big force of police personnel and senior officers has been deployed in the district.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Alappuzha/Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 19: Kerala's coastal Alappuzha district was rocked by back-to-back killings of two party leaders, the first belonging to the SDPI and the second to the BJP, leading to clamping of prohibitory orders by police Sunday.

Following the killing of an SDPI state secretary, a BJP leader was hacked to death subsequently in 12 hours and prohibitory order under CrPC Section 144 was imposed in the entire Alappuzha district Sunday.

Government of Odisha

The Longest Bridge of ODISHA

3.4 Kilometers long High Level Bridge over Mahanadi River

connecting Gopinathpur- Singhnath Pitha-Baideswar of CUTTACK District

Constructed at a cost of 111 crores benefit 5 lakh people & reduce distance by 45 Kilometers

inauguration by
Shri Naveen Patnaik
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Odisha
on 20th December 2021

Works Department

OIPR-34003/13/0036/2122

ZERO TOLERANCE TOWARDS CORRUPTION



PURSuing ITS ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY TOWARDS CORRUPTION, THE VIGILANCE WING OF THE STATE POLICE GOT CRACKING AND ACHIEVED REMARKABLE SUCCESS THIS YEAR. ITS SLEUTHS UNEARTHED SOME MAJOR CORRUPTION AND DA CASES. IN 2021, ANTI-CORRUPTION OFFICIALS HAVE CAUGHT BIG FISHES AND SEIZED PROPERTIES WORTH OVER CRORES OF RUPEES INCLUDING THE HIGHEST EVER CASH AND DA SEIZURES. THAT APART, MORE THAN A DOZEN OFFICIALS WERE SENT ON COMPULSORY RETIREMENT

ED lens on Pradeep, daughter, Pathaks

Gopalpur MLA Pradeep Panigrahi, his daughter Shruti Panigrahi, former IFS officer Abhaykant Pathak and his son Akash Pathak were grilled by the Enforcement Directorate this year on charges of money laundering in October and November. The agency quizzed Shruti for about six hours. During interrogation of the father-son duo earlier, the ED learnt that money was deposited in Shruti's bank ac-

count on more than one occasion. Gopalpur MLA was arrested on charges of forgery, criminal conspiracy and job fraud in December last year. Vigilance raided his residences and revealed that he amassed assets disproportionate to his known sources of income when he was an MLA from May 24, 2009 to November 30, 2020. He was found in possession of DA to the tune of ₹5,05,04,656. He was involved in Tata Motors job fraud. A case had been registered against him at Golanthara police station.

Abhay and his son Akash were arrested by the Vigilance last year for allegedly possessing assets worth ₹9.3 crore disproportionate to their known sources of income. The Vigilance had written to the ED about the ill-gotten money and benami properties of the father-son duo. The Enforcement Directorate grilled Akash on charge of cheating job seekers to the tune of crores of rupees on the pretext of getting them jobs at Tata Motors last year. Pradeep Panigrahi was a co-accused in the job fraud case. Notably, Akash Pathak was to marry the daughter of the Gopalpur legislator.

The vigilance sleuths had intercepted Bidhan Chandra Sahu at NC College Road while he was on his way to Cuttack from Salapada. During interception, a sum of ₹10,07,620 was recovered from him which he could not account for. Additional ₹64,000 was recovered during the house search, taking the total seized amount from him to ₹10,71,620. Vigilance recovered ₹1,75,810 from Prakash Kumar Mohapatra at Sundarpada, Bhubaneswar. Narottam Behera was intercepted by the Vigilance sleuths at Tangi check gate, Cuttack, while he was en route Bhubaneswar from Balasore. ₹89,000 was recovered from Behera. During searches at his house and residential government quarters, additional ₹9,25,000 was recovered taking the total seized amount from him to ₹10,14,000.

3 CLASS-I OFFICERS CAUGHT

Vigilance got a major breakthrough October 10 when its officials arrested three Class-I officers of the state government on graft charges. ₹22.61 lakh was also seized from the possession of the three officials. The three officials are Bidhan Chandra Sahu, Superintending Engineer, Irrigation Baitarini Division, Salapada, Keonjhar; Prakash Kumar Mohapatra, Regional Officer, State Pollution Control Board, Panposh, Rourkela and Narottam Behera, Regional Officer, State Pollution Control Board, Balasore.

Highest ever DA seizure

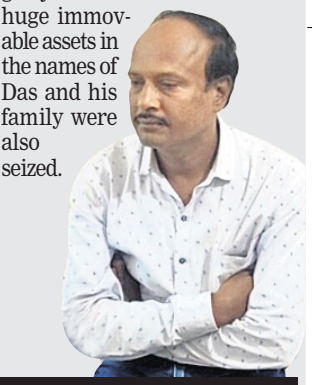
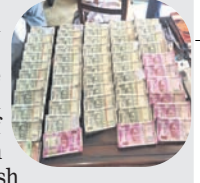


Vigilance added another feather to its cap when it unearthed the highest ever disproportionate assets from a deputy manager of the Odisha State Police Housing and Welfare Corporation. Deputy manager Pratap Samal's properties were valued at over ₹14.87 crore which is 1021% more than his known sources of income. This was an highest ever DA seized from a government servant for the Vigilance. Earlier, detection of DA worth around ₹9.35 crore from former IFS officer Abhaykant Pathak was the highest.

The Vigilance also registered a case against Samal's wife Sasmita for allegedly abetting her husband for corrupt practices. Samal has purchased almost all his properties in Sasmita's name. The seized DA was valued at ₹14,87,41,194. At least 25 plots owned by the couple were worth ₹3.41 crore. His 5-storied building at Gothapatna on Bhubaneswar's outskirts was valued at over ₹3.89 crore. The couple also owns buildings in Bhadrak. ₹1.61 crore bank deposits and insurance premiums of ₹57.72 lakh were seized. Samal had attempted to throw ₹20 lakh cash onto the terrace of his neighbour during the raid on his house.

RECORD CASH RECOVERY

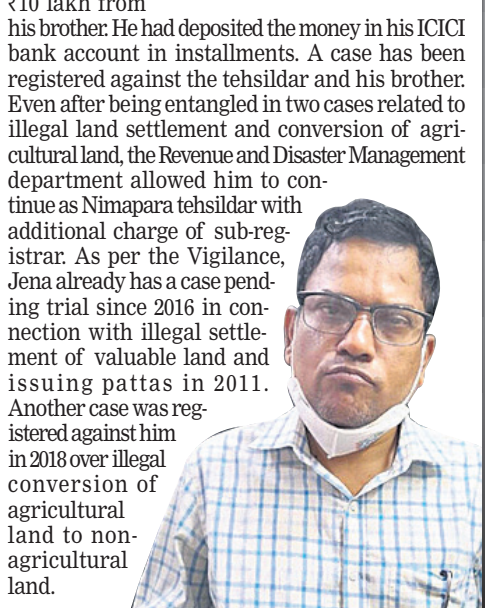
Vigilance crossed a major milestone November 26 this year when two-day raids made record cash seizure of ₹41.77 lakh from Santosh Das, an assistant engineer of integrated tribal development agency (ITDA), Baripada. Vigilance officials had raided the houses of Das and his relatives at 11 locations in Balasore, Mayurbhanj and Bhubaneswar on charges of possessing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. 659 gram of gold jewelers and huge immovable assets in the names of Das and his family were also seized.



BABU WITH 5 PAN CARDS

Vigilance officials caught Ramachandra Jena, the tehsildar and sub-registrar in charge of Nimapara in November this year. He was found to have possessed five PAN cards in his name with different numbers and different dates of birth. He had given three different father's names for the cards. Three cards carried his father's name as Khageswar Jena while two others had Baishnab Jena and Narayan Jena as father respectively. All the five PAN cards of the accused have different dates of birth between 1970 and 1972. Jena was arrested by Vigilance officials with unaccounted cash of ₹4.65 lakh. His brother Laxman, a former driver with Mo Bus service, was also arrested for being an alleged accomplice in Jena's corruption.

Searches were carried out at his residence in CDA Sector-11, Cuttack, his native Dhanmandal and Garadpur in Kendrapara district. The sleuths also found ₹50,000 from his official residence. Jena's younger brother Laxman admitted to have visited Nimapara thrice in September this year to collect ₹10 lakh from his brother. He had deposited the money in his ICICI bank account in installments. A case has been registered against the tehsildar and his brother. Even after being entangled in two cases related to illegal land settlement and conversion of agricultural land, the Revenue and Disaster Management department allowed him to continue as Nimapara tehsildar with additional charge of sub-registrar. As per the Vigilance, Jena already has a case pending trial since 2016 in connection with illegal settlement of valuable land and issuing pattas in 2011. Another case was registered against him in 2018 over illegal conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural land.



TAINT DIDN'T SPARE OSSC

In July, Vigilance arrested Biranchi Narayan Sahoo, private secretary to a member of Odisha Staff Selection Commission (OSSC) on charge of amassing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income following raids at different locations. The government has given him compulsory retirement August 31. ₹25 lakh and properties worth over ₹3.79 crore had been detected during simultaneous searches at multiple locations in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and four other places. Besides, they recovered gold ornaments from his house worth around ₹60 lakh. These apart, documents of four buildings including two double-storied apartments were unearthed. The state anti-corruption agency found documents related to Sahoo's foreign visits and 14 plots registered in his name and his family members. The officials also seized insurance papers worth ₹56 lakh and other imported goods. Many recruitment-related application forms and admit cards were also recovered from his home. The recovery of huge cash and properties worth crores of rupees from Sahoo's residence has pointed to his involvement in alleged irregularities in the recruitment process of the Odisha Staff Selection Commission.



CONSTABLE WITH ₹6.97CR ASSETS

In November this year, Vigilance unearthed properties worth ₹6.97 crore in possession of former constable Prasanna Behera and his kin in Bhubaneswar. Behera was arrested for running an unlicensed bar during pandemic time. He and his family members were found in possession of moveable and immovable properties worth crores. A DA case was registered against Behera. He had joined Odisha police as a constable in 1995. He was dismissed from service

October 24 this year for his involvement in several criminal cases. Behera has invested his ill-gotten wealth in two furniture showrooms in Bhubaneswar. He has encroached on government land. He had taken a bar on lease in Patrapada in the name of his brother. Behera's name came up during the probe of the murder of Manish Anurag Das, son of senior journalist Navin Das. Manish and his friends had attended a party in Behera's bar on the night of October 9.



Compulsory retirement for the corrupt, inept

Until December 2 since 2019, a total of 140 corrupt officials were given compulsory retirement in the state on charge of graft and inefficiency. Continuing its drive against the corrupt and inept officials, the state government January 30 ordered compulsory retirement of nine officers of the mines, forest, health and labour departments. While seven officials have been terminated for corruption, the remaining two have been dismissed for their inefficient functioning. Eight officials including three Odisha Administrative Service officers were sent on compulsory retirement November 13. Among the government officers sent on compulsory retirement on grounds of ethics, inefficiency and lack of integrity included Biranchi Narayan Sahoo, private secretary to a member of Odisha Staff Selection Commission (OSSC), former tehsildar of Nimapara, Ramachandra Jena, former deputy collector of Jagatsinghpur, Gouranga Charan Mohanty, and OAS officer and former tehsildar of Lathikata, Alphonse Bilung.



SHORT TAKES

Fish trader stabbed to death in Balasore

Balasore: A fish trader was stabbed to death by miscreants over past enmity at Galapola area under Sahadevkhunta police limits here, late Saturday night. The deceased was identified as Rabi Singh, a fish trader of the area. Sahadevkhunta police rushed to the spot and launched an investigation. A case was registered and the body sent for post-mortem. Meanwhile, police detained two youths and seized the vehicle of the victim. Preliminary investigations revealed that the murder, which occurred at around 11 pm, might have taken place over past enmity related to drug trade and money sharing among the accused, police said. Raids are being conducted at various places and very soon the accused will be behind the bars, police said. The incident occurred when some miscreants including the victim had assembled near Galapola and planning on some issues, late Saturday night. Their discussion took a violent turn when someone among the group ran back to his house and came back with a sharp-edged weapon. Enraged, he repeatedly stabbed Rabi on his stomach, chest and back. Rabi screamed and collapsed on the ground in a pool of blood. Police have raided various places to nab the culprits.

Arrest of five scribes opposed

Malkangiri: Mediapersons affiliated to Malkangiri Journalists' Association, Utkal Journalists' Association and State Journalists' Association started a dharna in front of local police station Sunday, over the arrest of five scribes. They accused police of attempting to muzzle the fourth estate. Five journalists of electronic media visited Korukonda CHC December 16 night to take stock of the healthcare services. On seeing the reporters at odd hours, three doctors on duty had allegedly misbehaved with them. However, next day, the three doctors filed a complaint against the media people at the police station, alleging that the journalists had misbehaved with them. Mediapersons alleged that the names of only two reporters were mentioned in the FIR. Surprisingly, police picked up all the five journalists on December 17 night, detained them for the whole night at police station and even abused them, the agitating scribes said. Five journalists also filed an FIR against the doctors, but the police have not taken any action against the doctors, it was alleged.

₹40L sanctioned for mini-stadium

Remuna: The state government has sanctioned Rs40 lakh for upgradation of Rupabali playground into a mini-stadium in Balasore. Minister of State for Sports and Youth Services, Tusharkanti Behera, laid the foundation stone for the project in Barunisingh panchayat under Remuna block. "I am happy that youngsters in Balasore district and Remuna block in particular keep interest in sports activities. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has dreamt a lot for the betterment of the younger generation," he observed.

42 families relocated from Debrigarh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sambalpur, Dec 19: Around 80 people of 42 families of a village that is nestled in the Debrigarh wildlife sanctuary have been relocated to reduce human-animal conflict and provide basic amenities to them, officials said. The villagers have been shifted to a place outside the reserve forest area, they said. The residents of Lambipali village in Bargarh district were living in a pathetic condition without proper road connectivity, drinking water and health facilities as they stayed far from other human settlements, Hirakud Wildlife Divisional Forest Officer Anshu Das said. They were unable to undertake cultivation due to a high density of wildlife population in Debrigarh, forcing the villagers to migrate in search of livelihood. The rural hamlet was established in the



reserve forest area in 1908. The wildlife division conducted a series of community mobilisation programmes in August to make them aware of the government policy for relocation and compensation, officials said. The villagers, under supervision of the forest department and the district administration, were involved in setting up a relocation colony and were shifted there December 17, the official said. They will construct their pucca houses on the land already allotted to them, and with the help of the administration, all facilities will be provided to them within a year.

Eight countrymade guns seized in Angul

STF NABS YOUTH; GUNRUNNING RACKET SUSPECTED

POST NEWS NETWORK

Angul, Dec 19: Acting on a tip-off, a special task force (STF) of police raided Kerjeng village under Chhendipada police limits in Angul district and arrested a youth on charge of gunrunning, late Saturday night.



The accused was identified as Ratnakar Kalta, 28, an arms smuggler and a native of Sarapali village under Naktideula police limits in neighbouring Sambalpur district bordering Chhendipada. Eight countrymade guns, seven live bullets and a mobile phone were seized from his possession during the raid. The STF raided the place after receiving intelligence inputs about rampant arms smuggling taking place near Budhapal village under

Riamal block in Deogarh district and at Kerjeng village under Chhendipada block in Angul district. Accordingly, an STF team from Bhubaneswar and Chhendipada Police jointly launched a raid in the area, late Saturday night.

They noticed a youth loitering aimlessly in suspicious condition and tried to nab him. The accused tried to escape by brandishing a pistol when the police team overpowered him. The team members seized the firearms and mobile phone from his possession. The STF officials handed over the accused to the Chhendipada police for further action. Chhendipada police registered a case and launched further probe into the arms smuggling by Kalta. He was subjected to grilling about his network, Chhendipada IIC Dhiren Kumar Behera said. The exact details about the arms dealing by Kalta and involvement of any racket can be ascertained after completion of the probe, the IIC said.

Notably, the STF has seized 64 firearms and 98 rounds of live ammunition since 2020, he added.

Prosthetic restoration hub comes up in Sambalpur

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Dec 19: In a first, an artificial limb restoration centre has been established at Sambalpur, a report said.

The centre, which is the first of its kind in the state, has been established at regional rehabilitation centre at Balibandha in Sambalpur. District Collector Subham Saxena inaugurated the centre, Saturday. The centre has been named as Silicon Cosmetic Restoration Workshop. The centre will help implant the fingers, nails, eyes, ears, lips and other body parts in individuals according to their complexion.

Inaugurating the centre, Collector Saxena gave away prosthetic thumb to a 24-year-old widow Tapaswini Meher of Khetrajpur, two left palms to a 13-year-old boy Aman Barik and 12-year-old Hrushikesh Patel of Bada Bazaar, a cosmetic left ear to 11-year-old girl Baby Kandulona of Tileimal in Redhakhole, Saturday. People from Sambalpur as well as other districts will be benefited by this centre, the Collector said.



The centre has been established with support of the district administration and funds available from the department of social security and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Two experts from Delhi trained the centre's employee Sachidananda Khuntia. Other staff will undergo training in phases. Santosh Kumar Nayak, officer of social security and empowerment of persons with disabilities, Rabindra Nath Satapathy, district welfare officer for the disabled and the staff of the regional rehabilitation centre among others were present at the function.

Ganjam: Woman sarpanch in Badapalli begs for a living

SPECIAL AUDIT OF DEVELOPMENTAL WORKS DEMANDED



POST NEWS NETWORK

Khallikote, Dec 19: The sarpanch of Badapalli panchayat under Khallikote block in Ganjam district has resorted to begging in nearby villages to make ends meet.

Hema Naik, a septuagenarian woman, won the panchayat election without contest nearly five years ago. She now leads a miserable life, despite being the sarpanch, locals said.

Hema belonging to Scheduled Caste was elected sarpanch as there was no rival against her. She is seen moving door to door every day seeking alms. Her plight surfaced after a video of her begging went viral.

Interestingly, Hema was seen sharing the dais a few days ago with MLA Suryamani

Baidya at an event where 'smart health cards' were distributed among beneficiaries under Biju Swasthya Kalyana Yojana.

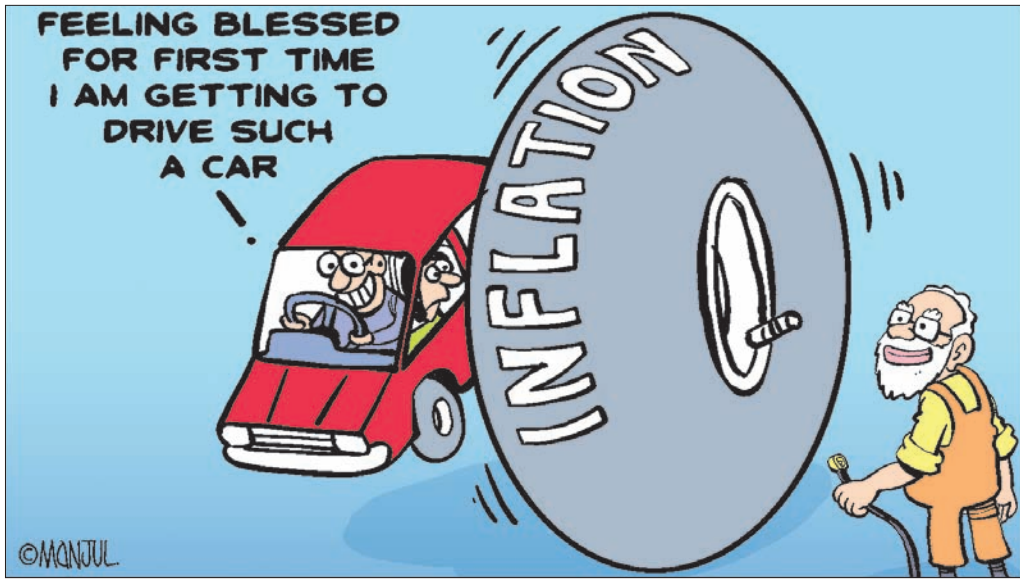
Hema attends the panchayat office on special occasions alone. Otherwise, she keeps on begging most of the days. When asked about her day-to-day official works, she remained silent and smiled.

On the other hand, villagers alleged that some people are taking advantage of Hema's ignorance about official works. "Despite being the sarpanch, she knows nothing about her works. Many officials are misappropriating the funds meant for panchayat's development," a local said.

Various outfits demanded special audit on various developmental activities implemented in the panchayat in last five years.

However, Khallikote BDO Mitali Patra said, "Allegation of the sarpanch begging is baseless. As she is not educated to handle official works, her husband and sons do the works on her behalf." Sunday, tehsildar Rajkishore Patnaik and BDO Mitali Patra provided Rs 10,000 from Red Cross Fund, blankets and 30 kg of rice to the sarpanch.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Eco-tourism boost for Koili Ghughar

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jharsuguda, Dec 19: The government has started working on an eco-tourism project at Koili Ghughar, a tourist spot under Lakhampur block in Jharsuguda district. A foundation stone for the project was laid by MP Suresh Pujari.

In the first phase, ₹3 crore will be made available for the eco-

₹3CR DMF FUND TO BE SPENT ON INFRA

tourism development from the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) fund. Local tribals have long been demanding tourist tag for Koili Ghughar.

Speaking on the occasion, MP Suresh Pujari and Brajrajnagar MLA Kishore Mohanty said that

considering the demand of the local people, the tourism minister had visited the spot and felt the need for development of the scenic place. The state government later accorded status of tourist spot to the place. For eco-tourism project of Koili Ghughar, the forest department has prepared an outlay for the project. The outlay has been sent to the Collector for approval.

Jumbo injured in Khuntuni range; treatment efforts on

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khuntuni, Dec 19: Forest officials have initiated efforts to tranquillise an injured female elephant to provide it treatment at Baradei Thakurani Pata near Brahmanbanasta under Khuntuni range in Cuttack. The animal has a deep wound on its right leg and it has been limping.

Meanwhile, a team of wildlife experts from the Satkosia sanctuary has been pressed into service.

Forest officials including Athagarh DFO Gopinath Sudarshan Yadav, range officer Gajendra Singh Pal Mathur, ACF Ghanshyam Muduli, foresters Rakesh Dalei, Saroj Panda and Dibyasingh Parida traced the injured elephant.

The ranger said that the elephant, aged nearly 15, is part of a 22-member herd. On being informed by the DFO, a four-member expert team from the Satkosia sanctuary reached the Khuntuni range.

The elephant was found limping amid the herd. This has made the effort of the officials to tranquillise the animal even more difficult.

Officials said that the injury of the animal might have been caused due to attack by a tusk or by a blunt piece of wood in the forest.

Union Bank of India advertisement containing a sale notice for immovable/ovable properties. It lists various properties for sale, including land parcels, buildings, and agricultural land, with details on location, area, and price. The notice is for an e-auction sale under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.



In sincerity is the certitude of victory. Sincerity! Sincerity! How sweet is the purity of thy presence?

THE MOTHER



Wilted EC

Constitutional propriety demands distinction between different pillars of a democratic society. It is essential that each arm of governance respects the others and does not transgress into their authority or tarnish their image.

Of late the people's trust in the independence of the judiciary has been somewhat shaken when several judgements of monumental importance to national life appeared to have been pronounced to blatantly oblige the executive.

When the PMO summoned the Chief Election Commissioner to a meeting chaired by an official in the PMO, the initial reaction of the CEC was predictable and appropriate as he made known his 'displeasure' at the tone and tenor of the letter to him and did not oblige the PMO by attending the meeting.

In India, the EC not only conducts elections but also supervises an electoral system in a manner that both the winner and the loser respect its decisions. Such trust and veneration have been built over the years. For this reason alone, the EC must be given due respect by the executive and it must be seen to be doing so not by mere words, but by deeds as well.

The country has since seen a few CECs who have made a mark on the electoral process. The other name that comes to mind is of JM Lingdoh. The account given by former CEC SY Quraishi in response to the PMO's preposterous letter to the EC is of instructive value.

The CEC and the two other Election Commissioners have done great disservice to the nation and the Constitution by subsequently surrendering to the government by attending an informal session with the official.

WISDOM CORNER

- Do the right thing. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest. MARK TWAIN
The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it. HENRY DAVID THOREAU
Time changes everything except something within us which is always surprised by change. THOMAS HARDY

WORDSWORTH

Pusillanimous

If you are pusillanimous, you have a small soul or weak spirit, one with few reserves of strength with which to resist the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. The implications are of utter spinelessness and a contemptible lack of courage.

Purl

Purl is from an obsolete Scots word pirl, which means a "twist". It was applied in the sixteenth century to a thread or cord made of twisted gold or silver wire that was used for embroidery.

LOL

Choose a punishment

A man was caught for speeding and went before the judge. The judge said, "What will you



take...300 days or \$30." The man replied, "I think I'll take the money."



Shivaji Sarkar

FOOD INFLATION ESPECIALLY IN STAPLES LIKE PULSES AND EDIBLE OIL IS THE LAST THING ANY POLITICAL PARTY WANTS IN THE RUN UP TO A CRUCIAL ELECTION

The highest wholesale price inflation in decades at 14.23 per cent may result in high deficit leading to levying of more taxes. Government expenses are certain to rise even if it wants to keep the deficit low at least on paper around 6 per cent.

SPECTRUM EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

A great time to be a techie

In the last 22 months, there has been a shortage of jobs in India. During the pandemic, sales of every business decreased, losses increased and activities came to a standstill. As a result, the unemployment rate also increased.



Narvijay Yadav

KEEPING PACE WITH THE CHANGING TIMES, MANY COMPANIES ARE INCREASING THEIR TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES

Looking from the perspective of the year 2022, new age businesses present hope, especially technical jobs. Keeping pace with the changing times, many companies are increasing their technical capabilities. This shows that the way companies work is changing and the use of technology is increasing.

Violence against children

Sir, Children across the world face heinous forms of violence, exploitation and abuse. It is estimated that around one billion children globally experience some form of violence every year.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST B-15, Russagarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

FOCUS INFLATION

MORE TAXES TO BE LEVIED?



The price rise is heightened by muted factory output at 3.2 per cent. This has led the Asian Development Bank to scale down India's growth estimate to 9.7 per cent, almost close to the rates of the RBI at 9.5 per cent

though in reality it depresses purchasing power and adds to many other woes including contraction of wages, a normal for many industries. Inflation naturally adds to the problem. It becomes difficult to afford high prices at low wages.

The high fuel prices are being tried to be countered with more battery-powered cars and being self-sufficient in producing lithium batteries. It aims at saving about

Rs 2.5 lakh crore in import of crude! But the new effort is capital intensive, expensive and has high prospecting cost. It plans to buy 12 lithium and cobalt mines abroad. The National Aluminium Co Ltd will hold a 40 per cent stake in the joint venture called Khanij Bidesh India Ltd, with Hindustan Copper Ltd and Mineral Exploration Corp Ltd controlling 30 per cent each.

Chinese companies control most such mines in Australia, Chile and Argentina. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison had discussed about Indian participation in critical metallic sectors. The progress is slow. Besides, lithium production cost is high and with rising shipping costs overall cost becomes oppressive.

apart, lithium reserves are not high and the prospective mines may not necessarily produce as much lithium as the world demands. A caution is needed before rushing for such a venture.

Though the new battery industry is trying hard for a fillip, it seems that battery powered cars may not be an economic solution. Overall so far despite all its complexities petroleum remains the versatile fuel and for long the world may not get rid of it howsoever it may like.

Most efforts often are crisis-led solutions and ignore the problems as the implementers are competing for kudos and high profits. India should better move slowly on battery production and electric cars. So far 20 companies have shown interest in producing lithium batteries.

Lessons must be drawn from the semiconductor crisis. There is also the problem in getting the chip essential for manufacturing semiconductor. It has hit the passenger vehicle industry hard. Automobile production has reduced by 19 per cent to 12.88 lakh units from 18.88 lakh units.

Similarly there is 20-30 per cent year-on-year rise in prices of edible oil. A public distribution department note says despite cut in import duty, a sudden spurt in prices edible oils/oilseeds has been observed which may be due to alleged hoarding of it by the stock holders.

So there can be programmes but solving the crisis in critical areas may not be easy. The impending shortages and cartelisation may result in overall price hikes. If the fuel crisis is not solved it is likely that inflation in the Indian situation would continue to be a bane.

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brings more opportunities and better prospects for everyone.

Due to the increasing use of digital technology, the demand for IT professionals is increasing in the Indian markets. Employment opportunities are being created in technology, healthcare, e-commerce and manufacturing sectors. The job opportunities in the field of IT are much more than one can imagine.

Since the desired candidates are not available in sufficient numbers, IT companies intend to increase the salaries of the existing staff to retain their best employees. Companies do not want to lose their existing employees. For example, HCL Technologies has made a plan to give stake to 3,000 senior workers in the company as part of a strategy to retain the talent.

The writer is a senior journalist and columnist. Views expressed are personal.

A day to remember

Sir, Goa Liberation Day is celebrated December 19 every year to mark the success of 'Operation Vijay' undertaken by the Indian Armed Forces that liberated Goa from Portuguese rule. This year marks the 60th anniversary of Goa's liberation from the immoral and illegal 450-year Portuguese rule.

CK Subramaniam, NAVI MUMBAI

of the day **QUOTE**

India-Vietnam Parliamentary Friendship Groups in the respective Parliaments have been contributing to strengthen the bilateral cooperation



M VENKAIAH NAIDU | VICE PRESIDENT

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPPC) has fined the National Buildings Construction Corporation (NBCC) ₹1 crore for violating the ban imposed on construction activities to curb air pollution



GOPAL RAI | ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

There has not been a single instance of corruption in the last seven years. We have provided a corruption-free government. We have taken many decisions and one or two may be wrong. But no one, not even critics, can say that our intention is bad



AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Terrorist killed
Srinagar: A Pakistani Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist was killed in an encounter with security forces in Harwan area of the city in the early hours of Sunday, police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Harwan following specific input about the presence of terrorists in the area, he said. The search operation turned into an encounter after terrorists fired upon the forces, who retaliated. In the ensuing gunfight, a terrorist was killed, the official said. The slain terrorist was identified as Saifulla, resident of Pakistan.

36 fall ill
Thane: Thirty-six people fell ill after having prasad in a village in Panvel, an official said Sunday. The prasad was distributed at a temple in Rithghar on Saturday on the occasion of 'Datta Jayanti', Panvel tehsildar Vijay Talekar said. "Thirty-six people complained of giddiness, nausea and stomach problems after having prasad. They were admitted in a hospital and many have been discharged too. All are stable at the moment. A medical team is in the village to monitor the situation," he said.

Couple attacked
Palghar: A newly married couple was allegedly stabbed by an unidentified person at their home here in Maharashtra, police said Sunday. The incident took place around 2 am on Saturday in Nallasopara area, Tulinj police station's senior inspector Rajendra Kamble said. While the 24-year-old man and his wife, aged 22, were asleep, the accused allegedly broke into their house and attacked them with knife, he said.

Goat pox vaccine launched in India
Bangalore: A vaccine to control goat pox disease among India's significant goat population, which has high economic importance for rural livestock growers, was launched Sunday. 'Raksha Goat Pox', of leading Indian Immunologicals Ltd (IIL), is a live attenuated vaccine I.P. (Uttarkashi strain) grown on vero cell culture. The primary vaccination has to be done at 3 months of age and re-vaccination annually. The technology for the vaccine and its testing was obtained from Indian Council of Agriculture Research-Indian Veterinary Research Institute (ICAR-IVRI), Government of India and has been tested and certified by it for commercial release.

'LAND GRAB' BY ASSAM CM'S FAMILY

Cong demands SIT probe

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma

New Delhi, Dec 19: Congress Sunday demanded a time-bound SIT probe into an alleged land scam involving the Assam Chief Minister's family. It alleged that a company owned by Assam CM's wife and relatives has illegally grabbed government land. Addressing a joint press conference, Congress leaders Gaurav Vallabh, Ripun Bora, Jitendra Singh and Gaurav Gogoi said: "Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, on one hand is showing hard-handedness in evicting poor and deprived families on the ground that no one has the right to illegally takeover the government land, but on the other hand he is handing over the government land worth crores of rupees to his family members on his own whims and fancies," they alleged. The Congress alleged: "As per an investigation by leading media houses, a real estate company, RBS Realtors, Co-founded by the chief minister's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sarma is allegedly occupying around 18 acres of government land intended for landless indi-

viduals and institutions." The party alleged that RBS Realtors Private Limited acquired most of the 18 acres in two stages, first in 2006-2007 and then in 2009. Individuals, who are landless and needy, are granted ceiling surplus land by the Assam government and are prohibited from selling that land for a 10-year period. "In 2009, a total of 11 bigha three katha and four lessa (i.e. 3,01,674 square feet or 6.92 acres) of ceiling surplus land in Bongora intended for and allotted to supposedly needy

individuals by the government of Assam was bought by Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife's company, violating the 10-year lock-in period," it said. "A total of seven plots in North Guwahati were allegedly allocated to RBS Realtors between 2008 and 2009 Plot 1- 4.37 acre land; Assam government allotted 4.37 acre ceiling surplus land to Lalmoti Talukdar on condition that it could not be sold for ten years. Barely two months later, on January 28, 2009, Talukdar sold 3.19 acres of the 4.37 acre to RBS Realtors Plot 2- 1872

MERCURY PLUMMETS



Birds search for food on a frozen surface of Dal Lake during a cold winter morning, in Srinagar. PTI PHOTO

KCR gearing up for showdown with Centre

Unlike the first phase of protest, which was confined to 'dharnas' in all the 119 Assembly constituencies, and the subsequent mega dharna led by KCR, as the Chief Minister is popularly known, in Hyderabad, the third phase will include demonstrations and burning of effigies

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Hyderabad, Dec 19: Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy is gearing up for a direct fight with the Narendra Modi government at the Centre over the 'raw deal' being meted out in the state, especially in paddy procurement. After two rounds of sit-in, including the one led by the Chief Minister himself in Hyderabad last month, demanding the Centre to lift entire paddy produced in the state, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) chief has asked his party cadres to widen the scope of the fight by staging protests in every village against 'anti-farmer' policies of the BJP-led NDA government. Unlike the first phase of protest, which was confined to 'dharnas' in all the 119 Assembly con-



stituencies, and the subsequent mega dharna led by KCR, as the Chief Minister is popularly known, in Hyderabad, the third phase will include demonstrations and burning of effigies. At a meeting with ministers, TRS state legislators, MPs and other leaders on December 17, KCR had declared an open war

with the Centre. "The party cadres have been told to burn effigies of BJP-led Centre and Union ministers who are speaking lies and spreading misinformation over the issue of paddy procurement," a senior party leader had said after the meeting. This will be the first time in seven years that TRS will be organising protests of this nature against the BJP-led Central government. KCR, who last week completed three years as Chief Minister in his second term, minced no words in slamming the Centre for doing injustice to Telangana. He asked the party leaders to go to the people in their respective constituencies and explain to them the anti-farmer policies of the Centre. KCR told the party cadres that the time has come for a decisive fight with the Centre, which is

RS productivity plunges to 37.60%



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: The productivity of Rajya Sabha hit a low of 37.60 percent during the third week of the ongoing Monsoon Session owing to disruptions and forced adjournments over the issue of suspension of 12 member of the House, officials said Sunday. The continued disruptions pulled down the cumulative functionality of the House for the first three weeks to 46.70 percent, the RS secretariat said. According to the data collected by the secretariat, the productivity of Rajya Sabha was 49.70 per cent and 52.50 per cent during the first and the second week, respectively. During the third week, of the total scheduled sitting time of 27 hours 11 minutes, the House could function only for 10 hours 14 minutes, losing 62.40 per cent of available time on account of disruptions and forced adjournments on the issue of suspension of 12 member of the House, the officials said. "During the third week, Question Hour which is meant for seeking the accountability of the Government has suffered the most with only four of the 75 listed Starred Questions orally answered by the concerned ministers," the RS secretariat said. Only 11.40 per cent of the time available for Question Hour was utilised during the week, while 62.70 per cent of the functional time has been spent on the government's legislative business. Three bills were passed and re-

According to the data collected by the secretariat, the productivity of Rajya Sabha was 49.70 per cent and 52.50 per cent during the first and the second week, respectively

turned during the week after discussing for a total of 6 hours and 25 minutes in which 33 members participated. A Short Duration Discussion on the 'situation arising out of the cases of Omicron variant of COVID-19' taken up during the week remained inconclusive. This discussion is listed for resumption Monday, the officials said. Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu had adjourned the House on Friday after 17 minutes of Zero Hour, urging the government and the Opposition parties to resolve the stalemate on the suspension issue. During the 15 sittings of the first three weeks of ongoing monsoon session, the House functioned for less than an hour per day for six sittings, according to official data. About 42 per cent of the functional time of the House has been spent on the government's legislative business passing a total of eight bills so far, while only about 18 per cent of the time has been spent on the Question Hour with only 56 of the 217 listed questions orally answered, said the secretariat.

3 farmers found dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bardhaman (WB), Dec 19: Three farmers have been found dead in West Bengal's rice bowl Purba Bardhaman district in the last two days, police said Sunday. The deceased farmers' families claimed that they had died by suicide after Cyclone Jawad-induced untimely rain destroyed potato and paddy crops, while the district administration is probing the incidents. Two farmers were found hanging in their houses in Debipur and Bantir villages in Raina I block on Saturday. Another farmer was found hanging in his house in Biruha village in Kalna II block Friday. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination, a police officer said. District Magistrate Priyanka Singla said that the incidents are being investigated. However, Raina I block BDO Soumen Banik said that after preliminary investigation, it was found that the suicides were not due to crop loss, and the police and agriculture department have been asked to further investigate the incidents.

In Bihar, smuggling fuel from UP is a rewarding affair

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Patna, Dec 19: With the majority of the Bihar police busy in enforcing the liquor ban, the fuel mafias are using this situation to their advantage to smuggle fuel from the border areas, especially from the border districts adjoining Uttar Pradesh. At present, the difference in petrol and diesel prices in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is big and it is turning out to be a great source of income for people living in West Champaran, Gopalganj, Siwan, Saran Bhojpur, Buxar, Kaimur and Rohtas districts. Such a situation emerged in the border areas after the central government reduced Value Added Tax

(VAT) on petrol and diesel ahead of assembly elections in five states including Uttar Pradesh. It has also asked all the states to reduce VAT. Following the instructions of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, the BJP ruled states reduced VAT more than the states ruled by other parties. In Bihar, the NDA is in power in alliance with the JDU to which Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also belongs. But he has not reduced VAT as much as BJP ruled states like Uttar Pradesh did. At present, the price difference in petrol is ₹13 per litre. In Bihar, the price of petrol is ₹108.71 per litre while in Uttar Pradesh the price of petrol is just ₹95.71 per litre.



Similarly, the price of diesel in Bihar is ₹93.72 per litre while it is available at ₹87.24 in Uttar Pradesh. As a result, people living in West Champaran are crossing Kushinagar border, purchasing the fuel in gallons and returning to their native places during the night. Similarly, people living on the borders of Uttar Pradesh in Gopalganj district go to Kushinagar

and Deoria, residents of Siwan and Saran go to Balia, residents of Buxar are frequently crossing the Bhabrauli border to enter Ghazipur district, Kaimur's residents go to Chandauli and Sonbhadra districts while Rohtas's residents generally go to Sonbhadra district to buy fuel at cheaper rates. "Smuggling of petrol and diesel is less dangerous than smuggling of liquor from Uttar Pradesh to Bihar: I used to go to Kushinagar in the evening and wait in the queue at fuel pumps for my turn. I used to completely fill the petrol tank of my Wagon R car and also fill two cans of 30 litres each in the dickey and easily return to my native place in West Champaran. It is a fruitful business for us as we used to sell it

for ₹5 to ₹6 less compared to the price of petrol at the petrol pumps in West Champaran," said Radhe Verma, a resident of West Champaran who did not mention the name of his village. "After the Bihar police's continuous raids to search of liquor in the state, we have left the manufacturing of liquor for some time. Now, we have jumped into the smuggling of petrol. It has a good margin of ₹7 to ₹8 per litre. The chances of a raid are minimal in this case. Moreover, we take non-motorable routes to smuggle petrol in the night using bicycles. The district police cannot dare to challenge us," said Lal Kishore Prasad, a resident of Gopalganj who also goes to Kushinagar.

international



Migrants continue to face widespread stigmatization, inequalities, xenophobia, and racism. Migrant women and girls face heightened risk of gender-based violence and have fewer options to seek support
 ANTONIO GUTERRES | UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

RUSSIA OFFICIALLY WITHDRAWS FROM OPEN SKIES TREATY

Russia has officially withdrawn from the Treaty on Open Skies, the Foreign Ministry announced in a statement. "Unfortunately, all our efforts did not allow us to preserve the treaty as it was intended by its authors," the Ministry statement said



of the day quote

NATO will discuss Russia's security proposals but it will not let Moscow dictate the alliance's military posture
CHRISTINE LAMBRECHT | GERMAN DEFENCE MINISTER

We were preparing to travel to Doha to negotiate with the Taliban about convening a Loya Jirga (National Assembly) and about a transition of power
HAMDULLAH MOHIB | FORMER AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER

Sooner or later, just as we lowered inflation all the way to 4% when I came to power, we will lower it again, we will make it fall again
TAYYIP ERDOGAN | TURKEY PRESIDENT

Daily Omicron cases in the UK triple to more than 10K

THE DEATH TOLL FROM THE OMICRON VARIANT JUMPED FROM ONE TO SEVEN

AGENCIES
London, Dec 19: More than 10,000 new Omicron cases have been reported in the UK in the highest daily surge so far, as the number of overall Covid-19 infections stood well above 90,000 cases.
 The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has confirmed an additional 10,059 cases of the new variant Saturday, more than three times as many as reported Friday (3,201), taking the total number of cases to 24,968.
 A total of 90,418 infections have also been reported, as the UK's Covid-19 daily deaths tally stood at

125, up Friday's count of 111, but down on the 132 reported last Saturday.
 "We've shown in the past as government in dealing with this pandemic that we will do what is necessary, but it's got to be backed up by data," UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid said in reference to reports that the government is planning tighter lockdown restrictions due to the Omicron surge.
 "We are watching the data and discussing it with our scientists and our best advisers almost on an hourly basis. We will monitor very carefully, and keep the situation under review," he explained.



Ministers have received a briefing on the latest Covid-19 data and a meeting of the Cabinet Office Briefing Room A emergency committee will be held over the weekend to assess if further measures are to be brought in.
 "I think if new restrictions are

brought in, and by the way, it's inevitable, there must be a major package of financial support for our hospitality, culture, and retail sectors," London Mayor Sadiq Khan said, who declared a "major incident" in the UK capital to help deal with the city's massive surge in the coronavirus cases.
 "I'm afraid over the last few days we've seen a major surge of Omicron. Although those in hospital is less than what it was this time last year, including those on ventilators, the number of positive cases is way above. In the last 24 hours, we've had almost 30,000 confirmed new cases, and in the last

seven days, more than 130,000 confirmed new cases. So, the direction of the travel is only going one way," he warned.
 Current Plan B rules for England include Covid passes for certain events, face-masks in more places and people being urged to work from home if they can.
 Other parts of the United Kingdom have similar rules in place, but Scotland has gone further by asking people to limit social contact to three households at a time in the run-up to Christmas. Wales has also ordered nightclubs to close post-Christmas from December 27.

Typhoon deaths in Philippines top 100



A house damaged by Typhoon Rai lies along a road in Surigao del Norte province, southern Philippines

AGENCIES
Manila, Dec 19: The death toll in the strongest typhoon to batter the Philippines this year has reached at least 146, and the governor of an island province especially hard-hit by Typhoon Rai said there may be even greater devastation that has yet to be reported.
 Gov. Arthur Yap of Bohol province in the central Philippines said 72 people died there, 10 others were missing and 13 injured, and suggested the fatalities may still considerably increase because only 33 of 48 mayors were able to report back to him due to downed communications.
 Officials were trying to confirm a sizable number of deaths caused by landslides and extensive flooding elsewhere. In statements posted on Facebook, Yap ordered mayors in his province of more than 1.2 million people to invoke their emergency powers to secure food packs

for large numbers of people along with drinking water. Both have been urgently sought in several hard-hit towns.
 After joining a military aerial survey of typhoon-ravaged towns, Yap said "it is very clear that the damage sustained by Bohol is great and all-encompassing." He said the initial inspection did not cover four towns where the typhoon blew in as it rampaged through central island provinces Thursday and Friday. The government said about 780,000 people were affected, including more than 300,000 residents who had to evacuate their homes. At least 64 other typhoon deaths were reported by the disaster-response agency, the national police and local officials. Most were hit by falling trees and collapsed walls, drowned in flash floods or were buried in landslides. Officials on Dinagat Islands, one of the southeastern provinces first pounded by the typhoon, separately reported 10 deaths just from a few towns, bringing the overall fatalities so far to 146. President Rodrigo Duterte flew to the region Saturday and promised 2 billion pesos (\$ 40 million) in aid. He met officials in Maasin City in Southern Leyte province where he was born. Duterte's family later relocated to the southern city of Davao, where he served as a longtime mayor before rising to the presidency.
 "The moment I was born into this world, I told my mother, 'Let's not stay here because this place is really prone to typhoons,'" Duterte told officials. At its strongest, the typhoon packed sustained winds of 195 kilometers (121 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 270 kph (168 mph), making it one of the most powerful in recent years to hit the disaster-prone archipelago, which lies between the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea.
 Floodwaters rose rapidly in Bohol's riverside town of Loboc, where residents were trapped on their roofs and in trees. They were rescued by the coast guard the following day. On Dinagat Islands, an official said the roofs of nearly all the houses, including emergency shelters, were either damaged or blown away entirely.
 At least 227 cities and towns lost electricity, which has since been restored in only 21 areas, officials said, adding that three regional airports were damaged, including two that remain closed.

SHORT TAKES

Bandits kill over twenty

Abuja: Over 20 people were killed when bandits attacked villages in Nigeria's northwestern state of Kaduna Saturday, a local official said Sunday. Samuel Aruwan, the commissioner for internal security affairs in Kaduna, said in a statement that four villages in the state's Giwa local government area came under heavy attacks, as the bandits went on the rampage, shooting at the villagers and setting ablaze houses late Saturday, as per Xinhua report.

Pak hosts OIC meet on Afghan

Islamabad/New Delhi: Pakistan will Sunday host the 17th extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers to focus on the current aggravating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, Geo News reported.

Netherlands to go into lockdown

The Hague: The Dutch government has announced a stricter lockdown out of fear for the rise of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in the country. "I stand here with a gloomy mind," Prime Minister Mark Rutte said at a press conference Saturday in the Hague. "The Netherlands is going into lockdown again."

Karachi blast: Death toll climbs to 17

Karachi: The death toll in the powerful blast that ripped through a building of a private bank in Pakistan's financial capital of Karachi has gone up to 17 after another injured person died at a hospital Sunday. The blast took place in a gas pipeline running through a sewage drain Saturday, killing at least 16 people and wounding 15 others while causing immense damage to the building constructed atop the drain, a spokesperson for the Karachi Police said.

12 killed in flash floods in Iraq

Baghdad: A total of 12 people were killed in floods caused by torrential rain in northern Iraq, governor of Erbil province Omed Khoshnaw said Sunday. The torrents swept 15 areas in Erbil, a total of 2,509 homes and 867 civilian cars were damaged by the floods, Khoshnaw said in a press conference in Erbil, the capital of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

LANKAN NAVY ARRESTS 43 INDIAN FISHERMEN

AGENCIES
Colombo, Dec 19: The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 43 Indian fishermen and seized six trawlers for allegedly poaching in the country's territorial waters, an official statement said Sunday.
 The Navy arrested the fishermen in seas Southeast of the Delft Island in Jaffna Saturday. "A special operation conducted by the Navy in seas Southeast of the Delft Island, Jaffna on the night of 18th December 2021, led to seizure of 6 Indian fishing trawlers poaching in Sri Lankan waters, with 43 Indian fishermen aboard," the Navy said in a statement.

The arrests were made by the Fast Attack Craft of the 04th Fast Attack Craft Flotilla (4 FAF) attached to the Northern Naval Command, it said, adding that the operation was carried out while adhering to the Covid-19 protocols. Arrangements are being made to hand them over to relevant authorities for legal action after conducting Rapid Antigen Tests of the apprehended Indian fishermen, it said.
 Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters. The fishermen issue has become a major irritant in bilateral ties.

Hong Kong votes in 'patriots only' polls

AGENCIES
Hong Kong, Dec 19: Hong Kong government efforts and last-ditch campaigning by candidates were struggling Sunday to boost turnout in an overhauled "patriots"-only legislative election, the first under a sweeping new security law.
 After eight hours of voting, turnout was more than 10 percentage points below the previous Legislative Council election five years ago.
 The election - in which only candidates screened by the government as "patriots" can run - has been criticised by some activists, foreign governments and rights groups while mainstream pro-democracy parties are not par-



Hong Kong government leaders have been urging people to vote, saying the poll is representative

ticipating. Turnout is a central issue, as observers consider it a barometer of legitimacy in an election where pro-democracy candidates are largely absent, more than a third of the seats

will be selected by a committee stacked with Beijing loyalists and a crackdown under a China-imposed national security law has jailed scores of democrats. Civil society groups have disbanded. The government Saturday sent blanket text messages to Hong Kong residents urging people to vote, and some critics calling on people to stay away as a protest. It is a crime in Hong Kong to incite someone not to vote or to cast an invalid vote.
 Hong Kong leaders say the poll is representative. They insist the overhaul, like the security law imposed last year, was needed to ensure stability after protracted protests that rocked the Asian financial hub in 2019.

Threat of Omicron looms over X-mas holidays in Europe, US

AGENCIES
London, Dec 19: The Netherlands went into lockdown Sunday and the possibility of more Covid-19 restrictions over the Christmas and New Year period loomed over several European countries as the Omicron coronavirus variant spreads quickly.
 In the United States, White House medical adviser Anthony Fauci urged people travelling over the holidays to get booster shots and always wear masks in crowded public spaces.
 He described Omicron as "raging through the world," and said travelling will increase the risk of infection even among vaccinated people. Dutch urban centres were largely deserted as the country began a snap lockdown that left people's Christmas plans in disarray.
 Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced the shutdown Saturday evening, ordering the closure of all but essential stores, as well as restaurants, hairdressers, gyms, museums and other public places from Sunday until at least January 14.

Uyghur woman recalls torture at China labour camp

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
Beijing/New Delhi, Dec 19: An Uyghur woman, who was arrested in northern China's Xinjiang region, has recalled the physical torture she endured during her detention at a labour camp, saying that she was gang raped and her "private parts were tortured with electricity", the New York Post reported.
 "You're left with marks on your body that make you not want to look at yourself," the newspaper quoted Tursunay Ziyawudun as saying. Her story is, tragically, not uncommon for members of the minority Uyghur community, with Turkish roots, in President Xi Jinping's China, the report said.



"They gave me sterilisation pills," said Ziyawudun. "I am pretty sure that is why I cannot have a baby now." Since around 2016, the Uyghurs have been pulled off streets and sent to re-education camps, where reports have surfaced about people being tortured, raped and even killed. They are sent there under the auspices of learning a trade and having their patriotism reinforced, the New York Post said.

Since around 2016, the Uyghurs have been pulled off streets and sent to re-education camps, where reports have surfaced about people being tortured, raped and even killed

In 2017, Ziyawudun was arrested, forced by police officers to turn over her passport and taken to a prison camp about 30 minutes from her village.
 There, she was made to sing communist songs of patriotism

and repeatedly told that her Muslim religion does not exist, the report said. After a month, she developed stomach issues, fainted and was released.
 "They sent me to the hospital," Ziyawudun, who came to the US as a political refugee in 2020, said. "If they hadn't I might have died." The year after she was arrested, she was summoned to a police station and told that she needed to complete her training.
 She was sent back to the "re-education" camp, where her hair was shorn, likely to be sold as a wig, and her earrings were ripped out. "They pulled it so hard that my ears were bleeding," Ziyawudun recalled. "I was being treated like an animal."



