



VANI ON CHOOSING FILMS

Vaani Kapoor never chooses films thinking that she would win awards for them, but picks them from her heart

LEISURE P2



PROVOKING NATURE

Iran puts ballistic missiles on display as talks aimed at reviving Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers flounder

INTERNATIONAL P10



BAIRSTOW'S RESCUE ACT

Jonny Bairstow scores a splendid unbeaten century to help England recover in the 4th Ashes Test against Australia

SPORTS P12

ODM GLOBAL SCHOOL
Unlock your potential

ADMISSIONS OPEN
I - XI (Day Boarding)
VI - XI (Residential)

www.odmglobalschool.org
1800-120-2316

Habib booked for spitting on woman's head

New Delhi: Popular hairstylist Jawed Habib found himself in the soup Friday for allegedly spitting on a woman's head while styling her hair and apologised for his action, even as the Muzaffarnagar police registered an FIR against him and the NCW issued a summons. The police said the FIR was lodged at the Mansurpur police station in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar on a complaint filed by Pooja Gupta, a resident of Baraut town on whose head Habib allegedly spat. He has been booked under Section 355 (assault or criminal force with intent to dishonour a person) of the Indian Penal Code and the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, they said. In Jaipur, former city mayor and Congress leader Jyoti Khandelwal also lodged a complaint against Habib, accusing him of insulting women.



Covid mortality 6-7 times higher than official figure

New Delhi: About 3.2 million people could have died from Covid in India by September last year, six-seven times higher than reported officially, according to a study based on one independent and two government data sources. The research, published in *Science Thursday*, used an independent nationally representative survey of 137,289 adults in all states and UTs interviewed from March 2020 to July 2021. An international team of researchers led by Prabhat Jha, professor at University of Toronto in Canada, found that Covid-19 constituted 29% of deaths from June 2020 to July 2021, corresponding to 3.2 million deaths, of which 2.7 million occurred in April-July 2021.



More P7

JSW Cement
The Leaders' Choice

1800 266 266 1 (toll free)

Colleges, varsities shut from Jan 10

Several educational institutions in the state have reported detection of large number of Covid-19 cases on their campuses



Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: With the rapid increase in Covid-19 cases in Odisha, the state government has ordered closure of all colleges and universities and their hostels from January 10. "All colleges, universities, technical educational institutions (other than medical colleges, nursing colleges & institutions under control of Health & Family Welfare department) under the superintendence of Odisha government shall remain closed with effect from January 10, 2022," Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) PK Jena said in an order. The order will be in effect till February 1, it said. The authorities of colleges, universities and tech-

plying with Covid-19 guidelines, the order said. All teaching and non-teaching employees will work as per the prevailing guidelines for government employees and perform duty as assigned to them by the respective authorities, the order said. Coaching institutions, organisations and individuals offering tuition will also stop taking offline classes, it said. Any person found violating the order will be punished under the provision of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and other relevant laws, it said. Several educational institutions in Odisha have reported detection of large number of Covid-19 cases on their campuses. In the order, Jena informed that the state is passing through a critical stage of the Covid-19 pandemic due to resurgence of cases in some parts of the state and it is necessary to strictly adhere to Covid-19 safety protocols to check the spread of the infection.



WATER STRESSED

Women walk to their homes after collecting water from a near-frozen water body amid an acute shortage in a village in Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh, Friday.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



7-day home quarantine must for all int'l arrivals

New Delhi, Jan 7: India Friday made seven-day home quarantine mandatory for all international arrivals and an RT-PCR test on the eighth day, as it issued revised guidelines for international passengers. The guidelines released Friday come into force from January 11 and will remain effective till further orders. As per existing rules, which have been retained in the revised guidelines, travellers coming from countries specified as 'at risk' have to submit sample for Covid testing post-arrival and they required to wait for the results at the airport before leaving or taking a connecting flight. If tested negative, they need to undergo home quarantine for seven days and then get their RT-PCR test done on the eighth. Travellers from all categories of countries will undergo home quarantine for seven days and undertake an RT-PCR test on the 8th day, officials said, sharing details about revised guidelines said. International travellers arriving through seaports/land ports will also have to undergo the same protocols as above, except that facility for online registration is not available for such passengers currently.

SC nod to NEET-PG counselling

Apex court upholds the validity of 27% OBC and 10% EWS quota, while doctors call it a 'historic day' for the medical fraternity



New Delhi, Jan 7: The Supreme Court Friday in an interim order, allowed resumption of medical counselling for NEET-PG admissions for the year 2021-22 and upheld the validity of 27 per cent OBC quota. A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and AS Bopanna said that detailed reasons for the interim order will follow, and the counselling for the NEET-PG for the academic year 2021-22 will proceed as per the criteria already notified. "Counselling on the basis of NEET-PG 2021 and NEET-UG 2021 shall be conducted by giving effect to the reservation as provided in the notice dated July 29, 2021 including

the 27 per cent reservation for the OBC category and 10 per cent reservation for EWS category in the All India Quota seats," the bench said. It said the submissions which have been made before this court over a span of two days necessitate a detailed interim order on the applicability of the EWS criteria as notified by Office Memorandum of 2019 for NEET-PG 2021. "The formulations of the reasons in the interim order on the EWS reservation would take some time. The validity of OBC reservation in the all-India quota seats

in NEET-PG and NEET-UG is upheld for reasons to follow," it said. The bench said, "We accept the recommendation of the Pandey committee that the criteria which have been stipulated in Office Memorandum (OM) of 2019 be used for 2021-22 in order to ensure that the admission process is not dislocated. The criteria for the determination of EWS notified by OM of 2019 shall be used for identifying the EWS category of candidates who appeared for NEET-PG 2021 and NEET-UG 2021 examinations." It added that the validity of the criteria determined by the Pandey Committee for identification of EWS would prospectively for the future will be subject to the final result of the petitions. "The petition shall be listed for final hearing on the validity of EWS criteria as recommended by the Pandey Committee in the third week of March, 2022. Reasons shall follow," the bench said.

Srimandir closed from Jan 10-31

Puri, Jan 7: The famed Jagannath temple in Puri will remain closed from January 10 in view of the increasing Covid-19 cases, a senior official said Friday. The temple will remain closed till January 31, as per the decision taken at the meeting of Chhatisa Nijog - the apex body of the temple's servitors, he said. The meeting was also attended by staff members of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration and district officials. "In view of the health interest of devotees and servitors, it has been decided to close the shrine from January 10 to January 31. The decision was unanimously taken at a meeting of Chhatisa Nijog," Puri's District Collector Samarth Verma told reporters. The daily rituals at the 12th-century shrine will be carried out as per the tradition by select servitors and priests, he said.

State reports biggest Covid spike in 6 months

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: Odisha Friday registered its biggest single-day spike in Covid-19 cases in six months as 2,703 more people tested positive for the infection, a health bulletin said. The state had registered 1,897 cases Thursday. According to the state health department bulletin, 2,703 Covid cases including 409 children in the up to 18 years age-group have been reported. Khurda district, which includes Bhubaneswar, logged the highest 926 cases, followed by Sundargarh (454), Cuttack (191), Sambalpur (179) and Jharsuguda (106). All other districts reported less than 100 cases. The daily test positivity rate has increased to 3.92 per cent Friday from 2.62 per cent Thursday. Odisha now has 8,237 active cases. With the confirmation of another death due to Covid, the death toll in the state mounted to 8,468. The state government has imposed night curfew in all urban areas from 9 pm Friday onwards till January 31. The state has also reduced the staff attendance in its all offices to 50 per cent. Moreover, RT-PCR test has been made mandatory for all travellers debarking at the Biju Patnaik International Airport here.

HEALTH MINISTER TESTS POSITIVE

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Health and Family Welfare Minister Naba Kisore Das has tested positive for Covid-19. Taking to Twitter, Das said, "I was tested asymptomatic Covid positive yesterday and now in home isolation. I request all those who have come in physical contact with me in the last 3 days to get themselves tested."

Kazakh Prez orders shoot-to-kill to quell uprising

Almaty, Jan 7: Kazakhstan's President said Friday he had ordered his forces to shoot-to-kill to deal with disturbances from those he called bandits and terrorists, a day after Russia sent troops to put down a countrywide uprising. Security forces appeared to be in control of the streets of the main city Almaty Friday but gunfire could still be heard after days of un-

rest in which dozens of people have been killed and public buildings ransacked and torched. "The militants have not laid down their arms, they continue to commit crimes or are preparing for them. The fight against them must be pursued to the end. Whoever does not surrender will be destroyed," President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said in a televised address. "I have given the order to law enforcement agencies and the army to shoot to kill without warning." Tokayev has blamed foreign-trained terrorists for the worst violence in the Central Asian state's 30 years of independence. Russia's defence ministry, cited by Interfax, said more than 70 planes were flying round the clock to bring Russian troops into Kazakhstan, and they were now helping con-



rol Almaty's main airport, recaptured Thursday from protesters. Demonstrations that began as a response to a fuel price hike have swelled into a broad movement against the government and ex-leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, 81, the longest-serving ruler of any former Soviet state. He turned over the presidency to Tokayev three years ago but his family is widely believed to have retained power in Nur-Sultan, the purpose-built capital that bears his name.

TROOPS IN ALMATY

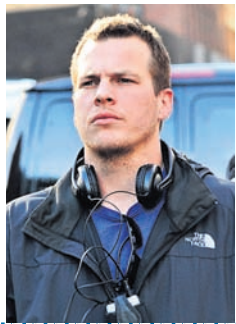
The interior ministry said 26 'armed criminals' had been 'liquidated', while 18 police and national guard service members had been killed since the start of the protests, figures that appeared not to have been updated since Thursday. State television reported more than 3,700 arrests. Widespread unrest has been reported in a number of other cities across the vast country of 19 million people. The internet has been shut off since Wednesday, making it difficult to determine the full extent of the violence. White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Washington was keeping a close eye on Russian-led deployment. It would be watching for any violations of human rights and 'any actions that may lay the predicate for seizure of Kazakh institutions.'

MARKET WATCH	
INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	59744.65 ↑ 142.81
NIFTY	17812.700 ↑ 66.80
DOLLAR	74.70 ↓ ₹0.13
EURO	84.30 ↓ ₹0.17
GOLD	₹47,395 ↓ ₹56
SILVER	₹60,412 ↓ ₹14

WEATHER		
	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	28.0°C	27.6°C
TEMP MIN	15.1°C	14.6°C
Humidity	92%	90%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Dry weather most likely

leisure



JONATHAN NOLAN TO DIRECT *FALLOUT* SERIES

Television series *Fallout* will be directed by Jonathan Nolan, brother of award-winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan. *Variety* has confirmed that Geneva Robertson-Dworet and Graham Wagner are now attached to serve as co-showrunners on the video game adaptation.

VANESSA, ROSARIO TO ANNOUNCE SAG AWARDS NOMINATIONS

Actresses Vanessa Hudgens, Rosario Dawson will be announcing the nominations for the 28th Annual Screen Actors Guild Awards on January 12 through its Instagram Live account.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com
accuracy • reliability • trust
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
Curl, massage, clip, tweeze, polish, gloss, condition... today, will you attempt to shed your old skin. A dream date may have you in jitters but Ganesh suggests that you take it easy. True relationships are not sealed by glossy kisses alone!

TAURUS
Your business is going to thrive this day, says Ganesh. Your plans, projections, speculations and gambles are likely to pay off and give you good dividends. You will be admired and respected in the business world for your honesty and integrity. You will be in the right frame of mind to think about expanding your business.

GEMINI
Your long-term goals seem to be shaping up well. You may also expect some good news, which will change the course of your life. Play a waiting game in matters of auctions and sealed tenders. And memorise these words: Prevention is better than cure.

CANCER
Not a good day for you in terms of fortune and opportunities. You will constantly find yourself in unwanted tricky situations without any fault of yours. You, however, are likely to know what to do in such situations by now, for you have been in too many of those in the past.

LEO
The friends we make go a long way in making us who we are, says Ganesh. Over the years, with your natural instinct to be a social charmer, you have built a fine circle of dedicated friends on whom you can bank with confidence under any circumstance. Today might be a day when you get the opportunity to make use of such friendship.

VIRGO
An easy-going day full of fun and light moments will help you vent all that pressure built up inside you. Ganesh predicts a progressive and profitable day for you. Expect to honour invitations to social events or even parties.

LIBRA
It is more than likely, and possible indeed, that you will surpass your own past performances today. All this is on the cards, despite the fact that your peers at work will try to outwit you. But it is your consummate set of skills that shall help you pre-empt all such attempts, says Ganesh.

SCORPIO
Don't put off cultivating healthy eating habits, says Ganesh. You should do better to control over-indulging in food as it may lead to obesity. Ganesh advises you to stick to a healthy lifestyle, especially when it comes to meals.

SAGITTARIUS
Life is bubbling within you and you shall be in a hyper-elevated state of bliss today. Your high-spirits and energy will inspire you to perform at your best. Moreover, your inner voice will be loud and bellowing. Make the most of this super day, says Ganesh.

CAPRICORN
Planning strategic moves will be done with, and all that will remain is execution. But Ganesh says there may be delays in implementing ideas that are crucial to the success of your project, and this may leave you disappointed and dismayed. But the problem will be short-lived and you will have nothing to worry about as you have all it takes to be a winner.

AQUARIUS
You need to think dispassionately and with clarity, says Ganesh. As always, sentiments may come in the way of your success today. Be careful, especially while taking decisions that will impact your future. You don't want to study law, just because your friends are doing it!

PISCES
Now is the time when the inner circle of friends that you have nurtured over the years will prove their worth, says Ganesh. It is good to know that in times of need you can bank on their support and count on their cooperation. You will be able to luxuriate in the benefits of their friendship today.



Never chosen films for awards, says Vaani

Mumbai: Actress Vaani Kapoor, who will be next seen in *Shamshera*, says she never chooses films thinking that she would win awards for them, but picks them from her heart. Vaani says: "I have never chosen films thinking I will win awards for them. I have always chosen projects from my heart and that's why I'm fortunate that I have films like *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* in my filmography. "It is rare to find a project that can consume you, make you dissolve yourself on screen to become someone like Maanvi. Maanvi is an idea and an ideal for the world and I'm blessed that I got to play this character with all my heart and soul." She said that if people have loved my performance it's because the character was written so 'beautifully and with so much dignity.' The actress added: "If I were to win awards, I would dedicate them to the transgender community in India because we wanted to speak about inclusivity. If the film wins or my performance wins, it will show people that mainstream media is embracing this thought of much-needed change. She continued: "Mainstream media has the power to change societies, make it evolve, and become better. But again, we didn't make the film keeping awards in mind. It was made from the purest place in Abhishek Kapoor's heart. He wanted us to open our minds."

Aditya starts shooting for *Thadam* remake

Mumbai: It's going to be a busy year for actor Aditya Roy Kapur as he has a lot of projects in his kitty. According to a source, Aditya will soon start shooting for *The Night Manager* remake and *Thadam* remake in the upcoming day. "Aditya has packed a slate for this year. He starts shooting for both the projects — *The Night Manager* remake and *Thadam* remake — simultaneously in the month of January. He will be shooting long hours and will pull off night shifts to juggle between the starkly different projects," the source added. For the unversed, *Thadam* remake will be helmed by debutant Vardhan Ketkar. The original, directed by Magizh Thirumeni featured Arun Vijay in a double role along with Tanya Hope, Smruthi Venkat and Vidya Pradeep. *The Night Manager*, is an espionage thriller that has a tense cat and mouse chase between a covert agent and a secret arms dealer. AGENCIES



SHILPA

pens a gratitude note for her kids

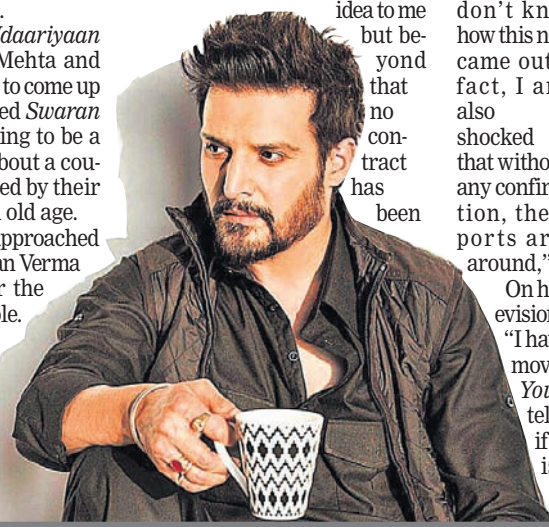
Mumbai: Shilpa Shetty's adorable display of affection for kids Viaan and Samisha speaks volumes about her bond with them. The actress often treats her fans with adorable photos and snippets of them featuring her fondest moments. Having said that, the actress recently shared an endearing photo of her kids and penned a gratitude note which read, "The last two years have been a roller coaster ride for all of us. This year, I want to make a note of the biggest and the littlest blessings life gives me that I am grateful for: Starting this series with the most priceless blessing of my life: Forever grateful for the two halves of my heart." In the picture, Shilpa can be seen hugging her kids with all the love and affection, as she held them close. Speaking of the year-end festivities, Shilpa had shared several glimpses of the same on her social media handles. She along with her kids and husband Raj Kundra had also gone for a vacation too and also celebrated Christmas away from the frenetic pace and chaos of everyday life. AGENCIES



Jimmy puts rumours about his TV debut to rest

Mumbai: Actor Jimmy Sheirgill opens up about the reports going around about his television debut and says it is too early to reveal anything as nothing has been finalised from his end. As per sources, *Udaariyaan* producers, Sargun Mehta and Ravi Dubey are all set to come up with a new show, titled *Swaran Mandir*, which is going to be a family drama. It is about a couple who are abandoned by their young children at an old age. The makers have approached well known actor Aman Verma and later Jimmy for the show to play a lead role. But Jimmy has not signed any contract, and neither Aman said yes for the show. Jimmy said

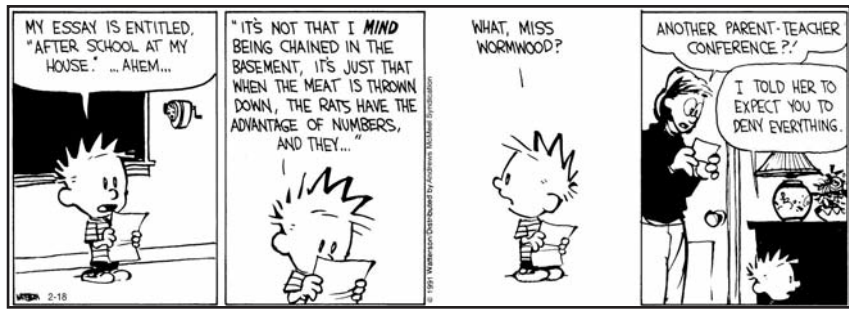
that Sargun just narrated the idea. "I have done a Punjabi film, *Jindua* many years back with Sargun, so I know him for quite a long time. They narrated an idea to me but beyond that no contract has been signed yet. This is too early to say anything as things have not moved ahead. I don't know how this news came out. In fact, I am also shocked that without any confirmation, these reports are going around," he says. On his interest in doing television shows, the actor adds: "I have been occupied with movies and web shows like *Your Honor*, so doing a television serial that too if it continues for years is not possible."



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

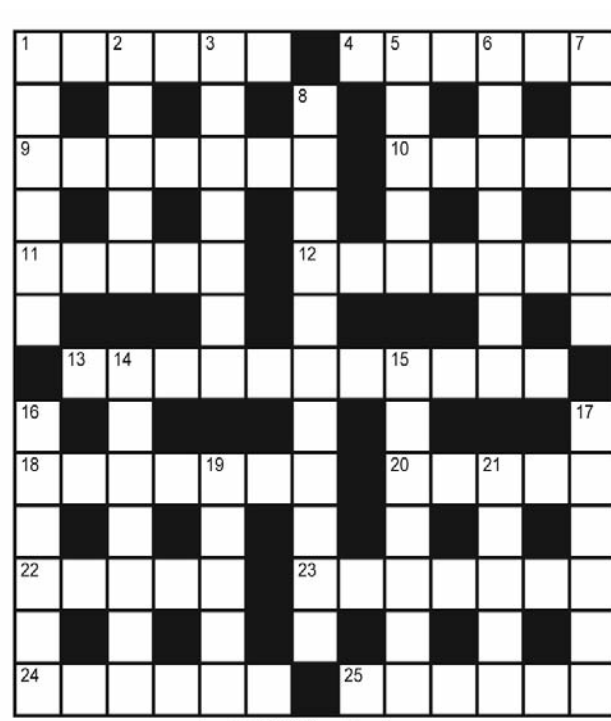


BREVITY



FUN post

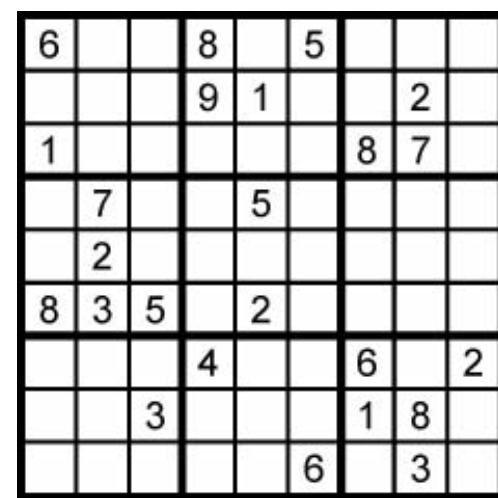
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Fire up
 - 4 Gad about
 - 9 Shake
 - 10 Foolish talk
 - 11 Bracelet site
 - 12 Furry-footed rodent
 - 13 Like a rousing party (2,4,5)
 - 18 Volcanic island in Melanesia
 - 20 Bolivian capital
 - 22 Little green man
 - 23 Lady in waiting?
 - 24 Artists' stands
 - 25 Eskimo houses
 - 3 Any dramatic scene
 - 5 Photo holder
 - 6 Kind of waffle
 - 7 Vigour
 - 8 Guffaws
 - 14 Nursemaids
 - 15 Kind of well
 - 16 Fly high
 - 17 Banquets
 - 19 Invalidate
 - 21 Doctrine
- Down**
- 1 Snare
 - 2 Impudence

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



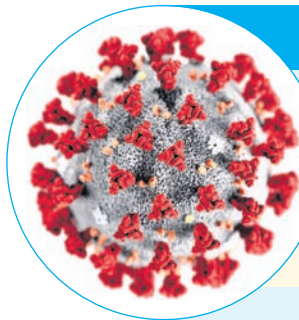
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



DRAMA FEST

Artistes from Manana Theatre Group stage play *Ulip* during a drama festival at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Friday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	30,11,85,342	25,77,48,572	54,92,181
India	3,52,26,386	3,43,71,845	4,83,178
Odisha	10,62,476	10,45,971	8,468

31L families get house repair aid

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday distributed financial assistance of ₹3,000 each to 31 lakh beneficiaries of state rural housing schemes.

The amount has been transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries of Biju Pucca Ghar Yojana (BPGY), BPGY (Mining) and Nirman Shramik Pucca Ghar Yojana for repair and maintenance of their houses built under these schemes.

Financial assistance of ₹1,444 crore has been transferred to the accounts of 31 lakh families. The fund has been credited directly to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.

The assistance has been transferred to the accounts of beneficiaries within 15 days of the announcement of the decision of the State Cabinet.

"We had taken a decision in 2014 to convert all kutcha houses into pucca ones. During these years, a total of 31 lakh pucca houses have been built and efforts will continue till there is no kutcha house left in the state," said Naveen while addressing the people on this occasion.

Highlighting the Central negligence in sanction of houses for the people under the its scheme, the Chief Minister said that many houses were destroyed in 14 districts of the state during Cyclone Fani and people are waiting for a house under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen).

"I have also been bringing the



BOOST TO BPGY

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF ₹1,444 CRORE HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO THE ACCOUNTS OF 31 LAKH FAMILIES

THE FUND HAS BEEN CREDITED DIRECTLY TO THE BANK ACCOUNTS OF THE BENEFICIARIES

THE ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED TO THE ACCOUNTS OF BENEFICIARIES WITHIN 15 DAYS OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DECISION OF THE STATE CABINET

Central scheme," he said.

The state government has decided to pay ₹5,000 for repair of their kutcha houses they are currently living in. "We are collecting the information of their bank accounts and the aid will reach them very soon," he said.

Stating that he is always with the poor, Patnaik said, "I will never allow the people of my state to be in a state of neglect. If the Union government does not help the homeless, your state government is with you."

During the Covid-19 pandemic, 12.25 lakh families have not yet got their homes, though they are eligible under PMAY-G. The state government will provide financial assistance of ₹5,000 from BPGY for repair of the houses where these families are staying, said the Chief Minister.

matter to the attention of the Centre. Our tribal brothers and sisters from south and western Odisha are also waiting for a house under

Manipur inks pact with KIIT for innovation hub

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: The Department of Information Technology (DIT), Manipur has signed an agreement with KIIT-Technology Business Incubator (KIIT-TBI) of KIIT Deemed to be University recently to establish Manipur Technology Innovation Hub (MTI-Hub).

The MTI-Hub, which will be set up with KIIT-TBI in PPP mode, will promote entrepreneurship in Manipur.

The pact was executed by Manipur government's IT director Nambam Deben and CEO of KIIT-TBI Mrutyunjay Suar.

As per the agreement, Manipur will provide 10,000 sqft built up area with part of operation cost.

Congratulating the team of KIIT-TBI for achieving this important milestone, KIIT founder Achyuta Samanta, "This is an important achievement of KIIT-TBI."

'O' SCARE



Traffic personnel enforcing night curfew at Jaydev Vihar Square in Bhubaneswar, Friday

OP PHOTO

Mo Chhatua brings SKOCH award for W&CD dept

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: The Women and Child Development (W&CD) department has been conferred with the prestigious SKOCH award for its 'Mo Chhatua' initiative at the 78th summit of the SKOCH group recently.

The Mo-Chhatua initiative of the W&CD department has transformed the supply chain management of take home ration (THR) distribution among the children and women across the state.

The initiative has been acknowledged and appreciated at the national level for being first of its kind in the country in bringing about a paradigm shift in the supply chain management process of THR.

The Mo Chhatua platform com-

prises a web-based portal and a mobile application that has been developed in line with the state government's 5T initiative. THR is being provided to children (6 months to 3 years), pregnant women, lactating mother and adolescent girl



Mo Chhatua initiative is a game-changer solution for take home ration management in the state

The initiative has been acknowledged and appreciated at the national level for being first of its kind in the country in bringing about a paradigm shift in the supply chain management process of THR

The Mo Chhatua platform comprises a web-based portal and a mobile application that has been developed in line with the state government's 5T initiative

facturing, packaging, supply and payment.

The entire supply chain management process has been completely digitised and the mobile application is being used by the stakeholders including the SHG members, ICDS supervisors, Child Development Project Officers (CDPOs), District Social Welfare Officer (DSWOs), district Collectors and other senior officials. Due to the software and mobile application, the stakeholders are able to do their respective works, including the quality monitoring, on time.

THR is a major step for welfare of women and children in Odisha. The Mo Chhatua initiative is a game-changer solution for THR management in the state, sources said.

BLUIS bags nat'l award for e-Governance

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: Bhubaneswar Land Use Intelligence System (BLUIS), a state government's initiative for safeguarding government lands in the Capital city, bagged the National Award for e-Governance 2020-21 (Gold) for 'excellence in adopting emerging technologies' at the 24th National Conference on e-Governance organised by Union government at Hyderabad, Friday.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh presented the award on behalf of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances. Additional Chief Secretary Sanjeev Chopra, Odisha Space Applications Centre (ORSAC) Chief Executive Officer Prafulla Mallik, Odisha Adarsha Vidyalaya Sangathan State Project Director Prem Chandra Chaudhary and Director of Estates Sushanta Kumar Mohanty received the award.

An initiative of General Administration and Public Grievance (GA&PG) department and launched by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik July 8, 2020, BLUIS is a web and mobile-based solution that has been developed by ORSAC to monitor changes in all government lands in



Union Minister Jitendra Singh hands over the award to Odisha officials

Bhubaneswar by leveraging high-resolution satellite imagery, thus making Odisha the first state in the country to tap space technology and artificial intelligence for safeguarding government lands.

BLUIS has competed with 89 high-tech projects of different agencies of states and Centre to emerge victorious, sources said.

Complimenting the GA&PG department and ORSAC for the accomplishment, Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra advised the officials to have more of the innovative technological applications for supporting quick de-

cision making process. Mahapatra also directed them to replicate the application in other municipal corporations of the state.

Chopra said the app, with a user-friendly interface for citizens as well as officials, has scalable and replicable features and key infor-cation on its dashboard. Citizens can use the app to report any suspected encroachment on government land.

ORSAC CEO highlighted the app's feature that enables crowd-sourcing cases of unauthorised land use. "This feature can be used by citizens to report any unau-

thorised development taking place over geo-tagged government lands," Mallik pointed out.

According to available data, as of now, 826 encroachment cases have been detected and 484 cases resolved through application of the technology.

The app has also facilitated early grounding of developmental projects.

Sources said governments of Jharkhand and Assam have sought the support of Odisha for implementing similar systems in Ranchi and Guwahati respectively.

BLUIS is a web and mobile-based solution that has been developed by ORSAC to monitor changes in all government lands in Bhubaneswar by leveraging high-resolution satellite imagery

This made Odisha the first state in the country to tap space technology and artificial intelligence for safeguarding government lands

Till now, 826 encroachment cases have been detected and 484 cases resolved through the app

Vaishnaw lays stone for infra upgradation at Cuttack rly stn

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: Union Minister of Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw Friday laid the foundation stone for development of the second entry and circulating area of Cuttack railway station.

The second entry of the railway station will have facilities like parking for two/three/four wheelers, pickup and drop points, parking for ambulance/VIP vehicles and a wider approach road.

Cuttack MP Bhartruhari Mahtab graced the occasion through video-conferencing and Choudwar-Cuttack MLA Souvic Biswal was the guest of honour at the event.

Addressing the gathering, Vaishnaw claimed that the Indian Railways is committed towards the development of Cuttack station. He said that fund is not a constraint for this purpose.

The Union minister also directed the officials to speed up the construction work and complete the project at the earliest. He also took stock of the infrastructure and



Minister takes stock of Taladanda road

The Union minister also took stock of the expansion of Taladanda canal road during his visit to the Silver City, Friday. Apprising him about the details of the road expansion, Cuttack Collector Bhawani Shankar Chayani urged the Union Minister to transfer 2 acres of railway land to the state government for the project. The Union Minister gave green signal in this regard, sources said. The minister also directed the Khurda Road Divisional Manager to transfer around 2 acres of railway land near the Malgdown to the state government for expansion of SCB Medical College and Hospital, sources added.

passenger amenities at the railway station.

East Coast and South Eastern Railway General Manager Archana Joshi, in her introductory

speech, elaborated the performance of the East Coast Railway zone. Khurda Road Divisional Railway Manager Rinkesh Ray offered vote of thanks.

WHEEL OF FAITH



A chariot wheel being placed at Puri Raj Bhawan in the presence of Governor Ganeshi Lal, Friday

P PHOTO

Traffic pollution chokes 2mn kids globally: Lancet

NO₂ puts kids at risk of developing asthma and the problem is acute in urban areas, says the study

From Los Angeles to Mumbai, a traffic-related air pollutant drives nearly 2 million new cases of paediatric asthma every year, according to a new study. Asthma is a chronic illness that causes inflammation of the lung's airways.

Researchers from George Washington University studied ground concentrations of nitrogen dioxide or NO₂, a pollutant that comes from tailpipe vehicle emissions, power plants and industrial sites. They tracked new cases of asthma that developed in children from 2000 until 2019 in more than 13,000 cities.



"Our study found that nitrogen dioxide puts children at risk of developing asthma and the problem is especially acute in urban areas," said Susan Anenberg, a co-lead author of the article and a professor of Environmental and Occupational Health at the varsity.

"The findings suggest that clean air must be a critical part of strategies aimed at keeping children

healthy," she added. The findings, published in the journal Lancet Planetary Health, showed that out of the estimated 1.85 million new paediatric asthma cases attributed to NO₂ globally in 2019, two-thirds occurred in urban areas.

Despite the improvements in air quality in Europe and the US, dirty air, and particularly NO₂ pollution, has been rising in South

Asia, Sub-Saharan African and the Middle East.

Paediatric asthma cases linked to NO₂ pollution represent a large public health burden for South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In a second study, published in the same journal, researchers from the varsity showed that 1.8 million excess deaths can be linked to urban air pollution in 2019 alone.

The team found that 86 per cent of adults and children living in cities around the world are exposed to a level of fine particulate matter that exceeds the guidelines set by the World Health Organisation.

"Reducing fossil fuel-powered transportation can help children and adults breathe easier and may pay big health dividends, such as fewer cases of paediatric asthma and excess deaths," Anenberg said. "At the same time, it would also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, leading to a healthier climate," she added.

IANS

Pangolin scales, leopard skin, tusk seized; 1 held

During the raid, the accused was found waiting for other wildlife criminals, which necessarily hints at the presence of a bigger racket in the vicinity



One leopard skin, an elephant tusk, and pangolin scales weighing 1.770kg along with other incriminating articles were recovered from Madan's possession

ment permitting him to keep the aforementioned illegal and sensitive materials. The wildlife products seized from Madan will be sent to Wild Life Institute of India, Deharadun for chemical examination. The STF has seized 25 leopard skins, 13 elephant tusks, seven

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: The Special Task Force (STF) of state Crime Branch has arrested a person engaged in the illegal trade of wildlife. The accused was identified as Madan Kumar Jayapura of Barghat area under Reamal police station in Deogarh district.

STF sources claimed that the officials received information regarding the execution of a deal in illegal wildlife trade in Deogarh. Subsequently, a team of STF from Bhubaneswar with the help of local Forest department officials in Deogarh Thursday carried out a raid at a secluded place on NH-49 near Tilebani under Deogarh police station.

The team arrested the accused who was waiting for other wildlife criminals, which necessarily hints at the presence of a bigger racket



OP PHOTOS

in the vicinity. The cops during their search found the accused possessing one leopard skin, one elephant tusk and pangolin scales weighing 1.770kg along with other incriminating articles. Madan failed to produce any valid docu-

deer skins, nine live pangolins and more than 16kg pangolin scales under its special drive which started in 2020 against wildlife crime. As many as 55 wildlife criminals have also been arrested during the above period.



FIRST JAB

Students of 15-18 age group being inoculated in a City school, Friday

OP PHOTO

RT-PCR test for those sans reports: BMC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: In a partial modification of its earlier order, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Friday said RT-PCR tests of passengers deboarding at Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) will be done on those who do not carry reports of their tests and not on all.

The passengers will be required to show reports of RT-PCR test conducted 72 hours prior to boarding a flight to Bhubaneswar, the modified order said.

Physical distancing norms should be followed while de-boarding and passengers who are found to be symptomatic during screening will be immediately isolated and taken to a medical facility of the BMC, it said.



FILE PHOTO

The BMC has set up a testing facility at the airport.

The civic body in its January 6 order had said that all passengers deboarding at Bhubaneswar airport, barring those in transit, will

have to undergo an RT-PCR test from Friday.

Passengers whose destination is Bhubaneswar will have to isolate themselves till the result of their RT-PCR test. The usual protocol

THE EARLIER ORDER HAD SAID THAT ALL PASSENGERS DEBOARDING AT BPIA, BARRING THOSE IN TRANSIT, WILL HAVE TO UNDERGO RT-PCR TEST

will be followed in case the report is positive, the order said.

Meanwhile, Odisha Friday registered its biggest single-day spike in Covid-19 cases in six months with 2,703 people testing positive for the virus.

BGU holds faculty development prog

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: The Birla School of Communication, a part of the Birla Global University (BGU), Bhubaneswar organised a week-long faculty development programme (FDP) for faculties, research scholars and media professionals.

The programme was inaugurated by BGU VC PP Mathur. Sumil Saxena, Head of Department at Times School of Media of Bennett University, graced the occasion as chief guest.

Forty participants from India and abroad registered for the FDP coordinated by Satnam Singh and Gyanaranjan. The valedictory address will be delivered January 12 by P Sainath, eminent journalist and founder editor of PARI.



MAIDEN REVIEW

Newly-appointed Traffic DCP S Susree reviewing traffic management in Capital city, Friday

OP PHOTO

Blocking left turns to invite penalty soon

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 7: Newly-appointed Traffic DCP for twin city, S Susree, Friday warned the unruly commuters against blocking the left turns at important traffic junctions in Capital city. Susree, a 2018-batch Odisha cadre IPS officer, Tuesday took charge as the new Traffic DCP of the twin city.

Susree Friday reviewed the traffic management at busy junctions like Capital Hospital Square, Master Canteen Square, AG Square, Nalco Square and Rabindra Mandap Square.

Speaking to media, she said, "We will first make announcements at important junctions instructing commuters not to obstruct the left side of the roads for unhindered passage to the left-turning commuters and for ambulances. However, if the situation does not improve, ₹500 penalty will be imposed on the violators."

State planetariums shut from Jan 10

Bhubaneswar: In accordance with the state government order, the Pathani Samanta Planetarium here, APJ Abdul Kalam Planetarium in Burla and Pathani Samanta Museum in Khandapada will remain closed for visitors with effect from January 10 until further order. This decision was taken as a precautionary measure against the spread of new Covid variant Omicron which has been a cause of concern for the state, said Laxmidhar Das, director of Pathani Samanta Planetarium.

HE dept suspends biometric system

Bhubaneswar: The state Higher Education (HE) department Friday directed all the colleges and universities to suspend the biometric attendance system for the staffers of universities and colleges across the state. In a letter to the universities and colleges, Higher Education secretary Saswat Mishra said biometric attendance system for students, teachers and other employees shall remain suspended from January 8, 2021 until further order in view of Covid-19 pandemic. However, attendance shall be recorded in physical mode.

BJP letter to Prez over PM security breach

Bhubaneswar: A BJP delegation from Odisha Friday submitted a memorandum to President Ram Nath Kovind through Governor Ganesh Lal expressing deep concern over the security breach of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's convoy in Punjab. The 10-member delegation was led by BJP state president Samir Mohanty. After meeting the Governor, Mohanty lashed out at Congress for the breach in the prime minister's security. "It is very shameful that the Congress-led government in Punjab was unable to provide security to the country's PM. It is one of the outcomes of Congress' conspiracy against the BJP," he said.

AFFIDAVIT

By an affidavit Before Executive Magistrate Notary Public, Cuttack at 24.1.05 Saiba Swain becomes Sandeep Swain for all purposes. S/o.-Sola Swain At-Balisahi, Nuapada, Madhupatna, Dist-Cuttack.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before Executive Magistrate, Cuttack Sadar 22.12.21. I am Pitamber Biswal, S/o Sarat Kumar Biswal hereby declare that, my wife's correct name is Manasi Biswal and DOB is 14.5.1982 as per all documents. But in my service record wrongly mentioned as Manashi Biswal and DOB is 10.8.1986. Manasi Biswal and Manashi Biswal one and same person.

'Paracetamol for post-job relief may harm kids'

THE ADVICE WAS ISSUED IN RESPONSE TO GROWING CONCERNS THAT SOME IMMUNISATION CENTRES ARE PRESCRIBING THREE PARACETAMOL 500 MG TABLETS AFTER RECEIVING THE COVID VACCINE FOR KIDS

Children undergoing Covid vaccination must not take paracetamol, a common pain reliever, without first consulting, doctors advised Friday. The advice was issued in re-

sponse to growing concerns that some immunisation centres are advising children to take three paracetamol 500 mg tablets after receiving the Covid vaccine. Taking paracetamol without consulting a doctor can harm children, the health experts warned.

"Paracetamol is not recommended as prophylaxis, before and after any Covid vaccination as we don't know how it alters the immune response of the vaccine," said Akshay Budhraja, Senior Consultant, Respiratory and Sleep Medicine, Aakash Healthcare.

"Giving paracetamol to children (15-18 years old) who are receiving Covid vaccines is not recommended. It is because it has the potential to cause hepatotoxicity (liver damage caused by drug exposure) in them," added Vijay Dutta, Senior Consultant - Internal Medicine, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre.

“ Giving paracetamol to children (15-18 years old) who are receiving Covid vaccines is not recommended. It is because it has the potential to cause hepatotoxicity (liver damage caused by drug exposure) in them ”

VIJAY DUTTA | SENIOR CONSULTANT - INTERNAL MEDICINE, INDIAN SPINAL INJURIES CENTRE

A low-grade fever, muscle ache, lethargy, headache, soreness at the injection site is common in the first two days after vaccination, which usually subsides on its own, without any medication.

"However, if the fever persists or the intensity increases then paracetamol or other painkiller is advised after consultation with



PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

a physician. So paracetamol is to be taken only after consultation and not as prophylaxis for fever, which happens because of the immune response of the body to the vaccine components," Budhraja added.

If children develop a fever after receiving the Covid vaccine, "they

should be given Mefenamic acid or Mefal syrup", while paracetamol is safe for adults over the age of 18 with fever, Dutta said.

Previously, Bharat Biotech, which developed India's first indigenous Covid vaccine, also issued a statement that no painkillers or paracetamol are recommended following

the inoculation.

To combat the increasing cases of Covid driven by the highly-transmissible Omicron variant, the government has begun administering the Covid vaccination to teenagers aged 15 to 18. Only Covaxin has been recommended for vaccinating teenagers.

According to Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, India has achieved one crore vaccination milestone for people between the 15-18 age group against Covid-19 till Wednesday, since the beginning of the drive on January 3. India's adult Covid inoculation has also reached 149.66 crore as of Friday morning.

Meanwhile, India Friday registered a single-day rise of 1,17,100 new Covid cases, a significant rise from the previous day's 90,928 cases, in a span of 24 hours. The country's Omicron infection tally has reached 3,007. IANS

FOR CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS CONTACT OUR BOOKING STATIONS

Acharya Vihar-Dayal Agency-9437135727, A.P. Tours and Travel, Maitri Vihar, C.S. Pur-9861301598, Aurobindo Market-Sai Audio & Electronics-9438304668, Airport Road-Sai Baba Variety Store-9090071530, Anish Infotech-Tankapani Road-9861341488, Bapuji Nagar- Dreamland Studio- 9777517314, Baramunda Rental Colony-Maa Ramchandi Communication-9658821469, Baramunda Housing Board Colony-Pappu Variety Store-9040500106, Cuttack Road-Alishan Snacks-8984236754, District Center (Chandrasekharpur)-Sai Google Mart-9776056507, Forest Park-DTDC Couriers & Services (HB Services)-7381024156, IRC Village-Bapi Xerox-9090090404, Gift Hut(Antriksh Gifts & Decors Pvt. Ltd.)-9954781084, Pruthvi Medicine-9853314816, Janpath-Krupajal Book Store-7978646669, Jaydev Vihar-AK Enterprises-7978116618, Subam Sai Books Store-8895550649, Swain Graphics- 9337121249, Jagannath Mobile Point- Janpath Road, Ram Mandir- 9938475415, Kanan Vihar-Auro Electronics-8260697560, Khandagiri- Swosti Mobile Centre- 7992914045, World Solution- 9938317559, KIIT Road-Jugad Jn-9338545031, Laxmi Sagar-Aditya Mobile-9438191836, Lewis Road-Spider Web-7809186415, Metro Satellite City-Arogya Mitra Medicine Store-9853621640, Madhusudan Nagar-Mohapatra Communication-9124446664, Maa Santoshi travels- Gajapati Nagar- 9777675867, Nayapalli- The Cake Room- 7873660137, Near Mayfair Lagoon-Cookiemann-9439491273, Nigamananda-Omm Sai Travels-9668284823, Nr Cosmopolis Main Gate- Shreeram Medical Store- 8763711714, Net Square- Niladri Vihar (C.S. Pur)- 7205634821, Priyadarshini Market-Astro Point-9938134346, R.N. General Store-Nilakantha Nagar-9438642501, Sahid Nagar- Maa Communication- 9437353424, Sahini General Store- Near Patia Railway Station, Mahavir Vihar- 9937586626, Satya Nagar-Baishnavi Mixture & Sweets-7894821764, Samantapur- Download Point-7504557743, Sailashree Vihar-Harsha Book Store-8093449515, Saheed Nagar-Jagannath Graphics-7978652670, Photo World-7978468191, Sainath Photo Studio-8984436129, Shanti & Co-9937071063, Siripur-Omm Maa Sarala Communication-9777682449, Sushree fashion- Jagmara-9938714347, Shree Vision- Sailashree Vihar-9861476678, Unit-3-LIC of India Premium Point-9337787080, Unit-7- LIC Premium Point- 9338227422, VSS Nagar-Friends Cake & Bake-8658200930, Jeet Infoworld-7205195782, XIMB Square-LD Books-9658061373.

SHORT TAKES

Bhadrak MP, MLA Covid positive

Bhadrak: Covid cases are on the rise in Bhadrak district leaving the health authorities worried. Among the Covid-infected people are Bhadrak MP Manjulata Mandal, MLA Sanjib Kumar Mallick and MP's PSO. According to reports, 26 people have been kept in isolation while people who have come in contact with the MP and the MLA have been advised to get themselves tested for Covid. It was learnt that officials of the health department are preparing a list of people who have come in contact with the MP and the MLA. It was stated that these leaders had gone to Kolkata recently and they are believed to have contracted the virus from there. The health department has put the number of fresh infection cases at 41 in the district.

Jumbo tramples woman to death



Keonjhar: An elephant trampled a woman to death at Kadakala under Bhuyan and Juanga Pidhi range in Keonjhar Thursday night. The deceased was identified as Prabhathi Dhibar (26). The elephant was reportedly causing mayhem in the village at night. Prabhathi and her husband were fleeing from their house when they met with the jumbo. The animal lifted the woman with its trunk and slammed her on the ground, it was said. Locals were panicked after this incident, as the elephant separated from its herd has been on a rampage in the area over last few weeks. The death due to elephant attack was confirmed by DFO Dhanraj HD.

Digapahandi gets irrigation project

Digapahandi: In an effort to boost irrigation for the farm sector, a multi-purpose water conservation dam (an in-stream storage structure) will be built at Fasiguda under Digapahandi block in Ganjam district. Speaker Suryanarayan Patro has laid the foundation stone for the project. According to reports, the in-stream storage structure will be set up at the confluence of Ramnadi and Ghodahada rivers. The project aims at providing irrigation coverage to 565 hectares of land in Fasiguda, Bhismagiri, Moulabhanja, Nimakhandi Pantha and Chasinimakhandi panchayats. It was learnt that construction of the project will start within 15 days. The lift irrigation department which is executing the project will make provision of irrigation through underground pipes. Engineers of the Chikiti irrigation division have talked to farmers of 11 villages about the irrigation prospect in the region from the project.

VSSUT puts off offline exams, cancels physical classes

COVID SURGE



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Jan 7: The Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology (VSSUT) in Sambalpur postponed offline semester exams and cancelled physical classes Friday in view of a surge in Covid-19 cases in the varsity.

Offline classes in VSSUT will remain cancelled till January 10. The students who have tested positive for the virus are presently in isolation at Angira hostel of VSSUT.

Those who test negative will be allowed to go home, a source said. "A medical team had visited the varsity Thursday to collect swab samples of the students. The decision has been taken to contain further spread of the virus in the university. A decision on the conduct of the third, fifth and seventh semester examinations will be taken after the situation improves," a senior VSSUT official informed. It is pertinent to mention, VSSUT earlier resumed physical classes for undergraduate and post-graduate students March 16, last year. Sambalpur administration sent students of the varsity to their homes after 22 students tested positive for Covid-19 in the last three days, Vice-Chancellor Prof Bansidhar Majhi expressed.



After a spike in Covid cases, firefighters of Nalco's CISF unit sanitising indoor and outdoor wards of Mathalput CHC in Damanjodi area of Koraput district, Friday

PREVENTIVE MEASURE

Balasore-Bhub MEMU train starts rolling

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasore, Jan 7: A MEMU train from Balasore to Bhubaneswar started rolling here Friday. Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw visited the district and flagged off the Balasore-Bhubaneswar MEMU train, a long-cherished dream of the people of Balasore district.

The Union Railway Minister also laid the foundation stones for a new railway station at Nilagiri and another station at Jaleswar. He inaugurated the Basta railway station and its buildings.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony here, the minister said that literary works of legendary litterateur Fakirmohan Senapati, a native of Balasore, have enriched the Odia language and the state is proud of him. He recalled Fakirmohan's masterpieces like 'Daka Munsai' and 'Randi Puta Ananta.'

Drawing an analogy between the



Flagging off of first MEMU passenger train from Balasore to Bhubaneswar by Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, Hon'ble Minister of Railway, India on 07.01.2022

contributions of the UPA and the NDA governments to the railway sector in the state, Vaishnaw said when the UPA government was in power, the state would get only ₹700 to ₹800 crore. After the NDA came to power in 2014, the railway funding for the state has increased 10 times, he asserted. He also stated that in the current year, the state has been allocated ₹7,000 crore for various railway projects.

Speaking on the occasion, Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs and Jai Shakti, Bisweshwar Tudu said as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made an MP from Odisha (Ashwini Vaishnaw) the railway minister, a lot of works in the railway sector can be done in the

Vaishnaw said when the UPA govt was in power, the state would get only ₹700 to ₹800 crore. After the NDA came to power in 2014, the railway funding for the state has increased 10 times

days to come.

Balasore MP Pratap Chandra Sarangi said after Ashwini Vaishnaw became the railway minister, the railway station at Nilagiri has been possible. The MP recalled that when Ashwini Vaishnaw was collector of Balasore, he had successfully conducted the rescue and the relief operation post the 1999 Super Cyclone. He added that the minister has a long relation with the people of Balasore.

Lokayukta to probe ₹22-cr toilet scam in Nayagarh

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, Jan 7: Massive irregularities were allegedly committed in construction of toilets under the Swachh Bharat Mission in Khandapara block of Nayagarh district. Some people alleging a ₹22 crore scam in the toilet construction had taken up the issue with the Lokayukta.

Hearing the case, Lokayukta had ordered an investigation into the irregularities. The investigation will be completed in two months. It was learnt that Lokayukta has formed a team to look into the scam.

According to reports, 22,000 toilets have been shown as constructed in official records in 22 panchayats of this block. ₹25 crore has been utilized for these toilets.

However, ground reality is different. Most of the toilets don't have doors while scores of them have been left half constructed. In many cases, toilets do not have pans and septic pits. Some toilets have been completed without septic tanks.

However, bills of these toilets have been withdrawn by contractors. Frowning upon the mess in the



implementation of the Swachh Bharat Mission, Surendra Panigrahi, state president of the Bharatiya Bikash Parishad, said only 10 per cent of the 22,000 toilets have been completed in the block while rest of the toilets have been left half-way done. "Bills for the toilets have been made. Hence, fund to the tune of ₹22 crore has been misappropriated," he added.

Following a complaint at the Lokayukta, a case (153, dated February 25, 2021) has been registered. September 9, 2021, an additional complaint in this regard was also submitted to Lokayukta.

Thereafter, the Lokayukta had sought a report about the fund embezzlement in toilet construction in Kiajehara, Kosaka, Godisahi, Mardarajpur and Kantilo panchayats from Khandapara BDO, junior engineer and assistant en-

gineer of the rural water supply and sanitation (RWSS) department.

The Lokayukta held a hearing on the case November 21, 2021 and submitted a list of toilets of the five panchayats to the petitioner.

The Lokayukta held another hearing December 28, 2021. Then, the petitioner had shown photographs of the incomplete toilets. In its order, Lokayukta stated that a team constituted by it will look into the irregularities.

Niranjan Das, the district secretary of the Bharatiya Bikash Parishad, said that he has still photographs and video clips of the incomplete toilets. During the investigation, the evidence will be produced to the investigating team of the Lokayukta, he added. He alleged that two former BDOs, a JE and an assistant engineer of the RWSS are involved in the scam.

Dhenkanal: Hunting of migratory birds up

AGENCIES

Dhenkanal, Jan 7: With the arrival of avian guests in Dhenkanal this winter, hunting of the birds has increased manifold in the district.

Taking advantage of the birds thronging riverbeds, waterbodies and wetlands in large numbers, hunters poison the birds to catch them, local residents alleged Thursday.

Rampant hunting activities have also troubled the district Forest department. According to sources, migratory birds gather in the wetlands near Brahmani river between November and January.

Meat of Siberian birds, grey crane and Brahminy duck (Ruddy shelduck) has good demand in the local markets.

Fearing that use of traps might attract eyes of forest officials, hunters prefer to use poison-laced foodgrains instead. A number of migratory birds were hunted Sunday and Monday at Brahmani riverbed near Nagena village, the locals alleged.

"Poison-laced foodgrains often pose a threat to turtles and other aquatic animals in the Brahmani river," the local residents stated.

Dhenkanal DFO Prakash Chand Gogineni said, "We had visited the spot after getting complaints regarding hunting of migratory birds. We suspect that the hunters come from other side of the river. Security arrangements have been beefed up and patrolling has been intensified in the region to keep hunters away."

As Tapaswini enters in-law's house, father-in-law leaves



POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Jan 7: In a new twist in Dr Sumit and Tapaswini's case, the former's father Pramod Kumar Sahu soon left his house after Tapaswini Dash was given entry into the house in the presence of police as well as administrative officials at Brahmanagar locality in Berhampur Thursday evening.

Sahu cited that he felt insecure to stay in his own house after Tapaswini's entry. Meanwhile, Sahu released a video in which he narrated in detail the rea-

son which compelled him to leave the house.

"Tapaswini has previously levelled dowry harassment charges against me and my family members due to which I feel unsafe and scared to stay in the house in her (Sumit's wife) presence," Sahu alleged.

"Despite lack of clarity in the order given by the District and Sessions Judge Court in Berhampur, the local tehsildar and police officer allowed Tapaswini to stay in my house," Sahu expressed.

"Ganjam administration officials gave entry to Tapaswini into the house without my approval. There was apparent confusion regarding the court order. I sought a clarification from the police and local tehsildar, but they ignored it due to pressure exerted by their higher-ups," Sahu further said.

RARE ALBINO CROCODILE SIGHTED IN BHITARKANIKA

AGENCIES



Kendrapara, Jan 7: A rare albino salt-water crocodile has been recently sighted at Bhitarkanika National Park, a forest officer said Friday. Rajnagar Mangrove (Wildlife) Divisional Forest Officer JD Pati said that the albino crocodile was sighted in the hatchery and rearing complex of crocodiles at Dangmal in the national park.

Forest personnel have named it 'Sweta'. The national park is now home to three captive albino crocodiles. The three-year-old female crocodile was born in the hatchery from the eggs collected from the wild, he said.

"During my visit to the hatchery Wednesday, I discovered this albino crocodile and advised the forest personnel to take proper care of this whitish-coloured crocodile," researcher

Sudhakar Kar said.

It takes some years for the whitish complexion of an albino crocodile to develop, he said. Although albino estuarine crocodiles are rare, they have been spotted in the wild in Bhitarkanika.

"During the census last year, we counted 1,768 crocodiles, including 15 albino reptiles, in the rivers, creeks and other water bodies of Bhitarkanika," Kar said. Forty-year-old 'Gori', hatched and bred by the Forest Department in 1975 as a part of a crocodile conservation programme, was the first albino crocodile spotted in Bhitarkanika.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, ELECTRICAL CIRCLE (R&B) NIRMAN SOUDHA, BHUBANESWAR
E-mail: seec.bbsr2010@gmail.com
Bid Identification No. S.E.E.C. (R&B) 11/2021-22
No. 18 / Date: 04.01.2022
EI-Estg-576/21
No. B-988: The tender for the work "Laying of 33KV 300 Sqmm. 3 Core XLPE U.G. Cable through HDPE Pipe for Power Supply to Keonjhar medical College & Teaching Hospital for the year 2021-22" (Tender ID No. 2021_EICCL_73502_1) invited vide Bid Identification No. S.E.E.C. (R&B) 11/2021-22 is hereby cancelled due to receipt of single tender in first call.
Sd./- Superintending Engineer
OIPR-34006/11/001712122 Electrical Circle (R&B), Odisha, BBSR

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA No. C-1839
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, P.H. DIVISION, CUTTACK
e-mail ID: eephtctii@gmail.com, sephdct521@gmail.com
e-Procurement Notice for Bid Identification No. SEPH-DIVISION, CTC - 133 of 2021-22

- Name of the Work : 2 Nos. of P.H. Work
- Estimated Cost : Rs. 38.55 lakhs to 39.50 lakhs
- Period of Completion : 1 to 2 Months
- Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal : From 11.00 A.M. of 07.01.2022 to 5.00 P.M. of 17.01.2022
- Last date/time of receipt of bids in the portal : 5.00 P.M. of 17.01.2022
- Date & time of opening of bids : 11.00 A.M. of 18.01.2022
- Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid : The Superintending Engineer, P.H. Division, Cuttack - 753004, Odisha, Ph. (0671) 2979063

e-mail : eephtctii@gmail.com sephdct521@gmail.com
Further details can be seen from e-procurement portal <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in>.
Sd./- Superintending Engineer P.H. Division, Cuttack
OIPR-13009/11/0044/2122

Ropeway for Nilamadhaha shrine in a limbo

AGENCIES

Khandapara, Jan 7: Ancient temple shrines are visited by tourists and devotees round the year and are good revenue earners for the state exchequer.

However, the state government has done little for the development of these shrines despite a growing demand among the devotees for the development of these temples.

The famous Nilamadhaha temple at Kantilo in Nayagarh district is a case in this point where installation of a ropeway is stuck in government red-tape despite completion of a survey over last six years.

As a result, elderly and disabled people visiting the temple find it difficult to climb atop the hill for darshan of the deity in the absence of a ropeway.

It has been witnessed that many a times elderly and disabled people return from the foothill without visiting the deity as they find it hard to climb the staircase to reach the hilltop.

Locals have alleged that lack of political will is responsible for the delay in execution of the ropeway



FILE PHOTO

project. The Nilamadhaha temple is a very old temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu of Hindu pantheon and the deity occupies a central position in the Jagannath cult.

The temple is situated atop twin hills of Brahmadri and Padmadri on the banks of the Mahanadi at Kantilo in Nayagarh district. It is visited by hundreds of devotees every day.

The temple is surrounded by four doors namely Lion's Gate

(Singhadwar) on the east, Tiger Gate (Byghradwar) on the west, Elephant Gate (Hatidwar) on the north and Horse Gate (Ghodadwar) on the south. The road to each gate has a flight of 54 steps.

The deity is revered by devotees who through it round the year to witness the permanent flow of holy water from the feet of Lord Nilamadhaha. Lord Siddheswar present in the shrine is another

Six years ago, a survey was conducted on installation of a ropeway at the famous shrine in Nayagarh, but the project has been buried under red-tape. No effort is allegedly made to execute it

highlight of the place.

Keeping the difficulties of devotees in mind, it was decided to construct a ropeway. However, the proposal is buried under red-tape.

Former Khandapara MLA Anubhav Patnaik had stressed construction of a ropeway to the shrine in 2014 during a visit to the shrine with Janakiballav Mohapatra, engineer-in-chief of the state water resources department, November 13, 2014.

Later, concerned officials conducted a survey to implement the project in 2016. Since then, six years have passed but the project is yet to

be implemented. This has sparked resentment among the visiting tourists and devotees.

Reports said Patnaik realized the difficulty in climbing 54 steps to the temple and stressed installation of a ropeway as has been done in various shrines of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Later, on the advice of the chief engineer, Lingaraj Associate, a private firm, conducted a survey for the project, March 1, 2016. The firm was advised to install a ropeway of 175 mtrs in length from the foothill on the west to the hilltop.

A preliminary estimate pegged the expenditure at ₹3 to ₹4 crore for installation of the ropeway. The survey report was submitted to the District Collector. Later, a detailed project report and a design were submitted to the state government.

However, the ropeway project never became a reality. Locals have demanded that Khandapara MLA Soumya Ranjan Patnaik and the state tourism department should take note of the issue and press for installation of a ropeway to the shrine before the state government.

FOCUS DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

PESSIMISM AMID PROGRESS



Within the space of just a few generations, humanity has created the material conditions for establishing the kind of society that our ancestors could hardly imagine. But everything now depends on whether we can figure out the politics of wealth distribution

that the proportional gap between rich and developing countries is as large as ever.

Even developed countries like the United States are apparently incapable of properly distributing the enormous wealth that has been created by modern post-industrial economies. The past four decades have given the lie to the neoliberal claim that a more unequal society would release immense entrepreneurial energies, lifting all boats. Yet policies to accord well-being, utility, and dignity to all people have consistently been blocked.

One major hurdle is the idea that some of society's non-rich deserve not more but even less. This view has long been applied to Hispanics and African-Americans in the US, Muslims in India, Turks in Britain, and all those who have ever run afoul of blood-and-soil nationalism. Many now seem to believe that the Enlightenment vision of human equality was wrong and should be replaced with the Aristotelian principle that it is unjust to treat non-equals equally.

Another hurdle is economic. It was long assumed that technology, capital, and labor would always ultimately function as complements, because every machine and information-processing task would still need to be supervised by a human. But our information-processing technologies have been outpacing our educational system, and the hope for harmonious complementarity has become a pipe dream.

Climate change, nationalism, and the challenges associated with new technologies are just a few of the big problems humanity will be facing in the post-pandemic decades. In his first inaugural address, Franklin D. Roosevelt referenced Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish..." Unless and until such a vision for our own time emerges, the people will see only gloom ahead.

The writer is Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, and a research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Humanity as a whole is wealthier today than at any time in its history. And yet, from the short-term challenge of the pandemic to the existential threat of global warming, there is a widespread sense that things are going badly wrong. The start of a new year is an occasion for hope, but is pessimism the more appropriate default?

To answer that question, we should consider our current situation in a broader context. For the first ten thousand years after the invention of agriculture, humanity had no chance of achieving any approximation of "utopia," regardless of how one defined that term. Then, within our parents' and grandparents' lifetimes, something approaching that ideal came into view. Yet we have repeatedly failed to grasp it. As my friend the late Max Singer used to say, a truly "human world" will remain out of reach until we have figured out the politics of wealth distribution.

Until just a few generations ago, humanity marched to a Malthusian drum. With technological progress ploddingly slow and mortality extremely high, population size was everything. In a world where almost one-third of elderly women had no surviving sons or grandsons, and hence no social power, there was immense pressure to have more children in one's childbearing years. The resulting population growth (without commensurate growth in the size of farms) offset any gains in productivity and incomes from better technology and kept typical living standards low and stagnant.

The Malthusian society's best shot at relative happiness was to foster a custom of delaying marriage, thereby pushing down the birth rate. Paced with the problem of unsustainable population growth, this practice represented a social rather than a biological solution (which took the form of malnutrition). At the same time, the elite's best shot at happiness was to establish a smooth process of extracting wealth from the farmers and craftsmen.

It is now the third decade of the twenty-first century and humanity is almost through what social

scientists call the demographic transition: a shift from high to low birth and death rates, owing to economic development and technological advances. Malthusian population pressure no longer keeps us poor. Our productivity vastly exceeds that of all previous generations, and it continues to grow. In the next two generations, we will achieve as much proportional growth in our technological powers as our forebears in 1870 had since the great migration out of Africa 50,000 years earlier.

In many parts of the world, there already is enough wealth to ensure that nobody is hungry, unsheltered, or vulnerable to many of the health threats that used to shorten most lives. There is enough information and entertainment that nobody need be bored. There are enough resources to allow everyone to create or pursue whatever his or her calling may be. True, there will never be enough prestige to satisfy everyone; but if we are willing to settle for universal basic dignity, there is no longer any material reason why we should have a society where peo-

ple feel disrespected. Why, then, do things seem to be going badly wrong? First, the world has failed to build governance institutions that can manage global problems like climate change. That challenge could have been handled at very low cost a generation ago. Now, averting a disaster and adapting to the change that is already here will entail much, much larger upfront costs. And to what end? Merely to preserve for a few years longer the wealth of fossil-fuel robber barons?

Second, the world's unprecedented wealth is absurdly, appallingly, criminally maldistributed. The bottom billion people may have smartphones and some access to health care, but in many ways, they are not much better off than our pre-industrial Malthusian ancestors. It has been 75 years since US President Harry Truman wisely added global economic development to the Global North's agenda. Though he would be happy to see that the Global South is much, much richer now than it was in 1945, he would be tremendously disappointed to find



J Bradford Delong

IT IS NOW THE THIRD DECADE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AND HUMANITY IS ALMOST THROUGH WHAT SOCIAL SCIENTISTS CALL THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION

There is nothing mind can do that cannot be better done in the mind's immobility and thought-free stillness. When mind is still, then truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence.

SRI AUROBINDO



Change of guard or change of heart?

The secretary-level reshuffle, in which nine Central ministries and departments got new secretaries, is being depicted as an opportunity for upward mobility for 1990-batch IAS officers who were waiting for secretary-level postings at the Centre for a long time. However, people are still trying to wrap their heads around some of these changes. One or two of them had been stowed away in cold storage but, clearly, circumstances have changed at the Centre and in multiple states and, therefore, a change of guard was felt necessary.

Among those who surprised the conventional babu expectations was Vini Mahajan, the former Chief Secretary of Punjab, who has been named as Secretary of the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation. In 2020, Mahajan was appointed by then Punjab CM Amarinder Singh as the state Chief Secretary but had stepped down from the post in September this year after Amarinder's government was toppled. But since he has joined hands with the BJP, Mahajan has been 're-adjusted'. It is likely that her husband Dinkar Gupta, who was removed as Director-General of Police of Punjab by the current state Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, may soon be brought to Delhi in a senior capacity with one of the paramilitary organisations.

Equally of interest is the appointment of Indian Forest Service (IFS) officer Bharat Lal as the next Secretary of the Lokpal Secretariat. Many expected Lal to become Secretary of the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation (which has now gone to Mahajan) on the assumption that he had worked as additional secretary in the department and overseen the completion of some prestigious drinking water pipelines projects.

Now bureaucrats are wondering whether this is a change of guard or a change of heart and what the next moves will be.

Varun Gandhi leads by example

With the Omicron surge right during the campaigning for the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, Varun Gandhi, the third-term BJP MP from Pilibhit, has started the new year with a commendable idea. He along with District Magistrate



BABUDOM BYTES

Dilip Cherian

Pulkit Khare and other district officials is conducting meetings with Health officials in the area to ensure that his parliamentary constituency is prepared to deal with the surge in Covid cases widely anticipated by health experts.

Too often babus at the grassroots level are used to being harangued by politicians and the public alike. So having their MP actively supervise the preparatory work to face the Covid challenge in the district is a welcome step to enthrone the district officials and try to ensure that the havoc of the second wave of Covid last year is not repeated. Good teamwork and able leadership can achieve a lot. In this pandemic, Varun is setting a 'healthy' example that other lawmakers in Uttar Pradesh and at the Centre can emulate in their respective domains.

Babus to turn school teachers in Himachal

Students and teachers in government schools in Himachal Pradesh are bracing for the 'descent' of IAS and state administrative service officers on their premises to "improve standards of education" in these schools. The state government took this new initiative and Chief Secretary Ram Subagh Singh has sent out an order to all district education officers to implement the decision, which calls for these babus to take classes in the schools under their respective jurisdictions at least once a fortnight.

The Chief Secretary says that the babus will teach students and also share their experiences and guide the students to choose their careers. The aim of sending babus to teach school students is to create trust of parents in government schools and also to inspect the schools for any deficiency in infrastructure. The state Education Secretary Rajiv Sharma has said that the officers will be expected to turn in regular reports of their teaching experience to the government.

However, the babus may find it disconcerting that this noble initiative has not found favour with the existing teachers who see in this an attempt by the government to "undermine the teaching community". Meanwhile, the government is hoping that the initiative sparks interest in students to opt for Central and state services. Apparently, there is a marked drop in the number of IAS and IPS aspirants in Himachal Pradesh. Hope this works!

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

WISDOM CORNER

It is better to remain silent at the risk of being thought a fool, than to talk and remove all doubt of it.

MAURICE SWITZER

Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to reform (or pause and reflect).

MARK TWAIN

When someone loves you, the way they talk about you is different. You feel safe and comfortable.

JESS C. SCOTT

WORDSWORTH

Cash on the nail

The story says that merchants paid their debts by putting their money on a nail. So pay on the nail or cash on the nail came to mean settling a debt promptly. The nails were erected in Bristol from about 1550 to 1631. They were originally elsewhere but were moved to their present site after the Corn Exchange was built in the 1740s. Although the story seems to have been captured by Bristol, nails have also been recorded in the Stock Exchanges in Liverpool and Limerick. The latter dates from 1685 and was described by the blind Irish playwright John O'Keefe in his Recollections of 1826: "In the centre of Limerick Exchange is a pillar with a circular plate of copper about three feet in diameter, called The Nail, on which the earnest of all stock-exchange bargains has to be paid." At one time, merchants did transact their business on them as a public way of demonstrating that they were making a deal. The Tome Stone in Barnstaple once served a similar purpose. All this might seem to confirm the truth of the story. However, the popular link of the various nails with the expression seems to have begun only with an entry by Dr E Cobham Brewer in the first edition of his Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, in 1870. The expression on the nail, on the spot, at once, without delay, is first recorded in print in 1596. This predates most of the known nails. This isn't definitive, because they might have replaced others of earlier date. But the reference by John O'Keefe is the first record of the name, a surprisingly late one if they were known by that name before 1596. The phrase ad ungulum, "on the nail" — to a nicety, to perfection or to the utmost — is in the Satires of the Roman poet Horace 2000 years ago and is based on an even older Greek expression. This may be from the idea of a sculptor having created a carving so perfect that running a fingernail over it couldn't detect any unevenness, or from a joiner testing the accuracy of a joint. This is likely to have been the inspiration for the Anglo-Norman phrase, albeit with a shift in sense from "to the utmost" to "completely; in full".

SPECTRUM ECONOMY

Fear of investing in India

India has become the fastest growing economy in the world. Yet domestic demand is weak. The government may consider two policies in order to stimulate domestic consumption. First is a supply side policy; and second, a demand side policy. The government can try to reduce the price of goods in the market to stimulate demand in the supply side policy. Let us say the supply of potatoes in the market declines. Then the consumers will buy more potatoes and less of other vegetables. This will lead to an increase in demand of potatoes. Increased supply will be followed by increased demand. The balance between supply and demand will be reached at a lower price. The government can try to increase the demand for goods in the market and directly stimulate demand in the demand side policy. If the demand for potatoes increases then the price will increase and the farmers will bring in more quantity of potatoes. Increased demand will be followed by increased supply. Again a balance will be reached but, now, at a higher price. Increase in consumption is obtained in both the policies.

The government has adopted the supply side policy. The Reserve Bank of India has made available loan to commercial banks at low rates of interest so that they can lend at low rates of interest. Thinking is that low rates of interest will lead to lower cost of production and increase consumption just as cheap potatoes may stimulate more demand for potatoes. The government has implemented a "Production-Linked Incentive Scheme" (PLIS) wherein industries are provided with financial incentive to increase production. The thinking is that higher production would lead to lower production cost and stimulate demand.

The danger of this policy is that the demand may not actually be created. For example, few years ago farmers of Palanpur in Gujarat had dumped their potatoes on the streets because there were no buyers for potatoes even at ₹3 per kg. The result is that low price of a product does not ensure that it will lead to rise in demand. On the other hand, a demand side approach is more solid. For example, the supply of face masks has

increased dramatically after the Covid pandemic without low interest rates and PLIS incentives. Producers have found one way or the other to produce the goods since the demand is high. The difference between the "supply side" and "demand side" approaches is that the supply side approach remains uncertain because it may or may not lead to creation of demand, whereas the "demand side" approach is more assured because producers find one way or the other to produce the goods.

The government must change gears in 2022. It should consider ways of increasing demand in the economy. Needless to say, the basic objective of the economy is to increase domestic consumption. The welfare of the people is obtained directly if consumption is increased. It is of no use if the farmers produce more sugarcane, the industries produce more sugar and it is exported for consumption abroad. Two policies may be considered to increase demand. One, the entire government bureaucracy is today acting as middlemen between the government and the recipient. The government

should remove these middlemen from the welfare system and provide the money directly to the people just as the government is determined to remove the middlemen from the farmer's mandis. People will be able to purchase the goods from the market with the direct cash transfers and this will stimulate demand in the market. The second policy is to stem the outflow of our own capital. Anecdotal reports indicate that high net worth individuals from India are emigrating in large numbers. Many Indian businessmen are establishing factories in Vietnam or other countries, producing goods there and then importing them into India. In the present times, businessmen are afraid of investing in India. So the government should prepare a study of the reasons for the outflow of Indian capital. My feeling is that the social tension is a major deterrent. The government must make investment attractive within the country.

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



Bharat Jhunjhunwala

THE GOVERNMENT MUST CHANGE GEARS IN 2022. IT SHOULD CONSIDER WAYS OF INCREASING DEMAND IN THE ECONOMY

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Banking on state security

Sir, It was a totally unethical way of handling the Prime Minister's security, thereby causing lapse on the strict road map and clearing the road for safety and security of the VVIP. The Ministry of Home Affairs has sought a detailed report on the security breach in Punjab. Such dereliction of security procedure in the Prime Minister's visit is totally unacceptable and accountability will be fixed. This incident was also a big security lapse as far as the PM is concerned. Protestors were given access to the Prime Minister's route, while the Punjab CS and DGP gave assurances to SPG that the route is clear. It appears that the state police are treating PM's security as a child's play. Congress party is in turmoil in Punjab and is trying to play its card close to the chest and lapse is not pardonable and must be punished as well. Whatever our differences may be, every state government must provide the highest level of security for the Prime Minister. Banking on the highest degree of security is followed in all the states but Punjab played dirty politics. As per procedure, they have to make necessary arrangements for logistics, security as well as keep a contingency plan ready. Also in view of the contingency plan, Punjab government has to deploy additional security to secure any movement by road, which was clearly not deployed.

CK Subramaniam, NAVI MUMBAI

Take precautions

Sir, Omicron, the new variant of the COVID-19, has spread across countries since it was first detected in South Africa. Many countries have even closed their borders and re-imposed travel bans to prevent the spread of this new variant. The World Health Organisation has described Omicron as an alarming variant that is far more contagious than the other variants. Hence, we need to be more vigilant and follow all rules related to COVID-19 strictly. People are known to wear masks on their necks. Such careless behaviour will only lead to the increase in the number of corona cases. People should continue to follow measures to reduce their risk of getting infected with COVID-19 by wearing masks that are well-fitting, followed by hand hygiene and physical distancing, improving ventilation of indoor spaces, avoiding crowded places and getting themselves vaccinated. Avoid poorly ventilated or crowded spaces. Open windows to improve ventilation indoors and should realise that COVID-19 has taken away the lives of many people.

Jubel D'Cruz, MUMBAI

national

of the day quote

Under CAA, no refugee can claim tribal rights in Arunachal Pradesh. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has already sent a clear message to the Chakma and Hajong refugees living in the state

KIREN RIJU | UNION MINISTER

The positive changes witnessed in Uttar Pradesh under the Yogi Adityanath government in the last five years were just "trailer" and the real film of making the state prosperous will start after the assembly polls

NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

Digital medium can prove to be a boon in imparting quality education to children in rural areas

KALRAJ MISHRA | RAJASTHAN GOVERNOR

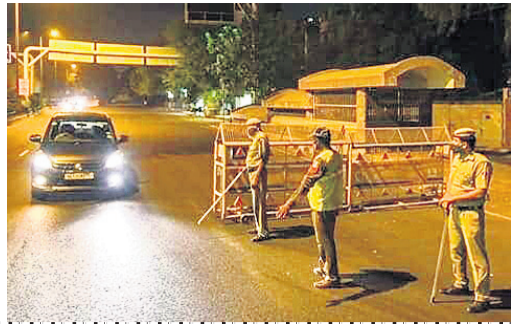


The government might impose stricter rules if the number of Covid cases in the state doesn't come down

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

COVID VIOLATORS IN SOUP

Over 200 FIRs were registered and 683 challans issued for violations of Covid appropriate behaviour during the night curfew imposed across the national capital amid growing number of infections, the Delhi Police said Friday



PM'S SECURITY BREACH

Secure all records, put probes on hold: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Chandigarh, Jan 7: The Supreme Court Friday asked the Centre and the state government to put on hold their probes into the security lapse during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Ferozpur visit and directed the high court registrar general to immediately secure all relevant records.

The directions by a bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana came on a day when a Central team investigating the lapse visited Ferozpur, meeting officials responsible for the security arrangements for the PM's visit on Wednesday.

Sources in Punjab said the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has sent show cause notices to some police officials in the state. Also, the Punjab government submitted a report to Centre, informing that an FIR has been registered against unidentified protesters.

The prime minister's convoy was stranded on a flyover for nearly



20 minutes on Wednesday due to a blockade by farmers in Ferozpur. He then returned from poll-bound Punjab without attending the planned events, including a rally. The Centre had accused the state's Congress for the security breach and sought an immediate report from it.

The political slugfest over the incident continued on Friday with Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar demanding that his

Punjab counterpart Charanjit Singh Channi's government should be dismissed and President's Rule imposed in the state.

Both the Centre and the state have set up high-level committees into the lapse. The Supreme Court has now asked them to put the probes on hold till Monday when it will next hear the petition.

"Heard counsel for parties. Taking into consideration the arguments advanced, keeping in view

that it pertained to the security of the prime minister and other issues... As first step, we deem it appropriate to direct Registrar General of Punjab and Haryana High Court to secure records forthwith," the bench, also comprising justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, said in the order.

The apex court also directed the Punjab government, its police and other Central and state agencies to provide all relevant records immediately to the Registrar General. The SC was hearing a plea by 'Lawyers' Voice' seeking a thorough investigation into the security breach.

The petition sought the preservation of evidence on security arrangements, a court-monitored probe and action against the "erring" Punjab government officials.

The three-member committee, constituted by the Union Home Ministry on Thursday, is seeking full details about the sequence of events that unfolded during Modi's Punjab visit, sources said.

SCBA writes to CJI, expresses anguish



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 7: The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) has written to Chief Justice of India NV Ramana expressing anguish at the non-consideration of names of its members for elevation as judges in various high courts.

SCBA president Vikas Singh in his letter addressed to the chief justice and the four senior-most judges of the apex court on January 6 said that it had constituted a search committee which identified 48 names for consideration for elevation in various high courts (HCs).

The names were handed over to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) several months back. However, none of the names suggested by the committee have been considered by any of the high court collegiums despite having a large number of vacancies in HCs, it said.

"The entire exercise was also to bring more transparency in the exercise of appointment to the higher judiciary which is repeatedly being alleged to be under a cloak of secrecy," it was claimed in the letter.

The letter stated that a decision

had also been taken by the earlier executive committee along with the judges committee to change the partition walls of chambers so as to make three chambers out of two for the purposes of single allotment.

However, in spite of the association's repeated request, the final chamber allotment list was not prepared in a time-bound manner, it said. "We have been corresponding with the registry to find out the progress of work in terms of the decision of last executive committee and we were told that no work has started to re-design the same," the SCBA said in the letter.

It claimed that the association has been asking for extra space to provide for a more proximate library, a lunch room and rooms for the president and secretary of SCBA in the annexe building in front of Court No. 11 which was verbally assured by former CJI Dipak Misra. However, "till date no action has been taken in this regard", the letter stated.

The SCBA has requested that an urgent audience be granted to its executive committee to discuss the issues and necessary action be taken at the earliest.

SHORT TAKES

Tight security at RSS HQ

Nagpur: Security has been tightened at the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh headquarters in Maharashtra's Nagpur as well as certain Central government offices and other sensitive locations after militants of a terror group conducted a recce there, top police officials said Friday. Commissioner of Police Amitesh Kumar said that militants linked with the Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-E-Mohammed (JeM) had come to Nagpur recently and conducted a recce of several key locations across the state's second capital, sparking security concerns.

84 devotees test positive for Covid

Mandya: A high alert has been sounded in Mandya district of Karnataka as 84 devotees, who returned from Tamil Nadu after pilgrimage to Om Shakti temple, have tested positive for Covid-19, district authorities said Friday. Another batch of more than 800 pilgrims is arriving in the district and authorities have made arrangements to test them for Covid-19.

3 minors charred

Dibrugarh (Assam): Three minors were charred Friday while playing inside a makeshift shelter in Charaideo district of Assam, police said. The tragic incident took place around 10.30 am at Greater Baruahola village under Sapon police station in the upper Assam district, Charaideo Superintendent of Police Sudhakar Singh said. "Four minors were playing inside a 'Tongi Ghri' when one of them tried to light some wheat straws and those caught fire, and the blaze engulfed the entire structure... One managed to escape, while the other three were charred to death," he said.

Tihar inmate swallows phone, hospitalised

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 7: A prisoner at the high-security Tihar Jail in the national capital was hospitalised after he swallowed a mobile phone, an official said here Friday.

Director General (Prison) Sandeep Goel said that the incident took place January 5. "One inmate of Jail no.1, Tihar, swallowed a mobile phone when our staff approached him for search on suspicion," the DG said.

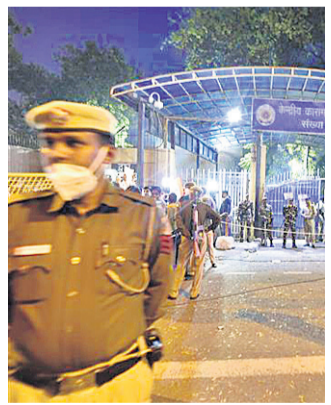
He informed that the said inmate was then immediately taken to the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital in the city. "Although his condition was fine so far, but mobile phone was still inside his body," Goel said.

The Tihar Jail has been strengthening its security arrangements following major backlash it has received over its officials being caught providing facilities to the inmates, of which the main gadget was a mobile phone.

Over 40 officials at the Tihar Prison have been booked by various law enforcement agencies during the past six months for extending benefits to the prisoners in one or the other way.

Goel earlier, had said that the Tihar Jail will soon have two X-ray based human body scanners that can prevent infiltration of illegal articles and gadgets inside the prison premises.

The usage of mobile phones by inmates is a serious concern, however, can be tackled with the usage of apt technology. Goyal said they are installing three new towers inside the jail premises that would confine the mobile signals emanating from the prison.



WINTER WONDERLAND



Tourists visit snow covered plains at Solang valley in Manali

PTI PHOTO

India hails promise to avoid nuclear weapons

In a rare joint statement, the five key nuclear-armed nations Monday said that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought while vowing to prevent the spread of atomic weapons

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 7: India Friday welcomed a joint pledge by the US, the UK, China, Russia and France to prevent the spread of atomic weapons and reaffirmed its nuclear doctrine of maintaining a credible minimum deterrence based on a 'no first use' policy and commitment to universal nuclear disarmament.

In a rare joint statement, the five key nuclear-armed nations Monday said that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought while vowing to prevent the spread of atomic weapons.

Arindam Bagchi, the spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said that as a re-

sponsible nuclear weapon state, India has a doctrine of maintaining a credible minimum deterrence based on a 'no first use' posture and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states.

He said India remains committed to the goal of universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament. "We welcome the Joint Statement this week, which reaffirms the importance of addressing nuclear threats, and underscores the desire to work towards creating a security environment more conducive to progress on disarmament with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all," he said.

Bagchi was responding to a media query on the joint statement. In the statement, the five world powers underlined their desire to work with all states to create a security environment conducive to progress on disarmament with the ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with "undiminished" security for all. "We intend to continue seeking bilateral and multilateral diplomatic approaches to avoid military confrontations, strengthen stability and predictability, increase mutual understanding and confidence, and prevent an arms race that would benefit none and endanger all," the joint statement had said.

In his comments, Bagchi said India's annual resolution at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on

'Reducing Nuclear Danger' calls for steps to reduce the risk of unintentional or accidental use of nuclear weapons, including through "de-alerting and de-targeting" of nuclear weapons.

"Our annual resolution on a 'Convention on the Prohibition of the use of Nuclear Weapons' seeks the commencement of negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on an international convention prohibiting the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances," he said.

"Both resolutions are adopted with substantive support at the UNGA. India will continue to contribute further to the global nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation agenda," he added.

173 Italy returnees test positive for Covid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Amritsar/New Delhi, Jan 7: At least 173 passengers on a Rome-Amritsar charter flight were found to be Covid-positive after being tested on arrival Friday, officials said.

This is the second consecutive incident wherein a large number of passengers coming from Italy to Amritsar airport have tested positive for coronavirus on arrival.

Thursday, 125 passengers who were travelling from Milan in Italy on another charter flight were found positive after being tested on arrival at the Amritsar airport.



Amritsar airport Director V K Seth said Friday, "Test results of 210 passengers have been shared with me. Out of them, a total of 173 passengers have tested positive."

"This flight came from Rome. It landed at around 12.20 pm today at the airport," he added. The officials said there were total 285 passengers on the charter flight that landed on Friday.

District health authority officials said all 173 passengers, who were found positive, were being sent for institutional quarantine at their respective home town districts. According to the rules of the Union Health Ministry, passengers coming from "at risk" countries to India have to compulsorily get tested for COVID-19 on arrival at the airport.

Covid mortality 6-7 times higher than official figure: Study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 7: About 3.2 million people could have died from Covid in India by September last year, six-seven times higher than reported officially, according to a study based on one independent and two government data sources.

The research, published in the journal Science on Thursday used an independent nationally representative survey of 137,289 adults in all states and union territories interviewed from March 2020 to July 2021.

An international team of researchers led by Prabhat Jha, a professor at the University of

Toronto in Canada, found that COVID-19 constituted 29 per cent of deaths from June 2020 to July 2021, corresponding to 3.2 million (32 lakh) deaths, of which 2.7 million (27 lakh) occurred in April-July 2021.

A sub-survey of 57,000 adults showed similar increases in mortality with COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 deaths peaking similarly, they said. Two government data sources found that, when compared to pre-pandemic periods, all-cause mortality - or death from any cause - was 27 per cent higher in 0.2 million health facilities and 26 per cent higher in civil registration deaths in 10 states, the re-



searchers said.

Both increases occurred mostly in 2021, according to the study. "The analyses find that India's cumulative COVID deaths by

September 2021 were 6-7 times higher than reported officially," the authors of the study said.

The researchers noted that India's reported COVID-19 death

totals are widely believed to be under-reported because of factors like incomplete certification of COVID deaths and misattribution to chronic diseases.

The first study is mortality reported in a nationally representative telephone survey conducted by CVoter, an independent, private polling agency.

In addition, the researchers studied the Government of India's administrative data on national facility-based deaths and civil registration system (CRS) deaths in 10 states. As of January 1, 2022, India has reported over 35 million cases of SARS-CoV-2, second only to the US, while its official cumu-

lative Covid death count stands at 0.48 million (4.8 lakh).

"If our findings are confirmed, this may require substantial upward revision of the World Health Organization's estimates of cumulative global COVID mortality, which as of January 1, 2022, stood at 5.4 million," the authors said.

The researchers said model-based estimates of cumulative COVID deaths through June 2021 in India range from a few hundred thousand to over four million, with most suggesting a substantial official undercount. In order to better estimate India's COVID deaths, alternative approaches to model-based estimates are needed, they said.

Public holiday not fundamental right, it's time to reduce them: Bombay HC

The court made the observation while rejecting a plea seeking directions to declare August 2 a public holiday to celebrate the Liberation Day of the Dadra and Nagar Haveli

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Jan 7: The Bombay High Court recently held that there is "no legally enforceable fundamental right to a public holiday and whether or not to declare a particular day as a public holiday or optional holiday is a matter of government policy." It also observed that since there are "too many public holidays in the country, the time has come to reduce and not to increase them."

The court made these observations while rejecting a plea seeking directions to the Administrator of Dadra and Nagar Haveli to declare August 2 as a public holiday to celebrate the Liberation Day of the Union territory.

A division bench of Justice Gautam S Patel and Madhav J Jamdar was Wednesday hearing the plea by Kishnabhai Nathubhai Ghutia who, pending hearing and final disposal of his writ petition, sought an order directing the respondent authorities to issue a notification declaring August 2 as public holiday from this year.

Appearing for the petitioner, advocates Bhavesh Parmar, Devmani Shukla, Rajesh Sahani and Reshma Nair told the court that August 2, 1954 the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli gained "Liberation/Independence" from Portuguese rule and became part



of the territory of India.

"From 1954 to 2020, 2nd August was permitted as a public holiday on account of Liberation or Independence. This was discontinued on 29th July, 2021," the petitioner claimed. It was further argued that if August 15 can be declared as a public holiday to mark the nation's Independence Day, there is no reason why August 2 should not be declared a public holiday for Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

The petitioner further referred to an order of another bench of the high court passed April 15, 2019 pertaining to the concerned Union Territory, wherein 'Good Friday' was listed as a restricted (optional) holiday but not a gazetted holiday.

As per the said order, the argument was made that taking into account the population of

Christians in the area; it was decided not to declare Good Friday as a gazetted holiday. However, observing that Christmas and similar holidays are widely celebrated, the coordinate bench had disposed of the PIL by directing the administrator to declare Good Friday as a gazetted holiday in the Union territories of Diu, Daman, Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

However, the bench led by Justice Patel observed, "That order stands on a different footing from the present case. That PIL was about the failure to gazette i.e. make compulsory, a public holiday rather than keep it optional. Whether or not to declare a particular day as a public holiday or an optional holiday or no holiday at all is a matter of government policy. There is no legally enforceable right that can be said to have been infringed."

Couple sexually assault, kill minor daughter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, Jan 7: The railway police in Maharashtra's Solapur apprehended a couple travelling with the body of their 16-month-old daughter, who had allegedly been sexually assaulted and strangled to death, an official said Friday.

The railway police Thursday nabbed the duo from a Gujarat-bound train at Solapur station with the body of the toddler, the official said. The accused were travelling from Secunderabad city of Telangana in a Rajkot-bound train to dispose of the body at their hometown, he said. As per the preliminary probe, the child's 26-year-old father had allegedly sexually assaulted and strangled her to death at their home in Secunderabad January 3, and the mother had helped him in the crime.

Some alert passengers in the train got suspicious when the child did not show any sign of movement during the journey, the official said. "The fellow passengers then informed the ticket examiner on the train, and subsequently, the railway police at Solapur station were also alerted," said Ganesh Shinde, additional superintendent of police, (railway police).

The duo was made to disembark at Solapur railway station, he said. "Following a medical check-up, the toddler was announced dead. It was revealed that the father had strangled her to death after sexually assaulting her. The mother had also helped him in the crime. The family then boarded the Rajkot-bound train, as they wanted to dispose of the body at their native place," Shinde said.

HC extends Varavara Rao's surrender date by six months

THE COURT ASKED NIA HOW THE 83-YEAR-OLD POET-ACTIVIST CAN BE SENT TO JAIL AMID COVID-19 SURGE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 7: The Bombay High Court on Friday extended till February 5, the date of surrender for poet Varavara Rao, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case who is currently on medical bail, before Talaja prison authorities in Maharashtra.

A bench of Justices SS Shinde and NR Borkar dismissed the National Investigating Agency's (NIA) request for extending such date of surrender only by a week. The bench said in view of the rising cases of coronavirus across the state, it would not be wise to send the 83-year-old poet-activist back to prison. Rao, who was lodged in the Talaja prison in Navi Mumbai as an undertrial, was granted temporary medical bail for six months in February 2021 by another bench of the HC that was led by Justice Shinde. He was admitted to the private Nanavati Hospital in Mumbai at the time for treatment of multiple ailments. His date of surrender was scheduled for September 5, 2021, but Rao filed a new application through advocate R Sathyanarayanan and senior counsel Anand Grover seeking an extension of medical bail.

The date of Rao's surrender has been extended since then by the HC on several accounts, including further time sought by the NIA, which is investigating the case, for filing



replies to the new application and getting the octogenarian medically examined again, among others. The NIA, however, has been opposing extension of Rao's medical bail, saying his treatment at Nanavati Hospital is now complete and as per doctors there, he does not need continued medical care at the private hospital currently.

Friday, NIA counsel Sandesh Patil told the HC that Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh had not been briefed in the matter and sought a week's time to complete the process. He urged the HC to grant the next date of hearing in a week's time. The bench, however, said there was no point posting the matter for hearing next week and extending Rao's date of surrender only till then, considering the coronavirus pandemic.

"Mr Patil, there is no point in keeping (the plea for hearing) next week. Experts say third wave (of coronavirus) may last for 50 to 60 days. This time, the police, health workers are testing positive very rapidly. The situation wasn't as bad the last time. So in such a situation, is it proper to send him (Rao) back to jail?" the judges asked. "Of course, we are aware of the seriousness of allegations (against Rao), and the point of law involved. We will hear you (all parties) on the next date on merits," the bench said. Grover then told the HC that considering Rao's health condition, his old age and chronic ailments, the Telegu poet had also filed a fresh application before the HC seeking "permanent bail on health grounds."

Maha plans to waive stamp duty on gold, silver import

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Jan 7: In a bid to bring its tax structure at par with competing states and secure its revenues, the Maharashtra government is mulling to waive the stamp duty on the import of gold and silver in the state.

While Maharashtra levies a 0.1 per cent stamp duty on gold imported by air, sources said that the import of gold has been shifting to other states, as they don't impose stamp duty. As this arbitrage resulted in decline of gold imports within the state, sources said that

mittee will be headed by Manoj Saunik, Additional Chief Secretary (Finance), and will submit its report within a month.

At present, Maharashtra levies 0.10 per cent stamp duty on gold imported by air.

Officials from the state finance department said that the committee has been constituted following demand by the bullion and jewellers industry. "The stamp duty on the import of gold is not there in places such as Delhi, Chennai and others. So, the traders are importing gold from these places as they have lower taxations. As a result, the



the government has been losing hundreds of crores in goods and services tax (GST) on import of gold. They further said that the waiver of stamp duty on gold could increase state revenue.

Thursday, the government constituted a committee to conduct a comprehensive study of the stamp duty, comparing it with that of other states, its impact on the state revenue and the industry if stamp duty were to be waived and also to recommend a road map. The com-

government is losing the revenue that it could have received otherwise," said an official.

The India Bullion and Jewellers Association, in its representation to the state government last May, had said that due to levying of stamp duty of gold, the import is getting shifted to the neighbouring state and Maharashtra is losing revenue. India imports nearly 800 tonne of gold, which is equivalent to almost ₹4 lakh crore, every year by air.



Municipal corporation workers demolish illegal shanties near Vashi in Navi Mumbai, Friday

PTI PHOTO

EVICTED DRIVE

Posters ban entry of non-Hindus to Varanasi ghats

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Varanasi, Jan 7: Posters banning the entry of non-Hindus to the Varanasi ghats along the Ganga appeared on the walls of buildings, which were reportedly pasted by activists of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal.

The city convenor of Bajrang Dal, Nikhil Tripathi 'Rudra' said that through these posters, a 'clear' message has been given to those who treat the ghat as 'picnic spots'. "We are warning to them to stay away from the ghats of Ganga, as it is not a picnic spot but a symbol of 'Sanatan' culture," he said.

The VHP city secretary, Rajan Gupta, said that those who have no respect for Sanatan dharma should not come to the ghats and temples.

"We will welcome them if they show respect to Sanatan dharma," he said. The poster adds that "it is not a request but a warning".

UP CM slashes power tariff for farmers by 50%

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Jan 7: The Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh has announced a 50 per cent reduction in power tariff on agricultural use.

The move is apparently aimed at assuaging the feelings of farmers ahead of the state elections.

According to the government spokesman, the decision will directly benefit over 13 lakh users in rural and semi-rural areas.

The order, announced by the Chief Minister's office, divided the targeted consumers into four categories - metered, unmetered, energy efficient pumps and farmers in the urban areas receiving metered power supply.

On metered connections for pumps in rural areas, farmers would be required to pay only Re 1 per unit instead of the existing ₹2 per unit. The fixed charge of ₹70 per horsepower (HP) too has been reduced to ₹35 per HP.



Likewise, in case of unmetered connection, the fixed charge has been reduced from ₹170 per HP to ₹85 per HP.

For energy efficient pumps, the electricity rates have been reduced from ₹1.6 to 83 paise per unit. The fixed charge, too, has

been slashed from ₹70 per HP to ₹35 per HP. In case of farmers receiving metered power supply in the urban areas, the electricity rate has been reduced from ₹6 per unit to ₹3 per unit. The fixed charge has also been brought down from ₹130 to ₹65 per HP.

The Chief Minister's office said the decision has been taken keeping in view the 'convenience and prosperity' of the farmers. The sop will come into effect immediately, a government spokesperson said.

These leaders will be missed in UP elections

These leaders were not only crowd-pullers for their parties but also represented vote banks that have the capacity of making and marring fortunes

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Jan 7: The absence of four top political leaders will be sorely felt in the upcoming UP Assembly elections this year.

These leaders were not only crowd-pullers for their parties but also represented vote banks that have the capacity of making and marring fortunes. The biggest loss in these elections will be for the BJP. The party's best-known face in state politics - Kalyan Singh - is no more.

The former Chief Minister, who passed away in August last year, was the OBC face of the BJP and commanded respect among the people. He was also a torchbearer of the Ayodhya movement and one of the first faces of Hindutva.

His appeal extended beyond caste



lines and his rapport with Opposition leaders helped the party in times of crisis. Though Kalyan Singh did not campaign in the 2017 assembly and the 2019 Lok Sabha elections since he was holding a gubernatorial assignment at that time, his presence was palpable in the polls as candidates and leaders rushed to him for advice. Another stalwart who is already being missed in this election season is



Lalji Tandon who passed away after prolonged illness in July 2020. Tandon was one of the few leaders in the BJP who rose beyond caste lines and was known for his election management and excellent administrative qualities. He was also the party's crisis manager who handled the BJP's turbulent relationship with the BSP.

"He was one leader in the party to whom one could pour out his or

her 'mamm ki baaf' in the true sense of the term, and he would listen patiently. Today, the leaders have no time to hear the workers' problems," said a minister who requested anonymity.

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Chaudhary Ajit Singh, who died in May last year, was the tallest political leader in western UP. Though his Rashtriya Lok Dal is poised for a revival after the farmers' agitation, Ajit Singh's absence is being deeply felt by his party workers.

The Samajwadi Party, on the other hand, will find it difficult to find an orator as powerful as Mohd Azam Khan, who was also among the party's star campaigners.

Azam Khan has been lodged in jail since February 2020 on charges that range from statue theft, buffalo

theft, goat theft, books theft, land grabbing, encroachment and forgery.

With Azam Khan missing in action, the SP does not have a Muslim face in the upcoming elections and the entire burden of campaigning now rests on the shoulders of Akhilesh Yadav.

Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Samajwadi patriarch, will also remain away from the campaign though he may make one or two appearances. The veteran leader is facing health issues and has been advised to keep away from crowds, especially at a time when Covid cases are surging.

"Netaji (Mulayam Singh) may issue a video appeal for all constituencies and may even address a rally or two if the situation eases during campaigning," said a source.

UP POLLS 2022

AKHILESH, JAYANT MEET FOR SEAT-SHARING TALKS

AGENCIES

Lucknow, Jan 7: Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav met his alliance partner Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary in Lucknow Thursday and discussed the seat-sharing arrangement for the upcoming UP Assembly polls.

Sources in both parties said the RLD was most likely to get around 35 seats in western UP.

The SP said the seat-sharing formula would be finalised after another interaction between the leaders. After the meeting, Yadav and Chaudhary shared photographs of the meeting on Twitter. Yadav

wrote, "Conversation about the future of UP with Jayant Chaudhary." Similarly, Chaudhary tweeted, "Cemented our ties for the development of Uttar Pradesh!"

Speaking about the final seat deal, SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary said, "The meeting was to talk about seat sharing. There will be another round of meeting between the two leaders, and after that, we will announce the seat-sharing formula."

The RLD had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha elections as part of the "grand alliance" comprising the SP and BSP. The RLD had lost all three seats — Baghat, Mathura and Muzaffarnagar — it contested.

of the day quote

The company secretaries should look beyond corporate governance and play a vital role in bringing organised and unorganised together

SMRITI IRANI | UNION MINISTER

The DMK government must immediately intervene in the resumption of work at National Cooperative Sugar mills in Madurai district for the sake of 10,000 cane farmers and 500 workers

O. PANEERSELVAM | FORMER CM OF TN

The spate of raids being carried out recently, are not to dig out black money but are aimed at harassing Samajwadi Party supporters

SHIVPAL YADAV | PRAGATISHEEL SAMAJWADI PARTY LOHIA PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

Man kills minor son

New Delhi: A 5-year-old child was allegedly beaten to death by his father in the national capital, sources said Friday. According to an official, information was received from Max Hospital Saket, that a child was brought dead to the hospital. Subsequently, the police reached the hospital and received the specific MLC. The doctor told the police that the deceased child was brought by his mother at 10 p.m. in an unconscious and unresponsive state. On inspection of the body, it was found that there were marks and bruises on hands, legs, body and on the neck.

PM Modi cancels Pondicherry visit

Pondicherry: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was to inaugurate the National youth festival at Pondicherry on January 12, has cancelled his visit due to a surge in Covid cases in the Union Territory (UT) and Tamil Nadu. The information was shared by senior BJP leader and Home Minister of Union Territory of Puducherry on Friday. The National Youth Festival which was to be held from January 12-16 to mark the 75th anniversary of Indian independence and birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda will now be held in the virtual mode for three days only.

Criminals killed

Chennai: Two notorious criminals were killed Friday by the Tamil Nadu Police after they tried to escape from custody. The deceased are identified as Dhinesh (34) and Moideen (28). According to the police, the two were involved in two back-to-back murders that happened on Thursday late night at Chengalpattu in which two vegetable merchants, Karthik and Mahesh, were killed. Chengalpattu special police team led by Station house officer (SHO) Ravi had arrested the duo.

Policemen thrashed

Patna: Miffed over illegally charging money from bikers, angry villagers thrashed four police personnel in Patna's Azimchak village, an official said Friday. The incident occurred on January 2 and its video was shared on social media Thursday night. The villagers claimed that a police team from the Gaurichak station used to illegally charge money from bikers while checking their vehicles in the Azimchak village. "On January 2, they signalled a biker to stop because he was not wearing a helmet. As he tried to escape from the place, the police thrashed him with a baton. The biker got injured and fell on the ground," said a villager.



What has been happening at our borders is a major lapse of national security. Will the PM ever talk about it? RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

MAJOR MILESTONE

India achieved a major milestone in its vaccination programme against COVID-19 as the cumulative vaccine doses administered in the country surpassed the 150-crore mark Friday



India, China military talks likely next week



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 7: India and China military delegates are likely to hold talks January 12 to deliberate over ways to de-escalate the border dispute between the two nations.

It would be the 14th round of India and China Corps Commander level military talks focusing on disengagement in the remaining friction areas like Depsang, Hot Springs and others.

The talks are happening when China has implemented new border laws from January 1 and has also started construction of a bridge on Pangong Lake in Eastern Ladakh to which India has objected.

On Thursday, India had strongly objected to China's illegal construction of a bridge on a part of the Pangong Lake and had stated that the government is monitoring the situation.

Talking about reports about a bridge being made by the Chinese side on Pangong lake, the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had said, "Government has been monitoring this activity closely. This bridge is being constructed in areas that have been under illegal occupation by China for around 60 years now. As you are well aware India has never accepted such illegal occupation."

The official pointed out that separately, the government has been

The talks are happening when China has implemented new border laws from January 1 and has also started construction of a bridge on Pangong Lake in Eastern Ladakh to which India has objected

taking all necessary steps to ensure that our security interests are fully protected. As part of these efforts the government has also, in the last seven years, increased significantly the budget for the development of border infrastructure and completed more roads and bridges than ever before.

"These have provided much needed connectivity to local population as well as logistical support to armed forces. Government remains committed to this objective," the official had said. China has been carrying out construction of a bridge connecting the north and south banks of the Pangong Lake for at least two months and is taking place at India's claim of the Line of Actual Control. The bridge to connect the north and south banks of the Pangong Lake will allow the Chinese People's Liberation Army quick access to both sides.

Under ECRP-II, funds are also made available for installing liquid medical oxygen (LMO) tanks and medical gas pipeline systems (MGPS). The states are required to make these facilities operational and secure an approval from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) in respect of the LMO tanks, the statement said.

Bhushan urged the states to commission the PSA plants being set up from the states' funds and CSR funds on a war-footing. The states

FIGHT AGAINST VIRUS

Centre asks states to ensure oxygen supply

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 7: Underlining the challenge posed by a rising number of COVID-19 cases across the country, with a focus on Omicron, the Centre Friday emphasised that it is the primary responsibility of the states to ensure that all the oxygen equipment at all the health facilities are tested and kept in a functional state to meet any emergency situation.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan chaired a high-level meeting with representatives from the states and Union territories through a video-conference on Friday to review the preparedness status of the entire spectrum of oxygen equipment, including ventilators, PSA and oxygen plants, oxygen concentrators and oxygen cylinders, for a timely and effective management of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a statement issued by the health ministry.

The states were urged to ensure full and optimal utilisation of the ECRP-II funds through daily reviews and to upload the expenditure on the dedicated NHM-PMS portal so that they are eligible to receive further funds to strengthen the healthcare facilities up to the sub-district level.

Under ECRP-II, funds are also made available for installing liquid medical oxygen (LMO) tanks and medical gas pipeline systems (MGPS). The states are required to make these facilities operational and secure an approval from the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO) in respect of the LMO tanks, the statement said.

Bhushan urged the states to commission the PSA plants being set up from the states' funds and CSR funds on a war-footing. The states



Workers refill oxygen cylinders as coronavirus cases rise in Patna

were also requested to ensure that a mock drill of the PSA plants is carried out to ensure that the oxygen flow at the patients' bedside adheres to adequate purity and the recommended outlet pressure with no leakages.

In addition, the flow meters must remain in a functional state, they were told. The states were also exhorted to monitor the installation of PSA plants at private as well as medical college hospitals.

The Union health secretary emphasised that the states need to ensure that the delivered ventilators are quickly installed and commissioned at the designated field health facilities, the statement said.

They were urged to address the large gaps that continue to exist between the numbers of delivered and installed ventilators, provide the consignee details of hospitals for the requirement of additional ventilators and expedite the issuance of final acceptance certificates for the installed ventilators.

The states were further reminded to expedite the process of finalising the maintenance contracts with the manufacturers. They were also

advised to lodge any complaint related to ventilators in the online complaint management system, which was launched on August 30 last year, the statement said.

It was pointed out that the Union health ministry has started the National Oxygen Stewardship Programme from December 22. The states need to ensure that the technical training of the operators is completed. More than 1,600 candidates joined the training programme covering 738 districts. An online PSA training programme is also being carried out by the Directorate General of Training (DGT) through 24 regional centres across the country.

The states were also urged to ensure an adequate buffer stock of drugs and update the buffer stock details of government hospitals and medical colleges on the Drugs and Vaccine Distribution Management System (DVDMS) portal. The states and Union territories that have not frozen their buffer requirement of drugs on the DVDMS portal were urged to timely update the same, along with the details of the stocks available and the purchase orders placed, the statement said.

3 MILITANTS KILLED IN ENCOUNTER

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Srinagar, Jan 7: Three terrorists were killed and one army officer was injured in an encounter with security forces at Zolwa Kralpora Chadoora in central Kashmir's Budgam district, officials said Friday.

The police said that based on specific inputs regarding the presence of terrorists in Zolwa Chadoora village area of Budgam, a joint cordon and search operation was launched on Thursday evening by the police and the army. During the search operation, the terrorists fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party, which was retaliated leading to an encounter. Later on, the CRPF also joined the operation.

"The joint team first evacuated all the civilians trapped around the encounter site to safer places. Besides, to avoid any collateral damage due to darkness, the operation was suspended during night hours and in the wee hours it resumed again, resulting in the elimination of three terrorists linked with proscribed terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed. During the encounter, one army officer received minor splinter injury," the police said.

One of the killed terrorists has been identified as Wassem Mir, a resident of Nowgam Srinagar, who was active since December 2020.

UP bags best state award in water conservation efforts

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 7: Uttar Pradesh Friday bagged the first prize for water conservation efforts, followed by Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu in the second and third place respectively at the National Awards 2020.

The awards were announced by Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. The awards were instituted to encourage and recognise individuals and organisations doing exemplary work in the field of water resources management.

"Water is fundamental to life. India's current water requirement is estimated to be around 1,100 billion cubic meters per year, projected to go up to 1,447 billion cubic meters by 2050. Water as a resource is crucial to India, which is one of the fastest growing economies in the world," Shekhawat said.

"While India has more than 18 per cent of the world's population, it has only 4 per cent of the world's renewable water resources. It is in this backdrop that the National Water Awards (NWA) were instituted to recognise and encourage exemplary work and efforts made by states, districts, individuals, organisations across the country in attaining the government's vision of a 'Jal Samridh Bharat'," the minister said.

Secretary, DDWS, Vini Mahajan was also present on the occasion. The award winners -- a total of 57 awardees in various categories -- would be given a citation, trophy and cash prize, a statement from the Ministry of Jal Shakti said.

MAMATA TAKES PM HEAD ON AT INAUGURATION



Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee virtually inaugurates the second campus of Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute in Kolkata via video conferencing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 7: Underlining his government's commitment to reaching the benefits of high-quality healthcare services to the poor and the middle class, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the second campus of Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute (NCI) here Friday.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who also attended the event that was held on-

line, caused a flutter with her remark that she had already inaugurated the complex during the second COVID-19 wave, when the state desperately needed more and more centres to cater to the surge of patients.

A strident critic of Modi, Banerjee said she was attending the event after being invited twice by Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, and underscored her government has been following all guidelines issued by the Centre

despite differences and "questions raised by the governor" over its decisions.

Dedicating to the nation the 400-bed tertiary cancer care centre built at a cost of ₹534 crore, Modi told the gathering that India has reached the "historic milestone" of administering 150 crore doses of COVID-19 vaccine during the day.

"Today, over 90 per cent of India's adult population has already got the first dose of Covid vaccine. This reflects the country's sense of self-confidence, self-dependence and self-pride for an achievement that is difficult for even the developed and rich nations," he asserted.

Extolling the Ayushman Bharat scheme, the prime minister said it has become a global benchmark for public healthcare systems with Over 2.60 crore people, including 17 lakh cancer patients, having benefited from it so far.

"This is yet another step towards our national resolve to reach high-quality healthcare services to all our citizens, especially the poor and the middle class," he said.

COVID PRECAUTION



A healthworker takes a swab sample of a sadhu for Covid testing near a transit camp of Gangasagar pilgrimage in Kolkata

Unprecedented rush seen for marriages in Hyderabad

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Hyderabad, Jan 7: The Central government's move of raising the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years has led to an unprecedented rush for marriages in the Muslim community in Hyderabad and other towns of Telangana.

Hundreds of marriages are being solemnised in the state every day due to the panic which has set in ever since the Child Marriage Amendment Bill 2021 was tabled in Parliament last month.

Though the Bill was referred to the Select Committee following objections raised by the opposition parties, the fears of the Bill getting Parliament's approval in the next session of Parliament are driving parents to advance the marriages originally fixed for later this year or next year.

Fearing that the legislation will

delay the marriages of their daughters by three years, parents are convincing the parents of bridegrooms to advance the marriages. In many cases, only the legal formalities are being completed with both sides agreeing to have reception, Valima and other rituals as per the original schedule.

Several qazis are performing 10-20 nikah each every day. Nikahs are not just being solemnised in mosques and function halls but also at homes. Qazis, who are appointed by the State Waqf Board, are seen rushing from one place to other to complete the legal formalities.

Nikahs are usually held in mosques in the evenings but due to the huge demand nikahs are also being performed in the afternoon. On normal days, mosques see one to two nikahs each every day but now this number has gone up to eight-ten.



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE: IANS

Qazis say they have never seen a situation like this in the past. Even at the peak of the marriage season, they used to perform 3-4 nikahs. "This is unprecedented. Parents are very worried and they want the nikah to be solemnised as early as possible," a Qazi said.

Parents are in a hurry to complete the entire process by obtaining the marriage certificates from Wakf Board. Some unscrupulous

The situation has forced Telangana State Waqf Board to step in. Its chairman Mohammed Saleem held a meeting with Qazis and advises them to help allay the apprehensions among parents.

"I have urged Qazis to counsel both sides not to panic as the Bill has not yet passed and the legal age of marriage for women continues to be 18. We are appealing to parents not to take wrong decisions in a hurry," said Saleem.

A leader of Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), Saleem hopes that the Bill will not be passed as several parties were against the move to enhance the legal age of marriage of women. He claimed that 90 per cent of parents in all the communities marry off their daughters at the age of 18-20 and only 10 per cent give them higher education.

The Waqf Board chairman said even if the Central government pushes through the Bill it is not

likely to be passed early. He pointed out that the Bill has already been referred to the Select Committee. The panel will have consultation with members of different parties and this process itself will take a few months.

He said TRS and other parties would oppose the Bill in Parliament. Since the Bill has to be passed by both the houses and the President has to give his assent to make it a law, he believes that the entire process may take two years.

United Muslim Forum, an apex body of various Muslim socio-religious organisations, has also appealed to the community not to rush through the marriages as the Bill has still not passed by Parliament. The Bill has already drawn flak from several Muslim groups, who see this as an interference in Muslim Personal Law. They say Islam permit marriage of a girl once she attains puberty.

international



North Korea's nuclear and missile programs pose an ongoing threat to the region and the international community
ANTONY BLINKEN | US SECRETARY OF STATE

BLAME GAME

Pakistan Friday blamed India for obstructing the SAARC process and alleged that New Delhi's "myopic attitude" was rendering a valuable platform for regional cooperation increasingly dysfunctional



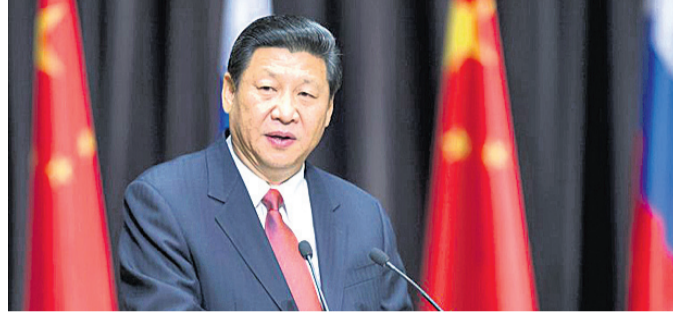
of the day quote

Imran Khan, who has been proven a thief and a liar under the law, must resign
SHAHBAZ SHARIF | LEADER OF THE OPPI IN THE PAK NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The EU will also build proposals for an architecture of European security, which is still largely dependent on the US and NATO
EMMANUEL MACRON | FRENCH PRESIDENT

The current year has just started and November is far away. Then why is there worry about extension in the tenure of the army chief
IMRAN KHAN | PAKISTAN PRIME MINISTER

Xi extends support, lauds Kazakh Prez for decisive action



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Jan 7: Chinese President Xi Jinping Friday threw his weight behind beleaguered Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev who is tackling an unprecedented and bloody public protest at home, saying Beijing firmly opposes any attempt to destabilise the neighbouring country.

China firmly opposes any force undermining Kazakhstan's stability, threatening the country's security, and sabotaging the peaceful life of the Kazakh people, Xi said in a verbal message to Tokayev, who has already sought support from Russian President Vladimir Putin. Xi said China strongly rejects any attempt by external forces to provoke unrest and instigate "colour revolutions" in Kazakhstan, as well as any attempt to harm the friendship between China and Kazakhstan and disrupt the two countries' cooperation.

He said Tokayev has taken decisive and effective actions at a critical moment, quickly calming the situation and showing the sense of responsibility as a statesman, and demonstrated high responsibility. China shares an over 1,000-mile border with Kazakhstan and has a population of more than 2 million Kazakh-origin people, mainly in its Xinjiang province. Reports from Kazakhstan said the country is ex-

As a fraternal neighbour and permanent comprehensive strategic partner of Kazakhstan, China is ready to provide necessary support to help the former Soviet republic to overcome the difficulties
XI JINPING | CHINESE PRESIDENT

periencing its worst public protests since gaining independence three decades ago. The protests which began over a near-doubling of prices for a type of vehicle fuel, quickly spread across the country, reflecting wider discontent over the rule of the same party since independence. As Xi expressed his backing of Tokayev, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said China is willing to do its best to provide the necessary support to Kazakhstan and help it tide over difficulties.

As protesters burned down government buildings and killed over a dozen law enforcement officers, Tokayev Friday said he has permitted law enforcement agencies to open fire and kill "terrorists". Internet services have been cut across the country and flight services in its commercial hub, Almaty have been suspended.

Polish leader admits country bought powerful Israeli spyware

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Warsaw, Jan 7: Poland's most powerful politician has acknowledged that the country bought advanced spyware from the Israeli surveillance software maker NSO Group, but denied that it was being used to target his political opponents.

Jaroslav Kaczynski, the leader of Poland's ruling conservative party, Law and Justice, said in an interview that the secret services in many countries are using the Pegasus software to combat crime and corruption.

Kaczynski said the use of such spyware arose in response to the growing use of encryption to mask data in transit, which defeated earlier monitoring technologies.

By hacking phones, it lets authorities monitor communications, as well as real-time conversations where they are not encrypted. "It would be bad if the Polish services did not have this type of tool," Kaczynski said in an interview to be published in the Monday



edition of weekly magazine Sieci. The wPolityce.pl news portal published excerpts Friday.

The interview follows exclusive reports by The Associated Press that Citizen Lab, a cyber watchdog group at the University of Toronto, found that three Polish government critics were hacked with NSO's Pegasus.

On Thursday, Amnesty International independently verified Citizen Lab's finding that Sen. Krzysztof Brejza was hacked multiple times in 2019 when he was running the opposition's parliamentary election campaign.

Text messages stolen from Brejza's phone were doctored and aired by state-controlled TV in Poland as part of a smear cam-

PROVOKING NATURE IRAN DISPLAYS MISSILES AMID N-TALKS

The display came on the second anniversary of a ballistic missile attack on bases housing American troops in Iraq in retaliation for the US drone strike that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in 2020

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, Jan 7: Iran put three ballistic missiles on display at an outdoor prayer esplanade in central Tehran Friday, as talks in Vienna aimed at reviving Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers flounder.



Iran put three ballistic missiles on display Friday, as talks in Vienna aimed at reviving Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers flounder (AP PHOTO)

ficial ranges of up to 1000-km (620 miles), were already-known models, the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said.

Diplomats from countries that remain in the 2015 nuclear deal — Britain, France, Germany, Russia

and China — are working with Tehran to revive the accord, which had sought to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions in exchange for trade.

American diplomats are present in Vienna but they are not in direct talks with Iranians. The ac-

cord collapsed in 2018 when then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the US. And re-imposed sanctions on Iran. A report by state TV said the missiles on display were the same types as those used to strike US Bases in Iraq. The Iranian military mistakenly shot down Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752 with two surface-to-air missiles after the attacks, killing all 176 people on board. After days of denial, the Guard publicly apologised, blaming air defense operator who authorities said mistook the Boeing 737-800 for an American cruise missile.

An Iranian military court in December held a hearing for 10 people suspected of having role in downing the Ukrainian airliner. State TV said a commemoration ceremony for the victims was held in Tehran's main cemetery with the presence of their families as well as officials.

SHORT TAKES

Pak NSA to visit Kabul

New Delhi: Moeed Yusuf, the National Security Advisor (NSA) of Pakistan, will visit Kabul soon as tensions have risen along the Durand Line, the de facto border between the two countries, Tolo News reported. It was decided during a high-level meeting in Islamabad Thursday that NSA Yusuf would visit Afghanistan amid tensions along the Durand Line.

Floods, landslides hit Indonesia

Jakarta: Six people died and 500 others evacuated from their homes as floods and landslides hit Indonesia's easternmost province of Papua, the country's disaster management agency said Friday. "Heavy rains since Thursday night have hit several sub districts in Jayapura City, Papua province, triggering floods and landslides," the agency's spokesperson Abdul Muhari said.

China: Three killed, 14 trapped in blast

Beijing: At least three people were killed and 14 others trapped in debris after a building collapsed due to a suspected gas leak at a Sub-District Office in southwest China Friday. The blast occurred at the Sub-District office in Wulong District's Chongqing Municipality, trapping 27 people. Thirteen people had been pulled out from the debris, three of whom died during rescue efforts, state-run CGTN-TV quoted the on-site emergency response team as saying.

Israel to scrap travel ban

Tel Aviv: Israel is set to lift the travel ban to eight countries as the Covid-19 positivity rate among the arrivals from these nations has dipped, the Ministry of Health said in a statement. The eight countries are the United Arab Emirates, the US, Ethiopia, Britain, Tanzania, Mexico, Switzerland and Turkey, reports said.

Heavy snowfall kills 11 across Afghan

Kabul: Heavy snow, that started falling across Afghanistan earlier this week triggering avalanches and floods, have so far claimed the lives of 11 people, while injuring 23 others, the media reported. Citing officials of the Taliban-led Afghan government, Bakhtar News Agency said that 90 per cent of the country's territory witnessed snow or rainfall that led to financial loss besides the deaths and injuries, reports Khaama Press.

READY FOR RACE



Decorated horses are seen ahead of the Epiphany Horse race in Pietrosani, Bucharest, Romania

UNI PHOTO

'Lanka could face fuel crunch by Jan 3rd week'

AGENCIES

Colombo, Jan 7: Sri Lanka could face shortage of fuel by the third week of January, Energy Minister Udaya Gammanpila warned Friday, as he urged the Central Bank to step in and pump in foreign currency required for imports.

Gammanpila's grim warning comes close on the heels of the Ceylon Electricity Board issuing a statement, asking citizens to brace for power cuts in the days to come due to its inability to purchase fuel.

The Sri Lankan government Tuesday had announced a \$1.2 billion economic relief package amidst a severe foreign exchange crisis grappling the island nation. At the beginning of December last year, the forex reserves were sufficient for just a month of imports.

However, last week, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka announced that the country's foreign exchange reserves had doubled in the span of just one month, and touched \$3.1 billion. According to sources, the forex reserve boost was buoyed by

SL bank pays \$6.9mn to Chinese company

Colombo: A top state-owned bank in Sri Lanka Friday paid \$6.9 million to a Chinese company to settle a longstanding dispute triggered over its fertiliser shipment that was rejected by Colombo after it was found to be contaminated. The announcement comes after the Colombo Commercial High Court dissolved an order preventing the payment to Qingdao Seawin Biotech for the imported fertiliser.

a 10 billion-yuan (\$1.6 billion) currency swap agreement signed with China March 21 this year.

"There is this looming danger which I have informed the Cabinet no less than on 8 occasions. The Central Bank has to ensure Letters of Credit can be opened for cooking gas and fuel. We could substitute imported food with some local varieties, but for fuel it is not possible," Gammanpila said.

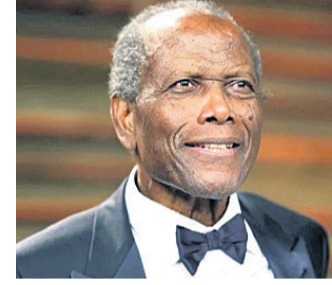
Oscar winner and groundbreaking star Sidney Poitier dies

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Los Angeles, Jan 7: The first Black man to win an Oscar, the Bahamian thespian and diplomat Sidney Poitier, passed away Friday at the age of 94 in his native country.

His death was announced by the Foreign Affairs Minister of Bahamas, Fred Mitchell, prompting an outpouring of tributes for the actor who'll forever be remembered for the characters he played in 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner', 'In the Heat of the Night', and 'Lilies of the Field'.

Poitier, according to 'The Independent', was automatically granted US citizenship after being unexpectedly born in Miami while his parents were visiting in February 1927.



Sidney Poitier

He grew up in the Bahamas but moved to America when he was 15, landing his first lead film role just one year later in 'Blackboard Jungle' (1955).

Recalling Poitier's early days, controversial talk show Piers Morgan tweeted a heart-warming story. "When he answered an ad for actors, as an illiterate young man, the theatre owner sneered: 'Go be a dishwasher,'" Morgan wrote. "Sidney already was a dishwasher. Stung by the jibe, he vowed to prove him wrong. He became the first Black man to win the Best Actor Oscar." 'Euphoria' star Colman Domingo, in an emotional Twitter post, wrote: "Until I can properly eulogise him later. Heart broken. I am because of him. He blazed a tremendous path for thespians such as me. I am forever grateful. Standing O for this giant." Poitier's first experience of awards recognition came with 'The Defiant Ones' (1958), which saw him nominated for Best Actor alongside co-star Tony Curtis.

Troops deployed at UK hosps due to Covid-hit staff shortages

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, Jan 7: The UK's Armed Forces have sent 200 personnel into National Health Service (NHS) hospitals across London as major incidents were declared on Friday due to staff shortages as a result of a continued surge in Covid-19 cases.

The UK's Ministry of Defence (MoD) said it will provide 40 defence medics and 160 general duty personnel for the next three weeks to assist with the crisis. These military medics will assist NHS doctors and nurses with patient care, while general duty personnel will help fill gaps caused by other absences as the UK's daily Covid infections maintained a high trend at 179,756, driven by the Omicron variant.

"The men and women of our Armed Forces are once again stepping up to support their dedicated colleagues in the NHS, as they work hand-in-hand to protect the nation from Covid-19," said UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace.

Across the UK, about 1,800 armed forces personnel are supporting the NHS response to the pandemic. The MoD said that more than 1,000 servicemen and women have also already been made available to support the vaccine booster programme, including 730 in England, 221 in Scotland and 98 in Wales. The UK's Royal College of Nursing has said the deployment means the government can no longer deny there is a "staffing crisis" within the NHS. Dr Chaand Nagpaul, the Indian-



PHOTOGRAPH: MOD/CROWN COPYRIGHT/PA

origin council chairman of the British Medical Association (BMA), said "we have never known this level of staff absence before" and

the pressures facing the health service and general practitioners (GPs) "is not normal". Latest figures from NHS England show that 39,142

Our brilliant armed forces have supported the country throughout the pandemic. Once again, they are stepping up to assist NHS workers who are working round the clock across the capital, helping the health service through this difficult winter period where the need is greatest
SAJID JAVID | UK HEALTH SECRETARY

NHS staff at hospital trusts in England were absent because of

of the day quote

First, we should work as a facilitator not an obstructer. Second, BIS should develop as a global organisation. Learning from global experiences, integrating global standards. Show to the world we are best

PIYUSH GOYAL | UNION MINISTER

While IT has continued to drive growth in hiring, it is heartening to see a comeback from sectors of hospitality & travel, retail, and real Estate

PAWAN GOYAL | CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICER, NAUKRI.COM

While the first two waves of the pandemic crippled us badly and resource crunch forced many restaurants to shut down, we see a larger concern with this third wave as it may actually hurt consumer sentiments in the near term which is already visible

KABIR SURI | PRESIDENT, NRAI



We are happy to have achieved such encouraging scores in the S&P Global corporate sustainability assessment. This is a testament to our continuous efforts towards building an organisation that truly lives the credo of #DoGreen

PRAVEER SINHA | CEO & MD, TATA POWER

RECORD DEALS IN 2021

India reported a record 2,224 deals amounting to \$115 billion in 2021, according to the Annual Grant Thornton Bharat Dealtracker. The year 2021 saw 14 deals valued at over a billion dollars each, 15 deals valued between \$500 million and \$999 million and 135 deals valued between \$100 million and \$499 million, it added



Govt estimates FY22 GDP growth at 9.2%

Risks to the economy stem from an Omicron-led third wave may upend growth revival across sectors, especially the contact-intensive services industries

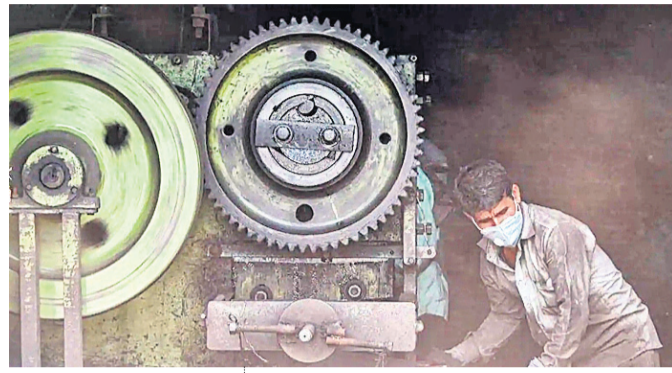
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 7: The Indian economy remains on track to regain its position as the world's fastest-growing major economy after official estimates Friday put the GDP expansion at a tempered 9.2 per cent this fiscal amid concerns over the impact of a resurgent virus on the fragile recovery.

The growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) of 9.2 per cent in April 2021 to March 2022 fiscal (FY 2021-22) given by the National Statistical Office (NSO) in its first advance estimate compares with 9.5 per cent expansion forecast by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) last month.

With 9.2 per cent growth in 2021-22 fiscal, the economy will surpass the pre-Covid level in actual terms, mainly on account of improved performance by farm, mining and manufacturing sectors.

"Real GDP or GDP (gross domestic product) at Constant Prices (2011-12) in the year 2021-22 is estimated at ₹147.54 lakh crore, as against the Provisional Estimate of GDP for the year 2020-21 of ₹135.13 lakh crore, released on May



AS PER NSO ESTIMATES, GDP IN ACTUAL TERMS IN 2021-22 WILL SURPASS THE PRE-COVID LEVEL OF ₹145.69 LAKH CRORE IN 2019-20

WORLD BANK PROJECTED AN 8.3% GROWTH RATE WHILE OECD PUT IT AT 9.7%

MANUFACTURING SECTOR IS LIKELY TO SEE A GROWTH OF 12.5% AGAINST A CONTRACTION OF 7.2% A YEAR AGO

AGRICULTURE SECTOR IS ESTIMATED TO SEE A GROWTH OF 3.9%, HIGHER THAN THE 3.6% EXPANSION RECORDED IN THE PREVIOUS FINANCIAL YEAR

31, 2021. The growth in real GDP during 2021-22 is estimated at 9.2 per cent as compared to the contraction of 7.3 per cent in 2020-21," as per a statement by the NSO.

The projection is less than the 9.5 per cent forecast by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)

and S&P, while Moody's Investors Service had in recent weeks put India's growth forecast at 9.3 per cent. Fitch Ratings has projected an 8.7 per cent expansion.

The finance ministry's Economic Survey in February last year had projected an 11 per cent growth

TCS retains passport project; chip-based e-passports soon



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 7: Largest software exporter TCS Friday bagged the second phase of the Passport Seva Programme (PSP), after an over decade-long work in the first phase which has witnessed rapid strides in citizens availing the services.

The second phase of the PSP, which is already the largest mission-critical e-governance programme in India, will last nine-and-a-half years and see the company deploy the latest technologies to further ease services. TCS will also introduce the much-awaited e-passport, a senior company official said.

"We will bring in the technology (for e-passport), but you know the sovereign functions like granting or printing of the passport booklet will continue with the government," Tej Bhatla, business unit head for public sector at TCS, told PTI.

He explained that it will not be a completely paper-free document as work like visa stamping will continue, but will definitely reduce the need for paper through automation wherever possible.

The passport jacket will contain an electronic chip which will have important security-related data encoded on it, he said, adding that while some countries do have such passports already and others are working on it, India will be among the leaders in introducing such a system. When asked about the timelines by which the e-passport will be introduced, Bhatla said the

India's largest IT firm TCS Friday said its Board will consider a buyback proposal January 12

wait will not be more than a few months. Asked about IT companies' refrains about government contracts like payment terms and how the receipts flow, Bhatla said all the commercial aspects have been kept in mind.

Over the last decade, over 86 million passport issuances have been facilitated by TCS as part of the first phase of the PSP, and Bhatla said the numbers will only go up during the new contract period as people travel more.

The company plans to set up a third data centre to store critical data after putting up a primary and secondary data centre as part of the first phase, he said, adding that all the work apart from printing and issuing the passport is handled by TCS.

The company will deploy a few hundred technology workers on the project, besides the front-office staff at the Passport Seva Kendras.

It plans to use technologies such as biometrics, artificial intelligence, advanced data analytics, chatbots, auto-response, natural language processing and cloud to enhance the citizen experience and will also strive to further shorten the turnaround times.

SHORT TAKES

Forex reserves dip by \$1.466bln

Mumbai: The country's foreign exchange reserves declined by \$1.466 billion to \$633.614 billion in the week ended December 31, RBI data showed. In the previous week ended December 24, the reserves dipped by \$587 million to \$635.08 billion. It touched a life-time high of \$642.453 billion in the week ended September 3, 2021. During the reporting week ended December 31, the decline in foreign exchange reserves was on account of a fall in foreign currency assets (FCA), a major component of the overall reserves. Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) weekly data released Friday showed.

HGS logs worst plunge in 14 yrs

Bangalore: Shares of Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS) sank 20% Friday in their worst intraday fall in 14 years, with analysts saying a special dividend announced by the company after the sale of its healthcare business missed investor expectations. HGS, the business process management unit of century-old Indian conglomerate Hinduja Group, said Thursday it would pay an interim dividend of ₹150 per share (\$2.02), or about \$42 million, after receiving \$1.09 billion in sale proceeds.

E2W sales jump 132% in 2021

New Delhi: Electric two-wheeler (E2W) sales in India increased by 132 per cent in 2021 on a year-on-year basis, said the Society of Manufacturers of Electric Vehicles (SMEV). Total sales of E2W, including high-speed and low-speed ones, during the period under review rose to 233,971 E2W as against 100,736 units sold in 2020. The industry body pointed out that customers have now started to shift in large numbers from petrol two-wheelers to electric ones due to attractive prices, lower running costs, and lower maintenance.

Citi to terminate unjabbed staffers

New York: Citigroup Inc Friday told its staff that it would terminate employees who are unvaccinated as of Jan 14, enforcing a policy previously announced last year, according to a source familiar with the matter. Citigroup said in October it would require US employees to be vaccinated against Covid-19 as a condition of their employment.

NET-ZERO TARGET

Bids invited for gas sales network

REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 7: India has invited bids in an auction for licences to supply natural gas to households, automobiles and small industries in some areas of five states, an official statement said Friday, as the country pushes to cut its carbon emissions. India, the world's third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, has set a 2070 goal for net zero carbon emissions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is targeting raising the share of natural gas in India's energy mix to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.2 per cent. Natural gas, while still a fossil fuel, emits less CO2 than coal.



The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Friday set a deadline of April 6 to submit bids for city gas distribution (CGD) authorisation for areas offered in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

The board has so far awarded CGD licences for some areas of 27 states and union territories covering 70 per cent of India's population, and is in the process of finalising winners for its previous round, in which 26 entities had submitted bids for 61 geographical areas.

After bids in the latest rounds are finalised, about 88 per cent of the country's area will be authorised for the development of the CGD Network, providing access to natural gas to about 98 per cent of India's population, the board said in the statement.

TO PAY INTEREST ON DUES

Airtel opts out of equity conversion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 7: Telecom operator Bharti Airtel will not avail the option of conversion of the interest on deferred spectrum and AGR dues to equity, under the reforms package, according to a regulatory filing by the company Friday. Airtel said it has informed the Telecom Department about its decision.

"... We wish to inform you that the company has confirmed to DoT (Department of Telecom) that it will not avail the option of conversion of the interest on deferred spectrum and AGR (Adjusted Gross Revenue) dues into equity," Airtel said in a BSE filing.



The telecom sector got a shot in the arm with the government last year approving a blockbuster relief package that includes a four-year break for companies from paying statutory dues, permission to share scarce airwaves, change in the definition of revenue on which levies are paid and 100 per cent foreign investment through the automatic

ABUSE OF MKT DOMINATION

CCI orders probe against Google

REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 7: India's competition watchdog Friday ordered an investigation into Alphabet Inc's Google following allegations from news publishers, saying its initial view was that the tech giant had broken some antitrust laws.

In its order, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) said Google dominates certain online search services in the country and may have imposed unfair conditions on news publishers.

The complainant, Digital News Publishers Association, which comprises the digital arms of some of India's biggest media companies, said Google denied fair advertising revenue to its members.

"In a well-functioning democracy, the critical role played by news media cannot be undermined," the CCI order said. "It appears that Google is using its dominant position in the relevant markets to enter/protect its position in the market for news aggregation service."



News organisations, which have been losing advertising revenue to online aggregators such as Google, have complained for years about tech companies using stories in search results or other features without payment.

The CCI order also mentioned new rules in France and Australia - fuelled by media lobbying and public pressure - that have led to licensing deals around the world collectively worth billions of dollars.

BIZ BUZZ

UCO BANK CELEBRATES 79TH FOUNDATION DAY

Balalore: The 79th Foundation Day of UCO Bank was celebrated in Balalore Zone Thursday. On the occasion, blood donation camp, free health check-up for senior citizens, distribution of study materials, sweets & clothes at orphanages, customer meet and several other programmes were organised at various branches of Balalore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar district. A cultural programme was also organised virtually, wherein Zonal Manager Lalatendu Behera expressed his gratitude to all the employees and customers for their relentless support in the long voyage of the bank. Behera also congratulated his team members namely NK Singh, Pradeep Kumar, Kshirod, Raju Ranjan for making this programme a grand success.



GRAM SABHA FOR JSW'S JAJANG MINES HELD



Jajang: A two-day Gram Sabha for JSW Steel's Jajang Iron Ore Mines to obtain forest clearance was organised peacefully in the presence of a huge number of local residents, government officials and JSW authorities. Gram Sabhas were held in four villages like Jurudi, Jajang, Jaribar, Palasa (Ka) and Bandhubeda. A Jajang resident Bhimsen Lohar said: "I support JSW. Mines in here should be handed over to the company. But I urge the JSW authorities to address the drinking water issues at the household level in the area." Meanwhile, Regha Majhi drew the attention over the poor health facilities available in Jajang village. Majhi requested JSW to facilitate ambulance services in the village for immediate response to emergencies. The company paid a patient hearing to the concerns and assured to address issues depending on feasibility in the coming days.

India to become hub for Covid drugs production: Fitch

THOSE AUTHORISED BY THE DRUGS CONTROLLER GENERAL OF INDIA TO MAKE COVID-19 ANTIVIRAL GENERAL DRUGS INCLUDE DR. REDDY'S LABORATORIES, TORRENT PHARMACEUTICALS, CIPLA, SUN PHARMA, NATCO PHARMA, VIATRIS, HETERO DRUGS AND MANKIND PHARMA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 7: India will become the largest global hub for Covid-19 antiviral general drug production after the drug controller granted emergency-use authorisation to several pharmaceutical companies in the country to manufacture and market generic versions of molnupiravir, Fitch Solutions said Friday.

Increased access to molnupiravir will keep hospitalisations and deaths in India to a manageable level as Omicron infections

rise, Fitch Solutions said in a report.

Lagevrio (Molnupiravir) was developed by Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, and it is the first ever oral antiviral drug for the treatment of high-risk adults with mild to moderate Covid-19.

Following the authorisation, Cipla, Sun Pharma, and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories are set to release molnupiravir capsules in the coming weeks, and the rest of the companies will follow.

On January 6, 2022, Covid-19 cases increased to 1,17,100 with

3,007 of these cases confirmed as the Omicron variant, according to the Union Ministry of Health.

Moreover, India continues to lag behind in its Covid-19 vaccine rollout target as 44.5 per cent of the population has been fully vaccinated, Fitch Solutions said quoting "Our World In Data". Therefore, given the slow vaccination and recent sharp rise in Covid-19 cases, generic versions of molnupiravir could significantly reduce risk of hospitalisation/admission or deaths.

Generic molnupiravir will increase access in India and other low-

and middle-income countries (LMICs), while simplifying current supply chain obstacles, it said.

With this relatively low cost, we expect molnupiravir generic versions to significantly increase access in India and other LMICs after regulatory approvals,

COST EFFECTIVE A full five-day treatment course with molnupiravir in the US costs around \$712 (Rs 52,909). Generic versions of the drug will cost between \$18.79 (about ₹1,400) to \$21.48 (about ₹1,600) for a five-day course

Dr. Reddy's has set the price of its molnupiravir generic version, molflu, at \$0.4693 (Rs 35) per capsule and \$18.79 (Rs 1,400) for a five-day course of 40 capsules

it said. Having a solid, compact form, oral drugs does not need containment requirement of glass vials and the tablets can be tightly packed with-

out risk of breakage. Similarly, a larger quantity of the drug can be contained within a set space, increasing the rate at which the drug can be distributed, it added.



WICKETKEEPER-BATTER, ALONG WITH STOKES, RESCUE VISITORS FROM 36/4 TO 258/7 AT STUMPS ON RAIN-HIT DAY 3 OF THE FOURTH ASHES TEST AT THE SCG

JONNY TON LIFTS ENGLAND

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sydney, Jan 7: A timely century by Jonny Bairstow (103 batting, 140b, 8x4, 3x6) and a half century for Ben Stokes (66, 91b, 9x4, 1x6) helped England claw their way back to 258/7 after a terrible start to the third day of the fourth Ashes Test. At stumps, Jack Leach (4 batting) was giving Bairstow company, with England trailing Australia by 158 runs.

Bairstow scored England's first century in their seventh innings this series against Australia. It was the headline performance Friday, when England had slumped to 36/4 by lunch before their middle order counterattacked to get back into the match on another rain-affected day at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

In clear pain after being struck on the thumb by a Pat Cummins delivery and with batting partners running out, Bairstow began attacking at nearly every ball and brought up a deserved century moments before stumps by slashing a Cummins delivery for four. His 138-ball hundred contained 12 boundaries and three sixes.

Bairstow celebrated his seventh Test century by running with arms aloft halfway toward the England team's dressing room, where his teammates had gathered to acknowledge a vital innings in the context of the match which had earlier looked to be slipping away.

England has already lost the five-match series with three straight losses, allowing Australia to retain the Ashes, but are determined to get something positive out of the tour.

Earlier, Stokes made a typically swashbuckling knock as part of a



BEN BURSTS OUT LAUGHING

Sydney: Ben Stokes inexplicably survived being bowled out on day three of the fourth Ashes Test as Australia bowler Cameron Green's effort hit his stumps – but the balls didn't fall off. Stokes decided to leave Green's rasping delivery midway through the second session but was left sweating when the ball clipped off-stump. But the balls didn't come off and while Paul Reffel raised his finger to give out for lbw, Stokes immediately reviewed and the Decision Review System (DRS) revealed the shocking turn of events. The England all-rounder was seen roaring with laughter after seeing the review come through on the big screen at the SCG.

128-run partnership with Bairstow which steadied England's innings after its early collapse. Nathan Lyon () eventually ended the 128-run partnership by trapping Stokes lbw with a ball that kept low.

He was perhaps fortunate to get that far having before tea survived a missed caught-and-bowled chance off Cummins and then successfully reviewing an on-field lbw out decision where the ball had in fact missed the pad and flicked the off stump but not dislodged the ball.

Shortly after raising his half century, Bairstow was struck by a ball from Cummins that reared up

and struck the batsman on the thumb. Bairstow received treatment on the ground before resuming his innings, but was visibly in discomfort holding the bat.

Jos Buttler became the second duck of the innings, chipping to Khawaja at cover off Cummins (2/68) to reduce England to 173/6 and in danger of not avoiding the follow-on target of 218.

But Bairstow and Mark Wood () combined for a 72-run partnership to reduce the visitors' nerves. Cummins eventually had Wood caught by Lyon while going for one big shot too many.

Before lunch, England's batting frailties again were exposed by Australia's pace attack after it resumed with 13 without loss in a rain delayed session.

Haseeb Hameed was dropped on two by wicketkeeper Alex Carey in Mitchell Starc's (1/49) second over, but the reprieve only cost four runs as Starc bowled the opener for six in his next over.

Scott Boland (2/25) bowled Zak Crawley (18) and then had Root caught at slip for a duck in his next over with the England skipper again playing away from his body and edging behind to Steve Smith

Déjà vu at SCG

Sydney: England's Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes were subjected to abuse while heading into the dressing room during the tea break here with an Australian fan telling him to 'lose some weight'. Both Bairstow and Stokes stopped to confront the spectator as they climbed the steps to the pavilion, with the Yorkshireman firing some words back and describing the sledger as 'weak as p***'. In a video published by the 'Sydney Morning Herald', one spectator can be heard shouting: "Stokes, you're fat." Another then yells: "Take your jumper off, Bairstow. Lose some weight, Bairstow." Stokes didn't react to the abuse aimed at him but stopped at the top of the stairs when Bairstow decided to hit back. "Pal... that's right. Just turn around and walk away. Weak as p***," Bairstow retorted. Other spectators in the vicinity applauded the efforts of the two England batsmen. The police officers reportedly spoke to several men after the incident and they were directed to leave the stadium. It came 12 months after India's Mohammed Siraj was racially abused while fielding at the same stadium. Though Cricket Australia confirmed that Indian players were subjected to racial abuse, six men who were ejected from the stadium following Siraj's complaint were cleared.

at second slip. Cameron Green (1/24) dismissed Dawid Malan (3) in the over before lunch, leaving England in tatters at the break.

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 416/8d; England 258/7 (Jonny Bairstow 103 batting, Ben Stokes 66, Mark Wood 39; Scott Boland 2/25, Pat Cummins 2/68). Match to continue.

ICC changes T20I playing conditions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, Jan 7: Slow over-rates in T20Is will invite stricter penalties now with the ICC Friday announcing that teams which fail to keep up with the schedule will end up with one fielder less outside the 30-yard circle for the remainder of the innings, starting this month.

The governing body also introduced an optional drinks interval midway through the innings in bilateral T20 international cricket as part of its updated playing conditions.

The in-match penalties are in addition to the sanctions for slow over rate outlined in Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel. The existing sanctions include demerit points and financial penalties on teams and their captains.

"The over rate regulations are captured in clause 13.8 of the playing conditions, which stipulate that a fielding side must be in position to bowl the first ball of the final over of the innings by the scheduled or rescheduled time for the end of the innings," the ICC stated.

"If they are not in such a position, one fewer fielder will be permitted outside of the 30-yard circle for the remaining overs of the innings."

Under normal regulations, five fielders are allowed outside the 30

yard circle after the first six overs. However, in case of the schedule not being kept up by the bowling side, "no more than four fielders shall be permitted outside the fielding restriction area..."

The bowler's end umpire will inform the captain of the fielding side, the batter and the other umpire of the "scheduled cessation time for the innings prior to the start of the innings, and of any rescheduled cessation time following any subsequent interruption to play."

The change was recommended by the ICC Cricket Committee, which regularly discusses ways to improve the pace of play in all formats, after considering reports on the effectiveness of a similar regulation that was included in the playing conditions for the Hundred competition conducted by the ECB.

In another change, an optional drinks break of two minutes and thirty seconds may be taken at the mid-point of each innings subject to agreement between Members at the start of each series.

The first men's match to be played under the new playing conditions will be the one-off tie between the West Indies and Ireland at the Sabina Park in Jamaica January 16.

The first T20I of the three-match series between South Africa and the West Indies in Centurion January 18 will be the first women's match played under the new playing conditions.

The first men's match to be played under the new playing conditions will be the one-off tie between the West Indies and Ireland at the Sabina Park in Jamaica January 16.

Atlético cruise on day of upset wins

BARCELONA: Villarreal and Osasuna became the latest topflight sides in Spain to be eliminated by lower-division rivals from the Copa del Rey, while Atlético Madrid eased into the round of 16. Diego Simeone's Atlético routed Rayo Majadahonda 5-0 to ensure it wouldn't repeat its flop from last season, when it lost against another third-tier opponent. Cunha, Renan Lodi, Luis Suárez, Antoine Griezmann and João Félix scored for the defending league champions. Unai Emery's Villarreal lost 2-1 at Sporting Gijón after the second-division side came from behind. Moi Gómez put Villarreal ahead just after halftime, only for Djuka Durdevic to level before defender Bogdan Milovanov struck the winner for the hosts with two minutes left. Osasuna was ousted by second-division Girona 1-0 after it failed to recover from an early goal by David Juncá. First-division sides Levante, Alavés, Granada, Getafe and Celta Vigo had already lost to lower-division rivals.

Roma errors hand Milan win in Serie A



ROME: Jose Mourinho was left gesticulating in apparent disapproval after two grievous errors from his Roma players handed AC Milan a 3-1 win in Serie A. First, striker Tammy Abraham stuck out his arm to block a shot that resulted in a penalty for Milan, then defender Roger Ibañez made an errant back pass that was intercepted by Olivier Giroud, which led to the Rossoneri's second goal just 17 minutes in. Giroud converted the penalty and Junior Messias scored Milan's second on a rebound after Giroud's effort hit the post. Abraham then pulled one back for Roma with a deflection but Milan goalkeeper Mike Maignan maintained the Rossoneri's advantage with a series of difficult saves. Milan also hit the goalframe twice, while Roma finished with nine men when Rick Karsdorp and Gianluca Mancini each picked up their second yellow cards – which will mean they'll be suspended for Sunday's game against Juventus. With Roma down to 10 men, Rafael Leão restored Milan's two-goal advantage after being set up with a chested pass from fellow substitute Zlatan Ibrahimovic to sprint in alone toward goal. Ibrahimovic then had a penalty attempt saved by Rui Patrício.

Bopanna-Ramkumar in Adelaide Int'l semifinals



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Adelaide, Jan 7: India's Rohan Bopanna and Ramkumar Ramanathan registered a resounding straight-set win to cruise into the semifinals but it was the end of the road for compatriot Sania Mirza in their respective ATP and WTA tournaments here Friday.

Bopanna and Ramkumar trounced the French-Monegasque duo of Benjamin Bonzi and Hugo Nys 6-1, 6-3 in the doubles quarterfinals of the Adelaide International 1 ATP 250 men's event.

However, Sania and her Ukrainian partner Nadiia Kichenok endured a bad day in the office as the two failed to make the summit clash of the Adelaide International 1 WTA event.

The duo put up a fiery fight but eventually lost their doubles semifinal tie 1-6, 6-2, 8-10 against local favourites Ashleigh Barty and Storm Sanders in one hour five minutes.

The unseeded Indian pair of veteran Bopanna and Ramkumar will now clash with the fourth seeded Bosnian-Mexican duo of Tomislav Brkic and Santiago Gonzalez for a spot in the final.

The two Indians are pairing up for the first time on the ATP tour. Should Bopanna and Ramkumar continue their good show the two may pair up for India's Davis Cup tie against Denmark scheduled to be played in New Delhi in March.

The two Adelaide events are tune up tournaments for the Australian Open, starting January 17 in Melbourne.

Dravid hints at conversations with Pant

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Johannesburg, Jan 7: India head coach Rahul Dravid has hinted at having a conversation with wicket-keeper batter Rishabh Pant over the timing of his shots, including the wild slog that led to his dismissal in the second innings of the lost second Test against South Africa here.

Speaking to media after India's seven-wicket defeat Thursday, Dravid said he would always want Pant to play positive cricket but at times, the shot selection can be different.

"We know Rishabh plays positively and he plays in a particular manner and that has got him a little bit of success. But of course there are times when we are going to have to have some sort of level of conversations around that," he said.

"It is just little bit or may be selection of the time to play that (shot)," Dravid added at the virtual post-match press conference.

Pant tried to smash Kagiso Rabada out of the ground on the third ball of his innings but ended up edging it to the wicketkeeper, drawing sharp criticism from all quarters.

"No one is going to ever tell Rishabh (Pant) not to be a positive player or not to be an aggressive player but sometimes it is just the question of picking and choosing the time to do that," Dravid said when specifically asked whether he was upset with Pant's shot.

Dravid also said that Pant can change the course of the game very quickly. "Maybe giving your-



self a little more time might be a little bit more advisable but look I mean in the end, we know what we are getting with Rishabh," he explained. "He is a really positive player, he is someone who can change the

The team has backed them (Pujara & Rahane) because of the experience and what they have done in the past. They had the belief that they will come good and they did. Sometimes we can be a little bit hard on some of our senior players because you have these exciting young players waiting in the wings and we all want to see them get a bit of exposure. But as long as these senior players are playing well and not getting out badly, then I think we should show faith in them

AJUNIL GAVASKAR

slightly difficult period that sets the game up for you or sets your innings up. So, I mean he (Pant) is learning.

"He plays in a particular way so it's always something that he is going to keep learning, keep improving and keep getting better," elaborated Dravid.

Dravid's on Vihari & Iyer's chances: If you look at some of our guys now senior players and being sort of considered, senior players, they have also had to wait for their time and also have had to score a lot of runs at the start of their careers. So it happens (wait) as its nature of the sport. They have just got to take heart from the fact that whenever they are getting opportunities, they are doing well and hopefully their time would come

Djokovic spends religious day in detention

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, Jan 7: Regardless of who made an error on the visa or the vaccination waiver or whatever, the reality Friday for tennis No.1 Novak Djokovic was spending one of his important religious holidays in an Australian detention hotel working on his challenge against deportation.

Djokovic has been receiving calls from Serbia, including from his parents and the president, hoping to boost his spirits. A priest from the Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox Church in Melbourne sought permission from immigration authorities to visit the nine-time Australian Open champion to celebrate the Orthodox Christmas.

"Our Christmas is rich in many customs and it is so important that a priest visits him," the church's dean, Milorad Locard, told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. "The whole thing

around this event is appalling. That he has to spend Christmas in detention. It is unthinkable."

Djokovic's supporters gathered outside the Park Hotel, used to house refugees and asylum seekers near downtown Melbourne, waving flags and banners.

They mixed with human rights advocates who were there more to highlight the plight of other longer-term people in detention, many who have long complained about their living conditions and exposure to the coronavirus in the pandemic.

A day after both the prime minister and the home affairs minister said it was the responsibility of the individual to have their visa documents in order, it seemed to dawn on people locally that whatever mistakes happened in the process, one of the highest-profile athletes in the world was in detention.

Djokovic flew to Australia confident he had everything he needed



Supporters of Novak Djokovic and pro-refugee protestors rally outside the Park Hotel, where the ATP World No.1 player is believed to be held while he stays in Melbourne

to compete, given he had been approved by Victoria state government for a medical exemption. That same evidence didn't comply with the Australian government's regulations.

So, instead of preparing to defend his Australian Open title, and bid to win a men's-record 21st major title, he's preparing to go to the Federal Circuit Court on Monday to challenge his visa cancellation and deportation.

Attention is moving away from Djokovic's vaccination status – a touchy topic in a city where people spent so long in lockdown and were subject to harsh travel restrictions – and onto questions about how the nine-time Australian Open champion could have wound up in this situation.

Even some who have been critical of Djokovic in the past are now in his corner. "Look, I definitely believe in taking action, I got vaccinated because of others

and for my mums health, but how we are handling Novak's situation is bad, really bad," Nick Kyrgios, an Australian player and outspoken critic of some of Djokovic's opinions on vaccinations, posted on Twitter. "This is one of our great champions but at the end of the day, he is human. Do better."

Jelena Djokovic posted on social media to thank her husband's supporters. "Thank you dear people, all around the world for using your voice to send love to my husband," she posted on Twitter. "I am taking a deep breath to calm down and find gratitude (and understanding) in this moment for all that is happening."

Critics of the medical exemptions have said if there were no loopholes, then nobody would be in Djokovic's position right now. And while players have sympathized with Djokovic's situation, some have said getting vaccinated would have prevented the problems.