

## ସତର୍କ ରୁହନ୍ତୁ, ଭୟଭୀତ ହୁଅନ୍ତୁ ନାହିଁ

‘ଆପଣଙ୍କର ଚିକିତ୍ସା ଅବାଧ୍ୟତା ବା ଅବହେଳା, ସମଗ୍ର ମାନବ ସମାଜ ପାଇଁ ଘାତକ ହୋଇପାରେ’

ନବବର୍ଷ, ମକର/ପୋଜର, ବିବାହ/ବ୍ରତ, ଅନ୍ତେଷ୍ଟିକ୍ରିୟା, ବଶଭୋଜ ଓ ଅନ୍ୟାନ୍ୟ ସାମାଜିକ/ଧାର୍ମିକ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମ ସମୟରେ ବୋର୍ଡିଂ ପୁରୁଣା ନିୟମ କଡ଼ାକଡ଼ି ପାଳନ କରନ୍ତୁ । ବୟସ୍କ ବ୍ୟକ୍ତି, ଅଣଫୁଲୁକ ରୋଗୀ ଓ ଶିଶୁମାନଙ୍କ ପାଇଁ ଅଧିକ ସତର୍କତା କରନ୍ତୁ ।

ନିୟମିତ ୪୦ ସେକେଣ୍ଡ ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ହାତକୁ ଭଲଭାବରେ ଧୁଅନ୍ତୁ

ସର୍ବଦା ସଚିତ ଭାବରେ ମାସ୍କ ପିନ୍ଧନ୍ତୁ

ନିକଟ ଅନ୍ୟମାନଙ୍କ ଠାରୁ ୨ ମିଟର ଦୂରରେ ରଖନ୍ତୁ

୧୮ ବର୍ଷରୁ ଉର୍ଦ୍ଧ୍ୱ ବ୍ୟକ୍ତି ୨ ଡୋଜ୍ ବୋର୍ଡିଂ ଚଳା ନିୟମ ନିଅନ୍ତୁ

ସଦ୍ୟ ବିଦେଶରୁ ଫେରିଥିବା ବ୍ୟକ୍ତିଙ୍କ ସମ୍ପର୍କରେ ଜିଲ୍ଲା ଜନସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ ଅଧିକାରୀ କିମ୍ବା ସହରାଞ୍ଚଳ ଜନସ୍ୱାସ୍ଥ୍ୟ ଅଧିକାରୀଙ୍କୁ ସୂଚନା ଦିଅନ୍ତୁ ।

**ଅଧିକ ଜାଣିବା ପାଇଁ ସାମ୍ବ୍ୟ ସହାୟତା ନଂ. ୧୦୪କୁ କଲ୍ କରନ୍ତୁ ।**

ଫେସ୍‌ବୁକ୍: facebook.com/HFWOdisha | ୱେବ୍‌ସାଇଟ୍: http://www.health.odisha.gov.in/ | ଟ୍ୱିଟ୍ଟର: @HFWOdisha

# Classes I to V may not resume Jan 3

Despite Odisha government's decision to reopen primary schools from January 3, the surge in Covid-19 cases may force postponement

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 29:** A day after the Odisha government announced reopening of primary schools for students of classes I to V, Dr Rama Raman Mohanty, Director of Medical Education and Training (DMET) said Wednesday that the decision may be revoked in view of the prevailing Omicron situation. Cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus have been on the rise in India. So far 21 states including Odisha have reported more than 900 cases of Omicron infection.

"The Odisha government may have taken the decision to reopen primary schools keeping in mind situation before the emergence of the Omicron variant. Also the daily Covid-19 cases in Odisha had dropped below the 200-mark," Mohanty said. "However, the decision may be revoked as the situation is more complex now and Omicron cases are increasing," he



added. Mohanty informed that Covid-19 cases in India registered 40 per cent increase Wednesday. He said the Health Department is mulling over the steps to be taken for curbing the infections.

"People should stay away from crowded places, wear masks, maintain social distancing and wash their hands regularly as a part of precautionary measure. These are the ways to prevent the spread of the virus," informed Mohanty.

School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash had earlier announced Tuesday that primary schools in Odisha that had been closed since the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 would reopen January 3, 2022.

## ODISHA REGISTERS 9TH OMICRON CASE

**Bhubaneswar:** The number of cases of Omicron infection in Odisha went up to nine Wednesday with a returnee from the UAE testing positive. The 31-year-old man from Keonjhar had tested positive for Covid-19 on return. The genome sequencing of the man's sample confirmed that he had been infected by the Omicron variant. The man is currently undergoing treatment at a private hospital and his condition is stated to be stable.

It meant that close to 27,000 schools in the state would have the students back in classes I to V.

The decision evoked mixed reactions among educationalists and parents of the students with a majority of them opposing the decision. Many parents had opined that as the kids tend not to follow social protocols they would be prone to get infected by the virus.



## Khairi's foster mother breathes her last

**Cuttack:** Nihar Nalini Swain, the foster mother of tigress Khairi passed away Wednesday. She was 88 and died due to age-related ailments, informed a relative. Nalini had been residing at an old age home here since the death of her husband, Saroj Roy Choudhury, a former forest officer. In 1972, Nalini and Saroj rescued a female tiger cub from Khairi river bank in Balasore district and named it Khairi. The cub became an integral part of the family as it grew into a full grown tiger. Many stories, documentaries and films were made on this unique human-animal bonding which remained till the tigress breathed her last in 1981 due to an ailment.

## Dedicated vax centres for kids

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 29:** The Odisha government chalked out details Wednesday to set up dedicated Covid-19 vaccination centres for the inoculation of children between 15 to 18 years age group, director of Health and Family Welfare department Bijay Panigrahi informed.

"All the district collectors in the state have been directed to set up dedicated Covid-19 vaccination centres in their respective districts. Besides, they have been instructed accordingly to fix specific time slots for administering vaccines to children at already existing centres," Panigrahi told mediapersons here. He also informed that more than 25 lakh children in the above mentioned age category will be eligible for vaccination in the state.

## 6 promoted to IG, DIG ranks

**Naveen Patnaik asks new officers joining the Odisha Civil Services to discharge their responsibilities judiciously and honestly**

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 29:** The Odisha government has promoted three IPS officers to the Inspector General (IG) category with effect from January 1, 2022. The officers are Deepak Kumar, Asish Kumar Singh and Satyabrata Bhoi, all of the 2004 batch.

"The place of posting of the officers will be decided by the Home department," said a notification issued Wednesday by the General Administration and Public Grievance department.

Other than these three, 2004-batch IPS officer Nitinjeet Singh,

who was on central deputation, has been allowed proforma promotion to the grade of IG of Police in Level-14 of pay matrix with effect from the same date.

In another separate development, three 2008-batch officers, namely Umashankar Dash, Prakash R and Satyajit Nayak, have been promoted to the DIG category.

Three senior cops also have been promoted to the Selection Grade. They are Akhileswar Singh, Brijesh Kumar Rai and Charan Singh Meena.

Earlier in the day, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik welcomed 153 new officers who joined the Odisha Civil Services in various positions. Patnaik interacted with them virtually during the orientation programme at the Lok Seva Bhawan here. He asked them to discharge their duties with honesty and judiciously.

"Civil Service is very unique and

## 14 CYBERCRIME PS INAUGURATED

**Bhubaneswar:** In an aim to control rising cyber crimes and economic offences in the state, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday inaugurated 14 police stations that will only investigate such cases. Patnaik said that his government is committed to provide to the people of Odisha a modern system with a well-trained police force to counter technology-based crimes. The aim is to protect their lives, liberty and property effectively, Patnaik added. The CM further informed that economic offences have emerged as a blue collar crime and the need of the hour is to tackle those.

special in its own way. It is not just a profession. It is a service towards your motherland and its common man," Patnaik pointed out.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



My New Year will start with joy and relief. I finally managed to file my I-T return

## ₹25/L petrol sop for Jharkhand 2-wheelers

The move will benefit 62 lakh families owning motorcycles or scooters who will get 10 litres of petrol every month at slashed rates



**Ranchi, Dec 29:** Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren Wednesday announced concession of ₹25 per litre on petrol prices for two wheelers owned by the poor in the state from Republic Day next year. Soren made the announcement on the completion of two years of the JMM-led coalition government in the state.

The concession will be given for 10 litres of petrol for every month, a statement by the state government said later.

"To provide relief to the poor

and middle class families of Jharkhand who are impacted by the increased fuel prices the government has decided to give relief of ₹25 per litre on petrol to two-wheeler owners from January 26, 2022," Soren said.

"A poor person, having a motorcycle in the house, is unable to drive it due to lack of money to

buy petrol ... An amount of ₹25 per litre would be transferred to the bank account of poor ration card holders. This system is going to be implemented from January 26 next year. A poor family can get this amount up to 10 litres of petrol per month," said a statement quoting Soren.

"Jharkhand government is working fast to bring its action plans on the ground. Prices of petrol and diesel are sky-rocketing. This has adversely impacted the poor and middle-class families. A poor man - despite having a motorcycle at home - can't use it because he can't afford petrol - can't go to the market to sell his farm produce," he further added.

The Centre had November 3 cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record ₹5 and ₹10 per litre to help bring down rates from their highest-ever levels. It had become effective from November 4.

## STRIKING THE PERFECT POSE



Artistes perform during the International Odissi Dance Festival at the auditorium of the GKCM Odissi Research Centre in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

### MARKET WATCH

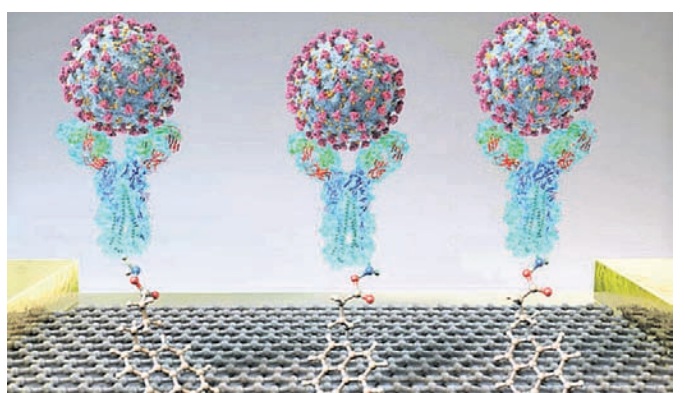
INDEX	VALUE	VIATION
SENSEX	57806.49	↓ 90.99
NIFTY	17213.60	↓ 19.70
DOLLAR	75.19	↓ ₹0.04
EURO	84.66	↑ ₹0.18
GOLD	₹47,777	↓ ₹265
SILVER	₹61,630	↓ ₹884

### WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP	27.0°C	26.8°C
MIN	17.0°C	17.5°C
Humidity	89%	91%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Generally cloudy sky	

# Antibodies that can block Omicron variant identified

This new finding will go a long way in designing vaccines in future in the fight against various variants of coronavirus



**Washington, Dec 29:** Scientists have identified antibodies that neutralise Omicron and other variants of coronavirus by targeting areas that remain essentially unchanged as the virus mutates. The research has been published in the journal 'Nature'.

The findings will certainly help design vaccines and antibody treatments that will be effective against not only Omicron but other variants that may emerge in the future.

"This finding tells us that by focusing on antibodies that target these highly conserved sites on the spike protein, there is a way to overcome the virus' continual evolution," said David Veelsler, an associate professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine in the US.

The Omicron variant has an unusually high number of 37 mutations in the spike protein, which the

virus uses to enter and infect the human cells.

"The main questions we were trying to answer were: how has this constellation of mutations in the spike protein of the Omicron variant affected its ability to bind to cells and to evade the immune system's antibody responses," Veelsler said.

To assess the effect of these mutations, the researchers engineered a disabled, non-replicating virus, called a 'pseudovirus', to produce spike proteins on its surface, as coronaviruses do.

They then created 'pseudoviruses' that had spike proteins with the Omicron mutations and those found on the earliest variants identified in the pandemic.

The researchers first looked to see how well the different versions

of the spike protein were able to bind to protein on the surface of cells. This protein is called the angiotensin converting enzyme-2 (ACE2) receptor.

The scientists found the Omicron variant spike protein was able to bind 2.4 times better than spike protein found in the virus isolated at the very beginning of the pandemic. They also discovered that the Omicron version was able to bind to mouse ACE2 receptors efficiently suggesting Omicron might be able to 'ping-pong' between humans and other mammals.

The researchers then looked at how well antibodies against earlier isolates of the virus protected against the Omicron variant. The team found that antibodies from people who had been infected by

earlier strains and from those who had received one of the six most-used vaccines currently available all had reduced ability to block infection.

Antibodies from people who had been infected, recovered, and then had two doses of vaccine also had reduced activity, but the reduction was less, about fivefold, clearly demonstrating that vaccination after infection is useful.

"This shows that a third dose is really, really helpful against Omicron," Veelsler said.

However, when they tested a larger panel of antibodies that have been generated against earlier versions of the virus, the researchers identified four classes of antibodies that retained their ability to neutralise Omicron.



# leisure



## WOULD BE THRILLED IF NONE REMEMBERED ME: BRYAN

Sixty two year-old Canadian singer and photographer Bryan Adams, who has been in the public eye for decades, has admitted he would be thrilled if no one remembered him and would love it if all traces of him were removed from the Internet.

## TAYLOR SWIFT IS A FORCE OF NATURE: DON MCLEAN

American singer Don McLean has heaped praise on Taylor Swift, describing the singer as a force of nature. The comment came after Swift's 10-minute version of *All Too Well* overtook Don's *American Pie* as the longest-in-length chart-topper in US history.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com  
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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

**ARIES**  
You will put your eloquence to excellent use today, and it will be praised by one and all, particularly by members of the opposite sex, and you will bask in all the glory. However, Ganesh suggests that you spare some time for meditation to balance your internal and external worlds.

**TAURUS**  
This day you could be in for some unexpected and unpleasant shocks, warns Ganesh. There is a strong likelihood of getting insulted or humiliated. You must therefore be alert and on your toes. You could that way, manage to avert situations that may threaten your standing and reputation.

**GEMINI**  
Today, luck is on your side. In the afternoon, you will remain reserved and subdued. But as the day progresses, you will be a different person altogether. You will transform into an enterprising and outgoing person.

**CANCER**  
Your day will revolve around your spouse and matters related to him/her. Thanks to the love and warmth that he/she will shower on you, you may not want to go to work, and you would expect the same from him/her.

**LEO**  
It is time to erase all negative vibes in your surroundings, says Ganesh. The stars ensure that you nurture only the positive aspects of your life today. Chances are that you might find yourself perched atop the horns of dilemma at work, but that shouldn't throw you off your game.

**VIRGO**  
Signs indicate that you shall bring changes you wanted at your workplace. Cash flow will be outrageous, even as your loved ones - on whom it is spent - will love it. Members of the opposite sex will be charmed by your appeal, says Ganesh.

**LIBRA**  
You are at your best when communicating with others, and your silver-tongued speech will charm many. Your day will be spent in negotiating, meetings, and in interacting with people to get things done. At work, you may be put in charge of some investigative task. Towards the evening, people around you will find you incredibly charming and irresistible.

**SCORPIO**  
Take the lonely road today in business ventures, advises Ganesh. Professionally, you are capable of managing massive missions. Be set to administer your department all by yourself. You shall stake a claim as a great team leader today, says Ganesh.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Your role in bringing around important and influential deals will be pivotal indeed, says Ganesh. However, at work, the final result may not actually be up to the standards you expected. But a pleasant evening with your beloved will clear all such shadows and lighten your mood.

**CAPRICORN**  
It is time again for that once-in-blue-moon mood swing. You will be easily irked by everyday activities and may let small, less important things bother you too much, foresees Ganesh. But the darkest hour is just before dawn. Things should start looking up later in the day.

**AQUARIUS**  
Worried about your future? Just approach your work more seriously. You may be overburdening yourself by helping others. While this is noble, Ganesh says it shouldn't be at the cost of your own health. By noon, your spirits will lift. You realise that it's okay to be a little selfish.

**PISCES**  
Today is likely to be an extremely competitive and demanding day for you. You need to be extremely careful in how you go about doing your tasks, so as to not give anyone a chance to pick out mistakes in your work.

## 'I don't want to be a normal actress'



**Mumbai:** Miss Universe 2021 Harnaaz Sandhu doesn't mince words when accepting that she has her heart set on Hindi film industry. "I am an actor by profession, and I have been part of theatre for 12 years," says the beauty-pageant winner.

Sandhu has featured in Punjabi films like Yaara Diyan Poo Baran and the yet-to-be-released Bai Ji Kuttange. She made her television debut with the show, Udaariyaan. With her latest win propelling her into the limelight, she now hopes to venture into the Hindi film industry. "However, I don't want to be a normal actress. I want to be one of those who are very influential, and who break stereotypes by choosing strong characters, being wise, and inspirational."

But even as she plans to train attention to her acting career, Sandhu says she will be equally devoted to using her platform to further several causes. "Obvious issues plaguing our society are climate change and women empowerment. They are close to my heart. I have seen my mother advocate for the causes. I plan to use my win to not only celebrate my crown, but also address the responsibility that come with it."

AGENCIES



## Manoj tops list of most popular OTT performers

**Hyderabad:** Actor Manoj Bajpayee is the most popular OTT actor in India in 2021, according to an Ormax Media survey.

In the survey, actor Manoj Bajpayee topped the list of the most popular OTT actors, followed by Pankaj Tripathi.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui grabbed third place in the list, while Samantha Ruth Prabhu, who captivated audiences as 'Raji' in *The Family Man 2*, was fourth.

Radhika Apte, Kay Kay Menon, Saif Ali Khan, Sushmita Sen, Jithendra Kumar, and Tamannah Bhatia bagged spots in the top ten OTT actors.

Ormax Media took to Twitter to publish the results of the survey, "Most popular OTT actors in India (Sep-Nov 2021): @BajpayeeManoj stays at no. 1, @kaykaymenon02 (no. 6), @thesushmitasen (no. 8), and @tamannahspeaks (no. 10) make an entry in the Top 10 #OTT #Streaming." IANS

## Controversy dogs Prithviraj over the great king's clan

**Jaipur:** The Gujjars in Rajasthan have threatened to stop the screening of Hindi film *Prithviraj* starring Akshay Kumar if the movie continues using the term 'Rajput' for Prithviraj Chauhan.

The community claimed that Prithviraj was from the Gurjar community and was not a Rajput. However, leaders from the Rajput community have strongly rejected their claim and said that Gurjars were initially gauchar, who then converted into Gujjar and then Gurjars.

They basically come from Gujarat and hence got this name,

claimed Shri Rajput Karni Sena national spokesperson Vijendra Singh Shaktawat.

This is a place-related term and not a caste-related term, he added.

Gurjar leader Himmat Singh said, "#Prithviraj Movie is made on the basis of Prithviraj Raso written by Chand Bardai and the same was shown in the teaser of Prithviraj movie. After studying the inscriptions available in history, researchers have believed that Chand Bardai wrote it around 400 years back after the reign of Prithviraj Chauhan." IANS



## Twinkle's heartwarming post on dad's birthday

**Mumbai:** Actor-turned-author Twinkle Khanna shared a throwback picture of herself with her father, yesteryear's superstar Rajesh Khanna, on his birth anniversary Wednesday, December 29. Twinkle took to her Instagram as she walked down memory lane with a picture of her giving a peck on her father's cheek.

up at the biggest one in the galaxy. It's our day together, now and forever."

Immediately, she was inundated with good wishes from friends, starting with her debut co-star Bobby Deol to couturier Manish Malhotra and actor Sikandar Kher.

Earlier, husband Akshay Kumar had put up a special birthday post for Twinkle on his Instagram from their Maldives vacation. The poetic social media post soon caught everyone's attention and went viral within minutes. IANS



## 'Mom had a big crush on 'Kaka Ji'

**Mumbai:** Rajesh Khanna is called the first 'Superstar' of Hindi film industry and there was a mad craze for him during the 1970s.

On his birth day Wednesday, former actress and social activist Somy Ali recalled how her mom had the biggest crush on the late actor.

"My mom had the biggest crush

on him and all she would listen to was his songs, the majority of them sung by Kishore da, which would blast over the tape recorder in our house when I was a kid in Pakistan," she reminisced.

The Aao Pyar Karein actress also recalled watching Anand.

"I remember my mother crying profusely when Kaka ji died in the end. When I was seven years old, my father organised a trip for my mom and me to visit Mumbai," said the former Hindi film actress.

"My dad was close friends with

Dutt Saab's manager, and he facilitated our visiting sets with Amit ji, Dharam ji, Rekha ji, and Kaka ji. So, I was lucky enough to meet him when I was seven and he invited mom and me to his house 'Ashirwaad' for lunch," she shared. IANS



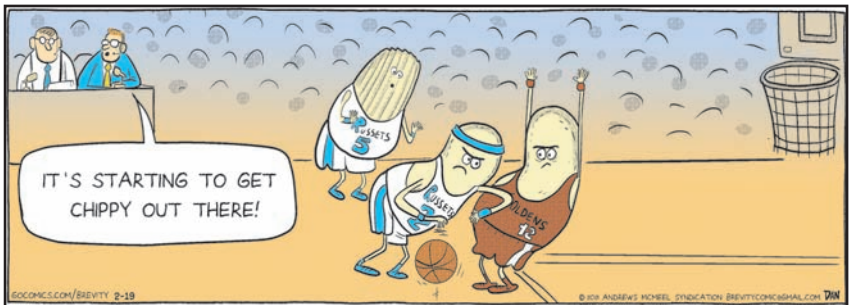
### PEANUTS



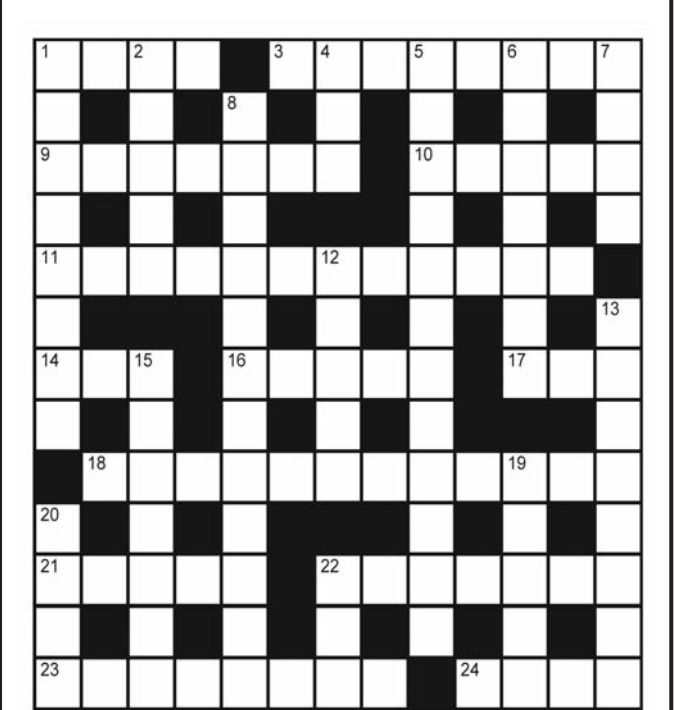
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



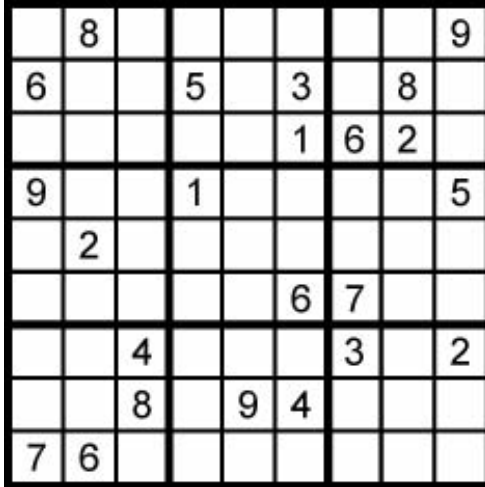
### FUN post CROSSWORD



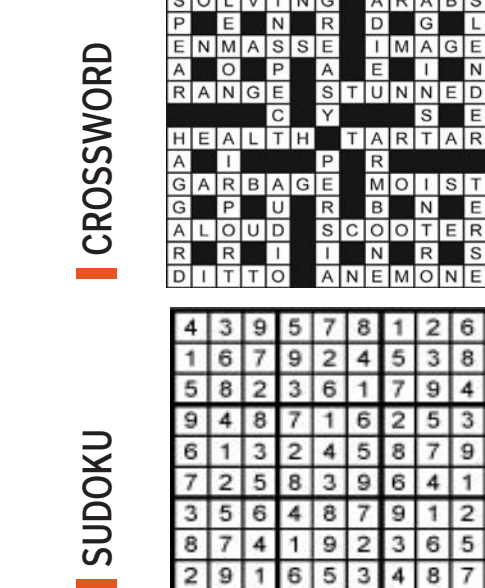
- Across**  
1 Window frame  
3 Wastrel  
9 Medicinal herb  
10 Heather and bracken tracts  
11 Fireworks  
14 Congeal  
16 Unrefined  
17 Roll-call vote  
18 Asian draft animal (5,7)
- Down**  
21 Eucalyptus eater  
22 One-eyed giant  
23 Shipshape (4-4)  
24 Charity
- Down**  
1 Road pointer  
2 Whale finder  
4 Semi  
5 Chain reaction (6,6)
- Across**  
6 Ill-tempered  
7 Laddie's love  
8 The Euro replaced it (8,4)  
12 Leftover  
13 Goes on a bender  
15 Drudgery  
19 Wake Island, e.g.  
20 Distort  
22 Upper limit

### SUDOKU

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



### SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

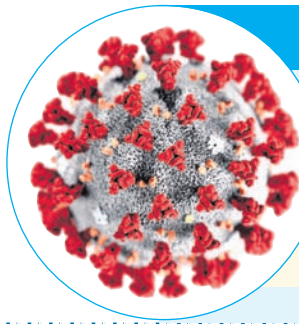


downtown



GIFTS FOR LORD

Devotee Subrata Ratha donates silver utensils for the performance of Srimandir rituals, Wednesday



COVID-19 TRACKER

Table with 4 columns: Region, Infected, Recovered, Dead. Rows: World, India, Odisha.

CM unveils AI-based life certificate system

Claiming that Odisha is the first state to implement such digital service for the pensioners, the Chief Minister expressed happiness over the initiative

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: As part of the 5T principle of governance, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday launched online verification of identity and submission of life certificates for the pensioners.

The Chief Minister virtually launched the new verification system on the occasion of an orientation programme conducted for newly-recruited 153 officers of Odisha Civil Services Wednesday.

Under the new system, identification of the pensioners and submission of life certificates can now be accomplished through artificial intelligence (AI) based video-verification process.

Launching the system, Patnaik said it's in true spirit of 5T and Mo Sarkar initiative of his government. "It will be of immense help to the pensioners as they can submit their identification and life certificates digitally by using their mobile phones, without visiting any government office."

Claiming that Odisha is the first state to implement such digital service for the pensioners, Patnaik expressed happiness over the initiative.

Welcoming the new officers, the Chief Minister said, "Civil service is unique in its own way.



CM Naveen Patnaik, in presence of 5T Secretary VK Pandian, welcomes 153 Odisha Civil Services officers

It is not just a profession. It is a service towards your motherland and its common man. At no point of time and under no circumstances you should let down the trust of the common man.

"This day marks the beginning of a new chapter in their (new recruits) life. They have now taken the role of a responsible civil servant and are now expected to shoulder the roles and responsibilities that come attached to it," said Patnaik.

Stating that development of the state and welfare of the poor remain at the core of all initiatives of the state government, Patnaik said it is only through hard work and devotion of young and capable officers like them that the people will

be able to reap the true benefits of state's initiatives and Odisha can become the Number 1 state.

He said that initiatives like '5T' and 'Mo Sarkar' are directed towards bringing transformative changes in the governance mechanism. The government is working dedicatedly to provide doorstep services to the people, he added.

He also launched e-Diary, under which all information contained in the Government Diary can be readily and conveniently accessed by citizens using their mobile phones.

Secretary to CM (5T) VK Pandian said as the officers have been inducted to this service purely on the basis of merit, they should also follow the same principles in their public career to maintain absolute transparency, treat people professionally with empathy.

State gets 14 cybercrime police stations

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: In the wake of rising cybercrimes and economic offences in the state, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday inaugurated 14 police stations that will investigate only these cases.

Inaugurating the police stations, Patnaik said his government is committed to providing the people of Odisha with a modern system with a well-trained police force to counter technology-based crimes. "The aim is to protect their lives, liberty and property effectively," Patnaik added.

The Chief Minister further stated that economic offences have emerged as blue collar crimes and the need of the hour is to tackle these anti-social activities.

"Cybercrimes have been rapidly emerging as a dominant crime in society. What makes it more worrisome is that it is anonymous, and not restricted by jurisdictional



Dignitaries at the inauguration of cybercrime police stations in Cuttack

boundaries. Since the source of information is invariably based on servers existing in foreign countries, collection of evidence against the perpetrators becomes really challenging," he said.

Patnaik further said that economic offences have also emerged as a blue collar crime which not only affects the citizens but causes deep injuries to the financial health of the country.

The 14 police stations will be at

Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Keonjhar, Angul, Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Puri, Koraput, Bhawanipatna, Bolangir and Kandhamal.

At present, three such police stations are there at Sambalpur, Rourkela and Berhampur. These three police stations will also be merged with the new system. With the opening of new police stations, the total number of such police stations in Odisha will reach 14. The new police stations will

have trained policemen and technical experts. They will be equipped with latest hardware and software required for investigating economic and cyber offences, he pointed out.

The Chief Minister also inaugurated three upgraded police stations. While the first upgraded police station has been opened at Info Valley Special Economic Zone (SEZ), the second has been opened at Bayalis Mouza under Cuttack Urban Police District, and the third has been located at Pahal under Bhubaneswar Urban Police District.

These police stations will fulfill the longstanding demands of the citizens of the areas and will strengthen policing in the suburban areas of the twin city.

Minister of State, Home Dibya Shankar Mishra expressed confidence that the new police stations will be able to contain cyber and economic offences. Secretary to Chief Minister (5T) VK Pandian moderated the programme.

ARIIA: KIIT tops in pvt univ category

New Delhi: The Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology secured the top position among the universities and deemed universities (private/self-finance technical) in the Atal Ranking of Institutions on Innovation Achievements (ARIIA) 2021 announced by the Education Ministry, Wednesday.

63 OAVs next year

Bhubaneswar: School and Mass Education secretary Satyabrata Sahu Wednesday said that the state government will open 63 Odisha Adarsha Vidyalayas (OAVs) next year. This was revealed during a workshop on capacity building of DEOs on strengthening teaching learning.

BJP knocks Guv's door for OBC quota in rural polls

PNN/ AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: A delegation of BJP, including three legislators, Wednesday sought the intervention of Governor Ganeshi Lal for reservation of seats for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in the upcoming panchayat elections in the state.

A memorandum signed by BJP MLAs Lalitendu Bidyadhar Mohapatra, Mukesh Mahaling and Sanatan Bijuli was submitted to the Governor to press for the demand.

Even though OBCs constitute about 54 per cent of the state's population, the state government deprived them of their rights by not giving reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), said Mohapatra.

"We have requested the Governor not to hold the three-tier panchayat elections until reservation of seats for OBC in the rural bodies is made," he said.

In their memorandum, the BJP



MLAs said the Constitution mandates advancement and adequate representation of the SC, ST and OBCs. Adequate representation of OBCs in local self-government is one of the objectives of the very idea of decentralisation of power and taking governance to the grassroots level.

However, the move of the Odisha government to proceed with the panchayat elections without reservation for OBCs is strictly contrary to the object, intent and purpose of the constitutional scheme of advancement and adequate representation of OBCs, they alleged.

"It is quite unfortunate that Odisha government is actively pursuing to conduct the panchayat elections without reservation for the OBCs. The election would deprive the people of OBC community of their rights for five long years which by no stretch of logic can be said to be a short period, causing grave prejudices to the backward classes," read the memorandum.

Stating that a similar matter is sub-judice in the Supreme Court, the BJP lawmakers said the union government has already filed a review petition before the apex court December 27 to allow reservation for the OBCs in the local bodies/municipal corporations for the time being till the states comply with the triple test criteria.

The MLAs requested the Governor to take up the issue with the State Election Commission (SEC) in order to ensure panchayat elections are held with reservation for the OBCs through constitutional mechanism.

IMD forecasts rain, fog

Bhubaneswar: The IMD Wednesday predicted light to moderate rain and dense fog for several places across Odisha from Thursday. However, winter is unlikely to return until January 19.

Nandankanan to be made world-class zoo

POST NEWS NETWORK

Barang, Dec 29: Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) is among the 15 zoos in the country which will be upgraded to international standards, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) Sisir Kumar Ratho said on the 62nd Foundation Day of the zoo here Wednesday.

Ratho said, "After introduction of the modern car parking and revamped toy train, efforts are on to redevelop the bus stand near Nandankanan. With the Centre accepting our proposal, Nandankanan has become one of the 15 zoos in India to get upgraded to international standards with all modern facilities." PCCF (Wildlife) Shashi

Paul, who attended the event as its guest of honour, said, "NZP enclosures will be redesigned soon. We've signed a pact with Tierpark Berlin in Germany for the purpose. New animals and birds will be introduced at NZP for which agreements have been signed with zoos in Sri Lanka and Singapore under the animal exchange programme."

Forest and Environment Minister BK Arukha inaugurated four buses that will exclusively ply in Chandaka-Dampara Wildlife Sanctuary. Tourists can book a 13-seater bus for Rs 13,000 and enjoy the joyride to the sanctuary, it was learnt.

The NZP authorities have shut the zoo for public from December 30 to January 3 fearing Omicron spread.

2021: 2 crucial Odisha cases remained unsettled in SC

KULDEEP SINGH, OP

New Delhi, Dec 29: The outgoing 2021 might be quite a busy year for Odisha in the Supreme Court with a number of cases being heard by the apex court but a couple of long pending matters remained sub-judice.

Odisha has approached the apex court on numerous issues but inter-state disputes turned out to be the major causes of worry for the state.

In 2007, Odisha had filed an original suit in SC against Andhra Pradesh (AP) challenging the multi-purpose Polavaram project, being constructed by the latter on River Godavari. Odisha alleged that the project would lead to submergence of huge tracts of land in Malkangiri district and make scores of tribals homeless and landless. This case is still pending in the SC even after several rounds of hearings. The plea was last heard in February 2020.

In 2021, Odisha also moved the SC challenging the National Green Tribunal (NGT) order on Polavaram

but that matter was also heard only once. The hearing ended with a simple adjournment as Justice L Nageswara Rao recused himself from hearing the case. During the hearing of the petition against NGT order, Odisha had pleaded for early listing of the original suit. An advocate appearing for an NGO had also written to the SC for early listing of Polavaram case but in vain.

Another crucial case which could not make any headway in 2021 was the Srimandir case. The SC had in its interim order in 2019 directed the state government to chalk out strategy for hassle-free darshan for devotees in the temple. The SC had last heard the matter in January 2020 and adjourned it for four weeks. The petition was filed in 2018 alleging harassment of devotees at the 12th century shrine. The petitioner, Nalini Padhi, had sought proper mechanism for hassle-free darshan for devotees.

Apart from these two cases, there were some days which went in the



favour of Odisha as the apex court took up Vamsadhara river dispute for hearing this year. As many as three petitions of Odisha against AP have been pending in SC over Vamsadhara river dispute. The third petition was filed this year against Vamsadhara tribunal order passed in June 2021. In a major breakthrough, the SC clubbed all three petitions and commenced the hearing of the matter. The SC heard the matter December 8 last and posted it for final disposal in January 2022.

Another inter-state dispute that knocked the legal corridor was in the form of a contempt plea against AP over Kotia group of villages. Odisha alleged that the neighbouring state has violated the apex court's judgement of 2006 and held panchayat elections in Kotia group of villages this year. The SC after holding several hearings on the matter directed both the states to look for a political solution to the border dispute.

In 2021, the SC had expressed exasperation over the cut and paste order of the Orissa High Court. The apex court had observed that the cutting and pasting of tribunal orders may only add the volumes in judgement but will not address the core issues.

This year, a plenty of high profile cases from Odisha also reached the legal corridors in Delhi. Odisha Lokayukta filed a petition in the SC challenging Orissa High Court order in Pradeep Panigrahi corruption case. The case is sub-judice. The SC had also refused to entertain a writ petition filed by Panigrahi seeking

registration of a criminal case against Odisha Lokayukta on charges of forgery.

The Pari murder case of Nayagarh also made its way to the SC with the parents of the 5-year old girl seeking a probe by central agency. However, the apex court restored the petition of Pari's father in the High Court and granted liberty to parents to amend the writ petition in the High Court. The SC had also set aside an order of the High Court wherein the HC had directed Pari's father to approach district magistrate for his grievances.

Another case that reached the apex court was the death of activist Aditya Dash. However, the apex court refused to interfere in the case citing that a petition was already pending with the High Court.

Moreover, in a major relief to private un-aided schools in Odisha, the SC had exempted them from the binding effect of the state government's notification directing waiver of fees for the pandemic period.

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It is only when we are not disturbed that we can always do the right thing at the right time in the right way.

THE MOTHER



## Europe's Dilemma

European countries are currently divided over whether to join US President Joe Biden's diplomatic boycott of the upcoming Winter Olympics in Beijing. The episode underscores yet again that when it comes to dealing with China, Europe and the United States truly are an ocean apart.

Beyond sharing fundamental political values, the US and Europe often employ similar rhetoric about the challenge China poses to the international order. Nonetheless, most European governments cannot reconcile their interests with the vision of a US-led coalition of democracies standing up to the world's autocracies, and European officials balk at pursuing a China policy focused on containment, under the guise of competition.

While the European Union wants to deepen transatlantic cooperation, there is no consensus on how to do so without alienating China or undermining the very international system it aims to defend. Nor are European governments convinced of America's reliability as a partner. Biden might value the transatlantic relationship, but his predecessor, Donald Trump, did not. Who is to say what the next US president – possibly Trump himself – will stand for? This doubt is a key motivation behind the EU's effort to operationalise its vision of "strategic autonomy."

To be sure, there is scope for transatlantic collaboration on China. In fact, efforts to advance such cooperation are already in motion, in the form of initiatives like the US-EU Dialogue on China and the US-EU Trade and Technology Council. Joint action to counter China's anti-competitive commercial and trade practices, export and investment restrictions in response to China's human-rights abuses, and a push for high standards for overseas infrastructure projects should be welcomed.

But the current US-EU agenda on China might be overly ambitious. Clearer prioritisation is needed to maximise the benefits of coordination. Furthermore, differing legal systems and threat perceptions in the US and Europe will make progress in key areas – such as carbon taxes, antitrust policy, or responses to Chinese disinformation campaigns – painfully slow. The prospects for meaningful military and security cooperation vis-à-vis China are especially limited. While European countries have made some symbolic moves – for example, the German warship Bayern recently demonstrated the right to free passage in the South China Sea – they are wary of going much further.

This is the case even for France, the only European country with a significant military presence in the Indo-Pacific. As French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian recently explained, "We do not underestimate the depth of competition with China, which can be ferocious, and the need for a constant evaluation of risks, but we try to avoid the militarisation of our strategy to allow us to include – respectful of their sovereignty – all interested countries."

This unwillingness to take a hard stance on China is set to persist. While Germany's new government does appear likely to adopt a somewhat firmer tone, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has taken a cautious line, making clear that all actions should be "carefully weighed" and emphasising the need to seek a cooperative approach.

So, the US should not expect Germany to start viewing relations with China through a primarily ideological lens any time soon. The communication failures surrounding the AUKUS defence agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US – a deal that blindsided France, which lost a major defence contract – further underscore the limits of US-Europe military cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

But transatlantic cooperation is hardly the only way Europe can influence the US-China relationship – and mitigate the risks that its rapid deterioration implies. Strategists are currently scrambling to draw lessons from history and devise an approach that enables the two sides to compete without catastrophe, particularly armed conflict. Europe can help here.

The EU should consider launching a diplomatic initiative reminiscent of the Helsinki Process, credited with reducing tensions between the Soviet and Western blocs in the 1970s. Through such a process, Europe could broker agreements to promote de-escalation, risk reduction, and crisis management, thereby reducing the likelihood of armed conflict.

Europe's limited capacity to project military power in the Indo-Pacific could be an asset in this context, as it bolsters European actors' credibility as honest brokers and trusted intermediaries. Compared to more direct stakeholders, the EU might be better positioned to mediate thorny issues such as Taiwan and the South China Sea. It might even be able to promote constructive diplomacy in the domains of cyber and outer space. In these contexts, American and Chinese forces regularly operate in proximity, and a miscalculation could lead to war.

No one should underestimate the difficulty of establishing rules of the road that are robust enough to avert conflict. But Europe has a comparative advantage in this area – one that it has demonstrated repeatedly in the past. For example, the European Commission and European countries played a central role in delivering multilateral export-control regimes, such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement. Europe has also played a critical role in negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme.

An EU-led de-escalation initiative in the Indo-Pacific is far from a sure thing, especially given the recent increase in tensions between the EU and China. But it would align with the EU's professed goal of pursuing an inclusive approach to the region that strengthens the rules-based international order. More important, it offers perhaps the best chance of averting war between great powers. Is that not why the EU was created?

Robert Williams is Executive Director of Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center. Moritz Rudolf is a postdoctoral fellow at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Center.

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## FOCUS VACCINE INEQUITY

# MUTATION OF APARTHEID

The reaction by governments in the Global North to the discovery of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 in South Africa has provided further proof – as if any more were needed – of the deeply inequitable response to the coronavirus pandemic. The backlash against African countries was swift and severe, as if barring travellers from the region could somehow keep the rest of the world safe.

It hasn't, and closing borders won't work when the next frightening variant emerges. Global injustice, it turns out, is very bad for public health.

Although more than half the world's population has now been vaccinated against COVID-19, only 8% of people living in lower-income countries have received a vaccine dose, compared to 48% in lower-middle-income countries and much higher rates in high-income countries. As of November, the United States had administered more than twice as many doses than had been given in all of Africa.

Given these numbers, it is no surprise that variants of concern continue to emerge and spread rapidly in countries with low vaccination rates. And the disparity is not an accident. It is a direct result of nationalist policies and vaccine hoarding by wealthy countries.

Even before vaccines became available, many experts, including Director-General of the World Health Organisation Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, warned about the consequences of vaccine nationalism. Despite this, wealthy countries have monopolised vaccine supplies, in some instances purchasing enough doses to inoculate their populations nine times over.

This summer, it seemed like the tide was turning. In June, members of the G7 pledged to donate their excess doses to low- and lower-middle-income countries either directly or through mechanisms like the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) facility. As more and more people in wealthy countries were vaccinated, there was some hope that vaccine national-



It is clear that disparities in vaccine access are not an accident of fate, but a result of concerted efforts by wealthy countries to keep vaccine supplies within their own borders and by pharmaceutical companies to increase their profits

ism and hoarding might end and that doses might finally make their way to countries desperately in need of them.

But in the past few months it has become clear that vaccine nationalism hasn't ended. Instead, it has mutated.

Wealthy countries like the US began pushing to administer additional doses of some vaccines even before there was evidence to support the use of booster shots. In fact, shortly before the WHO called for a moratorium on boosters until vaccines had reached those who need them most, the US signed a deal to purchase 200 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for use as boosters. At the time, the use of third shots as boosters was not even approved by the US Food and Drug Administration.

But booster shots in developed countries are not the only reason low- and middle-income countries lack doses. Canada, Spain, and Germany, among others, pledged months ago to donate millions of COVID-19 vaccines directly to low- and middle-income countries as well as to COVAX. Yet recent figures show that many governments have failed to deliver on these commitments. For example, the United Kingdom pledged to donate over 70

million doses, but has delivered less than 7% of this commitment.

Pharmaceutical companies and wealthy governments have been quick to blame low vaccine uptake in poor countries on vaccine hesitancy and underdeveloped health-care delivery systems. In a COVID-19 media briefing hosted by the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said that the level of vaccine hesitancy in Sub-Saharan Africa is "way, way higher than the percentage of hesitancy in Europe or in the US or Japan." This is despite evidence that vaccine hesitancy is lower in Africa than in many wealthy countries.

Bourla's effort to deflect blame for low vaccine coverage was an attempt to justify Pfizer's profiteering. From the outset, the company has prioritised profitable deals with wealthy countries over sharing its vaccine technology with African producers.

AstraZeneca, one of the few pharmaceutical companies that made arrangements for equitable access to its vaccine through a licensing arrangement with the Serum Institute of India, recently announced that it would begin increasing the price of doses with the goal of making a profit. This de-

cision reflects the worryingly misguided perception that the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

Wealthy countries also have been promoting a narrative that African governments lack the infrastructure and capacity to administer the doses that they have secured. But this criticism ignores the conditions under which doses have arrived. Donations often have shown up without advance notice, many close to expiration. With no information about the type, quantity, and condition of the arriving vaccines, health officials are unable to make preparations to deliver them in time. It is worth noting that, despite these challenges, African countries have been able to administer 62% of the doses they have received.

This scapegoating obscures the reality that low vaccine uptake in Africa is a direct result of wealthy countries' vaccine hoarding and nationalist policies. And efforts to rectify this inequity have been blocked by the same governments that have an excess of vaccines. For example, a waiver of intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines is a crucial mechanism to increase their availability. But while South Africa and India applied for the waiver from the World Trade Organisation more than a year ago, the application has been blocked repeatedly by countries like France, Germany, Spain, and Canada.

It is clear that disparities in vaccine access are not an accident of fate, but a result of concerted efforts by wealthy countries to keep vaccine supplies within their own borders and by pharmaceutical companies to increase their profits. It is time for rich-country governments and the pharmaceutical companies whose interests they serve to share vaccine doses equitably. Until everyone has access to a COVID-19 vaccine, no one is safe.

The writer is a member of the Africa CDC's African Vaccine Delivery Alliance and Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing.

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AS OF NOVEMBER, THE UNITED STATES HAD ADMINISTERED MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY DOSES THAN HAD BEEN GIVEN IN ALL OF AFRICA



Robert Williams & Moritz Rudolf

While the EU wants to deepen transatlantic cooperation, there is no consensus on how to do so without alienating China or undermining the very international system it aims to defend. Nor are European governments convinced of America's reliability as a partner

## SPECTRUM ECONOMY

# Path of recovery will follow path of virus

Even as India's macroeconomic situation improves, it may not yet be the time to celebrate. The World Bank sees rise in global extreme poverty. However, the IMF says India's economy is poised for a rebound after enduring a second wave of COVID-19. "What happens in India has a big impact, both in the region and in the world," Luis Breuer, IMF's Senior Resident Representative to India, says.

India's broad range of fiscal, monetary and health responses to the crisis supported its recovery and, along with economic reforms, are helping to mitigate a longer-lasting adverse impact of the crisis, according to the latest annual review by IMF. Though policy steps helped mitigate the pandemic, it's still likely to result in greater poverty and inequality. And the path of recovery will follow the path of the virus. "There's a lot of uncertainty about COVID," Breuer said. "We cannot rule out future waves."

Despite large increases in India's Central Budget, the state budgets are presenting problems with contraction of revenues and rising deficits. In the face of dwindling revenue receipts, the Reserve Bank of India observed that the states took recourse to expenditure compression. As a result, developmen-

tal expenditure was squeezed. Simultaneously capital expenditure was cut in key social and economic services, including medical and public health, irrigation and flood control, transport and rural development. This underscores the need for raising additional resources.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman precisely for this reason placed the second batch of supplementary demands for additional spending of Rs 3.73 lakh crore. This involves higher than expected cash outgo of Rs 2.99 lakh crore. The rest would be through cut in expenditures.

The items of additional expenditure include Rs 62,057 crore for past liabilities of Air India, Rs 58,430 crore for fertilizer subsidies, Rs 49,805 crore for department of public distribution and food. A significant recovery of Rs 13,901 crore recovery was made from fugitives Vijaya Mallaya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi.

The high borrowings may have an impact on finances and would require high-paced growth to check the difficult effects on finances and economic conditions in the years ahead. It means the sailing for the common man may not be easy with possible impact on consolidation of the economy due to higher debt

servicing cost and further increase in the process of running the government.

The greatest problem is in increasing consumption demand. It accounts for 50 per cent of the total GDP. In the second quarter, private final consumption expenditure registered a growth of 8.64 per cent year-on-year compared to 11 per cent contraction a year back. This indicates an enhanced economic performance. This is followed by government financial consumption expenditure growth of 8.7 per cent against contraction of 23.9 per cent in 2020-21. Agriculture shows a growth of 4.49 per cent and manufacturing 5.5 per cent.

Everything, however, is not in shape. The World Bank finds that debt loads in emerging markets and developing economies have spiked during the pandemic. The challenge is acute, says Global Economic Prospects and comes after a decade that saw the fastest, biggest and broadest expansion of debt levels around the world.

A concern is that developing economies will need to be careful as they would have to withdraw post-pandemic fiscal support and look to increase the efficiency of public spending. The World Bank says that debt burden will be felt long

after the virus abates, as servicing costs rise, slowing recoveries and hindering efforts to address other development challenges. The concerns are equally good for India.

In reality, the World Bank says that there is more debt than what meets the eye because "it is not a very straightforward exercise." Global debt surveillance today depends, says the World Bank, on a patchwork of databases with different standards and definitions. They contain large gaps; the report shows that publicly available tallies of debt stocks in low-income countries can vary by as much as 30 per cent of a country's GDP because of divergent definitions and standards in local and international databases.

Most projects in India are having high debt and its related problems. Meanwhile, the continuing farmer agitations in various ways in Ghaziabad, Noida and elsewhere in northern India, have become more assertive in their demands. Omicron is being watched carefully. It has its impact on the stock market and if there is another lockdown, the cost could be higher. India remains important to world economy, as IMF representative Luis Breuer says. So a positive growth for India would decide the future.

INFA

## WISDOM CORNER

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility.

SIGMUND FREUD

Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

CARL JUNG

## LOL

### Knitting & driving

A policeman spots a woman driving and knitting at the same time. Driving up beside her, he shouts out



of the window... "Pull over!"

"No," she shouts back, "a pair of socks!"

## Suspense over Sasikala

# 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

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Sir, "Good leadership is one that forgives the wrongdoers and accepts them." Former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam (OPS) thus spoke at a party function to celebrate Christmas. What was significant about his sermon on 'forgiveness' was that it came in the presence of another former chief minister Edappadi K Palaniswamy (EPS). It was clear who OPS had in mind – VK Sasikala – the estranged party leader who was expelled for 'anti-party' activities before she served a jail term. After being released from jail, Sasikala surprised all by not displaying an interest in plunging back into politics. Thus, both OPS and EPS heaved a sigh of relief before the Assembly elections because neither of the two was eager to welcome Sasikala back into AIADMK. In politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies, only permanent interests. Party leaders are well aware of EPS' aversion to Sasikala. OPS, on the other hand, does not believe that AIADMK's doors are shut for Sasikala. OPS and EPS nearly fell apart during the latter's CM tenure; they were able to make it up later. Both OPS and Sasikala belong to the same caste, and a distinct caste equation has paved the way for a possible Sasikala comeback into politics and the AIADMK. A section of the leaders understand that only Sasikala's re-inclusion can work wonders for the demoralised party ranks and help AIADMK take baby steps towards regaining power in Tamil Nadu. An OPS-Sasikala combination may rewrite political equations in the state.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

## Buoyed farm unions

Sir, Buoyed by the success of their agitation, 22 farm unions under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) have decided to contest all the 117 constituencies in the upcoming Assembly elections in Punjab. While anyone is free to contest elections, farmer unions need to think through this move carefully. The last thing they need is for their recent success to go to their head. This would actually undermine their cause of representing farm interests and expose them as opportunists. While the farm sector desperately needed agricultural reforms, the reason why farmer unions were successful in their year-long agitation is that they were seen as representing farmer interests cutting across communities in Punjab, Haryana and western UP. This made it near impossible for any political party to take sides against them.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE



SHORT TAKES

SPCB moved for waste mgmt

**Keonjhar:** Garbage piles are found dumped in parts of Keonjhar municipality in the absence of proper waste management system and a treatment plant. As disposal of garbage has failed to work, it has caused air and water pollution in the civic body. Sadar MLA Mohan Charan Majhi expressed concern over problem, and has written to the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) to take immediate steps for garbage treatment in the area. He added that even though the municipality was set up 70 years ago, no step has been taken to establish a garbage treatment plant. While the number of population in the civic body is on the rise, tonnes of garbage are disposed of on the streets by households every day. Piles of garbage on roadside continue to pollute air and water in the area, Majhi observed.

Canal water for BPCL plant opposed

**Bargarh:** Farmers are up in arms against water supply from Hirakud dam through Bargarh canal to the under-construction ethanol plant at Baulasingh in the district. The ethanol plant is being set up by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL). The district administration held a meeting with the representatives of the Bargarh Chasi Sangathan Samanwaya Samiti on the issue of water supply to the plant here. Officials of the BPCL were present at the event. It was learnt that there had been no alternative source of water supply for the plant. Bargarh canal water is used for construction of the plant. Farmers made it clear that if the plant continues to use canal water even after its completion, it will create a crisis for the farm sector. The BPCL officials said after commissioning of the project, an alternative source of water will be ready and the plant will not use the canal water.

# Baby swap rocks Subarnapur DHH

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Subarnapur, Dec 29:** A newborn was allegedly swapped at the district headquarters hospital in Subarnapur Wednesday. Bisikesan Jhankar, father of the baby, filed a complaint at Ullunda police station Wednesday in this regard. Police have started an investigation into the matter. The incident has come just a month after a newborn girl was reportedly stolen from this hospital. Reports said, a woman, identified as Banita Jhankar of Gandapali village under Ullunda police limits, was admitted to the DHH six days ago after she experienced labour pain. Hospital records showed Banita delivered a girl December 24. However, in the FIR it was

stated that a staff nurse at the DHH initially informed Banita's husband and mother that she had delivered a baby boy. However, they handed over a girl after some time, it was alleged. Banita's husband, Bisikesan Jhankar, demanded an investigation into the matter. He alleged that the hospital authorities are involved in the baby swapping. Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO) in-charge Dr Ramesh Swain said, "We have not received any such complaint yet. However, if we come across any allegation, the matter will be probed." Sonepur IIC Niranjana Das said an investigation into the matter is on. He said two baby girls were delivered at the DHH that day.



Locals united under the Odisha Development Forum stage protests, demanding an airport for Berhampur and inclusion 18 panchayats in the civic body

# Similipal: Dog power for wildlife safety

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baripada, Dec 29:** The Similipal Tiger Reserve Project (STR) has taken up a host of measures to ensure safety of wildlife and food chain for tigers and elephants inside the Similipal Sanctuary in Mayurbhanj district. The STR has formed a dog squad to sniff out dangers from poachers to wildlife. It is going to press two trained dogs into service. The dogs are named Maya and Drona. The STR is focused on increasing the tiger population and curbing the movements of poachers inside the sanctuary area. The forest officials and forest protection committees are creating awareness on safety of wildlife and greenery in the sanctuary.

**Maya and Drona can follow footprints of wild animals by sniffing and will track the straying animals. The two can guide them back to their habitats**



Famous for tiger conservation and as a national park, the Similipal sanctuary spread over 2,750 square/km has been accorded the World Heritage status by



the UNESCO. However, despite this, wildlife inside the sanctuary still faces dangers from poacher, fire, snares and sound pollution. To ward off such dangers, the STR has formed a dog squad comprising four officials and two dogs. They have received training for seven months at Chandigarh.

The dogs can follow footprints of wild animals by sniffing and will track the straying animals. The dogs will guide and bring them back to their habitats. Maya and Drona can also sniff gun powder, smells of guns, and footprints of poachers.

Maintaining the food chain for tigers inside the sanctuary is vital. "To ensure population growth of tigers, there is a need for increasing herbivores. Then, making provision of sufficient grass for herbivores is in focus. The forest department has taken up a lot of measures for creating grasslands inside the sanctuary," said M Jagjayananda, the Field Director of the STR. He said there is a plenty of sal trees in Similipal, but one per cent of grassland is there. "By January, the villages in the core area will be relocated and grasslands created. Grasslands will spur the population growth of herbivores," he exuded hope.

The department has installed warning lighters inside the sanctuary to ward off man-elephant conflicts. If elephants enter villages, warning lighters will automatically emit light with help of their sensors. People will get advance warning about the entry of wild elephants. "There is a need for creating bamboo forests inside the sanctuary. It will help elephants get food. The size of tiger population will also go up," said Bhanumitra Acharya, former honorary wildlife warden.

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
PUBLIC NOTICE FOR ENERGIZATION OF OVER HEAD TRACTION WIRES FOR KHURDA ROAD BYE PASS LINE BETWEEN ARGUL & HARIPURGRAM PASSENGER HALT  
Proforma 10-01

Notice is hereby given to all users of Railway lines and premises situated on the completed section of the under noted section of the East Coast Railway, Khurda Road division that the 25,000 volts, 50 Hz, AC Over Head Traction wires will be energized on or after the date specified against the section. On and from the same date the over head traction lines shall be treated as live at all times and no unauthorized person shall approach or work in the proximity of the said overhead lines.

SL. NO.	SECTION	DIVISION	DATE OF CHARGING
1	KHURDA ROAD BYE PASS LINE BETWEEN ARGUL & HARIPURGRAM PASSENGER HALT	KHURDA ROAD	31.01.2022

**INTRODUCTION OF AC 25 KV TRACTION "WARNING TO ROAD USERS"**  
Proforma 10-02

It is notified for information of the public that in connection with introduction of 25,000 volts, AC, electric traction over the SECTION OF KHURDA ROAD BYE PASS LINE BETWEEN ARGUL & HARIPURGRAM PASSENGER HALT IN KHURDA ROAD DIVISION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY, height gauges have been erected at all the level crossings with clear height of 4.78 meter above road level with a view to prevent loads of excessive height from coming into contact or dangerous proximity to live traction wire (contact wire), which shall be at a height of minimum 5.5 meter above the rail level crossings.

Public are hereby notified to observe the height specified above for the purpose of loading vehicles and to see that the loads carried in road vehicles do not infringe the height gauges under any circumstances.

The dangers of load of excessive height are as follows:-  
i) Danger to the height gauge and consequent obstruction to the road as well as the railway line.  
ii) Danger to the materials or equipment carried or the vehicle itself.  
iii) Danger of fire and risk of life due to contact with or dangerous proximity to the conductors.

PR-106/CE/21-22 Chief Electrical Engineer/Con-I/Bhubaneswar

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. I-310  
**BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OFFICE, LANJIGARH**  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
Bid Identification No. BDO, LANJIGARH - 01/2021-22

1 Name of the work	: 3 (Three) Nos of works
2 Estimated Cost	: Rs. 12,08,096.00 to Rs. 20,91,557.00
3 Period of Completion	: 6 (Six) Calendar months
4 Date and time of availability of bid document	: From 30.12.2021 to Dt.05.01.2022 till 17.00 hours
5 Last date/time for receipt of bid	: Dt.06.01.2022 till 17.00 hours
6 Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	: BDO, Lanjigarh
7 Date of Opening	: Dt.07.01.2022 at 11.00 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal [www.kalahandi.nic.in](http://www.kalahandi.nic.in).  
Sd./- Block Development Officer, Lanjigarh  
OIPR-19185/11/0002/2122

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. MM-326  
**FOREST, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE DEPARTMENT**  
**OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, SUBARNAPUR FOREST DIVISION**  
Tel/Fax: 06654-295076, e-mail: dfosubarnapur@gmail.com  
Letter No. 5971/F, Dated, Subarnapur the 18th December 2021  
**CORRIGENDUM**  
Bid Identification No. DFO, SNP 04/2021-22 Dated: 06.12.2021 of DFO, Subarnapur in view of the typographical error occurred in the Bid Identification No. DFO, SNP-04-2021-2022, Dtd.06.12.2021 of DFO, Subarnapur Forest Division the following changes have been made in the tender documents published vide above Bid Identification of DFO, Subarnapur.  
01. The cost of Bid Paper appeared in Col. 5 in case of the following work item is revised as follows:

Sl. No.	Item of Work	Cost of Bid Paper published earlier in Tender Notice in Rs.	Cost of Bid Paper revised in Rs.
03	Construction of Group-D Staff Quarters in Forest Colony, Subarnapur	6000.00	4000.00
04	Construction of Boundary Wall at Nandighospali in Ullunda Range of Subarnapur Range	6000.00	4000.00
05	Construction of Boundary Wall at Sulia in Ullunda Range of Subarnapur Range	6000.00	2000.00

02. All other terms and conditions as published in the Tender Notice DFO, SNP-04-2021-2022, Dtd.06.12.2021 will remain unchanged.  
The corrigendum is published by the Divisional Forest Officer, Subarnapur Forest Division on behalf of Governor of Odisha.  
Sd./- Divisional Forest Officer  
Subarnapur Forest Division  
OIPR-08014/11/0003/2122

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. O-1571  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, MOHANA**  
e-mail - rwdmohana@gmail.com  
**NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement**  
**Identification No. Online Tender 08/MOHANA/2021-22**

1. Name of the Work:- Road Works. 2. Total No. of Work:- 03 (Three) Nos. 3. Estimated Cost:- Varies from Rs. 5.23 lakhs to Rs. 13.27 lakhs. 4. Class of Contractor:- As per Annexure. 5. Period of Completion:- 01 (One) Calendar month. 6. Other details:-

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	No. of Works	Availability of Tender Online for bidding From	To	Last Date & Time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of opening of tender
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division, Mohana	Online Tender 08/MOHANA/2021-22	03 (Three) Nos.	01.01.2022 from 10.00 AM	11.01.2022 upto 5.00 PM	10.01.2022 upto 5.00 PM	12.01.2022 at 11.30 AM

Further details can be seen from the Website [www.tenderorissa.gov.in](http://www.tenderorissa.gov.in)  
OIPR-25148/11/0008/2122  
Sd./- Executive Engineer, R.W. Division, Mohana

# Dua bridge on Jagannath Road sinks

Thousands face commuting woes as communication to 15 panchayats is hit

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nayagarh, Dec 29:** Communication to over 15 panchayats in Nayagarh district was disrupted Wednesday as Dua bridge at Dimisara Chhak on New Jagannath Road connecting Sarankul with Puri caved in. Communication on this route has been closed, a report said.

According to reports, thousands of people from 15 panchayats, dependent on this route, are facing commuting woes. They alleged that for lack of repair of the raft foundation of the bridge, it

sank. Locals had earlier demanded repair of the bridge, but the works department had not paid much heed to its maintenance.

River water had eroded its foundation. The bridge started sinking in the middle at 9 am and hours later it got into a U-shape, locals said, adding that it will soon collapse. About 38 years ago, then Ranpur MLA Ramakant Mishra had inaugurated the bridge which has since become rickety.

Sand mafia used to mine sand from around its pillars and transport sand over the bridge. Sand mining had



weakened its foundation while water had further eroded its base.

Former sarpanch of Dimisara, Suryamani

Pradhan, said the works department had neglected repair of the bridge even though locals had been drawing its attention.

Former sarpanch Satyaban Nayak said there is a need for a diversion road for communication. As long as an alternative passage is not made, people will be facing problems. After the bridge sank, people of over 200 villages are in a soup. College students from Nayagarh and Sarankul could not go to Godipada College Wednesday. Executive engineer of the Nayagarh works division, Pramod Dhar said a diversion road would be laid. The Collector has been apprised of the bridge's sinking and the need for a new bridge, he added.

# Twin city gets new DCP, Traffic

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 29:** The state government Wednesday effected a minor reshuffle in the police in which 2018 batch IPS officer S Susree, SDPO, Kesinga, was posted as DCP, Traffic, for the twin city.

As per the notification issued by the home department, 2017 batch IPS officer Prahlad Singh Meena, SP, Malkangiri has been shifted to the police headquarters as AIG. Meanwhile, Talcher SDPO Nitesh Wadhvani was appointed as SP Malkangiri. Furthermore, Abilash G, SDPO, Malkangiri has been posted as SP, Narcotics, STF DCP Traffic, Mayadhar Sethi has been posted as DCP, Crime, while Madhuri Samal, SP, Narcotics, has been shifted as SP, Crime Branch.

# Loans to Kotia people under Baram Yojana

**Pottangi:** Amid repeated incursion bids by Andhra Pradesh into Kotia panchayat under this block in Koraput district, the district administration tried to woo villagers by giving away loans to them under Baram Yojana, a report said. Pottangi MLA Pritam Padhi gave away loans to villagers in Tala Ganjeipadar, Kotia and Digugabadar villages.

# Junior docs' stir hits healthcare services at MKCG

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, Dec 29:** Both indoor and outdoor healthcare services at MKCG Medical College and Hospital here have been affected as junior doctors continued their agitation Wednesday. However, service at the emergency ward continued unaffected.

Junior doctors under the Junior Doctors' Association (JDA) staged a sit-in for the third day Wednesday in front of the administrative building of the MKCG Medical College and Hospital.

President of the JDA, Dr Satyaswarup Patnaik and secretary Dr Prabhuprasad Patnaik said their agitation will continue until NEET PG-2021 counselling is started. The agitating junior doctors sought to expedite the admission process. They said the results of NEET-PG exams were published two months ago. As the counselling gets delayed, the admission of medical students is getting delayed, the JDA stated. On the other hand, work pressure on junior doctors is mounting at hospitals, the JDA said. It said that a PG student is supposed to prepare for exams apart from discharging his/her duty as a doctor.

# BJD makes inroads into BJP, Cong pockets in Malkangiri

OVER 1,000 WORKERS JOIN THE RULING PARTY AT A MISRAN PARBA

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Malkangiri, Dec 29:** With the three-tier panchayat elections likely to be held in February, the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) wants to leave no stone unturned to broaden its support base in Malkangiri district.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress, on their part, seem to be on a back foot and losing ground in Chittrakonda and Malkangiri Assembly constituencies.

In these two constituencies, the two opposition parties received jolts as over 1,000 party workers from the BJP and the Congress crossed over to the BJD at a Misran Parba here Wednesday.

Notably, the BJD had won in Chittrakonda and the BJP won in Malkangiri in the last Assembly elections. According to reports, Malkangiri Assembly segment has 60 per cent Bengali-speaking voters. The BJD had set its sight on these voters. Five months ago, the ruling party started efforts to ensure that these voters get benefits from various welfare schemes



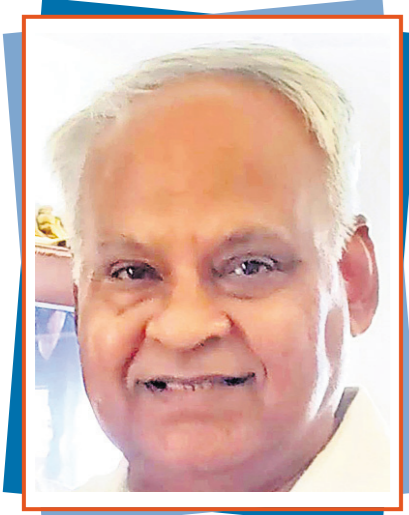
of the state government.

The ruling party organized a misran parba at Harichand Ashram on the banks of Potteru river; Wednesday. Over 4,000 workers and district level functionaries attended the meeting.

The BJD's organizational secretary, Pranab Prakash Das, Sports Minister Tusharkanti Behera, chairperson of Odisha State Seeds Corporation Iswar Panigrahy, Chittrakonda MLA Purnachandra

Baka, former MLAs Manas Madkani, Mukund Sodi, former MP Pradip Majhi and party's district observer Prakash Dang deliberated on various welfare schemes of the state government. Over 1,000 BJP and Congress workers, including Bengali people joined the BJD. The BJD's organizational secretary announced as assistance of Rs 1 crore for development of Harichand Ashram temple and the ashram.





**Nishikanta Mishra**  
Team Admark



**Mahendra Gupta**  
Gupta Power



**Purshotam Budhraj**  
Narayani Motors



**Charchit Mishra**  
OSL Group

*The year 2021 brought some hope to the pandemic-ravaged world of business in the form of easing of restrictions and reopening of the economy, while pent-up consumer demand drove sales in some sectors. On the other hand, skyrocketing inflation and supply chain bottlenecks posed challenges to businesses across sectors. In spite of this, some entrepreneurs prevailed over the situation and drove their businesses to newer heights during these uncertain times. Orissa POST presents the Business Power List 2021*

**NB: This list is in no particular order**



**Manoranjan Das**  
PMG Yamaha



**Dr. Arjit Mohapatra**  
Jagannath Health Care



**Subhash Chandra Nayak**  
NIIS Group of Institutions



**Debesh Prasad Nanda**  
Trinity Skoda



**Debidutta Mishra**  
SJ Developers



**Mala Mishra**  
DPS, Kalinga



**Achyutananda Meher**  
Arundhati Motors



**Dr. Krupasindhu Panda**  
HCG Panda Cancer Hospital



**Shloke Sen**  
Super Sales Motors



**Pradosh Kumar Rout**  
Pragati Milk



**D Murali Krishna**  
Vikash Group



**Padma Shri Chaturbhuj Meher** (Meher's)



**Ashok Jalan**  
Odyssey Motors



**Binod Dash**  
Synergy Institute of Technology



**Dr. Prakash Chandra Dalai**  
Gasto & Kidney Care Hospital



**Kalinga Keshari Rath**  
Evos Buildcon



**Lalatendu Mohanty**  
Priyadarshini Odishi Handloom



**Deben Ray**  
Spice Up



**Sriram Panda**  
MITS Group



**Biswachetan Mishra**  
Hallmark Ornaments



**Aditya Das**  
Ram's Assorted Cold Storage



**Bichitrnanda Senapati**  
Homefills



**Pratap Balabantaray**  
BIITM



**Sanjay Das**  
Hari Plast Udyog



**Dr. Pradeep Ku. Mohanty**  
Sadguru Medical and Research Centre



**Akhil Poddar**  
Utkal Auto



**Ganesh Prasad Bagaria**  
Grihasthi Udyog



**Sanjay Didwania**  
Pro Visual



**Lipsa Hans**  
Chandi Bhandar



**Avinash Chhapolia**  
GRC Garments



**Alok Agrawal**  
Akash Deep Hyundai



**Amit Agarwal**  
Ridhi Siddhi



**M Keshav Rao**  
Green Chillyz



**Sourav Roy**  
Radhagobindo Roy Grandson Jewellers



**Prabhu Charan Mohanty**  
Xavier Group of Schools



**Anil Agarwal**  
Twin City Builder



**Pramod Chandra Rath**  
Pramod Convention & Club Resort



**Deepak Sharma**  
Ujjwal Bajaj



**Ambarish Dash**  
Yuvodaya Group of Institutions



**Natwar Banka**  
Hotel Welcome Resort



# national

## of the day quote

We will end harassment being meted out to truckers by issuing annual stickers which will ensure that no truck is stopped on the road for checking of papers

SUKHBJIR SINGH BADAL | SHIROMANI AKALI DAL (SAD) CHIEF

Shocked at the government's action of freezing the accounts of Missionaries of Charity. Condemning the cruel, insensitive and inhuman decision which will hurt the ailing and suffering poor the most. Demand PM's intervention and immediate reversal

P CHIDAMBARAM | SENIOR CONGRESS LEADER

The financial position of the state has been under severe stress due to Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent flood situation only accentuated it

MK STALIN | TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### Three mowed down by truck

**Pune:** Three pedestrians were killed when a truck going in reverse knocked them down on the Mumbai-Bangalore highway here Tuesday morning, police said. The incident took place on Navle Bridge in Narhe area, said a police official. While the three victims died on the spot, the truck driver and his assistant ran away, leaving the vehicle behind.

### Leopard spreads panic

**Coimbatore:** A leopard strayed into the campus of a college here in the wee hours of Wednesday sparking off panic among residents in the locality. The leopard mauled a dog to death before leaving the scene. The watchman of the college noticed the carcass and informed the Forest Department. Fortunately, the college remained closed for the festive season and there was no one around, police said.

### Intense cold wave across Kashmir

**Srinagar:** The cold wave conditions intensified across Kashmir as Gulmarg skiing resort witnessed season's record low with mercury plunging more than 10 degrees below the freezing point, officials said. Kashmir valley is currently under the grip of the 40-day harshest winter period known as 'Chilla-i-Kalan' which began Tuesday.

### Rains lash parts of Ch'garh

**Raipur:** As unseasonal rains lashed several parts of Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel Wednesday directed officials to carry out an immediate assessment of damages to crops and houses in the state. Incessant showers hit Raipur, Durg, Korba and Rajnandgaon districts Tuesday evening, causing a drop in the day-time temperature by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius, an official said.

### 2 held for gang-rape

**New Delhi:** Police have arrested two persons for allegedly raping a woman in West Delhi's Hari Nagar area, officials said Wednesday. Around 3 am Monday, the woman asked an unknown person to drop her at a relative's house. The man, who was accompanied by another person in the car, picked her from Sagarpur. They allegedly raped her after stopping the car at a secluded place in Nihal Vihar area. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Prashant Gautam said.



The AAP has imposed a night curfew in Delhi to show that the situation is serious and these elections should not be held

CHARANJIT SINGH CHANNI | PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER

## SWACHH BHARAT MISSION

Under Phase-2 of the nationwide Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), 25,000 villages have declared themselves Open Defecation Free (ODF). In a tweet, the SBM team said that villages across India are working actively to ensure safe sanitation, solid and liquid waste management arrangements and visual cleanliness for achieving ODF plus status



# IMPORT BAN ON 351 DEFENCE ITEMS FROM DEC 2022

It is the third list released by the Ministry in the last 16 months and comes as part of the government's overall aim to make India a manufacturing hub of military platforms and equipment



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** The defence ministry Wednesday announced a fresh list of 351 sub-systems and components that will not be allowed to be imported under a staggered timeline beginning December next year.

It is the third list released by the ministry in the last 16 months and it comes as part of the government's overall aim to make India a hub of manufacturing of military platforms and equipment.

The ministry said the new initiative will save foreign exchange equivalent to around Rs 3,000 crore annually. It also released a list of 2,500 items that it said have already been 'indigenised'.

"A positive indigenisation list of sub-systems/assemblies/sub-assemblies/components has been notified by the department of defence production, Ministry of Defence, as part of the efforts to achieve self-reliance in defence manufacturing and minimise imports by defence public sector undertakings," the ministry said in a statement. It said "351 imported items" will be "indigenised" in the next three years. The notification on the new list was issued Monday. The ministry said the items mentioned in the list will only be procured from Indian industries as per the timelines indicated.

According to the notification, import restrictions on the first set of 172 items will come into force by December next year while the same provisions will be applicable on another batch of 89 components by December 2023.

Import restrictions on another set of 90 items will come into effect by December 2024. The items included laser warning sensor, high-pressure globe valve, drainage intrusion detection systems, various types of cables, sockets and voltage control oscillator. In August last year, the ministry announced that India will stop the import of 101 weapons and military platforms like transport aircraft, light combat helicopters, conventional submarines, cruise missiles and sonar systems by 2024. A second list, putting import restrictions on 108 military weapons and systems such as next-generation corvettes, airborne early warning systems, tank engines and radars, was issued in May.

In the last few years, the government has taken a series of measures to boost domestic defence manufacturing.

In May last year, the government announced increasing the FDI limit from 49 per cent to 74 per cent under the automatic route in the defence sector.

India is one of the largest importers of arms globally.

## Ludhiana blast suspect Multani always planned unrest in India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** Jaswinder Singh Multani who has alleged links with Sikh For Justice (SFJ) was detained in Germany by the concerned authorities on the request of Indian agencies.

The German authorities were given enough proof that Multani is wanted in India and is a part of larger conspiracy. Through diplomatic channel he was finally detained in Berlin. Now, there are possibilities that he will be brought to India to face trial.

The intelligence agencies have claimed that Multani wanted to create anarchy like situation all over India.

Earlier, many farmer leaders including Balbir Singh Rajewal was on his hit list. He wanted to get them killed so that it could lead to massacre across the country.

As per Punjab Police dossier, he is an expert in radicalising youths against India. The intelligence agencies have claimed that Pakistan's ISI is financially supporting him to recruit people in India. Multani is a suspect in Ludhiana District and Sessions Court blast case. He was reportedly in close touch with dismissed Punjab Police Constable Gagandeep Singh who planted the bomb and got killed as the bomb suddenly went off.

The Indian intelligence agencies gathered information and found an international angle in the blast. They came to know that Gagandeep used to contact Multani frequently. This input was shared with concerned authorities in Berlin to nab Multani.

# 'New normal' most used phrase in '21

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** While the phrase "now more than ever" was the one mostly searched and used in 2020, it was the turn of "new normal" amid the Covid-19 pandemic that was used the most in 2021, according to Google.

Google's 'Ngrams' tool (launched in 2009 by part of the Google Books team) has revealed how words and phrases have fallen and risen in popularity over time. Ngrams shows how books and other pieces of literature have used certain words or phrases over time, and we can chart their popularity throughout the years.

"One caveat: Ngrams currently tracks data from 1800 to 2019, prior

to 2020, Ngrams' data ranged from 1800 to 2012, but the team added a huge new dataset about two years ago," said Molly McHugh-Johnson, Contributor, The Keyword (Google Blog). This isn't the first time "new normal" appeared in the lexicon, though.

"It began to see small bursts of usage in literature and other writing in the mid-19th century - though if you use Ngrams to see some of the examples of how it showed up, anew normal' was often in reference to types of academic institutions," McHugh-Johnson said in a blog post late Tuesday.

And then, "new normal" just sort of faded away, only to return big amid the pandemic. "Then of course, I thought of 'vaccine', which



actually began its Ngrams debut on a high, falling sharply between 1800 and 1813 and only to rise again in the early to mid 1900s, when many scholarly articles were published about things like typhoid, cholera and pertussis vaccinations," McHugh-Johnson explained. Lastly, she took a look at "hy-

brid", as hybrid workplaces are becoming the norm in the pandemic and Google has also adopted this.

According to Ngrams, it's been in use since at least the year 1800, which is how far the tool's data goes back, and has gently, steadily risen since.

What "hybrid" means hasn't really changed, but it's the situations we're applying it to that have - there's a much wider scope of daily life that falls under this category. "Hybrid" didn't change, but how we live has. 2020 felt in many ways like a pause in life, and this year we began finding new, creative ways to adapt, a little of our old methods, mixed with the new," said McHugh-Johnson.

# Rlys strove hard in 2021 to be back on track

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** The story of Indian Railways in 2021 was one of recovery and putting its house in order after a forced hiatus from the tracks for the first time in its history due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Railways has been completely dependent on its freight revenues for sustenance over the last two years, with the passenger segment running in loss in 2020 and gaining momentum only slowly with the removal of restrictions during the first half of this year.

**FINANCIAL SITUATION**  
A recent report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has noted that the Indian Railways' operating ratio of 98.36 per cent in 2019-2020 does not reflect its true financial performance and if the actual expenditure on pension payments is taken into account,



the ratio will be 114.35 per cent.

Last year, the Railways was able to lower its expenditure and make up for the shortfall in traffic through revenue generated by freight operations. A fall in pension liabilities also helped with the Railways' massive pension bill of more than Rs 51,000 crore in the current financial year has been converted into a loan by the finance ministry.

## RAILWAYS' BIG TICKET PROJECTS

The year was also marked by struggle to address issues causing delays and resulting in missed deadlines for big ticket projects. The Rs 81,000 crore Dedicated Freight Corridor, the Railways' single-largest developmental project currently underway, was scheduled to be completed by December 2021.

The new deadline is now June 2022, which officials said could be further delayed.

## PASSENGER PAINS

When will the concessions for senior citizens be restored? Will waiting list end? Will we get bedrolls?

These are some of the queries that passengers have for the Railways. Between March 22, 2020 and September 2021, around 4 crore senior citizens have undertaken journeys on trains without concessions.

## RECRUITMENT BLUES

Job seekers have now taken to social media sites like Twitter to protest the delay in the recruitment process by the Railway Recruitment Board.

"One crore plus students had applied for Railway exam in 2019. It's been 3 years, the exam hasn't

## NAGALAND KILLINGS

### SIT questions Army personnel, locals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** The special investigation team probing killing of locals in Nagaland grilled 14 Indian Army personnel and a few locals, sources said Wednesday.

The SIT, comprising of local police and Army officers also held meeting with Konyak Union and Konyak Students Union along with relatives of the deceased and village representatives.

The team reached Oting village of Nagaland where the incident took place for forensic details.

Last week, the Indian Army said its inquiry into the December 4 incident of civilian killings in Nagaland is progressing expeditiously and all efforts are being made to conclude it at the earliest.



"We have taken out notices for people to come forward and assist us in the inquiry by providing any information including videos, photos or any other material from original sources and will be grateful for the same. This can be conveyed on WhatsApp Messenger at +916026930283 or Army Exchange Helpline +913742388456", the Army had said in a statement.

The Indian Army is also said that they are fully cooperating with the Special Investigation Team (SIT) inquiry ordered by State Govt and required details are being shared in timely manner.

## WHAT NEXT

The gamechanger for the Railways will be the commissioning of the Dedicated Freight Corridor. The DFC, with its advantages of speed and higher carrying capacity, can also help reduce freight charges by as much as 50 per cent. Officials say that the lower haulage charges will be passed on to customers, and that the plan is to generate Rs 15,000 crore in revenue every year. It will also connect the hinterland with industrial hubs and make railways the go to cost-effective mode of transport for goods across the country.

happened. I demand government not to play their future. Railway should declare Group D exam date immediately," tweeted an aspirant.



# national

## of the day quote

How the Congress played with the country is not hidden. When in government, they encouraged and nurtured terrorists and fake cases were foisted against Hindu organisations. And now when it is out of government, it opposes all works which are in people's interest

YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

If situation demands BJP is ready to hold virtual rallies as it has done in previous elections

GAJENDRA SHEKHAWAT | UNION MINISTER

We have made a manifesto in which we have said what we want to do for you in the field of health, education and employment. We will give jobs to 20 lakhs of which eight lakh to women, will work for your self-respect, security and for making you strong in a proper manner

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY

### SHORT TAKES

#### Ukrainian hangs self

Mathura: A 36-year-old Ukraine national allegedly committed suicide here in a temple where he was staying by hanging from a wooden hook in his room, police said Wednesday. The incident happened in Govind Kund area Tuesday night, SP Rural Shrish Chandra said. A suicide note with a request to perform his last rites in Brijbhumi was also found on him, he said.

#### Three killed in lightning strike

Chhindwara (MP): Three members of a family died after being struck by lightning amid rains in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district, an official said Wednesday. The incident took place at Kukda Chiman village Tuesday evening when the victims were working in a farm and suddenly heavy rains lashed the area, Mohkhd tehsildar Meena Dashaia said.

#### PM's planned visit to UAE postponed

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the first half of next month has been postponed, people familiar with the development said Wednesday. The prime minister was scheduled to visit the strategically important Gulf nation around January 6, they said. The people cited above said the visit has been postponed in view of the rising cases of Omicron Covid-19 variant and that it could take place in February.

#### NPP leader Haokip joins BJP

New Delhi: Letpao Haokip, a leader of BJP's ally NPP in Manipur and cabinet minister in the state government, joined the saffron party Wednesday in the presence of Union minister Bhupender Yadav. Haokip is the Youth Affairs and Sports minister in the BJP-led government in Manipur from the National People's Party (NPP) quota.

#### Nitish loses cool

Patna: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar lost his cool during a Samaj Sudhar Abhiyan (social reforms campaign) rally in Muzaffarpur Wednesday. When the Chief Minister was addressing the rally on the campus of Muzaffarpur Institute of Technology, some people created a ruckus, which attracted the attention of the mediapersons present at the venue.



Covid-19 cases are on the rise; there are a few omicron infections, too. So, a review of the situation is required. If the numbers keep increasing, we may consider closing down schools and colleges

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

### FRESH CURBS IN GOA

In the wake of a surge in Covid-19 cases in Goa, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant Wednesday said parties and events in the coastal state will only be allowed if guests either have 100 per cent vaccination or Covid negative certificates



## 'India may see 'short-lived' Covid 3rd wave soon'



Passengers lined up outside the Akshardham Metro Station, in New Delhi

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 29: A Covid-19 tracker, developed by UK's University of Cambridge, has predicted that India may soon see an intense but short-lived virus wave "within days", even as the highly transmissible Omicron variant of Covid is spreading like wildfire in the country with over 780 cases reported Wednesday.

The tracker had aptly predicted the devastating second wave in May and had also forecast in August that India would see a slow burn in its Covid infections.

"It is likely that India will see a period of explosive growth in daily cases and that the intense growth

phase will be relatively short," Paul Kattuman, Professor at the Judge Business School at the varsity was quoted as saying to Bloomberg.

"New infections will begin to rise in a few days, possibly within this week," he said. However, he added that it was hard to predict how high the daily cases could go.

The tracker showed a sharp rise in infection rates in six states as a "significant concern" in a December 24 note, and this expanded to 11 Indian states by December 26, the report said.

The rapid spread of Omicron infection has contributed to the total tally of Covid infection in India. The country's overall Covid

cases tally crossed the 9,000-mark Wednesday and currently stands at 9,195 cases. However, the overall tally has been around 7,000 in the last week.

According to the Union Health Ministry update, the Omicron infection has so far spread into 21 states and Union Territories.

Out of the 238 Omicron cases detected in Delhi, 57 of them have been discharged. Gujarat, Kerala, Telangana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, West Bengal have reported Omicron cases in two-digit figures, the data showed.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in its weekly epidemiological update has warned that the risk posed by the Omicron

### 'Yellow alert' to continue in Delhi for now

New Delhi: The DDMA Wednesday decided that Covid-related restrictions imposed in Delhi under the 'yellow alert' will continue for the time being and authorities will monitor the situation for a while before deciding on fresh curbs, according to officials. The decision was taken at a meeting chaired by Lt Governor Anil Bajaj, who is also the chairperson of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority. It was attended by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and several experts. The DDMA had Tuesday declared a 'yellow alert' under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the city amid a spike in coronavirus cases following the emergence of the virus' Omicron variant.

variant is still "very high". Omicron is behind rapid virus spikes in several countries, including those where it has already overtaken the previous dominant Delta variant, said the global health body in its weekly bulletin.

Mumbai logged 2,510 cases of Covid today - an 82% jump over Tuesday's cases. 20 related deaths were recorded in Maharashtra in 24 hours. Mumbai is prepping for a massive spike and Minister Aaditya Thackeray met civic officials to chart a course.

### HYDERPORA ENCOUNTER

## Amir's mother threatens suicide

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ramban/Jammu, Dec 29: The parents of Amir Magray, one of the four persons killed in the Hyderpora encounter, Wednesday rejected the police probe which suggested their son was a militant, with his mother threatening to kill herself and the family set to move the high court seeking the return of his body. The special investigation team (SIT) of the Jammu and Kashmir Police probing the encounter said Tuesday that while one civilian was killed by a foreign terrorist, two others including a local "militant" (Magray) died in the crossfire after being used as a "human shield" by the hiding terrorist.

A Pakistani terrorist and three other persons were killed in Hyderpora November 15 and the police had claimed that all the slain men had links to militancy. The families of the three, alleging foul play, had said they were innocent, prompting the police to order the inquiry.

Separately, a magisterial probe was also ordered by Lt Governor Manoj Sinha in the encounter which was one of the rare operations carried out jointly by the

A Pakistani terrorist and three other persons were killed in Hyderpora November 15 and the police had claimed that all the slain men had links to militancy

army and the Jammu and Kashmir Police within the city limits.

In a 3.42-minute video, Amir's mother Mubeena termed the SIT version "completely baseless" and said she will consume poison to end her life if the body of her son was not returned to the family for burial within five days.

"They have killed my innocent son who was earning a living by working as a labourer and they have leveled false allegations against him. They are doing it for their promotion. I have decided to end my life by taking poison if they fail to return his body within five days and the government and those who leveled the allegations against my son will be responsible for my death," Mubeena said.

## Over 4K POs in 90 Maoist-hit dists soon

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 29: The Department of Posts under the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology is working expeditiously on a plan to open 4,903 new branches of post offices in 90 Left Wing Extremism affected districts in the country.

In a statement, the Department of Posts said that in the first phase, so far 1,789 branches have been opened and the remaining 3,114 new post office branches will also be started by the end of March, 2022. The government has already sanctioned posts of Gramin Dak Sevaks, Postmaster and Assistant Postmaster for these 3,114 new post offices to be opened in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh. The concerned circles have been directed to make these post offices operational by the end of March, 2022.

Listing the achievements during the year 2021, the postal department said that the Postman mobile app has already been launched for 1.43 lakh post offices including 98,454 in rural areas. A record number of 47.5 crore real time delivery status queries of speed post were recorded from January to October, 2021 through this app.

Along with this, the postal department also installed GPS system in about 1,263 working mail motor service vehicles across the country.

Exhorting people to connect through social media, the department said that India Post is one of the first departments of the gov-



ernment to start its own social media accounts. So far, the department has more than 308,400 followers on Facebook, 323,800 on Twitter, 9800 on Instagram and 204900 on Ku. Videos related to the Department of Posts and its various schemes are being uploaded continuously on YouTube as well.

The department is also working expeditiously to redress the grievances of the people through social media. The social media cell of the department now works for 16 hours instead of 8 and according to government data, in the year 2021 from January 1 to November 15, a total of 2,39,133 complaints were registered through social media, out of which 2,37,187 were redressed. The redressal was done within the stipulated time period and the complaint resolution percentage was 99.2.

Detailing other achievements of 2021, the Department of Posts said that it has signed multilateral agreements with 120 countries for faster customs clearance. A total of 1.67 crore new accounts were opened and transactions of around Rs 8.19 lakh crore took place in Core Banking Service of Post Offices.

### NIA conducts searches at 12 places

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 29: The NIA Wednesday conducted searches at 12 locations in Dhanbad, Saraikela Kharsaawa and Ranchi districts of Jharkhand, Patna, Chapra, Gaya districts of Bihar, Chandauli district of Uttar Pradesh and Bardhaman district of West Bengal.

A NIA official said that the case relates to stealing arms and ammunition from armouries of CAPFs and their supply to senior leaders of the CPI (Maoist) and other terrorist groups in Jharkhand.

Initially the case was lodged in a Jharkhand police station November 11 this year. Later December 19 the case was taken over by the NIA.

### SUPPLY OF ARMS TO CPI (MAOIST)



After taking over the case the anti terror agency Wednesday conducted searches at 12 locations to gather evidence against the accused persons.

"We have recovered unaccounted cash to the tune of Rs 1,46,000, digital devices including laptop, cell phones, computer and digital storage devices, incriminating documents, pilfered ammunition boxes and other incriminating material," said a NIA official. He said that further investigation in the case was on.

### OPEN INVITATION TO COVID



People violate social distance norms at Nishatganj weekly market in Lucknow

UNI PHOTO

## 3 ultras killed, cop injured in separate encounters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Dec 29: Three militants were killed and a policeman was injured in two separate encounters between security forces and ultras in Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday, police said.

The encounters broke out in Kulgam and Anantnag districts - both in south Kashmir. Acting on specific input about the presence of militants in Mirhama area of Kulgam, security forces launched a cordon and search operation there, a police official said.

He said when the forces were

conducting searches in the area, the hiding militants fired upon them. The forces retaliated and an encounter ensued in which three militants were killed, the official said.

The identity and group affiliation of the slain militants are being ascertained, he added. The second encounter took place in Nowgam Shahabad area of Dooru in neighbouring Anantnag, the official said.

In the initial firing, a policeman was injured and he was shifted to the hospital, he said. The exchange of fire is still going on and further details are awaited, he said.

## Sodhi given 'Z' category security after joining BJP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 29: Like in West Bengal, the Centre has accorded 'Z' category security cover to Punjab politician and former Congress leader Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi after he joined the Bharatiya Janata Party recently.



Sodhi, who joined the BJP December 21, will be getting this security cover both in Delhi and Punjab, to be provided by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), sources in the security set up said here Wednesday.

A four-time MLA who won the last Assembly elections from Guruhar Sarai, Sodhi is said to be close to former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh. He has already announced his resignation from the Congress on social media, where he posted his resignation letter addressed to interim Congress President Sonia Gandhi.

The Union government had provided central security cover to 79 BJP leaders in West Bengal including Trinamool turncoats and the new joiners during the West Bengal assembly elections in February-March this year.

The VIP security of many of them was withdrawn immediately after they returned to the TMC.

### COVID SCENE IN 2021

## From worse than better to hope of vaccines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: The Covid-19 pandemic took a deadlier and more devastating turn in 2021 soon after a glimmer of hope was provided by the launch of vaccines at the beginning of the year, etching nightmarish memories of people struggling to secure hospital beds, medicines, Oxygen and even arrange a proper funeral for their loved ones.

Just as the year was about to end and things seemed back to normal, the emergence of Omicron variant of coronavirus, nearly 800 cases of which have been detected in the country as Wednesday, threw the health ministry in a tizzy even as demands for booster doses of vaccine grew louder.

Two vaccines - Covishield man-

ufactured by Serum Institute of India and indigenously-developed Covaxin by Bharat Biotech - were rolled out January 16 with health-care workers getting inoculated in the first phase and then frontline workers. The next phase saw people over 60 years of age and those aged 45 and above with specified comorbid conditions getting the jobs.

As vaccination gradually picked up pace and its scope was expanded, the government battled controversies surrounding its supply and availability to states and union territories and modifying the vaccine purchase and distribution policies.

Amid all these, a second wave of Covid driven by the Delta variant engulfed the country in May-June bringing the health system to its knees and leaving people gasp-



ing for help.

The daily cases peaked May 6 with the country registering a staggering 4,14,188 infections and shortage of oxygen and hospital beds sparked global concerns and worries. The second wave along with it also brought in another deadly fungal infection - mucormycosis - caused mainly due to the lowered immunity

because of excessive use of steroids and possibly industrial oxygen.

The daily burden of cases started witnessing a downward trend June onwards as the government stepped up the vaccination campaign opening it up for the entire adult population and resolving issues with the supply chain from June 1.

According to health ministry data, India's total tally of Covid-19 cases as Wednesday was 3,48,08,886. After much deliberation and amid the Omicron threat, the government gave its nod for vaccination of those aged between 15-18 years.

On December 25, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that vaccination for children between 15-18 years will start from January 3, while "precaution dose" for health-care and frontline workers will

begin from January 10.

The Drugs Controller General of India had granted emergency use authorisation to Bharat Biotech's Covaxin and Zydus Cadilla's needle-free ZyCoV-D for vaccinating children and adolescents in the 12-18 years age group with certain conditions.

The government also gave its nod to two more Covid vaccines - Covovax and Corbevax - besides drug Molnupiravir for treatment of adult patients who have a high risk of progression of the disease.

During the second wave, amid questions about the government's handling of the crisis, the health ministry saw a change at its helm with Mansukh Mandaviya replacing Harsh Vardhan as the Union health minister July 8.



# international



**If separatist forces in Taiwan seeking independence provoke, exert force or even break through any red line, we will have to take drastic measures**  
MA XIAOGUANG | SPOKESMAN, TAIWAN AFFAIRS OFFICE, CHINA

## WW-II SUBMARINE WRECK DISCOVERED

Greek divers have discovered the wreckage of an Italian submarine 80 years after it was sunk by the Allied Forces in the Aegean Sea during World War II



### of the day quote

At the end of the day, of course there can be a good deal. Is that, at the moment, under the current dynamic, expected to happen? No, because a much harder stance is needed  
NAFTALI BENNETT | PM, ISRAEL

The National Health Service Covid vaccination programme continues to break records with almost 2,500,000 people jabbed Monday, the second-highest number for a Bank Holiday so far  
EMILY LAWSON | HEAD OF NHS VACCINATION PROG, UK

Nawaz Sharif will never return home voluntarily, rather the government will bring him back once the agreement with the UK government is finalised  
FAWAD CHAUDHRY | INFORMATION MIN, PAKISTAN

### SHORT TAKES

#### Ex-senator dies at 82

**Las Vegas:** Harry Reid, the former US Senate majority leader and Nevada's longest-serving member of Congress, has died. He was 82. Reid died Tuesday, "peacefully" and surrounded by friends at home in suburban Henderson, "following a courageous, four-year battle with pancreatic cancer," according to family members and a statement from Landra Reid, his wife of 62 years. "Harry was a devout family man and deeply loyal friend," she said. Funeral arrangements will be announced in coming days, she said.

#### BRICS bank to admit Egypt

**Beijing:** The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) Wednesday announced that it will add Egypt as its new member. Egypt is the fourth new member admitted into NDB, after Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Uruguay, further expanding the bank's global outreach. "We are delighted to welcome Egypt into NDB's family. We look forward to supporting its investment needs in infrastructure and sustainable development," said Marcos Troyjo, President of the NDB.

#### Sudan: 31 bodies found from mine

**Cairo:** Sudanese authorities said Wednesday rescue workers retrieved at least 31 bodies from a collapsed gold mine in West Kordofan province. The country's state-run mining company said workers and villagers were still searching the Darsaya mine for more bodies or possible survivors. The mine is located in the Fuja village, around 700 kilometers south of the capital of Khartoum. The defunct mine collapsed earlier this week, killing at least 38 people, the company said Tuesday. It posted images on Facebook showing villagers gathering at the site as at least two dredgers worked to find possible survivors and bodies.

#### New Year's music banned in Greece

**Athens:** Greece's health minister said Wednesday that music will be banned at all commercial venues for New Year's celebrations as part of new restrictions announced in response to a surge in COVID-19 infections fuelled by the omicron variant. The restrictions, originally planned to take effect Jan. 3, will start early Thursday after the daily number of infections rocketed to nearly 22,000 Tuesday.

## COVID cases soar worldwide

AGENCIES

**Sydney/Rome, Dec 29:** Daily COVID-19 infections have hit record highs in the United States, swathes of Europe and Australia as the new Omicron variant of the virus races out of control, keeping workers at home and overwhelming testing centres.

Although some studies have suggested the Omicron variant is less deadly than some of its predecessors, the huge numbers of people testing positive mean that hospitals in some countries might soon be overwhelmed, while businesses might struggle to carry on operating because of workers having to quarantine.

France, Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Malta all registered a record number of new cases Tuesday.

The average number of daily COVID-19 cases in the United States has also hit a record high over the past seven days. The previous peak was in January of this year.

New daily infections in Australia spiked to nearly 18,300, Wednesday eclipsing the previous pandemic high of around 11,300 hit a day earlier.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said his country needed a gear change to manage overburdened laboratories, with long walk-in and drive-in queues reported in a number of areas.

Testing bottlenecks have also built in European nations, in-



cluding Spain where demand for free COVID-19 testing kits provided by Madrid's regional government far outstripped supply Tuesday, with long queues forming

outside pharmacies. A number of governments were also increasingly worried by the huge numbers of people being forced into self-isolation because

### Global infections up 11% last week

**BERLIN:** The World Health Organization says the number of COVID-19 cases recorded worldwide increased by 11% last week compared with the previous week, with the biggest increase in the Americas. The gain followed a gradual increase since October. The UN health agency said in its weekly epidemiological report released late Tuesday that there were nearly 4.99 million newly reported cases around the world from Dec 20-26. The agency said that "the overall risk related to the new variant ... omicron remains very high." It cited "consistent evidence" that it has a growth advantage over the delta variant, which remains dominant in parts of the world. It noted that a decline in case incidence has been seen in South Africa, and that early data from that country, the UK and Denmark suggest a reduced risk of hospitalisation with omicron. But it said that more data is needed "to understand the clinical markers of severity including the use of oxygen, mechanical ventilation and death, and how severity may be impacted by vaccination and/or prior infection."

■ LATEST SURGE BEING DRIVEN BY OMICRON VARIANT

■ FRANCE, UK, US, ITALY, SPAIN ALL REPORT RECORD DAILY CASES

■ AUSTRALIAN PM SAYS COUNTRY NEEDS 'GEAR CHANGE'

■ STUDIES IN SA, UK, DENMARK SUGGEST OMICRON LESS SEVERE

they had been in contact with a coronavirus sufferer.

However, China showed no let up in its policy of zero tolerance to outbreaks, keeping 13 million people in the city of Xian under rigid lockdown for a seventh day as new COVID-19 infections persisted, with 151 cases reported Tuesday. No cases of Omicron have been announced in Xian so far.

Many countries are still grappling with the earlier Delta variant, including Poland, which reported 794 COVID-related deaths Wednesday - the highest number in the fourth wave of the pandemic.



## Indonesia allows boat with Rohingya refugees to land

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Jakarta, Dec 29:** Indonesian authorities decided Wednesday to allow a boat carrying 120 Rohingya Muslims to land after drifting for days off the country's northernmost province of Aceh.

The decision was made because of the severe conditions experienced by the passengers, who are overwhelmingly women and children, said Armed Wijaya, who heads a refugee task force at the Coordinating Ministry for Political, Law and Security.

"The Indonesian government has decided, in the name of humanity, to accommodate the Rohingya refugees currently adrift at sea near Bireuen district," Wijaya said in a statement.

Local authorities had earlier



said they would push the boat back to international waters despite calls from the United Nations refugee agency and human rights groups that it be allowed to land.

The vessel is reportedly leaking and has a damaged engine, and is floating in the open sea in harsh weather and may be at risk of capsizing, the UNHCR said Tuesday.

The boat was first sighted by local fishermen Sunday about 60 miles (96 kilometers) off the coast of Bireuen, said Badruddin Yunus,

the leader of the local tribal fishing community.

He said fishermen were unable to tow the broken-down wooden boat but provided food, water and clothes to the passengers, including 60 women, 51 children and nine men.

"Their condition looks weak but fine," said Yunus, adding that the Rohingya said they wanted to go to Malaysia and had been at sea for 28 days before their boat's engine broke down.

Local officials, supported by police and the navy, provided food, medicine, a new engine and a technician to help repair the boat, and earlier said they would push it back to international waters once it is fixed, said Bireuen district chief Muzakkar Gani, who also cited concerns that some of the people might have COVID-19.

## Gucci advert ignites public fury in China

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Beijing, Dec 29:** Gucci's differentiated treatment of Chinese and Western audience has been slammed by Chinese netizens who say it's clearly a manifestation of guilty conscience, and that the brand knew it has presented a Western-style Asian appearance that would irritate the Chinese audience, Global Times reported.

With the waves stirred by the slanted-eyed model posters of Three Squirrels and Mercedes-Benz still unsettled among the Chinese public, another wave hit the country Wednesday as an advertisement of Italian luxury fashion brand Gucci was found featuring an Asian-



looking model with scary makeup, an exaggerated nose ring and a leather whip in her hand, the report said.

In the advertisement for Gucci's new series of bamboo top handle bags posted online, an Asian-looking female model is seen holding a bag with makeup featuring thin, light eyebrows, small eyes, and high cheek bones that amplify the Asian face typically depicted in the Western narrative, the report said.

## Severe Brazil flooding spreads

IN BAHIA STATE, MORE THAN 470,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN AFFECTED

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Brasilia, Dec 29:** A total of 116 cities in the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia were in a state of emergency because of flooding Tuesday due to heavy rains that have been pounding the region since the end of November.

Cities in at least five other states in Brazil's north and southeast have also been flooded in recent days.

In Bahia, flooding has affected more than 4,70,000 people. In at least 50 cities, water surged into homes and businesses, and people were forced to abandon their belongings. Official data from the



state government say 34,163 people have been made homeless and almost 43,000 are displaced. There have been a total of 21 deaths and 358 people injured since the beginning of the month. This is the heaviest period of

rainfall for Bahia in the last 32 years, according to the website of the National Centre for Monitoring and Alerts of Natural Disasters, a government agency in southern Bahia, it rained more than five times the normal amount for this

## Plane's windscreen cracked by block of ice at 35K feet

The incident has been described as a 'one-in-a-million' chance and left some 200 passengers stranded over Christmas instead of being able to make it back to London

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Dec 29:** A British Airways aircraft carrying around 200 holiday travellers from London survived a mid-air scare after a

lump of ice from a jet 1,000 feet above it smashed into the plane at 35,000 feet that left its windscreen cracked, according to media reports.

The Boeing 777 aircraft cruising at 35,000 feet was making the journey from London Gatwick to San Jose in Costa Rica Christmas Day when the freak accident took place.

The block of ice fell from another plane that was flying 1,000 feet above the jet while it was cruising at 35,000 feet. It completely cracked up the two-inch-thick windscreen, which is built to withstand extreme force and is similar to bul-



letproof glass. The aircraft landed safely at San Jose.

Despite the mid-air accident, all the passengers were safe but

were stranded at an airport for several hours after their plane made an emergency landing.

The flight was rescheduled 50 hours after the passengers' orig-

inal scheduled time.

"We were told when it was our turn to check-in by the San Jose desk staff that the plane had a broken windshield and it would be too dangerous to fly it back. At this point we were devastated - realising we would miss Christmas with both of our families," Mitchell said.

Following the incident, British Airways issued an apology to the passengers who had their Christmas Day ruined.

"We will never fly an aircraft unless we feel it is completely safe to do so, and on this occasion, our engineers were unable to clear it to

time of the year.

In an interview with local radio stations Tuesday morning, Bahia Gov. Rui Costa compared the situation to a "bombardment".

He also said that coronavirus vaccines were lost in the floods of some cities. Some municipal health offices and medicine depots were completely under water, he said.

On Tuesday, the population of at least four municipalities in Bahia received warnings to leave their homes because of the increased flow of the Pardo River due to the opening of the Machado Mineiro dam's sluice gates in neighbouring Minas Gerais state, according to the state government's advisory office.

fly. Since then, our teams have been working behind the scenes to do all they can to ensure an aircraft is ready at the earliest opportunity to bring customers to London," the official said.

"We appreciate the patience and the understanding of our customers and our engineers and crew colleagues who have also done all they can to assist," the report quoted the official as saying.

British Airways has offered a full refund to all the affected passengers, and will also pay the 520 pounds per person stipulated for long delays under air passengers' rights rules, the report said.



# business

## of the day quote

Major announcements of economic reforms are also leading many small companies to witness stellar growth

PARTH NYATI | FOUNDER, TRADINGO

Easing up of local restrictions while ensuring an aggressive vaccination drive, coupled with the implementation of strict protocols to ensure safety and hygiene by hotels provided a major relief and boost to confidence amongst the travelling community

MP BEZBARUAH | SECRETARY GENERAL, HOTEL ASSOCIATION OF INDIA

We are thrilled to have the entire Airlearn team join the Teachmint family. Teachstack is a unique enterprise offering from our product suite, which has already seen adoption from global edtech start-ups

MIHIR GUPTA | CEO AND CO-FOUNDER, TEACHMINT

## SHORT TAKES

### 15 notices by CCPA to cooker sellers

**New Delhi:** Consumer protection regulator CCPA has issued 15 notices to e-commerce entities as well as sellers for offering pressure cookers that are non-compliant with BIS norms, the government said Wednesday. These notices have been issued by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) as part of its suo-moto action. "15 Notices have already been issued with respect to such violations," an official statement said. The cases have also been forwarded to Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) for taking necessary action under the BIS Act, 2016, it said.

### Mankind, BDR join hands for Covid pill

**New Delhi:** Mankind Pharma Wednesday said it has joined hands with BDR Pharmaceuticals to launch oral anti COVID-19 pill Molulife (Molnupiravir) in the country. The tie-up is a licensing arrangement where production is by BDR Pharma and marketing, selling, promotion, distribution is by Mankind Pharma, the company said in a statement. On Tuesday, the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) granted permission for restricted use of antiviral medication Molnupiravir under emergency situation for treatment of Covid-19 in adult patients who have a high risk of progression of the disease.

### Realme's 5G phone sales jump 9,519%

**New Delhi:** Smartphone brand realme became the fastest-growing 5G Android smartphone brand globally in the third quarter (Q3) this year, registering a 831 per cent (on-year) growth, a new report showed Wednesday. In India, realme's 5G smartphone sales grew a whopping 9,519 per cent, the most among all regions. The growth helped realme retain the sixth spot in the global 5G Android smartphone sales. Much of realme's growth came from China, India and Europe.

### E-commerce hiring surge 28% in 2021

**New Delhi:** Employment opportunities in the e-commerce and allied industries witnessed a 28 per cent surge in 2021, and recruitment activities in this segment will gain further momentum driven by economic recovery and aggressive vaccination drive, according to TeamLease Services. The e-commerce sector grew by 8 per cent in 2020 and 30 per cent in 2021. It is now poised to reach \$111 billion by 2024 and \$200 billion by 2026.



Going forward, for the Bajaj portfolio, except for implementing one state-of-the-art ICE platform that is currently under development, all our R&D drive train resources are now laser focused on creating EV solutions for the future

RAJIV BAJAJ | MD, BAJAJ AUTO

## PAID ALL DUES TO AAI: AIRASIA

AirAsia India said it has paid all its dues to the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and the airline was making all payments as per credit terms on due dates from September 2021. "In this period, from September to today, we have paid out ₹59 crore within the due dates as per the policy of the Airports Authority, said AirAsia spokesperson



## GlobalBees becomes latest unicorn of India

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** GlobalBees, a leading roll-up e-commerce company, has secured \$111.5 million in Series B funding led by Premji Invest. The round also saw participation from existing investors, including SoftBank and FirstCry, while Steadview Capital became the latest investor to back the company.

With this latest investment, GlobalBees' valuation stands at \$1.1 billion. The company plans to use the proceeds to further

strengthen its product portfolio and expedite its efforts towards product innovation, customer experience, hiring talent and scaling companies.

With this investment, we are well set up to become India's largest brand platform

NITIN AGARWAL | CEO, GLOBALBEES

The company is now 100 plus people strong. The company is in advanced talks with 20 plus companies to strengthen its portfolio of digital first brands.

GlobalBees was founded in May



2021 and has a diverse portfolio of companies across categories such as Homecare, Beauty and Personal Care, Nutrition & Wellness, Fashion Jewellery, and Eyewear in just 7 months. GlobalBees plans to invest in 100 plus brands across ver-

ticals over the next three years, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), sports, home organisation, and lifestyle.

The company has offices in Delhi and Bengaluru and has developed assets and expertise in marketing, technology, supply-chain & logistics and product innovation and more. In July 2021, the company raised \$150 million in a mix of equity and debt in a Series A, led by FirstCry and other investors.

GlobalBees is an aggregator of digital brands that transforms marketplace sellers into international brands.

## EBB AND FLOW

# FPIs' net investments cross ₹51K cr in 2021

With the global financial system still flush with liquidity, emerging market assets, especially equities, might well remain the preferred investment avenue for many more months to come, experts opined

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** Waves of foreign portfolio investments worth over ₹51,000 crore splashed into the Indian market in 2021 as overseas investors turned net buyers of domestic securities for the third straight year while excess global liquidity and other factors steered the ebb and flow of their investing ways.

Mirroring the roller-coaster ride for foreign portfolio investment flows in the Indian market this year, FPIs emerged as net buyers for six months, including three months continuously starting from January. In June, August and September also, these investors made net investments and the remaining six months witnessed net FPI outflows.

Excess liquidity in the global financial system, resurgence of concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, rising global inflation as well as higher valuation of Indian equity markets are among the mix of factors that influenced FPIs.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research at Morningstar India, said FPI flows were driven by excess liquidity in the global financial system on the back of stimulus measures an-



FPIs TURNED NET BUYERS BUT THEIR INVESTMENT IS MUCH LESS COMPARED TO NET INFLOWS OF ₹1.03 LAKH CRORE IN 2020. AND LAST YEAR'S QUANTUM WAS LOWER THAN ₹1.35 LAKH CRORE INVESTMENTS MADE IN 2019

DATA WITH THE DEPOSITORIES SHOWED THAT OVERSEAS INVESTORS PUMPED IN ₹26,001 CRORE INTO EQUITIES, ₹23,222 CRORE INTO DEBT SEGMENT AND ₹1,848 CRORE IN HYBRID INSTRUMENTS

FPI FLOWS ACROSS MARKETS WERE MIXED, WITH SK, PHILIPPINES, THAILAND AND INDONESIA, WITNESSING INFLOWS TO THE TUNE OF \$2,443MLN, \$1,711MLN, \$190MLN, AND \$55MLN, RESPECTIVELY, WHILE TAIWAN WITNESSED OUTFLOW OF \$15MLN

nounced by central banks and resurgence of the pandemic.

Foreign fund flows into the domestic market was quite robust in the first three months of this year on the back of multiple factors, including the government's pro-growth Budget, decline in coronavirus cases, launch of Covid vaccine and improvement in economic numbers.

Srivastava noted that the gush of liquidity in the global finan-

cial markets after the US announced a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package and a rejig in some of the global indexes resulted in fund flows into Indian equities.

However, the sharp surge in Covid cases in the subsequent months spooked foreign investors. Reversing the bearish trend, FPI interest in Indian equities revived and they came back to invest in June after two previous months of net outflows.

## Major relief to taxpayers by I-T dept

OVER FIVE CRORE INCOME TAX RETURNS (ITRs) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED MARCH 2021 HAVE BEEN FILED SO FAR, THE I-T DEPARTMENT SAID

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** Taxpayers who have not e-verified their ITRs for 2019-20 fiscal can complete the verification process by February 28, 2022, as the Income Tax department has given a one-time relaxation to assessees.

As per law, an income tax return (ITR), filed electronically without a digital signature, has to be verified electronically through Aadhaar OTP, or net-banking, or code sent through demat account, pre-validated bank account and ATM within

120 days of filing the return. Alternatively, taxpayers can send a physical copy of the ITR filed to the Centralised Processing Centre (CPC) office in Bangalore.

If the verification process, which is done through ITR-V form, is not complete, then it is considered that the return has not been filed.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) in a circular dated December 28, said a large number of electronically filed ITRs for the Assessment Year 2020-21, still remain pending with the Income Tax department for want of receipt of

a valid ITR-V Form at CPC, Bangalore or pending e-Verification from the taxpayers concerned.

"In respect of all ITRs for Assessment Year 2020-21 (fiscal 2019-20) which were uploaded electronically by the taxpayers within the time allowed... And which have remained incomplete due to non-submission of ITR-V Form... The Board... Hereby permits verification of such returns either by sending a duly signed physical copy of ITR-V to CPC, Bangalore through speed post or through EVCOTP

modes. Such verification process must be completed by February 28, 2022," the CBDT said.

This relaxation shall not apply in those cases, where during the intervening period, I-T department has already taken recourse to any other measure for ensuring filing of tax return by the taxpayer concerned after declaring that the return has not been filed, it added.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said "non-compliant taxpayers would get ample time to come clean and complete the verification process, enabling the tax department to process the returns."

## Deja vu for retail cos; uncertainties may roil recovery

WITH OMNICHANNEL APPROACH GAINING CURRENCY, TECHNOLOGY WILL REMAIN A KEY ENABLER FOR THE RETAIL INDUSTRY AND IN 2022, THE FOCUS IS LIKELY TO BE ON BUILDING AN AGILE AND SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN THAT PROVIDES THE CONVENIENCE OF 'PHYGITAL' SHOPPING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** Just after recovering from the devastating pandemic blows this year, the Indian retail industry is once again staring at uncertain times with localised restrictions back in many places to curb coronavirus infections even as the industry players are turning 'phygital' to cater to customers.

Concepts like video shopping may become more mainstream and companies will continue to adopt advanced analytics to improve sales and gain granular actionable insights on buyer behaviour.

Metro Cash & Carry India MD

& CEO Arvind Mediratta said COVID has changed consumer behaviour and buying patterns drastically.

He also pointed out that health and safety concerns predominantly led to consumer decisions that resulted in people looking for essential products, especially the ones with health benefits.

"Customers now decide 'when to shop', 'where to shop' and 'how to shop' - be it online, offline or a mix of both. They are looking at a seamless omnichannel experience. Hence, phygital has emerged as an intrinsic part of customers' shopping experience, and this integration between offline and online retail is likely to grow,"



RAI data showed that retail sales in Nov 2021 was up 9% growth over the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 and 16% growth compared to 2020

Retail companies like Ikea have expanded their retail presence both offline and online

Mediratta told PTI.

According to him, retailers have to imbibe an integration strategy to enhance customer value proposition and experience.

Deloitte India Partner Rajat Wahi said COVID has defined a new normal for retailers and has altered the business dynamics forever for them.

However, the retail industry, which is now leveraging technology to engage with and reach their end customers, are also grappling with certain implications.

With the emergence of the Omicron variant and localised restrictions put in place by various states, there are rising concerns that the retail industry's recovery might

be hit in the near term, according to analysts. ICRA AVP & Sector Head Sakshi Suneja said the spread of the Omicron variant poses a key downside risk to the recovery path. During the year, the ₹24,500 crore-deal between the Future Group and Reliance Industries' retail arm could not be completed.

Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd (RRVL), the retail arm of Reliance Industries, had - for the second time - extended the timeline for completing its ₹24,713 crore deal with Future Group to March 31, 2022 as it still awaits regulatory and judicial clearances. Future Group is also engaged in a bitter legal with Amazon, which is opposing the deal.

## FOOD POISONING ROW

# Apple puts Foxconn's facility on probation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** Apple has put Sriperumbudur factory of iPhone assembler Foxconn on 'probation' following worker protests and an assessment that revealed substandard living conditions, saying it will ensure strict standards are met before the unit reopens.

The factory located on the outskirts of Chennai was shut down after workers protested against the poor condition of dormitories and dining rooms. It will resume operations once 'necessary improvements' are made. Foxconn's Sriperumbudur factory hit headlines recently over mass-food poisoning at its offsite dormitory facility.

Foxconn, which assembles iPhone among other gadgets at the factory, apologised for the lapses and said it will revamp local management team and systems to ensure high standards needed are achieved and maintained.

An Apple spokesperson said: "We hold our suppliers accountable to the highest standards in the industry and regularly conduct assessments to ensure compliance."

Following recent concerns about food safety and accommodation conditions at Foxconn Sriperumbudur, Apple dispatched independent auditors to undertake additional detailed assessments.

"We found that some of the remote dormitory accommodations and dining rooms being used for employees do not meet our requirements and we are working with the supplier to ensure a compre-



hensive set of corrective actions are rapidly implemented," the Apple spokesperson said.

"Foxconn's Sriperumbudur facility has been placed on probation and we will ensure our strict standards are met before the facility reopens. We will continue to monitor conditions closely," the spokesperson added.

Apple supplier Foxconn, in a statement, said it is restructuring local management team and management systems to make sure it can achieve and maintain the high standards, that are required.

Foxconn Technology Group further informed that all employees will continue to be paid while necessary improvements are undertaken before restarting operations. The company said that some offsite dormitory facilities did not meet the required standards.

While the plant was widely expected to open around December 30, Apple's latest move to put Foxconn facility on probation could mean some delay in resumption of operations at the plant until all of the standards are met by Foxconn for its employees, say market watchers.

## RBI sees NPAs rising to 8.1-9.5% by Sept

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 29:** Gross bad loans of banks may rise from 6.9 per cent in September 2021 to 8.1-9.5 per cent by September 2022 if the Omicron variant strikes the economy hard, as per the financial stability report of the Reserve Bank released Wednesday.

The report also said that the rising stress level in the retail loan portfolio of banks - the mainstay of bank credit for many years now - was led by home loans, which grew in double-digits so far this fiscal.

"While asset quality improved, with gross non-performing assets (GNPA) and net NPA (NNPA) ratios declining to 6.9 and 2.3 per cent, respectively, in September 2021, the slippage ratio inched up during the same period as private sector banks showed a higher rate of deterioration in asset quality," as per the report.

But, based on the stress tests, the report warns that the GNPA ratio may rise to 8.1 per cent by September 2022 under the baseline scenario and further to 9.5 per cent under severe stress, if the economy is hit by an Omicron wave.

"Within the bank groups, public sector banks' GNPA stood at 8.8



per cent in September 2021 and may deteriorate to 10.5 per cent by September 2022 under the baseline scenario, while for private-sector lenders, the same may rise from 4.6 per cent to 5.2 per cent, and for foreign banks, it may increase from 3.2 per cent to 3.9 per cent over the same period," the report said.

Similarly the overall provisioning coverage ratio moved up from 67.6 per cent in March 2021 to 68.1 per cent in September 2021.

However, the same tests on non-banks indicate that a significant number of them would be hit if there are liquidity shocks and the network analysis points to increasing inter-bank exposure, raising contagion risks.



# INDIA IN DRIVER'S SEAT

SIX WICKETS, WEATHER IN BETWEEN VISITORS' WIN AT CENTURION AS SOUTH AFRICA REACH 94/4 WITH SKIPPER ELGAR STANDING TALL IN 305-RUN CHASE



**SPLENDID START:** Mohammed Shami celebrates with teammates after dismissing Aiden Markram in his first over

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Centurion, Dec 29:** Jasprit Bumrah (2/22) produced a couple of magic deliveries at the fag end of the fourth day as India remained on course for an emphatic victory against a rattled South Africa in the first Test here Wednesday. The home side would be praying for their captain Dean Elgar's dogged defiance and some rain on the final day Thursday. Chasing a never achieved victory target of 305 at the Supersport Park, South Africa finished the day at 94/4 with Elgar unbeaten on

52 after Indian batters caved in on a track with uneven bounce, getting all-out for 174 in just 50.3 overs. It was another failure for the seasoned trio of skipper Virat Kohli, Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane but the pacers again swung the match in India's favour. With 211 runs required and six wickets in hand, an intriguing battle could be on the cards on the final day but the Indian team would pray that forecast of a steady afternoon shower Thursday doesn't come true. Elgar and Rassie van der Dussen (11 off 65 balls) added 40 runs but more importantly batted for more

than 22 overs. Just when the game looked like meandering, Bumrah went wide off the crease and got the ball to cut back late just when Van der Dussen decided to shoulder arms thinking that it would go straight. And then at the stroke of stumps, a lethal delivery knocked the stuffing out of night watchman Keshav Maharaj (8) to leave the Proteas in complete tatters. Even Mohammed Siraj (1/25) bowled one that was angled in and moved away late taking Keegan Peterson's (17) outside edge. Aiden Markram was the first to be dis-



DEAN ELGAR

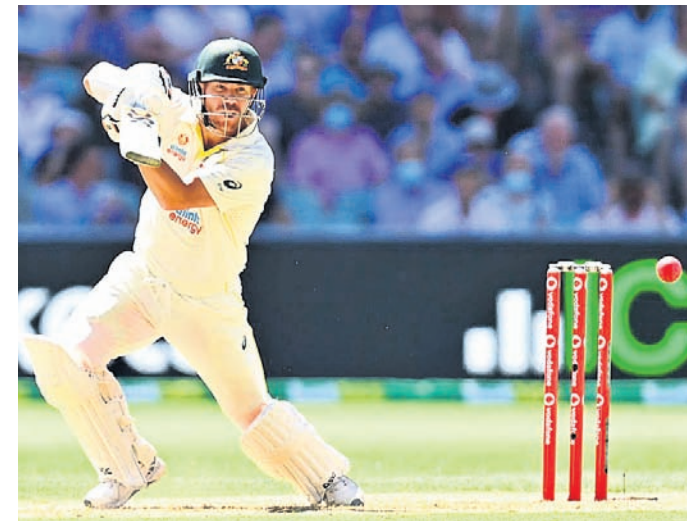
**BRIEF SCORES**

**India 327 & 174** (Rishabh Pant 34, KL Rahul 23, Ajinkya Rahane 20; Kagiso Rabada 4/42, Marco Jansen 4/55, Lungi Ngidi 2/31); **South Africa 197 & 94/4** (Dean Elgar 52 batting; Jasprit Bumrah 2/22). **Match to continue.**

**Ashwin 2nd among bowlers, all-rounders**

**DUBAI:** Seasoned India off-spinner R Ashwin Wednesday retained his second position in both the ICC Men's Test Player Rankings for bowlers and all-rounders. Ravindra Jadeja managed to hold to his third position in the Test all-rounders list. Rohit Sharma and skipper Virat Kohli also retained their positions in the Test batters' chart - at fifth and seventh respectively. The Test batting chart is being led by Australia's Marnus Labuschagne (915 points), followed by England skipper Joe Root (900). Among Test bowlers, Ashwin is the only Indian in the top 10, steady at the second spot with 883 rating points. Australia Test captain Pat Cummins continues to lead the pack. In the Test all-rounders list, Indian duo of Ashwin (360) and Jadeja (346) are below leader Jason Holder (382) of the West Indies. The Test Team ranking is being led by India with 124 rating points, while New Zealand and Australia occupy the second and third positions respectively.

## GOALS BEFORE QUITTING TEST Warner eyes 2023 Ashes, win in India



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Melbourne, Dec 29:** An Ashes series win in England in 2023 and defeating India in their own backyard are the two important milestones Australia opener David Warner is eyeing before calling it quits from Test cricket. After retaining the Ashes with an unassailable 3-0 lead inside 12 days, Warner, who turned 35 in October this year during the T20 World Cup, where he won the 'Player of the Tournament' award in Australia's title triumph, admitted that there are still a few goals he'd like to achieve before quitting the longest format of the game. "We still haven't beaten India in India. That would be nice to do. And obviously, England away, we had a drawn series (in 2019), but hopefully, if I managed to get that

chance and opportunity, I might think about going back," Warner was quoted as saying by 'ESPNcricinfo'. Warner has played 13 and eight Tests across three series in England and two in India, respectively. But he has a poor record in both the countries, averaging 26 and 24 respectively without a century. Warner would turn 37 by the next Ashes trip to England, but for the left-handed opener age is just a number. "I think James Anderson sets the benchmark for older guys these days," he said. "We look up to him as we're getting on in our days. But for me, it's about performing to the best of my ability and putting runs on the board. I feel in good touch. As I said, I was out of runs not out of form, so hopefully, I can put some more numbers on the board leading into this new year."

## Ferran Torres joins Barca from Man City

ASSOCIATED

**Barcelona, Dec 29:** Barcelona completed the signing of Ferran Torres from Manchester City Tuesday for a reported fee of 55 million euros (USD 62.25 million), around double what the English champions paid for the Spain forward 16 months ago. Torres signed a five-year deal and will have a buyout clause of one billion euros (USD 1.13 billion), according to Barcelona. The Spanish club needed to bolster their attacking options following the retirement of Sergio Aguero because of a heart problem. Aguero also joined Barcelona from City but played just five games. The 21-year-old Torres returns to Spain, where he played for Valencia before joining City in the offseason of 2020 with a reputation of being one of Europe's best young players. He scored 16 goals in 43 games in all competitions for City but was never a regular because of the many attacking options available to manager Pep Guardiola. Torres hasn't played since October because of a foot injury sustained on national-team duty. "Ferran should be proud of what



he has achieved here at Manchester City," said Txiki Begiristain, City's director of football. "Last season was his first time in a new country, but he adapted well. He always gave 100 percent, worked hard for the team and scored goals which helped us win trophies." Torres will be presented as a Barcelona player at the Camp Nou here next Monday.

## Salah misses penalty as Reds lose

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Leicester, Dec 29:** Losses for Liverpool are about as rare as penalty misses by Mohamed Salah. Both happened Tuesday and, even at the halfway stage of the season, it could cost Jürgen Klopp's team the Premier League title. Liverpool were beaten 0-1 by a patched-up Leicester team and could find itself nine points behind Manchester City heading into the new year, if the leaders win at Brentford Wednesday. It's a cushion that might prove to be insurmountable given City is on a nine-match winning streak in the league and is looking unstoppable, scoring 17 goals in its last three victories. Liverpool also will soon be without its two star forwards, Salah and Sadio Mane, who are heading to the African Cup of Nations next week. They were granted permission to delay joining up with their national teams ahead of the tournament so they could play for Liverpool over the festive period but they couldn't make the difference at King Power Stadium. Salah won a penalty but saw his weak effort saved by Kasper Schmeichel in the 16th minute, thereby failing to convert a spot kick for the first time in 16 attempts. His last penalty miss was against



**CONTRASTING FORTUNES:** Mohamed Salah's penalty is saved by Leicester City custodian Kasper Schmeichel (inset)

Huddersfield in October 2017. Liverpool ultimately slumped to only its second loss in all competitions this season when substitute Ademola Lookman found space between Joel Matip and Virgil van Dijk and shot inside the near post in the 59th minute. Liverpool are tied on 41 points with Chelsea, and both are six points behind City. All three teams have played 19 games, with City and Chelsea - at home to Brighton - in action Wednesday. Denied victory at 10-man

Southampton - a 1-1 draw - after having two second-half goals ruled out, Tottenham manager Antonio Conte remained philosophical. Still, Conte said he felt Harry Kane's 53rd-minute goal, which would have put Tottenham 2-1 ahead, should have stood instead of being scrubbed off because the England captain's arm put him in an offside position when he was played through. Then, 14 minutes later, Southampton goalkeeper Fraser Forster came out to catch the ball

under pressure from Tottenham substitute Matt Doherty and dropped it onto his own heel. The ball ricocheted back into the net but the referee blew for a foul by Doherty, even though contact appeared minimal. James Ward-Prowse's 25th-minute opener for Southampton was cancelled out by Kane, who converted a penalty in the 41st after Son Heung-min was tripped by Mohammed Salisu. That earned the Southampton defender a second yellow card.

## Humpy takes 6th position in World Rapid Chess meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Warsaw (Poland), Dec 29:** Defending champion Koneru Humpy failed to live up to her billing, finishing sixth with 7.5 points in the women's section of the FIDE World Rapid Chess Championship 2021 here. In the open event, young Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh scored nine points to finish a creditable ninth, just half a point behind champion Nodirbek Abdusattorov (9.5) of Uzbekistan. Humpy, who began the final day of the Rapid event with a draw against Alexandra Kosteniuk, also split points in her subsequent matches against Antoaneta Stefanova of Bulgaria and Gulnar Mamadova of Azerbaijan. R Vaishali was the next best Indian performer in the women's section, finishing in the 14th spot with seven points followed by Vantika Agrawal (6 points, 38th place), and Padmini Rout (5.5, 49th). In the open section, Mitrabha Guha logged 8.5 points to finish an impressive 15th. Vidit S Gujrathi (7.5 points) took the 45th spot while Harish Bharathakoti, who had a good start, settled for 60th place with 7 points. P Harikrishna, the highest ranked Indian player here, ended 99th with 6.5 points.

## 2021: When King Kohli became a lesser mortal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** Virat Kohli's watertight grip over Indian cricket loosened significantly in a mixed 2021 bag, when the team's winless run at ICC events continued but the 'Men in Blue' cherished a historic Test series triumph in Australia. When MS Dhoni left white-ball captaincy in 2017, Kohli became the undisputed king of Indian cricket with his rule unchallenged for the three years that followed. In the absence of a strong administration at BCCI, Kohli called the shots and not many seemed to mind it with India performing well across formats though the ICC title eluded them. However, his reign had to be challenged at some point with Sourav Ganguly and Jay Shah filling the power vacuum in the world's most powerful board towards the end of 2019. The Alpha males of Indian cricket did not come in each other's way for the following year and cracks in their relationship could only be seen after Kohli decided to step down from T20 captaincy at the end of the 2020 World Cup. He had no plans to leave the ODI captaincy but India's premature exit from the tournament led to the in-

evitable and the mighty Kohli did not see that BCCI bombshell coming. Following his sacking as 50-over skipper, dirty linen was washed in public with Kohli and Ganguly contradicting each other on the sequence of events that led to the former's removal. Kohli is used to the spotlight with cameras following his every move on the field but now that space will be shared by new white ball skipper Rohit Sharma. With 70 international hundreds under his belt, the charismatic cricketer has nothing left to prove but after a quiet two years with the bat by his high standards and his feud with the BCCI, Kohli will be more fired up than ever to show that he remains the best in the business. The early exit at T20 World Cup was a big disappointment but it marked the end of a successful era under Kohli and Ravi Shastri, especially in the longest format. Not many can question the greatness of the Kohli-led Test team but the defeat in the World Test Championship final against New Zealand was also a big letdown of the year. India had played remarkably well to reach the final and would have been worthy winners of that trophy but New Zealand once again



upstaged them on the big stage. However, nothing can take sheer off India's second consecutive series win in Australia with an injury-ravaged team struggling to even field a playing eleven in the series decider in Brisbane. The win at the Gabba will be talked about for years to come, not just because it was Australia's first loss at the venue in 33 years but the way India overcame an injury crisis and the 36 all-out debacle at Adelaide to script a comeback for the ages. Kohli went back home after the first Test for the birth of his child but the way Ajinkya Rahane led the side in his absence also played a major role in India's monumental achievement Down Under. Later in the year, Kohli and Co. were set for another overseas series win but the fifth and final Test in England had to be cancelled due to a COVID outbreak in the visitors. India lead the series 2-1 with the final Test to be played next year. India look in good shape to extend their dominance in the five-day game but Rohit and coach Rahul Dravid have work to do to turn the team's fortunes in white-ball cricket with T20 World Cup and ODI World Cup scheduled in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

**Djokovic pulls out of ATP Cup in Australia**

**SYDNEY:** Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the ATP Cup in Australia ahead of the first Grand Slam tournament of the season, organizers said Wednesday. No reason was given but the top-ranked Serb has declined to comment on his vaccination status in recent months and Australia's strict regulations require all players, officials and fans to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. ATP Cup organizers disclosed Djokovic's withdrawal in a roster update that included France replacing Austria in the 16-country event following the withdrawals of Dominic Thiem and Dennis Novak. Dusan Lajovic will replace Djokovic for Serbia. The ATP Cup begins Saturday in Sydney.

**I-League suspended after Covid +ve cases**

**KOLKATA:** I-League was Wednesday suspended for at least a week after COVID-19 breached its bio-bubble as eight players and three officials have tested positive for the dreaded virus. Five players and three team officials from Real Kashmir FC, one player each from Mohammedan Sporting, debutants Sreenidi Deccan FC and Aizawl FC returned positive in the tests conducted Tuesday. The first round matches were played on Sunday and Monday while the third round games are scheduled for January 4 and 5. Sreenidi, Mohammedan Sporting, NEROCA and Aizawl FC have matches scheduled for Thursday while RKFC have a game Friday.

**Marsh, Rizwan, Buttler, Hasaranga shortlisted**

**DUBAI:** Australian all-rounder Mitchell Marsh and Pakistan wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan were Wednesday named among four players shortlisted for the ICC Men's T20I Player of the Year award. The other two players are Sri Lankan all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga and England wicketkeeper-batter Jos Buttler. A part of the T20 World Cup winning Australian team, Marsh scored 627 runs in 27 matches at an average of 36.88 while also taking eight wickets at 18.37 during the year. Rizwan aggregated a staggering 1326 runs in only 29 matches at an average of 73.66 and a strike-rate of 134.89. Hasaranga took 36 wickets, including a hat-trick, in 20 matches at 11.63 and scored 196 runs. Buttler was also brilliant during the year with 589 runs in 14 matches at 65.44 with one century.