



## SELF ASSESSMENT

Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas says when she puts herself under pressure, she performs better

LEISURE P2



## PATRIOTS WIN HK POLLS

Pro-Beijing candidates dominated HK's elections in the city's first public poll after Beijing passed a poll amendment

INTERNATIONAL P10



## AUSSIERS WIN 2ND TEST

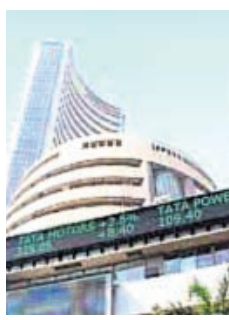
Jhye Richardson's five-wicket haul helps Australia beat England by 275 runs in the second Ashes Test in Adelaide

SPORTS P12



## ALERT FOR SEVERE COLD WAVE

**Bhubaneswar:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Monday predicted cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely to prevail in several parts of Odisha in the next two to three days. As per IMD, north-westerly/northerly dry and cold wind at lower levels is penetrating over Odisha. Under its influence, isolated cold wave conditions are likely to prevail in some parts of interior and adjoining districts of the State during the next two to three days. Already reeling from intense cold wave, as many as 13 places in the state recorded minimum (night) temperature below 10 degree Celsius, Sunday. Daringbadi in Kandhamal district recorded the lowest minimum temperature of 4 degree Celsius.



## Omicron scare: Sensex tanks 1,190 pts

**Mumbai:** Equity benchmark Sensex plunged 1,190 points Monday as concerns over the impact of surging Omicron cases across the world spooked investors, triggering an intense selloff in global equities. The 30-share index slumped 1,189.73 points or 2.90 per cent to end at 55,822.01. Similarly, the NSE Nifty tanked 371 points or 2.18 per cent to 16,614.20. Tata Steel was the top loser in the Sensex pack, sinking over 5 per cent, followed by SBI, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank and NTPC. On the other hand, HUL and Dr Reddy's were the gainers. According to experts, exploding COVID-19 cases, sustained selling by foreign institutional investors and slowing growth momentum in the developed economies have spooked markets the world over.

## DAS BURMA AIDE'S DEATH

### Two tested by polygraph

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The state crime branch (CB) investigating the mysterious death of Chittaranjan Palai Monday conducted a lie detection (polygraph) test on two of the accused including a woman at the State Forensic Science Laboratory (SFSL) here. Meanwhile, another suspect in the case is scheduled to undergo the polygraph test Tuesday.

The CB sleuths Monday brought the suspects, Jagannath Sarangi



and two of his aides including the woman, to the SFSL for the lie detection test. The sleuths hope to elicit vital leads that would help them remove the mystery behind the death of Palai. The sleuths asked the accused several queries on their relationship with the deceased and the happenings of the fateful day. Palai's uncle alleged that the deceased had gone to attend a feast where the suspect, Sarangi, along with other friends was present December 11. However, he did not return from the feast.

His uncle lodged a complaint with the police alleging that it was a pre-planned murder. Following an order of DGP Abhay, the case was handed over to the CB December 15. Palai, the State Planning Board deputy chairman Sanjay Das Burma's personal aide, was found dead in mysterious circumstances in Nuainai near Sadar Gadamrugasira under Sadar police limits December 13.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



See, our state has become number one... in media spendings

## BOOST TO HEALTHCARE



Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik flags off the Mukhyamantri Vayu Swasthya Seva (air health services) at Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar, Monday. ST Secretary VK Pandian, Health Minister Naba Kishore Das and senior health experts are seen

## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR PANCHAYAT POLLS OUT

■ A total 853 ZP seats will be contested on party symbols while elections for 91,916 wards and 6,794 panchayats will be held on a non-party basis

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The State Election Commission (SEC) Monday issued the Model Code of Conduct to be followed by candidates and parties ahead of three-tier Panchayat polls in the state.

In a 12-page note, the SEC said the code will be in force from the date of issue of the notification for the elections till the counting of votes is completed. The panchayat polls are likely to be held before March 2022. The elections would be held in five phases and the dates would be announced after a meeting with all political parties, a source in the SEC said Monday.

As per the code, parties and candidates will refrain from criticiz-



ing the private life of their rivals during the campaign. The criticism should be confined to policies and programmes of all contestants and their parties in the elections. Any kind of criticism based on unverified allegations or distortions would be considered a violation, the SEC said. Candidates and parties were told to refrain from alluring voters in any form.

Comments, speeches and campaigns in any form that would aggravate differences, create hatred or cause tension among different castes and communities and religious and linguistic groups must be avoided, it said.

Election meetings or campaigns

would not be allowed in any religious and government institution. Campaigning would not be allowed between 8 pm and 7 am and campaigning through public address system would come to an end 36 hours before polling dates.

Candidates contesting for offices where election is conducted on nonpolitical party basis cannot use the name and symbol of any political party during campaigning.

Permission to use public places for holding election meetings and take out procession on public roads will be given by the appropriate authority on a first come first serve basis. No liquor or intoxicant shall be served by any political party or candidates to their workers/supporters on the poll day and during the 36 hours preceding it. Ministers, MPs & MLAs and persons holding public offices cannot combine their official visits with electioneering work and shall not make use of the official machinery or personnel.

## DELIMITATION PANEL Jammu to have 43 seats, Kashmir 47

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** The Delimitation Commission on Jammu and Kashmir has proposed six additional seats for Jammu region while one more Assembly seat for Kashmir Valley, the sources said here Monday.

The sources also said the commission arrived at the proposal to add more seats after the discussion with its five associate members.

The commission, headed by former Supreme Court Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, had a meeting with five Lok Sabha members from Jammu and Kashmir for the consultations and were asked to respond to the proposal by December 31 this year.

The commission has proposed to reserve nine seats for the ST and seven seats for the SC in the UT, the sources said, adding earlier there were no reserved seats for STs and SCs. If the recommendations are implemented, the Jammu region will have 43 seats while the Kashmir Valley will have 47 seats.

## CM unveils air ambulance for tribal districts

Under this service, specialist doctors will be flown to remote areas of the state to treat people suffering from serious ailments

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday launched the Mukhyamantri Vayu Swasthya Seva' (air health services) under which specialist doctors will be flown to remote areas of the state to treat people suffering from serious diseases.

Patnaik flagged off a flight carrying specialist doctors to the tribal-dominated and Maoist-hit Malkangiri district. The doctors after reaching Malkangiri will treat the people suffering from certain serious diseases.

Apart from Malkangiri, the Mukhyamantri Vayu Swasthya Seva' will be available in the tribal-dominated districts of Nabarangpur, Nuapada and Kalahandi in the first phase. Other districts will be covered under the programme in a phased manner, Patnaik said.

Health and Family Welfare Minister NK Das said specialist doctors required for the treatment of critical patients admitted to various district headquarters hospitals (DHHs), will go to the remote districts to treat patients.

He said doctors from medical colleges and corporate hospitals will be flown to the remote districts through aircraft/ helicopters for prompt treatment of the patients. If required, the patients will be airlifted to various health-care facilities in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, the minister said.

So far, the minister informed that a team of doctors of the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack has been formed for this purpose. Later, doctors of MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur; VIMSAR in Burla and

## LONGEST BRIDGE OVER MAHANADI



**Bhubaneswar:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday inaugurated the state's longest bridge over the Mahanadi river at Gopinathpur in Cuttack district. The 3.4-km-long bridge, connecting Singhanath Pitha and Baidesar in Cuttack district, will reduce the distance by 45 km, benefitting around five lakh people, officials said. The bridge, constructed in T-shape, is built at a cost of ₹111 crore, they said. Patnaik had laid the foundation stone of the bridge February 28, 2014. Ahead of Patnaik's visit, the police detained hundreds of Congress and BJP workers, including former MLA Debasis Patnaik, as they were protesting with black flags at Banki. The opposition activists were demanding the dismissal of Minister of State for Home DS Mishra for his alleged link with the prime accused in the Kalahandi woman teacher's kidnap and murder case.

other private hospitals empanelled under the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) will be engaged in the service. The service will be offered free of cost to the patients, the minister said. He said the poor patients who were deprived of better treatment by specialists/experts due to location disadvantage, will now avail the benefit from this initiative. Specialist doctors of neurology, nephrology and cardiology department will be flown to the district headquarters hospitals. The follow-up treatment of the patients will be carried out through telemedicine, he said.

## Heroin worth ₹400cr seized from Pak boat

AGENCIES

**Ahmedabad, Dec 20:** A Pakistani fishing boat with six crew members and carrying 77 kg of heroin worth around ₹400 crore was apprehended in the Indian waters off the Gujarat coast, officials said Monday. The drug seizure was made after Sunday midnight in a joint operation by the Indian Coast Guard and the Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), around 35 nautical miles off the Jakhau coast in Kutch district of Gujarat, they said.

They apprehended the Pakistani fishing boat 'Al Huseini' with six crew members on board in the Indian waters and seized 77 kg of heroin worth approximately ₹400 crore, Gujarat's defence PRO said in a tweet in the morning. The boat was later brought to the Jakhau coast for further investigation, he said.

The Gujarat ATS in a release said the Pakistani boat had left the



Karachi port and was trying to establish contact using very high frequency (VHF) radio channel and code words, 'Hari-1' and 'Hari-2', for the delivery of the drugs. The joint operation was carried out after the ATS received a tip-off that the boat from Karachi was to reach around 35 nautical miles off the Jakhau coast, after crossing the International Maritime Border Line between the two countries. The boat, belonging to one Shahbaz Ali, left the Karachi port and its crew members loaded the drugs sent to them on a fibre boat at a distance of six nautical miles from the Karachi port.

## PANAMA PAPERS LEAK CASE

## Aishwarya appears before ED

■ The 48-year-old daughter-in-law of superstar Amitabh Bachchan is being questioned and her statement is being recorded under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** Actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan Monday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) here for questioning in a case linked to the 2016 'Panama Papers' global tax leaks case, official sources said.

The 48-year-old daughter-in-law of superstar Amitabh Bachchan is being questioned and her statement is being recorded under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA). The actor has also submitted some doc-

uments to the agency when she appeared before the agency at its office near India Gate. Dubbed 'Panama Papers', an investigation of a stockpile of records from Panamanian legal firm Mossack Fonseca by the Washington-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) in 2016 had named several world leaders and celebrities who allegedly stashed away money abroad in offshore companies.

Some of them are stated to be holding valid overseas accounts. The leaks tranche had a total of 426 India-linked cases. The ED has been probing the case linked to the Bachchans since 2016-17.

It had issued notices to the Bachchan family asking them to explain their foreign remittances since 2004 under the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Liberalised



Remittance Scheme (LRS) and regulated under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

Some documents were submitted by the Bachchans to the agency then. Some other instances of alleged irregularities linked to the family are also under the scanner

of the federal probe agency, the sources said. Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, married to Amitabh Bachchan's actor son Abhishek, was stated by the ICIJ to have links with an offshore entity in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) that was created in 2005. Her family was also stated to be part of this offshore entity that had an "initial authorised capital of USD 50,000." The company was reportedly dissolved in 2008. Abhishek Bachchan has also been examined by the ED in the past in another instance linked to the offshore leaks case, sources said.

The government had created a multi-agency group of central investigative agencies under the chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes that also comprised officials from the ED, RBI and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to monitor the probe.

MARKET WATCH	
INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	55822.01 ↓ 1189.73
NIFTY	16614.20 ↓ 371.00
DOLLAR	76.18 ↓ ₹0.15
EURO	86.29 ↓ ₹0.41
GOLD	₹48,333 ↓ ₹261
SILVER	₹61,361 ↓ ₹776

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP	MAX 24.2°C	24.8°C
	MIN 13.8°C	12.4°C
Humidity	80%	70%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
	Forecast: Dry weather most likely	



# leisure



## SPIDER-MAN CO-STARS ARE LIKE FAMILY: MARISA TOMEI

Actress Marisa Tomei says that she loves the camaraderie on set in the *Spider-Man* films and hopes to work with director Jon Watts again. "You do feel part of a family, which is very hard to find in Hollywood," Tomei told the /newspaper.

## MCCARTNEY'S BASS GUITAR SELLS FOR RECORD-BREAKING \$496K

The Beatles icon Paul McCartney's bass guitar Yamaha BB-1200 was sold at auction for \$496,100, making it the most expensive bass ever sold. The instrument smashed the previously-held record set last year when a 1969 Fender Mustang belonging to former *Rolling Stones* rocker Bill Wyman sold for \$384,000.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com  
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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

**ARIES**  
The artist in you seeks expression today. Thus, you could decide to paint your house in attractive colours, or repair a piece of old furniture in modern style. You may become sentimental about a forgotten matchbox collection, and decide to replenish it.

**TAURUS**  
Today, your natural ability to deal confidently and successfully with problems and issues is likely to let you down. Ganesh sees this be particularly true in money matters. You will be caught up in financial problems without being able to resolve them suitably. Confusion and indecision will prevent you from finding a way out.

**GEMINI**  
Your tendency to pay attention to even insignificant happenings will mean that situations evolving around your person will affect you profoundly, even when they shouldn't. You will be showered with love and care by your loved ones.

**CANCER**  
Today, you will feel blessed. And blessed you are, indeed. You will have the proverbial Midas touch, albeit with a slight difference: you will not touch the people you love and turn them to gold. You will just touch their heart and make them happier.

**LEO**  
Humanity is something that is missing a lot these days, and you believe it to be your duty to ensure that you reach out to everyone around you, says Ganesh. But don't expect anything as revolutionary and emphatic in your personal life. At work, you may expect smooth sailing of sorts towards the latter part of the day, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
Creativity is bubbling inside you, asking to be uncorked. You may be struggling more than enough to tackle challenges thrown at you. Cash benefits will come your way in office. But Ganesh advises you to pay due attention to your health.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesh says today you will like to do something special in a subject that interests you. Past incidents or memories will flash in your mind today. Today you will be able to tell what is in your heart and mind to a special person. Ganesh wishes you a happy and joyous day.

**SCORPIO**  
Today, you may be at your creative best and encourage various forms of arts. If the passion grows, you may even consider taking lessons in classical music or dance. Love is in the air during the evening. Ganesh foresees a romantic dinner and drive with your beloved.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Ganesh foresees an action-packed day for you, today. Your work may demand shooting innovative ideas to work on the new projects in the pipeline. And good news is that you will live up to your superiors' expectations.

**CAPRICORN**  
Today, you'll open a mix bag of surprises, opportunities, challenges, and not-so-good fall of events. You'll have a tendency of letting the noticeable details fall between the cracks at work. This is certainly not a good trait to have, however, it will not harm you much. As the day progresses, you'll encounter a delightful surprise, feels Ganesh.

**AQUARIUS**  
Hurry, splash on some Giorgio or curl your tresses! The spotlight is on you today, and you don't want a drab work jacket to take away the shine. You remain brilliant, both on the personal and professional fronts. Your rivals will envy your easy charm, says Ganesh.

**PISCES**  
Your emotions are likely to rule you today. Expenses, which will cause you to dip into your savings, are indicated. Evening should see you build up an amazing connection with a special someone, says Ganesh.

## 'Flaws are a mark of being human'

**Mumbai:** Actress Athiya Shetty recently revealed that she has been a victim of body shaming in her childhood because she looked a certain way and that it took her a long time to gain her lost confidence. Recollecting her memories, she said, "Yes I have fallen into the category of body shaming when I was young. People need to realise that body shaming is not only associated with being overweight but also being skinny. I have always believed that commenting on someone's weight, appearance or anything that can make them less confident is something that is inappropriate."

Talking about her healing process, she said, "I used to be very, very conscious of my body and I still am, but I am a lot better because I am a lot more confident about myself and who I am as a person today." The actress shared that flaws are a mark of being human and there's nothing wrong with imperfections. "Being imperfect is your own perfect, it is important to help society understand that not everyone is the same so I think it's more spoken about for women rather than men to have different body types. All men don't need to be muscular and look a certain way because it is tough to sometimes be a certain way and you shouldn't need to feel that," she concluded.



## Priyanka performs better when under pressure

**New Delhi:** Ever since her acting debut in 2003, Priyanka Chopra Jonas has proved herself in every work that has come her way. The global star says she performs better when under pressure but does not take the stress from other people's expectations.

The former Miss World, who is currently creating waves internationally with her stellar performances, says she was always told that she wouldn't be able to do it.

Proving everyone wrong, Priyanka, who is one of India's highest-paid and most popular entertainers, in an interview said: "I do put pressure on myself. When I put pressure on myself I perform better; I take decisions and work well under pressure. But I don't take pressure from other people's expectations."

The *Mary Kom* actress added: "I never have because I would never be able to survive if I was listening to what everybody thought. I have always been told that 'Yeh thodi na kar payegi' and 'you won't be able to do it'. I have always heard that but I just keep walking forward and keep doing my work."

The actress who swept the audiences off their feet with her work in films such as *Barfi!*, *Kaminey*, *Dil Dhadakne Do* now awaits the release of the much talked about film *The Matrix Resurrections*. IANS



## Subhash Ghai to make OTT debut with 36 Farmhouse

**Mumbai:** Veteran filmmaker Subhash Ghai is all set to make his foray in the OTT space as a producer and writer with the family entertainer *36 Farmhouse*.

The film, which stars Flora Saini, Amol Parashar, Barkha Singh, Vijay Raaz, Ashwini Kalsekar and Sanjay Mishra, is inspired by Ghai's endeavour to offer viewers content that a family can enjoy together.

Talking about the project, Subhash Ghai says, "It's great if one can reach out to viewers across the world, who have exposure to great content. *36 Farmhouse* is sure to echo the sentiments of the Indian diaspora worldwide because it has family issues today at its core and it also explores the dichotomy of the rich and the poor through an interesting lens."

The film, produced by Subhash Ghai and Rahul Puri, directed by Ram Ramesh Sharma, with story written by Subhash Ghai and dialogues by Sharad Tripathi, will be released on ZEE5 as it turns a new leaf in the life of the veteran filmmaker. IANS

## Sanjay wants Hirani to make Munna Bhai sequel

**Mumbai:** As his comedy film *Munna Bhai M.B.B.S* clocked 19 years in Hindi cinema Monday, actor Sanjay Dutt made an emotional appeal to fans in Nagpur to press director Rajkumar Hirani to make *Munna Bhai 3*. The actor, at an event in Nagpur, said, "I am tired of requesting Raju Hirani many times. Since he hails from Nagpur, I appeal to Nagpurians to press him for making *Munna Bhai 3* franchise."

It evoked loud applause from the people. The full cast of the second film *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* included Boman Irani, Dilip Prabhavalkar, Jimmy Sheirgill, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Saurabh Shukla and Parikshat Sahni, among others.

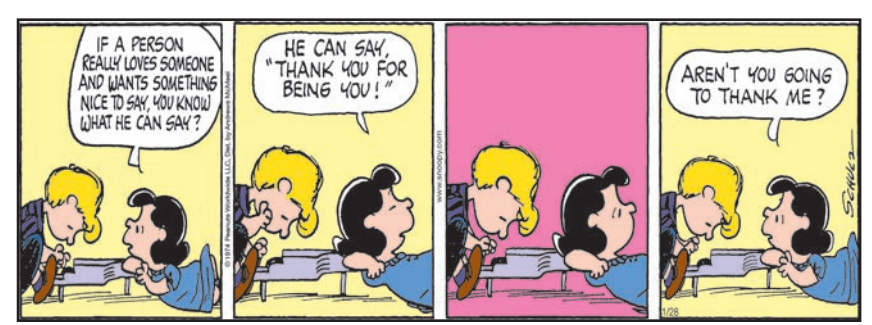
The film won National Awards for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment,

for Best Screenplay, for Best Supporting Actor and for Best Lyrics.

On the work front, Sanjay has a long list of films waiting release such as *Prithviraj*, *Shamshera* and *K.G.F: Chapter 2*. IANS



### PEANUTS



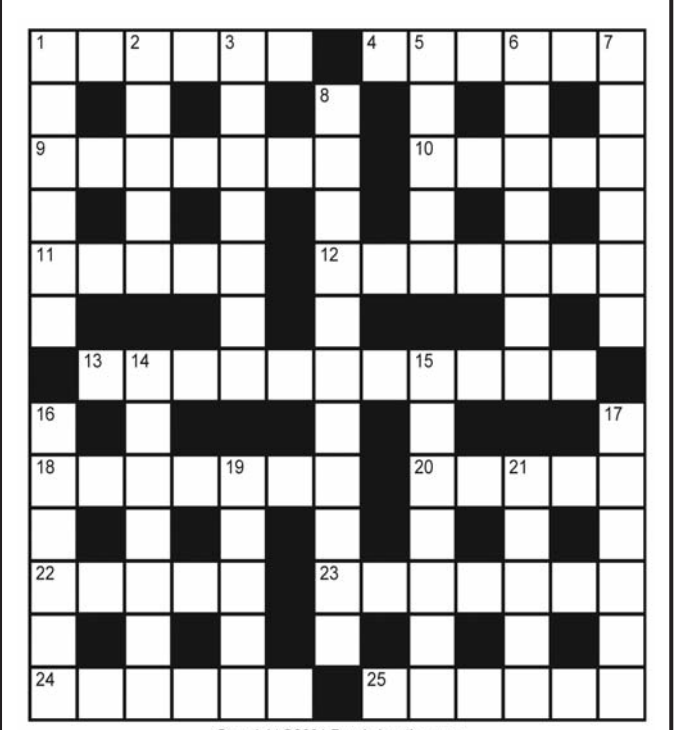
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



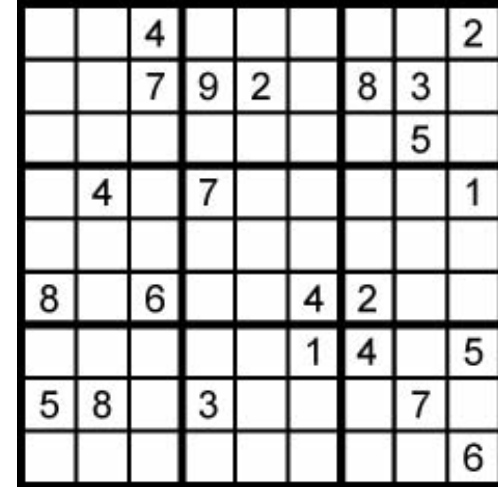
### FUN post CROSSWORD



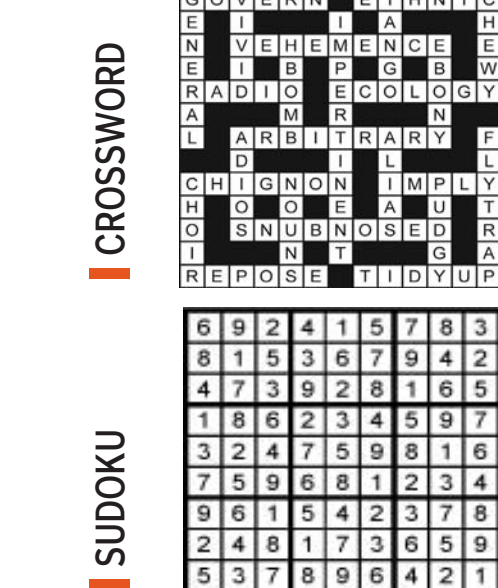
- Across**
- 1 Washed-out
  - 4 Previous
  - 9 Mexican saloon
  - 10 Apartment sign (2,3)
  - 11 Utopian
  - 12 Far-out
  - 13 Spirit chaser?
  - 18 Physics topic
  - 20 Clear the slate
  - 22 Thin crisp biscuit
  - 23 Sign on the back
  - 24 Some stockings
  - 25 Vinegar holders
- Down**
- 1 Cookout
  - 2 Fencing action
  - 3 They hang on eaves
  - 5 Santa's reindeer, e.g.
  - 6 Toy dog
  - 7 Decayed
  - 8 Marinated pot roast
  - 14 Attentive
  - 15 Svelte
  - 16 Kind of situation (3-3)
  - 17 Drives back
  - 19 City on the Po
  - 21 Feel the same

### 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



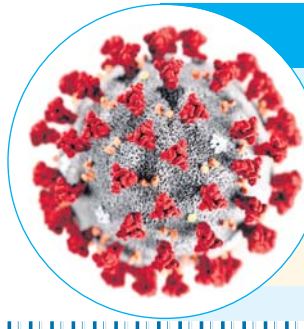
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW





**TALENT FETED**

Mo College chairperson Akash Dasnayak felicitates actor Sofia Alam at the silver jubilee celebration of Show Time 2021 in Puri, Monday



**COVID-19 TRACKER**

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	27,51,62,398	24,69,36,074	53,73,012
India	3,47,46,838	3,41,87,017	4,77,554
Odisha	10,53,020	10,42,875	8,445

# CM: Poor, marginalised at core of devpt initiatives

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The poor and the marginalised are the core beneficiaries of the development programmes and schemes of the state government, said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik here Monday.

"The poor and the marginalised are the core beneficiaries of the development programmes and schemes of my government. Therefore, I have directed all government officials to treat our citizens professionally, with dignity and empathy," said Patnaik while addressing at an orientation programme for the new recruited junior assistants, virtually.

As many as 125 junior assistants joined the Odisha Municipal Cadre in the Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) department Monday.

Welcoming the new recruits, Patnaik said H&UD department has taken up numerous schemes under the 5T governance mantra like Jaga Mission, Mukta, Aahar,

As many as 125 junior assistants joined the Odisha Municipal Cadre in Housing and Urban Development department

Unnati, Drink from Tap, urban water supply, urban sanitation, Garima, and many other schemes for the development of urban areas and welfare of the urban people.

He said that the posting of junior assistants across all 114 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) will help strengthen their human capital and improve service delivery.

Highlighting the 5T and Mo Sarkar initiatives, he said that the 5T Initiative of the government has a focus on transformation of the state through principles of Transparency, Technology, Teamwork and Time.

"Under 'Mo Sarkar', we have put in place a direct feedback moni-

toring system to know about the attitude of officials towards citizens and the quality of service delivery," he said.

Patnaik urged the junior assistants to always remember the basic tenets of the 5T governance model and Mo Sarkar and give their best to deliver on it.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mohapatra said that the Chief Minister has directed to fill all the vacancies in every department of the government. The government is making all-out efforts to fill the vacancies under special drive, he added.

Secretary to Chief Minister (5T) VK Pandian advised the new employees to follow transparency while performing public duty.

During experience sharing with new recruits, Pandian advised the latter to provide services transparently and work for the welfare of the people with utmost sincerity as they too have joined the government service through a transparent system, on their own merit.

**IN SYNC**



Artistes of Gunjan Dance Academy perform at the concluding ceremony of Mahanadi Utsav at Baliyatra Ground in Cuttack, Monday

OP PHOTO

# 1 more attempt allowed for OCSE-21 aspirants

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The state government Monday decided to allow one more additional compensatory attempt for appearing in OCSE-2021 irrespective of age limit.

There was a pressing demand from some OCS Examination aspirants to allow additional chances to appear in the OCSE-2021 irrespective of their maximum age limit. The state government said that after careful consideration, it has been decided by the government that notwithstanding anything contained in the rules, the intending candidates who have appeared in OCSE-2019 or OCSE-2020 but are otherwise ineligible to appear/compete in the OCSE-2021 on account of attainment of upper age limit or ex-

haustion of the attempts prescribed under the rules, shall be allowed one more additional compensatory attempt for appearing in OCSE-2021. No further attempt for OCSE shall be allowed in future.

Earlier, on account of delay in conducting Odisha Civil Services Examination, the Combined Competitive Recruitment Examinations (CCRE) each year during the period and consequent to the introduction of UPSC pattern in the OCS Examination, it was decided by the government in the past to allow additional compensatory attempts to appear in the OCSE-2016, OCSE-2017, OCSE-2018, OCSE-2019 and OCSE-2020 irrespective of maximum age limit of the candidates. This shall come into force with immediate effect.

# BJD flays passing of Bill sans debate

POST NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Monday questioned the Union government for passing the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 without having a proper discussion in the Lok Sabha.

BJD MP Anubhav Mohanty, speaking on behalf of the party in the Lower House, said that Parliament is made for debates and discussions. The Bill should not be passed without discussion in the House, he added.

"There should be a debate and proper consideration in the House. The parliamentary procedure should be followed while passing any Bill. The BJD has always been in favour of constructive discussion in the House. Our party never creates ruckus in the House," the Kendrapara MP said.



**ODISHA IN PARLIAMENT**

Significantly, the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that seeks to link electoral rolls to Aadhaar number has been passed in the Lok Sabha Monday, amidst continued protests from Opposition members.

The Bill allows electoral registration officers to ask for Aadhaar numbers of applicants wanting to

The BJD has always been in favour of constructive discussions in the House. Our party never creates ruckus in the House

ANUBHAV MOHANTY | BJD MP

register as voters to establish the identity of the applicant. Law Minister Kiren Rijiju, however, clarified that linking of Aadhaar to Electoral Photo Identity Card is voluntary.

It also seeks to allow the officers to ask for the number from "persons already included in the electoral roll for the purposes of authentication of entries in electoral roll, and to identify registration of name of the same person in the electoral roll of more than one constituency or more than once in the same constituency".

# IRON OUT BSKY ISSUES: DAS TO ACS, HEALTH

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** In the wake of refusal by private hospitals to provide treatment under Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY), Health Minister Naba Kishore Das Monday directed the department officials to resolve the issues of All Odisha Private Medical Establishment Forum (AOPMEF).

Das directed the additional chief secretary of Health department to hold discussions with AOPMEF members and resolve the problems, if any. He stressed the need to take immediate steps in addressing any inconsistencies in the scheme.

The minister reiterated the government's commitment to the development of healthcare and health infrastructure in the state and hoped that the BSKY would be able to pro-

vide better healthcare to the people of the state in the coming days.

Earlier, the AOPMEF has refused to provide treatment to patients due to lack of clarity in the existing terms and conditions of BSKY. The forum claimed that the treatment expenses fixed by the state government for various diseases are quite low and providing service at that rate is not possible.

According to the claims of the private hospitals, the scheme does not have transparency on who would bear the treatment expenses if the total medical bill exceeds the insured amount.

The forum said the MoU states that the government should release the payment to private hospitals within 30 days. However, the payments remain pending for several months.

**OTDC CAFE ON CARDS**



OTDC chairperson Shreemayee Mishra lays foundation stone for a cafe of the corporation in Khandagiri area of Bhubaneswar, Monday

OP PHOTO

# CB nabs fake RAW official in ₹1.17 crore fraud case

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The Crime Branch of Odisha police has arrested a fraudster who along with his aides duped a New Delhi-based businessman of ₹1.17 crore by impersonating a RAW officer, officials said here Monday.

Based on a complaint filed by the businessman, Rikab Chand Munot alias Mukesh Jain, proprietor of Rashtriya Stainless Steel, the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of CB arrested Rajesh Gahlot December 18 from Dwarka area of the national capital.

The accused was later produced before the Metropolitan magistrate of Dwarka that granted Gehlot 5-day transit remand. He has been asked to appear before the SDJM court in Bhubaneswar on or before December 24.

The accused trio - Rajesh, Suryamani and Amit - pretending to be RAW, IAS and Odisha Works department officers respectively, cheated Mukesh Jain and his son of ₹1.17 crore with the help of a woman masquerading as a treasury officer

They cheated the complainant and his son on the pretext of facilitating big government contracts for them in the works department of Odisha

The accused handed over fake work orders having a contract value of ₹32.52 crore and ₹47.52 crore to the complainant and duped him of ₹1.17 crore

Earlier, two other accused, Suryamani Tripathy and Amit Kumar, had been arrested in this case. Both are still in judicial cus-

tody, police officials said.

The three accused - Rajesh, Suryamani and Amit - pretending to be RAW, IAS and Odisha Works department officers respectively, cheated Mukesh Jain and his son of ₹1.17 crore with the help of a woman masquerading as a treasury officer.

They cheated the complainant and his son on the pretext of facilitating big government contracts for them in the works department of Odisha. The three arrested persons handed over fake work orders having a contract value of ₹32.52 crore and ₹47.52 crore to the complainant and duped him of ₹1.17 crore, the police said.

Further investigation in the case is in progress to identify and nab the other accused involved in this case and in similar kinds of frauds, the officials added.

# BMC floats tender for e-waste disposal

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Monday floated tenders for disposing of e-waste collected from denizens across the state capital.

The civic authority had in August launched weekly drive of collecting electronic and domestic hazardous waste. The drive which was being carried out every Saturday aimed at collection of wastes such as damaged cords, keyboards, broken parts of mobile phones, TV remotes among other articles. The items were to be handed over to e-waste collectors of the city as recommended by the Odisha State Pollution Control Board (OSPCB).



The civic authority had in August launched weekly drive of collecting electronic and domestic hazardous waste

"As of now, we have accumulated about seven tonne e-waste. As per the OPCB guidelines, the waste will be given to authorized collection agencies and firms who have expertise and experience and handling the e-waste. The revenue out of the bid will be used for sanitation purposes," said a BMC official.

It can be mentioned that the campaign which was launched from Gajapati Nagar is operational in 10 wards. However, BMC plans to expand the initiative in all its 67 wards of the Capital in a bid to efficiently manage the city's garbage collection.

# Even triple vax can't limit Omicron spread: BioNTech CEO

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Paris, Dec 20:** Three doses of a Covid vaccine may not be able to curb the rapid spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid, warned Ugur Sahin, CEO of Germany-based BioNTech.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the variant, known to escape vaccine immunity, has spread to about 90 countries.

"We must be aware that even triple-vaccinated are likely to transmit the disease. It is obvious we are far from 95 per cent effectiveness that we obtained against the initial virus," Euronews quoted Sahin as saying to the French daily Le Monde Monday. BioNTech partnered with US drugmaker Pfizer to develop the two-dose revolutionary Covid jab, based on mRNA technology.

Despite this, Sahin noted that early data from the UK and South Africa is providing us with "reassuring information".

The latest research from South Africa, where Omicron was first reported, suggested that two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine offered 70 per cent effectiveness in reducing the risk of hospitalisation. Israeli researchers have also found that the booster doses of the vaccine works against Omicron.

"There will be a loss of effectiveness against Omicron over time, it's very likely, but it's still to be measured how quickly. I will not base predictions on preliminary laboratory data but on real-life data, which is much more appropriate," the German immunologist said.

Sahin said testing for Covid-19 is important, especially for the eld-



erly and during winter, as are other protective measures such as mask-wearing, adding, "otherwise we will not be able to control the rapid expansion of this new variant".

The German company is already

designing a coronavirus vaccine adapted to the new variant, using Omicron's spike protein and its 32 mutations as an antigen. Sahin announced this should be ready by March, the report said.

"We remain on track with our 100-day target, which means we should be able to deliver our first suitable vaccines to Omicron in March, subject to regulatory approval," he said. Some researchers have voiced concern about the effect of these new vaccines as instead of boosting new immune defences, they could risk boosting inadequate ones.

"This principle is an unproven hypothesis, personally, I don't think this is a real problem. The immune system has high adaptability and plasticity, and should be able to activate both, strengthening existing immune responses while generating new antibodies," Sahin said, adding "but we will obviously have to assess it."

Scientists at WHO have also predicted that Omicron has "substantial growth advantage" over the Delta variant and it will soon

# Moderna claims its booster shot effective

Moderna, which has produced an mRNA vaccine, Monday, said that a booster dose of its vaccine appeared to be protective against Omicron. Moderna said that its research so far showed that a 50 microgram dose of its vaccine, which is the current amount for a booster jab, increased the level of antibodies 37-fold, compared with two doses. It also said a full dose of 100 micrograms boosted antibody levels 83-fold, it said.

take over Delta. It is still unclear how effective vaccines are against the new variant, the WHO said.



# Nabard sanctions infra projects worth ₹803cr



- ₹32 crore has been allocated for the construction of six flood protection projects in four districts
- ₹300 crore has been sanctioned for the construction of Kusumi irrigation project in Nayagarh district
- The bridge projects of total length of 7,439.10km will improve connectivity for 14.21 lakh people in 1,291 villages

(RIDF), officials said Monday. The Nabard has sanctioned ₹471 crore for construction of 200 bridges in rural areas of 27 districts, while ₹32 crore has been allocated for the construction of six flood protection projects in four districts, said C Udayabhaskar, chief general

manager, Odisha regional office, Nabard. Similarly, another ₹300 crore has been sanctioned for the construction of Kusumi irrigation project in Nayagarh district, he said. The bridge projects of total length of 7,439.10 km will improve rural connectivity for 14.21 lakh people in 1,291 villages, while the flood projects will benefit 1 lakh people of 67 villages by providing protection from inundation, Udayabhaskar said. Moreover, the Kusumi irrigation project will provide assured irrigation for 3,745 hectares in 49 villages, thereby benefiting 15 lakh people. With this sanction, the cumulative sanction under RIDF XXVII (2021-22) reached ₹2,781 crore, he said.

## IN MEMORIAM



Dignitaries at the Bisweswar Mishra Memorial Lecture organised at the Orissa High Court bar Association Convention Hall, Cuttack, Monday

OP PHOTO

# 'MFIs push women SHGs into debt trap'

**AIDWA NATIONAL SECRETARY TAPASI PRAHARAJ ALLEGES THAT WOMEN SHGs ARE BEING EXPLOITED BY MFIs AS BANKS "HESITATE" TO GIVE THEM LOANS**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** High-cost loans from microfinance institutions (MFIs) have more often landed women self-help groups (SHGs) into a debt trap, Kerala's former finance minister Thomas Isaac has said. He said MFIs charge high interests on loans given to women SHGs. "MFIs used to take 24 per cent interest from women self-help groups other than processing fees. As a result of which, they are often unable to repay loans and go for more advances to make repayments. In this process, they get entangled into a debt trap and are unable to overcome it," Isaac said. He was addressing the 4th Sushila Gopala Memorial Lecture



on Women in the Web of Modern Moneylenders, organised by the Odisha unit of All India Democratic Association (AIDWA) here Sunday. He also alleged that there was "no regulation" on the MFIs.

Echoing Isaac, Tata Institute of Social Science Prof R Ramakumar claimed that the "microfinance mechanism is meant for earning super profit by financing the poor". AIDWA national secretary Tapasi

Praharaj also alleged that women SHGs "are being hugely exploited by MFIs as banks "hesitate" to give loans directly to them. "The rate of interest should not be above 11.25 per cent as stipulated by the Reserve Bank of India, and all the states should have a mechanism to stop the modern-day moneylenders who have appeared in the name of MFIs," she said. The speakers at the event said the economic conditions of women have become "worse" due to lack of jobs in view of the prevailing Covid-19 pandemic. "Whatever provisions are made by the governments, they mostly benefit the MFIs and not the women," Praharaj said. They demanded strong regulation on activities of the institutional moneylenders.

# Prioritise sanitation, H&UD Secretary tells ULB officials

**H&UD Secretary G Mathi Vathanan emphasised that capacity building of service providers is must to ensure better sanitation service delivery in urban areas**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** An orientation workshop on Chief Minister's Cleanest City award, GFC Star Rating and Swachha Suvakshan-2022 was held Monday for the capacity building of service providers to ensure better sanitation service delivery in urban areas. In the workshop, Housing & Urban Development (H&UD) de-

partment Secretary G Mathi Vathanan emphasised that capacity building of service providers is must to ensure better sanitation service delivery in urban areas. Engagement of Mission Shakti members, transgender and rag pickers in the sanitation value chain has strengthened the sanitation process, he said. He also urged all ULB personnel to take sanitation as priority action, and work with passion and exhibit leadership to strengthen the process. Commitment of ULB personnel to make their respective cities clean would ensure better sanitation and waste management in urban areas, Mathi Vathanan added. On the occasion, director of Municipal Administration &

Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) Sangramjit Nayak stressed on better community engagement in the sanitation value chain. The Housing & Urban Development department is organising such kinds of capacity building initiatives at regular intervals in an effort to achieve the 'Swachh Odisha Sustha Odisha' target. It is worth mentioning here that solid waste management in urban Odisha has witnessed a transformation and revolution in recent past. Provision of processing facilities in the form of wealth centre, a combination of micro composting centre and material recovery facility for processing and disposal of wet waste and dry waste respectively has given a fillip to the entire value chain.

## Parents' body meets new CBSE RO

**BHUBANESWAR:** The Odisha Parents' Federation Monday met the newly appointed CBSE Regional Officer K Srinivasan at Bhubaneswar CBSE headquarter and discussed several issues including the controversy about the comprehension question that was asked in the English Language and Literature paper of Class X in the ongoing Term I board exam. The controversial comprehension question has been termed as misogynist from many quarters. Members of the federation, headed by Basudev Bhatt, met Srinivasan and discussed many important issues including irregularity in this year board exam question papers.

## NEWS SNIPPETS

### Reshuffle in city police

**BHUBANESWAR:** The Commissionerate Police Monday effected a minor reshuffle in the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Police and IICs in Bhubaneswar UPD. Zone-IV ACP Rajat Kumar Ray has been posted as the ACP of Zone-III while Bharat Chandra Sahoo, the incumbent ACP of Zone-III, has been transferred to DCP, Headquarters. Paresh Kumar Rout and Ramesh Chandra Bisoi will be the new ACP of Zone-IV and VI respectively. Senior cop Prakash Chandra Pal has been posted as Additional DCP. Dayanidhi Nayak, the incumbent IIC of Dhauli police station, will now take charge as the IIC of Jatni police station. Santoshini Behera will replace Banita Maharana, the new IIC of Mahila police station. Similarly, the current IIC of Jatni police station has been given the charge of Bharatpur PS.

### 7.22kg brown sugar seized till Dec 15

**BHUBANESWAR:** The city police has seized brown sugar weighing more than 7 kg till December 15 this year. The police also arrested 98 drug peddlers involved in illegal trade of brown sugar from various locations of the city. As per the press note released by the Bhubaneswar UPD, 72 cases were registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act between January 1 and December 15. Out of that, 44 cases registered against persons on the allegations of selling or possessing brown sugar. Similarly, the police also registered 27 cases and arrested 49 persons engaged in cannabis trade. Around 801 kg cannabis has been seized by the police during the period. Commissionerate Police also seized Rs 45, 64,942, seven four-wheelers and one firearm from the accused persons.



### Elderly drowns in Begunia pond

**BEGUNIA:** A 60-year-old man drowned in a pond at Ganpur village under Shimo panchayat in Khurda district Monday. The deceased was identified as Makar Rana. According to sources, Rana had gone to the pond for daily ablutions around 8am when he slipped deep into the pond water. After a while, locals spotted Rana floating in the pond. They fished him out and admitted him to Khurda District Headquarters Hospital where doctors declared him dead. The villagers demanded compensation to the bereaved family.

### CHSE Class XII exam likely in March

**BHUBANESWAR:** The Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) Monday directed the principals of higher secondary schools to ensure timely conduct of Quarterly Examination 2021-22. In a letter to the principals, deputy secretary of CHSE said that as it was instructed earlier that the three Quarter-end Examinations for Class XII are to be conducted and the first two quarter-end examinations must have been completed by now. It is also emphasised that the third Quarter-end Examination for Class XII students must be complete by January 10 without fail and the marks of all the three examinations must be kept ready in tabulation register specifically maintained for this purpose. The CHSE directs that links will be provided to the higher secondary schools for uploading of the Quarter-end Examination marks very soon. Annual higher secondary exam 2022 is tentatively scheduled for March 2022. Details of the examination will be communicated in time.

# State reports 186 new Covid cases, 1 death

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 20:** The state Monday reported 186 new Covid-19 cases, seven less than the previous day, with the tally rising to 10,53,020, a Health department bulletin said. The death toll rose to 8,445 as a 72-year-old man in Khurda district succumbed to the disease in the last 24 hours, it said. Fifty-three other Covid patients have died due to comorbidities so far, the bulletin said. Khurda district registered the highest number of new infections at 94, followed by Cuttack at 18. Thirty-nine children are among the newly infected patients, the Health department bulletin further said. The coastal state currently has 1,821 active cases.

**Khurda registered the highest number of new infections at 94, followed by Cuttack at 18, while as many as thirty-nine children are among the newly infected patients**

At least 258 patients recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 10,42,701. The state conducted 54,226 sample tests for Covid-19 Sunday, and the daily positivity rate was at 0.34 per cent. Over 2.86 crore people have received the first dose of Covid-19 vaccines, and nearly 1.87 crore beneficiaries got the second jab in the state.

# IIT-Mandi's mathematical model on non-invasive brain simulation

An international team of scientists led by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Mandi has performed a mathematical simulation studies on non-invasive brain simulation techniques. The multi-institutional research team, comprising scientists from the National Brain Research Centre and University at Buffalo, US, also developed the mathematical model to understand the physiological effects of non-invasive brain stimulation. Transcranial electrical stimulation (tES) is a non-invasive brain stimulation technique that passes an electrical current through sections of the brain to study or alter brain function. In the procedure, multiple electrodes are applied to the scalp of the patient, and current is passed be-

tween the electrodes through the soft tissue and skull. Part of the current penetrates into the brain and affects the nerves, resulting in altered activity. Beyond being explored as a curative, tES is considered useful to map the functions of the brain, that is, to understand the relationship between the brain part and behaviours or actions. Given the important nature of the brain, the use of electricity on it can be dangerous if outcomes are not known. The response of various blood vessels in the cranium and various neurological pathways to tES must be clearly understood to get maximum benefit of the procedure, with minimum damage. "We simulated a physiologically detailed mathematical model of the neurovascular unit (NVU) with four compartments: synaptic



space, astrocyte space, perivascular space, and arteriole smooth muscle cell space called Neurovascular Units or NVU," said Shubhajit Roy Chowdhury, Associate Professor at School of Computing and Electrical Engineering, IIT Mandi.

The mathematical model involved the application of perturbations of varying frequencies (0.1 Hz to 10 Hz) to simulate the electrical field, to the four nested NVU compartmental pathways and analysed the changes in blood vessel diameter in response to the

frequencies. Three types of non-invasive brain stimulation - transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS), transcranial alternating current stimulation (tACS) and transcranial oscillatory current stimulation (tOCS) - were modelled to investigate their physiological effects. The initial tES effects on the blood vessels were also found to occur via the perivascular space - a fluid-filled space surrounding the blood vessels in the brain. "Our study can help brain- and neuro-specialists plan patient specific restorative neuro-rehabilitation activities for stroke, post traumatic brain injury, mild cognitive impairment, dementia, and other neuropsychiatric disorders," Chowdhury added. Such a mathematical model based quantitative analysis would help in individualised therapeutic protocols for neuropsychiatric disorders. The team has planned experimental studies that involve blocking of various pathways to validate their modelling results. The results have been published in the journal Brain Stimulation.

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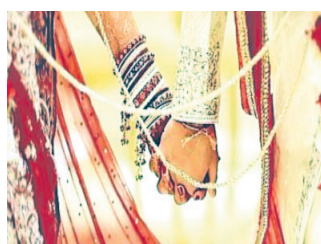


SHORT TAKES

Woman RI attacked in Keonjhar

**Anandapur:** A woman revenue inspector (RI) sustained critical injuries after she was allegedly attacked by a man with a sharp-edged weapon inside her office here in Keonjhar district, Monday. The injured RI was identified as Seema Simantani Sahoo and she sustained critical injuries on her head, limbs and neck after a youth barged inside the office and attacked her while she was busy attending to her work. Simantani was rushed to the Anandapur hospital and later shifted to Cuttack after primary treatment. The accused, identified as Gobinda Jena, 55, of Bankhidi village under Anandapur police limits, has been arrested. Jena allegedly attacked Sahoo with a billhook and tried to flee the spot but was overpowered by locals and handed over to the police. According to reports, the attack took place over a land-related case. Meanwhile, the police have launched an investigation. The exact reason behind the attack is yet to be ascertained, Anandapur police IIC Manoranjan Pradhan said.

Couple takes wedding vows on Constitution



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, Dec 20:** A couple in Ganjam district has tied the knot by taking their marriage vows on the Constitution instead of following the traditional Hindu rituals. The newly-wed, Bijya Kumar (29) and Shruti (27) also donated blood at a donation camp held near their reception in Berhampur town Sunday. They also pledged to donate their body organs. Several guests at the wedding too donated blood and signed forms pledging to donate their organs on the couple's appeal. "In 2019 this kind of wedding was organised for my elder son

after convincing the parents of his bride," said D Mohan Rao, the groom's father.

Rao had convinced Shruti's parents, who are from Uttar Pradesh, to solemnise the marriage in the name of the Constitution instead of following the traditional Hindu rituals, to which they agreed.

Rao, a retired government employee, said the Constitution is a holy book for every Indian and it is essential that people should be aware of the ideals enshrined in it.

"We hope that our wedding will set an ideal before others and inspire them to follow it in the future," said Shruti, after taking the oath for marriage and exchanging garlands.

The Ganjam secretary of Humanists Rationalist Organisation, a civil society body, KN Senapati said at least four such weddings have been solemnised in Berhampur in the past three years.

"We hope that more youths will come forward for this type of weddings in future," he added.

KABADDI TOURNNEY



A tense moment during the final match of the 50th Inter-College Mens' kabaddi tournament organised by Berhampur University at Buguda in Ganjam district, Monday. People's College, Buguda emerged champions defeating Brundabanchandra College, Kendupadar by 81-16 points

Dengue continues to spiral in Ganjam

**Berhampur:** At least three more persons tested positive for dengue as the disease continued to spread its tentacles in Ganjam district, Monday. Two affected persons are from the district while the third person is from the Berhampur Municipal Corporation area. The affected persons have been admitted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital for treatment, district Health officials said. The number of dengue patients has seen a sharp rise in the district this year compared to last few years. This year, 323 persons have tested positive for dengue. A 30-year-old youth from Gate Bazaar area in the city tested positive for dengue, while a 24-year-old youth from Surala village under Chikiti block too tested positive. However, details of the third affected person are yet to be available.

Snowfall in Daringbadi

**Daringbadi:** Intense cold wave swept Daringbadi in Kandhamal district after mercury plummeted to 4°C, throwing normal life out of gear. The drop in temperature at Daringbadi, known as the Kashmir of Odisha, led to snowfall late Sunday night. Locals and tourists are thronging to various places in the area to witness the snowfall. Snowfall was witnessed near the electricity office, Kilabadi, Simanbadi, Sraniketa, Kirikuti, Sinagbali, coffee garden and in the remote villages under the block.

Major fire at Sambalpur gutkha unit, 28 injured

AN ELECTRICAL SHORT-CIRCUIT IS SUSPECTED TO HAVE TRIGGERED THE FIRE

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, Dec 20:** At least 28 workers, including 11 critical, sustained varying degrees of injuries after a major fire broke out inside a gutkha manufacturing unit located at Saradhapali area in Sambalpur district, Monday.

The actual reason behind the fire mishap is yet to be ascertained. However, it is suspected to have occurred because of an electrical short-circuit. "Perhaps a blast occurred in a machine from where the blaze spread to other parts in the unit. Most of the employees who were working inside are from outside Odisha," a source informed.

"We were operating a machine when it went off and don't know what caused the inferno. Most of us are out of danger now, but two have sustained



severe burns," an injured worker stated. "A mishap occurred when the workers were packing gutkha. We will carry out a detailed probe to ascertain the actual reason behind the fire," Sambalpur Superintendent of Police B Gangadhar said.

The injured were rescued and rushed to Veer Surendra Sai Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (VIMSAR) in Burla. Later, 11 of them were shifted to Ispat General Hospital at Rourkela after their condition deteriorated. According to reports, the

critically injured persons have suffered over 80 per cent burn.

The affected workers have blamed the factory owner for the mishap. They claimed that the fire occurred due to the lack of fire safety and other measures in the unit. Angry locals have demanded arrest of the factory owner. Later, Suryavanshi Mayur Bikash, sub-collector, and Sambalpur SPB Gangadhar rushed to the spot and took stock of the situation. On being informed, a team of local fire services personnel reached the spot and launched a massive operation. They succeeded in dousing the flames after striving for over two hours.

"The entire area was filled with thick smoke and it was impossible to enter the unit. Two floors of the factory were engulfed by fire. We rescued the workers with the help of locals," a senior fireman expressed.

Sumit-Tapaswini marital discord gets murkier

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, Dec 20:** The marital discord between Tapaswini Dash aka Dimple and Dr Sumit Sahu took a new turn after the former, accompanied by some local women, barged into the house of the latter breaking open the lock of the main gate, Monday evening.

Tapaswini has been staging a dharna in front of her husband Sumit's house at Brahmanagar in the city demanding justice.

A scuffle ensued in front of the dharna site before the women broke the lock of the main gate and entered the house. The police stood as mute spectators instead of restraining the agitating women. According to latest reports, the Additional SP of

Berhampur has reached the spot to pacify the protesting women.

The incident took place after Berhampur SDJM again asked Sumit to take an accommodation on rent and stay with Tapaswini. Sumit was also directed to bear the cost of accommodation, food and medicines of Tapaswini, her lawyer Deepak Pattnaik said. However, the court has not clarified where will Tapaswini stay until Sumit takes a house on rent, Pattnaik said.

Notably, Tapaswini, a native of Ganjam district, hogged the limelight after staging a sit-in for 11 days in front of her husband Sumit's house at Brahmanagar in Silk City under a tent. She that demanded her in-laws accept her as their daughter-in-law. Tapaswini had claimed that she had

married Sumit in a court, September 7, 2020. After the marriage, she even lived at Sumit's house as his wife for six months. She was, however, driven out of the house on the pretext of conducting their marriage as per traditional rituals. She was asked to go to her parents' place and stay there till her marriage with Sumit is solemnised.

Recently, the SDJM court had ordered the couple to live in a rented accommodation, the cost of which is to be borne by Sumit. However, Sumit allegedly disappeared and later claimed that his absence from the house was on account of sickness.

Sumit's family Sunday accused Tapaswini of demanding ₹8 lakh, which was rubbished by the latter claiming that the old video had no relation with the present stand-off.

STIR AT PROPOSED JSW PLANT SITE

Villagers dig trench to prevent entry of police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Paradip, Dec 20:** A group of people in Jagatsinghpur district Monday confronted the police, dug a trench around a village besides erecting bamboo barricades following an effort of the administration to demarcate the boundary of a newly created village close to the proposed plant site of Jindal Steel Works Limited (JSW), officials said.

The authorities have created Mahala village after carving out some portion of Dhinkia village, which was the epicentre of a movement against setting up of a factory by South Korean steel major Posco a decade ago. The government has planned to allot land to JSW from other villages, barring Dhinkia, an official said.

Though there is no plan to displace any family from Dhinkia for the project, the people of the area

have been opposing bifurcation of the village, a local revenue official said. Locals alleged that by bifurcating Dhinkia, the state government has adopted the 'divide and rule' policy in order to allow industries in the region.

On Monday morning, when revenue officials along with police personnel, reached the area for demarcation of the newly created village, a large number of residents of Dhinkia, with women and children at the front, started protesting. The villagers and the police came face to face at Baliitkira area near the Jatadhara river mouth.

At some point, police said, some villagers allegedly hurled stones at them. Locals, on the other hand, claimed that the security force baton charged on the peaceful demonstration by children and women opposing division of the village.

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REGIONAL OFFICE: BALASORE  
**CORRIGENDUM**  
With reference to our Sale Notice published in the "Orissa Post", Dtd. 20.12.2021, the Amount Due, Reserve Price & EMD of the A/c M/s. Dharti Trading Agency of our Bhadrak Branch-1 are inadvertently wrongly published Rs.3,16,00,000/-, Rs. 1,44,90,653.83 & Rs. 14,49,066/- respectively. The actual Amount Due is **Rs. 1,44,90,000/-** as on 31.05.2021, Reserve Price is **Rs. 3,16,00,000/-** & EMD is **Rs. 31,60,000/-**. The Borrower/Co-Aplicants: 1) Mr. Gopal Bal...and others mentioned under our Bhadrak Branch-1 should be read under our **Sathipur Branch (e-AB), P.O.: Dulakhpatna, Via: Barundai, Jajpur, PIN-755025, Ph No.: 9368855121, Email - bm1004@unionbankofindia.com.** All other facts remain unchanged.  
Date: 20.12.2021 Sd/- Authorized Officer

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/21-22/ E-Tender/85, Dt. 16.12.2021  
1. Tender No. e-Tender-EAST-KUR-223-2021, Date: 15.12.2021  
Description: EXECUTION OF 14.00 KM THROUGH SLEEPER RENEWAL WORK ON DOWN LINE IN PATCHES BETWEEN RAGHUNATHPUR-PARADEEP SECTION OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.  
Approx cost of the work: ₹313.12 lakhs  
2. Tender No. e-Tender-N-KUR-233-2021, Date: 13.12.2021  
Description: PROPOSED RIVER BED MAPPING/3D SCANNING OF RIVER BED OF BRIDGE NO-391 (BAITARAM) 15x45.72M TOWNS IN BETWEEN BAITARAM ROAD-MANJURI ROAD STATION OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.  
Approx cost of the work: ₹9.52 lakhs  
3. Tender No. e-Tender-South-KUR-236-2021, Date: 15.12.2021  
Description: FORMATION TREATMENT FOR 3.00 KMS. FROM KM. 574.25 TO 575.75 ON UP & DOWN LINE BETWEEN GANJAM-CHATRAPUR SECTION OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.  
Approx cost of the work: ₹348.64 lakhs  
4. Tender No. e-Tender-HQ-KUR-237-2021, Date: 15.12.2021  
Description: PROPOSED MISCELLANEOUS REPAIRS TO STATION BUILDING, PLATFORM ALONG WITH PASSENGER AMENITIES WORKS AND CIRCULATING AREA OF KHURDA ROAD RAILWAY STATION.  
Approx cost of the work: ₹185.24 lakhs  
Completion Period of the work: 18 (Eighteen) Months (For sl no. 1), 03 (Three) Months (For sl no. 2), 06 (Six) Months (For sl no. 3) and 10 (Ten) Months (For sl no. 4).  
Date & time of Tender Closing: 05.01.2022, 1500 hrs (For all tenders).  
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.treps.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./ PR-648/M/21-22) Khurda Road

**OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, BANPUR**  
**TENDER CALL NOTICE**  
Tender Call Notice No.: 2662/Dt.18.12.2021  
No. C-1646- The Executive Officer on behalf of Banpur NAC invites Price Bid for Sanitation Work through tender call notice as per the following:  
1. Type of Works : As per the D.T.C.N.  
2. Total No. of works : As per the D.T.C.N.  
3. Tender Amount Cost : As per the D.T.C.N.  
4. Date and time of availability of Bid Documents in the Portal : From Dt. 20.12.2021, 10.00 A.M. to Dt. 27.12.2021, 5.00 P.M.  
5. Original Bid documents submission in office : Dt. 28.12.2021 before 3.00 P.M.  
6. Date & Time of Opening of Tender : Dt. 28.12.2021 at 3.30 P.M.  
Further, the details of tender documents can be had from the office website [www.banpurnac.in](http://www.banpurnac.in). Corrigendum if any shall only be published in above website.  
Sd/- Executive Officer, Banpur NAC  
OIPR-13177/11/0003/2122

**WORKS DEPARTMENT**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
**MAYURBHANJ (R & B) DIVISION, BARIPADA**  
No. B-846:- e-mail - bpd\_eerb@rediffmail.com  
**Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice**  
Bid Identification No. E.E.-45/2021-22  
1. Number of works - 1 (One) number of works.  
2. Approximate estimated cost:- 48.41 Lakh  
3. Period of Completion: - 2 (Two) Calendar months.  
4. Date & Time of availability of bid documents in the portal :- Dt. 20.12.2021 to 27.12.2021.  
5. Last Date / Time of receipt of bid in the portal :- Dt. 27.12.2021 up to 4.00 PM  
6. Date of Opening of bid :- Dt. 28.12.2021 at 11.00 AM  
7. Name & address of the Office inviting bid :- Executive Engineer, Mayurbhanj (R&B) Division, Baripada.  
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in>  
Sd/- Executive Engineer  
Mayurbhanj (R&B) Division  
OIPR-34060/11/0016/2122

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. b-30  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, N.H. DIVISION, BERHAMPUR**  
e-mail: eenhbm@gmail.com  
**INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB) [e-Procurement]**  
Bid Identification No. EE-NH-BAM/06 No.5822 Dated: 18.12.2021  
1) The EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, N.H. DIVISION, BERHAMPUR on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in Single cover system in **ONLINE MODE** from eligible contractors for construction of Building Works as detailed in the table below:  
2) Nature of work : Buildings  
3) No. of work : 1 No.  
4) Tender Cost : Rs.4,000/-  
5) Class of Contractor : 'C' & 'D' Class  
6) Availability of Bid : 21.12.2021 to 05.00 PM of 27.12.2021 document in portal  
7) Date of Opening of Bid : 28.12.2021 at 11.00 A.M.  
8) The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website <https://tendersorissa.gov.in>  
9) Any Corrigendum/ Addendum/ Cancellation of will be displayed in the e-tender website only.  
Sd/- Executive Engineer, NH Division, Berhampur  
OIPR-34082/11/0006/2122

MINING MENACE

Overloaded vehicles deprive govt of crores

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, Dec 20:** The state government is losing revenue over ₹10 crore annually due to illegal plying of cargo vehicles overloaded with minerals from stone quarries and crusher units in this district.

Road safety measures too have gone for a toss due to rampant plying of overloaded vehicles here. However, no one cares to address the problem as these vehicles ply on roads with impunity. Such apathy and callousness can be gauged if one takes a look at the road condition in Sukinda and Chadheidhara areas connecting Bhuban in Dhenkanal district.

The regional transport officers have been asked to personally supervise vehicles for overloading, but they seem to be apathetic to the issue. The revenue officials are no less responsible for the sorry state of affairs. Reports said that thousands of heavy vehicles like Hywa, trucks and tractors are illegally plying from various stone quarries and crusher units under Dharmasala tehsil in the district. Over 2,000 vehicles ply daily on this route carrying construction materials like boulders, metals, concrete and gravels from the stone quarries and crusher units located in the area.

On the other hand, revenue collection is quite disappointing and does not match with the number of



vehicles plying on the route. Observers said that this could have never been possible without the tacit support of revenue, transport and police officials, as these stone smugglers allegedly pay around ₹30 lakh as bribe per month.

The government fails to see through their designs for which it loses revenue worth crores of rupees every year. It is alleged that that six-wheelers are carrying 25 tonnes of cargo instead of 9.5 tonnes, 50 tonnes are carried by 10-wheelers instead of 16 tonnes, 60 tonnes in 12-wheelers instead of 20 tonnes. Moreover, mini trucks have approval to carry only three tonnes of minerals, but they are carrying over

seven to eight tonnes. It is alleged that some senior officials of state Transport department are hand in glove with the stone smugglers for whom the annual target for revenue collection is fixed as per their whims. As a result, it becomes easier for the Transport officials to achieve their target and draw appreciation from the state government.

Sources said that various mining firms like IMFA, Tata Mines, OMC and Facor carry out excavation for mining in Kaliapani area of the district. Such excavations result in formation of large pits and 100 to 150 trips of sand are required daily to fill these pits. The required

REGIONAL TRANSPORT OFFICERS HAVE BEEN ASKED TO PERSONALLY SUPERVISE VEHICLES FOR OVERLOADING, BUT THEY SEEM TO BE APATHETIC TO THE ISSUE. THE REVENUE OFFICIALS ARE NO LESS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS

sand is transported from the Brahmani river bank in Bhuban and Marthapur in Dhenkanal district and Kabatbandh area in Jajpur district. Gravel and metals are transported from Chadheidhara in Jajpur district. The vehicles plying from Chadheidhara and Bhuban are under the jurisdiction of Jajpur and Dhenkanal RTOs. However, the RTO officials hardly take any action against these overloaded vehicles.

It is alleged that some senior mines officials are also involved in this misdemeanour. Locals have drawn the attention of Dhenkanal and Jajpur Collectors several times but their pleas are yet to be addressed.



FOCUS ECONOMY

# SOME PRIORITIES FOR 2022



**Beyond Omicron, inflation, unemployment, poverty and inequality are other worrying measures such as the slow off-take in credit from banks, little evidence of large investment projects forthcoming from the private sector, and the continued absence of students from schools**

So the priorities for next year seem self-evident. Firstly get ready for Omicron, without using harsh lockdowns, or spooking or panicking the public. The vaccination progress must be sustained and accelerated. Secondly, ensure that schools are started everywhere, at least with 50 per cent rotation of students. Skilling and training, including a nationwide portable apprentice scheme with government backed accreditation must be rolled out with urgency. Corporations will readily employ apprentices if they are free from burden of hiring them permanently. Thirdly, start executing the national infrastructure pipeline projects in earnest. These promise expenditure of close to 20 lakh crore annually, which can have a multiplier effect on jobs as well as ancillary and vendor industries. Fourthly, ensure support to sustained export growth. Zero rating of GST is desirable. Don't shackle agriculture exports. The Production Linked Incentive scheme which is currently applicable to 13 sectors must succeed, and should also dovetail with export support. India has to learn from Bangladesh, which with sheer focus on the export of textile and clothing for more than a decade, has overtaken India in terms of per-capita income. The fifth item is to rationalise the tax burden. The indirect taxes like GST hurt the poor much more than the rich. We have regressed, since the share of direct taxes of the total has fallen. This needs to be reversed. Doing that will also make a dent on rising inequality.

Next year will hopefully see the economy on an up-cycle. Private investment is bound to pick up once business and consumer confidence picks up. For that to happen some of the above policy imperatives have to be implemented and require action both from the Central and state governments. Here is wishing all our readers a safe, healthy and prosperous 2022.

*The writer is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution.*  
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The New Year will soon be upon us. Within a month of the New Year's dawn, the Finance Minister will present a Budget, outlining her spending priorities for the next financial year which begins in April 2022. We will also get a report card on the country's economic performance via the Economic Survey. Thanks to many frequently measured indicators which come every month or even every fortnight, we don't really have to wait for the year-end report card to know how we are doing. This year-end column is not really about a pre-budget wish list, as about identifying the priorities for next year.

As we welcome the New Year, what is the economic backdrop? On the positive side, the world economy is practically booming, with two of the largest economies i.e. America and China both growing above 5 per cent. In America, the high growth is causing some overheating. The inflation rate has peaked to nearly 7 per cent, the highest in four decades. It is exacerbated by excess money supply and now labour and skills shortage. The high growth in the world economy should be an exporting opportunity to developing countries like India. Indeed, India's goods exports may touch 400 billion dollars this year, a jump of nearly 40 per cent over last year. The other positive indicators are healthy tax collection (much ahead of the target set in last year's Budget), roaring stock market and high company valuations, good profitability in the corporate sector (at least large corporates), and a low ratio of the net non-performing assets (i.e. bad loans) on bank balance sheets. On the negative side firstly is the anxiety about Omicron. How big will the third wave be? Will it be potent? Will it force lockdowns? This fear is partly mitigated because there is better preparedness in the healthcare sector (including oxygen and beds), a higher and increasing share of vaccinated people, there is a hybrid and higher level of herd immunity, there is better enforcement of protocols like masking, better un-

derstanding of micro-managing lockdown restrictions and finally a weary and perhaps reluctant acceptance that life must go on. Additionally, perhaps this variant while highly infectious, is not as potent in causing fatalities. Of course, this is not to advocate letting the guard down. The other negatives are distress in the informal economy especially in contact intensive sectors (like roadside vendors, kirana shops, mall workers). The rural economy is also under great stress as is manifest in the increased demand for work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Despite an expected bumper crop, the prices of cereals are low, and hence the demand for a higher Minimum Support Price. Meanwhile, food inflation is rising thanks mainly due to edible oils (largely imported), and protein items like milk and poultry. Rural unemployment rates and rural wages are stagnating. The CMIE and ILO data show India's labour participation rate (LPR) is only about 40 per cent, the lowest in Asia. This is the ratio of people between 18 and 60, who have a job or are seeking one. Even Bangladesh is at 53, Pakistan at 48 and Nepal at 74. Is India's low ratio revealing discouraged workers, who have given up hope of even finding a job?

India's female labour participation rate at 20 per cent is already the lowest among peer countries and has been a cause for concern for quite some time. Added to inflation and unemployment (and low LPR) is the phenomenon of increased inequality. The latest World Inequality Report 2022 shows that the top 10 per cent holds 57 per cent of the total national income. Of this the top 1 per cent alone holds 22 per cent of national income, while the bottom half holds just 13 per cent. This makes India one of the most unequal large economies. It also corroborates the recent report of Niti Aayog (based on the National Family Health Survey data) of high multi-dimensional poverty rates in states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. The Niti Aayog measure actually excludes income, and depends on measures like infant mortality, ownership of assets and education. Beyond Omicron, inflation, unemployment, poverty and inequality are other worrying measures such as the slow off-take in credit from banks, little evidence of large investment projects forthcoming from the private sector, and the continued absence of students from schools. This two-year hiatus in schooling can have a long-term detrimental effect on India's human capital development.



Ajit Ranade

**THE HIGH GROWTH IN THE WORLD ECONOMY SHOULD BE AN EXPORTING OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES LIKE INDIA**

## For Women & Children

A virtual tug of war has begun between India and Pakistan over handling the humanitarian-economic-political crisis in Afghanistan, each trying to rope in countries of their choice in their bid to consolidate their respective position. India hosted a dialogue in Delhi December 19 with five Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan in turn organised in Islamabad the same day the biggest conference on Afghanistan since the United States-backed government in Kabul fell in August. It was attended by envoys from 57 member nations of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The eagerness of Pakistan, which had acted as a sanctuary for the Taliban during the past 20 years when the latter were hunted down by the US troops, was clear from the pronouncements of its top leaders. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan made a fervent appeal to the international community to provide help to the '40 million Afghan citizens' who have been plunged into a catastrophic humanitarian crisis with food scarcity and severe winter cold staring them in the face. The Taliban government is plagued by international isolation and the consequential freezing of its financial resources worth billions of dollars causing serious funds crunch.

India on the other hand pitched for finding ways to help the Afghan people, but insisted on the formation of an inclusive government in Kabul that, in its perception, presupposes any solution to the Afghan crisis. In his opening remarks at the third India-Central Asia Dialogue, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spelt out the goals India has set for it and the five Central Asian countries. These include a 'truly inclusive' and representative government, fight against terrorism and drug trafficking, ensuring unhindered humanitarian assistance and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities as key priorities in Afghanistan. The objectives are in keeping with the concerns of the six countries which fear a backlash harming their economic and political interests if the Taliban are given a carte blanche to rule Afghanistan the way they want.

In a clever way the intentions were couched in a diplomatic language when Jaishankar said, "We must find ways of helping the people of Afghanistan." He floated a 'Four C' approach focusing on commerce, capacity enhancement, connectivity and contacts to further expand the cooperation between the two sides. However, the fact remains the volume of trade and commerce between India and the five Central Asian countries has so far been negligible. It is less than 2\$ billion per annum. Jaishankar also underlined the need for having diversified supply chains and more regional solutions to various challenges. In the past few years, although India has been focusing on expanding overall cooperation with the energy-rich Central Asian countries, considering them to be part of its extended neighbourhood yet it has not put in the desired push because it could not predict the Afghan crisis and act judiciously. The recent developments in Afghanistan have only increased manifold the importance of the Central Asian countries with three of them - Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - sharing borders with war-ravaged Afghanistan.

The foreign ministers sought to use the current crisis in Afghanistan to forestall any attempt to export terror and commit cybercrimes directed against their countries. Predictably, their joint statement 'condemned' terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. The language leaves no one in doubt about their intent to send the message across to the Taliban regime that providing safe haven, using terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism, terror financing, arms and drugs trafficking, dissemination of a radical ideology, and abuse of cyber space go against the basic principles of humanity and international relations. While none of these countries recognise Taliban, only Tajikistan has taken a strong stand against any bilateral contacts with the group after it took control of Afghanistan August 15, 2021. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have re-opened their missions in Kabul. They have also exchanged ministerial level visits with Kabul, as have Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. India has thus far met Taliban leaders publicly only twice, in Doha and Moscow.

One takeaway for India from the meeting is that in the face of Pakistan refusing to allow land trade from India, the five Central Asian countries expressed their keenness to make more use of the sea route via Chabahar, which is connected to Central Asian countries by road and rail through Iran and the International North South Transit Corridor (INSTC) going via the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. Pakistan appears to be playing smart and it sought to use the common denominator of Islam connecting the OIC countries to bail the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan out of the crisis.

Diplomacy and humanitarian aid should move hand in hand to make the Taliban see reason and wake up to the reality of a liberal world unhindered by varied forms of coercion. Till now the Taliban regime has only declared that it believes in respecting women, but it has not yet made clear whether women will be allowed to pursue studies in classrooms or work in offices. If the Taliban want access to their assets locked in foreign banks and stop economic collapse, according freedom to their women and children seems to have emerged as an important criterion.

### WISDOM CORNER

- If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles.** SUN TZU
- There is no austerity equal to a balanced mind, and there is no happiness equal to contentment; there is no disease like covetousness, and no virtue like mercy.** CHANAKYA
- The people to fear are not those who disagree with you, but those who disagree with you and are too cowardly to let you know.** NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

### WORDSWORTH

#### Pyknic

A pyknic person is short and fat. It has nothing to do with over-indulgence in al-fresco meals, though it is said the same way as picnic. In the early years of the twentieth century the German psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer examined criminals to try to tie their physical shape and constitution to their personalities and mental illnesses. Tall and thin ones he called asthenic and considered them to be the sort that commits fraud and petty theft. A second set were athletic types with well-developed muscles - unsurprisingly, he concluded these were more likely to be violent. The third sort were the pyknic ones, who seemed to be a mixture of the other two kinds so far as their criminal tendencies were concerned. He took pyknic from Greek puknos, thick or close-packed. It appeared first in his book Körperbau und Charakter in 1921, from where it soon moved into English. The American psychologist William Sheldon built on and modified Kretschmer's ideas, coming up with the three terms to describe body types - endomorph, mesomorph and ectomorph - that are now more common. He considered Kretschmer's pyknic type to be a mixture of the endomorph and the mesomorph and came up with the phrase pyknic practical joke to describe a person who is muscular in early life but who later goes pear-shaped and balloons out into obesity.

### LOL

#### Stop or slow down

A cop stops a man for running a stop sign and the subject gives the cop a lot of grief explaining that he did stop. After several minutes, the cop explained to the gentleman that he didn't stop, he just slowed down a



little. The gentleman said: "Stop or slow down, what's the difference?" The cop pulled the guy out of the car and hit him with a nightstick for about a minute and then said, "Would you like for me to stop or just slow down?"

### SPECTRUM RESOURCES

## Water as an asset class is here



Willem H. Buiters

**THE FUTURE OF WATER AS A SIGNIFICANT ASSET CLASS DEPENDS ON THE WILLINGNESS OF GOVERNMENTS AND SOCIETY TO PRICE WATER AT ITS LONG-RUN SOCIAL MARGINAL COST AS A SCARCE RENEWABLE RESOURCE**

Just over a decade ago, I predicted the arrival of water as an asset class. I foresaw "a massive expansion of investment in the water sector, including the production of fresh, clean water from other sources (desalination, purification), storage, shipping, and transportation of water." This would result in "a globally integrated market for fresh water within 25 to 30 years. Once the spot markets for water are integrated, futures markets and other derivative water-based financial instruments - puts, calls, swaps - both exchange-traded and OTC will follow. There will be different grades and types of fresh water; just the way we have light sweet and heavy sour crude oil today."

In fact, I believed that water would eventually be "the single most important physical-commodity-based asset class, dwarfing oil, copper, agricultural commodities, and precious metals."

Ten years later, the future is now - though not quite what I expected. In December 2020, the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Group created the first futures market in water: Cash-settled water futures with a maximum contract period of two years are now traded on the CME Globex electronic trading system. I view this development as somewhat

premature. For futures markets (and markets for other derivatives like put and call options) to function properly, the underlying spot market - in this case the spot market for physical water or water rights - should be liquid and transparent.

CME Group's futures market is based on the Nasdaq Veles California Water Index, which tracks the cash price of physical water rights in California, based on transactions in surface water and in four ground-water markets. Because the local and regional water supplies often are not connected, let alone fully integrated, the spot market underlying the futures market is too segmented; it does not represent a single, homogeneous commodity or asset.

Two ongoing developments stand out. One is Project Greenland, created and sponsored by Thomas Schumann Capital, in partnership with North Atlantic Research and Survey Ltd. Under its Iceberg Management and Water Extraction Program, suitable free-floating North Atlantic icebergs weighing 1.2-1.4 million tons are towed to an operational location in Scotland, where the ice and water are prepared for international transportation.

The target markets are in the water-deprived Middle East and North Africa. The project is scal-

able and relies on established technologies and infrastructures being deployed in an innovative and disruptive manner. Given time, additional technological advances, and proper spot-water pricing, icebergs from Antarctica also could become viable sources of fresh water.

A second fascinating entrant to the global water markets is SkyH2O's Atmospheric Water Generation (AWG) system, a proprietary technology that extracts clean fresh water from the atmosphere. The business model here is flexible and scalable, because AWG capacity can be deployed in a distributed manner to reach the ultimate customers, be they governments, households, or industrial, commercial, and agricultural users.

The future of water as a significant asset class depends on the willingness of governments - and ultimately of society at large - to price water at its long-run social marginal cost as a scarce renewable resource. Globally, over 70% of fresh water is used in agriculture, and most of this usage is either free or heavily subsidised. Households in many countries also pay but a small fraction of the long-run social marginal cost of the water they use.

I hope and expect that both these

anomalies will soon end. There is growing recognition of deepening freshwater-scarcity crises around the world, as well as a greater willingness on the part of policymakers to price negative environmental externalities appropriately. To recognise water as a scarce renewable resource, a tradable commodity, and a marketable asset is not to diminish its unique significance as a good that is essential to life and viewed by many as a gift from God. When socially efficient water pricing creates economic hardship, an appropriate fiscal response through targeted income support is required. If this fails - perhaps because the state cannot identify who is adversely affected by proper water pricing - a two-tier tariff may be required. While a social subsistence level of water should be provided for free or at a heavily subsidised price, all additional water usage could be priced at its full long-run social marginal cost to preserve the right incentives.

Water is indeed becoming an asset class. Give it another decade, and exchange-traded funds for water and water rights will be part of the new normal for investors.

*The writer is a visiting professor at Columbia University.* ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

### Paradigm shift for society

Sir, Marriage is intended to be a union that binds two souls together for lifetime. Legal marriage age for girls in India was 15 years till 1978. It was raised by three years from that year. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was put in place in 2006. And through an amendment to this Act, the Centre has proposed to increase the minimum age to enter into wedlock in women to 21, at par with men. When the minimum age was 18, tendency to marry off girls below that age was very common. Even with the enhanced minimum age for marriage, the proneness of a lot parents to get their daughters married before 21 may not diminish. But 21 is always better than 18 because of the legal definition of a child. The Centre is optimistic about a possible decline in child marriages after the latest amendment. A great deal of child marriages takes place in rural India, and that is another perturbing factor. Girl child marriages in India saw a decline from the early 90s. So, the country has achieved some amount of success in preventing child marriages but obviously the government knows it is too little, too late. But better late than never, so the Niti Aayog was entrusted with the responsibility of suggesting modification in age of marriage of girls considering various factors like health of the mother at a tender age, maternal mortality ratio in young mothers and nutrition in mother and child. Behind all this, the aim is to educate and empower girls alongside employment and independence to make certain they stand on their own feet. A girl's rights with respect to safety, security, sanitation, health and work need no special mention.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

### A rare first

Sir, Kidambi Srikanth deserves accolades for bagging a historic silver medal at the BWF World badminton championship in Huelva. Singapore's Loh Kean Yew brought the curtains down on the Indian's winning streak, winning the summit clash in straight sets. Srikanth raised the bar in the second game, but Loh stole a march, winning it 22-20. However, Srikanth still etched his name in the record books by becoming the first Indian man to reach the championship final after his come-from-behind win over compatriot Lakshya Sen, who claimed the bronze. The double-medal effort is also a rare first for India at the World Championship. Way to go!

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

## 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

**OrissaPOST**  
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010



# national

of the day quote

Those who are making statements against the liquor ban should know that they gained public support because of this. We had imposed a liquor ban following public opinion. Hence, he should avoid giving statements that promote liquor consumption in Bihar

Today, the Delhi Cabinet approved the establishment of the Delhi Teachers' University. The varsity will prepare highly qualified and well-trained teachers in Delhi itself. 'Delhi Teachers University' Bill 2021 will be placed before the Delhi Vidhan Sabha in the coming session

We have allowed construction and demolition activities from today (Monday). However, I appeal to all agencies engaged in such work not to be complacent or take undue advantage of the permission

## SHORT TAKES

### Gay couple enters into wedlock

**Hyderabad:** For the first time in Telugu states, a gay couple has entered into a wedlock. Abhay Dange (34) and Supriyo Chakraborty (31) exchanged rings and vows at a private ceremony held at a resort on the outskirts of Hyderabad on December 18. The wedding, attended by 60 family members and close friends of the couple, was officiated by Sophia David, a trans woman from Hyderabad.

### Protest held against arrest of fishermen

**Chennai:** Tamil Nadu fishermen held road blockade at Rameswaram Monday under the aegis of several fishermen organisations against the arrest of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu by Sri Lankan Navy on charges of having crossed the international waters. Six fishing boats have also been seized by the Sri Lankan Navy. Fishermen union leader S Sesu Raja told IANS, "We are fighting for the release of 55 fishermen who are in the custody of the Sri Lankan Navy. We will hold a hunger strike Wednesday at Thangachimandapam and will hold a rail roko January 1 if fishermen are not released by then."

### J&K man found dead

**New Delhi:** A 36-year-old man, hailing from Jammu and Kashmir, was found dead in Delhi's Greater Kailash area, an official said here Monday. According to the official, information was received that the victim, identified as Rahul Thakur, was lying unconscious near a house near M-Block market in Greater Kailash-I.

### Six more Omicron cases in Delhi

**New Delhi:** Six more cases of the Omicron variant of Covid have been detected in Delhi, taking the total number of people testing positive for the latest variant of the coronavirus here to 28, sources said Monday. At least 12 patients have been discharged, they said.

### Ex-BJP MLA joins SP

**Lucknow:** Ram Iqbal Singh, a former BJP MLA and member of the party's state executive, joined the Samajwadi Party (SP) Monday. Singh, known as a firebrand leader, had been vocal in his criticism of the party's policies on key issues, including the October 3 Lakhimpur Kheri violence.



The AAP leaders are clamouring for power but their nefarious designs will be thwarted by the wise people of Punjab

CHARANJIT CHANNI | PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER

## INDIA APPOINTS NEW ENVOY TO CHINA

Senior diplomat Pradeep Kumar Rawat has been appointed as India's next Ambassador to China, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced Monday. Rawat, an Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer of the 1990 batch and regarded as a China expert, will succeed Vikram Misri



## LS NOD TO BILL ON ELECTORAL REFORMS

# Oppn questions tearing hurry on Aadhaar linkage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** A Bill to link electoral roll data with Aadhaar ecosystem and bring other poll reforms was passed by Lok Sabha Monday after a brief debate and amid demand by the opposition to refer it to a standing committee.

The Election Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021, piloted by Law Minister Kiren Rijiju, was passed by a voice vote with opposition members claiming that the move to link electoral roll with Aadhaar number would violate privacy and could even allow non-citizens to vote.

"So, if you are in a position where you are asking Aadhaar for voters, all you are getting is a document that reflects residence. It does not reflect any proof of citizenship. Therefore, you are potentially giving



ing the right to vote to non-citizens," Congress member Shashi Tharoor said in Lok Sabha.

Besides linking electoral roll to Aadhaar, the bill also seeks to make the statutes gender neutral by substituting the term 'wife' with 'spouse' to allow husbands of service voters to cast their vote from the place where their wives are posted. It also seeks to provide four qualifying dates - January 1, April 1, July 1 and October 1 - in a year for reg-

istration of voters, instead of a single qualifying date - January 1. The Bill was introduced after 12 noon and passed amid din by 15:10 pm.

Opposition members slammed the government for rushing the bill through parliamentary process in a "tearing hurry" and demanded that it be referred to a standing committee. In a statement, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau condemned the manner in which important changes in the electoral laws, which

have far-reaching consequences, have been rushed through Lok Sabha and passed in a din.

Responding to opposition concerns in Lok Sabha, the law minister said the Bill seeks to justify the Supreme Court judgement in the Puttaswamy case that defines the fundamental right to privacy.

Rijiju said the Bill justified all the conditions given in the judgement - permissible law, legitimate state interests, test of proportionality. He said the Bill will help in weeding out multiple entries in the electoral rolls and ensure that a person is registered as a voter in one constituency and would eventually lead to clean elections. On Aadhaar linkage, Rijiju said, "This is voluntary, not compulsory or mandatory."

The Bill makes it clear that "no application for inclusion of name in the electoral roll shall be denied and no entries in the electoral roll shall be deleted for inability of an individual to furnish or intimate Aadhaar number due to such sufficient cause as may be prescribed".

Rejecting the demand for referring the Bill to a panel, Rijiju said various proposals which are part of the bill have already been suggested and recommended by the Standing Committee of Law and Personnel. The minister further said that the Bill will cleanse the election system and eliminate multiple entries.

BJP member Nishikant Dubey said the Congress and the Trinamool Congress were opposed to the Bill due to vote bank politics as they will not be able to make Bangladeshi and Nepali citizens voters in India.

## Kerala killings: 2 held, Oppn slams LDF govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Alappuzha (Ker), Dec 20:** The Kerala Police Monday said two people have been arrested in connection with the death of SDPI's K S Shan and claimed "substantial lead" in the investigation into the murder of BJP's OBC Morcha's Ranjith Sreenivas, even as the opposition attacked the ruling CPI(M) over the "deteriorating" law and order situation in the state.

After paying homage to slain BJP OBC Morcha leader here today, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai alleged that the law and order system in Kerala has come to an end which is why killings over political differences are taking place in the state. He asked the LDF government to prevent any further attacks against BJP leaders and workers. Slamming the Left government, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly

V D Sathesnan alleged that there is a serious situation where neither Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is holding the Home portfolio, nor the Chief of State Police has any control over the police force. In a statement, the ruling CPI(M) alleged that the attacks and killings were "part of a conspiracy to disrupt peace" in the state.

As the political parties engaged in blame game over the killings, ADGP (Law and Order) Vijay Sakhare, who is heading the Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the two separate cases, said two persons were arrested in connection with the killing of SDPI leader and efforts are on to nab those who killed the BJP leader. While Prasad and Ratheesh were arrested in connection with the killing of the SDPI state secretary, eight other people involved in the crime have been identified and police teams deputed to nab them, the senior officer said.

## 'Conspiracy behind sacrilege bids'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Amritsar, Dec 20:** SGPC chief Harjinder Singh Dhami Monday expressed apprehension of a "big conspiracy" behind the alleged sacrilege attempt at the Golden Temple and said the man involved in it seemed to have received "commando training".

He also claimed that the law allows a person to kill in self-defence, suggesting that this is what happened at the Golden Temple when the man was lynched after the alleged sacrilege attempt.

He told reporters that suspecting foul play, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) task force had stopped the man from entering the Golden Temple but he managed to gain entry inside the sanctum sanctorum after the shift of task force members changed in the evening.

"I feel that he had undergone commando training from the way he jumped the railing and did it (made a sacrilege attempt) in just



six seconds. There is a big conspiracy behind it," Dhami said. On being asked that the man was lynched when caught by the SGPC task force, Dhami said "devotees were angry over this incident".

The man had picked a sword and was going to attack the holy Guru Granth Sahib, which is considered a living entity by Sikhs, Dhami said. One can kill a person in self-defence if somebody attacks with an intention of murder and the law does not consider it as an offence, he said. Before the task force members could do anything, the man was beaten up by the angry crowd that led to his death, he said. Dhami said the SGPC will set up its own special investigation team to "bring out the truth". Dhami said

it will comprise two representatives from Sikh organisations, two from the SGPC and two "Panthic" scholars. "The SGPC has watched the CCTV footage to get to the bottom of the incident," he said. "CCTV cameras revealed that the accused reached Sri Harmandar Sahib via Jalliwala Bagh Marg at 8.30 am on the day of incident. During this time, he first came from the Sri Akal Takht Sahib secretariat side around 9 am to enter the 'parikarma', but returned," Dhami said.

"He then reached Guru Ramdas Sarai side through the plaza and entered the langar hall at 9.38 am. He had langar and took tea. From here, he entered the parikarma of Sri Harmandar Sahib at 10.19 am," said Dhami. "He reached inside the sanctum sanctorum for the first time at 10.34 am and at 10:37 am. He went upstairs on Har Ki Pauri and came out at 11.45 am. He then re-entered Sri Harmandar Sahib and committed the highly despicable incident at 5.46 pm," said Dhami.

## Unnao rape victim road accident: Sengar, five others discharged

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** Expelled Uttar Pradesh BJP legislator Kuldeep Singh Sengar, along with five others, was Monday discharged in the Unnao rape survivor's rape accident case after a Delhi court found no evidence against him.

"No prima facie evidence on record to charge Kuldeep Singh Sengar regarding a criminal conspiracy to extend threat to kill the victim or her members. No charges can be framed against him," said Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ravindra Kumar Pandey in the order.

## The case pertains to an accident July 28, 2019, when a truck had rammed into the vehicle in which the rape survivor, her lawyer, and two relatives were travelling to Rae Bareilly

Apart from Sengar, his aides Gyanendra Singh, Komal Singh, Arun Singh, Rinku Singh, and Awdesh Singh were also discharged in the case. However, accused Ashish Kumar Pal, Vinod Mishra, Haripal Singh and Naveen Singh were charged under Sections 506(ii) of IPC read with 34 of IPC.

The case pertains to an accident July 28, 2019, when a truck had rammed into the vehicle in which the rape survivor, her lawyer, and two relatives were travelling to Rae Bareilly. The rape survivor and the advocate sustained grievous injuries while the two others were killed on the spot. An FIR had been filed against Sengar and nine others in relation to the accident. Earlier, he had been convicted in the Unnao rape case, in December 2019 and was sentenced to imprisonment for the remainder of his life, besides getting a fine of Rs 25 lakh. Sengar, a former BJP MLA from Unnao's Bangarumau seat, was accused of rape charges in a case that created a political storm in 2017.

## FIGHT FOR RIGHTS



Farmers shout slogans as they block a railway track to protest against the state government over their various demands, including compensation for the damage to paddy crops, at Devi Dass Pura village near Amritsar

## BB seeks DCGI nod for phase 3 trial of nasal vax

India is yet to approve the use of the intranasal vaccine BBV154 developed by the Hyderabad-based company

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** Bharat Biotech has sought permission from India's drug regulator to conduct a phase-3 study for its intra-nasal Covid-19 vaccine as a booster dose on participants vaccinated with Covishield or Covaxin, official sources said Monday.

The company had in August received the Drug Controller General of India's (DCGI's) nod for conducting phase 2 clinical trials of the nasal vaccine.

"Bharat Biotech has put in an application seeking permission to conduct a study titled 'A Phase 3 Study to Evaluate the Safety and Immunogenicity of BBV154 and BBV152 as third dose (booster) to participants previously vaccinated with SARS-CoV-2 vaccines'," an official said.

BBV154 is an intranasal replication-deficient chimpanzee ade-



novirus SARS-CoV-2 vectored vaccine. Bharat Biotech has in-licensed the technology from Washington University in St Louis, the US.

The company reports that the doses of the vaccine administered to healthy volunteers in the phase-1 clinical trial have been well tolerated. No serious adverse events were reported, the DBT had said. Previously, the vaccine was found to be safe, immunogenic and well-tolerated in the pre-clinical toxicity studies. The vaccine was able to elicit a high level of neutralising antibodies in animal studies, it added.

On the government's stand over allowing the use of booster doses, NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr V K Paul had last week said these interventions and measures are driven by science, local epidemiology and resources.

# Old age can spur Delta, Omicron co-infections: Experts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** A weaker immune system, old age and comorbidities can increase the risk of co-infection with Omicron and Delta variants of Covid-19 at the same time, said health experts Monday.

Last week, scientists at the UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) noted that some people have become infected by both the Delta and Omicron variants that are "operating separately as two epidemics" at the same time, making them seriously ill. The possibility

of a person being co-infected with both Delta and Omicron at the same time "is rare", Dr Dipu TS, Clinical Associate Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases, Amrita Hospital, told IANS.

However, "it's not impossible to have co-infection of two strains, especially if the patient has an immunocompromised status", he added. Anecdotal reports have also suggested episodes of co-infection with two different strains of Covid-19 virus in the past. "Even though Covid infections normally only involve one mutant strain, in extremely rare cases, it is also possible that two strains strike at the



same time," Dr Namita Jaggi, Chairperson of Labs and Infection control at Artemis Hospital, Gurugram, told IANS. But, co-infection can occur due to exposure to a large crowd with high chances of exposure to people infected with different Covid variants, she

said adding "there is also a possibility that people who are recovering from Covid-19 may be at a higher risk of co-infection". Further, some reports also have suggested that people living in areas with lower vaccination rates are at greater risk of getting co-infected.

In addition, the risk of co-infection has been found more among the elderly, those with comorbidities and a compromised immune system, Jaggi said.

The highly transmissible Omicron variant has to date spread to about 90 countries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) stated that it has "a

growth advantage over Delta" and may soon overtake it. As per the SAGE, a successful new variant typically claims dominance by being much more infectious than previous strains, as has happened in the UK with Delta. In its latest update, the WHO said there is still limited data on the clinical severity associated with Omicron. So far it is known that people with Omicron can have the full spectrum of disease, everything from asymptomatic infection, mild infection, with people needing hospitalisation, but not oxygen support.





### OMICRON SCARE

# All Covid +ve samples to be sent for genome sequencing: Kejriwal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 20: Amid the Omicron scare and the growing number of coronavirus cases in Delhi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal Monday said all samples that test positive for the infection will now be sent for genome sequencing.

He also urged the Centre to allow the administration of booster shots to the fully vaccinated city residents. The chief minister appealed to people not to panic and wear masks as they are the most effective protection against the virus.

"For the last few days, COVID-19 cases are increasing in the city. Yesterday (Sunday), it was over 100. We don't know what type of Covid cases these are, normal or the Omicron variant. So, to ascertain this we have now decided to send the samples of all positive cases for genome sequencing," Kejriwal said at a press conference.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) during which the Omicron situation, including its possible effects and steps to deal with it, was discussed, according to sources.

Kejriwal appealed to the Centre to allow the administration of booster shots to those Delhi residents who have already received both doses of Covid vaccine. "About 99 per cent of our eligible population has received the first dose and about 70 per cent has been vaccinated with both doses. I request the central government to allow booster doses for all those who have been vaccinated with both doses. We have the infrastructure to administer booster doses. We can start with our healthcare work-



The decision was taken at a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority during which the Omicron situation, including its possible effects and steps to deal with it, was discussed, according to the Chief Minister

Kejriwal appealed to the Centre to allow the administration of booster shots to those Delhi residents who have already received both doses of Covid vaccine

ers and then vaccinate the rest of the population," he said.

Kejriwal also said the home isolation system will be strengthened in Delhi as according to experts the Omicron variant only causes mild symptoms. "We will strengthen the home isolation system as most cases will not require hospitalisation. There is no need to panic in view of the Omicron variant as we have made adequate arrangements in hospitals to deal with any outbreak," he said.

He said the government has made adequate arrangements for hospital beds, oxygen, medicines and everything else that may be needed to combat the virus. "We will not let the people of Delhi face any difficulty in their treatment," he added.

The chief minister held a meeting on November 30 to review preparations to tackle a possible third wave of coronavirus and the spread of the Omicron variant. It has been assessed that 30,000 Covid beds are ready in Delhi. The gov-

ernment will be able to arrange 100 beds per ward on a two-week notice, which will take the total bed capacity in Delhi to over 64,000, according to an official statement.

Additionally, 6,800 ICU beds will also be ready very soon. Medicine stocks are currently being added and home isolation arrangements are being strengthened, the government statement said.

The Delhi government has issued a Covid helpline number - 1031 - to help patients with any problem. The helpline is operational 24x7. The call attendants work in three shifts and can attend 600 to 700 calls. The government is also focusing on increasing manpower for Covid management to be prepared for a possible spread of the disease. This will include medical, nursing and paramedical students trained in oxygen therapy, Covid management and paediatric ward Covid management. A workforce of 5,000 health assistants has been readied for any future needs, the statement said.

# Assam faces rising human-elephant conflict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 20: Assam which has the country's second highest elephant population is facing a rising trend in human-elephant conflict as the forests in which pachyderms roamed gets fragmented as farms and tea gardens come up.

Train accidents, electrocution, poisoning, 'accidental' deaths like falling into ditches and even lightning strikes have led to the deaths of some 71 elephants while conflict between the tuskers and humans have seen 61 people killed during the year.

Over the last ten years a total 812 people and 900 elephants were killed as competition for land intensified. Fueled by a combination of a population boom and poverty, man has expanded his frontiers, while animals have found their jungles shrinking.

"Fragmented, degraded, shrinking and encroached habitats have led to man-elephant conflicts leading to electrocution, poisoning and train hits, Elephant Foundation's Kaushik Barua said, adding "this is now the 'story of Assam's elephants in the wild....At this rate,



The state government has constituted and notified coordination committees comprising all stakeholders with the local range officer as the member secretary to coordinate to save elephants from accidental deaths

PARIMAL SUKLABAIIDYA | MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS

the elephant numbers that we are proud of stands to slip", Assam currently has an estimated population of around 5,700 elephants, second only to Karnataka's more

than 6,000. Speeding trains which claimed four lives within less than a month have been a major cause for concern spurring both the state government and railway authorities into action.

"The state government has constituted and notified coordination committees comprising all stakeholders with the local range officer as the member secretary to coordinate to save elephants from accidental deaths", Minister for Environment and forests Parimal Suklabaidya said.

Vulnerable section of railway tracks prone to elephant death have been identified for monitor-

ing by frontline and railway staff while signages are displayed at vulnerable points to alert train drivers about the possible presence of elephants near the railway tracks, he said.

Cleaning of vegetation along the railway track are done regularly to allow unhindered and clear view to the loco pilot, anti-depredation squads have been formed to avert any elephant fatalities due to train hits and trained elephants or 'kunkis' have been deployed to monitor the movement of wild elephants, the minister added.

Northeastern Frontier Railway spokesperson Guneet Kaur said that there are many instances of alert loco drivers who have saved elephants from being hit but in the recent incidents no information from forest officials or villagers on the movement of animals was received by the nodal railway officials.

"After recent incidents, NF Railway has decided to conduct a detailed enquiry and has imposed caution during train movement along with reassessment of notified elephant corridors being taken up in coordination with the forest department", she said.

### BEATING THE CHILL



Homeless people wearing woollen clothes bask in the sun on a cold winter morning in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

### Assam may bring in law against mob lynching

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 20: The Assam government Monday said that it will discuss and consider a proposal to introduce a bill against mob lynching, in line with states like Manipur, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

Replying to the issue of bringing in legislation to stop incidents of mob lynching, Assam Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika said in the Assembly that the state government has not thought about it so far.

"Though we have not enacted any law against mob lynching, we must take steps to prevent it. Many such gruesome incidents have shaken us. We will discuss and consider the acts implemented by other states," he said.

Hazarika said that as of now, the Assam government has not looked at the anti-mob lynching laws of states like Manipur, Rajasthan and West Bengal.

"We do not have any information about other states' laws. However, the Supreme Court, in the judgement in Tehseen Poonawalla case, had issued a set of guidelines to stop mob lynching incidents. It had also said that there was scope of enacting anti-mob lynching laws," he said.

The minister mentioned several cases of mob lynching that took place in Assam in last few years that are being tried in fast-track courts under various sections of the Indian Penal Code.

On November 29, a 28-year-old All Assam Students' Union (AASU) leader was lynched by a group of people in Jorhat after a heated argument over an accident in front of scores of onlookers, who did nothing to stop it but were busy filming the incident on mobile phones.

# CAQM lifts curbs on construction work



REUTERS FILE PHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 20: The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) Monday lifted the restrictions on construction and demolition activities in Delhi-NCR and the entry of trucks in the national capital in view of an improvement in air quality and favourable meteorological forecast.

The panel noted that the air quality index in Delhi has improved from the very poor category and has consistently been in the poor category for the last three days.

"Construction and demolition (C&D) activities in NCR shall now be permitted, with immediate effect subject to persons and agencies undertaking C&D activities strictly complying with dust control norms and directions issued under the Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules and CPCB guidelines in this regard," an order read.

"Entry of trucks to Delhi, which hitherto was only selectively permitted, would be permitted with immediate effect till further orders," it said. The India Meteorological Department's forecast indicates continuation of the favourable trend of wind speed and climatic conditions to facilitate dispersion of pollutants from the region, it said.

The central air quality panel had on Friday last allowed au-

THE PANEL HAD NOVEMBER 16 BANNED C&D ACTIVITIES IN DELHI-NCR AFTER POLLUTION LEVELS SHOT UP ALARMINGLY

thorities in Delhi-NCR to resume physical classes for students in classes 6 and above, colleges and other educational institutions with immediate effect. It had also said that physical classes for students up to class 5 can begin from December 27.

The panel had on November 16 banned C&D activities in Delhi-NCR after pollution levels shot up alarmingly. On November 24, the Supreme Court re-imposed the ban on construction, exempting non-polluting activities such as plumbing, interior decoration, electrical work and carpentry.

On December 17, the panel eased the restrictions on C&D activities, allowing projects related to public utilities, railways, metro, airports and ISBTs, national security, defence, healthcare, highways, roads, flyovers, power transmission, pipelines etc.

# RUCKUS IN ASSAM ASSEMBLY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 20: The Winter Session of Assam assembly began with chaotic scenes on Monday after the Speaker rejected an adjournment motion moved by the Congress to discuss the alleged land scam by a company co-founded by the wife of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The unruly scene inside the House forced Speaker Biswajit Daimary to adjourn the session for 10 minutes. Later, the entire opposition comprising the Congress, AIUDF, the CPI(M) and one Independent MLA staged a walk-out as the matter was not allowed to be discussed.

Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia and other Congress MLAs served a notice for an adjournment motion to dis-

cuss alleged violation of laws while acquiring 29 bighas and 9 lecha (around 18 acres) of government land by RBS Realtors Pvt Ltd. Daimary initially said he received an adjournment motion on violation of land policies by a private company and the motion was disallowed. He did not mention what the notice was all about. On this, Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi said, "Cannot we talk about the CM's family's land scandal?"

Reacting to Gogoi's question, all the BJP members stood up and started shouting at him. The speaker said there was no need to take anyone's name. Justifying his stand to reject the motion, Daimary said, "I have not got any data on the topic. There are only some newspaper clippings."

When Gogoi insisted on reading out the topic of the notice, he



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma

said that there was no need to read it out in the House. Saikia then said that it would be wrong if the opposition party was not allowed to even talk on the admissibility of the notice. A decision to reject it can be pronounced thereafter.

Other senior Congress MLAs such as Bharat Chandra Narah and Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha

too questioned the Speaker for not reading out the notice. "The rule allows the Speaker to decide on the admissibility of a notice. I have checked it and found that it is not admissible," Daimary said.

Gogoi then again raised the issue, mentioning the alleged land scam by the wife of the chief minister. The BJP members too reacted sharply to this, leading to adjournment of the House for 10 minutes.

When the House reassembled, Saikia raised the topic again and urged the Speaker to discuss the matter. When Daimary stuck to his point over dismissal of the notice without mentioning the topic, the opposition stood and shouted against the alleged scam.

Finally, the Speaker allowed Saikia to talk on the admissibility of the notice related to grabbing of government land.

# DPCC to study microplastics pollution in Yamuna

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 20: In a first-of-its-kind survey by a government body in the national capital, the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) will conduct a study to ascertain the concentration, distribution and composition of microplastics in river Yamuna, besides soil, vegetables and other edible products.

The pollution control body will also examine if the soil in the floodplains of river Yamuna is fit for agriculture, according to officials. Microplastics are fragments of any type of plastic less than five millimetres, according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the European Chemicals Agency. They enter natural ecosystems from a variety of sources, including cosmetics, clothing, and industrial processes.

Studies conducted earlier have shown that microplastics carry bacteria that are pathogenic to human and natural biota, and can enrich antibiotic resistant genes from municipal activated sludge. The polymeric compounds and additives such as copper ions used in the production of plastics are toxic. Also, microplastics absorb various toxins



PTI PHOTO

in water that subsequently desorb inside the host organism.

The Yamuna floodplains, stretching 48 kilometres from Palla to Okhla, will be divided into three stretches of 16 km each for the study: Delhi Segment I (Palla to Wazirabad), Delhi Segment II (Wazirabad to Nizamuddin Bridge) and Delhi Segment III (Nizamuddin Bridge to Okhla), according to the terms of reference prepared by the DPCC.

A DPCC official said the idea to study the presence of microplastics in river Yamuna and the national

capital originated after an MP asked a question in Parliament about microplastics in river Ganga.

"It is sad that we have not conducted any such study in the national capital," the official said, citing a report by environment research and advocacy organisation, Toxics Link. The Toxics Link study on River Ganga threw up alarming results as "microplastics were found in all the samples".

"Locations with higher population density and greater industrialisation (textile, tannery, etc.) had a higher microplastics concentra-

tion in the river," the report says.

"Compared to the concentration of microplastics in rivers such as the Rhine in Europe, the Patapasco, Magothy, Rhode in North America, the Elqui, Maipo, Biobio, and Maule in South America, the pollution is much higher in the Ganga," according to a report by Dr Mahua Saha, a senior scientist at the National Institute of Oceanography, Goa, and his team.

As river water is used for drinking and irrigation purposes quite extensively, an increased concentration of microplastics increases

Studies conducted earlier have shown that microplastics carry bacteria that are pathogenic to human and natural biota, and can enrich antibiotic resistant genes from municipal activated sludge

The pollution control body will also examine if the soil in the floodplains of river Yamuna is fit for agriculture, according to officials

the potential harm it can cause to organisms and humans. As part of another study, the DPCC will examine the soil of the Yamuna for various contaminants and its fitness for agriculture and remediation possibilities. "River Yamuna is one of the most important rivers of India and is highly polluted.

The river water and the adjacent soil are contaminated with various pollutants, including heavy metals. In this study, the effects of seasonal variations and heavy metal contamination in Yamuna water on physicochemical properties and enzyme activities of soil will be observed," the terms of reference read. Sampling will be collected from 10 points along the river course in summer, monsoon and winter.



# international

## of the day quote

The fifth wave has begun. The children's vaccine is safe, and it is the responsibility of the parents. A parent who has been vaccinated three times also needs to protect his children. Don't leave your children exposed and vulnerable to the coming omicron

NAFTALI BENNETT | PRIME MINISTER, ISRAEL

Any threat to Iran's nuclear and military bases by the Zionist regime is not possible without the green light support of the United States

GEN GHOLAMALI RASHID | TOP REVOLUTIONARY GUARD COMMANDER, IRAN

Imran Khan and his mafias usurped trillions of rupees in corruption but none of them were held accountable under this government that pledged to be the so-called flag-bearer of anti-corruption

MARRIYUM AURANGZEB | INFORMATION SECY, PML-N, PAK

## SHORT TAKES

### Leftist millennial wins Chile polls

**Santiago:** A leftist millennial who rose to prominence during anti-government protests was elected Chile's next president Sunday after a bruising campaign against a free-market firebrand likened to Donald Trump. With 56 per cent of the votes, Gabriel Boric handily defeated by more than 10 points lawmaker José Antonio Kast, who tried unsuccessfully to scare voters that his young, inexperienced opponent would upend Chile's vaunted record as Latin America's most stable, advanced economy.

### Space tourists return to earth

**Moscow:** A Japanese billionaire, his producer and a Russian cosmonaut safely returned to Earth Monday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station. Fashion tycoon Yusaku Maezawa, his producer Yozo Hirano and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin made a soft landing in a Russian Soyuz capsule in the steppes of Kazakhstan at 9:13 am about 148 kilometers southeast of the city of Zhezkazgan.

### Court postpones Suu Kyi verdict

**Bangkok:** A Myanmar court Monday postponed the issuing of verdicts in the latest of a series of cases against the country's ousted leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, a legal official knowledgeable about the case said. The postponed verdict from the court in the capital, Naypyitaw, is for the second among multiple cases brought against the 76-year-old Nobel laureate since the army seized power Feb 1, ousting her elected government and arresting top members of her National League for Democracy party.

### 10K trapped in Malaysia floods

**Kuala Lumpur:** Rescue teams Monday worked to free people trapped by Malaysia's worst flooding in years after heavy rains stopped following more than three days of torrential downpours in the capital and around the country. At least three people were reported to have died as a result of the flooding. At least 10,000 people were trapped by floods over the weekend and Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob said rains had dumped more water on the capital and surrounding Selangor state than the monthly average for this time of the year, which is marked by monsoons and wet weather.



If there is confrontation, then China will not fear it, and will fight to the finish. There is no harm in competition but it should be positive

WANG YI | CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER

## CHINA TO UNVEIL NEW-YEAR COINS

China's central bank will issue a set of commemorative coins starting next week in celebration of the new year. The set of three coins, all legal tenders, includes one gold, one silver and one two-colour copper alloy coins



## CHRISTMAS IN THE BALANCE

# Nations eye Britain's bleak Omicron surge



A view of the exterior of Wembley Stadium in London, which is being used as a vaccination centre, as the coronavirus booster vaccination program is ramped up

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, Dec 20:** Britain's main nurses' union warned Monday that exhaustion and surging coronavirus cases among medical staff are pushing them to the breaking point, adding to pressure on the government for new restrictions to curb record numbers of infections driven by the omicron variant.

The warning throws into stark relief the unpalatable choice Prime Minister Boris Johnson faces wince holiday plans for millions for a second year running, or face a potential tidal wave of cases and disruption.

Many governments in Europe and the US are confronting similar dilemmas over how hard to come down in the face of omicron, which appears more transmissible than the previous delta variant that itself led to surges in many parts of the world. Early evidence suggests omicron may also produce less serious illness — though scientists

caution it is too soon to say — and that it could better evade vaccine protection.

Even if it is milder, the new variant could still overwhelm health systems because of the sheer number of infections. Confirmed coronavirus cases in the UK have surged by 50% in a week as omicron overtook delta as the dominant variant.

Patricia Marquis, England director for the Royal College of Nursing union, said the situation over the next few weeks looks "very bleak," as growing absences from

sickness and self-isolation hit hospitals already struggling to clear a backlog of postponed procedures and treat normal winter sicknesses alongside coronavirus cases.

The British Medical Association has warned that almost 50,000 doctors, nurses and other National Health Service staff in England could be off sick with COVID-19 by Christmas Day unless additional restrictions are introduced.

But many political leaders are reluctant to impose the stiff measures they resorted to earlier in the pandemic — often because they promised their people that vaccines would offer a way out of such restrictions and it may be politically untenable to impose them again.

In the US, the prospect of a winter chilled by a wave of coronavirus infections is a severe reversal from the optimism projected by President Joe Biden some 10 months ago, when he suggested that the country would essentially be back to normal by Christmas. France is desperately trying to avoid a new lockdown that would hurt the economy and cloud President Emmanuel Macron's expected re-election campaign.

## Initial booster data promising: Moderna

**Washington:** Moderna said Monday that a booster dose of its COVID-19 vaccine should offer protection against the rapidly spreading omicron variant. Moderna said lab tests showed the half-dose booster shot increased by 37 times the level of so-called neutralizing antibodies able to fight omicron. And a full-dose booster was even stronger, triggering an 83-fold jump in antibody levels, although with an increase in the usual side effects, the company said. While half-dose shots are being used for most Moderna boosters, a full-dose third shot has been recommended for people with weakened immune systems.

# 375 dead, 56 missing after typhoon slams Philippines

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Manila, Dec 20:** The death toll from the strongest typhoon to batter the Philippines this year climbed to 375, with more than 50 others still missing and several central provinces struggling with downed communications and power outages and pleading for food and water, officials said Monday.

At its strongest, Typhoon Rai packed sustained winds of 195 kilometers per hour with gusts of up to 270 kph before blowing into the South China Sea Friday.

At least 375 people were killed, 56 were missing and 500 were injured, according to the national police. The toll may still increase because several towns and villages remained out of reach due to downed communications and power outages, although massive cleanup and repair efforts were underway.

Many were killed by falling trees and collapsing walls, flash floods and landslides. A 57-year-old man was found dead hanging from a tree branch and a woman was blown away and died in Negros Occidental



province, police said.

Governor Arlene Bag-ao of Dinagat Islands, among the southern provinces first hit by the typhoon, said Rai's ferocity on her island province of more than 130,000 people was worse than that of Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful and deadliest typhoons on record which devastated the central Philippines in November 2013 but did not inflict any casualties in Dinagat.

At least 14 villagers died and more than 100 others were injured by flying roofs, debris and glass shards and were treated in makeshift surgery rooms in damaged hospitals in Dinagat, Bag-ao said. Many more would have died if thousands of residents had not been evacuated from high-risk villages.

# Peng Shuai tells she never wrote of being assaulted

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Beijing, Dec 20:** Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai has denied saying she was sexually assaulted, despite a November social media post attributed to her that accused a former top Communist Party official of forcing her into sex.

The Lianhe Zaobao Chinese-language newspaper posted video of Peng it says was taken Sunday in Shanghai in which she said she has been mainly staying at home in Beijing but was free to come and go as she chose.

"First of all, I want to emphasize something that is very important. I have never said that I wrote that anyone sexually assaulted me. I need to emphasize this point very clearly," Peng told the newspaper's reporter.

The reporter did not ask how or why the lengthy and highly detailed Nov 2 post appeared or whether Peng's account had been hacked.

The paper said it interviewed Peng at a promotional event for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games which begins Feb 4.

## SL navy arrests 12 Indian fishermen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Colombo, Dec 20:** The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 12 more Indian fishermen and seized two fishing trawlers for allegedly poaching in the country's territorial waters, taking the number of Indians apprehended in the last two days to 59, an official statement said Monday.

The arrests were made in seas South of Mannar in the Sri Lankan waters Sunday.

It comes a day after the Navy arrested 43 Indian fishermen and seized six fishing trawlers in seas Southeast of the Delft Island in Jaffna.

"As part of the Navy's effort to prevent poaching by Indian fishing trawlers in Sri Lankan territorial waters, the Navy managed to take hold of 8 Indian fishing trawlers and 55 Indian fishermen during operations conducted by the Northern and North Central Naval Commands 18th and 19th December," the Navy said in a statement.

The operations were carried out adhering to COVID-19 protocols.

Arrangements are being made to hand them over to relevant authorities for legal action after Rapid Antigen Tests of the apprehended Indian fishermen, the statement 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.

## RECORD LOW TURNOUT

# Pro-Beijing candidates sweep victories in HK



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Hong Kong, Dec 20:** Pro-Beijing candidates dominated Hong Kong's legislative elections, beating out moderates and independents in the city's first public poll after Beijing passed a resolution to amend the city's election laws.

Candidates loyal to Beijing won a majority of the seats in Sunday's election after the laws were changed to ensure that only pro-Beijing "patriots" could run the city.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam said during a news conference Monday she was "satisfied" with the election despite a 30.2% voter turnout — the lowest since the British handed Hong Kong over to China in 1997.

She said that the number of registered voters reached 92.5%, a record high compared to the 2012 and 2016 elections, when around 70% of voters had registered.

"For registered voters, deciding

whether they want to exercise their voting rights in a particular election is entirely a matter for themselves," she said.

"In this election, 1.35 million voters cast their votes. They did not just return candidates of their choice to LegCo, and I think it was also because of their support for the improved electoral system," said Lam, referring to the city's Legislative Council.

Under the new laws, the number of directly elected lawmakers was reduced from 35 to 20, even as the legislature was expanded from 70 to 90 seats. Most of the lawmakers were appointed by largely pro-Beijing bodies, ensuring that they make up the majority of the legislature.

The opposition camp has criticised the elections, with the largest pro-democracy party, the Democratic Party, fielding no candidates for the first time since the 1997 handover.

## SALUTE OF SUPPORT



A boy from Myanmar, who lives in Thailand, flashes a three-finger salute at a temporary donation station for sending relief supplies to refugees who fled a flare-up in fighting between the Myanmar army and ethnic minority rebels in Mae Sot district, Thailand

# Iran's Revolutionary Guard holds drill

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Tehran, Dec 20:** Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard staged a major military exercise across the country's south Monday amid heightened tensions over Tehran's nuclear programme, state TV reported.

The Guard's aerospace division, ground troops and naval forces joined in the five-day drill, the report said, with maritime forces set to maneuver in the strategic Strait of Hormuz, the narrow gateway for 20% of the world's traded oil.

The exercise comes days after



talks to revive Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers broke up in Vienna. Iran has accelerated its nuclear advances as negotiations to return to the accord struggle to make headway, alarming Israel and other regional rivals. Israel has repeatedly threat-

ened unilateral action against Iran's nuclear programme.

Gen Gholamali Rashid, a top Guard commander, vowed a harsh response to any Israeli military action against Iran. Iranian forces will launch "a crushing attack on all bases, centres, paths and space used to carry out the aggression without delay," the semi-official Mehr news agency quoted him as saying.

"Any threat to Iran's nuclear and military bases by the Zionist regime is not possible without the green light support of the United States, he said.

# Himalayan glaciers melting at 'exceptional rate': Study

THE HIMALAYAN MOUNTAIN RANGE IS HOME TO THE WORLD'S THIRD-LARGEST AMOUNT OF GLACIER ICE, AFTER ANTARCTICA AND THE ARCTIC AND IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS 'THE THIRD POLE'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Dec 20:** Glaciers in the Himalayas are melting at an "exceptional" rate because of global warming, threatening the water supply of millions of people in Asia, according to a study published Monday.

The researchers found that the Himalayan glaciers have lost ice ten times more quickly over the last few decades than on average since the last major glacier expansion 400-700 years ago, a period known as the Little Ice Age.

The study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, also shows that Himalayan glaciers are shrinking far more rapidly than glaciers in other parts of the world.

A team led by researchers at the University of Leeds, UK, made a re-

construction of the size and ice surfaces of 14,798 Himalayan glaciers during the Little Ice Age.

They calculated that the glaciers have lost around 40 per cent of their area — shrinking from a peak of 28,000 square kilometres to around 19,600 sq kms today.

During that period they have also lost between 390 cubic kilometres and 586 cubic kilometres of ice, the researchers said.

The water released through that melting has raised sea levels across the world by between 0.92 mm and 1.38 mm, they said.

The acceleration of melting of Himalayan glaciers has significant implications for hundreds of millions of people who depend on Asia's major river systems for food and energy, the researchers said. These rivers include the



Brahmaputra, Ganges and Indus, they said. The team used satellite images and digital elevation models to produce outlines of the glaciers' extent 400-700 years ago and to "reconstruct" the ice surface. The satellite images revealed

ridges that mark the former glacier boundaries and the researchers used the geometry of these ridges to estimate the former glacier extent and ice surface elevation.

Comparing the glacier reconstruction to the glacier now, de-

Our findings clearly show that ice is now being lost from Himalayan glaciers at a rate that is at least ten times higher than the average rate over past centuries. This acceleration in the rate of loss has only emerged within the last few decades, and coincides with human-induced climate change

JONATHAN CARRIVICK | AUTHOR, UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

The study suggests this variation is probably due to differences in geographical features on the two sides of the mountain range and their interaction with the atmosphere — resulting in different weather patterns.

Himalayan glaciers are also declining faster where they end in lakes, which have several warming effects, rather than where they end on land, the researchers said.

The number and size of these lakes are increasing so continued acceleration in mass loss can be expected, they said.

Glaciers which have significant amounts of natural debris upon their surfaces are also losing mass more quickly, contributing around 46.5 per cent of total volume loss despite making up only around 7.5 per cent of the total number of glaciers.



From the Republic Day violence to Lakhimpur Kheri incident and terms such as 'toolkit' and 'andolanjeevi' entering the Indian political lexicon, it was controversies galore during the year-long farmers' movement against the three contentious agri laws. As farmers protested the enactment of the three farm laws and set up camp at entry points into the national capital since November 28 last, a slew of controversies dotted the prolonged protests. However, the resolve of farmers to ensure repeal of the legislations which they said would leave them at the mercy of corporations, remained unshakable



**HOMeward JOURNEY**



Thirteen months of struggle on the streets. Heartfelt thanks to the citizens of the country  
**RAKESH TIKAIT**

BKU spokesperson Rakesh Tikait preparing to leave for home after farmers ended their year-long agitation

**ICONIC FIGHT ENDS** After an iconic fight with the Centre that resulted in the withdrawal of contentious farm laws, farmer leader Rakesh Tikait and his supporters December 15 left for their homes from Ghazipur on the Delhi-Uttar Pradesh border that had become their home for 383 days. Before leaving, farmers held 'havan' (a Hindu ritual) and expressed gratitude to all who stood with them in solidarity with the farm movement. Tikait said: "I want to thank everyone and particularly those who organised langars at the border."

# SAGA OF SACRIFICE & STRUGGLE

**LAKHIMPUR KHERI BURNS**



A massive controversy related to the farmers' protests erupted when four farmers were killed in Tikonia area of Lakhimpur Kheri district, the native place of Union Minister Ajay Mishra, in Uttar Pradesh on October 3 after they were allegedly mowed down by an SUV. Later, the crowd lynched four other people, including BJP workers. Over a dozen people, including Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra's son Ashish Mishra, have been arrested so far by a special investigation team (SIT) which is probing the case.

**HOW THE PROTEST BEGAN**

The farmers' year-long agitation began in 2020 against the three contentious farm laws for agricultural reform. Farmers from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh reached Delhi borders and set up camp there in November last year. The farmers demanded that the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020; Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020; and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020; be rolled back and a new law made to guarantee the minimum support price for crops. The three laws raised concerns that this will lead to the abolishment of the minimum support price (MSP) guaranteed by the government on select crops and leave farmers at the mercy of big corporates. Since these laws were promulgated, thousands of farmers gathered at the Delhi's borders demanding their repeal, pushing the SAD to quit the NDA government at the Centre. November 2020 saw a nationwide general strike in support of the farmers and thousands converging at various border points on the way to Delhi. Many rounds of talks took place between the central government and farmers represented by the farm unions. All were inconclusive with agreement on only two relatively minor points.



Weeks after the farmers set up camps at Delhi's borders demanding repeal of the laws, the national capital witnessed unprecedented scenes as farmers protesting against the farm laws clashed with the police during a tractor rally on Republic Day called by farmer unions to highlight their demand for the repeal of the legislation. Many of the protesters reached the Red Fort and entered the monument. Some of them even hoisted religious flags on its domes and the flagstaff at the ramparts. Hundreds of people, including security personnel, were injured and one protestor died after his tractor overturned.

**REPUBLIC DAY VIOLENCE**



**BRAVING ALL ODDS**



For the past one year, an overwhelming number of farmers camped at the Singhu border area of Delhi, braving by turns biting cold, monsoon rains, Covid pandemic scare and also accusations of "creating obstructions", but the spirit of solidarity allowed them to soldier on against all odds. The Singhu border between Delhi and Haryana was the fountainhead of the farmers' protest seeking repealing of the three contentious farm laws, and from there the movement had gradually expanded to Ghazipur border touching Uttar Pradesh and other sites. The spirit of fighting for a cause displayed by these farmers was bolstered by an army of volunteers who lent a helping hand to them in times of dire need. The nearly year-long journey of protesting farmers has been arduous and painful, beset with tales of loss and longingness, of braving cold waves and water cannons, of deaths and suicides.



over a year. The constitutional formalities to revoke the laws will be done in Parliament's Winter session beginning from November 29, the Prime Minister said. In his address, Modi also announced the formation of a committee to promote zero budget-based agriculture, a term for farming based on natural fertilizers and

local seeds, to change crop patterns as per the changing needs of the country and to make MSP more effective and transparent. While farmers' unions described the announcement as a huge victory, Opposition parties claimed that the upcoming state elections in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, which have a huge base of farmers, forced the decision. The Parliament on November 29 approved the repeal of the three controversial farm laws in rushed voice votes in both houses on the opening day of the Winter Session as the government stonewalled the Opposition demand for a debate. The Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021, which sought to rescind the three laws passed last year to ease rules around the sale, pricing and storage of farm crops, was taken up by Lok Sabha which passed it within minutes and, thereafter, it was introduced in Rajya Sabha and approved by voice vote. The whole exercise was completed within two hours. On December 1, the President gave his assent to the Farm Laws Repeal Act 2021.

**HISTORIC WIN**

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) December 9 announced the suspension of its over a year-long agitation after they received a formal letter from the central government accepting their key pending demands including withdrawal of police cases against the protesters and on MSP. Soon after the SKM's announcement about the suspension of the stir, the protest sites erupted into celebrations with farmers raising their union flags, greeting each other on the success of their agitation and playing patriotic songs from their tractors. Protesters were also seen dismantling their tents, even as farmer leaders said they will leave for their respective destinations soon. However asserting that this is not the end of the movement, farmer leaders said they would meet on January 15 to see if the demands have been fulfilled by the government.



**CONTROVERSIES GALORE**

Soon after the Republic Day violence, teen climate activist Greta Thunberg and pop star Rihanna made an entry into prime time debates after they expressed support against the Centre's agriculture laws. India reacted sharply to the comments by the foreign celebrities and others, saying a very small section of farmers in parts of the country had some reservations about the farm reforms and a proper understanding of the issue was needed before rushing to comment on the agitation. Thunberg had also shared "a toolkit for those who want to help" and soon the "toolkit" issue spiralled into a massive controversy with the Delhi police later registering FIRs against several people for allegedly trying to tarnish India's image. Climate activist Disha Ravi was arrested for allegedly being involved in sharing the "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest. She was later granted bail. Toolkit soon emerged as a new word for protest planning with the ruling BJP also accusing the Opposition parties of conspiring to malign India's image and the Opposition slamming the Centre. Also in February, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while speaking in Parliament, had hit out at those behind the protests, saying a new "breed" of agitators called "andolanjeevi" has emerged in the country who cannot live without an agitation and the nation should guard against them. The Congress had hit back at Modi for his "andolanjeevi" remark and called him "Jumla jeevi".

**GOVT'S U-TURN**

Making the announcement during a televised address to the nation on the occasion of Guru Nanak's birth anniversary on November 19, the Prime Minister said the Centre will repeal the three farm laws marking a climb-down by his government to meet the unrelenting demand of farmers protesting in several states against the reform measures for







**Some rules, we will come out this month (for) giving greater payment security, putting in place a greater payment security mechanism (for gencos)**  
RK SINGH | UNION POWER MINISTER

## JAPAN'S OSAKA GAS ENTERS INDIA

Japan's Osaka Gas Co said Monday it has entered India's urban gas distribution market by investing in the local unit of Singapore-based AGP International Holdings as part of its overseas expansion drive. Osaka Gas, Japan's second-biggest city gas supplier, plans to invest up to \$120 million in the Indian unit



## of the day quote

Business is improving and we do hope that this will sustain. However, there are still worries around Omicron and the third wave, leading to a feeling of cautious optimism

**KUMAR RAJAGOPALAN** | CEO, RAI

Being an affordable source of energy with substantial reserve, coal is going to stay as major source of energy in the foreseeable future

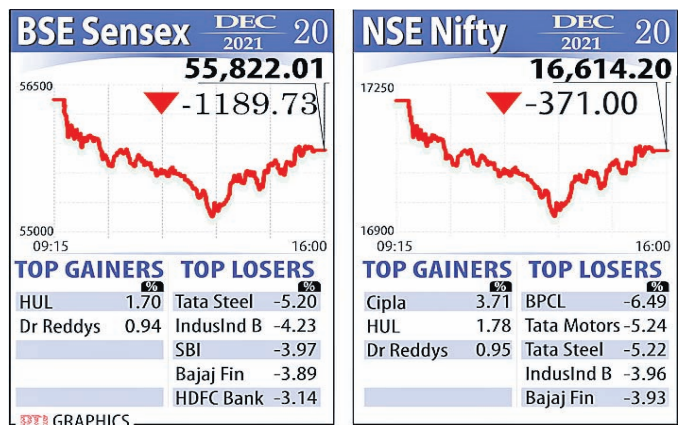
**PRALHAD JOSHI** | COAL MINISTER

The transmission sector is key to India's vision of Power for All. Our aim is to strengthen India's grid by investing in high-quality transmission projects like KMTL that will benefit the country

**NAVEEN MUNIAL** | DIRECTOR-BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND COMMERCIAL, APRAVA ENERGY

## MONDAY MAYHEM

# Sensex crashes as Omicron concerns slam global stocks



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 20:** Equity indices plunged to over four-month lows Monday as concerns over surging Omicron cases across the world jolted investors, sparking a heavy selloff in global markets.

Relentless selling by foreign investors amid a hawkish tilt by central banks also weighed on sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 1,189.73 points or 2.90 per cent to end at 55,822.01 - its lowest since August 23 this year. On similar lines, the NSE Nifty tanked 371 points or 2.18 per cent to end at 16,614.20.

The market capitalisation of all BSE-listed companies tumbled by Rs 6.79 lakh crore to stand at Rs 2,52,57,581.05 crore. Tata Steel was the top loser in the Sensex pack, sinking 5.20 per cent, followed by IndusInd Bank, SBI, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Kotak Bank and NTPC. Only HUL and Dr Reddy's managed to close in the green, climbing up to 1.70 per cent.

According to experts, exploding Covid-19 cases, sustained selling by foreign institutional investors and slowing growth momentum in the developed economies have spooked markets the world over.

"India has been undergoing a phase of consolidation in the last two months. Currently, selloff is due to rapid rise in FIIs selling triggered by hawkish world central banks' policy, cautious view on Indian market due to high valuation compared to peers and drop in retail inflows," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

All sectoral indices ended in the red, with BSE realty, oil and gas, metal, bank and energy indices falling up to 4.74 per cent. Broader BSE midcap and smallcap indices lost as much as 3.42 per cent.

Global equities spiralled lower after surging Omicron cases raised the prospects of fresh lockdowns ahead of Christmas and New Year holidays. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended with heavy losses. Stock exchanges in Europe too were trading deep in the red in mid-session deals.

Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude tumbled 3.51 per cent to \$70.94 per barrel.

However, the rupee notched up gains for a third straight session Monday, rising further by 16 paise to settle at 75.90 against the US dollar as easing crude oil prices revived an otherwise lacklustre sentiment.

## NON-PERFORMING ASSETS

# PSBs recover over ₹5.49L cr in 7 FYs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** The government has taken comprehensive steps to reduce NPAs and to effect recovery, enabling public sector banks (PSBs) to recover more than Rs 5.49 lakh crore over the last seven fiscal years, the Lok Sabha was informed Monday.

In a written reply, Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad said that with regard to the details of the recovery rate of non-performing assets (NPAs), the RBI has informed that it has not formally defined 'recovery rate' in the context of NPAs in the banking industry.

"Comprehensive steps have been taken by the Government to reduce NPAs and to effect recovery, which enabled PSBs to recover Rs 5,49,327 crore over the last seven financial years," he said.

"In FY2020-21, despite widespread impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy and its cascading effect on the actions in respect of recovery measures, the recovery during the financial year as a percentage of gross NPA as on beginning of the financial year



Despite widespread impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy, the recovery during the financial year as a percentage of gross NPA as on beginning of the financial year was still at 12.28%

As per RBI data, recovery made by PSBs during the FY as a percentage of gross NPA as at beginning of the FY has improved from 11.33% in 2017-18, to 13.52% in 2018-19, and to 14.69% in 2019-20

was still at 12.28 per cent," the minister said. The minister also informed that primarily as a result of transparent recognition of stressed assets, gross NPAs of PSBs rose from Rs 2,79,016 crore (gross NPA ratio of 4.97 per cent) as March 31, 2015, to Rs 8,95,601 crore (gross NPA ratio of 14.58 per cent) as March 31, 2018.

He further said that as a result of government's strategy of recog-

nitiation, resolution, recapitalisation and reforms, NPAs have since declined to Rs 6,16,616 crore (gross NPA ratio of 9.11 per cent) as March 31, 2021.

To a question related to PAN Card, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in some cases, persons have been allotted more than one PAN. However, all duplicate PAN cards, as per record, have been de-duplicated, he said.

## ₹13K cr recovered from defaulters

**Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Monday said that banks have recovered Rs 13,109.17 crore from asset sale of fugitives like Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi. Speaking on the banks' recovery from willful defaulters, she said that a total of Rs 13,109.17 crore has been recovered from the asset sales of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi as of July 2021 as per the information provided by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The latest recovery was Rs 792 crore from the sale of assets belonging to Mallya and others July 16, 2021, she added.**



## SHORT TAKES

### Future shares rise up to 20 per cent

**New Delhi:** Shares of Future Group companies Monday zoomed up to 20 per cent after the Competition Commission suspended its more than two-year-old approval for Amazon's deal with Future Coupons and imposed a Rs 202-crore penalty on the e-commerce major. Future Lifestyle Fashions jumped 20 per cent, Future Supply Chain Solutions 19.99 per cent, Future Retail Ltd 19.92 per cent, Future Enterprises 19.93 per cent and Future Consumer zoomed 19.91 per cent on the BSE. All these companies hit their upper circuit limits.

### RIL most-visible corporate in media

**New Delhi:** Reliance Industries Ltd, India's largest corporate by revenues, profits and market value, topped 2021 Wizique News Score ranking as India's most-visible corporate in the media. State Bank of India (SBI) is a close second on the ranking, followed by Bharti Airtel, Infosys and Tata Motors, according to Wizique's News Score Report. Globally, Facebook is ranked No 1 on the index, followed by Alphabet Inc, which owns Google. Amazon is ranked at No 3 followed by Apple Inc, Samsung Electronics, Netflix and Microsoft.

### HDFC Life launches retirement plan

**Bhubaneswar:** HDFC Life launched Systematic Retirement Plan - an individual, group, non-participating, non-linked, savings deferred annuity plan that systematically allows you to save for your retirement years. HDFC Life Systematic Retirement Plan allows customers to lock in their annuity interest rates right at inception of the policy. An individual has an option to choose a premium payment term of 5 to 15 years. He / she can choose the deferral period up to 15 years.

### ICICI Prudential signs UNPRI

**Bhubaneswar:** ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has become the first Indian insurance company to sign the United Nations supported Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI), thereby showing its commitment towards Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) issues. With Assets under Management of over Rs 2.37 trillion, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance is a key institutional investor and believes integrating the ESG framework in its investment management practices will ensure sustainable value creation for all stakeholders.

## CCI clears Tatas' acquisition of AI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** Competition Commission has approved Tata Group's proposed acquisition of debt-laden Air India as well as its two subsidiaries.

The Rs 18,000 crore-deal that includes the winning bidder Talace taking over Rs 15,300 crore-worth debt, is a major step in the government's efforts over the years to revive the ailing airline.

Talace Pvt Ltd, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Sons, emerged as the winning bidder in October. It will buy 100 per cent stakes in Air India Ltd, Air India Express Ltd and 50 per cent shareholding in Air India SATS Airport Services Pvt Ltd



(AISATS). Competition Commission of India (CCI) has approved Talace acquiring shareholding in Air India, Air India Express and AISATS, an official release said Monday.

Deals beyond a certain threshold require approval from the CCI, which has the mandate to ensure

fair competition in the market place. AISATS is engaged in the business of providing ground handling services at Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mangalore and Thiruvananthapuram airports. It also provides cargo handling services at Bangalore airport, the release said. State-owned Air India has been incurring a monthly loss of more than Rs 600 crore.

Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, December 14, said the Air India transaction is a "win-win situation" across the board and that taxpayers' money will now be more justifiably used for many more socially productive purposes rather than filling the deep losses of the airline.

## OMICRON OUTBREAK WEF defers Davos Annual Meeting '22

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi/Geneva, Dec 20:** The World Economic Forum on Monday said it has decided to defer its Annual Meeting 2022 in the Swiss Alpine ski resort town of Davos in the light of continued uncertainty over the Omicron outbreak.

The Annual Meeting, which was scheduled to take place in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland between January 17-21, 2022, is now planned for early summer.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) held its last Davos summit, attended by top leaders from across the world, in January 2020, just before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, while the 2021 meeting could not take place due to the outbreak.

The Geneva-based entity, which describes itself as an international organisation for public-private cooperation, had first planned to shift the 2021 annual meeting to another location in Switzerland and then to Singapore, before finally cancelling it.

In a statement on deferring the 2022 meeting to early summer, the WEF said participants will instead join a headline series of 'State of the World' sessions bringing together global leaders online to focus on shaping solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.

The WEF said despite the meeting's stringent health protocols, the transmissibility of the Omicron variant of Covid-19 and its impact on travel and mobility have made deferral necessary.

Among others, more than 100 leaders from India, including union ministers, chief ministers and CEOs, had already been registered for the Davos Annual Meeting 2022, for which 'Working Together, Restoring Trust' was decided as a theme.

## INFLATIONARY INFLECTED

# Sebi halts futures trade in key agri commodities

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, Dec 20:** India's market regulator ordered a year-long suspension of futures trading in key farm commodities Monday, as the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils, and a major producer of wheat and rice, struggles to tame food inflation.

India's most dramatic move since allowing futures trade in 2003 threatens market confidence by making hedging difficult at a time of record highs in producer prices, weeks after farmers ended protests that led to the scrapping of contentious reforms.

In its order, the market regulator told commodity exchanges not to launch futures contracts of soybean, soyoil, crude palm oil, wheat, paddy rice, chickpea, green gram, rapeseed and mustard for a year.

For existing contracts, no new po-



**It's like shooting the messenger, but we have sympathy with the government, because they were worried over edible oil inflation**

**ATUL CHATURVEDI** | PRESIDENT, SOLVENT EXTRACTORS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

sitions would be allowed in these commodities, the regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), added.

Traders said the government, facing intense pressure to rein in food prices ahead of key state elections early next year, wanted to curb speculation that might have fuelled the rises.

Indian prices of edible oil prices hit records this year, prompting New Delhi to cut taxes on imports of palm, soy and sunflower oil in October. But the step had only lim-

ited impact, as global prices remain high and volatile.

Small buyers and traders stand to be hardest hit by the move, as it will expose them to both volatile global prices and the depreciating rupee currency, said a dealer with a global trading firm.

Also badly hit will be the local National Commodity And Derivatives Exchange (NCDEX), which derives most of its volume from trading in farm commodities, said a senior industry official who declined to be identified.

# LS passes Supplementary Demands for Grants amid din

The Lower House passed the second batch with voice vote, permitting the government to spend an additional ₹3.73 lakh crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 20:** The Lok Sabha Monday cleared the second batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants authorising the government to spend an additional Rs 3.73 lakh crore during the current fiscal amid protest by the Opposition over various issues.

Talking about the Supplementary Demands for Grants, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said additional cash outgo of Rs 2.99 lakh crore is because of big ticket expenditure going for Air India and rise in fertiliser subsidy due to firming up of global prices.

"We have to ensure that the farm-

ers don't suffer because of it (rise in global prices). And therefore, increase in the subsidy for fertiliser has been provided, which itself is accounting for Rs 58,431 crore," she said.

As per the Supplementary Demands for Grants, there would be net cash outgo of over Rs 2.99 lakh crore and Rs 74,517 crore extra expenditure would be matched by savings by different ministries.

As per the document, Rs 62,057 crore would be given to the Civil Aviation Ministry for equity infusion in Air India Assets Holding Company (AIAHL) for repayment of past government guaranteed borrowing and past dues liabilities



Over ₹5,000 crore and more than ₹4,000 crore have been earmarked for additional spending by the ministries of defence and home, respectively

of Air India. As per the Supplementary Demands for Grants, an additional Rs 2,628 crore would be given towards loans and advances to Air India for recoup-

ment of advance from the Contingency Fund of India.

Besides, the Department of Food and Public Distribution would be given an additional Rs 49,805 crore

## UNDER THE GRANT

■ The extra spending includes infusion of over ₹62,000 crore into the company that holds residual assets and liabilities of Air India

■ ₹58,430 crore by way of additional fertiliser subsidy

■ ₹53,123 crore towards payment of pending export incentives

■ ₹22,039 crore to rural development ministry for transfer to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Fund

for meeting expenditure towards various schemes of food storage and warehousing.

About Rs 2,400 crore would be given to the Department of

Commerce for meeting expenditure towards subsidies under the 'Interest Equalisation Scheme', and investment under the Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC) scheme, among others.

The Budget 2021-22 had projected the government's total expenditure at Rs 34.83 lakh crore. But this is expected to overshoot considering the two batches of Supplementary Demands for Grants presented by the government so far. The government had in August received Parliament nod for net additional spending of Rs 23,675 crore in the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants.



# India take on Japan

# 2ND ASHES TEST: AUSTRALIA WIN BY 275 RUNS TO TAKE 2-0 LEAD Richardson fifer sinks England

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Adelaide, Dec 20: Australia took a 2-0 lead in the five-test Ashes series Monday by beating England by 275 runs and all but ensured the century-old urn will remain Down Under, courtesy a five-wicket haul by Jhye Richardson (5/42).

Set 468 runs to win, England was bowled out for 192 with 21 overs remaining on the final day of play in the day-night Test at Adelaide Oval. Jos Buttler (26) faced 207 deliveries for England before treading on his stumps to be out hit wicket in a losing cause.

"That's the attitude we have to harness through the whole game," England captain Joe Root said. "The fight and attitude was great today and we just have to do more of it."

Australia stand-in captain Steve Smith said England "showed some really good resistance and fight". "We always felt (it would only take) a couple of balls, there was still plenty of time left. We just tried to stay calm," Smith said.

Only one team has come from 0-2 down to win an Ashes series: Don Bradman's Australians in 1936-37. As holders of the Ashes, Australia needs only to draw the next match.

Paceman Richardson took five wickets as Australia followed their nine-wicket triumph in the first Test in Brisbane with another resounding win, their ninth consecutive win in day-night matches.

Meanwhile, Australia has named an unchanged 15-man squad for the remaining three Ashes Tests. Josh Hazlewood missed the Adelaide Test because of a side strain. Fast bowler and captain Pat Cummins, a late scratch from



**SPLENDID SPELL:** Jhye Richardson reacts after dismissing James Anderson, the last England wicket, to seal the win for Australia in Adelaide

the second test because he was a close contact of a COVID-19 case, will rejoin the squad Thursday.

Hazlewood will need to prove his fitness in the Melbourne Cricket Ground nets to play the Boxing Day Test starting December 26. The fourth and fifth tests in Sydney and Hobart, respectively, are in January. Under-pressure opener

Marcus Harris, who averages 22.19 from 12 Tests after scores of three and 23 in Adelaide, is expected to remain at the top of the order.

**BRIEF SCORES**

Australia 473/9d & 230/9d beat England 236 & 192 (Chris Woakes 44, Jos Buttler 26; Jhye Richardson 5/42, Mitchell Starc 2/43, Nathan Lyon 2/55) by 275 runs.



**A DIFFERENT INNINGS:** Jos Buttler played a dodgy knock, quite diverse to his playing nature

## CONFIDENT MEN IN BLUE START OVERWHELMING FAVOURITES IN THE ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY HOCKEY SEMIFINAL

goals. The Indians completely outperformed Japan in all departments of the game in their league match and they would eye an encore in the semifinal as well.

The Japanese will have to lift their game by leaps and bounds and play out of their skin to give themselves any chance of registering an upset win.

Young Suraj Karkera has been brilliant under the bar for India, making some brilliant saves throughout the tournament while the Harmanpreet-led Indian backline too defended stoutly, saving as many as five penalty corners against Japan Sunday.

However, the Indian defence will need to be a little more cautious Tuesday and concentrate on not conceding too many penalty corners, which could hurt them as past results hardly matters in knock-out stage matches.

A slight slip-up or lapse in concentration can derail their campaign and spoil their second successive ACT title. India had won the title jointly with Pakistan in the last edition in Muscat.

Meanwhile, South Korea face Pakistan in the first semifinal Tuesday.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 20: Back to their best after a slow start, defending champions and Olympic bronze-medalist India would start as overwhelming favourites against Asian Games gold winner Japan in the semifinal of the Asian Champions Trophy men's hockey tournament here Tuesday.

The Manpreet Singh-led side's confidence must be sky high as they had thrashed Japan 6-0 in their last round-robin match and come Tuesday, India would definitely fancy another big win en

route to the title clash. Having said that, India will need to guard against complacency as any slip-up could spoil all their hardwork.

India ended the round-robin stage of the five-nation tournament at the top of the standings with 10 points, ahead of Korea (6), Japan (5), Pakistan (5) and hosts Bangladesh (0).

But the start was far from ideal for India. Playing their first tournament after their historic Tokyo Olympics campaign, the Indians were held 2-2 by South Korea in their lung-opener before turning things around with a resounding 9-

0 win over Bangladesh, followed by 3-1 victory over arch-rivals Pakistan and the thrashing of Japan.

Vice-captain Harmanpreet Singh has been a revelation not just at the back but from penalty corners as well, converting two against Japan on Sunday. And, he definitely will pose a big threat for the Japanese. The Indian midfield is also being held together brilliantly by skipper Manpreet and Hardik Singh. The forwardline of Dilpreet Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Akashdeep Singh and Shamsher Singh too has shone bright in the tournament so far, scoring some fine field

# Spurs, Liverpool play out thrilling stalemate



Harry Kane (R) is joined by Emerson Royal for celebration after the former's goal against Liverpool in London, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Dec 20: Harry Kane scored only his second goal of the Premier League season for Tottenham in an engrossing wild 2-2 draw with Liverpool Sunday.

Tanguy Ndombéle slipped Kane in after Harry Winks had won the ball back. Kane — last season's top scorer in the league — sent the ball into the far corner in the 13th minute.

Diogo Jota headed Liverpool level in the 35th and Andrew Robertson nodded the visitors in front from close range in the 69th. Spurs players were furious as they thought Dele Alli was fouled in Liverpool's

penalty area in the buildup but the appeals were dismissed.

Spurs needed just five minutes to equalize as Alisson Becker made a mess of clearing Harry Winks' ball through, allowing Son Heung-min to slot into an empty net.

Moments later Liverpool was reduced to 10 men as Robertson got sent off for a wild kick on Emerson Royal.

Liverpool held on but the dropped points are costly, slipping to three points behind leader Manchester City, which beat Newcastle 4-0. Tottenham is six points behind fourth-place Arsenal but with three games in hand due to coronavirus and snow postponements.

# 1st Test likely to be spectatorless

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Johannesburg, Dec 20: The first Test between India and South Africa starting at Centurion December 26 will be played without spectators as the host country's cricket board is not selling tickets in view of the emergence of the new COVID-19 variant Omicron, according to a report.

Only some suite holders and delegates will be able to watch the match live though current COVID-19 restrictions implemented by the government allow for 2,000 fans, according to Afrikaans language weekly newspaper 'Rapport' as quoted by 'news24' website.

The organisers are, however, waiting to see if there are any changes to government regulations regarding COVID-19 next week.

As of now, no tickets are on sale for the second Test beginning here at the Wanderers from January 3.

"Please note, no announcement has been made regarding ticket sales for the upcoming Test match at the #ImperialWanderers Stadium between South Africa and India," the official Twitter account of the stadium said. "At this point, it isn't clear if fans will be allowed. We will make further announcements in due course."

The series is taking place amid the rising threat of COVID-19 following the emergence of the Omicron variant last month. The country has seen a spike in the number of COVID-19 cases in the



Test skipper Virat Kohli and Cheteshwar Pujara go through some slip-catching drills in Pretoria

past few weeks.

The tour itself was earlier in serious doubt because of the prevailing situation but the Boards of both the countries agreed to go ahead with it.

Sunday, Cricket South Africa (CSA) announced that the re-

maining round of four-day franchise series, the country's premier domestic competition, has been postponed as a precautionary measure over COVID-19 fears.

The visitors, who arrived here December 16, are staying in a resort (Irene Lodge) which is entirely

booked for them by CSA to ensure that a strict bio-bubble is maintained throughout the series.

The third Test will be played in Cape Town from January 11. The three-match Test series will form part of the new cycle of the ICC World Test Championship.

# Virus-hit Real held by Cadiz in La Liga tie

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Dec 20: Depleted by coronavirus infections, Real Madrid was held 0-0 at home by Cadiz in the Spanish league to end their 10-game winning streak across all competitions.

Jorge Molina struck three times in Granada's 4-1 win over Mallorca to become the oldest player — at 39 years and 241 days — to score a hat trick in the top five European leagues.

The stalemate against Cadiz leaves Madrid six points clear at the top. It came a day after second-place Sevilla cut into Madrid's lead by beating defending champion Atlético Madrid 2-1.

Carlo Ancelotti was without Luka Modric, Rodrygo, Marco Asensio, Gareth Bale, Marcelo, and backup goalkeeper Andriy Lunin because of a COVID-19 outbreak.

The virus outbreak gave Eden Hazard a rare chance to play a complete match for Madrid. The Belgium forward, who cost Madrid 100 million euros in 2019, hadn't started a match since September, when he was part of the lineup that was embarrassed 2-1 at home by Moldovan side Sheriff in the Champions League.

The Belgian, who has suffered multiple injuries since moving to Madrid, had a quiet first half. He managed a glancing header that Ledesma saved shortly after the restart.

**OLDEST HAT-TRICK**

Molina is the oldest player to score a league hat trick in the top tiers of Spain, England, Germany, Italy and France, according to Opta. The striker didn't debut in the first division until he was 29, but he then played long stints with Real Betis and Getafe before joining Granada last season.

Molina has credited his attention to rest, a good diet, and regularly fasting for stretches of 16 hours as key to prolonging his career.

## CCCL: Utkal Alumina emerge champions



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 20: Utkal Alumina emerged champions of the 12th edition of Charitable Corporate Cricket league, Sunday.

The champions humbled Vedanta by seven wickets in the final. They chased down a 76-run target in just 5.2 overs. Earlier, Vedanta batters found it tough to score, managing only 76 runs in eight overs, losing nine wickets in the process.

# Redemption tale: The Srikanth story of guts and grit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 20: From being at the pinnacle of global rankings to hitting nadir by failing to qualify for the Olympics, K Srikanth has seen it all in a matter of four years. So, it was hardly a surprise that the seasoned shuttler's celebrations seemed muted after the history-making world championships silver.

He is not the one to celebrate comebacks. Instead, Srikanth displayed the equanimity that has helped him stay afloat during his struggle with fitness and form.

It was India's first ever silver medal in men's singles at the prestigious tournament but there were no fist-pumps or "dream come true" quotes. All he could gather was "this is something I really worked hard for, and I am really happy to be here today."

Chief coach Pullela Gopichand understood what the 28-year-old was going through and was glad that he did not get swayed by the success that has followed months of toiling and heartbreak, the biggest one being the Olympic miss.

Even if he had let his hair down a bit, who could have judged him? Because for a while now, the biggest believer in his ability to do something big was Srikanth himself.

Faced with a visa issue, he was not even sure of making it to the tournament, leave alone winning a medal and he was just happy to be competing.

It was in 2001 when the man from Guntur followed in the footsteps of his brother Nandagopal to pick up the racquet. Soon, he was training at the Pullela Gopichand Academy and earned early success as a doubles player but he switched to singles on the advice of the chief coach and burst into the scene with the Thailand Open win in 2013.

He was hailed as the next big thing when he shocked five-time world and two-time Olympic champion, Lin Dan in the final of China Open Super Series Premier event, a performance that also held out promise of a medal at the Rio Olympics. But Srikanth faltered at the quarters at Rio after Lin Dan avenged his loss at the biggest stage.

However, the Indian soon returned



to stun the badminton world by claiming four super series title in five finals in 2017, a feat achieved only by the likes of Lee Chong Wei, Lin Dan and Chen Long in a calendar year.

But then he injured his knee during the French Open in November that year and aggravated it at the national championships. He recovered to claim the coveted Commonwealth Games gold at Glasgow, 2018 and earned his place at the top of the world ranking for a week in April too.

The knee injury and other niggles, especially related to his ankle, affected his performance. With the Olympic qualification round the corner, Srikanth also rushed his return from injuries and the haste expectedly backfired. The number of internationals wins dwindled because of which his ranking started plummeting and he was out of the top 10 in November 2019.

He stayed committed to the process. A series of quarterfinal and semifinal finishes kept him afloat but he needed a title win, a taste of what it feels to stand at the podium again.

The COVID-19 pandemic first seemed like a blessing in disguise as he could get back to his best shape but then the second wave hit, leading to cancellation of three Olympic qualifiers and his hopes of making it to the Tokyo Olympics evaporated.

When the international circuit resumed, Srikanth once again looked for that one win which could reinstate his confidence.

Although wins were difficult to come by, his gritty show in a three-game thriller against two-time world championships gold-medalist Kento Momota at the French Open in October gave him a boost.

He turned a corner after that, reaching the semifinals at the next two events — Hylo Open and Indonesia Masters. But he still needed some luck to get closer to the title.

It came his way when he emerged as the highest seeded player in his half following withdrawals of Momota, Jonatan Christie and Anthony Ginting in Spain.

Srikanth grabbed the opportunity with both hands and Sunday achieved his long cherished dream of a World Championship medal.