



## KRITI GETS NOSTALGIC

As *Heropanti* clocks eight years, Kriti Sanon takes to Instagram and shares a series of photos with Tiger Shroff

LEISURE P2



## MASSACRE IN MYANMAR

Myanmar troops fatally shot more than 30 villagers and set the bodies on fire, a witness and other reports said

INTERNATIONAL P10



## INDIA FACE SA

Team combination in focus as India lock horns with South Africa in the first Test in Centurion, starting today

SPORTS P12

# VAX FOR 15-18 FROM JAN 3

PRECAUTION DOSE FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS & SR CITIZENS WITH COMORBIDITIES FROM JAN 10

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday announced that vaccination against COVID-19 for children between 15-18 years will start in the country from January 3, while precaution dose for healthcare and frontline workers will begin from January 10.

In an address to the nation amid increasing COVID cases through the Omicron variant of the virus, he said the precaution dose will also be available for citizens above 60 years of age and with comorbidities on the advice of their doctor from January 10 next year as well. The prime minister used the term 'precaution dose' and did not call it 'booster dose' as it has been generally referred to. Modi said global experience shows that following all preventive measures at personal level is a big weapon to fight COVID as he asked people to be alert and take all precautionary measures but cautioned against any panic.

He said vaccination is also an important weapon to combat the pandemic. This is the time to be careful, while engaging in festi-



## DCGI nod to Covaxin for kids above 12 yrs

**NEW DELHI:** The Drugs Controller General of India has granted emergency use authorisation to indigenously-developed Bharat Biotech's Covaxin for children above 12 years with certain conditions. It is the second vaccine to receive the regulator's nod for use among those below 18 years after Zydus Cadila's needle-free ZyCoV-D.

ities, he said. "I would urge all of you not to panic, be careful and alert. Remember to mask up and keep washing hands," Modi said.

Administration of nasal vaccine and world's first DNA vaccine against COVID will soon start in India as well, he said.



## IMD PREDICTS RAIN IN STATE FROM DEC 27

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha may experience rainfall over the next few days that can again lead to a fall in the minimum temperature after a spell of cold wave gripped the state last week, the Met office said Sunday. The minimum temperatures saw a marked rise at many places across Odisha. The mercury was below 10 degrees Celsius in six areas, the Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre said in a bulletin. Sundargarh recorded the lowest minimum temperature in the state at 8 degrees Celsius, while Phulbani and Daringbadi in Kandhamal district logged 8.5 degrees each, it said. There will be no large change in minimum temperature during the next four-five days in Odisha, according to the weather office. Light to moderate rain or thundershower is very likely to occur at a few places over Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar during a 24-hour period from Monday morning, it added. It forecasted downpour at a few places in Bargarh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Angul, Dhenkanal, Jajpur and Bhadrak districts during the subsequent 24 hours from Tuesday morning.

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# Tomar hints at return of farm laws

■ Union agriculture minister's statement comes a month after PM Narendra Modi said the farm laws would be withdrawn

AGENCIES

**Nagpur, Dec 25:** The three controversial farm laws repealed by the Centre last month could be brought back at a later date, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said Friday at an event here.

"We brought agriculture amendment laws. But some people did not like these laws which were a big reform brought about 70 years after Independence under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership," Tomar said at the inauguration of an agri industry exhibition 'Agrovision' here in the presence of Union Minister Nitin Gadkari.

"But the government is not disappointed...we moved a step back and we will move forward again be-

cause farmers are India's backbone," he added. The agriculture sector needs investment in a big way the minister said. "The sector which has received the least private investment is agriculture," he said.

Private investment flowed into other areas which created jobs and the contribution of these industries in the GDP rose, Tomar said.

"The agriculture sector, despite being so big, did not receive this kind of opportunity. Today this sector receives most of the investment through government programmes...Through government purchase (of farm produce), subsidy on fertilizers, seeds and pesticides and other policies," he said.

The present investment in the sector benefits the traders and not farmers, the Union minister claimed.

"You don't find warehouses and cold storages in villages...Hence Prime Minister Modi has announced infrastructure investment of ₹1 lakh crore as well as investment in allied sectors like animal husbandry, food processing, fish-



The government is not disappointed...we moved a step back and we will move forward again because farmers are India's backbone

NARENDRA SINGH TOMAR  
UNION AGRICULTURE MINISTER

eries, herbal farming, altogether adding up to ₹1.5 lakh crore," he said. "There is still a lack of private investment in agriculture sector," Tomar added.

India has had a bumper harvest during the pandemic and the government purchased more produce than ever before, he noted.

Earlier, November 21, Rajasthan Governor Kalraj Mishra had said the three repealed farm laws will be brought back. BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj had also made a similar statement. The Farm Laws Repeal

Act repealed the three farm laws which were passed by Parliament in September last year with an objective to bring reforms in the agriculture sector, especially marketing of farm produce.

These three farm laws were - Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

## Centre hatching conspiracy: Cong

**NEW DELHI:** The Congress Saturday alleged that the Centre was hatching a 'conspiracy' to bring back the three farm laws after the next round of Assembly polls and urged the people to teach the government a lesson by defeating it in the elections. The Congress' sharp attack came over Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar's remarks. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said the country's agriculture minister has 'insulted' PM Modi's 'apology' - "it is condemnable." "If anti-farmer steps are taken again, then satyagraha of 'annadatas' will take place again," he said. "Had defeated arrogance, will again defeat it," Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi. Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the 'concocted conspiracy' to bring back the three 'anti-farmer' agri laws now stands exposed again by the statement made by Tomar.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



No, dear Delta, you are deadly enough. I can't let you attend any religious congregation!

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	27.8°C	27.5°C
TEMP MIN	14.6°C	13.5°C
Humidity	98%	90%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
		Fog/mist in the morning

# BJD to field 40% OBCs in rural, civic body polls

■ The state government had removed reservation of seats for OBCs from panchayat and urban polls following Supreme Court's direction

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) led by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Saturday decided to nominate at least 40 per cent OBC candidates for the upcoming panchayat and urban local body elections in the state.

The BJD executive committee has passed a resolution to this effect at its meeting held here Saturday, BJD leader and minister Arun Kumar Sahoo said.

Party's organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das moved the proposal which was approved at the meeting, Sahoo added. Meanwhile, Opposition BJP and

Congress have termed the decision an eyewash to woo the OBC voters.

OBC wing president of the BJP, Suratha Biswal said, "Though there was no reservation, about 50 OBC MLAs are there in the present Assembly. So, without playing politics over the issue, will the BJD government file a review petition in the Supreme Court?"

Similarly, Gyana Beura, OBC cell chairman of Odisha Congress, said the ruling party has taken this step for its political gain. During the last panchayat polls, the BJD had nominated about 60 per cent OBC candidates. So there is no meaning of saying they will give 40 per cent reservation to the OBC for the upcoming polls, he said.

Notably, the state government had removed reservation of seats for the OBC community from the panchayat and urban polls following the Supreme Court's direction.

## SANTA AT TAJ



A woman with her children dressed as Santa Claus visits Taj Mahal on the occasion of Christmas, in Agra

## PRI laws amended; jail for false info

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** Ahead of the panchayat polls, the Odisha government amended three laws to punish candidates who provide false information in the affidavit filed for the rural elections.

The ruling BJD government amended the Odisha Grama Panchayat Act, 1964, the Odisha Panchayat Samiti Act, 1959 and the Odisha Zilla Parishad Act, 1991 through an ordinance.

As per the ordinance, a candidate who himself or through his proposer, with intent to be elected in an election gives false information which he knows or has reason to be believed to be false or conceals any information in his nomination paper or in his affidavit will be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend up to six months, or be fined, or with both.

Similarly any elected member of the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) will be disqualified, if he/she has not furnished an affidavit containing particulars relating to his criminal antecedents, assets and liabilities and educational qualification at

# World's most powerful space telescope sets off on daring quest

■ The launch of NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, built to give the world a glimpse of the universe as it existed when the first galaxies formed, has opened a new era of astronomy

AGENCIES

**Kourou (French Guiana), Dec 25:** The world's largest and most powerful space telescope rocketed away Saturday on a high-stakes quest to behold light from the first stars and galaxies and scour the universe for hints of life.

NASA's James Webb Space Telescope soared from French Guiana on South America's northeastern coast, riding a European Ariane rocket into the Christmas morning sky.

The \$10 billion observatory hurtled toward its destination 1 million miles (1.6 million km) away, or



more than four times beyond the moon. It will take a month to get there and another five months before its infrared eyes are ready to

start scanning the cosmos. First, the telescope's enormous mirror and sunshield need to unfurl; they were folded origami-style

to fit into the rocket's nose cone. Otherwise, the observatory won't be able to peer back in time 13.7 billion years as anticipated, within

IT IS EXPECTED TO TAKE A MONTH TO REACH ITS REMOTE DESTINATION

Named after a former NASA director, Webb follows in the footsteps of the legendary Hubble -- but intends to show humans what the Universe looked like even closer to its birth nearly 14 billion years ago

It is expected to beam back new clues that will help scientists understand more about the origins of the Universe and Earth-like planets beyond our solar system

a mere 100 million years of the universe-forming Big Bang.

"It's going to give us a better understanding of our universe and our place in it: who we are, what we are, the search that's eternal," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson had said earlier this week. But he cautioned: "When you want a big reward, you have to usually take a big risk."

Intended as a successor to the aging Hubble Space Telescope, the long-delayed James Webb is named after NASA's administrator during the 1960s. NASA partnered with the European and Canadian space agencies to build and launch the new 7-ton telescope, with thousands of people from 29 countries working on it since the 1990s.

Around the world, astronomers had eagerly waited to see Webb finally taking flight after years of setbacks. Last-minute technical snags bumped the launch nearly a week, then gusty wind pushed

it to Christmas.

Inside Launch Control, there was a smattering of Santa hats. Cheers and applause erupted in the centre following Webb's flawless launch, with jubilant scientists embracing one another and repeated exclamations of "Go Webb!"

"We launch for humanity this morning," said Arianespace CEO Stephane Israel. "After Webb, we will never see the skies in quite the same way."

If all goes well, the sunshield will be opened three days after liftoff, taking at least five days to unfold and lock into place. Next, the mirror segments should open up like the leaves of a drop-leaf table, 12 days or so into the flight.

In all, hundreds of release mechanisms need to work — perfectly — in order for the telescope to succeed. "Like nothing we've done before," said NASA programme director Greg Robinson.



the time of filing nomination.

The state, which is impacted by natural disasters like cyclones, frequently, has given power to the gram panchayats and panchayat samitis for disaster management. Now gram panchayats and panchayat samitis can prepare their own disaster management plans at village, panchayat and panchayat samiti level, carry out and facilitate relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in disaster affected areas in accordance with state plan and district plan.

Meanwhile, the state government issued a fresh draft seat reservation list for the post of Zilla Parishad chairperson across 30 districts. As per the draft notification, out of the 30 ZP chairperson seats, seven seats are reserved for ST candidates while five seats are reserved for SC candidates.



# leisure



## HOLLAND DEFENDS MCU MOVIES AS 'REAL ART'

Hollywood star Tom Holland has defended the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) from legendary filmmaker Martin Scorsese's criticism. The *Spider-Man: No Way Home* actor shared that Marvel films are 'real art' when firing back at Scorsese's claims in which the celebrated director had said that they're 'not cinema', reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

## DANIEL CRAIG DOESN'T WANT JAMES BOND TO BE STREAMED

Hollywood star Daniel Craig has urged people not to stream James Bond films because they deserve to be seen on a big cinema screen. Craig said: "One of the greatest things that's happened is we got this movie into the cinema. That's where Bond movies should be."



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
You will delight in romantic pursuits today. You would like to spend the whole day with your friends and loved ones, indulging in activities that appeal to you. But Ganesh says your peers may not approve, as they may think you are trying to shirk work.

**TAURUS**  
If you are a manager or an administrator, Ganesh forecasts an outstanding day for you. Things will turn out far better than your expectations. Even if you are in some other profession you will stand out at your workplace and be appreciated and admired. The latter half of the day will see you going out on spree with your spouse, or sweetheart. A lovely evening, ending with a romantic dinner romantic is a near certainty.

**GEMINI**  
You will be in the mood to break free of the rut and routine of daily life today. Trying to keep up with numerous deadlines will keep you tense with worry. You will end up neglecting your familial duties in pursuit of work related activities. You need to find a balance between your responsibilities at work and at home, says Ganesh.

**CANCER**  
You will be dying to take a break today, and go on a brief pleasure trip with your sweetheart. However, it won't be possible. So in the afternoon, you will have an extended lunch break, making plans for a future trip. A vacation is all you can think of today. Your work may suffer a little, but you will more than make up for it.

**LEO**  
The long hours you've spent alone are nearing their end, says Ganesh, as the stars align to help you find that special someone; chances are that today shall be the beginning of an enduring romantic relationship for you. This sense of personal joy will spill over into your workplace as well, and will keep you in cheerful spirits. But avoid any confrontation with people around you, especially neighbours and acquaintances, suggests Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
There is an important turning point about to reveal itself in relationships and how they will proceed. Ganesh sees you busying yourself in arranging a get-together with friends and family. In the evening, the opposite sex will make a whale of a difference between optimism and despair.

**LIBRA**  
For every matter, there is a particular solution unique to it. With your systematic approach to things, you are a firm believer of this statement. And it is a good thing too, since today, this habit shall help you grab the limelight at work, says Ganesh. In the second-half of the day, your eye for detail will go a long way in enhancing your insight. You will spend the evening buying electronic gadgets: the latest cellphone or music player, you have your eyes set on something along those lines today.

**SCORPIO**  
Ganesh foresees that your enthusiasm and renewed zeal would encourage you to take up all the challenges at work front. And just like a smile is infectious, your positive attitude towards work too would be contagious and encourage your peers. However, it's important to unwind after a stressful day. A hot cup of coffee in one hand and a novel in another, with some instrumental music in background would be a good idea!

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Logic and reasoning will shape your day today. You remain confident of better things to come in the future. Your cubicle may offer stress and tension, but all of that will be swept away by the showers of love and affection of your dear ones. Keep that smile and your chin up, says Ganesh.

**CAPRICORN**  
Your extraordinary sense of humour will keep those around you amused throughout the day, so much so that they will look forward to spending more time with you in the future as well, says Ganesh. Also, your ability to solve problems with ease will impress many. Widening social network and maintaining healthy relations with them all will benefit you in numerous ways.

**AQUARIUS**  
Today, you will blow hot and cold. Hence, no one will know what to expect from you. This will throw your rivals off balance, keeping you a step ahead of them. At work, you will finally win recognition and respect. Ganesh wants you to be satisfied for now, and wait for a better tomorrow.

**PISCES**  
In times of adversity, it is your loved ones who will stand you in good stead, and it is your patience and persistence which will get you home. Your actions today will demonstrate your dedication and sincerity to the job at hand, says Ganesh.



## PC looks back on journey in showbiz

**NEW DELHI:** She has been in the acting business for 18 years and it has not been easy. Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who is currently creating waves internationally with her powerful performances, says she is a sum of all her decisions and is proud to be where she is today.

Priyanka made her Hindi film debut in 2003 with *The Hero: Love Story of a Spy*. She was later seen in movies such as *Fashion*, *Krrish*, *Barfi!* and several others.

It was in 2015, when she made her debut in Hollywood with the show *Quantico* and since then there has been no stopping her. Her latest international release is *The Matrix Resurrections* starring Keanu Reeves.

She shared that she had her share of ups and downs.

"It's been a lot of walking forward. It's been a lot of ups and downs. It's not been easy. I am a sum of all my decisions and I am very proud to be where I am," added the *Bajirao Mastani* actress.

IAN5

## Ranveer took six months to perfect Kapil's famous catch

**NEW DELHI:** Ranveer Singh, who is getting love and appreciation from cricket and cinema fans alike for portraying Kapil Dev in *83*, has revealed that it took him six months to perfect that famous backward-running catch, which was taken by the legendary cricketer to dismiss Sir Viv Richards off a Madan Lal delivery June 25, 1983.

"It took me six months to get it perfectly done. The catch was tough running backward. So, Sandhu sir used to throw the ball and I had to run and take it," he said.

*83* got a bumper opening at the box-office. And the Ranveer is in awe after getting such a positive response from fans, and the "love and respect" that is being showered on the film from across the world.

Ranveer was in the national capital for the screening of *83*. For the film, the versatile actor has stepped into the shoes of the legendary Indian captain and one of the greatest all-rounders, Kapil Dev.

The acclaimed actor is a shape-



shifter who can perform any role with the same grace. From *Bajirao*, *Padmavat*, *Simmba* and *Gully Boy* to now *83*, he has played diverse characters without any reference point whatsoever and has delivered the best performances.

"Ranveer is not imitating Kapil, he is inhabiting (the character)." This message has been reverberating across social media, with netizens going gaga

over his performance in *83*.

"I am overwhelmed with the kind of messages I am getting right now. Everybody is liking the movie — Sunil Gavaskar sir, Madan Lal sir, Kapil sir, my guru Balwinder Singh Sandhu sir, PR Man Singh sir all have messaged and praised my work. What else do you want when such great personalities appreciate your work," an emotional Ranveer said.

IAN5

## Kriti recreates Heropanti pose with Tiger

**NEW DELHI:** Kriti Sanon and Tiger Shroff are reuniting for *Ganapath*. Recently, the stars wrapped the shoot. Now, the actress has taken to her Instagram handle to share a series of photos with her co-star as they recreated their *Heropanti* pose.

Sharing the 'then and now' pictures, Kriti wrote, "And we tried to recreate what we started with.. but as you swipe right, you'll see the warmth and fondness come alive! It's been almost 8 yrs since we started our journey together! We've both grown, evolved and come a long way.. but deep within, i guess we are still the same! (Just pretending to be more mature versions of the newbies we were). It was such a great feeling to be back on a set with you Tigy!"



*Ganapath* is directed by Vikas Bahl and produced by Vashu Bhagnani, Vikas Bahl, Deepshikha Deshmukh, and Jacky Bhagnani. The film is set to take the big screen by storm December, 23 2022.

AGENCIES



## Samantha being considered for Jr NTR's upcoming movie

**HYDERABAD:** With only a few days left for the release of *RRR*, actor Jr NTR has started prepping for his next movie for which the producers are eyeing Samantha Ruth Prabhu to act opposite Jr NTR.

Jr NTR has an offer to act under Koratala Siva's direction for their next which is touted to be a high-budget movie.

Though they have not approached the Shaakunthalam actress yet, the team seems to have fixed a script, which would elevate Samantha's role like never before.

Jr NTR has also wrapped up his shooting for reality quiz show *Evaru Meelo Koteswarulu*'s first season. So, post *RRR* release, Jr NTR and Koratala are all set to start shooting.

The producers are planning to launch the movie by organising a formal 'pooja' event in Hyderabad after Sankranti.

Director Koratala Siva and Jr NTR had worked together for *Janatha Garage* earlier.



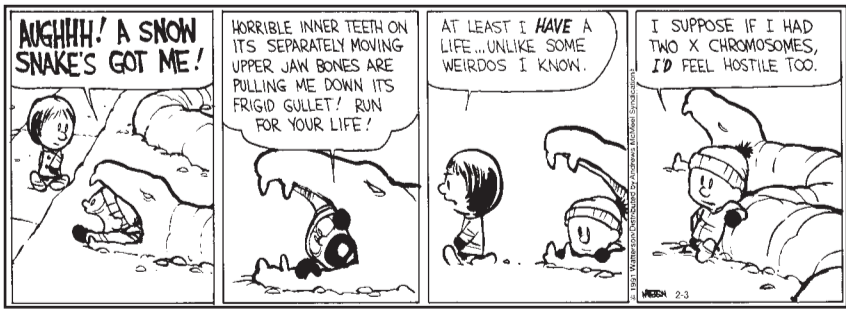
IAN5

### FUN post

#### PEANUTS



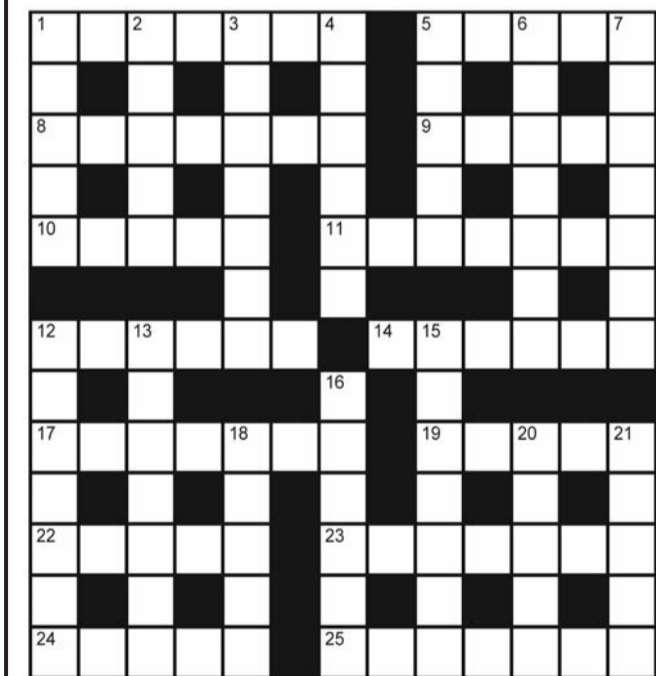
#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### BREVITY



#### CROSSWORD



#### Across

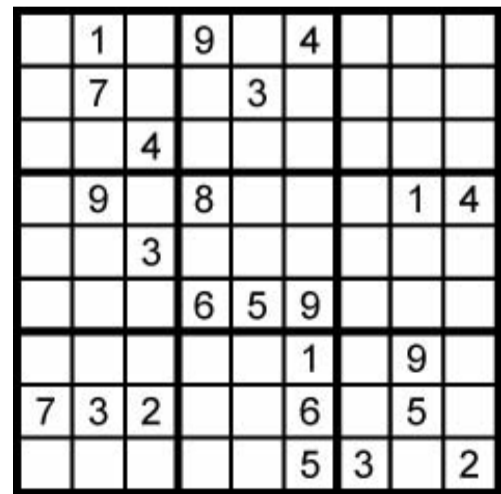
- 1 Ivy feature
- 5 Molten rock
- 8 Large city in Israel (3,4)
- 9 Perch
- 10 Cruise ship
- 11 Detects
- 12 Look suggestively
- 14 Overnight bag
- 17 Boat race
- 19 Ab strengthener (3,2)

#### Down

- 22 Mistake
- 23 Baseball frames
- 24 Give way
- 25 Top athlete (3-4)
- 6 Italian dumpling
- 7 Entertainer
- 12 Theft
- 13 Defensive stance in fencing (2,5)
- 15 Armory
- 16 Mexican menu item
- 18 Fatigued
- 20 Words to live by
- 21 Conundrum

#### 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



CROSSWORD

SUDOKU



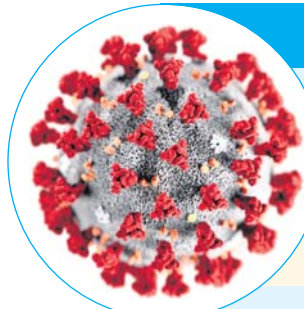
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW





**ZOO VISIT**

Nandankanan Zoological Park witnessed the footfall of around 20,000 visitors on the Christmas Day, Saturday



**COVID-19 TRACKER**

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	279,496,838	249,878,145	5,411,897
India	3,47,79,815	3,42,23,263	4,79,520
Odisha	10,53,769	10,43,601	8,451

**4 food processing units get ₹5.19cr subsidy**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** The state government Saturday approved Capital Investment Subsidy (CIS) worth over ₹5.19 crore for four food processing units (FPU) during the 10th meeting of the sub-committee of the State Level Empowered Committee constituted under Odisha Food Processing Policy-2016.

Four CIS proposals worth ₹519.17 lakh were placed before the committee chaired by MSME Principal Secretary Satyabrata Sahu and recommended to the government for approval.

The four FPU belong to Khurda, Bolangir, Sambalpur and Dhenkanal districts.

"The encouraging fact to be highlighted here is that all the four units have started their commercial production during the gloomy Covid-19 pandemic and out of the four units, three are led



PIC FOR REPRESENTATION

The 4 CIS proposals worth over ₹5.19 crore were placed before the committee chaired by MSME Principal Secretary Satyabrata Sahu and recommended to the govt for approval

These 4 FPU belong to Khurda, Bolangir, Sambalpur and Dhenkanal districts, out of which three are led by women enterprisers

All four units have not only started production during the pandemic, but also thrived to overcome the economic constraints due to the same

by women enterprisers. They have not only started production, but also thrived to overcome the economic constraints of the pandemic," said an official.

"These food processing units

have proved their resilience which will further be boosted by the socio-economic developmental agenda of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. Industrious efforts and aspiring motivation in tandem with con-

ducive and fostering ecosystem can achieve wonders. Today, it has been substantiated by a fresh development observed in the MSME department of Odisha," a government official said.

**Poet's corner held at Sanskruti Bhawan**



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** A 'poet's corner' event was hosted by Kendra Sahitya Academy at Sanskruti Bhawan Auditorium here in honour of poet and Odisha Sahitya Academy president Hrushikesh Mallick Saturday evening.

Presided over by convener of Odia Language Advisory Board Bijayamand Singh, the literary session was attended by a large audience of elite poets and authors. Mallick related his poetic life and factors behind his creative achievements at the event which was followed by an interactive session with his readers.

Kendra Sahitya Akademy regional secretary, Kolkata, Devendra Kumar Debesh welcomed the gathering.

"Basusena", a volume of poems by Mallick, which was translated into Hindi by Rabindra Nath Mishra of the Department of Hindi, Shantiniketan, was unveiled on the occasion. Mishra also deliberated at length on the rigours and pitfalls of translation at the event.

Pradipta Kumar Panda, member of Odia Language Advisory Board, proposed the vote of thanks.

**Covid restriction order tweaked for BJD fete: BJP**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** Opposition BJP Saturday accused the Odisha government of modifying its order of restrictions on Christmas and New Year celebrations due to Omicron threat, to accommodate the ruling Biju Janata Dal's Foundation Day celebrations December 26.

The BJP in a statement claimed that the order issued by the Odisha government Friday restricting all activities involving people due to Omicron threat, was originally to be implemented from December 25 till January 2. However, hours after the order was issued, the state government modified the order saying that the restriction will be imposed only December 25 and from December 31 till January 2

The BJP said the order issued by the state govt Friday restricting all activities involving people due to Omicron threat, was originally to be implemented from December 25 till January 2

However, hours after the order was issued, the state government modified the order saying that the restriction will be imposed only December 25 and from December 31 till January 2

Thereby, the restrictions will not apply to December 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30

will be imposed only December 25 and from December 31 till January 2.

Thereby, the restrictions will

not apply to December 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30. BJP state general secretary Golak Mohapatra alleged that the government changed its order and did not keep December 26 under the purview of the restriction just to facilitate the BJD to organize rallies and gatherings.

The BJP also claimed that the ruling party does not want that the party's foundation day celebration to be less grand at a time when the state is preparing for the panchayat and urban polls. No government official was available for comment.

Despite restrictions imposed by the government, the BJP, however, observed the 'Susasan Diwas' (good governance day) marking the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister AB Vajpayee in the state.

**THREAT TO RIDLEYS**



Fishing trawlers spotted in the prohibited zone of Puri sea, Saturday, in violation of the norms laid down by the state government for safe breeding of Olive Ridley sea turtles.

OP PHOTO

**FAKE TOBACCO PRODUCTS WORTH ₹8 LAKH SEIZED**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** The Special Task Force (STF) of the state Crime Branch has seized fake Zarda and other tobacco products worth ₹8 lakh during a raid on the outskirts of the state capital.

The STF also arrested one person for illegal storage, manufacture and sale of fake paan masala and tobacco products.

The accused was identified as Nibas Sahoo of Barang area. Following a tip-off, a team of STF with the help of local police carried out a raid at Dahapatna village in Barang area.



The cops found duplicate tobacco products weighing 2.50 quintal, valued at around ₹8 lakh.

Police arrested Sahoo after registering a case (279/2021) at Barang police station in this regard.

**BEGUNIA MURDER**

**HC grants interim bail to Manas Das**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Khurda, Dec 25:** The Orissa High Court has granted interim bail to Manas Das, chief of NGO Manababad Sangathan, who had been arrested in connection with the murder of Satyabrata Nayak of Begunia August 2.

Das had sought interim bail from the HC citing his wife's illness. As per the court order, Das would be released on the bail for a month against a guarantor and a surety of ₹40,000, said his lawyer Sarat Mansingh. While granting the interim bail, the HC asked Das not to



influence the witnesses and interfere in the investigation process. The police had arrested Das from his Bhubaneswar residence September 2 in connection with the murder case. Das's involvement was alleged in the abduction and murder of Nayak.

While granting the interim bail, the HC asked Das not to influence the witnesses and interfere in the investigation process

The police had also nabbed Das's son Manoranjan in connection with the assault on Maguni Nayak and his son Anand of Begunia.

The father-son duo had been lodged in Khurda sub-jail. A lower court in Khurda had granted bail to Manoranjan a few days ago.

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** Turning a blind eye to the impending threat of Omicron spread, citizens in large numbers thronged big malls and restaurants in the Capital city Saturday, throwing Covid norms to the winds.

The Covid guidelines imposed by the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) were seen going for a toss as great many people were spotted without masks. Social distancing norms were also found to be blatantly violated.

Many claim that the denizens seem to be ignoring the serious and worrisome speed at which the Omicron variant is spreading across the globe.

The mad rush also ensued traffic jams at all important junctions and market places in City Hundreds of vehicles were found stuck in the jam for hours near malls that saw increased footfall in view of Christmas. Even Ambulance vehicles carrying serious patients failed to find their way out of the rush. The City witnessed heavy traffic jam from 3pm till 9pm.

Stretches like Aiginia to Khandagiri, Janpath and Kalpana Square to Rasulgarh Square witnessed huge rush of vehicles

The Covid guidelines imposed by the BMC were seen going for a toss as great many people were spotted without masks. Social distancing norms were also found to be blatantly violated

Roads stretching from Aiginia to Khandagiri, and Janpath and Cuttack Road from Kalpana Square to Rasulgarh Square witnessed huge rush of vehicles.

Notably, the BMC authorities had Friday issued several guidelines urging denizens to avoid congregations. However, the huge gatherings Saturday proved the BMC directions futile.

Speaking to Orissa POST, a senior traffic official said, "We have been clearing traffic on road stretches near malls and restaurants across the City since afternoon. It is the duty of local police and BMC authorities to check and avoid congregation at shops and restaurants."

**Palai murder accused on 2-day CB remand**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Puri, Dec 25:** A local court here Saturday allowed the Crime Branch to take the two accused in the Chattaranjan Palai murder case on two-day remand.

The Crime Branch had sought the permission of the court to take accused Jagannath Sarangi and Ashok Upadhyaya on remand for seven days.

"We will interrogate the accused duo and try to find out the exact reason behind the incident and the possible involvement of some other persons in it," said a Crime Branch official.

The Crime Branch Friday claimed to have blown the lid off the mysterious death of Palai, a close aide of State Planning Board Deputy Chairman Sanjay Das Burma, with the arrest of Sarangi and Upadhyaya.

The CB suspected that Palai had been murdered over an altercation December 11.

**City saw thefts, burglaries rise**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** The City witnessed a rise in offences like theft, burglary and snatching in 2021. As many as 2,929 property offence cases have been registered at different police stations of the Capital city till December 5, 2021.

The data revealed significant rise in snatching cases in the City in 2021. Police in Bhubaneswar arrested 1,422 criminals involved in various property offence related cases till December 5, 2021. The police managed to arrest 21 robbers, 274 burglars and 913 thieves during the above period.

The police succeeded in arresting 204 snatchers in 2021. It had also booked 252 habitual offenders under Section 110 of the Cr.P.C.

Police recovered booty to the tune of ₹29, 40, 136 after arresting the accused.

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FOCUS ECONOMY

# TAXING FISCAL CREDIBILITY



Although politicians have always had incentives to cast themselves and their policy proposals in the best possible light, they now seem to be going further than ever into the realm of hyperbole. And, increasingly, the public isn't falling for it

One are the days when political leaders saw credibility as their most precious asset. Presidents, Prime Ministers and economic policymakers have crossed into territory beyond the familiar terrain of political hyperbole, becoming increasingly disconnected from voters' own understanding of reality.



Michael J Boskin

**POLITICAL LEADERS HATE TO BE THE BEARERS OF BAD NEWS, PREFERRING TO BLAME PROBLEMS ON THEIR OPPONENTS OR SOME POLITICAL FOIL LIKE THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY**

There are multiple explanations for this. First, today's communication environment favors extreme statements over cold, dispassionate, fact-based analysis. In a polarised society, politicians have grown more interested in feeding their extremist base than in offering moderation or compromise.

Second, forecasts sometimes turn out badly. The claim that "inflation is transitory" was not unreasonable at first; but it became more dubious with every passing month, partly because the public has a different understanding of the term than economists do. To the average voter, transitory means "gone quickly," a description that does not fit a problem that has not only persisted but worsened.

Third, political leaders hate to be the bearers of bad news, preferring to blame problems on their opponents or some political foil like the oil and gas industry. Every time gasoline prices spike, the Left claims it is the result of a nefarious conspiracy of domestic producers. Yet to my knowledge, no such conspiracy has ever been found.

alone to understand probability. And, unlike economists, politicians usually don't bother much with nuance.

Consider inflation. To economists, statistical agencies, central banks, and finance ministries, inflation means prices are rising. But to the general public, inflation implies that prices are uncomfortably high for one's budget.

The difference between net and gross is another frequent source of confusion. A good example is the (usually exaggerated) claim that millions of jobs would be created by rapidly phasing out fossil fuels by relying on subsidies and mandates for wind and solar power.

Another example is the budget-scoring gimmickry used to hide the true costs of legislation like US

President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better" (BBB) bill. To cram as many "progressive" policies as possible into a ten-year \$1.75 trillion budget window, many benefits supposedly would end after a short period. The implication is that programmes lasting one, three, or six years would be paid for with ten years' worth of tax hikes.

In fact, nobody believes that these programmes will be allowed to lapse when their expiration dates arrive. As President Ronald Reagan famously said, "Nothing lasts longer than a temporary government programme." Hence, when the Congressional Budget Office scored the budgetary cost as if the BBB programs would last the full ten years, the total soared to almost \$5 trillion, \$3 trillion of which would be added to the already unprecedented national debt.

Democrats are hardly alone in using budget gimmickry. When Reagan's Budget director, David Stockman, was unable to get enough spending cuts to satisfy a law requiring that the Budget forecast show a balanced budget a few years out, he included a famous asterisk: "spending cuts to be decided later."

There are also different interpretations of short- and long-run time horizons. Economists measure the short run in quarters or a year or two; but for the general public, short-run means weeks – or a couple of months at most.

Feeling increasing pressure from rising inflation, Biden often repeats the claim by some prominent economists that his BBB bill will reduce inflation. The logic here is that greater subsidies for childcare, paid family leave, and the like will enable more parents to work. That is a debatable empirical proposition. But even if true, the argument relies on a claim about inflation in the coming weeks, not in the coming years or months. It would be absurd to claim that massive additional government spending will quickly reduce short-run inflation in an economy that is already close to full employment. Not surprisingly, recent polls show that the public isn't falling for it.

*The writer is Professor of Economics at Stanford University and Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

PROJECT SYNDICATE



The path is long, but self-surrender makes it short; the way is difficult, but perfect trust makes it easy.

THE MOTHER

## Wish for 2022

Someone observed that the last two years seem as one. We began 2020 with the pandemic and are ending 2021 with it but that's not the only similarity. Internal turmoil, tension on the border and an economy that was limping since 2017 seem to all be with us more or less permanently. What can we expect from 2022? Let us consider this.

Perhaps we should begin from the place that has become frozen in time: Kashmir. We undid the constitutional guarantees Kashmiris had but were unable to deliver to them anything better. They are not democratically governed today (the only such part of the country), nobody has invested there, the Pandits have not returned and the violence remains. This year saw more killings than each year from 2011 to 2015 and there is no sign that this will abate. We have lost interest from there and moved on as a nation. Few know that the main mosque of Srinagar is closed for Friday prayer. The government worries that if this is allowed, what the people feel will be expressed. In 2022, we should expect this to continue because so far as is visible, India has no plan for Kashmir.

Ladakh might see a thaw on the border if recent news is to be believed. This disengagement will be on China's terms, purely because we have not accepted that there is intrusion so from our side there is no pressure for a return to the status quo ante of February 2020. That is very difficult terrain and it is quite certain that both sides, which are there in the tens of thousands, are suffering. Given this, and the fact that China apparently has what it wanted — which is access up to the 1959 claim line — we should see some lessening of tension on their terms. The small group of people who write on national security will say this is a setback but since the government controls the narrative almost entirely, this will not matter. Meanwhile, our alliance with the United States, Australia and Japan against China has more or less ended and America has aligned on security against China with Australia and UK.

On the economy, there is no pressure on the government to perform. We can say this because a decline in GDP growth had been noticed since January 2018 and continued for two years and three months before the pandemic and the first lockdown. So the trouble we are in is unrelated to the pandemic. Next year our GDP output will be the same size as it was before the pandemic but before the pandemic we were already struggling for a long time. That will continue. Two of the main causes of this will continue to puzzle economists. First, the fact that India's rate of labour participation (those working or looking for work) is among the lowest in the world. Second that private consumption, the largest component of GDP by far, remains at pre-pandemic levels and shows no signs of revival.

Politically we have plenty of action. States that will have new Assemblies include Gujarat, Punjab, Goa and Uttar Pradesh. The BJP has been in a permanent majority in Gujarat for a quarter century and has had over a 40 per cent vote share in UP, meaning that the odds are that it will retain the state. The presidential election is also this year, just after UP.

What else? The Central Vista will be inaugurated, or at least some part of it; and substantial work will have been done on the temple in Ayodhya. There will be more pageantry of the sort we saw in Kashi earlier this year, for those who like that sort of thing.

There are currently few or no protestors on long term protest in India, which is the first time that this has happened since the beginning of 2020. But the North-East is rebelling against AFSPA and the Union government will have to ensure that this doesn't turn into a problem in a part of the country that is always restive. Nagaland's Assembly (including all the BJP members) passed a unanimous resolution against the law's continuance in their state. It will be a stark comment on democracy in the North-East if Delhi chooses to impose itself despite this vote. We shall see.

The pandemic will itself continue, but we can hope that it does not do the damage that it did either in 2020 or in 2021. It may have escaped the attention of many but there will be substantial long-term damage to India because of the lack of access to education for a generation of children. How many have the ability to 'learn from home' and the equipment to allow them to do so? The majority does not and their learning will suffer so this is one part of the pandemic we will carry with us into the future.

It has been a very hard last four years for India on most fronts. The wish is that 2022, if not bring us into happier times, at least sees some easing of the pain.



Aakar Patel

It has been a very hard last four years for India on most fronts. The wish is that 2022, if not bring us into happier times, at least sees some easing of the pain

### WISDOM CORNER

- Just don't give up trying to do what you really want to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don't think you can go wrong. **ELLA FITZGERALD**
- Everyone has inside of him a piece of good news. The good news is that you don't know how great you can be! How much you can love! What you can accomplish! And what your potential is! **ANNE FRANK**
- Find out who you are and be that person. That's what your soul was put on this earth to be. Find that truth, live that truth, and everything else will come. **ELLEN DEGENERES**

### WORDSWORTH

#### Carphology

Carphology refers to the movements that delirious patients sometimes make, as if searching for or grasping at imaginary objects, or picking the bed-clothes. Not a word that's likely to be in most people's neither vocabulary; nor indeed one that often appears outside large dictionaries. It comes from the Greek karpologia, a compound of the two words karpous, straw, and legeln, to collect. So it means to act as though one was picking up bits of straw, a neat description of the involuntary movements sometimes seen in delirious patients. All the dictionaries that include carphology also refer the reader to floccillation. This is the Latin equivalent, formed from floccus, a bit of wool or straw, which has also given us the sense of flock that refers to finely-chopped cotton or wool, as in flock wallpaper. There is an even rarer verb to floccillate, meaning to twitch aimlessly, which turns up in Samuel Beckett's Watt of 1959.

#### Carwhichet

Let's riddle you a riddle: "How far is it from the first of July to London Bridge?" Stumped for an answer? Then try this one: "If a bushel of apples cost ten shillings, how long will it take for an oyster to eat its way through a barrel of soap?" These two perplexing queries were provided by John Camden Hotten, in his Slang Dictionary of 1865, as examples to illustrate the word carwhichet, or carriwitchet, as he preferred to spell it. His version was as good as anybody's, since the term has never been used enough to settle to an agreed form and everybody who has used it has made their own guess about the spelling. A carwhichet (let's stick with that version) is a hoaxing question or conundrum, sometimes a mere pun or bit of verbal byplay. Nobody knows where the word comes from, however you spell it. A link with French colifichet has been cautiously suggested. In that language, it refers to a small object of little value, a bauble, knick-knack or trinket.

### SPECTRUM AFGHANISTAN

## Imran sheds crocodile tears at OIC

Dr Amjad Ayub Mirza

**IMRAN KHAN SHEDS CROCODILE TEARS OVER THE MISERY THAT THE AFGHAN PEOPLE FACE TODAY BLAMING IT ON THE PREVIOUS "CORRUPT" GOVERNMENTS**

Imran Khan cannot make up his mind about the purpose of the recently held 17th Extraordinary Session of OIC held in Islamabad. During his address to the attendees, he said that it was a 'humanitarian duty' of the world that they help Afghanistan with aid, yet in his second breath he claimed that it was a 'religious duty' of Muslims to help Afghanistan.

He said, "No country has suffered as much as Afghanistan". Imran Khan conveniently ignored the fact that the troubles in Afghanistan were concocted in Pakistan. Was it not in order to create the so called 'strategic depth' against India that the Pakistani military ruler General Muhammed Zia Ul Haq (1977-88) began to arm Afghan War Lords against the left wing government of Noor Muhammed Taraki in 1978?

And is it not true that for a fist full of dollars the military generals transformed Pakistan into a frontline state for western imperialism and China whose only purpose was to bog down the Soviets who had come to defend the Afghan Saur Revolution?

What about the millions of

Afghan jihadi, then called the Mujahadeen, trained, armed and then sent into Afghanistan to conduct a civil war in that country?

Imran Khan sheds crocodile tears over the misery that the Afghan people face today blaming it on the previous "corrupt" governments and ignored the fact that today Afghanistan was under the yoke of the most brutal, anti-civilization, drug dealers and smugglers in the form of the Afghan Taliban who have come to power after ousting an elected government and who have since been trampling upon human rights, depriving the ethnic groups of any political representation and failing to stop the export of terrorism by the Afghan based Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan into Khan's own country.

Not all what he said seemed untrue. For instance, Imran Khan said that "if the world does not act this will be the biggest man made (read Pakistan made) crisis". Pleading to the OIC to help Afghanistan, Imran Khan said that it was their religious duty, and that it was "a question of...40 million human beings" yet in

Pakistan-Occupied Jammu Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan six million of my people are currently suffering from hunger and face starvation due to lack of wheat, water and electricity. Already we have spent half of the winter in darkness and food shortage. What about us? Are majority of our people in the PoJK and PoGB not 'Muslims' or human beings?

Khan Sahib passionately talks about drought in Afghanistan leading to a food crisis but conveniently forgets that it is his own government that has reduced the quota of wheat for PoGB by 20,000 bags a month and all flour depots in the PoJK have been shut down due to lack of flour.

One feels amazed at Imran Khan's desperation in seeking help for his Taliban brothers when he protests against preconditions the world community has set for the Taliban to comply with before they qualify for world recognition.

Well, as the IOC meeting was in session in Islamabad, Afghan Taliban were attacking Pakistan army at the Pak-Afghan border between Chaman in Balochistan and Nangarhar province in Afghanistan. The Taliban held the

Pakistan military personnel at gun-point and dug up the barbed wire fence laid by Pakistan over the Durand Line claiming that they did not recognise the border between the two countries.

In 1893 Sir Mortimer Durand had sketched the border between British India and Afghanistan and an agreement was signed between himself and the Afghan ruler Abdul Rahman Khan.

According to the agreement, the border was to be recognised by both parties for 100 years. Hence, since 1993 the Durand line agreement stands null and void. The Taliban who took the barbed wire with them have warned that if another attempt to seal the border is made they will not refrain from using force to exert their will.

Imran might have thought that once India responds with live ammunition the OIC meeting would become an India bashing event helping him to drag in the so called and fabricated Kashmir issue. It did not happen.

*The writer is an author and a human rights activist from Mirpur in PoJK. He currently lives in exile in the UK.*

## 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

#### Keen contest

Sir, When India and South Africa square it off Sunday at Centurion, both countries may want to prove a point or two before they move on to the Wanderers in Johannesburg and then Cape Town in a three-match Test cricket series. The visitors have badly lost both the matches played against the hosts at Centurion. This record begs to be broken. Though India has performed well in Tests in South Africa, they have been able to win a series only in the shorter formats of the game. In their seven visits to that country, the Indians are yet to win a Test series, and Virat Kohli and his men would be hoping for a series win in the South African backyard. Experts are predicting the matches will be decided by the fast bowlers of either side. It cannot be overlooked that batting is a weak link of both teams. India, despite possessing "one of the best batting sides" in world cricket, is hampered by the woefully poor batting form of some of its key batsmen. South African pitches are both bouncy and fast. It will require rare application and supreme concentration on the part of the Indian batsmen to negotiate the Proteas bowlers. It is amazing how India has transformed into a very good fast bowling side. A decade-and-a-half ago, it was ludicrous to even think about fast bowlers consistently winning matches for India.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

#### Women commandos

Sir, It is indeed a matter of pride to know that women commandos are to be deployed by the CRPF for the security and protection of VVIPs, including the Union Home Minister and some top political leaders. The induction of women commandos for VIP security truly goes to show that the government is all set to fulfill its aim and promise of giving more empowerment to women and take the nation to gender equality, parity, women's uplift and empowerment. It also puts an end to gender bias. This reposes the faith and trust of the nation in 'Nari Shakti'. The first batch of women commandos will comprise 32 female combatants who have been trained in an array of duties to protect high-risk personalities. The women commandos have completed a 10-week long training in unarmed combat, body frisking and special-weapons firing. The initiative no doubt will inspire our young girls who wish to venture into bold, challenging and committed ventures and serve the nation.

M Pradyu, KANNUR



SHORT TAKES

Guv orders probe against ACF

Keonjhar: Governor Ganeshi Lal has recommended an investigation against assistant conservator of forests (ACF) Ghanashyam Mohant in connection with the seizure of a tractor in Keonjhar. The Governor's directive came on the basis of a complaint from Janardan Giri, a resident of Gopalpur that his tractor was seized with malafide intention. In a letter (1-6/2021) pertaining to the complaint, the Governor asked the Collector of Keonjhar to order an investigation against the ACF and submit a report to the Governor's office. The ACF has illegally seized the tractor of Giri November 13, 2014 while the former was the ranger of Ghatagaon. In the records of the seized tractor, it was stated that 100 CFT of high grade stone and 35 sal logs were loaded on the trolley of the tractor. But it is not possible to carry such a huge load on the trolley, Giri had complained. Later, Ghanashyam Mohant belonging to Keonjhar was promoted to ACF in the same district. Giri had demanded an investigation into the matter and sought transfer of the ACF for an impartial probe.

3 held for bid to loot sub-collector



Barbil: Police arrested three people on charge of intercepting the vehicle of Champua sub-collector and attempting to loot the vehicle. The accused were produced in court Saturday. The accused were identified as Prasannajit Oram, Suman Kumar Patra of Bhadrashahi and Shibam Sandil of Jhadgaon. The arrest has come following a complaint lodged by Champua sub-collector Pratap Pritimaya at Barbil police station Saturday. Police registered a case and arrested the three. According to police, the three had intercepted the vehicle of the sub-collector at Tehsil Chhak at 8 pm Friday while the latter was on his way to Barbil municipality office.

80 SHGs engaged in paddy buying

Jharsuguda: In a boost to women empowerment, 80 self-help groups (SHGs) have been engaged in paddy procurement in Jharsuguda district. However, the process has been affected by the ongoing agitation by the staff of cooperative societies. Upset over the stalemate in paddy buying, farmers in the district had warned of agitation. To deal with the situation, the civil supplies department has opened Sarbahal regulated market committee since December 20 and trained women members of 80 SHGs. They were roped in for paddy procurement. For smooth procurement of paddy, mandis have been opened in 78 panchayats where women will buy paddy from farmers.

Jumbo carcass found, poisoning suspected



POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, Dec 25: Forest officials Saturday recovered the carcass of a 20-year old tusker from Sarabeda jungle near Jokapani village under Pallahara forest range and on the fringes of Keonjhar district. The cause of death is yet to be ascertained while locals suspected it to be a case of poisoning.

On being informed, Dhanaji Major, divisional forest officer of Angul, Duryodhan Jerai, forest range officer and forest officials

rushed to the spot and launched an investigation. People also rushed to the spot while some were seen worshipping the animal.

Locals alleged that two elephants had died in a month in the same forest due to alleged negligence of forest officials. They alleged that elephant menace had become a regular affair in the area as the animals often stray into villages and damage paddy and vegetables crops. The animals damage properties and destroy human lives, the villagers said.

When questioned about the reason behind the animal's death, the forest officials remained tight-lipped. The exact reason of the death could be ascertained after the probe report comes in. Forest officials said a post-mortem will be conducted and the tusks trimmed before burying the carcass.

VIOLATION OF NORMS



Heavy tourist footfall at Talasari beach for Christmas celebrations in violation of Covid norms Saturday has sparked concern on spread of Covid-19. OP PHOTO

₹1 LAKH 'SECURITY' FOR ₹5 LAKH LOAN TO WSHGs

WSHG MEMBERS DO NOT REAP BENEFITS OF ZERO INTEREST LOANS AS BANKS DON'T COMPLY WITH GOVT ORDER

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, Dec 25: Banks allegedly deduct a whopping ₹1 lakh upfront towards security from every ₹5 lakh loan sanctioned to women self-help groups (WSHGs) under the Mission Shakti programme in this district.

The matter came to the fore at a recent loan mela organised for WSHGs at the DRDA conference hall, December 21, Tuesday. According to belated reports, some self-help groups levelled allegations against the banks at the loan mela.

The issue cropped up when the block coordinator of the Mission Shakti was explaining how the government provides loans at zero per cent interest to WSHGs. Some WSHG members alleged lack of co-operation from banks.

They alleged despite clearing their loan along with interest, the interest is not credited to their accounts. They have failed to reap the benefits of the government scheme as some banks do not cooperate.

Jyotshna Panda, a woman SHG member, alleged some banks visit their homes and provide loans under Mission Shakti programme. However,



A WSHG member making a point at a loan mela in Nayagarh

they charge as high as ₹1 lakh as interest to be paid upfront for every ₹5 lakh loan, ₹50,000 for ₹3 lakh loan and ₹30,000 for ₹2 lakh loan.

The banks deduct the security amount from the loan amounts before handing over the truncated amounts. As a result, various SHG groups face harassment in the hands of banks. She claimed she has brought up these allegations in the loan mela to highlight the plight of SHG women. Collector Poma Tudu said the state government provides interest free loans to women SHG groups to make them

Banks charge ₹1 lakh as interest to be paid upfront for every ₹5 lakh loan, ₹50,000 for ₹3 lakh and ₹30,000 for ₹2 lakh loan, leaving less funds with the members of WSHGs

director of the district rural development agency (DRDA) said the state government had set a target of ₹217 crore loan to the banks for 8,405 WSHGs in Nayagarh district. However, ₹204.90 crore has been sanctioned to 7,936 WSHGs.

Various banks organise loan melas from time to time. Meanwhile, Nayagarh district has stood first in bank credit linkages and the Mukhyamantri Krushi Yojana.

Samidha Padhi, coordinator of Mission Shakti said the government returns interest to the WSHGs if they pay back their loans with interest in time. The interest amount is credited to their savings bank accounts. She assured that she would look into the complaints on banks deducting security from their loan amounts.

Scam in PACSs: No headway in probe

Farmer organisations have alleged massive irregularities in PACSs of Barchana, Markandpur, Dhaneswar and Mahisara

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, Dec 25: Irregularities had been alleged in farmer registration, loan disbursements and insurance coverage in many co-operative societies of Jajpur district.

Chief executives of Baruhan primary cooperative society in Jajpur block, Bharatpur primary cooperative society in Barchana block, Kalayanpur and Aumri primary cooperative societies in Binjharpur block had been suspended earlier.

However, investigations into some of these irregularities have slowed down, a report said. Besides, various farmer organisations have alleged massive irregularities at PACSs in Barchana, Markandpur, Dhaneswar and Mahisara in 2021. The irregularities have not been probed as yet.

Secretary of the Markandpur primary cooperative society had allegedly indulged in irregularities while sanctioning loans to farmers. He had unauthorisedly kept passbooks of farmers.

Acting on the complaint, deputy registrar of State Cooperative Society (Credit) had directed the deputy registrar of cooperative society, Cuttack, to conduct a probe into the alleged irregularities at Markandpur primary cooperative society, October 26, 2021.

Meanwhile, top officials visited the PACS, but nothing was known about what action was taken in this regard. It was alleged that the secretary concerned has mutually settled the issue, scuttling the investigation.

Besides, irregularities worth ₹20 lakh were committed in paddy



FILE PHOTO

procurement using the names of four members of a family at the same society.

After a case was filed in the Orissa High Court, the authorities had got the matter probed while the secretary and some other staff of the society were suspended.

Similarly, some farmers in Barchana had alleged April 5, 2021, that secretary-in-charge of local PACS Bikash Kumar Swain had messed up with the token system for paddy procurement. Some traders had managed to sell their paddy worth lakhs of rupees in a fraudulent manner.

The matter was probed, but no one knows what happened to the investigation. Besides, over 15 farmers had not received their payments from Dhaneswar PACS. After they drew the attention of the civil supplies and consumers welfare department July 16, 2021, an investigation was ordered into the matter.

But nothing has happened to this case. Vigilance had conducted a probe into the alleged irregularities at Mahisara PACS and ordered the management for action. Secretary of the society is allegedly being protected on this issue. When contacted, ARCS Prashant Mallick said investigation into these irregularities is on.

Grenade, Red items seized in Malkangiri

POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri, Dec 25: Security forces have recovered a grenade, six electric detonators and several other items used by Maoists from Mariwada forest under Jodamba police limits in Malkangiri district during a combing operation, Friday.

A joint team of SOG and DVF personnel unearthed the Maoist dump. Addressing a presser, SDPO Abhilash G said a hand grenade, a generator set, six detonators, codex wires, 65 charging clips, disc cables, a battery and other explosive materials used for making IEDs were seized.

The SDPO said, "Acting on credible inputs, a search operation was launched under Jodamba police limits. The team has unearthed a Maoist dump and recovered the grenade and other explosive materials." He said combing operations



Nuapada: Ammo recovered from Maoist camp

Nuapada: A Maoist camp Saturday was busted following an exchange of fire between a joint team of security forces and Maoists at Patdhara reserve forest under Boden block in Nuapada district.

The combing operation was jointly carried out by the personnel from the Special Operations Group (SOG), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and District Voluntary Force (DVF). A huge cache of ammunition was

seized following the exchange of fire. The joint team got information from a reliable source about the presence of a faction of ultras in the reserve forest. Swinging into action, the security personnel launched the operation, the source added.

During the operation, the ultras opened fire at security personnel and in retaliation, the team exchanged fire. However, the Maoists managed to flee. The security forces

have been intensified in the Swabiman Anchal, bordering Andhra Pradesh, following the discovery of the explosives and other articles. He called upon Maoists to join the mainstream for development of the district. In October, the security forces had unearthed a Maoist dump and recovered a huge quantity of explosives near Koraput.



have seized tiffin bombs and several other explosives from the camp.

Birds 'poisoned' to death in Chilika area

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Dec 25: Wildlife personnel recovered carcasses of 29 birds of five different species from a field under Chilika wildlife division Saturday, an official said.

The poachers might have dumped the carcasses of the migratory birds at Ratamati near Bhusandpur in Tangi range, fearing arrest by wildlife personnel as police and wildlife officials patrol the area in early morning, police suspect.

"After getting information, our staff rushed and recovered as many as 29 dead birds from the spot," Tangi wildlife range officer Choodarani Murmu said. The carcasses of the birds were identified as northern pintail (17), large whistling duck (5), three each of gadwall and lesser whistling ducks and one spot billed duck, Murmu said.

"We suspected the poachers might have killed the birds by applying poison in the lake. They might have dumped the dead

birds fearing arrest and fled from the spot as the police and wildlife personnel were conducting patrol in the area, while our staff searched several hotels in the nearby area," she said.

"We have registered an unnatural death case and started an investigation to arrest the accused persons," she said. Wildlife officials suspect the poachers might have hunted the birds as there is high demand for the meat of aquatic birds, especially on the eve of festivals like Christmas and New Year. The wildlife officials have registered six bird poaching cases and arrested seven hunters during the current migratory season and seized 56 bird carcasses, sources said.

After the incident, the wildlife authorities in the Chilika have decided to intensify patrolling in the night hours in the shore area along with the lake. "We will intensify the patrolling in the shore areas, especially during night hour," said assistant conservator of forests Sarat Kumar Mishra.



REPRESENTATIVE PICTURE

ANNUAL FUNCTION



School students performing at their annual function in Bargharh, Saturday

OP PHOTO

MURDER BID ON PASTOR Prime accused held, AK-47 rifle seized

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paralakhemundi, Dec 25: Police Saturday cracked the case of a murder bid on a pastor over suspected sorcery and witchcraft practice as they arrested a person and seized an AK-47 rifle and ammunition from his possession.

The accused identified as Pramod Majhi was arrested during a midnight raid, Friday. Pramod was produced in court after his arrest, Saturday. He was absconding after committing the crime, February 7. An Ak-47 rifle, 28 bullets and two magazines which he had hidden in Gidhikupari jungle were seized.

Pramod and his two associates had shot at pastor Dambardhar Majhi on Karadabadi Road in Jadingi village under Adaba police limits in the district February 7 over suspected sorcery and witchcraft practice. The pastor was rendered critical but escaped death. The accused even tried to bludgeon his head with a stone. Family members rescued and admitted him to Brahmanigaon hospital. Later, a complaint was lodged in the police station, February 8.



ON REVIVAL PATH

After staying under lockdown for most of 2020, the showbiz opened up partially in 2021. But the glamour world remained mostly in news for all the wrong reasons. However, Harnaaz Sandhu's Miss Universe title, super success of 'Sooryavanshi' and some content-driven movies on OTT platforms put the film industry on a course of revival. Here is a look at Orissa POST's favourite picks from the most memorable moments that made headlines in the outgoing year

Record shattering wedding. Received a total of over 10 million likes on Instagram touched in just 24 hours.

KatViv marriage was unique in many ways. The wedding posts broke all records (like counts), including those held by NickyK (Nick and Priyanka) and Virushka (Virat and Anushka), Katrina's latest post, consisting of her wedding pictures.

Highest Grossing Hindi Movies. Like last year, entertainment industry hit the rough weather in 2021 also. Only a few movies have reached the ₹50-crore milestone in 2021 with the exception of Sooryavanshi which garnered over ₹200 crore.

Sooryavanshi, Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui, Bell Bottom. This Akshay Kumar-starrer action-thriller was clear winner at the box-office collecting over ₹200 crore within a few weeks of its release.

IN THE SOUP

A number of celebrities found themselves in trouble for various reasons in 2021. OP picks up a few names from the list.

Kangana Ranaut, Aryan Khan, Varun Dhawan-Natasha Dalal. In a controversial interview the Mari Karimka actress said India got its 'real freedom' in 2014 and that the freedom from Brits in 1947 was given as 'bheek' (alms).

Raj Kundra, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonu Sood. Shilpa Shetty's husband was arrested July 19 for being involved in making of pornographic films.

'Sabyarchita' got hitched. Odia film industry's power couple Sabyasachi Mishra and Archita Sahu's wedding was one of the most awaited occasions for their fans and people of Odisha.

Amarendra Mohanty, Shantiraj Khosla, Tapu Mishra. Eminent Odia music director and singer Amarendra Mohanty succumbed to Covid-19 May 17, 2021.

Men & Wives

Outgoing 2021 saw quite a few fresh beginnings in Indian film industry including the big fat wedding of Vicky Kaushal and Katrina Kaif at Six Senses Fort Barwara in Rajasthan. A look at some of the most awaited marriages of the year

Rajkumar Rao-Patralekha. Rajkumar Rao and Patralekha tied the knot November 15 after a decade-long dating. The couple solemnised the relationship in an intimate ceremony at the Oberoi Sukhvilas Spa Resort, New Chandigarh.

Abhishek Banerjee. He was celebrated on the OTT platform for Ajeeb Daastans and Anka Kahaniya. The actor is already being hailed as a younger Pankaj Tripathi.

Atal Bihari Panda. Veteran Odia actor Atal Bihari Panda, who was also a renowned playwright and lyricist, died due to old age-related ailments June 5, 2021.

Ushering in a new era

The outgoing year didn't see too many films releasing in theatres. But the movies released on streaming platforms made a lasting impact on the viewers. A few actors, from those movies, stood out from the rest and here they are...

Adarsh Gourav. The White Tiger was his key to the world of cinema. He was conferred with IMDB's Breakout STARmeter Award for the film and he soon will be sharing the screen with the legendary Meryl Streep.

Kriti Sanon. Truly the best performer of the year, Kriti, took on the role of a surrogate mother this early in her career in Mimic, a bold risk that paid off and how!

Puneeth Rajkumar. The popular Kannada actor passed away October 29, 2021, after suffering a massive cardiac arrest while working out in the gym in the morning.

World at her feet

Actress-model Harnaaz Sandhu made India proud after she beat contestants from 80 countries to win the Miss Universe title. Sandhu was crowned by former Miss Universe 2020 Andrea Meza at the 70th edition of Miss Universe held in Eilat, Israel.

Jeet Ki Zid. Based on the real life story of Major Deep Singh who was left paralysed below his waist after the Kargil War, Jeet Ki Zid follows his life after war as he struggles to get back on his feet - figuratively and literally.

The Family Man 2. Bombay Begums. The Family Man is back after a two-year gap to re-examine the challenges of saving the nation, as well as the mysteries of marriage. The second season of the Amazon Prime Video web series created by Raj & DK.

Amarendra Mohanty, Shantiraj Khosla, Tapu Mishra. Eminent Odia music director and singer Amarendra Mohanty succumbed to Covid-19 May 17, 2021.



OTTs ON ROLL

Bombay Begums. Invents a new enemy and resurrects an old adversary. Meanwhile, ace undercover intelligence agent Srikanth (Manoj Bajpayee) grapples with the twin tasks of preventing a 9/11-style attack and protecting his brood.

Honey Singh-Shalini Singh. Renowned Bollywood singer and rapper, Yo Yo Honey Singh and Shalini Taiwar took their wedding vows on October 20, 2021.

Surekha Sikri. The National Award-winning theatre, film and TV actress died July 16, 2021, at the age of 76 due to cardiac arrest.

International nominations at Emmys

Squid Game. Hellbound. This new South Korean fantasy horror series from Netflix overtook Squid Game as the most watched TV show on the streaming platform, one day after its release last month.

Nusrat Jahan-Nikhil Jain. Trinamool Congress MP and actress Nusrat Jahan and her husband Nikhil Jain tied the knot in 2019 in Turkish town of Bodrum. However, they decided to part ways and ended their wedding.

Baldwin 'shot' DoP dead. The Rust director of photography (DoP) was killed and the movie's director was injured October 21 in an incident involving a prop gun fired by actor Alec Baldwin on set.

Controversy Film Awards on hold

The Orissa high court ordered the state government to put off the 31st edition of Odisha film awards after a movie director alleged that the organisers violated the rules and selected two movies - Khushi and Gollam Love - that are remakes of a Korean and Punjabi movies.

VANISHING STARS

SOME OF OUR BELOVED STARS ARE NO LONGER WITH US EVEN THOUGH THEIR MEMORIES AND ON-SCREEN AVATARS WILL REMAIN ETCHED IN OUR COLLECTIVE MEMORY. HERE IS A LIST OF SOME OF THE EMINENT PEOPLE FROM THE SHOWBIZ WHO PASSED AWAY IN 2021

Siddharth Shukla. A popular anchor and model, Siddharth had appeared in several Hindi TV serials and films.

Rajiv Kapoor. The younger brother of Randhir Kapoor and the late Rishi Kapoor, passed away February 9 due to cardiac arrest.

Robert Downey Jr. The American filmmaker and actor, best known for 1969 satire Patney Swappa, has died at the age of 66.

Rajiv Kapoor. The younger brother of Randhir Kapoor and the late Rishi Kapoor, passed away February 9 due to cardiac arrest.

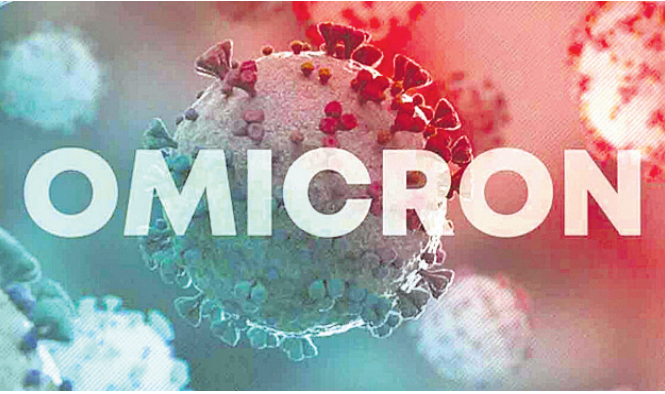
Dilip Kumar. One of the greatest and most iconic Indian film actor and a former Member of Parliament, Mumbai, on 7 July 2021.

Charlie Watts. The Rolling Stones drummer, who helped them become one of the greatest bands in rock 'n' roll, died at the age of 80.



# No 'Delmicron' virus yet, time to fight Omicron: Health experts

As the debate rises in India over a new Coronavirus strain being called 'Delmicron', leading health experts Saturday advised people not to pay heed to rumours



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** As the debate rises in India over a new Coronavirus strain being called 'Delmicron', leading health experts Saturday advised people not to pay heed to rumours and wait for the global health agencies like the World Health Organisation (WHO) or US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to confirm or deny the presence of such Covid variant.

Several news reports talking about 'Delmicron' surfaced this week in India, quoting Dr Shashank Joshi, a member of Maharashtra's C-19 task force, who said: "Delmicron, the twin spikes of Delta and Omicron, in Europe and US, has led to a mini-tsunami of cases."

There is no such Covid variant

**Neither the Indian Council of Medical Research nor the Indian National Covid-19 Task Force have spoken about the presence of so-called 'Delmicron'**

As of now, and there is no information either on another mutation of the SARS-CoV-2 virus after Omicron, which is spreading wildly worldwide.

Neither the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) nor the Indian National Covid-19 Task Force have spoken about the presence of so-called 'Delmicron'.

Harshal R Salve, Associate Professor at the Centre for

Community Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi, told IANS that no such variant exists.

"There is no new Covid virus variant called 'Delmicron' yet," Salve said.

"Omicron is also no new virus as it's a mutated coronavirus. As per evidence available so far, its infectivity is on the higher side but the symptoms are milder in nature. So there is no need to panic about it," he added.

India has reported a total of 415 Omicron cases, the Health Ministry said Saturday. At least 115 have recovered. Maharashtra has the highest number of Omicron infection with 108, followed by Delhi with 79. Gujarat has 43 cases and Telangana 38.

According to Dr Neha Gupta, infectious diseases specialist at Medanta-The Medicity in Gurgaon, Delta is still the predominant Covid strain in India while Omicron is now spreading.

"As of now, studies have shown that the Omicron variant has a short incubation period of just 3 days as compared to Delta variant where it could be 2-28 days. This implies that the third wave would be of shorter duration and, perhaps, reach a higher peak if Covid-appropriate measures are not followed," she told this news agency.

As for the so-called Delmicron variant, "there is no need to have unnecessary fear", she added.



A closed shop between two open shops at Sarojini Nagar market, Saturday, after Delhi government ordered the market to operate on odd-even basis from December 25 to 26 amid rising cases of Omicron variant of COVID-19 in New Delhi

# TN urban local body polls likely in Feb 2022

*The Tamil Nadu Election Commission is likely to announce the dates for the upcoming urban local body elections after Pongal*

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, Dec 25:** The Tamil Nadu Election Commission (EC) is likely to announce the dates for the upcoming urban local body elections after Pongal, January 14.

The delimitation exercise is taking place for the newly created and expanded urban local bodies.



According to Tamil Nadu EC officials, elections would be held for 21 corporations, 138 municipalities and 490 town panchayats.

Sources in the EC told this news agency that the elections are likely to take place in February 2022 and a notification would be issued immediately after Pongal.

The state would soon be announcing free gift hampers for

Pongal which include 20 items comprising rice, jaggery and sugarcane to 2.15 crore public distribution system cardholders. Gift hampers will also be provided to Sri Lankan Tamils residing at rehabilitation centres and would cost the state government to the tune of ₹1,088 crore.

With the DMK not announcing the cash gift during Pongal, there is resentment brewing at the grassroots level and it has to be seen how the response will be in the upcoming civic body polls.

D Jayakumar, former minister in the previous AIADMK government, said, "The DMK government has failed miserably in maintaining law and order in the

state which is abysmal. Resentment has started brewing after the government failed on its poll promises and it will not be like rural local body polls when they won comfortably."

The Bharatiya Janata Party will be contesting in alliance with the AIADMK and this would lead to an interesting political fight in western Tamil Nadu. DMDK and PMK, the former allies of the AIADMK, are contesting the upcoming civic polls alone. Makkal Needhi Maiam led by party Chief Kamal Haasan and Naam Tamilar Katchi are desperate for a win. The possible spread of Omicron variant of the coronavirus is also a matter of concern.

# Five Tihar inmates dead in 8 days

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** Five prisoners at the high-security Tihar Jail in the national capital have died in the past eight days, a Delhi Police official said here Saturday.

Despite all the deaths appearing to be from natural causes, the official said that a "Magisterial inquiry under Section 176 of the CrPC has been initiated in all the fatalities".

**Despite all the deaths appearing to be from natural causes, the official said that a magisterial inquiry has been initiated**

On Friday also, an inmate's death was reported in Tihar Jail no 3.

The official said that the prisoner was found unconscious in his cell and was immediately taken to a hospital where the doctors declared him dead. He also allegedly died because of health issues. The deceased prisoner was identified as Vikram alias Vicky Director General (Prisons) Sandeep Goyal told this news agency that these deaths of the prisoners took place in different jails and "none were related to any kind of violence".

"In all these, the circumstances indicate natural causes like old disease or other unknown reason," Goyal said, adding as per rules, inquest proceedings are being conducted by Metropolitan Magistrate in each case.

# Man abducted with 'toy gun', released after ₹50L ransom

A man was abducted in the national capital with the help of a toy gun and a ransom of ₹50 lakh was taken from his father

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** A man was abducted in the national capital with the help of a toy gun and a ransom of ₹50 lakh was taken from his father, the police said Saturday.

The police informed that four people, including two women, were arrested for the abduction of the man, identified as Kinshuk, a resident of Shalimar Bagh in Delhi.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Priyanka Kashyap said December 18, a call was received in which the caller identified as Vikas Aggrawal stated that his son Kinshuk had been kidnapped at gunpoint from Flower Market, Gazipur, and was later released after paying a ransom of ₹50 lakh.

On being contacted, Kinshuk informed that he along with his employee Richa Sabarwal, who works as flower decorator at his father's banquet hall, and driver Jitender went to the flower market at Gazipur to purchase flowers.

After finishing the work at the Flower Market, when they stepped into the car, a person wearing a black hood jacket, cap and mask held them at gun point and asked the driver to take the car towards Ashok Vihar. On the way to Ashok Vihar, the kidnapper made a WhatsApp call on the mobile of



Kinshuk's father and demanded ₹1 crore.

Following brief negotiations, Vikas Aggrawal paid ₹50 lakh in Ashok Vihar, Delhi. Thereafter, the kidnapper released Kinshuk, Richa and the driver Jitender, and asked Vikas Aggrawal to drive the car. The victim's father reported the matter to the police the next day.

Based on this information, a case under Sections 346 A, 25 and 27 of the Indian Penal Code was registered and an investigation was taken up. A police team was constituted which checked the CCTV footage of the area.

"In this mammoth task, around 150 CCTV cameras were checked by the team by covering approximately 70 km distance," the DCP said. During the CCTV

footage analysis, a suspected scooter was seen, following which one man named Kamal Bansal was arrested and interrogated, who disclosed the name of his friend Gurmeet Singh, a resident of Onkar Nagar.

"Immediately, Gurmeet Singh was also arrested and on his disclosure, other co-accused person Richa, who was the mastermind of the crime and staged her abduction along with the victim, was apprehended," the official said.

On sustained interrogation, it was revealed that Gurmeet Singh, Richa Sabarwal and Anita (mother of Richa) hatched a plan to kidnap Kinshuk and extort money from Vikas. Accordingly, they bought a toy gun and executed the plan December 17.

# XMAS CELEBRATIONS MUTED IN DELHI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** The Christian community in the national capital celebrated Christmas Saturday with caution as fewer people reached churches amid concern over the Omicron variant of coronavirus.

On Wednesday, the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) had directed district magistrates to ensure that no Christmas and New Year gatherings take place in the national capital.

However, after receiving various communications seeking clarity, it said on Thursday that religious places will remain open on Christmas and New Year's Eve for celebrations and prayers subject to strict compliance of Covid-appropriate behaviour.

Talking about the midnight mass across churches in the city, Anil Joseph Thomas Couto, Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Delhi, said not many people stepped out for Christmas this year.

"Even though there is no such restriction on visitors, there was confusion regarding the DDMA order. So, not many people have come out this year. People seem a bit anxious due to the entire situation. We haven't seen much footfall," Couto told this news agency.

He said a lot of churches made extra efforts by holding early services last evening.

"Even though churches were prepared to handle the situation keeping the Covid SOPs in mind, the overall environment is not very positive and vibrant," he said.

# 'Equal pay for equal work' can't be a general theory: HC

*Madras High Court has set aside an order directing the education department to pay the regular pay scale to scavengers appointed in 2012*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, Dec 25:** Holding that the theory of 'equal pay for equal work' cannot be applied blindly in all the cases, the Madras High Court has set aside an order of a single judge directing the education department to pay the regular pay scale to scavengers appointed in 2012.

In the Education department, scavengers were appointed under a special time scale of ₹1,300-3,000 + Grade Pay of ₹300 based on a GO issued in March, 2012. They challenged the offending portion of the GO that fixed a special time scale of pay for them instead of regular time scale of pay - ₹4,800-10,000 + Grade Pay of ₹1,300.

A single judge of the Madurai Bench of the High Court allowed the writ petition by striking down the offending clause in the said GO as unsustainable and directed to place the petitioner scavengers on par with other scavengers already working in the Education department by paying regular time scale of pay.

This order was challenged in a writ appeal and the same is pending



ing before the Madurai Bench. While so, the government issued another GO in June 2012, sanctioning 558 additional posts of sweepers in the police department, on the same pay scale of ₹1,300-3,000 + Grade Pay of ₹300. Challenging this, they moved the High Court demanding the pay scale of ₹4,800 - ₹10,000 + Grade Pay of ₹1,300, as held by the single judge.

The Police department filed the present appeals challenging the orders of the single judge.

Allowing the same, the bench of Justices S Vaidyanathan and R Vijayakumar observed that the single judge had allowed the writ petition of the scavengers in the Education department and quashed the offending portion of the GO only based upon the orders of a division bench passed in January, 2019. The Supreme Court by a judgment delivered in May 2019, which was followed by a Full Bench of the High Court in March this year, had held that 'equal pay for equal work' cannot be followed in all cases.

The top court had held that the different mode of recruitment and selection process would limit the scope of invoking the principle of 'equal pay for equal work'.

# Experts from WHO warn TN of sudden spurt in Omicron cases

AGENCIES

**Chennai, Dec 25:** Experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), including Chief Scientist Soumya Swaminathan, has warned the Tamil Nadu Health Department against the possibility of a sudden spurt in Omicron cases.

The experts have warned the possibility of a hike in Omicron cases following inadequate vaccines and lack of Covid-appropriate behaviour during the upcoming festival season.

Swaminathan in a review meeting with the Chief Minister, Health Minister and Health Department officials virtually on Friday said that the Omicron variant may not give time to prepare for health-care providers.

The WHO Chief Scientist, according to the state Health Department officials, warned



that the Omicron variant has a high transmission rate and it evades antibodies and immunity. The experts cautioned the government to be prepared with more beds, oxygen cylinders, drugs and testing kits.

The state's Health Secretary J Radhakrishnan urged people to celebrate Christmas, New Year and Pongal in a subdued manner.

He said that people must try to have online 'darshans' and virtual celebrations instead of physical visits to religious places.

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Chennai, Dec 25:** The opposition AIADMK, battered and bruised in back-to-back polls since the 2019 general elections, is trying for a make-over but the lack of unity among its top leaders, O Panneerselvam and K Palaniswami, is creating issues for the party.

The AIADMK wants to bring in a high-level performance in the upcoming urban local body elections scheduled in a couple of months' time. But there needs to be unity at the top which however is lacking in the party.

While VK Sasikala was expelled from the party and both Panneerselvam and Palaniswami were opposed to her entry, after the rural local body elections to the eight districts, there is a re-thinking in a section of the party

leadership led by Panneerselvam.

Panneerselvam and Sasikala belong to the same Thevar community which has a considerable influence in southern Tamil Nadu, the forte of the former Chief Minister, where there has been a lot of pressure from the community elders for re-entry of Sasikala into the party fold.

The recent Christmas wish of Panneerselvam calling for forgiving the past mistakes and a new beginning is being read by many as a sign of the former Chief Minister providing an extended rope to the expelled interim general secretary of the party to make a comeback.

However senior leaders of the AIADMK, including former ministers, D Jayakumar and CV Shanmugham, have openly expressed strong opposition to Sasikala's re-entry and said that



the party does not need such leaders who had brought a bad name to the AIADMK. The statements of these leaders, who are said to be close to Palaniswami, are considered to be with the support and blessings of the opposition leader who is totally opposed to the entry of Sasikala.

R Padmanabhan, Director, Socio-Economic Development Foundation, a think-tank based out of Madurai, said: "AIADMK is lacking a charismatic leader and there is a vacuum at the top for that. The rate at which Stalin is surging ahead is to be studied properly by the AIADMK if they need a comeback and bringing in Sasikala who knows the in and out of AIADMK politics as being a shadow and aide of former Chief Minister, late J Jayalalitha. I don't think that she will take out a magic wand and bring AIADMK back to reckoning but of course, she can make a difference however little it may be."

Sasikala has been working meticulously among the party cadres for recognition in all parts of the state. She has a team of dedicated office staff who is engaging her with the party cadres across the

state as well as lower and mid-level leaders of the party to connect a direct chord with the lower strata of the party.

KL Muruganadan, a former leader of AIADMK from Palani in Dindigul district, said: "The AIADMK is now under lot of pressure and the party needs a different line of thinking. Sasikala if brought back to the party can infuse some charisma to the party cadres as she had the experience and exposure of being the ear and eyes of a dynamic political leader Jayalalitha, and this is her advantage. If party makes use of that, then AIADMK has a life and both the leader's OPS and EPS must unite for that to bring her back to the party fold and give an impetus to the fortune of the party, otherwise, the party will have to play second fiddle to the DMK."



## of the day quote

The Modi government has taken decisions that are good for the people and not which people would like, even at the cost of political damage

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Reports in media that West Bengal Governor Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar has put his seal of approval on the Howrah Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2021 are not correct. It is under consideration under Article 200 of Constitution as inputs @MamataOfficial are awaited

JAGDEEP DHANKHAR | WEST BENGAL GOVERNOR

I pray to the God for the safety and well being of everyone. The warm glow of festive lights and smiling faces everywhere filled my heart with joy. As we celebrate I urge everyone to maintain all COVID protocols. Wear a mask at all times and use hand sanitizers. Merry Christmas to all my brothers and sisters across the world. From Vatican to Goa to Meghalaya to Kolkata- enjoy the festive season and make happy memories

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

## SHORT TAKES

### Assam imposes night curfew

**Guwahati/Agartala:** After the Central government sounded an alert in different parts of the country on the Omicron variant of Covid-19, the Assam government Saturday announced a night curfew across the state for an indefinite period, officials said. An official of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said the night curfew would be enforced from 11.30 p.m. in the night to 6 a.m. in the morning across the state. However, the night curfew would not be applicable on December 31 to allow people to attend functions related to New Year celebrations.

### Man held with gold biscuits

**New Delhi:** A person, who was trying to smuggle in gold biscuits from Sharjah, was arrested at the Jaipur International Airport by customs officials. A senior custom official said Saturday that customs officials at Jaipur International Airport intercepted a passenger who arrived by Air Arabia flight from Sharjah.

### Rousing welcome

**Jammu:** After spending 29 years in a Pakistani jail, Kathua resident Kuldeep Singh returned to a rousing welcome at his hometown here on Friday night, following which he asked the youth to "never pull back from making any sacrifice for the country". Singh (53), along with Mohammad Gufran from Aurangabad, were released by Pakistan on Monday and they reached Red Cross Bhavan at Guru Nanak Dev Hospital in Punjab after their repatriation. Singh said Pakistani agencies tortured him for three years after his arrest in 1992.

### Three girls drown

**Hyderabad:** Tension prevailed at the KPHB police station in Hyderabad on Saturday as BJP workers staged a protest demanding justice for the families of three girls, who drowned in a water body formed at an abandoned government construction site. Family members and relatives of the three girls and BJP workers led by Medchal urban district president Harish Reddy staged the protest outside the police station.



The most discouraging stand of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government has been its flat refusal to cut excise duty on fuel prices. There were some leaders from this government who held cycle rallies against the Centre for high prices of fuel. But their hollowness now stands exposed as their own government has refused to cut down the fuel rates

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS | BJP LEADER

## SRINAGAR SHIVERS

The minimum temperature in Srinagar remained above the freezing point Saturday as the weather office has forecast moderate to heavy rain/snow between December 26 and 28 in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh



## PUNJAB POLLS

# 22 farmer groups form political front

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, Dec 25:** Twenty-two farm organisations in Punjab that were part of the protest against three central farm laws formed a political front Saturday and announced they would contest the upcoming state Assembly polls to give a "political change".

The decision in this regard was taken by representatives of these organisations here. These 22 farm bodies were among 32 farmer organisations in Punjab which participated in the over-a-year-long protest against the three central farm laws.

However, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), which had led the farmers' stir against the laws, clarified it is not contesting the assembly elections and added that it has nothing to do with declaration by some farmers' organisations of Punjab to form a "Samyukt Samaj Morcha" for contesting the polls.



Talking to reporters here, farmer leader Harmeet Singh Kadian said the Samyukt Samaj Morcha has been set up for fighting the Punjab polls due early next year. The SKM was formed with various bodies having different ideologies and "we returned after fighting a battle after more than a year", he said while referring to the central laws

which were repealed in the recently concluded Winter Session of Parliament.

"The kind of welcome we received in Punjab and the expectations of the people from us has increased," said the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Kadian) leader. "There is a lot of pressure from the cadre and others on us,

and they said if you can win that 'morcha', then you could do something for the betterment of Punjab," Kadian said.

"We are coming out with a new morcha Samyukt Samaj Morcha," he said. Kadian claimed that three more farm bodies, including the BKU (Dakaunda) and the BKU (Lakhowal), have supported this decision but they are holding their own meetings.

"On the call of the people of Punjab, we brought this 'morcha', which is ready to fight all the 117 (assembly) seats (in the state)," he said. "We also give an open invitation to other bodies to join us to build a new Punjab," Kadian said.

Balbir Singh Rajewal of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (Rajewal) will be the leader of the Samyukt Samaj Morcha, he said. Farmer leader Baldev Singh said the farmer bodies are entering politics while keeping in mind the expectations of the people.

## PAYING HOMAGE



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary at Sadaiv Atal in New Delhi

## IED expert among 4 militants killed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Srinagar, Dec 25:** Four militants, including an IED expert, were killed in twin encounters with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir Saturday, police said.

While two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) militants were killed in Shopian district, two Ansar Gazwat-ul-Hind ultras were gunned down in Pulwama district in south Kashmir. Acting on specific input about the presence of militants in Chowgam village in Shopian, security forces launched a cordon and search operation there during the night, a police official said.

"During the operation, as the presence of terrorists got ascertained, they were given ample opportunities to surrender. However, they denied it and fired indiscriminately at the joint search party which was retaliated, leading to an encounter," he said.

In the ensuing gunbattle, two militants were killed, the official said, adding their bodies were later retrieved from the encounter site.

He identified the two ultras as Sajad Ahmad Chak, a resident of Braripora, Shopian, and Raja Basit Yaqoob, a resident of Achan Litter, Pulwama.

"As per police records, both the killed terrorists were categorised terrorists linked with proscribed terror outfit LeT and were part of groups involved in several terror crime cases. Besides, the killed terrorist, Chak, was instrumental in motivating and recruiting the youth to join terror folds," the official said.

He said incriminating material and arms and ammunition including two AK series rifles, four AK magazines and 32 rounds were recovered from the encounter site. The recovered material has been taken into case records for further investigation, he added.

In another encounter that broke out at Hardumir in the Tral area of Pulwama, two militants were killed, the official said.

Inspector General of Police, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar identified the two as Nadeem Bhat and Rasool alias Adil.

He said Rasool was an Improved Explosive Device (IED) expert.

## LUDHIANA BLAST

# Accused had Khalistani links: DGP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chandigarh, Dec 25:** Punjab DGP Siddharth Chattopadhyaya Saturday said the dismissed head constable killed in the Ludhiana court blast had links with Khalistani elements and terror outfits, and some Pakistan-based entities could be behind the incident.

The DGP told reporters Gagandeep Singh (31), who was dismissed from service in 2019, had gone to the washroom of the courts complex to assemble the bomb and plant it somewhere.

He was alone in the washroom when the bomb went off. Gagandeep was posted as a "munshi" at a police station in Khanna, his native place, and was sacked in connection with a drug case, Chattopadhyaya said.

He was arrested by the anti-drug special task force for carrying 385 gm of heroin and booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in 2019. He spent two years in jail and was currently out on bail. The next hearing in the case was scheduled for December 24, a day after the blast, the officer said.

During his time in jail, he probably came in contact with some bad elements, police said. Citing the initial probe, Chattopadhyaya said Gagandeep had links with



The DGP said the explosive used in the blast was the kind that only terrorists have and it might have come from across the border

Khalistani elements, both within Punjab and abroad, terror outfits, mafia groups as well as narcotic smugglers.

He said further details will be disclosed later. To a question about Pakistan's involvement in the blast, the DGP said police have "full suspicion" but he could not say so conclusively. The leads gathered so far indicate that someone sitting and operating in Pakistan could be behind it, he added. Asked if Pakistan-based pro-Khalistani organisations

could have had a role in the blast, Chattopadhyaya said there were indications of links to Khalistani elements and narco-terrorism.

Gagandeep was facing a narcotics case and his link with the mafia was also established, he said. The DGP said the explosive used in the blast was the kind that only terrorists have and it might have come from across the border.

He said the blast was the biggest example of the "dangerous cocktail" of terrorism, organised crime, mafia and narcotics. Asked if RDX was used in the bomb, Chattopadhyaya said the material has been sent for examination and the type of explosive used will be known after the report comes. "I cannot say conclusively what the (explosive) material was," he said, adding that it was unlikely to be RDX.

# Omicron surge: Central teams deployed in 10 states

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** Multi-disciplinary central teams have been deployed in 10 states which are reporting either an increasing number of Omicron and COVID-19 cases or a slow vaccination pace, according to a Union Health Ministry office memorandum.

As per the document, these 10 states are Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Mizoram, Karnataka, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Punjab.

"In view of rapid surge in cases

and deaths because of COVID-19, as reported by various news channels, the state governments, and noted in internal reviews, it has been seen that the number of Omicron cases has emerged in some states.

"It has also been observed that the pace of COVID-19 vaccination in these states is less than the national average. In wake of this situation, a decision has been taken to deploy multi-disciplinary central teams to 10 identified states some of which are either reporting increasing number of Omicron and



COVID-19 cases or slow vaccination pace (list enclosed), to aid the efforts of the state and district administration for management of COVID-19," the memorandum stated.

These teams will be stationed

As per the document, these states are Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Mizoram, Karnataka, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Punjab

in the states for three to five days, and they will work along with the state health authorities, it said. The teams will specifically

look into areas of contact-tracing, including surveillance and containment operations, and COVID-19 testing, including sending of adequate samples from clusters to the INSACOG network for genome sequencing, the memo stated.

They will also look into enforcement of Covid-appropriate behaviour, availability of hospital beds, sufficient logistics, including ambulances, ventilators, and medical oxygen, and the COVID-19 vaccination progress.

# UP Assembly polls: Parties go all out to woo voters

MAYAWATI'S PARTY IS EYING THE BASTIONS OF OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES, BUT WHETHER IT WILL SUCCEED IN ITS ENDEAVOUR OR NOT WILL BE KNOWN IN THE TIMES TO COME

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Lucknow, Dec 25:** Political parties are making all out efforts to

woo voters in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, which will decide the political fate of many of them.

Leaving no stone unturned, the ruling BJP has appointed in-charges in the state to lead the party's campaign. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited his parliamentary constituency Varanasi twice this month and dedicated various welfare schemes to the people. Foundation stones for various schemes are continuously being laid.

Besides Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari and Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani have also entered the political arena to campaign for the



saffron party. The BJP will take out 'Rath Yatra' in 403 Assembly constituencies to persuade the electorate in its favour: Central and state ministers are likely to join the yatra. Shah will not only hold public meetings and roadshows from December 26 to 31 but also organ-

isational meetings, during which he will give tips to the cadres.

He will stay for the night at those places and study the ground realities. Shah, who is the BJP's chief strategist and is considered a poll expert, especially for Uttar Pradesh, has a significant contribution in

bringing the party to power in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, 2019 Assembly polls and the 2019 general elections.

To come to power, Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav has stitched together alliances with small parties to set the caste equations right. Besides Akhilesh patched-up with estranged uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav. Shivpal has also accepted Akhilesh as his leader.

In Western UP, the SP has an alliance with Jayant Chaudhary's RLD. Akhilesh had addressed a joint rally with Jayant.

The SP chief took out "Vijay Rath Yatras" in Kanpur, Kanpur Dehat, Jalaun, Hamirpur, Banda, Mahoba, Lalitpur, Jhansi, Rai Bareilly, Jaunpur, Mainpuri, Etah,

but whether this will convert into votes is yet to be seen.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati kicked-off her poll campaign by organising a prabudh sammelan. Mayawati's party is eyeing the bastions of other political parties, but whether it will succeed in its endeavour or not will be known in the times to come.

The Congress is also claiming that it will win the Assembly polls. The grand old party has announced schemes for women in a bid to woo the fairer sex. It has roped in chief ministers of the Congress-ruled states for campaigning.

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen president Asaduddin Owaisi is scrambling to win a few seats in the polls.



# international

## of the day quote

Helping hands that look around to see whether our neighbour is sick, eating meals, living in a warm room would be the heart of Jesus. We are heading to a light. We will do our best to make the world a warmer place

MOON JAE-IN | PRESIDENT, SOUTH KOREA

We all have to do everything possible not to take steps backwards in this health crisis that has caused so much suffering

FELIPE VI | KING OF SPAIN

The care sector is experiencing unprecedented challenges prompted by the pandemic and the changes we've made to the health and care visa will bolster the workforce and helping alleviate some of the pressures currently being experienced

PRITI PATEL | HOME SECRETARY, UK

## SHORT TAKES

### Truck-bus crash claims 10 in Iran

**Tehran:** A road accident in southwestern Iran killed at least 10 people on Saturday, Iranian media reported. The official IRNA news agency said the accident happened as a truck hit a minibus that was carrying labourers on the road linking the city of Khorramshahr with the city of Ahvaz in Khuzestan province. The fatalities include the truck driver and nine workers from the minibus. Three other cars rear-ended the bus and each other. Thirteen injured were taken to local hospitals.

### 4 cops killed in Lanka shooting

**Colombo:** A Sri Lankan policeman opened fire on a group of his fellow officers, killing four of them and wounding three others in the eastern Sri Lanka's Thirukkivil town, a senior official said Saturday. The incident happened on Friday evening at Thirukkivil police station when the police sergeant had opened fire at his colleagues killing three on the spot while another died in hospital due to critical injuries.

### Yemeni rebel attack kills 2

**Dubai:** Saudi Arabia said a Yemeni rebel attack on the southern border town of Jizan killed two people and wounded seven more late Friday. The statement published by the official Saudi Press Agency said Yemen's Houthi rebels launched a projectile that killed a Saudi citizen and Yemeni resident. Six of the wounded were Saudis and one was a Bangladeshi national, Saudi media said. Shrapnel also smashed into nearby cars and shops.

### Malaysia flood toll reaches 41

**Kuala Lumpur:** The number of people who died in the massive floods in Malaysia has increased to 41, authorities said. Besides those confirmed dead, at least another eight individuals have been reported missing. Inspector-General of Police Acryl Sani Abdullah Sani told a media briefing. He said of the 41 cases reported, 25 deaths were reported in Selangor, 15 deaths in Pahang and one fatality in Kelantan, with the victims comprising 26 men, 13 women and two children in the three states, reports Xinhua news agency.

## Thousands of flights cancelled globally as Omicron mars Xmas



REUTERS

**New York, Dec 25:** Commercial airlines around the world canceled more than 4,500 flights over the Christmas weekend, as a mounting wave of COVID-19 infections driven by the Omicron variant created greater uncertainty and misery for holiday travelers.

Airline carriers globally scrapped at least 2,401 flights Friday, which fell on Christmas Eve and is typically a heavy day for air travel, according to a running tally on the flight-tracking website FlightAware.com. Nearly 10,000 more flights were delayed. The website showed that 1,779 Christmas Day flights were called off worldwide, along with 402 more that had been scheduled for Sunday.

Commercial air traffic within the United States and into or out of the country accounted for more than a quarter of all the canceled flights over the weekend, FlightAware data showed.

Among the first US carriers to report a wave of holiday weekend cancellations were United Airlines and Delta Air Lines (DAL.N), which scrubbed nearly 280 flights combined Friday alone, citing personnel shortages amid the surge of COVID-19 infections.

COVID-19 infections have surged in the United States in recent days due to the highly transmissible variant Omicron, which was first detected in November and now accounts for nearly three-quarters of US cases and as many as 90% in some areas, such as the Eastern Seaboard.

### Airlines continued to cancel flights Saturday owing to staffing issues tied to COVID-19 during one of the busiest travel times of the year

The average number of new US coronavirus cases has risen 45% to 179,000 per day over the past week, according to a Reuters tally.

New York reported more than 44,000 newly confirmed infections Friday alone, shattering that state's daily record. At least 10 other states set new one-day case records Thursday or Friday.

In Britain, many industries and transport networks were struggling with staff shortages as sick workers self-isolated, while hospitals have warned of the risk of an impact on patient safety. One in 20 Londoners had COVID-19 last week, a figure that could rise to one in 10 by early next week, according to data released on Thursday by the Office for National Statistics.

Government data showed a record tally of 122,186 new infections nationwide Friday, marking a third day in which the number of known cases has surpassed 100,000.

While recent research suggests Omicron produces milder illness, and a lower rate of hospitalisations, than previous variants of COVID-19, health officials have maintained a cautious note about the outlook.



In India, Imran Khan is called a 'puppet' and in the United States it is said that he has powers even less than that of a mayor. Imran has not come into power by the votes of the people but with help of military establishment

NAWAZ SHARIF | FORMER PM, PAKISTAN

## S AFRICA DECRIES AUCTION

South Africa has initiated urgent steps to halt the auction of the key to the jail cell on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela spent 18 of his 27 years as a political prisoner before becoming the country's first democratically-elected president



## Women, children among dozens killed in Myanmar

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Bangkok, Dec 25:** Myanmar government troops rounded up villagers, some believed to be women and children, fatally shot more than 30 and set the bodies on fire, a witness and other reports said Saturday.

The purported photos of the aftermath of the Christmas Eve massacre in eastern Mo So village, just outside Hpruso township in Kayah state where refugees were sheltering from an army offensive, spread on social media in the country, fuelling outrage against the military that took power in February.

The accounts could not be independently verified. The photos showed the charred bodies of over 30 people in three burned-out vehicles. A villager who said he went to the scene told The Associated Press that the victims had fled the fighting between armed resistance groups and Myanmar's army near Koi Ngan village, which is just beside Mo So, Friday. He said they were killed after they were arrested by troops while heading to refugee camps in the western part of the township.

The government has not commented on the allegations, but a report in the state-run Myanmar Alinn daily newspaper Saturday said that the fighting near Mo So broke out Friday when members of ethnic guerrilla forces, known as the Karenni National Progressive Party, and those opposed to the military drove in "suspicious" vehicles and attacked security forces after refusing to stop.

The newspaper report said they included new members who were going to attend training to fight the army, and that the seven vehicles they were travelling in were de-



### The purported photos of the aftermath of the Christmas Eve massacre in eastern Mo So village spread on social media

stroyed in a fire. It gave no further details about the killings.

The witness who spoke to the AP said the remains were burned beyond recognition, and children's and women's clothes were found together with medical supplies and food. "The bodies were tied with ropes before being set on fire," said the witness, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he feared for his safety.

He did not see the moment they were killed, but said he believed some of them were Mo So villagers who reportedly got arrested by troops Friday. He denied that those captured were members of locally organised militia groups.

## B'DESH FERRY FIRE

### Search ops on for missing passengers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dhaka, Dec 25:** Massive search operations continued for the second day Saturday for the missing passengers of an overcrowded three-storey ferry carrying around 800 people that caught fire on the Sugandha River in southern Bangladesh, killing at least 41 people and injuring over 150 others.

The fire broke out around 3.00 am (local time) Friday in the engine room of the Barguna-bound MV Abhijan-10 launch that started a journey from Dhaka. Scores of passengers went missing in the mishap, police and fire service officials said.

"Coastguard, fire service officials and police are still looking for bodies as we are unsure about the exact number of the missing passengers," a district administration official told reporters in Jhalakathi district in southern coastlines. Hundreds of people crowded the river bank and joined the rescuers in engine-run boats to look for their missing relatives, officials said.

## Queen remembers late husband in her Christmas address

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, Dec 25:** Queen Elizabeth II in her Christmas Day message shared the pain she felt after the death of her husband as she encouraged people everywhere to celebrate with friends and family, despite the grief caused by a pandemic now stretching into its second year.

Saying she understood the difficulty of spending the holiday season "with one familiar laugh missing," the monarch delivered her address beside a framed photograph of her arm-in-arm with Prince Philip, who died in April at age 99. On her right shoulder was the same sapphire chrysanthemum brooch she wore in the photo — a glittering statement pin that she also wore as a newlywed.

"Although it's a time of great happiness and good cheer for many, Christmas can be hard for those who have lost loved ones," the queen said.

## CPC removes top Xinjiang official sanctioned by US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Beijing, Dec 25:** The ruling Chinese Communist Party (CPC), headed by President Xi Jinping, has abruptly replaced its chief in the volatile Xinjiang province, Chen Quanguo, who was sanctioned by the US over alleged human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims in the region.

Chen no longer serves as Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional Committee of the CPC, state-run Xinhua news agency reported Saturday.

The CPC Central Committee has decided to give Chen another appointment, the news agency

### Ma Xingrui, who was the governor of Guangdong province, has been appointed as new party chief for Xinjiang

said in a brief report.

Chen has been accused by the US, the UK and the European Union of widespread human rights abuses against Uyghurs, but he is tipped for a promotion, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on the development.

Last year, the US government had slapped sanctions against Chen

and several other Chinese officials in-charge of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, stating they were "believed to be responsible for, or complicit in the unjust detention or abuse of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs and members of other minority groups in Xinjiang".

The three Chinese officials banned by the US were Chen Quanguo, CPC Party Secretary of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Zhu Hailun, the then Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Political and Legal Committee and Wang Mingshan, the Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau.

## 16+ migrants dead in shipwreck

REUTERS

**Athens, Dec 25:** At least 16 people died when their boat overturned off the Greek island of Paros in the central Aegean Sea Friday, in the third maritime disaster involving migrants this week, the country's coastguard said.

Authorities scrambled a search and rescue operation overnight northwest of Paros. Air and sea assets were deployed to the area, the coastguard said.

Greece is one of the main routes into the European Union for migrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East and beyond, though the flow has tapered off since 2015-2016, when more than a million people traversed the country to other EU states.

The country's semi-official Athens



News Agency said the bodies of 12 men, three women and an infant were recovered from the area.

Eighty people were believed to have been on the vessel, which according to the coastguard was believed to have been headed for Italy from Turkey. The circumstances under which the vessel capsized were unclear.

Giannis Plakiotakis, Greece's shipping minister, said trafficking gangs were responsible for

the disasters.

The gangs are indifferent to human life, stacking dozens of people, without lifejackets, in vessels which do not conform to the most basic of safety standards, he said in a written statement.

Earlier Friday, Greek authorities said they had recovered 11 bodies from the scene of another shipwreck, when a sailboat carrying migrants sank off an uninhabited islet in southern Greece Thursday.

## On Xmas, Pope prays for pandemic's end, peace dialogues

HE USED THE WORD 'DIALOGUE' 11 TIMES IN A SPEECH OF LITTLE MORE THAN TWO PAGES

AGENCIES

**Rome, Dec 25:** Pope Francis prayed Saturday for an end to the coronavirus pandemic, using his Christmas Day address to urge health care for all, vaccines for the poor and for dialogue to prevail in resolving the world's conflicts.

Amid a record-setting rise in COVID-19 cases in Italy this week, only a few thousand people flocked to a rain-soaked St Peter's Square for Francis' annual "Urbi et Orbi" ("To the city and the world") Christmas address. Normally, the square would be packed with tens of thousands of holiday well-wishers.

At least they could gather this year. Italy's 2020 holiday lockdown forced Francis to deliver a televised address from inside the

Apostolic Palace to prevent crowds from forming in the square. Although Italy this week counted more than 50,000 cases in a single day for the first time, the government has not ordered another lockdown.

The pope's Christmas Day speech gives him an opportunity to draw a global audience's attention to conflicts big and small. This year was no different. Francis lamented ongoing conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, newly flaring tensions in Ukraine and Ethiopia, and an "unprecedented crisis" in Lebanon.

"We have become so used to them (conflicts) that immense tragedies are now being passed over in silence; we risk not hearing the cry of pain and distress of so many of our brothers and sisters," he said from the loggia of St



Peter's Basilica as Swiss Guards stood at attention in the square below.

Francis warned of the pandemic

tendency to withdraw and isolate, urging instead dialogue to try to resolve the world conflicts. He prayed in particular for those most af-

Let us ask him for the strength to be open to dialogue. On this festive day, let us implore him to stir up in the hearts of everyone a yearning for reconciliation and fraternity

POPE FRANCIS

ected by the virus, including women and children who have suffered increased abuse during lockdowns.

"Son of God, comfort the victims of violence against women, which has increased in this time of pandemic. Offer hope to young children and adolescents suffering from bullying and abuse," he said.

He prayed for "consolation and

warmth" for older adults who are alone, as well as for health care workers who "generously devote themselves" to caring for the sick.

"Grant health to the infirm and inspire all men and women of good will to seek the best ways possible to overcome the current health crisis and its effects," he said. "Open hearts to ensure that necessary medical care — and vaccines in particular — are provided to those peoples who need them most."

Francis delivered his speech hours after celebrating a "Midnight Mass" service for some 2,000 people, a fraction of the basilica's capacity. The service actually began at 7:30 pm, a nod to the 85-year-old pope's endurance and a hold-over from last year, when the service had to end before Italy's nationwide COVID-19 curfew.



## of the day quote

The banking sector navigated well during 2022. Even in the absence of relief measures such as moratorium on loan repayments or standstill on NPA classification, banks were able to reduce their NPAs

**ANIL GUPTA**  
VICE-PRESIDENT AND SECTOR HEAD, ICRA

The deal pipeline for IT services companies continues to be strong, which is reflected in investor confidence in those companies

**AJIT MISHRA**  
VP RESEARCH, RELIGARE BROKING LTD

Our partnership with Angkasa Pura II (AP II) is testimony to the trust placed in us by the Indonesian government and authorities. We will strive to bring our best to this beautiful and strategic country of ASEAN

**SRINIVAS BOMMIDALA**  
CHAIRMAN, GMR GROUP

## SHORT TAKES

### Russia penalises Google and Meta

**MOSCOW:** A Moscow court Friday said it was fining Alphabet's Google 7.2 billion rubles (\$98 million) for what it said was a repeated failure to delete content Russia deems illegal, the first revenue-based fine of its kind in Russia. Later Friday, the court fined Meta Platforms 2 billion rubles (\$27.15 million) on the same grounds. Russia's communication watchdog Roskomnadzor said that Facebook and Instagram failed to remove two thousand pieces that violate Russian laws whereas Google keeps 2,600 pieces of banned content. Moscow has increased pressure on big tech this year in a campaign that critics characterise as an attempt by the Russian authorities to exert tighter control over the internet, something they say threatens individual and corporate freedom.

### Bitcoin surges to \$51K on Christmas

**Washington:** On Christmas eve, the value of Bitcoin rose to \$51,000 (roughly ₹38.27 lakh) and touched its highest level in more than two weeks. The world's largest and oldest cryptocurrency has risen by about four percent in the past couple of days. On Friday, in Asian trading, at one point the value of the cryptocurrency had even touched \$51,524 (roughly ₹38.67 lakh). This rise was a result of wider positive sentiment in financial markets. In 2021, so far, the digital asset — famed for its volatility — has risen by about 76 percent. In November, Bitcoin had lost more than \$18,000 (roughly ₹13.50 lakh) in value after hitting a record high of almost \$69,000 (roughly ₹51.77 lakh) earlier in the month.

### Hexagon Nutrition files for ₹600cr IPO

**Mumbai:** Hexagon Nutrition has filed preliminary papers with capital market regulator SEBI to raise up to ₹600 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The Mumbai-based fully integrated company is engaged in product development and marketing, including research and development and nutrition manufacturing. The company's public issue consists of a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating to ₹100 crore, and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to 30,113,918 equity shares, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The issue size will be approximately in the range of ₹500-600 crore.



The used car market will hit 10 million vehicles by FY30 at a 14% CAGR — how many segments can promise that kind of growth?

**AMIT KUMAR** | CEO, OLX AUTOS

## TIKTOK: MOST POPULAR WEBSITE

Popular short video-sharing platform TikTok has surpassed tech giant Google as the most popular website of the year. According to a report by IT security company Cloudflare, the viral video app gets more hits than the US-based search engine, reports BBC. In 2020, Google was first, and a number of other sites, including TikTok, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft and Netflix, were all in the top 10



## RECORD FEAT IN 2021

# IPO binge leaves investors hung over

The biggest sectors driving IPO volumes were technology and healthcare. A total of 426 technology IPOs and 332 healthcare-related deals were launched, collectively accounting for almost 42% of IPO proceeds raised by firms globally

REUTERS

**New York/London, Dec 25:** Initial public offerings (IPOs) around the world raised a record \$594 billion in 2021, riding the coattails of stock market rallies, yet often disappointing investors with their subsequent stock performance.

Companies ranging from technology start-ups to blank-check acquisition firms flooded the market with offerings, capitalising on investors' willingness to place speculative bets as low interest rates and the re-opening of economies thanks to Covid-19 vaccines fueled their appetite for risk.

"It was a truly euphoric capital market when you put it in the context of new issuance activity, and in particular in the creation of new public companies," said Andrew Wetenhall, co-head of equity capital markets in the Americas at Morgan Stanley.

"Some of those bets worked out. Those who bought into the \$81.2 billion IPO of lending start-up Affirm Holdings Inc., backed by PayPal Holdings Inc., in January have more than doubled their money, versus a 25% return in the S&P 500 index," he added.

A total 2,097 IPOs, excluding those of SPACs, raised \$402 billion in 2021



It has been an extraordinary year for equity formation globally - dare I say one that is unlikely to be repeated any time soon

**JAMES FLEMING** | GLOBAL CO-HEAD OF EQUITY CAPITAL MARKETS, CITIGROUP INC

Other major ones included Chinese online video company Kuaishou Technology, with \$5.4 billion in proceeds, and Korean e-commerce giant Coupang Inc, which raised \$4.6 billion.

**SPACs RETREAT**  
SPACs, which went public mostly in New York, raised a total of about

A total 2,097 IPOs, excluding those of SPACs, raised \$402 billion in 2021 globally

SPACs raised a total of about \$160 billion this year, accounting for 28% of the total proceeds raised by US IPOs

That was an 81% increase in proceeds and a 51% rise in the number of IPOs from 2020

Among the biggest offerings in 2021 was EV maker Rivian Automotive Inc, which raised over \$12 billion in its market debut in Nov, making it the largest US IPO since Alibaba Group Holding Ltd in 2014

cial media platform Reddit, transportation tech start-up Via, software maker Cohesity and private equity firm TPG having filed with regulators to go public.

There is also regulatory risk. The US Securities and Exchange Commission has cracked down on the New York listings of Chinese firms, requiring more disclosures. Ride-hailing giant Didi Global Inc, which completed its \$4.4 billion IPO in New York in June, has said it will move its listing to Hong Kong, as China pushes many of its companies to go public closer to home.

The IPO pipeline for the first quarter of 2022 is strong, with so-

## BOOSTED BY LOCALISATION

# Electronics mfg set to touch ₹7L cr in FY23

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** Buoyed by the government's ₹23 lakh crore policy push for self-reliant India, the domestic electronics manufacturing industry is expected to see 30 per cent growth in the next fiscal to be worth nearly ₹7 lakh crore.

While the government continues to make efforts to move up in the global electronics supply chain and is expected to come up with new policies and incentive schemes for wearables and IT hardware, the immediate challenges are those around electronic components, mainly electronic chips, and potential threats from the coronavirus pandemic.

"The value addition from local manufacturing units is expected to go up to 25 per cent next year from 18 per cent at present. The government is aiming to grow overall electronics production in the country by 30 per cent to over ₹6.9 lakh crore next year," a senior Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) official told PTI.

The MeitY has proposed a PLI scheme of about ₹22,000 crore to promote wearables as well as enhance incentives for IT hardware manufacturers in the next financial year as it aims to increase electronics exports from India by 50 per cent.

According to industry body ICEA, whose members include Apple, Foxconn, Wistron, Lava and Vivo, mobile phone production in the country peaked at ₹2.2 lakh crore



Chinese players like Xiaomi, Vivo, Oppo, Realme and Iqoo dominate the smartphone segment with 70% market share

Import of electronics in 2020-21 reduced to ₹2.85 lakh crore from ₹2.9 lakh crore in 2019-20 due to rise in local manufacturing

in 2020-21 and is expected to cross ₹2.75 lakh crore by March 2022.

"Chinese companies are only focussing on catering to the Indian market requirement. Therefore, they have not participated in the PLI scheme. We expect Indian companies to do well and become global champions," the MeitY official said.

The electronics manufacturing growth in the country remained almost between ₹5,33,670 crore in 2020-21 and ₹5,33,550 crore in 2019-20. The government has made a third attempt to attract electronics chip makers in the country with ₹76,000 crore incentive schemes spread over a period of six years and is confident of attracting 100 companies in the next 4 years under the package.

## NCLAT stays CCI order on beer makers

A two-member NCLAT bench has directed parties, including United Breweries Ltd, to deposit 10% of the penalty amount by way of 'Fixed Deposit Receipt' within three weeks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has imposed a stay on the orders passed by the fair trade regulator CCI slapping penalties on several beer makers, including United Breweries Ltd that faces a fine of ₹751.8 crore.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) September 24, 2021, imposed penalties totalling over ₹873 crore on UBL, Carlsberg India, All India Brewers' Association (AIBA) and 11 individuals for cartelisation in the sale and supply of beer.

The said order was challenged before the NCLAT, which is an appellate authority over the CCI. It hears appeals against any direction issued or decision made or order passed by the CCI.



"During the pendency of the Appeal, to prevent an aberration of justice and to secure the ends of justice, stays the impugned order dated 24.09.2021 in suo moto case no. 62017 subject to the payment of 10 per cent of the penalty amount levied by the first Respondent CCI, by way of 'Fixed Deposit Receipt' to and in favour of the Registrar, NCLAT, New Delhi, within three weeks from the date of passing of this order," said an NCLAT order passed December 23.

The NCLAT has also directed the CCI and the All India Brewers Association to file replies over the notices issued by it. The appellate tribunal has directed to list the matter March 29, 2022, for admission.

Confirming the development, UBL in a regulatory filing said it received an order passed by the NCLAT, staying the CCI order upon a condition of pre-deposit of 10 per cent of the penalty amount imposed on the company.

The company will comply with the directions and the said 10% amount shall be deposited through a fixed deposit receipt within stipulated time as mentioned in the Order, UBL had said, now controlled by Dutch-based multinational Heineken.

Earlier this year, Heineken had acquired additional ordinary shares in UBL June 23 taking its shareholding in the company from 46.5 per cent to 61.5 per cent.

## COAL KEEPS PACE POWER DEMAND UP 10% IN APRIL-NOV

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** Power demand jumped more than 10% in the April-November period of the current financial year, indicating a strong recovery. According to government data coal-fired generation met 71% of the demand, making it clear that coal will continue to occupy the centre stage amid growth in power demand.

Considering all sources put together the power generation was 978 billion units (BU) during the period under review, while coal-fired plants accounted for 696 BUs.

Indeed, coal-fired plants stepped up generation by 14% to bridge the gap left by a 28% fall in output from stations running on imported coal and 43% from imported gas as a sharp rise in their prices made them uneconomical for cash-strapped distribution companies.

The outlook could have been different had Coal India Ltd, which accounts for 80% of fuel supplies for power production, and captive mines not ramped up production to maintain pace with the rising power demand — except for a short period when supplies were hit by heavy rains between Mid-August and September.

Coal India's production has registered a 5.6% growth despatch rose 19% in the April-November period compared to the same period of last year.

Production from captive mines rose nearly 56%.

# Top 10 stocks to 'buy' in 2022: HDFC Securities

THE BROKERAGE NOTED THAT, CHIP SHORTAGES, COMMODITY PRICE INFLATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A THIRD WAVE OF COVID ARE KEY RISKS GOING FORWARD FOR THE COMPANY'S SHARE PRICE

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** For 2022, brokerage house HDFC Securities has given a 'buy' call for these ten



stocks - Aditya Birla Capital, Gail India, Hindustan Zinc, Iqca Labs, Mahindra & Mahindra, Max Financial, Max Healthcare, State Bank of India, Tech Mahindra, Zee Entertainment.

Aditya Birla Capital is the holding company of all the financial services businesses of

the Aditya Birla group.

"It continues its credible makeover journey to drive consolidated return ratios closer to franchise potential over the next three years," the brokerage said.

However, stiff competition from peers and new entrants and worsening of asset quality in the lend-

ing book due to the potential third wave of the Covid pandemic and slowdown in the economy are key concerns for the stock.

Gas transmission and distribution company GAIL is planning to expand in petrochemicals, speciality chemicals and renewables to supplement growth in its core business of natural gas marketing and transportation. It also intends to bid for new pipelines.

However, volatility in oil and gas prices, higher tariff reduction in existing pipelines and regulatory changes could impact its growth story in the near future, the brokerage said.

Hindustan Zinc is one of the world's largest and India's only integrated manufacturers of zinc-lead and silver and world's second-largest zinc-lead miner.

It is India's largest primary zinc producer, with 77 per cent market share including alloys and 80 per cent without alloys.

"High operating efficiency is driven by fully integrated operations and low-cost, high-grade zinc reserves and with access to the bulk of lead-zinc deposits in Rajasthan through long-term agreements with the Government of India, hence the company should sustain as a low-cost producer of zinc over the medium term," it added.

For Iqca Labs, the brokerage house is positive on the back of strong volume growth in domestic formulation across products, cost competitive and consistent quality in active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) segments.

The key therapeutic segments include cardiac, pain management,

anti-malarial and anti-diabetic, anti-infectives. The company derived 46 per cent of its revenues from the domestic market while 54 per cent from international markets in FY21.

In the case of Mahindra and Mahindra, world's largest tractor manufacturer and the third largest passenger vehicle manufacturer in India, the brokerage house believes its product offerings could help outperform the entire automobile sector: "M&M is targeting a 10 times increase in the agricultural implements segment to drive growth in the medium term (by 2027)," it added.

Having said that, chip shortages, commodity price inflation and the possibility of a third wave of Covid are key risks going forward for the company's share price.



# TRICKY TEST AHEAD

Team combination on skipper Kohli's mind as India take on South Africa in the first Test, commencing today

SA is one place where we have not won a series yet so we are very motivated to do that. The mindset is always to go out there and win a series in any country that we play. We will do our absolute best to make sure we keep contributing towards that cause

**VIRAT KOHLI**

## THE PROBABLE XIS

### INDIA

KL Rahul, Mayank Agarwal, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli (C), Ajinkya Rahane/Shreyas Iyer, Rishabh Pant (wk), R Ashwin, Shardul Thakur, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj/Ishant Sharma.

### SOUTH AFRICA

Dean Elgar (C), Aiden Markram, Keegan Petersen, Rassie van der Dussen, Temba Bavuma, Quinton de Kock (wk), Wiaan Mulder, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Duanne Olivier.

I am not going to sit here and say they are not the best side in the world because there's a ranking system for a reason. But the mere fact that we're playing in our backyard gives us still the upper hand going into the series

**DEAN ELGAR**

against a side which has only two players with 50 plus games – skipper skipper Dean Elgar (69 Tests) and senior keeper-batter Temba Bavuma (53 Tests).

It only helps that Kagiso Rabada will not have the dangerous and world's fastest Anrich Nortje for company in the bowling attack and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj is least of a worry as far as Indian batters are concerned.

Secondly, Kohli, the best batter in the team, has not scored a Test hundred since 2019 and has an average of less than 30. It does not match the lofty standards that is associated with the Indian skipper. He must be backing himself up to fire in this series.

But he would need his new deputy KL Rahul to replicate his per-

formance in England and also need Cheteshwar Pujara to score a few runs after having blunted the new Kookaburra if need be.

Iyer, who looks ahead of Rahane in battle for No.5 slot, would be tested by Duanne Olivier's back of the length deliveries that can rear up on a Centurion track which promises to quicken up as match progresses. In case of Rahane, he is completely out of confidence and that's never a good sign.

Rishabh Pant's game always goes up a notch or two in adverse conditions and skipper Kohli won't mind if he can make a minicameat of left-arm spinner Maharaj with those one-handed sixes. A lot will depend on how Rabada and Olivier start the proceedings.

But like any other away tour, the difference between the two sides could be Jasprit Bumrah, fresh from a break and raring to dismantle a batting line-up that depends on Elgar, his deputy Temba Bavuma and De Kock.

If Bumrah and Shami can blow up the top-order, the rest of the South African batters might not do well against Ravichandran Ashwin. Skipper Kohli will need all of that.

## PITCH AND CONDITIONS

The Centurion pitch can start slowly at times and then speed up on days two and three. At the moment, there is a lot of green grass on the surface, which will probably be trimmed. Scattered thunderstorms are forecast on the first and second days of the match. Thereafter, it is slated to be sunny and pleasant until the fifth day, on which thunderstorms are also forecast.

be officially dumped.

Since their historic first visit in 1992, the tour to Rainbow Nation has been an 'Achilles' Heel' for the touring Indian teams and skipper Kohli, who is certainly veering towards the business end of his leadership tenure, will like to achieve a first.

South Africa is no longer the force to reckon with in international cricket as they have been going through a rough transition phase over the past few years.

Kohli's men would like to pounce on the jittery Proteas like hungry African lions as the visitors have way more quality in its ranks than the home team which is full of rookies.

However an away Test series with some interesting sub-plots

and hidden narratives adds to the intrigue of the battle that lies ahead and especially for 'King Kohli'.

This particular series, where even if he emphatically denies in public sphere, will be fighting multiple battles – some tangible ones and a few intangibles.

First and foremost, Kohli, the captain, who would like to reassert his supremacy with a victory

## NUMBERS' GAME

**3** Test wins for India in 20 matches in South Africa, while the hosts have won 10 games with 7 ended in draws

**459** India's highest Test total in an innings in South Africa, which came in Centurion in 2010, while 620/4d is the highest by the hosts against India, coming in the same match

**135** India's lowest Test total in an innings in South Africa (Cape Town, 2018) since 2000, while 84 is the lowest for the hosts against the Indians, coming in Johannesburg, 2006

**558** Runs scored by Virat Kohli in 5 Tests in SA, most among the players from both sides (current squads); Dean Elgar (207 in 3 Tests) is leading the chart for the hosts

**21** Wickets taken by Mohammed Shami in 5 Tests in SA, most among the players from both sides (current squads); Kagiso Rabada (15 in 3 Tests) is leading the chart for the Proteas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Centurion, Dec 25:** Skipper Virat Kohli will be battling on multiple fronts with an aim to get the tricky team combination right as India have a real shot at winning their first ever away series against South Africa, which is short on experience going into the contest, starting with the Boxing Day Test.

The choice between an untested rookie like Shreyas Iyer and a proven but out-of-form Ajinkya Rahane for the number five slot, is not an enviable one. It's more like choosing between rock and hard place with fear of unknown being a persistent factor.

Not to mention the hard call on whether Shardul Thakur with far superior skills should be the fifth bowler in place of an 'over the hill' Ishant Sharma.

These are not easiest of decisions to make that require copious amounts of tactical acumen mixed in equal proportion with proper communication skills.

In Mumbai, during the New Zealand Test, the team management could 'rest' both Rahane and Ishant on the pretext of niggles but if Sunday, the duo doesn't figure in the playing eleven, it will be as good as being dropped. In the last Test, they were 'unofficially dropped' and in this one, they will



Shreyas Iyer and KL Rahul wait for their chance to bat during India's practice session ahead of the first Test against South Africa, starting Sunday

## 4TH NATIONAL PARA BADMINTON

# Parul bags gold in women's SL3 event



**PRAMOD BHAGAT**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 25:** World No.1 SL3 para shuttler Parul Parmar won the gold at the 4th National Para Badminton Championships here. She had to toil hard before edging past Uttarakhand's Mandeep Kaur 19-21, 21-17, 21-10 in the final. Mansi Joshi secured Bronze in the category.

In the women's wheelchair-1 category, Kerala's Alpha James secured gold, while Neerja Goyal settled for silver. Neerja's statemate Nirmala Mehta and Uttar Pradesh's Ranjeeta Maurya secured bronze.

In the women's wheelchair-2 category, Karnataka's Ammu Mohan secured gold beating Punjab's Shabana, who bagged silver. Prema Biswas and Suman Rawat had to settle for bronze.

In the women's SU5 category, Tamil Nadu's Manisha won gold

while Arti ended up with silver. Jyoti and Vaishali settled for bronze. In the women's SL4 category, Jyoti from Haryana secured gold while Chiranjita bagged silver and Kanak had to settle for bronze.

In the women's SH6 category, Tamil Nadu's Nitya Sre secured Gold, while Rhui had to settle for silver. Sasikala and Rachana had to content with bronze.

Paralympics gold medallist Pramod Bhagat had an impressive outing as he made into the round of 16 in both of his men's singles and doubles events.

The Odisha lad defeated Chandra Prakash in his SL3 singles match 21-12, 21-18. He then partnered with Tokyo Para Games bronze medalist Manoj Sarkar, who humbled Gourav Nihal in his SL3 singles match (21-3, 21-7), to outplay the pair of Gaurav Nayal and Rohksrkiit 21-7, 21-3.

## Bat signed by Indian team fetches \$25k

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 25:** A bat signed by the 2011 World Cup winning Indian cricket team was sold for USD 25,000, while Australia opener David Warner's 2016 IPL-winning signed SunRisers Hyderabad jersey fetched USD 30,000 in a non-fungible token (NFT) auction in Dubai.

The NFT auction, conducted by CricFlix in association with RevSportz and Fanatic Sports, witnessed huge response for the historic digital artifacts, garnering a total of USD 335,950 bidding Friday.

While Warner's 2016 IPL-winning signed jersey topped the chart with the highest bid, digital rights of the bat signed by the MS Dhoni-led team, which handed the country the ODI World Cup after 28 years, also attracted massive bidding.

The digital rights to the collection of cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar's 200th Test match was successfully bagged by an ardent Tendulkar fan, Amal Khan from Mumbai for USD 40,000 (Rs 30,01,410).

## 3RD ASHES TEST: BOLAND SET FOR DEBUT, VISITORS MAKE 4 CHANGES England look for better show at MCG

ASSOCIATED PRESS

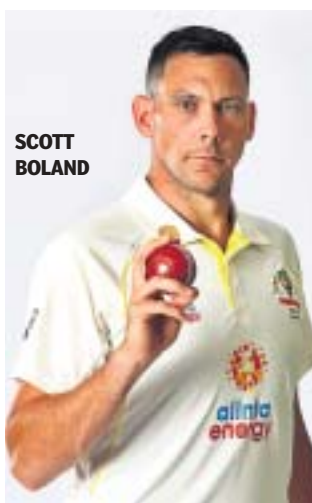
**Melbourne, Dec 25:** Australia will give fast bowler Scott Boland a Test debut in the third Ashes match beginning Sunday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground while England has made four changes to its side.

Boland was brought in as cover earlier this week and received the starting nod when fellow fast bowlers Jhye Richardson and Michael Neser were ruled out because of muscle soreness.

Josh Hazlewood was already out as he continues to recover from side strain, meaning captain Pat Cummins and Boland are the two new inclusions to the Australian XI. Boland will become the second Australian male indigenous Test player after fellow pace bowler Jason Gillespie.

Australia, which leads the five-match series 2-0, can wrap up the series and clinch the Ashes with a victory at the MCG.

England, meanwhile, dropped opener Rory Burns and pacer Stuart Broad, along with Ollie Pope and Chris Woakes.



**SCOTT BOLAND**

Bowlers Mark Wood and Jack Leach will return to the starting side, while Zak Crawley and Jonny Bairstow will play their first Tests in this series.

England also confirmed Jos Buttler will continue as wicket-keeper, rather than Bairstow taking over the gloves. Buttler was in a confident mood Saturday at a Christmas morning media conference.



**JONNY BAIRSTOW**

## Line-ups

**AUSTRALIA:** David Warner, Marcus Harris, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Cameron Green, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins (C), Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon & Scott Boland.

**ENGLAND:** Haseeb Hameed, Zak Crawley, Dawid Malan, Joe Root (C), Ben Stokes, Jonny Bairstow, Jos Buttler, Mark Wood, Ollie Robinson, Jack Leach & James Anderson.

## Blasters face Jamshedpur in Boxing Day ISL blockbuster



Sahal Abdul Samad is with a teammate during Kerala Blasters' practice

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Vasco da Gama, Dec 25:** Kerala Blasters will look to remain unscathed and continue their invincible run when they take on an in-form Jamshedpur FC in the ISL Sunday.

The Boxing Day blockbuster at the Tilak Maidan Stadium will see two sides who are not only in the top four but also in supreme form, riding on some free-scoring attackers and well-oiled defence in the last few matches.

Kerala have been unbeaten in six games while Jamshedpur haven't lost their last two. Jamshedpur shared the spoils in a 0-0 draw against Bengaluru FC in their previous engagement but the Men of

Steel have been prolific in front of goal with Greg Stewart being at the heart of their success.

Kerala have been spectacular so far, putting behind disappointments of previous years with a collection of players who have dazzled, especially in front of the goal. They won 3-0 against Chennaiyin FC in their last game, making light of an obdurate Chennaiyin defence.

Among the players who have risen to the occasion for Kerala is Sahal Abdul Samad, who has been brilliant, scoring in back-to-back games. Prior to the start of the season, the youngster had just one goal to his name. But in seven games this season, he has managed to score thrice.

Kerala have scored 12 goals in their first seven games, including an own goal in the game against Bengaluru FC. For the first time in its ISL history, the club has scored more than 10 goals after seven opening league games and that is a testament to its teamwork.

For Kerala, nine different players have had a goal or an assist this season. Only Jamshedpur FC (11) and Hyderabad FC (10) have more players contributing to a goal or an assist.

Jamshedpur, meanwhile, are sitting third in the table and have the same number of points as Kerala (12). A win will take either team level on points with leaders Mumbai City FC who have a game in hand.