



UNIFYING FACTOR
Actor Rashmika Mandanna says her hit movie 'Pushpa' has blurred cultural and language barriers
LEISURE P2



EFFECTIVE VAX
AstraZeneca's Vaxzevria vaccine has shown an increased antibody response to the Omicron variant of coronavirus
INTERNATIONAL P10



PANT SCORES TON
Rishabh Pant's unbeaten century allows India set a 212-run target for South Africa at Cape Town
SPORTS P12

LILIMA HANGS UP HER STICK
New Delhi: Midfielder of the Indian women's hockey team for close to a decade, Odia player Lilima Minz has decided to call it a day. She represented India in 156 matches and scored 12 goals. The Sundargarh player was part of the squad who won the bronze at the Asian Games (2014), silver at the 2018 Asian Games and gold at the FIH Women's Series Finals at Hiroshima in 2019. Lilima made her international debut at Argentina in 2011. She was also a part of the team that finished a historic fourth at the Tokyo Olympics Games, last year.



6-MONTH EXTENSION FOR SC MAHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar: Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra, set for retirement February 28 this year, has got a six-month extension, an official said Thursday. The Centre has approved the Odisha government's request to extend Mahapatra's tenure as the chief secretary by another six months. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has communicated the same to the General Administration department in Odisha. "I am directed to...convey the approval of the Central government for extension in service of SC Mahapatra... for a period of six months beyond his normal date of superannuation, February 28, 2022," read the DoPT letter. Mahapatra had assumed charge January 1, 2021.



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Aspirants write to CM for OCS Mains deferment

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC) aspirants have urged Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to postpone the Odisha Civil Services (OCS) Main Exam-2020 as Covid-19 cases continue to surge. The exams are scheduled to be conducted January 20 to February 8.

In a letter to Patnaik, the aspirants have cited instances of postponement of various academic and recruitment exams in the recent past due to the third wave of Covid-19. The aspirants also pointed out in the letter that a large number of persons appearing in the Civil Service Main examinations had tested positive for coronavirus after attending some papers. The exams had started January 7. The aspirants said in the letter that as the OCS Mains are an 18-day long process, there is a high risk of examinees getting infected. They also pointed out the issue of aspirants hailing from rural areas not getting house on rent to reside in Bhubaneswar and prepare for the exams as landlords are not renting the houses due to the sharp spike in Covid-19 cases.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL
POLL SURVEY AGENCY
Don't depend solely on public opinion. Take a headcount of defectors too!

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	61235.30	↑ 85.26
NIFTY	18257.80	↑ 45.50
DOLLAR	74.53	↓ ₹0.09
EURO	84.84	↑ ₹0.63
GOLD	₹47,766	↓ ₹42
SILVER	₹62,044	↑ ₹188

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	24.3°C	23.2°C
MIN	17.2°C	16.2°C
Humidity	96%	98%
Rainfall	5.2mm	19.2mm

Forecast: Light to moderate rain

TRAGEDY ON TRACKS



Six persons were killed and 67 injured when 12 bogies of the Bikaner-Guwahati Express train derailed and overturned in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district, Thursday (REPORT P9)

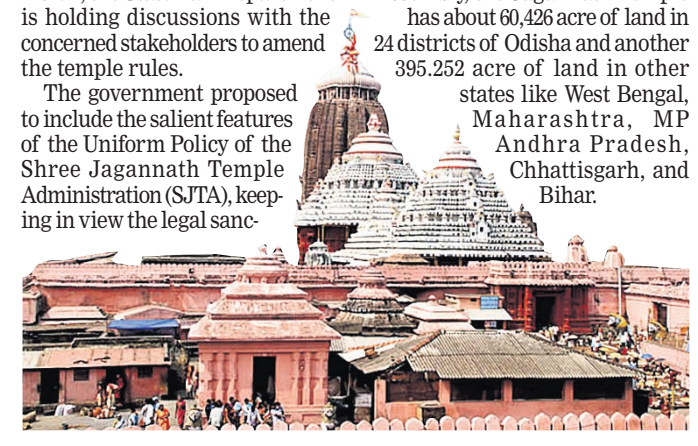
PROCESS TO CHANGE TEMPLE RULES STARTS

Once implemented the new rules will allow the SJTA to sell or lease out Jagannath Temple land without the approval of the Odisha government

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: The Odisha government has started the process to amend the Shri Jagannath Temple Rules, 1960 to facilitate smooth implementation of the amended provision in the Temple Act. The state Cabinet headed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had January 5 decided to make amendments to the Shree Jagannath Temple Act, 1954 for the settlement of long pending temple land-related issues. Accordingly, the Law department has amended the Act through an Ordinance. The Odisha government has amended the sub-section 2 under Section 16 of the Act to decentralise the power to lease out, sell or mortgage land properties or other immovable properties of Lord Jagannath. "Save as otherwise provided in

this Act, the immovable property taken possession by the Committee may be leased out, sold or otherwise alienated by it, subject to such condition and exception and in such manner as may be prescribed," is the new provision included in the amended Act. The amendment means that henceforth the immovable properties of the Jagannath Temple can be leased out for any time frame or can also be sold out without the approval of the Odisha government. To facilitate smooth implementation of the new provision, the State Law Department is holding discussions with the concerned stakeholders to amend the temple rules. The government proposed to include the salient features of the Uniform Policy of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), keeping in view the legal sanc-

tity and force attached to a Rule, sources said. Senior government officials will be conferred with power for disposal of the land settlement/alienation cases, procedure of disposal, manner of valuation etc. The Law department has requested the SJTA to provide details of land already recorded in the name of Shri Jagannath Temple Management Committee. Another meeting is scheduled to be held January 18 for this purpose, the source said. As per a statement made by the Law Minister Pratap Jena in the Assembly, the Jagannath Temple has about 60,426 acre of land in 24 districts of Odisha and another 395,252 acre of land in other states like West Bengal, Maharashtra, MP, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Bihar.



Congress nominates Unnao rape victim's mom as candidate

AGENCIES
Lucknow, Jan 13: The Congress has named the mother of 2017 Unnao rape survivor as its candidate for next month's Assembly Election in Uttar Pradesh. The name of the mother of the 19-year-old victim was released by the party's general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra here Thursday. Former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar was convicted and jailed for life for the girl's rape. Asha Singh has been fielded from Unnao district's Bangarmau constituency, the same seat where Sengar won as a BJP candidate in 2017. He remained lawmaker till his conviction. A bypoll on the seat was also won by the BJP. "Our list sends a new message that if you have been a victim of harassment and torture, the Congress will support you," said Priyanka, who had earlier released a women-centric 'Ladki hoon, lad sakti hoon (I'm a girl and can fight)' campaign in UP. Forty per cent of the tickets have been reserved for women, Priyanka said. "Our aim is to strengthen our party and for our candidates to fight on people's issues. We will not indulge in a negative campaign but about development and the progress of Dalits and backwards," Priyanka asserted.

Daily Covid cases breach 10K-mark

Since May 25 last year, this is the first time Odisha registered more than 10,000 cases on a single day

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Covid-19 cases in Odisha crossed the 10,000 mark Thursday as the state registered 10,059 fresh cases during the last 24 hours. Odisha had last reported over 10,000 cases May 25, 2021 with 11,623 infections on a single day. According to the state Information and Public Relation department, 872 infected persons were in the age group of 0 to 18 years. Among them 5,833 were in quarantine while the remaining 4,226 were local contact cases, the department said. All 30 districts in Odisha reported new cases. Khurda district continued to be on top of the infection list with 3,188 new cases, followed by Sundargarh (1,348), Cuttack (870) and Sambalpur (570). The active caseload now stands at 44,349 in Odisha. Three persons have succumbed to the virus in the last 24 hours.

The daily test positivity rate (TPR) in Odisha has also increased to 12.40 per cent from 11.76 per cent reported Wednesday. The TPR was 10.25 per cent Tuesday. Health Services director Bijay Mohapatra said the infection rate is on an upward trend in Odisha. It is expected to rise and reach a peak in the next few days, informed Mohapatra. "The hospitalisation rate however, has remained quite low as compared to the second wave. However, we are continuing the process of strengthening our healthcare infrastructure, medicine and oxygen supply as no one can predict the

DAILY TPR

January 13	12.40%
January 12	11.76%
January 11	10.25%

LAWMAKER TESTS +VE FOR 3RD TIME

BHUBANESWAR/BALASORE: Senior BJP MLA from Nilagiri in Balasore district Sukanta Nayak has tested Covid-19 positive for the third time in a span of 18 months, the lawmaker said Thursday. He informed that he tested positive for the virus Wednesday and is isolating at home. He had first contracted Covid-19 in July 2020 and again in September that year. Health Department sources said over 50 MLAs, six MPs and at least 11 ministers in Odisha have been infected in different phases since 2020.

virus," Mohapatra said. He added that the infection rate has been surging every day and the daily cases might breach the peak of 12,852 registered May 22, last year during the second wave in a few days. Meanwhile, in a separate development at least 22 employees of the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) tested positive for Covid-19 Thursday. The civic body has imposed restrictions on public entry into its office to curb the spread of the viral infection.

MODI HARPS ON QUICK VACCINATION

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted Thursday with chief ministers over the Covid-19 situation in India. He stressed on local containment of the virus spread and underlined the importance of vaccination and the need to further accelerate the 'Har Ghar Dastak' programme to achieve 100 per cent coverage. "It is a matter of pride for every Indian that today India has given the first dose to about 92 per cent of the adult population. The coverage of second dose has also reached around 70 per cent in India. We have vaccinated nearly three crore adolescents within 10 days," Modi informed. "The sooner we give the precautionary dose to frontline workers and senior citizens, the stronger our healthcare system will become," he added. MORE P9

Bharatpur 'suicide' case solved by cops

POST NEWS NETWORK
Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Commissionerate Police claimed to have cracked Thursday the mystery behind the suspicious death of 23-year-old Surekha Palei with the arrest of three persons. The woman was found dead in her room at Tarini Basti under Bharatpur police limits here January 10. Contradicting the allegations of murder by the deceased's family members, police asserted that Palei committed suicide after a heated argument with her boyfriend late January 9 night. Those arrested have been identified as, Biswajit Jena alias Chotu, the boyfriend of Palei and two of his friends including a minor. Two of the accused have been sent to judicial custody while the minor has

been sent to a juvenile home. Police sources informed that Palei had been in a relationship with Biswajit who was few years younger to her. Palei would reportedly ask the accused to marry her, but the latter always refused citing age difference. During a feast organised January 9, the deceased had a heated argument with Biswajit. Then late at night she hanged herself. When the accused awoke, they discovered Palei hanging. In a fit of panic, they dumped Palei's body in her house and fled from the slum. Police managed to arrest two accused hiding in the city while Chotu was held from his native village in Nayagarh. According to police, the post-mortem report and statements of the accused and others indicated that Palei committed suicide.

Women better off with female surgeons

A study has revealed women patients are likely to face more complications and even a risk to their lives if operated on by a male surgeon

AGENCIES
Ontario (Canada), Jan 13: How crucial is the selection of a surgeon for someone facing surgery. Many factors have to be weighed in, more so the success rate of the surgeon. However, researchers looking at health disparities have in the course of time managed to unearth another truth. And that is the gender of surgeons does matter for the patient to undergo a successful surgery. A study published in the medical journal 'JAMA Surgery' has said that women surgeons are better off in treating their patients—both male and female. However, the dif-



ference between having a male or female surgeon was more pronounced for women patients. It resulted in lesser number of complications and more importantly lesser number of deaths in case the surgeon was a woman. "We need to find out what it is about female surgeons and what they're doing," said Angela Jerath,

a clinical epidemiologist and associate professor at the University of Toronto who co-authored the study. "That is something we can all learn from." A 2017 study found that patients of women surgeons have lower death rates, fewer health complications and lower rates of readmission than those of male sur-

geons. However, Jerath and lead study author Christopher Wallis, a urological oncologist and assistant professor at the same university, wanted to find out the differences that existed between male and female patients when being treated by a woman surgeon. So Wallis and Jerath studied the history of 1.3 million patients in Ontario who underwent both simple and complicated surgical procedures. They discovered that both men and women experienced less adverse outcomes with women surgeons than they did with their male counterparts. Overall, the research data showed women whose operations were performed by a male surgeon had a 32% higher risk of death post-surgery than those who were operated on by a woman. They also faced prolonged stays at the hospital and had 11 per cent higher risk of readmission, the researchers found out.



WILL SMITH NOMINATED FOR SCREEN ACTORS GUILD AWARD

King Richard star Will Smith has been nominated for a Screen Actors Guild award. Smith, who won a Golden Globe just days ago for his portrayal of Venus and Serena Williams' father, is in the running for best actor.

KIM UNBOTHERED BY KANYE'S DATES WITH ACTRESS JULIA FOX

Reality star Kim Kardashian - who is dating comedian Pete Davidson - has completely moved on from her estranged husband Kanye West, who has shown his affection toward the actress Julia Fox with their lavish dates, including filling a hotel suite with clothes for her, which she described as "a real Cinderella moment."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
If you are involved in monetary matters, today you will find yourself weighing the benefits. A loan that you have applied for may be sanctioned. Look at a range of choices, says Ganesh, and you will end up feeling very happy about it.

TAURUS
This day you will have an urge to take a trip, be it a small one. Ganesh sees you enthusiastically making detailed plans and arrangements, arranging for funds and getting in touch with all those you desire to take along. It is possible that you may ultimately scrap your plans and choose to stay at home.

GEMINI
Today may not be very meaningful and productive for you, though you will get to spend plenty of quality time with yourself in the afternoon, which may not necessarily be to your liking. By evening, you may feel a little extra sensitive. A lonely day, or as an optimist would put it, you've got the whole day to yourself; it could have been worse (For instance, a day alone with your nagging mother-in-law!).

CANCER
You are likely to be at your inventive best today, feels Ganesh. You are likely to taste success, much to the delight of your colleagues at work and loved ones back home. However, experience counts, and if you are a beginner at something, you may face problems in your new venture.

LEO
A challenging day awaits you. You will face some tensions and problems, however this doesn't mean you will not be able to complete all your work successfully. Your personal life will proceed as usual, however expectations from you at the work-front will increase. You need to maintain a balance between your home and work-place, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
Children will be a source of a lot of appreciation today, in and out of the classroom. Your logical abilities will become stronger. Ganesh advises you to stay peaceful, flow with the tide and enjoy yourself, regardless of what happens in the day.

LIBRA
Ganesh says today is a fortunate day for starting new work. You will win the hearts of everyone with your amazing charm. Your house and its arty interior decoration will impress people

SCORPIO
Do your deeds and don't expect returns is what Indian mythology has taught us since time immemorial. Now, it's time to implement it, especially at work. You may have to wait a little longer in terms of your business and joint venture. However, don't lose hope as the fruits of patience are sweet.

SAGITTARIUS
Good Samaritans around you may give unsolicited, but valuable advice. Take it as a hint, and consider it for your betterment. Take your decision after following the advice, and this may definitely yield benefits, says Ganesh.

CAPRICORN
Though less, you will get money from your investments and other resources. Don't ignore pending projects; complete them at the earliest so that you will have clear picture about your requirements and responsibilities, advises Ganesh.

AQUARIUS
There are no short-cuts to success. You know this very well and work you socks off to get what you want. Colleagues, friends and family - all of them will acknowledge and appreciate your efforts and achievements. Though you will be apprehensive about it, you will have to take some risks to bring the desired change in your life, says Ganesh.

PISCES
Interactions with those of the opposite sex will mark your day. It is also a good day to strike up friendship with those of the opposite sex. For those in love, today is a good day to spend time with your partner. For those looking for love, now is the best time to pop the question to that special someone you've secretly admired for long, says Ganesh.

Art Vision's dance fest concludes



Artistes present *Suta- The thread* at Rabindra Mandap, Thursday

Bhubaneswar: The silver jubilee celebrations of Art Vision came to an end with the conclusion of its two-day Odissi dance festival here at Rabindra Mandap, Thursday.

On the second day of the event

titled *Explorations Journey of 25 years in Odissi*, several artistes accompanied by a live orchestra presented some innovative dance drama productions. The programmes were choreographed by acclaimed Odissi exponent

Ileana Citaristi who is also one of the founders of the dance school.

The first performance of the evening was *Suta-The thread*, in which the dancers depicted beautifully the dedication and creativity of the Odisha's handloom artisans.

Art Vision's repertory members next showcased *Meghadootam*, a lyrical poem written by Kalidasa.

The dignitaries who attended the event include Culture Department Director Ranjan Kumar Das and music director Laxmikanta Palit.

For the unversed, Art Vision was founded in 1996 by Citaristi, a disciple of Odissi maestro Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, along with a group of artistes belonging to different disciplines who wanted to have a common ground for sharing experience and creative ideas. PMN

Kylie Jenner hits new social media milestone

Makeup mogul Kylie Jenner has become the first woman in the world to reach 300 million Instagram followers.

Despite keeping a low profile on social media for the past few months, Jenner becomes the first woman to reach the Instagram milestone, beating pop star Ariana Grande who previously held the record. She becomes the second most followed person on Instagram, after professional footballer Cristiano Ronaldo with 388 million followers.

The star, who is expecting her second child with rapper Travis Scott, took some time off social media after 10 concertgoers died at Scott's Astroworld Festival show in Houston. She returned to Instagram on Christmas Eve with a throwback picture of her mother, Kris Jenner. Since then, Kylie has shared two posts on the platform, both from her pregnancy photo-shoots.

Kylie Jenner previously held the record for the most-liked picture on Instagram for a picture featuring her daughter Stormi.



AGENCIES

Mouni Roy to marry Dubai-based bizman

Popular actress Mouni Roy, who extensively works in movies, television and digital space, is tying the knot with her longtime beau Suraj Nambiar. The actress and her Dubai-based businessman boyfriend are set to get married at a beach in Goa January 27.

According to a report, a five-star resort W Goa has been booked as the wedding venue. It will be a sea-facing wedding. The invites for the wedding have started to go out and guests have been requested to remain tight-lipped about the upcoming nuptials. The guests will have to abide by COVID-19 protocols and carry their vaccination certificates.

Mouni's close friends and choreographers Pratik Utekar and Rahul Shetty are rehearsing for a dance bash which will be held January 28. Among the guests that have been invited to wedding, Karan Johar, Ekta Kapoor, Manish Malhotra and Aashka Goradia are a few names.

Mouni Roy has been in a steady relationship with Suraj since 2019 but has remained tight-lipped about the same.

AGENCIES

Culture, language barriers blurring: Rashmika

Hyderabad: Rashmika Mandanna, lead actress of *Pushpa: The Rise*, is overwhelmed by the positive response garnered by the surprise blockbuster of 2021.

"I'm really grateful that all the hard work that the cast and crew had put in the film, is finally being seen and appreciated by viewers all across. There's so much love and positivity that the audience has showered upon the film, its characters, and the story, which is super encouraging."

Rashmika is also very

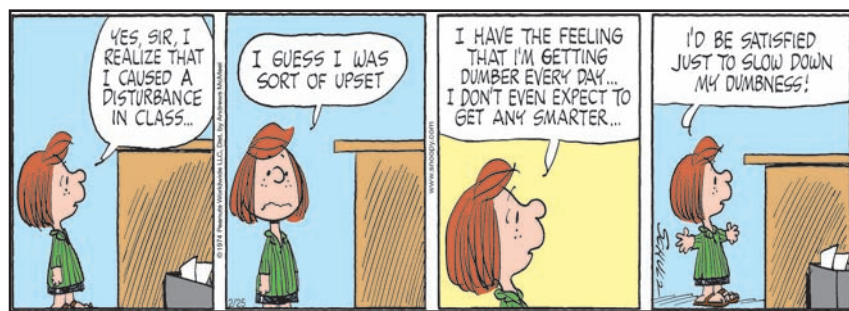
happy to see the film, being appreciated by audiences from different regions of the country. Adding to this she says "The humongous applause that the film has received, only shows us that the culture and language barriers are now blurring and fading away." It seems the film has broken all the cultural differences and sets an example of unity in diversity.

She promises that *Pushpa 2* will be bigger than ever. Earlier, taking to social media, Rashmika wrote, "Thank you for all you love for Pushpa.. only makes us want to work harder.. and we promise you.. Pushpa 2 will only be better and bigger! @thisisdsp"

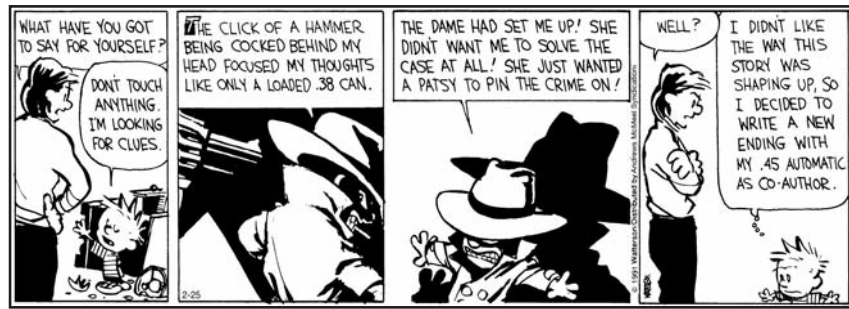
The pan-Indian actress will now be debuting in Hindi film industry with 2 big-ticket films - *Mission Majnu* and *Goodbye*.

IANS

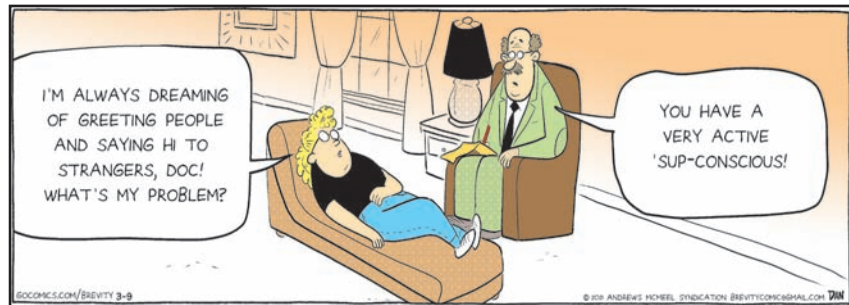
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

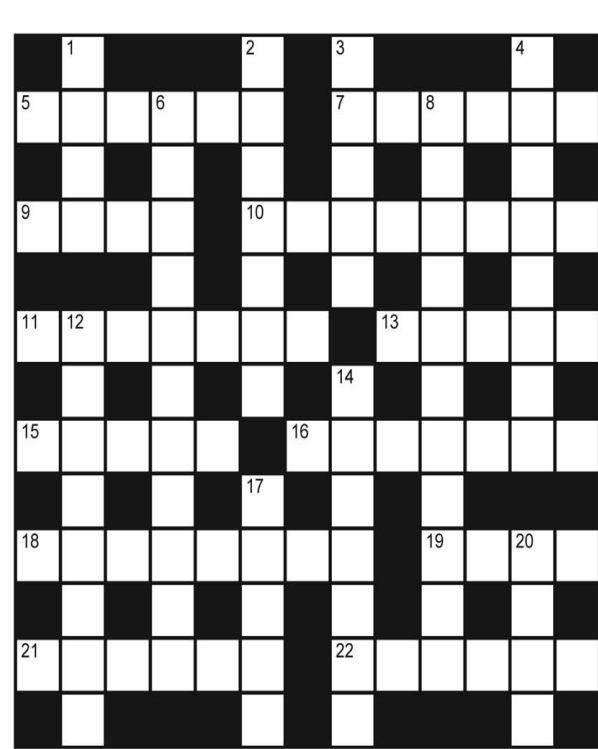


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD

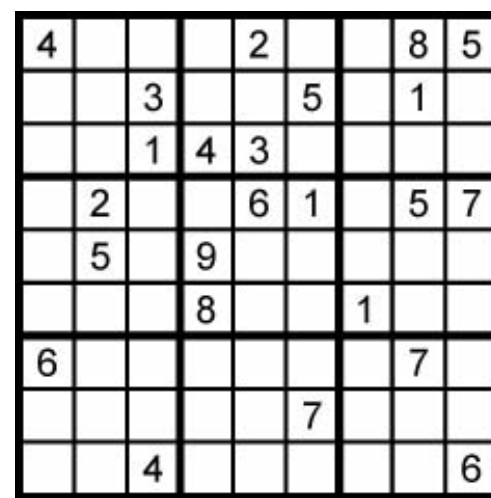


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- Across**
- 5 Scrooge's word
 - 7 Main course
 - 9 Taxing trip
 - 10 Small parrot
 - 11 Sightseer
 - 13 Canoe type
 - 15 In reserve
 - 16 Modernise
 - 18 Turkey vultures
 - 19 Hoodwink
 - 21 Liqueur flavoured with anise
 - 22 Eclipse phenomenon
 - Down**
 - 1 Engine sound
 - 2 Eternal
 - 3 Oyster's prize
 - 4 Rebel
 - 6 Thirteen donuts, maybe (6,5)
 - 8 Skip town (4,1,6)
 - 12 Muddled or unclear
 - 14 Mal de mer
 - 17 Lion's group
 - 20 Swimming site

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

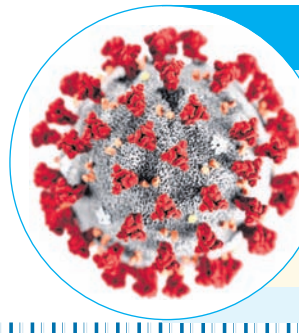


CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



AT LORD'S SERVICE
Garlands being prepared for Lord Jagannath and His siblings at Bada Odia mutt in Puri, Thursday



COVID-19 TRACKER			
	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	31,80,77,163	26,31,85,170	55,33,584
India	3,63,17,927	3,47,15,361	4,85,035
Odisha	11,01,606	10,50,179	8,472

Automobile dealers can't overcharge customers

For every rupee they charge customers, auto dealers must give receipts

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Automobile dealers cannot charge any amount from customers without giving proper receipts thereof. An order to this effect has been issued to all RTOs with an instruction to take action against the defaulting dealers.

The Commerce & Transport department. However, it is learnt that some dealers are not passing on this benefit to customers and continue to charge earlier fees, said the notification. It has been alleged that some vehicle dealers are charging extra amount from customers. The gov-

It is mandatory for the dealers to display details of payments to be made by the purchasers for each category of vehicles on notice boards in conspicuous places in their showrooms. It should be informed to the customers that no extra payment need to be made other than the ones mentioned on the display



NO WHEELING-DEALING

In a notification, the State Transport Authority has informed that the transport department is issuing driving licence and registration certificate of vehicles in digital mode starting January 1

As a result, the fee for registration of vehicles payable by the purchasers has been reduced from ₹282 to ₹140 through a recent notification of the Commerce & Transport department

However, it is learnt that some dealers are not passing on this benefit to the customers and charging the earlier fees, said the notification

In a notification, the State Transport Authority has said the transport department is issuing driving licence and registration certificate of vehicles in digital mode starting January 1. As a result, the fee for registration of vehicles payable by the purchasers has been reduced from ₹282 to ₹140 through a recent notification of

ernment only charges the registration and tax amount for new vehicles and hence, distributors should charge only that and not take any extra amount in the name of handling charges. If they need to charge any amount for a value added service, proper receipts have to be issued for the same, read the notification.

boards, said the notification. All charges whether essential or optional must be clearly mentioned on the display boards. For all charges the dealer must issue a receipt to the customers. The RTOs will inspect the automobile showrooms to ensure that they have complied with the above instructions, added the notification.

Rare human tail in newborn found

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Neurosurgeons at the Institute of Medical Sciences and SUM Hospital, the Medical College and Hospital of Siksha 'O' Anusandhan here claimed to have come across a rare human tail in a newborn baby which is said to be the first bony tail in thoracic region to be reported in the world.

The newborn had a spinal cord anomaly with a tail at upper back and a dermal sinus pit in the Coccygeal area and this is the only known case of a bony human tail in thoracic area, eminent neurosurgeon and SOA Vice-Chancellor Ashok Kumar Mahapatra told newsmen Thursday.

Human tail is a rare congenital condition and 195 such cases have been reported in the world so far but true bony human tail is exceedingly rare and 26 cases have been reported and all at the lower end of spine in Coccygeal region, he said, adding this one, however, was located in the thoracic area.

Mahapatra, who along with neurosurgeon Rama Chandra Deo, conducted the surgery to remove the tail, said it was a unique case of true thoracic bony human tail in a newborn baby. The baby successfully underwent three surgeries in one sitting which was conducted November 25 last and has been doing well. It is a rare case and needs to be reported to increase public awareness, Mahapatra added. Most people are not born with a tail because the structure disappears or absorbs into the body during fetal development and forms the vestigial tail bone or Coccyx, he said.

Formal notification for rural polls out

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Designated election officers Thursday issued formal notifications for conducting the three-tier panchayat election in their respective areas in the state. Earlier, the State Election Commission (SEC) had made an announcement to this effect.

Notifications have been issued inviting nomination papers for election to ward members, sarpanchs, panchayat samiti members and Zilla Parishad members. As per the schedule, candidates can file their nominations for sarpanchs, samiti members and Zilla Parishad members from January 17 to 21 while scrutiny of the nomination papers will be done January 22.

The candidates can withdraw their nominations till January 25 and the final list of candidates will be published on the same day.

The panchayat polls will be held in five phases starting February 16. The counting of votes and declaration of results will be done at the block levels for three days starting February 26.

As per new rules, candidates who file false information in the affidavit will be punished with imprisonment for a period of six months or a fine or both.

Similarly, any elected member of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) will be disqualified, if he/she has not furnished an affidavit containing particulars relating to his

DASHBOARD

Notifications have been issued inviting nomination papers for election to ward members, sarpanchs, panchayat samiti members and Zilla Parishad members

Candidates can file their nominations for sarpanchs, samiti members and Zilla Parishad members from January 17 to 21 while scrutiny of the nomination papers will be done January 22

Candidates can withdraw their nominations till January 25 and the final list of candidates will be published on the same day

criminal antecedents, assets and liabilities and educational qualification at the time of filing of nomination. Affidavits of candidates contesting for zilla parishad member posts will be uploaded to the district website so that people can know about the background of the candidates.

However, details regarding the candidates contesting for sarpanchs and samiti members will be displayed on the notice board of the election officer. Meanwhile, the three major political parties BJD, BJP and Congress have started the process for selection of candidates for the rural polls.

Fake sauce-making unit busted in Cuttack



A joint team of police and officials of the Cuttack Municipal Corporation Thursday raided a shop at Malgodown in the Silver City and a factory at 42 Mauza on the city's outskirts and seized huge quantities of fake tomato and chilli sauce. The factory was processing rotten pumpkins, chemicals and hazardous colours to prepare tomato sauce. The fake sauce was being sold at ₹27 per litre. A person has been detained in this connection

State's forest cover grows by 537 sqkm

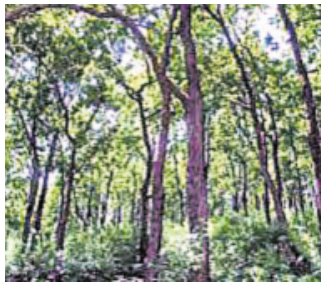
FOREST COVER GREW BY 885 SQKM (ISFR-2017), 273.51 SQKM IN 2019, 537 SQKM IN 2021

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Jan 13: With 1.04 per cent increase in the forest cover, Odisha is among the top three states in the country that recorded an increase in the forest cover; revealed the India State Forest Report (ISFR) 2021 released by the Union Environment, Forest and Climate Change ministry Thursday.

According to ISFR 2021, the top three states showing increase in forest cover are Andhra Pradesh (647 sq km) followed by Telangana (632 sq km) and Odisha (537 sq km). The forest cover of Odisha went up by 537 sq km to 52,156 sq km between 2019 and 2020. In 2019, the forest cover of Odisha was 51,618.51 sq km. The state also witnessed an increase of 356 sq km in tree cover in last two years.

In the 2021 report, the state has recorded more increase in forest cover as compared to the 2019 re-



port which saw a mild increase of 273.51 sq/km. The state had witnessed an increase of 885 square km in 2017. The report showed that out of 30 districts, 23 districts showed an increase in forest cover while the forest cover decreased in seven districts. The Simlipal Tiger Reserve was among the top three in terms of forest cover. The survey highlighted that about 43.87 per cent of the total forest in Odisha are prone to forest fire including 9.84

Zero in on preventing forest fire: CS

BHUBANESWAR: Investments in 'Ama Jungle Yojana' (AJY) and Joint Forest Management (JFM) under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik have yielded rich dividends for Odisha with a net increase of dense forest area by 243 sq/km during last two years. The state has also become first in the rate of increase in mangrove forest and third in forest rich tiger reserve. While complementing the department for

the achievements, Chief Secretary Suresh Mahapatra directed the department to focus on preventive fire protection. "As forest fire creates devastation to a large number of plants and animal lives, field officials must remain extremely vigilant to check the outbreak and spread of fire. He directed DFOs and field level forest officers to have more fire-break lines in forests and keep them clean for checking spread of fire.

per cent of forests which are very highly prone to forest fire while 33.98 per cent are moderate to highly forest fire prone.

The report stated that area-wise, Madhya Pradesh has the largest forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh,

Odisha and Maharashtra. In terms of forest cover as percentage of total geographical area, Odisha has of 33.50 per cent. The total carbon stock of forest in Odisha is 1.63 billion tonnes CO2 equivalent - 6.17% of the total forest carbon stock of the country.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Rayagada youth found dead near Gopalpur station

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 13: A 21-year-old youth was found dead on the railway tracks near Gopalpur railway station here, an official said Thursday. The deceased was identified as Nikhil Sahoo of Bijapur in Rayagada district.

According to Cuttack Government Railway Police (GRP) inspector in-charge Umakant Biswal, a few train passengers spotted the body in the morning and alerted the station manager, who in turn informed the GRP around 10am.

"We learnt about the body's identity from his cellphone. Sahoo's body was sent to SCB Medical College and Hospital here for an autopsy. A case (2/22) of unnatural death has been registered in this regard," Biswal added.

ଦୁଷ୍ଟନାଶ

ପବିତ୍ର ମହାନ ସଂକ୍ରାନ୍ତି ଅବସରରେ କେନ୍ଦୁଝର ଜିଲ୍ଲା, ରାଜ୍ୟ ତଥା ଦେଶବାସୀଙ୍କୁ ଆତ୍ମିକ ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ ଜଣାଇଛି । ଜଗତ ଜନନୀ ମା' ଦଶଭୂଜାଙ୍କ ଅପାରଜ୍ଵାଳୁ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କ ସୁଖ, ଶାନ୍ତି ଓ ସମୃଦ୍ଧି କାମନା କରୁଛି । ମହାମାରୀ କରୋନାକୁ ପ୍ରଭୁ ବଢ଼ଠାକୁର ପୂର୍ଣ୍ଣବାରୁ ବିନାଶ କରାନ୍ତୁ ଏବଂ ପ୍ରାର୍ଥନା ।

କରୋନା ହାରିବ - ଆମେ ଜିତିବ

ସମାଜନ ମହାକୁଡ଼

ପୂର୍ବତନ ବିଧାୟକ, ଚମ୍ପୁଆ, କେନ୍ଦୁଝର

NHRC urged to step into gutkha factory fire

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: A rights activist Thursday filed a petition before the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) seeking its intervention in a major fire mishap at a gutkha manufacturing unit in Sambalpur December 20 in which four workers reportedly died while several others sustained serious injuries. The activist, Pratap Mohanty, urged the commission to give ₹50 lakh compensation to relatives of deceased workers and pay ₹10 lakh to the families of the injured labourers.



The petitioner requested the NHRC to direct the DGP for taking stringent action against the cop for non-registration of FIR against the factory owner

He also requested the NHRC to direct the Director General of Police for immediate filing of a case against the manufacturer and take stringent action against the erring police officer for non-registration of FIR against the owner of the factory. The NHRC has been urged to direct DG, fire services to submit an action taken report within four weeks regarding fire safety measures in the gutkha factory. The activist also sought directions to the state labour department for an inquiry and submission of the ATR within four weeks in connection with the incident.

CIFA scientist bags national prof tag



Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: The Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture's (CIFA's) principal scientist Pramod Kumar Sahoo has been conferred with the prestigious ICAR national professorship recognition by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi.

Sahoo has been doing research in the field of fish health management over past three decades. He has secured a place in the Stanford University's top scientists' list for the years 2020 and 2021. Sahoo is trying to find solutions for Argulosis, which is the most challenging issue in aquaculture across the globe.

With the national professorship, Sahoo will upscale his research efforts with the special project titled 'Multifaceted approaches towards preventing/control of Argulosis in carp farming with special reference to development of novel vaccine candidate(s)', sources said.

This appointment propels him into an elite list of ten such chairs instituted by the ICAR across the country and he is the third fisheries scientist to get this coveted position within the agriculture research system and the first to be within the ICAR fisheries institutions. Upon his achievement, he was felicitated by the institute in a special ceremony.

ICAR-CIFA director Saroj Kumar Swain congratulated Sahoo for his achievement. "It is a rare honor for the institute as well as the people involved in the fisheries sector," he said.

Curbs imposed on Makar fete



FILE PHOTO

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Thursday issued a set of guidelines for Makar Sankranti and Pongal celebrations in the city in view of the rising Covid-19 cases.

As per the BMC release, congregations at river banks, ghats, ponds and other water bodies to take bath on the occasion of Makar Sankranti/Pongal are prohibited up to January 16.

The civic body has also prohibited organisation of Makar Mela/Meena bazaar, among others. "All religious places/ places of worship shall not allow public till January 16, 2022 inside their premises for offering Puja/Darshan on account of Makar Sankranti/Makar Mela/Pongal," said the BMC.

However, the usual rituals in the religious institutions can be conducted with bare minimum priests/servitors who are fully vaccinated. Besides, religious congregations and celebrations are also prohibited till January 16, 2022.

Earlier, the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) had released a set of restrictions that will be promulgated across Odisha to check

CMC SEALS COACHING HUB

CUTTACK: The enforcement squad of the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) sealed a coaching centre here for allegedly violating Covid-19 norms Thursday. CMC sources said the civic authorities found students at AR Creation Coaching centre flouting the Covid safety protocols during checks on its premises at Link Road. Terming the violation of the Covid restrictions by educated and young people as unfortunate, an official said, "Covid is presently in its peak, and students from several areas, including containment zones, might be attending tutorial classes. That's why the government has directed to shut all the physical classes." The state government had ordered closure of all schools, colleges and technical educational institutions other than medical colleges and nursing colleges from January 10.

congregations during Makar Sankranti and Pongal.

The SRC, in an order, urged people to perform the rituals/ puja on the occasion of Makar Sankranti/Pongal at home with family members only avoiding mass gatherings and adhering to the Covid-19 safety protocols such as physical distancing, use of face mask/covering and hand washing.

All religious places/ places of worship will remain closed for public on Makar Sankranti/Pongal/ Makal Mela day(s). However religious rituals are allowed with bare minimum priests/servitors and staff, the order stated, the SRC order said. The Capital city Thursday registered 1,055 Covid cases.

INVITING TROUBLE



Shoppers flouting Covid protocols at Unit-II Market Building in Bhubaneswar, Thursday. The Capital city registered 1,055 fresh Covid cases in a day

Govt for revival of defunct NSS units

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: The Higher Education department Thursday directed programme coordinators of the NSS bureau in different universities of the state to activate the defunct NSS units.

In a letter to all universities' NSS bureau, Ramesh Chandra Behera, deputy secretary of department, said it is observed by the government that there are many defunct NSS units in colleges /higher secondary schools under your jurisdiction for years together. They are not taking grants or doing any activities.

Due to this, students are being deprived of personality development programmes of NSS. On the other hand funds are accumulating and lying unspent at universities/CHSE level.

Therefore, the department directed them for activation of the defunct units. They directed them to create a list of defunct units with

COMMUNITY SERVICE

The sole aim of the NSS is to provide hands on experience to young students in delivering community service.

Due to defunct NSS units, the students are deprived from personality development programmes of NSS.

Funds are accumulating and lying unspent at universities/CHSE level.

data base first. Accordingly, district(s) wise virtual meetings shall be conducted with such principals and programme officers. The virtual meetings shall be conducted in a phased manner with maximum 10-15 defunct colleges for micro-level discussions of the problems and shall be requested to comply within a week to activate the units.

If no action is taken by the defaulting colleges/ higher secondary schools after all exercises, the NSS units shall be withdrawn and re-allocated to other desirous institutes. A compliance/ action taken report in this regard shall be submitted to the government by February 10, 2022.

The National Service Scheme (NSS) is a central scheme of the government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. The sole aim of the NSS is to provide hands on experience to young students in delivering community service.

The department earlier had decided to start the first inter-university competition from the 2021-22 academic year for the overall development of students ranging from academics to physical growth.

But in view of the Covid-19 situation, the HE department Monday postponed the first Odisha Inter-University Competition which was scheduled to be held from January 10 to February 6.

STF picks up drug peddler from near college

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: The Special Task Force (STF) of the state Crime Branch Thursday arrested a drug peddler following a raid near Haladia College under Khurda Town police limits.



Around 310 gram brown sugar worth ₹30 lakh and a few incriminating materials were recovered from the Rajkishore Sunday

The accused was identified as Rajkishore Sunday alias Gutu of Tangi Sahi under Gurujanga police limits in Khurda, an official said.

According to the STF, Gutu was taken into custody while he was waiting for a prospective buyer of drugs near Haladia College Wednesday evening.

"Around 310 gram brown sugar worth ₹30 lakh and a few incriminating materials were recovered from Gutu's possession. The accused was later handed over to Khurda police that arrested him and registered a case (23/22) under relevant Sections of the NDPS Act," said an STF official.

Earlier in 2020, the STF had arrested Gutu with brown sugar in a case (50/20) registered with Khurda police, added the official.

The STF has seized more than 44 kilograms of brown sugar and heroin and more than 87 quintals ganja since 2020. As many as 121 drug dealers and peddlers have been arrested by the STF during the period.

ON WARPATH



Youths studying outside of Harekrushna Mahtab State Library in Bhubaneswar, Thursday, as part of their protest against the library's closure owing to rising Covid cases

Hospitals told to set up telemedicine facility

Bhubaneswar, Jan 13: Amid the surge in Covid cases, the state government Thursday directed the medical colleges, hospitals, district headquarters hospitals, Capital Hospital and RGH Hospital to set up round-the-clock control rooms for coordination and delivery of telemedicine services.

In an order, the Directorate of Health Services asked the hospitals to make a roster arrangement of the facilities, specialists and medical officers to ensure delivery of telemedicine services.

Each district, medical college and hospital, Capital Hospital and RGH will form a committee, headed by a nodal officer, who will coordinate the telemedicine services, the order stated. "The WhatsApp number of the nodal officers and the service provider may please be

kept in record at the control rooms for coordination," read the order.

"Telemedicine services at SCBMCH in Cuttack, MKCGMCH in Berhampur, VIMSAR in Burla, Acharaya Harihar Post-Graduate Institute of Cancer and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Post Graduate Institute of Paediatrics in Cuttack will be available 24x7, the services in the four new medical college and hospitals in Balasore, Baripada, Balangir and Koraput, Capital Hospital in Bhubaneswar and RGH in Rourkela will be available from 8am to 5pm," the order added.

For PHC-HWCs and UPHC-HWCs, the schedule will be as per the OPD timing—8 am to 12 noon and 4 pm to 6 pm. The telemedicine facility under DMHP will continue from 8 am to 5 pm. The ongoing activity under e-Sanjevani will be ensured as per the timing fixed, it further said.

Cannabis can stop Covid virus from entering human cells: Study

AGENCIES

New York, Jan 13: US researchers have found that cannabis compounds have the ability to prevent the virus that causes Covid-19 from entering human cells.

A team from Oregon State University identified hemp, known scientifically as cannabis sativa, compounds via a chemical screening technique.

Hemp is a source of fibre, food and animal feed, and multiple hemp extracts and compounds are added to cosmetics, body lotions, dietary supplements and food, said Richard van Breemen, a researcher at varsity.

The team found that a pair of cannabinoid acids binds to the

SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, blocking a critical step in the process the virus uses to infect people. The findings were published in the Journal of Natural Products.

The compounds are cannabigerolic acid, or CBGA, and cannabidiolic acid, CBDA, and the spike protein is the same drug target used in Covid-19 vaccines and antibody therapy. A drug target is any molecule critical to the process a disease follows, meaning its disruption can thwart infection or disease progression.

"These cannabinoid acids are abundant in hemp and in many hemp extracts," van Breemen said. "They are not controlled substances like THC, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, and have



a good safety profile in humans. And our research showed the

hemp compounds were equally effective against variants of SARS-

STAY ON A HIGH

PAIR OF CANNABINOID ACIDS BINDS TO THE SARS-COV-2 SPIKE PROTEIN, BLOCKING A CRITICAL STEP IN THE PROCESS THE VIRUS USES TO INFECT PEOPLE

THE COMPOUNDS ARE CANNABIGEROLIC ACID, OR CBGA, AND CANNABIDIOLIC ACID, CBDA, AND THE SPIKE PROTEIN IS THE SAME DRUG TARGET USED IN COVID-19 VACCINES AND ANTIBODY THERAPY

CoV-2, including variant B.1.1.7 (Alpha), which was first detected

in the UK, and variant B.1.351 (Beta), first detected in South Africa."

Lab tests showed that cannabigerolic acid and cannabidiolic acid prevented infection of human epithelial cells by the coronavirus spike protein and prevented entry of SARS-CoV-2 into cells.

"These compounds can be taken orally and have a long history of safe use in humans," van Breemen said. "They have the potential to prevent as well as treat infection by SARS-CoV-2. CBDA and CBGA are produced by the hemp plant as precursors to CBD and CBG, which are familiar to many consumers. However, they are different from the acids and are not contained in hemp products."

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SHORT TAKES

Fishing ban: 7 AP fishermen held

Ganjam: A forest patrolling squad detained seven fishermen from Andhra Pradesh for fishing near Rushikulya river mouth in violation of the fishing ban imposed in the region for mass mating and nesting of Olive Ridley turtles, forest officials said. The fishermen were fishing in the sea around seven kilometre away from the Rushikulya river mouth when the patrolling squad intercepted their trawler and detained the fishermen. The trawler and 340 kg of fish also seized from them. The seized fish stock was handed over to two local women self-help groups who sold it at ₹14,700 to local traders. The detained fishermen were taken for questioning and later handed over to the district fisheries department. Notably, forest department has imposed a ban on fishing near the river mouth of Rushikulya due to mating of the Olive Ridley turtles. The ban is applicable at Prayagi on the north, Aryapalli to the south and near the river mouth.

₹125 cr allocated for 18 projects

Balasure: The state government has sanctioned ₹125 crore for 18 developmental projects in Balasure. Some projects have been completed while work on others will be started soon. According to reports, ₹13.06 crore has been allocated for expansion of road from Tamulia to Station Chhak, ₹11.09 crore allocated for a multipurpose sports complex at Angaragadia, ₹9.71 crore for renovation of Model Bus Terminal at Sahadevkhunta, ₹60 crore for a new overbridge at Nuniajudi. MLA Swarup Kumar Das has laid foundation stones for these projects. Besides, Balasure municipality will utilise ₹1 crore for renovation of Badakhua pond in ward-2 while ₹70 lakh has been allocated for renovation of Gadagadia pond.

Drive starts for beggars' rehab

Sambalpur: The Sambalpur administration has launched a drive to rehabilitate beggars Thursday. Under the initiative 37 beggars have already been rescued from different parts of the city, District Disability Rehabilitation Officer Rabindra Satpathy said. A temporary rehabilitation centre with a capacity to accommodate 100 people has also been set up for the purpose. "We are providing them free food there, besides conducting the necessary health check-up," Satpathy said. "If family members want to take them home, they will have to sign an undertaking that the rescued persons would not resort to begging in future," he said. The Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) Department is providing funds for the initiative. A survey conducted prior to the Covid-19 pandemic showed there were 370 beggars in the district, Satpathy said, adding, a fresh headcount exercise is being planned. He said work on the Integrated Infrastructure Complex, which will rehabilitate elderly people, transgenders, persons with disabilities (PwD) and drug addicts, was complete and the project is awaiting inauguration. "We will rehabilitate all the beggars at the complex once it becomes operational," he said.

Ragging of minor rocks Berhampur

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Jan 13: A minor boy was allegedly subjected to ragging at a private residential coaching centre under Baidyanathpur police limits here in Ganjam district, police said. The matter came to the fore after police registered a case over a complaint filed by the boy's mother and started an investigation. Meanwhile, police have detained the proprietor of the coaching centre and are questioning him on the charges. Involvement of others is also being probed. Police said that the victim, a minor boy of Aska area, is studying Plus-II at a government college in Berhampur. He has also admitted himself at a private residential coaching centre and staying in its hostel. However, a few days back, the boy was subjected to physical and mental torture in the centre. The matter crossed all limits when he was beaten up brutally and driven out of its hostel, Wednesday. On being informed, family members reached Berhampur and rescued their ward. Later, the boy's mother visited Baidyanathpur police station and lodged a complaint over physical and mental torture to her son in the centre. In the FIR, she has levelled serious allegations against the proprietor couple of the centre.

Police have detained the proprietor of the coaching centre for questioning

ing centre and staying in its hostel. However, a few days back, the boy was subjected to physical and mental torture in the centre. The matter crossed all limits when he was beaten up brutally and driven out of its hostel, Wednesday. On being informed, family members reached Berhampur and rescued their ward. Later, the boy's mother visited Baidyanathpur police station and lodged a complaint over physical and mental torture to her son in the centre. In the FIR, she has levelled serious allegations against the proprietor couple of the centre.



Migratory birds were sighted in a forest under Chandipur range of Balasure district during the annual bird census of the forest department, Sunday OP PHOTO

WINGED BEAUTIES

Ganjam: Beaches closed till Jan 17



POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, Jan 13: Beaches and other major water bodies in Ganjam will remain closed for visitors for five days starting Thursday, Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange tweeted. All the beaches in the district including Gopalpur and Sunapur will remain closed from January 13 to 17, the administration clarified. According to an official source, the decision was taken to avoid large congregations during upcoming festivals as well as to ensure enforcement of Covid-19 safety protocols.

Taking to official Twitter handle, the District Magistrate and Collector wrote, "In order to avoid large gatherings during upcoming festivals and to ensure Covid-19 protocols, all sea beaches in Ganjam such as Gopalpur, Sunapur etc and other major water bodies shall remain closed for public from 13th to 17th January, 2022. @CMO_Odisha @SRC_Odisha @IPR_Odisha."

COVID RESURGENCE

Joda Municipality shut

Joda/Saraskana: After eight employees of Joda Municipality tested positive for Covid-19, the civic body was closed Wednesday and Thursday. This step was taken to prevent transmission of the deadly virus, said Bichitrananda Nayak, the executive officer of the civic body. The municipality office has been sanitised, he added. Meanwhile, Saraskana area in Mayurbhanj district reported the first case of Omicron Thursday. The case was detected at Sirsa village. The infected person is in home isolation while three of his family members also tested positive for Covid-19.

Besides, the Collector also asked people through the Twitter handle to follow 'SMS - Sanitiser, Mask and Social distancing' and to get vaccinated to keep themselves and their families safe and healthy. It is pertinent to mention that Ganjam reported 154 fresh Covid-

30 more students at FMMCH Covid +ve

Balasure: With Covid-19 cases on the rise in Odisha, as many as 30 students of Fakir Mohan Medical College and Hospital (FMMCH) in Balasure tested Covid-19 positive Thursday, the authorities said. "About 220 students of the FMMCH had undergone RT-PCR testing recently, of which 30 tested positive. Number of Covid-19 cases among students of the government-run medical college could increase further," Balasure Additional District Medical Officer (ADMO) stated. The infected were kept in isolation and necessary medical treatment is being provided to them by the district administration. All the remaining students of the hostel have undergone RT-PCR testing. Sanitisation of the college premises is being carried out, the ADMO informed.

It is pertinent to mention that an undergraduate hostel of the FMMCH was previously declared as a Containment Zone for seven

19 cases Thursday and has 447 active cases in the district. Odisha government had earlier issued restrictions for celebration of Makar Sankranti and Pongal in the state. The festivals fall on January 14.



30 more students of Fakir Mohan Medical College and Hospital (FMMCH) in Balasure tested Covid-19 positive Thursday, the authorities said.

days starting from Tuesday after 15 of its students tested positive for the coronavirus. Meanwhile, Covid-19 daily caseload in Odisha has breached 10,000 mark as of Thursday morning for the first time in nearly eight months. In the last 24 hours, the state reported a total of 10,059 cases including 872 cases in the under-18 age group. Khurda district reported the maximum of 3,188 Covid-19 cases, followed by Sundargarh (1,348), Cuttack (870) and Sambalpur (570).

As per tweets of Health and Family Welfare department, Balasure district registered 278 new Covid-19 cases Thursday, 231 fresh caseload Wednesday, 198 Tuesday and 210 Monday, respectively.

Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Pradeep Kumar Jena instructed all District Collectors Wednesday to prohibit congregations at water bodies for observance or celebration of the upcoming festivals.

Red camp busted, four Maoists killed

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nuapada, Jan 13: A joint team of Special Operations Group (SOG), District Voluntary Force (DVF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have busted a Maoist camp and seized huge quantity of explosives. Four Maoists were killed in the encounter. This was informed Thursday by Nuapada Superintendent of Police Prayush Diwakar at a press conference held here in the morning. According to SP Diwakar, an exchange of fire broke out between the security personnel and a faction of outlawed CPI (Maoist) inside a densely forested area near Chhattisgarh border under Komma police limits in Nuapada district Wednesday night. Apart from explosives, several pieces of Maoist literature and other daily-use items were seized following the severe exchange of fire that continued for around an hour.

However, the ultras managed to flee from the spot, Diwakar added. Following the operation, the security personnel also recovered a bunch of GI wire, a tarpaulin, codex wire and a battery (12 Volt). The combing operation is still underway in the area, Diwakar informed. Acting on an intelligence input regarding presence of a large number of Maoists near Odisha-Chhattisgarh border to carry out anti-security force and other sub-



Some ultras managed to flee the spot while security forces recovered GI wires, a tarpaulin, codex wires and a battery during the combing operation, said the Nuapada SP

versive activities, a combing operation was earlier initiated by a joint team of SOG, DVF and CRPF January 7, a Nuapada police official said. It is pertinent to mention that about 50 to 60 Red rebels opened indiscriminate fire at the security forces at around 8.45 am January 9, while the security personnel were on a search operation under Sunabeda reserve forest. The team then retaliated in self-defense. Again January 10, the joint team of SOG, DVF and CRPF was sent to the same location for immediate reinforcement.

Machkund hydro project becomes fully functional



POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput, Jan 13: The Machkund hydroelectricity project here bordering Andhra Pradesh attained full capacity in power production Wednesday after all six of its turbines became fully operational after a long period. The turbines becoming fully operational has come as a good news for the project authorities as they plan to produce 120 megawatt of

electricity from the project per day, Braja Sundar Padhy, assistant executive engineer of the project said. The project, started in 1955, is a joint venture between Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. It is also the oldest commonwealth project. However, it failed to become fully operational for a long period due to a host of reasons. Many of the equipment of the project had become defunct and were lying unused. The project was operated on only three generators while the rest six generators were lying defunct. However, the project has now achieved its full capacity for power production after all six of its turbines were made fully operational.

BIRD FLU PRECAUTIONS 164 samples collected from Bhitarkanika NP

Kendrapara: As migratory birds through the Bhitarkanika national park here, there is fear of outbreak of bird flu. Bird flu or avian influenza is a viral infection that primarily spreads from bird to bird, but can also affect humans. The most common kind of bird flu virus is the H5N1 strain. Meanwhile, the officials of the forest department and the livestock department have started collecting blood samples and droppings in various parts of the national park as a precautionary measure. They have collected 64 samples in Bhitarkanika and 100 samples of blood and droppings from fowl farms and domestic animals from other parts of the district. The livestock department has provided training to rapid response teams and owners of 40 fowl farms.

Fish farming lets SHGs script their success story

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Jan 13: Agriculture is the mainstay of people in Kendrapara district as it lacks industries. However, people have failed to meet the expenses of families with agriculture alone, which is why youths are migrating to other states in search of better sources of livelihood. At a time when they are stressed to earn a living owing to migration woes amid pandemic, women members of self-help groups have become self-reliant by taking up fish farming in the district. These women are now earning handsomely to meet the expenses of their families. As many as 4,000 members of 389 self-help groups have taken up fish cultivation and earning over ₹5,000 each from the business. They are cultivating all types of fresh water fish like Rohu, Catla and Mrigal carp which have high demand in the local and outside market.

Anjali Sethy, an SHG member of Pegarpada village under Rajkanika block said their primary business was to sell fish caught by their men from river and water bodies in the district. However, they often face problems in meeting their expenses when they fail to get a good catch. This pushed them into distress as they pondered to find a way out of this situation. Soon, things changed for the better when they formed Baba Jaleshwar women self-help group with 10 women as its members two years back. The fisheries department asked them to take up fish cultivation by taking two ponds in the locality on lease. Each member took up the work with sincerity and the first year income encouraged them to further



Nearly 4,000 members of 389 SHGs have taken up fish cultivation and are earning over ₹5,000 each from the business. They are growing all types of fresh water fish like Rohu and Catla fish

increase their cultivation. Soon other women in the locality joined their group following which they took up 12 ponds in the area on lease, she said. Lakshmi Priya Mallick, secretary of Siddha Mahavir SHG in Entalpur village under Garadpur block said that taking up fish farming has given them a new lease of life during spread of Covid pandemic. The fish cultivation has become helpful for the poor families. They are using the ponds in the village and have been able to earn more than ₹5,000 each per month, she said. Jayanti Rout of Basantpur village under Rajnagar block said that their men face ban from fishing in the sea for a period of seven

months each year due to nesting of Olive Ridley turtles in Gahirmatha Island. They have to live in hunger during this period. However, after being encouraged by the state fisheries department, the women SHGs have taken the ponds on lease and carrying out the cultivation. This has helped them in feeding their family members and in meeting other expenses. Mamata Rani Samal, a member of Sri Sambhu women SHG of Vektakola village under Rajnagar block said they are cultivating all types of fish like Rohu, Mrigal carp and buffalo fish (catla) in the pond. The fish traders are visiting them near the ponds and buying the fish and paying them instantly. This has helped them to earn a handsome amount for their labour, she said. When contacted, Mamata Mohapatra, district fisheries officer said that various women SHGs have taken up cultivation in ponds spread over 160 hectares of land. Each group is supplied with fingerlings at 60 per cent subsidy and a loan assistance of ₹90,000 by the department. The scheme has been a success in Mahakalpara and Rajnagar blocks, she added.

BOUNDARY DEMARICATION



Revenue, IDCO officials and members of forest committees demarcating the boundary between newly declared revenue villages of Patana and Gobindpur under Erasama tehsil in Jagatsinghpur district for construction of a wall by IDCO for the proposed JSW project, Thursday OP PHOTO

FOCUS NEW EDUCATION POLICY

KNOWLEDGE AS POWER



The NEP's agenda for primary and secondary education shows that it's a complete revitalisation movement of Indian education system as it has argued that what is taught or learned in the formal curriculum may be in fact less important than the values and attitudes which are being inculcated

lack basic numeracy and literacy despite spending five years in school. To sort out, NEP has emphasised highest priority to achieving Foundational Literacy and Numeracy by all students by Grade 3 and vocational courses of choice or informal internship from grade 6th onwards. Besides, extensive use of technology in teaching and learning, removing language barriers and life skills such as communication, cooperation, teamwork, and resilience have been proposed for foundation of apprenticeship among children. The ethnographic materials on access to specialised knowledge show that learning in apprenticeship works if it is based on co-participation and engagement in a process of 'legitimate peripheral participation'.

Finally, NEP 2020 rightly recognised education as power in the form of economic and cultural capital while stating that "preservation and promotion of India's cultural wealth must be considered a high priority, as it is truly important for the nation's identity as well as for its economy". Cultural awareness and expression among the children are one of the major competencies to develop sense of identity, belonging and appreciation of other cultures and identities, and implications for authority and power.

The curriculum in formal education in state societies is generally designed predominantly with technical and occupational needs in mind, and its stated purpose is to prepare students to fill available occupational roles. Beyond it, the educational curriculum in NEP 2020 is a revolutionary reform in the contemporary global ecosystem, knowledge and employment landscape. The pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragya), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal.

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schooling may indeed not be an integral part of certain cultures, and the impact of education on some communities may be indirect.

Secondly, it has perhaps realised that present formal education is either a Western concept, inappropriate for the analysis of learning in Indian culture or it is a historical reality which has been imposed by the West on us. For that, all curriculum and pedagogy at all stages will be redesigned with three major focus - to be strongly rooted in the Indian and local context and ethos in terms of Indian culture, tradition and customs; towards real understanding and towards learning how to learn and adoption of 'experimental learning' including hands-on learning, sports integration, arts-integration, story-telling based pedagogy among others.

Thirdly, how children will acquire and construct knowledge? NEP has rightly argued that practical mastery develops outside formal schooling and least to do with 'education'. It has brilliantly argued for curricular integration of essential subjects, skills and capacities from traditional and contemporary domain of Indian society. These skills include sci-

entific temper; evidence based thinking, ethical and moral reasoning, gender sensitivity, constitutional values and others. The most important is "knowledge of India" will include knowledge from ancient India and its contribution to modern India and will be taught "doing what's right".

Children do not simply learn fixed concepts. Indeed, their concepts differ in significant ways from those of adults, and that they are actively engaged in the process of producing meanings. For instance, learning of spatial categories in childhood has a profound impact on notions of gender in adulthood and consequently social hierarchy. When children would 'acquire' traditional knowledge, they would construct as well as sustain traditions. The traditional learning is necessarily informal, but again it is argued that the context in which they are taught and learn are somewhat formal, even if they do not involve institutional learning.

Fourthly, NEP has rightly recognised that we are currently in a learning crisis, when providing apprenticeship to our children is concerned. Several reports observed that 50 per cent children

The National Education Policy 2020 has identified 25 thematic areas of intervention to turn India into a global knowledge superpower and to achieve global education development agenda reflected in the Goal 4 (SDG4) of the 2030. For that, National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of NCERT has been assigned to include Indian Knowledge System, to reduce curriculum to core essentials, promote multilingualism and local flavour in national school curriculum in India.

The NEP's agenda for primary and secondary education shows that it's a complete revitalisation movement of Indian education system as it has argued that what is taught or learned in the formal curriculum may be in fact less important than the values and attitudes which are being inculcated, and which arise from the structure of educational institutions and the patterns of social interaction they create.

Firstly, NEP has seen education as disruption or harbinger of cultural change. For that, it has replaced 10 years of primary and two years of secondary education into five years of foundational learning as core focus area, three years of preparatory, three years of middle and four years of secondary schooling. The core area of focus will be three-language formula, where mother tongue to be a medium of instruction till 5th grade.

May be it was realised that when colonial and post-colonial formal schools based on Western concepts were established in 'traditional communities' like India, they were meant for cultural transformation, which is seen in today's Indian society. The expansion of education is one part of a complex history which has disrupted patterns of social interaction. Particularly the missionary schools, among other things, taught local children that the traditional practices were evil. In any society, the socialisation practices and subsistence patterns in the childhood form the typical set of attitudes and orientations of its members, which then turn shapes the secondary institutions. Formal



Dr Debendra Kumar Biswal

THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE (JNAN), WISDOM (PRAGYAA), AND TRUTH (SATYA) WAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED IN INDIAN THOUGHT AND PHILOSOPHY AS THE HIGHEST HUMAN GOAL

SPECTRUM GOVERNANCE

Presidential form of govt for India?



Prof Satya Narayan Misra

THE CHOICE OF PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM WAS LARGELY BECAUSE OF INDIA'S FAMILIARITY WITH THE UK PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM AND EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT 1935

As the Indian Republic tumbles into its 72nd year, one is amazed by the unchanging character of our Constitution's basic structure; a doctrine coined by the Supreme Court in Kesavananda Bharati Case (1973). Be it the Congress or the BJP, they have implicitly agreed to retain the Constitution's core characters, like democracy, federalism, republicanism, secularism and independence of the judiciary. However, there are two areas of debate - supplanting parliamentary form of government with a presidential form and scrapping socialism from the script of the preamble that needs debating.

The choice of parliamentary system was largely because of India's familiarity with the UK parliamentary system and experience of working with the Government of India Act 1935. However, there were prominent detractors like Dr BR Ambedkar, who was more in favour of residential form of government. Gandhiji wished for a system based on village panchayats rather than copy the British. He wrote "If India copies England, it is my firm conviction that she will be ruined". However, it was Pandit

Nehru who tilted the balance for adopting parliamentary system. Dr Ambedkar, in an astonishing address in 1953, had blurted: "I am quite prepared today that I shall be the first person to burn the Constitution." KM Munshi, a distinguished member of the Constituent Assembly also wrote, "If I were to make a choice again, I would vote for the presidential form of government, so that when the politician fails the country, at least one organ of the state is capable of tiding over the crisis."

Much later R Venkat Raman as President had expressed grave doubts regarding the future of parliamentary democracy. He was alluding to the ghastly emergency years (1975-77) when there was mockery of collective responsibility as the President was made to sign an order without the approval of the Cabinet. As Granville Austin, the celebrated jurist observed "repression was piled upon repression and light seem to have gone out of India's Constitution".

The suggestion for a Presidential form hinges on four arguments. Firstly, it enables the President to have a Cabinet of outstanding professional competence and merit without the choice being restricted

to the elected MPs. Secondly, since the Cabinet members are not elected, they would not be motivated to adopt cheap populist measures. Thirdly, it permits Cabinet ministers to be more involved in the job of governing the country instead of indulging in endless politicking. Finally, it would discourage defection and horse trading in the event of a hung Assembly or Parliament. When Clement Attlee suggested the US presidential system as a model to the Indian leaders they rejected it. Atlee writes, "I had the feeling they thought I was offering margarine instead of butter".

After nearly 30 years of economic globalisation, which India adapted turning its back on socialism and wanton nationalisation, there is an all pervading feeling that in our Parliamentary form of governance, despite having brutal majority under Prime Ministers like Indira Gandhi or Narendra Modi slogans like "Garibi Hatao" and "Sab Ke Saath Sab Ka Vikash" have remained a hogwash. The biggest casualty has been poor delivery mechanism of basic services like quality primary education, affordable health care, proper sanitation for all and lack of accountability of the government in providing them.

Malnutrition amongst children is rampant (43%) as per Rapid Survey of Children Report (2014). Nearly half of the adolescent girls who will become future mothers are anaemic as per latest NFHS 5 report. This leads to high maternal mortality rates of 174 per lakh. The national nutrition mission to eliminate hunger and stunting amongst children has so far made no perceptible impact.

It is apprehended that any move to convert India to a presidential form of government will offend the basic structure doctrine. This is debatable. There is no permanence to the Constitution and it has to evolve over time. As Thomas Jefferson, the architect of the US Constitution had once observed "No one generation can bind another. The creator has to make the earth for the living and not the dead". In a similar vein Dr. Ambedkar had also written that "the Constitution is not merely a lawyer's documents but a vehicle of life and a spirit should always be the spirit of age."

The writer is Dean, School of Management KIIT, Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar. Views expressed are personal.

Preventing famine in Afghanistan

In August, the world watched in shock as the Western-backed Afghan government rapidly collapsed and the country spiraled into chaos, culminating in the Taliban's takeover of the capital, Kabul, and return to power after nearly 20 years.

Since then, Afghanistan has faded from global view. But almost nine million Afghans are now at risk of famine, and a further 14 million are facing acute hunger, owing to a drought and an economic collapse triggered by the sudden suspension of foreign aid. The World Health Organisation warns that one million Afghan children are at risk of dying this winter.

In December, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution exempting humanitarian aid from sanctions against the Taliban. But that is just one piece of the puzzle in addressing the humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan. The global community is facing an urgent challenge to prevent mass starvation and avoid a complete collapse of basic services.

The Council on State Fragility, of which I am a member alongside prominent global leaders, is calling on the international community not to abandon the people of Afghanistan, and to act now to head off imminent famine. Specifically, we urge world leaders to focus on three key imperatives.

First, as Afghanistan slides further into a devastating economic and humanitarian crisis, the UN - the one global actor that can help the country pull through - can still support Afghans, even as its member states continue to debate whether to recognise the Taliban government. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, acting with the full backing of the Security Council, should strengthen the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and send a special envoy to be based in Kabul with UN agencies' staff. Furthermore, Guterres should task the UNAMA with maintaining clear and consistent communication channels with the Taliban leadership and ensuring an integrated approach to humanitarian, development, and peace efforts.

The UN and its agencies are not new to such challenges. Similarly strong and coordinated UN responses have had a clear impact in other difficult contexts, including in North Korea, Yemen, and Sudan. In Afghanistan, UN agencies have excellent local staff: well-trained, experienced, and devoted men and women, many of whom successfully delivered aid programs under the Taliban's previous regime in the 1990s. They have done the same in Taliban-controlled areas in the recent past.

Second, inclusivity is essential to a stable, lasting peace. An inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan remains as necessary today as it was before the Taliban retook control of the country. Rather than writing off the Afghan peace process as dead in the water, the international community should view it as a multi-year, adaptive, and ongoing process of bringing all sides together to build bridges and reach a common understanding regarding the country's future.

The winner-takes-all politics that has long plagued Afghanistan must be avoided at all costs, because exclusion will only fuel endless cycles of conflict. National consensus-building mechanisms, chief among them a well-prepared and well-led Loya Jirga - a traditional gathering of ethnic, tribal, and religious leaders - can help to foster agreement among the country's communities and lead to the patient construction of the new dispensation Afghanistan needs.

Lastly, Afghanistan's immediate neighbours and near-neighbours - primarily Iran, Pakistan, China, and India, as well as key regional actors such as Qatar and Turkey - have a critical role to play in stabilizing the country. The international community should urge these countries to contribute to peace efforts in Afghanistan, and support existing constructive engagement by regional players, such as Qatar, that have established a track record as trusted interlocutors between the Taliban and the outside world.

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is severe, and millions of lives are at stake this winter. The international community, with strong UN leadership, can and should step up to support Afghans at this challenging time. The world must deliver aid where it is most needed, and support national reconciliation and peace processes for as long as necessary.

The writer, a former Foreign Minister of Algeria, is a former United Nations special representative in Afghanistan.

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WISDOM CORNER

"We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far." SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart." NELSON MANDELA

"For beautiful eyes, look for the good in others; for beautiful lips, speak only words of kindness; and for poise, walk with the knowledge that you are never alone." AUDREY HEPBURN

WORDSWORTH

Caucus

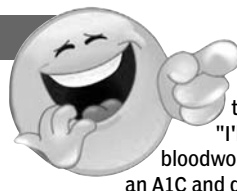
Current political events in the USA have again brought this word to the forefront of newspaper reporting. Its accidental similarity to Caucasus and Caucasian, the only other words in English that look anything like it, has sometimes led people up a false trail. The true origin of caucus has puzzled people almost from the moment it first appeared in the middle of the eighteenth century and attempts to solve the mystery have been notable for confusion, disagreement and misinterpretation. The only fact that everybody agrees on is that its birthplace is the New England city of Boston. Its earliest known use in its usual spelling was in a diary entry of February 1763 by John Adams, later to be the second President of the USA.

LOL

GEESE-HUNTING

Three doctors are out geese-hunting. A gaggle flies over and the oncologist raises and then lowers his gun. "I better conduct an MRI first to determine if those were really geese." Some more geese fly by & the endocrinologist raises his gun and

then lowers it. "I'll need some bloodwork to conduct an A1C and determine what those birds were first." Some more geese fly over. The trauma doc raises his shotgun and blows them out of the sky. "What were those things, anyway?" he asks.



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

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Economic recovery

Sir, Appropos, editorial "CoVID-hit economy", Orissa Post, January 12, the Central government's advance estimate of the 2021-22 GDP shows that the economy has bounced back to the pre-pandemic level. GDP is expected to grow by 9.2% to ₹147.53 lakh crore, or about \$3.2 trillion. In absolute terms, it means that the GDP estimate for this financial year is 1.26% higher than that of 2019-20, the last pre-pandemic year. However, the positive development has to be balanced by the forecast that private consumption continues to be lower than what was recorded two years ago. It indicates that the recovery has been uneven and swathes of the economy are yet to get back on track. Add to this, the advance estimate needs to be interpreted with care. It was compiled using data that could not have captured the impact of the ongoing third wave of Covid-19 infections. The data, however, shows that policy to deal with the Covid surge must refrain from lockdowns. Contact-intensive sectors are the worst hit by them. In this backdrop, Central government needs to persuade states to avoid resorting to blanket curfews. We need to use more sophisticated tools to insulate the still fragile economy from damage. The Union Budget, just weeks away, needs to design fiscal policy to support contact-intensive sectors that also provide jobs for youth with limited skills.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Teachers' recruitment

Sir, The Odisha government has removed the minimum qualifying criteria for TGT recruitment in government high schools, drawing flak from many educationists and intellectuals who are of the opinion that it will adversely impact the education system. This new provision also gives rise to a possibility that aspirants securing negative marks will make it to the final list if adequate numbers of eligible candidates from their category is not found. What constructive, productive, and quality education we can provide when we are ready to compromise with the recruitment criteria and that too for teachers, on whose capable shoulders rests the onus of nation-building. Every year nearly 2,000 students pass the two-year teacher training course from the state institutes, but unavailability of jobs in this field has forced them to switch to other professions. Instead of sporadic teacher recruitment and relaxations, if conducted every year, aspirants will not turn away from the teaching profession and the best for this profession from each category can be recruited without the need of easing or relaxation in the recruitment process.

Soumyakanta Senapati, CUTTACK

of the day quote

Great sense of responsibility & enthusiasm among Young India. Over 3 crore youngsters between the 15-18 age group have received 1st dose of the Covid-19 vaccine

MANSUKH MANDAVIYA
UNION HEALTH MINISTER

Those in the cabinet are also leaving the BJP. This is happening in Uttar Pradesh and (at the level of) districts in the state

SHARAD PAWAR | NCP PRESIDENT

Bhagwant Mann is my younger brother. He is a tall leader of the AAP. I had said he should be made the Chief Minister, but he said people should be asked first. He said the practice of deciding the name of the chief ministerial candidate in a closed-door meeting should be stopped

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP NATIONAL CONVENER

SHORT TAKES

Ker govt changes Pongal holiday date

Thiruvananthapuram/Chennai: The Kerala government Thursday declared January 14 as Pongal holiday in 6 districts, where there is considerable Tamil population, switching the date from January 15. The one-day local holiday was announced in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Palakkad and Wayanad districts. A government order issued in this regard said though January 15 was mentioned as 'pongal' holiday in this year's calendar, it is changed from Saturday to Friday. It also said the change was made considering the request of the Tamil Protection Council and also in accordance with the holidays of the Tamil Nadu government and the Centre. However, January 15 would be a working day in these districts in its place.

2 soldiers killed in 'accidental firing'

Jammu: Two soldiers were killed in accidental firing in J&K's Rajouri district Thursday, police said. Police sources said the soldiers were killed in an accidental firing incident near the Line of Control in Hanjanwali area of Rajouri. "A police team has rushed to the spot to ascertain the details of the incident. Preliminary reports indicate that it was an incident of accidental firing," a source said.

2.5 kg RDX, one detonator seized

Chandigarh: Close on the heels of terror module backed by the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF) busted, Punjab Police Thursday said it have recovered 2.5 kg RDX, one detonator, codex wire, five explosive fuses along with wires, 12 cartridges of AK 47 Assault Rifle. Director General of Police (DGP) VK Bhawra said the recovery was made on the interrogation of Amandeep Kumar, the prime accused in the two recent incidents of grenade attacks in Pathankot.

Woman branded witch, set on fire

Simdega: Close on heels of a lynching incident in Jharkhand's Simdega district, a 60-year-old woman was set on fire by locals at a village here on the suspicion that she practised witchcraft, a police officer said Thursday. Five persons have been arrested in this connection, the officer said. The victim with severe burn injuries was undergoing treatment at Sadar Hospital.



Deeply disappointed to note that the remand of our fishermen has been extended. Urge Hon'ble Dr S Jaishankar to prevail upon Sri Lanka to secure their immediate release

M K STALIN | TAMIL NADU CHIEF MINISTER

KASHMIR SHIVERS

Minimum temperature throughout Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh remained notches below the freezing point Thursday as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast rise in day temperatures and further drop in night temperatures in the two UTs



Hackers spreading malware via Omicron news emails

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 13: Cyber-security researchers have unearthed that hackers are spreading a powerful malware via news around the new Omicron strain, stealing information and credentials from Windows users in at least 12 countries.

Researchers from cyber-security firm FortiGuard said that hackers are infecting devices with 'RedLine' malware sent via emails, that steals all of the usernames and passwords it finds through

out an infected system.

"FortiGuard Labs recently came across a curiously named file, 'Omicron Stats.exe' which turned out to be a variant of RedLine Stealer malware. While we have not been able to identify the infection vector for this particular variant, we believe that it is being distributed via email," the company said in a statement. Based on the information collected by FortiGuard Labs, potential victims of this RedLine Stealer variant are spread across 12 countries.



"This indicates that this is a broad-brush attack and that the threat actors did not target specific organisations or individuals," said the researchers.

The first reports of RedLine

Stealer go back to at least March of 2020 and it quickly became one of the more popular infostealers sold in underground digital markets.

The information harvested by RedLine Stealer is sold on the dark net marketplace for as low as \$10 per set of user credentials.

The malware emerged just as the world began to deal with increased numbers of Covid patients and the growing fear and uncertainty that can cause people to lower their guard, which may have prompted its developers to use

Covid as its lure.

"Past RedLine Stealer variants are known to have been distributed in Covid-themed emails to lure victims. The file name of this current variant, 'Omicron Stats.exe', was used just as the Omicron variant was becoming a global concern, following the pattern of previous variants," said the researchers. Given that this malware is embedded in a document designed to be opened by a victim, "we have concluded that email is the infection vector for this variant as well".

Big cities could see Covid peak next week

REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 13: New Covid-19 infections in Indian cities such as capital New Delhi and Mumbai could peak next week after rising rapidly, experts said Thursday, as the country reported the highest number of daily cases since late May

The 247,417 new infections were more than 30 times higher daily cases from a month ago, rising as the more transmissible Omicron variant replaced Delta across the country. Total infections reached 36.32 million, behind only the United States.

"Our modelling, and those of others, suggests that the big Indian cities should see their peaks in cases close to January 20, while the overall peak in India may be shifted a bit later, to early February," said Gautam Menon, professor of physics and biology at Ashoka University near the capital.

Mumbai recorded a high of 20,971 infections last Friday but cases have been coming down since. City

New rules aim to free up resources but carry risks

India has eased its Covid-19 rules on testing, quarantine and hospital admissions in a bid to free up resources for its neediest people, a strategy hailed by experts even though it carries the risk of a heavy undercount of infections and deaths. "Contact-tracing has been the most resource-intensive activity since the pandemic began," said Sanjay K Rai, a professor of community medicine at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, the capital. "That strategy did not work and wasted resources," he added, saying serological surveys had shown it had detected only a fraction of infections. Four Indian epidemiologists echoed Rai's view, saying it was better to monitor the numbers of those in hospital, rather than infections, while targeting crowded spaces such as workplaces, dormitories and barracks with rapid testing. They added that the guidelines on shorter isolation and hospital admissions were in line with global practice, as most Omicron sufferers recover quicker, although they spread the virus faster. But some experts say the new rules could lull people into taking infections lightly until it is too late, especially in the rural areas home to two-thirds of the population, where few seek tests unless directed by authorities.

officials said the rate of infection was also coming down, with nearly 80% of Covid-19 hospital beds vacant. Delhi reported more than 27,500 infections Wednesday, close to its all-time high, and its health minister told local media this week infections could start coming down

in a few days. Federal and state health officials say a majority of the infections in the ongoing third wave have been mild, with fewer hospitalisations and deaths than the previous surge in April and May that killed hundreds of thousands of people.

The health ministry has said



common pain relievers like paracetamol should be enough for people with mild fever due to Covid-19. It has warned, though, against complacency as infections have now started rising in as many as 300 districts from fewer than 80 a week ago. "The experience from other countries informs us that it is more practical to track/monitor hospitalisations rather than new cases," said Rajib Dasgupta, head of the Centre of Social Medicine & Community Health at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University. Many cities and states, including Delhi,

have nevertheless imposed night curfews. Delhi also locks down fully on weekends, and has closed private offices, schools and restaurants throughout the week. India has administered two primary vaccine doses to nearly 70% of its 939 million adult population but many still remain unvaccinated. This has worried officials especially as five states hold elections starting February 10. The country reported 380 Covid-19 deaths Thursday, more than 46% of them fatalities in the southern state of Kerala not previously recorded.



IN HIGH SPIRITS

Lt Manisha Bohra of AOC Contingent gives a command during the full dress rehearsal for the Army Day Parade, at Army Parade Ground in New Delhi, Thursday

PTI PHOTO

HARIDWAR HATE SPEECH CASE

Police arrest Waseem Rizvi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dehradun, Jan 13: The Uttarakhand Police Thursday made the first arrest in the Dharma Sansad hate speech case nabbing Waseem Rizvi who is now known as Jitendra Narayan Tyagi from Roorkee in Haridwar district, and issued notices to two other key accused Yati Narasimhananda and Sadhvi Annapurna for appearance before it.

All the three are named along with others in the FIRs lodged in connection with the case. While Rizvi has been arrested, notices for appearance under Section 41 A of the CrPC have been sent to Yati



Narasimhananda and Sadhvi Annapurna, Uttarakhand DGP Ashok Kumar told PTI.

Yati Narasimhananda is the controversial priest of the Dasna Temple in Ghaziabad who had organised the Dharma Sansad in Haridwar, while Sadhvi Annapurna was one of the speakers at the

event where highly provocative speeches were allegedly made against Muslims. Waseem Rizvi was arrested from Narsan border in Roorkee, Haridwar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Yogendra Rawat told PTI. Rizvi who changed his name to Jitendra Narayan Tyagi after converting to Hinduism is among more than 10 people named in the FIRs lodged in connection with the case. He was formerly the head of Uttar Pradesh Shia Waqf Board. This is the first arrest in the case. When asked whether more arrests will follow, the SSP said it will depend on how the investigation progresses.

MAHA SHOCKER

'Graveyard' of illegally aborted fetuses found from hosp premises

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nagpur, Jan 13: At least 11 skulls and 54 bones of foetuses were found in the premises of a private hospital in Maharashtra's Wardha district, a recovery which came to light when the police were investigating a separate case of illegal abortion, an official said Thursday.

Acting on a tip-off, the police searched a biogas plant located in the premises of Kadam Hospital in Arvi tehsil Wednesday and found 11 skulls and 54 bones of foetuses, which have been sent for laboratory examination, the official said.

A probe was underway to ascertain if the recovered bones and skulls were disposed of legally or illegally, he said. The police had earlier arrested a doctor, Rekha Kadam, and a nurse of the hospital for allegedly performing an illegal abortion on a 13-year-old girl, inspector Bhanudas Pidurkar of the Arvi police station said.

Based on a complaint, the police arrested the doctor and the nurse on January 9 and also nabbed the parents of a minor boy who allegedly impregnated the girl with whom he was in a relationship, he said. The boy's parents had threatened the



victim's parents that they would defame the girl if she did not undergo an abortion, and they paid for the procedure last week, the official said.

A complaint of illegal abortion was lodged, following which the accused were arrested under relevant sections of the IPC and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, he said.

According to the police, the doctor had failed to inform the authorities about performing an abortion on a girl under the age of 18. Wardha Superintendent of Police Prashant Holkar told PTI that the accused doctor's parents-in-law, who are also physicians, have a license to perform abortions. A probe is underway to ascertain if the bones and skulls recovered from the biogas plant were disposed of legally or illegally, he said, adding Dr Kadam has not produced any documents in this regard.

India loses 259bn labour hours annually due to warmth: Study

Over the last four decades, heat-related labour losses have increased by at least nine per cent (60 billion hours annually) as global average temperatures rose about 0.4 degree Celsius because of human activities

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 13: countries are especially badly hit by heat-related labour losses. For example, India

currently loses around 259 billion hours annually due to the impacts of humidity and heat on labour, more than double previous estimates of 110 billion hours, says a study by Duke University.

Published in the journal Environmental Research Letters on Thursday, the study says that humidity and heat currently causes 677 billion hours of lost labour worth \$2.1 trillion annually, and human-caused climate change is worsening these losses.

With 3.3 billion workers globally, it works out around 205 lost hours per person per year.

Heat, especially when combined with humidity, can slow people down when they're performing heavy work such as in agriculture



Representational image

or construction. As the climate heats up further due to greenhouse gas emissions, every fraction of a

degree of warming is causing more work time to be lost for heat-related reasons. This new estimate of

work lost to heat and humidity is about 400 billion hours greater than other widely-used estimates - roughly the same as the amount of work lost during the Covid-19 pandemic - due to the inclusion of more up-to-date data on how heat and humidity affect humans doing heavy work.

The new data found that labour productivity can be slowed down at lower heat and humidity levels than previously assumed.

India currently loses around 259 billion hours annually due to the impacts of humid heat on labour and worth an estimated Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) \$624 billion.

The US loses PPP \$98 billion of labour per year. Without rapid emissions cuts, climate change is

set to further increase losses in already hot countries, and historically cooler countries will start to see more significant labour losses.

It is followed by China which loses 72 billion hours, up from an estimate of 24 billion; Bangladesh loses 32 billion hours, up from an estimated 15 billion; Indonesia loses 36 billion, whereas the previous estimate was 11 billion, and Vietnam loses 19 billion, up from an estimate of 8 billion.

In terms of changes, in the first 20 years of this century, India lost 25 billion more hours annually compared to the previous 20 years, China lost four billion extra hours per year, Bangladesh three billion, Indonesia two billion and Vietnam two billion.

Superspreader fears at Ganga Sagar Mela

Officials expect as many as three million people to take a ritual dip in the holy Ganga river Friday



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Sagar Island, Jan 13: Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims began packing an island in the Ganges Thursday for a vast religious festival as Covid-19 cases surge nationwide, prompting fears of a superspreader event. Officials said they expected as many as three million people, including ash-smearing, dreadlocked ascetics, to take a ritual dip in the holy river Friday, the climax of the annual Gangasagar Mela. Last April's Kumbh Mela, a similarly colossal religious festival that the Hindu nationalist government refused to ban, was partly blamed for a devastating spike in cases that killed 200,000, according to official tallies, though some experts fear the actual toll was several times that.

With coronavirus case numbers once again ballooning, a Kolkata court last week ruled that the Gangasagar Mela, which takes place on Sagar Island at the mouth of the Ganges in West Bengal, could go ahead. The state government Thursday appealed to people to get tested for Covid-19, with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urging devotees to wear two masks and not "spit on the island, as it spreads the virus". As with 2021's Kumbh Mela, this week's festival is attracting people from across northern India who, after cramming onto trains, buses and boats to reach the island, will then go home - potentially taking the virus's highly transmissible Omicron variant with them. "It's a big challenge amid the raging surge of the Covid variant to maintain social distancing," local district magistrate P Ulganathan told this news agency. "There is no doubt that such a gathering where people are in close proximity will increase the spread. We are continuously appealing to people to follow Covid-appropriate behaviour." Amitava Nandy, a virologist from the School of Tropical Medicines in Kolkata, said the government "has neither the facilities nor the manpower" to test everyone attending or impose social-distancing norms. "A stampede-like situation could happen if the police try to enforce social distancing on the river bank," Nandy told this news agency, saying the festival "may end up being the superspreader of the virus in India". Devotee Sarbananda Mishra, 56, who came from the neighbouring state of Bihar, told AFP that "faith in God will overcome the fear of Covid. The bathing will cleanse them of all their sins and bring salvation." "Death is the ultimate truth. What is the point of living with fear?" said Mishra, a schoolteacher resting at one of the many camps in nearby Kolkata waiting to go to the festival.

Is undercurrent in favour of the SP?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 13: The resignation of three ministers in three days and the subsequent photos being uploaded with Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav has changed the dynamics of UP politics. Till a few days back the BJP was confident of winning back the state but the resignations have sent jitters down the spines in the BJP camp. The question is, whether there is an undercurrent in favour of the Samajwadi Party which is perceived to be the biggest gainer from these exits from the saffron party. The SP is having the last laugh in terms of defections as all roads lead to the party office on Vikramaditya Marg in Lucknow. The rebels from the BJP BSP and the Congress are lining up at



Dharam Singh Saini with Akhilesh Yadav

Akhilesh Yadav's door, which analysts believe is in favour of the SP, as leaders like Maurya have a strong ground presence and feedback. Delhi based independent analyst Shakil Akhtar says, "There is a feeling in the defectors that they

can't return to their constituency on a BJP symbol so they went to the party which has social justice in its roots while the BJP was dependent on social engineering." The experts believe that the real issues are inflation, Covid deaths,

stray animals, unemployment and the BJP has not been able to gauge the minds of its own MLAs and ministers. Dharam Singh Saini Thursday became the third minister after Swami Prasad Maurya and Dara Singh Chauhan to quit the Yogi Adityanath led BJP government. Saini was Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ayush, Food Security and Drug Administration. After sending his resignation to the Governor, he went to meet Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav. Interestingly, in his resignation letter, Saini levelled the same allegation that other legislators had levelled against the Yogi government. Saini, who represents the Nakud Assembly seat which is in western UP, has returned the security cover.



ENDANGERED SPECIES

Two dead turtles lie on a beach of Sagar Island in the backdrop of fishing boats in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal, Thursday. Each year hundreds of thousands of adult and immature sea turtles are accidentally captured in fisheries ranging from highly mechanised operations to small-scale fishermen around the world

Drugs worth ₹10 cr seized in Siliguri

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Jan 13: In a major haul, the Special Task Force and the Special Operations Group have recovered drugs worth around Rs 10 crore from Siliguri. Six people, including two from other states, have been arrested in this connection. According to police, the seizure which is the highest in the last five years is considered to be a major success for the Siliguri Police Commissionerate and the Special Task Force because the cops are hopeful that while interrogating the people, police might get into certain leads which will enable them to intercept international rackets. Acting on a tip-off, the Special Operations Group of Siliguri Police Commissionerate raided the Kankata junction of the Eastern Bypass adjacent to Siliguri Wednesday afternoon and detected certain suspects who were wandering in the area aimlessly. Police intercepted the four and a huge amount of brown sugar was recovered from under the clothes.



Police arrested the four identified as -Kamal Sheikh of Kaliaganj in Baningsar of Nadia district, Monirul Islam of Bishnupur in South 24 Parganas, Shamsul Alam of Bajwah and Mohammad Meherul of Biswas Colony of Matigara near Siliguri.

BATTLE FOR UP 'Tainted' candidates seek back door in polls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Jan 13: All political parties may have vowed to keep away from tainted candidates but as elections knock on the door, they seem more concerned about winnability than their image. An interesting development in the elections this time is that both the BJP and Samajwadi Party (SP) are unwilling to take these 'tainted' (read criminals) leaders on board directly but have no qualms about these candidates taking the route through smaller parties who are in alliance with them. Mafia don-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari will be contesting his sixth election on the Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP), ticket from Mau. SBSP President Om Prakash Rajbhar had met Mukhtar in jail and offered him a ticket. Mukhtar's brother Sigbatullah Ansari has already joined the SP and will be contesting from Ghazipur. Interestingly it was the merger of Mukhtar's Qaumi Ekta Dal in the SP that had triggered a war between party chief Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shivpal Yadav in mid-2016. Akhilesh was opposed to the merger which was done by Shivpal,



then state president of the party. The war finally led to a vertical split in the party with Akhilesh removing his uncle from the state president's post and then assuming charge as party president. The SBSP is an ally of the SP and sources claim that Akhilesh has no objections to Mukhtar's candidature now. Another 'tainted' politician who is likely to make a back door entry is former BSP MP Dhananjay Singh. The BJP does not wish to welcome him into the party but wants it ally, the Apna Dal, to make him its candidate from Malhani in Jaunpur. In the recent panchayat elections, Dhananjay Singh's wife Srikala Reddy was elected as the zila panchayat chief.

Dhankar slams officials for skipping meets

The strong reaction from the Governor came after the two top state government officials did not attend a meeting convened by him earlier in the day

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Jan 13: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar expressed his "strong displeasure" after state Chief Secretary HK Dwivedi and Director-General of Police Manoj Malaviya skipped two scheduled meetings with him in three days and said there was a "constitutional lapse". The strong reaction from the Governor came after the two top state government officials did not attend a meeting convened by him earlier in the day. They skipped another meeting with him on January 10. The meeting was convened to seek details on why Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly Suwendu Adhikari was

stopped by the police from visiting Netaji in Jhargram district January 7 to attend a programme despite obtaining permission for the same from Calcutta High Court. The Governor alleged that the two officials have not only "damaged the reputation of top services" but also violated the "essence of democracy by defying his repeated calls for a meeting." "CS @MamataOfficial DGP @WBPolice conduct aggravated by lack of response and habitual defiance of directives from Guv. Rather than 'uphold the supremacy of the Constitution and democratic values' these officials @IASAssociation @IPS_Association have violated



essence of democracy," Dhankar said in another tweet. The Governor added that he would ensure that the Chief Secretary and the DGP "get into constitutional groove". "Constitutionally ordained 'to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and the law' would now ensure that CS @MamataOfficial DGP @WBPolice get into constitutional groove. These officials @IASAssociation

@IPS_Association have spinally damaged the reputation of top services," he added. Reacting to the Governor's remarks, TMC spokesperson Saugata Roy said, "The Governor has no other work than sending out tweets. The state government officers are working in a difficult situation and addressing issues such as the Covid-19 situation. The Governor should understand this."

UP schools violating RTE rules to face action

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Jan 13: The Uttar Pradesh government has decided that schools violating the Right to Education (RTE) Act rules will now face action. The basic education department has decided to initiate the process of withdrawing recognition of schools not complying with RTE rules. Nearly one lakh students

from 'weaker' sections of society have been admitted in private schools under RTE provisions for academic session 2021-22. Additional Director, basic education, Lalita Pradeep, said that complaints had been received against several schools who were not complying with RTE rules. Under RTE Act, children belonging to economically weaker sections and disadvantaged groups

are admitted in recognised unaided private schools to the extent of 25 per cent of the total capacity of their entry level classes, either pre-primary or Class I. The department has received complaints pertaining to school management harassing parents for unnecessary documents, striking off names of children without reason and not allowing children to attend school.

NCB makes huge drug haul from Nepal border



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Jan 13: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Lucknow zone, has seized a huge cache of psychotropic drugs and arrested six people for their involvement in drugs smuggling from across the India-Nepal border. The arrests were made at Rupaiddha of Uttar Pradesh's Bahraich district, officials said. The drugs were seized in an operation relating to curbing of illegal diversion of narcotics and psychotropic substances across the border. Acting on specific intelligence inputs, the NCB officials seized the psychotropic drugs and narcotics along with a huge amount of cash from various medical stores and other unauthorised premises. According to a statement issued by the NCB, a total of 4,237 tablets containing Alprazolam, 2,665 tablets containing Nitrazepam, 5,530 tablets of Tramadol and Diazepam injection and Pentazocine injection and 4,471 bottles of Codeine-based cough syrup worth Rs 30 lakh were

recovered from six premises, four of which were medical stores. Unaccounted cash currency of Rs 1,75,400 and 59,000 Nepali rupees were also seized in this operation. The arrested have been identified as Anil Kumar Mishra, Govind Kumar Verma, Ishfaq Ahmad, Mohd Ghalib, Shiv Kishor Vishwakarma and Radhe Shyam Verma. All of them are residents of Bahraich district. Officials said that the NCB, Lucknow Zone had been receiving the information of diversion and trafficking of narcotics and psychotropic medicines in the bordering areas of India and Nepal. In view of the upcoming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the NCB has deployed its teams in the field to develop intelligence related to drug trafficking and conduct operations and seizures based on intelligence. Teams on the India-Nepal border are keeping a close watch on smuggling of drugs in poll-bound areas.

UP POLLS BJP faces uphill task of repeating its 2017 show

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Jan 13: The BJP faces an uphill task of repeating its performance of the last assembly election of winning 53 out of 58 constituencies in western Uttar Pradesh where polling will be held in the first phase February 10. Western Uttar Pradesh which has seen widespread protests over the Centre's now-repealed farm laws will be very crucial for the BJP for achieving the target of winning more than 300 seats out of total 403 again, political analysts say. In the first phase, polling will be held in 58 assembly seats in Shamli, Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Baghpat, Hapur, Gautam Budh Nagar, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Mathura, Agra and Aligarh districts and the notification will be issued on Friday. On these 58 seats, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party won two seats each in 2017 and the Rashtriya Lok Dal got one seat. In addition to the farmer agitation, the issues of "exodus" of a community from Kairana, sugar-

cane price and payment, and the temple of Lord Krishna in Mathura are likely to feature prominently in the campaign by various parties. All Opposition parties, including the Samajwadi Party, Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party, have given priority to the issues related to farmers, while the ruling BJP claims that the Yogi Adityanath-led government has done several important works for the development of the region. The BJP highlights in its campaign the proposed international airport in Noida, ending migration from Kairana and the development of the region, along with clearing dues of sugarcane farmers. In the first week of September last, there was a big mahapanchayat of farmers in Muzaffarnagar against the three farm laws. Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait had made the allegation of harassment of farmers by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. After the communal riots in Muzaffarnagar in 2013, challenges



had arisen for the Samajwadi Party in this stronghold of western Uttar Pradesh and the BJP benefited in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha and 2017 Assembly polls. Adityanath and top BJP leaders claim that there has not been a single riot in Uttar Pradesh after the BJP government was formed in 2017. Political commentator Rajiv Ranjan Singh told this news agency that this time the election will see a war of words. If rallies and public meetings are not allowed be-

cause of the coronavirus pandemic, slogans and statements that will create a stir on the social media will be used. "Obviously parties will rake up old issues and a terrible round of accusations and counter-accusations will start," he said. Even before the notification for the first phase, cabinet ministers Swami Prasad Maurya and Dara Singh Chauhan have resigned accusing the BJP government of neglecting Dalits, backward, youth, farmers, unemployed and the un-

derprivileged. The development has increased enthusiasm of the Samajwadi Party and it claims that in the first phase itself, its cycle will accelerate towards attaining power. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said in a tweet that "mela hobe" (there will be unity) against the BJP, terming it oppressive and claimed that it will taste a historic defeat. SP spokesperson Rajendra Choudhary alleged, "The BJP government imposed the farm laws and withdrew them but more than 700 farmers lost their lives." "Every farmer will take account of this from the BJP government and from the very first phase, SP's cycle (poll symbol) will increase its speed to form the government and this time SP will get historic support and seats," he said. Along with enumerating the government's achievements in the region, Chief Minister Adityanath often claims in his meetings that he has freed Kairana from the mafia and the families who fled have returned to their homes.

of the day quote

Good to talk to Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya, Raychelle Omamo. Reviewed bilateral progress over the last year

Wishing you all a Happy Lohri. I pray for everyone's good health and well-being. May this special day further the spirit of brotherhood in our society

Hospital admissions due to Covid have stabilised in the city over the last four days but the number of cases and the positivity rate has seen an increase

SHORT TAKES

Tiger killed by poachers

Nagpur: A five-year-old tiger was allegedly killed by poachers in Arjuni-Morgaon forest range of Maharashtra's Gondia district Thursday, an official said.

Six migrant workers rescued

Ranchi: Six women migrant workers hailing from Jharkhand were rescued from Karnataka where they were held captive in an apparel unit, the state government said Thursday.

10 bovine rescued, smuggler arrested

Bharatpur (Raj): A suspected cattle smuggler was arrested and 10 bovines were rescued Thursday in Rajasthan's Bharatpur district, police said.

Strict rule

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh government is soon going to introduce an Act pertaining to online gaming, which will have a set of guidelines for the companies, said state Home minister Narottam Mishra Thursday.

Jeweller shot at

Patna: A prominent jeweller of Bihar's Nalanda district was shot at by five persons Thursday. The victim was identified as Suman Kumar Chintu, the owner of Suhagan Jewellers in Nalanda district.



There is a strong and intense anti-BJP, anti-incumbency wind blowing in Goa

ENFORCE COCKFIGHTING BAN: CENTRE TELLS AP

Following a complaint by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India that despite a ban on cockfighting in the country, hundreds of arenas have been built for cockfighting in Andhra Pradesh, the central government statutory body Animal Welfare Board of India has fired off a letter to the state's director general of police, demanding more vigilance and action against offenders and to stop such illegal events



6 killed, 67 injured as Bikaner-Guwahati Express derails in WB



According to the railway authorities, the reason behind the accident is yet to be determined but there was no problem regarding signal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Jan 13: At least six people killed while around 67 persons have been injured after 12 coaches of Guwahati-Bikaner Express derailed in Domohani area in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district Thursday afternoon.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was chairing a virtual meeting with the chief ministers on the Covid situation at the time of the accident, took information about the mishap from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

According to initial reports, the Guwahati-Bikaner Express 15633 (up) started from Bikaner in Rajasthan was heading to Guwahati in Assam via Patna when the accident took place near Maynaguri in Jalpaiguri district at around 5.15 pm Thursday.

Maynaguri was not one of the train's 34 stoppages' list and the Bikaner Express was merely passing Jalpaiguri at the time of the incident.

The Indian Railways said that 12 coaches have been affected, adding that the DRM and ADRM have rushed to the site along with the accident relief train and medical van. According to railway authorities, 4 of the 12 coaches have been fully damaged and the rescue teams, including that from NDRF and BSF, are trying to cut open the coaches with gas cutters.

"If there are people inside the fully-damaged coaches, the number of deaths will increase. One coach

is reported to have fallen into the water. We are trying to find out the condition of the coach. It has become dark, so the rescue operation is getting delayed," a senior railway official said.

"Deeply concerned to hear about the tragic accident of the Bikaner-Guwahati Express in Maynaguri. Senior officers of the state government, DM/SP/IG North Bengal are supervising rescue and relief operations. Those injured will receive medical attention as early as possible," Banerjee said.

"In an unfortunate accident, 12 coaches of Bikaner-Guwahati Exp. derailed near New Maynaguri (West Bengal) this evening. Personally monitoring the situation for swift rescue operations," Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw tweeted.

Vaishnaw, who would personally visit the accident site Friday, also apprised the Prime Minister of the whole situation.

Meanwhile, the railway authorities have announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh for the deceased, Rs 1 lakh for the seriously injured, and Rs 25,000 for the injured persons.

"The injured persons are being transferred to the Jalpaiguri Super Speciality Hospital, while the seriously injured people are being sent to the North Bengal Medical College," said the District Magistrate of Jalpaiguri, Moumita Godara Basu.

FEARLESS SKILL



Army jawans display their war skills during the full dress rehearsal for the Army Day Parade, at Army Parade Ground in New Delhi

PM stresses on localised measures to contain Covid

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday asked chief ministers to ensure minimum damage to the livelihood of common people and economic activities as they work to contain the coronavirus, while noting that its Omicron variant is infecting people many times faster than earlier variants.

"We have to be alert, be careful. But we also have to ensure that there is no panic situation. We have to see that in this festive season, the alertness of people and administration is not lowered anywhere," he told Chief Ministers at a virtual meeting to review public health preparedness and the ongoing vaccination programme.

In his remarks at the meeting, the prime minister underlined the importance of vaccination and the need to further accelerate the 'Har Ghar Dastak' programme to achieve 100 per cent vaccination coverage.



Irrespective of the virus variant, vaccine remains the only proven way to tackle the pandemic, and made in India vaccines are proving their superiority all over the world, he said.

"In order to defeat coronavirus we need to keep our readiness ahead of every variant. Along with tackling Omicron, we need to start preparing for any future variant from now itself," he said.

India has given the first dose of vaccines to about 92 per cent of its adult population while 70 per cent received both doses, he noted.

It has also vaccinated nearly three crore adolescents within 10 days and this shows India's potential and its preparedness to

deal with this challenge, Modi said. With any stringent lockdown affecting a large area likely to hit the economy hard, Modi asked chief ministers and heads of governments at various union territories to focus more on local containment and maintaining the momentum in the economy.

Some states have imposed fresh curbs to check the virus spread. Modi stressed that states should be in a position to provide maximum treatment to infected population in home isolation.

For this, home isolation guidelines should keep on improving and be strictly followed, he added and noted that tele-medicine facilities will also help a great deal.

Three accused in SDPI leader murder case granted bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kochi, Jan 13: The Kerala High Court Thursday granted bail to three of the accused in the murder case of SDPI state secretary K S Shan, who was hacked to death on December 18 last year and which had led to an alleged retaliatory killing of a BJP leader.

One of the accused who was granted the relief was an ambulance driver who allegedly helped some of the main accused in the case to escape by ferrying them in his ambulance.

Of the other two, one had harboured some of the main accused in his wife's house in Thrissur and the other had provided them with food, according to the prosecution.

Justice Gopinath P granted bail to the three, saying that as things stand today, "the only allegation against them is that of having committed an offence under section 212 (harbouring an offender) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which is a bailable offence".

Therefore, they are entitled to bail, the court said.

India-China LAC standoff: No breakthrough in 14th round of talks

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 13: There was no breakthrough in the 14th round of talks between the militaries of India and China, and the two sides agreed to maintain dialogue via military and diplomatic channels to work out a "mutually acceptable resolution" of the remaining issues.

The two sides said in a joint statement Thursday that they have agreed that the next round of border talks should be held at the earliest. Indian Army Chief General M M Naravane had said Wednesday that India was hopeful of resolving issues related to disengagement at Patrolling Point 15 (Hot Springs) in eastern Ladakh in the 14th round of talks.

The latest round of talks took place days after India hit out at China for building a bridge across Pangong lake in



eastern Ladakh and said it is in an area that has been under illegal occupation of that country for around 60 years.

The 14th round of Corps Commander-level meeting was held Wednesday at the Chushul-Moldo border meeting point on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. The joint statement said that the representatives from the defence and foreign affairs establishments of the two sides were

present at the talks. Along with Hot Springs, India has been talking with China about a quick disengagement on all the remaining friction points including resolution of issues in Depsang Bulge and Demchok.

Last week, India described China's renaming of some places in Arunachal Pradesh as a "ridiculous exercise" to support "untenable territorial" claims, asserting that the state has always been and will always remain an "inalienable" part of India.

Meanwhile, China said Thursday that it hopes "certain individuals" in India will refrain from making "unconstructive remarks", a day after Chief of Army Staff Gen. M M Naravane stated that threat in eastern Ladakh has "by no means reduced" and the Indian Army will continue to deal with the Chinese military in a "firm" and "resolute" manner.

UP POLLS SP-RLD ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES 1ST LIST OF 29 CANDIDATES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Noida, Jan 13: The Samajwadi Party-Rashtriya Lok Dal alliance Thursday announced its first list of 29 candidates for the first phase of Uttar Pradesh assembly polls.

Of the 29 seats, the SP has fielded candidates on 10 and the RLD on 19, according to a list shared on social media by the two parties which had announced a tie-up last year.

The SP has fielded Kunwar Singh from Agra Cantt, Madhusudan Sharma from Bah, Amarpal Sharma from Sahibabad, Aslam Chaudhary from Dhaulana, Salman Saeed from Kol, Zafar Alam from Aligarh, Nahid Hassan from Kairana, Pankaj Malik from Charthawal, Shahid Manzoor from Kithaur and Rafeeq Ansari from Meerut.

'Bedridden starts walking, speaking'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bokaro, Jan 13: A 55-year-old man in Jharkhand, who was bedridden following a road accident five years back, started to walk and speak after he was administered the first dose of Covishield vaccine, doctors claimed Thursday.

Stunned over the "miraculous recovery", a three-member medical team was constituted by the government to investigate the matter, they said.

Dularchand Munda, a resident of Salgadih village in Uttasara panchayat area of Peterwar block in Bokaro district, was bedridden after meeting with an accident five years back and was unable to walk and speak, doctors said.

"An Anganwadi worker administered Covishield vaccine to Munda on January 4 at his house. The next day, the family members were

MIRACULOUS RECOVERY AFTER GETTING COVID JAB

shocked when they saw Munda's lifeless body not only started to move but he regained his speech too," said Dr Albel Kerketta, the in-charge of Peterwar Community Health Centre.

Bokaro's Civil Surgeon Dr Jitendra Kumar said a three-member medical team has been constituted to examine the "miraculous recovery". Munda was totally bedridden for the last year with spine problems, doctors said. After receiving the first dose of Covishield - the anti-Covid vaccine, he not only stood up and started walking, but could also speak, much to the astonishment of his family, they said.

As bulls begin to roar, dauntless tamers ask for more

The State government permitted the conduct of the traditional sport of Tamil Nadu enforcing numerous restrictions on the men and animals making it mandatory for the bull owners, their assistants, tamers and spectators to furnish RT-PCR test negative report to participate and witness the Jallikattu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Jan 13: More than the sugarcane or sweet dish pongal made of rice and jaggery, it's the roaring bulls let off from the Vaadivasal (entry point) into the arena that appear to excite the dauntless bull tamers of Tamil Nadu, which witnessed the first Jallikattu for this Pongal 2022 season in Pudukkottai Thursday.

As about 700 bulls were let out into the arena, the tamers pumped their adrenaline to ride the native bulls by clinging on to their humps. On several occasions, the bulls had a free run as they menacingly charged forward giving but little option to the tamers to evade from



being guarded. The event at Thatchankuruchi in Pudukkottai district, flagged by State Law Minister S Regupathy, was held

amidst stringent Covid-19 safety norms and SoP for men and bulls.

The heroic traditional sport saw about 300 tamers participate in the annual event held in connection with the Pongal festival. About 150 spectators were allowed, a senior revenue official from the district said. The tamers and organisers took an oath not to harm the bulls and be fair in the game, he said.

The State government permitted the conduct of the traditional sport of Tamil Nadu enforcing numerous restrictions on the men and animals making it mandatory for the bull owners, their assistants, tamers and spectators to furnish RT-PCR test negative report to participate and witness the Jallikattu.

Also, SoP was issued to prevent cruelty to the animals. All those who took part in the sport and the spectators too should have been fully vaccinated, the government had said.

Those from the neighbouring districts of Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur too participated in today's event. Though similar events are held in several districts across Tamil Nadu, those conducted at Avaniyapuram (on January 14), Palamedu (January 15) and Alanganallur in Madurai district are the major attractions in the State. This time, the Jallikattu in Alanganallur will be held on January 17 instead of 16 when a complete lockdown will be enforced to contain the spread of Coronavirus.

international

of the day quote

Rival factions in Sudan must engage in talks to move forward in their transition to democracy

ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISSI | EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT

Not getting vaccinated is not just a personal decision but has consequences for the entire country

OLAF SCHOLZ | GERMAN CHANCELLOR

All parties must cooperate to save Lebanon and restore its prosperity before it is too late

NAJIB MIKATI | LEBANESE PM

SHORT TAKES

Sudan security forces fire tear gas

Sharm-el-Sheikh (Egypt): Sudanese security forces fired tear gas to disperse protesters in the capital of Khartoum as thousands took to the streets Thursday against a coup that has plunged the country into grinding deadlock, activists said. The demonstrations in Khartoum and elsewhere in Sudan are the latest in relentless protests since the military on October 25 ousted the civilian-led government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok.

S.Korean rescuers locate man

Seoul: South Korean rescuers Thursday located a man under a pile of debris and broken concrete at a 39-floor building that partially collapsed three days earlier while under construction, leaving six workers missing, officials said. Crews were trying to clear the rubble to reach the man, but have yet to confirm whether he is alive, said Yoo Man-geun, an official in southern Gwangju city.

Nigeria lifts ban on Twitter

Abuja: The Nigerian government has lifted its ban on Twitter in the West African country, seven months after the country's more than 200 million people were shut out of the social media network. Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari directed that Twitter's operations will resume in the country on Thursday, according to the director-general of the country's National Information Technology Development Agency.

Two Yemeni deminers killed

Sanaa: Two Yemeni deminers were killed after an anti-tank mine exploded during a disposal operation in the country's Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, a military official said. "An explosion occurred while a team of pro-government deminers were clearing a field of landmines laid previously by the Houthi rebel militia in the southern parts of Hodeidah," the official told Xinhua news agency.

Tokyo's Covid alert raised

Tokyo: The Tokyo metropolitan government Thursday raised its Covid-19 alert level to the second highest on its four-tier scale owing to the rampant spread of the Omicron variant in the Japanese capital. The scale was lifted one notch by the Tokyo metropolitan government, reports Xinhua news agency. The alert hasn't reached this level since September last year.



China has historical rights in the South China Sea. China's sovereignty and related rights and interests in the South China Sea have been established in a long period of history and are consistent with international law

WANG WENBIN | CHINA FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON

VARSITIES TO REOPEN: TALIBAN

The Taliban-led government will soon reopen universities across the country for both male and female students, but classes will be separate for boys and girls, a minister said in Kabul



'US discourages India from acquiring S-400'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Jan 13: The US is "discouraging" India from acquiring S-400 missile defence systems from Russia but Washington will have to weigh "important geostrategic considerations" on growing calls for a presidential CAATSA waiver to New Delhi, President Joe Biden's nominee for Coordinator for Sanctions Policy has told lawmakers.

The US has already imposed sanctions on Turkey under the CAATSA for the purchase of a batch of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia.

In October 2018, India signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the then Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions.

The Biden administration has not yet clarified whether it will impose sanctions on India under the provisions of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) for procuring the S-400 missile systems. CAATSA is a tough US law that was brought in 2017 and authorises the US administration to impose sanctions on countries that purchase major defence hardware from Russia.

James O'Brien, President Biden's nominee for the US State Department's coordinator for sanctions policy was asked at his confirmation hearing on



The S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system

In October 2018, India signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the then Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanctions

Wednesday if the US experience with Turkey provided any warning or lessons on how to proceed with India.

Following the US sanctions on Turkey over the procurement of S-400 missile systems, there were apprehensions that Washington may impose similar punitive measures on India. Russia has been one of India's key major suppliers of arms and ammunition.

"I believe they are very different circumstances, and, of course, different security part-

nerships -- but how do you believe we should think about the possibility of sanctioning our friends and not just threats?" Senator Todd Young asked O'Brien, a former career employee of the State Department.

In response, O'Brien said it was difficult to compare the two situations, with a NATO ally that is breaking with legacy defence procurement systems, and then with India, a partner of growing importance, but that has legacy relationships with Russia.

Russia warns of Cuba, Venezuela deployment

The negotiations in Geneva and Wednesday's NATO-Russia meeting in Vienna failed to narrow the gap on Moscow's security demands amid a buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Moscow, Jan 13: Russia Thursday sharply raised the stakes in a showdown with the West over Ukraine, with a top diplomat saying he wouldn't exclude a Russian military deployment to Cuba and Venezuela if tensions with the United States mount.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov, who led the Russian delegation in Monday's talks with the United States in Geneva, said in televised remarks that he would neither confirm nor exclude the possibility that Russia could send military assets to Cuba and Venezuela.

The negotiations in Geneva and Wednesday's NATO-Russia meeting in Vienna failed to narrow the gap on Moscow's security demands amid a buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine. While Moscow demanded a halt to NATO expansion, Washington and its allies firmly rejected them as a nonstarter.

Speaking in an interview with Russian RTVI TV broadcast, Ryabkov noted that "it all depends on the action by our US counterparts," adding that President Vladimir Putin has warned that Russia could take military-technical measures if the US provokes Moscow and turns up military pressure on it.

Ryabkov said a refusal by the US and its allies to consider the key Russian demand for guarantees



Sergei Ryabkov

against the alliance's expansion to Ukraine and other ex-Soviet nations raises doubts about continuing the talks. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov noted "some positive elements and nuances" during the talks, but described them as "unsuccessful" because of stark disagreements on Russia's key demands.

"The talks were initiated to receive specific answers to concrete principal issues that were raised, and disagreements remained on those principal issues, which is bad," he said in a conference call with reporters.

Peskov warned of a complete rupture US-Russian relations if proposed sanctions targeting Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top civilian and military leaders are adopted.

UN mission speaks to crew of seized vessel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

United Nations, Jan 13: A United Nations mission said it has spoken to the crew members of a United Arab Emirates-flagged cargo vessel that was seized by Houthi rebels off the port of Hodeidah in Yemen and has seven Indians on board.

"As part of its routine weekly patrol, UNMHA visited As-Salif port and neighbouring areas this afternoon. The patrol team saw the RWABEE vessel from a distance and spoke to its crew members," the UN Mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) said in a tweet Wednesday.

"The UNMHA patrol team also visited a fish market and a local school in As Salif to interact with the local population. No indication of militarisation was observed in the areas patrolled," it said.

India has called for the immediate release of the seven Indian crew members on board the United Arab Emirates-flagged cargo vessel Rawabi that was seized by Houthi off the port of Hodeidah in Yemen earlier this month.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T S Tirumurti, speaking at a UN Security Council meeting on Yemen on Wednesday, expressed grave concern over the seizure and detention of the UAE vessel Rawabi.

Tirumurti "called for the immediate release of 7 Indian crew members, expressed deep concern about their safety & well-being & that Houthis should ensure their safety till release."

India also called upon all parties to the conflict to immediately cease fighting, de-escalate the situation and engage unconditionally with the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen.

AstraZeneca as third dose effective: Study



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, Jan 13: The AstraZeneca Vaxzevria vaccine showed an increased antibody response to the Omicron variant of COVID-19 after a third booster dose, preliminary data released by the Anglo-Swedish biopharma major said Thursday.

In an ongoing safety and immunogenicity trial of the vaccine, a formulation developed by Oxford University and administered in India as Covishield, it was found that given as a third dose increased the body's immune response to Beta, Delta, Alpha and Gamma SARS-CoV-2 variants.

A separate analysis of samples from the trial showed increased antibody response to the Omicron variant. The results were observed among individuals previously vac-

inated with either Vaxzevria or an mRNA vaccine.

"Vaxzevria has protected hundreds of millions of people from COVID-19 around the world and these data show that it has an important role to play as a third dose booster, including when used after other vaccines," said Sir Mene Pangalos, Executive Vice President, BioPharmaceuticals R&D, AstraZeneca. "Given the ongoing urgency of the pandemic and Vaxzevria's increased immune response to the Omicron variant, we will continue to progress regulatory submissions around the world for its use as a third dose booster," he said.

The company said it is submitting this additional data to health authorities around the world given the urgent need for third dose boosters.

A separate Phase IV trial reported in a preprint with 'The Lancet' journal showed that a third dose of Vaxzevria substantially increased antibody levels following a primary vaccine series with CoronaVac (Sinovac Biotech). AstraZeneca said this data adds to the growing body of evidence supporting Vaxzevria as a third dose booster, irrespective of the primary vaccination schedules tested.

LOOMING THREAT



Workers wearing face masks to protect against coronavirus stand near a display of the Winter Paralympic mascot Shuey Rhon Rhon, left, and Winter Olympic mascot Bing Dwen Dwen near the Olympic Green in Beijing

Prince Andrew gives up military titles, patronages

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Jan 13: Buckingham Palace said Thursday that Prince Andrew's military affiliations and royal patronages have been returned to Queen Elizabeth II with her "approval and agreement."

The palace statement came after more than 150 navy and army vet-

erans wrote to the queen asking her to strip Andrew of all his military ranks and titles amid continued legal trouble for the prince, who is embroiled in a sex assault lawsuit in the US. "With the queen's approval and agreement, the Duke of York's military affiliations and royal patronages have been returned to the queen," Buckingham

Palace said in a statement.

"The Duke of York will continue not to undertake any public duties and is defending this case as a private citizen." A US district judge on Wednesday refused to dismiss a civil case against Andrew by an American woman, Virginia Giuffre, who alleges the royal sexually abused her when she was 17.

Russia-led alliance's troops prepare to pull out

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Moscow, Jan 13: Troops belonging to a Russia-led security alliance were preparing to pull out of Kazakhstan, the Russian Defense Ministry said Thursday.

The withdrawal comes only a week after they were deployed to the ex-Soviet nation on the request of its president, who was seeking to quell violent mass protests.

The demonstrations started on January 2 in western Kazakhstan following widespread outrage over a sharp rise in fuel prices.

They quickly spread nationwide and descended into violence within several days. Protesters stormed government buildings and set them ablaze, and dozens of people were killed in clashes with the country's security forces.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has blamed the unrest on foreign-backed "terrorists" and requested assistance from the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, a Russia-led military alliance of six ex-Soviet states.

The bloc sent over 2,000 troops to Kazakhstan last week.

Tokayev declared their mission accomplished and said they would start pulling out on Thursday.

Why you should still try to avoid catching Omicron

REUTERS

A fast-spreading Omicron variant that causes milder illness compared with previous versions of the coronavirus has fueled the view that COVID-19 poses less of a risk than in the past.

In which case, some ask, why go to great lengths to prevent getting infected now, since everybody will be exposed to the virus sooner or later? Here is why experts say it is not time to be complacent about Omicron:

YOU COULD STILL BECOME VERY ILL

Research has indicated that Omicron may be more likely to lead to an asymptomatic case of COVID-19 than prior variants. For those who do have symptoms, a higher proportion experience very mild illness, such as sore throat or runny nose, without the breathing

difficulties typical of earlier infections.

But the extraordinary spread of Omicron in many countries means that in absolute numbers, more people will experience severe disease. In particular, recent data from Italy and Germany show that people who are not vaccinated are far more vulnerable when it comes to hospitalization, intensive care and death.

"I agree that sooner or later everyone will be exposed, but later is better," said virus expert Michel Nussenzweig of Rockefeller University. "Why? Because later we will have better and more available medicines and better vaccines."

YOU COULD INFECT OTHERS

You might become only mildly ill, but you could pass the virus to someone else at risk for critical illness, even if you have antibodies from a prior infection or from



vaccination, said Akiko Iwasaki, who studies viral immunology at Yale University.

OMICRON'S LONG-TERM EFFECTS ARE UNKNOWN

Infections with earlier variants of the coronavirus, including mild infections and "breakthrough" cases after vaccination, sometimes caused the lingering, debilitating long-haul COVID syndrome. "We have no data yet on what proportion of infections with Omicron...

end up with Long COVID," Iwasaki said. "People who underestimate Omicron as 'mild' are putting themselves at risk of debilitating disease that can linger for months or years."

Also unclear is whether Omicron will have any of the "silent" effects seen with earlier variants, such as self-attacking antibodies, sperm impairments and changes in insulin-producing cells.

MEDICATIONS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY

Omicron treatments are so limited that doctors must ration them. Two of the three antibody drugs used during past COVID-19 waves are ineffective against this variant. The third, sotrovimab, from GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), is in short supply, as is a new oral antiviral treatment called Paxlovid, from Pfizer Inc (PFE), that appears effective against Omicron. If you get sick, you might not have access to treatments.

HOSPITALS FILLING UP

In fully vaccinated and boosted individuals without underlying medical conditions, Omicron "will not do too much damage," said David Ho, professor of microbiology and immunology at Columbia University. Still, the fewer infections, the better, especially now, "when the hospitals are already overwhelmed, and the peak of

Omicron wave is yet to come" for most of the United States, Ho said.

Due to record numbers of infected patients, hospitals have had to postpone elective surgeries and cancer treatments. And during past surges, overwhelmed hospitals have been unable to properly treat other emergencies, such as heart attacks.

MORE INFECTIONS MEAN MORE NEW VARIANTS

Omicron is the fifth highly significant variant of the original SARS-CoV-2, and it remains to be seen if the ability of the virus to mutate further will slow down.

High infection rates also give the virus more opportunities to mutate, and there's no guarantee that a new version of coronavirus would be more benign than its predecessors. "SARS-CoV-2 has surprised us in many different ways over the past two years, and we have no way of predicting the evolutionary trajectory of this virus," Ho said.



Interest rate hikes aimed at combating inflation could exacerbate the dangerous and deepening divergence in economic developments between advanced and developing economies
KRISTALINA GEORGIEVA | MD, IMF

YEZDI MAKES A COMEBACK

Classic Legends Thursday re-launched the iconic motorcycle brand YeZdi in the country. The company launched three distinct models -- YeZdi Roadster at a starting price of ₹1.98 lakh, Scrambler at ₹2.04 lakh and Adventure range at ₹2.09 lakh



of the day quote

India INX at GIFT IFSC is looking at exploring launch of digital asset-based products and has already made an application to IFSCA under Regulatory Sandbox

V BALASUBRAMANIAM | MD AND CEO, INDIA INX

We are humbled to receive such an encouraging response from our users who have helped us become the most preferred beneficiary bank for UPI payments

SATISH GUPTA | MD AND CEO, PAYTM PAYMENTS BANK

The (revenue) growth forecast for FY2022 has been revised downward by 200 bps to 15-17 per cent from the earlier estimates due to the ongoing Omicron wave, delayed recovery in semi-conductors and muted two-wheelers and bus demand

VINUTAA S | ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT AND SECTOR HEAD, ICRA

SHORT TAKES

Lenovo tops global PC mkt in Q4 2021

New Delhi: Lenovo's worldwide PC shipments fell nearly 12 per cent in the fourth quarter (Q4) of 2021, the first period of year-over-year decline since the first quarter of 2020. Still, with a 24.6 per cent market share, Lenovo remained the top vendor in the global PC market, according to a Gartner report. HP with 21.1 per cent share was second, followed by Dell with 19.5 per cent global market share in Q4.

Notices issued by NCLAT to CCI, FCPL

New Delhi: The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) Thursday issued notices over the petition filed by e-commerce major Amazon, challenging a recent order passed by the fair trade regulator CCI that suspended the over-two-year-old approval for its deal with Future Coupons Pvt Ltd (FCPL). The appellate tribunal has directed the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and FCPL to file their reply in next 10 days and Amazon to file a rejoinder over it. It has directed to list the matter on February 2, for next hearing.

Tata Motors global wholesales rise 2%

New Delhi: Tata Motors Thursday reported a 2 per cent year-on-year increase at 2,85,445 units in group global wholesales. Jaguar Land Rover, for the third quarter of FY22. Global wholesales of all Tata Motors' commercial vehicles and Tata Daewoo range in Q3 FY22 were at 1,02,772 units, higher by 14 per cent over Q3 FY21, Tata Motors said in a regulatory filing. For all passenger vehicles, the global wholesales in Q3 FY22 stood at 1,82,673 units, down three per cent as compared to the same period a year ago, it added.

Flipkart Group acquires Yaantra

Bangalore: Flipkart Group Thursday said it has acquired electronics recommerce company Yaantra for an undisclosed sum. The acquisition, said Flipkart, will augment its existing refurbishment business in the smartphone category. "Through the acquisition of Yaantra, we are enhancing our capabilities in a domain that is critical for the growth of the digital economy in India, as well as developing a comprehensive service ecosystem to support its expansion," said Ravi Iyer, Senior VP and Head, Corporate Development, Flipkart.

BOOST TO BILATERAL TRADE

India, UK kick off FTA talks

UK Secretary of State said that the UK and India have a "golden opportunity" to forge a new economic partnership as India's economy is set to rapidly grow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 13: India and the UK Thursday formally launched negotiations for the proposed free-trade agreement (FTA), which is expected to help double bilateral trade to over \$100 billion by 2030 and boost economic ties between the two countries.

It was launched by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan here.

Goyal said that today, the terms of reference of the free-trade agreement have been finalised and formally endorsed by both countries.

"We are launching formal negotiations for the free-trade agreement for which both teams will be proactively and regularly engaging with each other, deliberating on different aspects of our relationship and fast-tracking the interim agreement or an early-harvest agreement, where we hope to capture low-hanging fruits," he told reporters here.

That will provide opportunities for businesses on both sides and help substantially enhance

the volume of trade in goods and services, he added.

The first round of negotiations will begin January 17 and future rounds will take place approximately every five weeks. Both sides will strive to conclude the negotiations by December 2022.

On a deadline to conclude the talks, Goyal said both sides have agreed that they will focus initially on areas that are of mutual benefit and where there is less disagreement. For this, "we have set an aggressive timeline of the next few months and we would be able to easily come up with a substantive agreement in the initial phase itself," he added.

"An India-UK trade deal will supercharge our bilateral economic relationship, setting more businesses free to trade, supporting higher wages, lower prices and more choices in our shops," the UK minister added.

India's main exports to the UK include ready-made garments and textiles, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, petroleum products, transport equipment, spices, pharmaceuticals and marine products.



India, UK expect to double bilateral trade to over \$100 billion

Both sides hoped that the negotiations would conclude by the end of this year

Goyal said the pact will help in boosting Indian exports of leather, textile, jewellery and processed agri products

Trevelyan said both countries are aiming to double trade by the end of this decade, support jobs, businesses and communities

India's exports to the UK stood at \$8.15 billion in 2020-21, while imports aggregated at \$4.95 billion

Imports from Britain include precious and semi-precious stones, ores and metal scraps, engineering goods, chemicals and machinery. Talking to reporters about the

Adani inks \$5bn pact with POSCO

REUTERS

Bangalore, Jan 13: Indian billionaire Gautam Adani's infrastructure group and South Korean steel major POSCO aim to invest about \$5 billion on projects that include setting up an integrated steel mill in the western state of Gujarat, the companies said.

The project is part of a pact between one of India's most powerful conglomerates and POSCO, giving the South Korean steel major a fresh opportunity to cash in on growing steel demand in the South Asian nation.

The pact to explore business opportunities, under which both will invest about \$5 billion, covers industries such as renewable energy, hydrogen, and logistics, the companies said in Thursday's statement, without giving details.

"POSCO and the Adani group have agreed to explore business co-operation opportunities," they said, adding that one of these was putting up a green, environment-friendly integrated steel mill at Mundra in the coastal state.

POSCO now runs a 1.8-million-tonne cold-rolled and galvanized mill in the western state of Maharashtra, supplying automotive steel to India's leading automakers.

Adani aims to invest \$20 billion



South Korea's largest steelmaker had dropped plans for a \$12 billion steel plant project with an annual capacity of 12 million tonne in Odisha a few years ago, due to inordinate delays in land acquisition

in renewable energy in the next decade, saying it will also strive to make its port business a net-zero carbon emitter by 2025.

Its flagship, Adani Enterprises, is India's biggest coal trader, having faced opposition from climate activists for its push to operate Australia's Carmichael mine, one of the biggest greenfield coal projects of recent years.

RIL bolsters green push with \$80bn investment



REUTERS

Banaglore, Jan 13: India's Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) said it would invest ₹5.95 trillion (\$80.49 billion) to set up green energy projects and bolster its retail and telecom arms in the western state of Gujarat, as it targets net-zero carbon emissions by 2035.

Owned by billionaire Mukesh Ambani, the conglomerate has in the past year unveiled plans to re-

duce its dependence on its mainstay oil-to-chemicals business and invested in clean energy projects to brush up its green credentials.

The move is part of a larger renewable shift in the energy industry spurred by pressure from investors who want companies to do more to help in the fight against climate change.

"Reliance will invest 5 trillion rupees over a span of 10 to 15 years to set up a 100 gigawatts renewable energy power plant and has already started scouting land for the project," it said in a filing to the stock exchanges Thursday.

The remaining sum will be spent on setting up solar modules, fuel cells and energy storage batteries, as well as investing in existing projects and new ventures over the next three to five years.

LIC IPO to hit markets by March

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 13: The government will launch the mega public offer of LIC by March and file draft papers with market regulator Sebi by the end of this month, an official said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had last week reviewed the progress of the initial public offering (IPO) of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) in a meeting with top officials of the ministry.

The official said the September 2021 quarter financials of LIC are getting finalised as well as fund bifurcation is in progress.

"We are hopeful of filing the DRHP (draft red-herring prospectus) with Sebi by month-end or early-February. One thing is for sure that IPO will come before the end of the current fiscal," the official told PTI.

The government in September last year appointed 10 merchant bankers, including Goldman Sachs (India) Securities Pvt Ltd, Citigroup Global Markets India Pvt Ltd and



Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Pvt Ltd to manage the mega initial public offering of country's largest insurer LIC.

Other selected bankers include SBI Capital Market Ltd, JM Financial Ltd, Axis Capital Ltd, BofA Securities, JPMorgan India Pvt Ltd, ICICI Securities Ltd, and Kotak Mahindra Capital Co Ltd.

Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas has been appointed as legal advisor for the IPO. The government is in the process of deciding the quan-

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

United Nations, Jan 13: "India's recovery is on a solid path", the UN said Thursday reporting that the country recorded the highest estimated growth rate among the major economies last year and is set to be on the same trajectory during this year and the next.

The UN's annual World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) report estimated the growth rate of India's gross domestic product (GDP) at 9 per cent

Musk says 'working through challenges' with India govt

REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 13: Tesla Inc is "still working through a lot of challenges with the government" in India, its billionaire chief executive Elon Musk said Twitter Thursday, responding to a question on when it would launch its electric cars in the country.

Tesla had plans to begin selling imported cars in India last year and has been lobbying the government to slash import taxes on electric vehicles (EVs) before it enters the market. In October, it took its demands to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's office.

Musk didn't identify the "challenges" being worked on in his Twitter post.

The Indian market for premium EVs is still in its infancy and charging infrastructure is scarce. Just



5,000 of the 2.4 million cars sold in India last year were electric, of which a handful were luxury models.

India levies an import duty of as high as 100 per cent on imported cars, including EVs, which Musk has previously said are among the highest in the world. Analysts have said that at these rates Tesla cars would become too costly for many buyers, crimping sales.

Tesla's demands for tax cuts

have prompted objections from several local players, who say such a move would deter investment in domestic manufacturing.

Indian government officials are also divided over the US automaker's demands. Some officials want the company to commit to local manufacturing before considering any tax breaks, but Tesla has indicated it first wants to experiment with imports.

India's share in global merchandise exports at record high

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 13: India is gaining share in manufacturing exports and share of global merchandise exports is now at an all-time high, Credit Suisse said in a report.

Gains in commodities may not last, but momentum should persist in electronics (large market size, opportunities for share gains, policy support) and specialty chemicals (a decade of steady growth has brought scale to firms).

In textiles, exports are growing after a decade-long stagnation, currently mostly in upstream yarn/fabric, but order-books for apparel are strengthening too.

The opportunity in autos is as much local (strong demand growth gives scale), as potential share gains as global industry disrupts (new OEMs, business models and supply chains), the report said.

India's manufacturing share of GDP has been declining steadily since 2012, partly due to a stagnation in exports of manufactured



goods. As exports pick up again, either due to the impact of PLI

schemes or otherwise, they could boost GDP by 2.4 per cent in five

years. The boost to jobs would be concentrated in electronics and apparel.

Electronics hold much promise, not only on the large size (30 per cent of global goods exports), but also opportunities for share gains, given geopolitical shifts and China's shrinking industrial labour force. Helped by policy support, a critical mass appears to be building, with local and global firms investing in capacities in India (even those not gaining from PLI schemes).

In chemicals, while India lacks

sustainable advantage in bulks, its share of global exports of specialty chemicals has risen steadily (these are now 10 per cent plus of India's exports). Through steady growth, and in some cases China ceding share, the industry has now gained critical mass.

While electrical and equipment together account for \$600 bn of global exports annually, India's opportunity would be primarily in labour-intensive segments initially; scale could eventually drive upstream integration.

PROTEAS IN CONTROL

DESPITE PANT'S UNBEATEN CENTURY, HOSTS ON FIRM FOOTING FOR SERIES WIN REACHING 101/2 AT STUMPS ON DAY 3 WHILE CHASING 212 IN THE THIRD TEST

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cape Town, Jan 13: Rishabh Pant (100 n o, 139b, 6x4, 4x6) was fearless without being careless during a brilliant hundred in the most adverse circumstances but South Africa were on course for a memorable series win against India on a day when visiting skipper Virat Kohli was left fuming due to a contentious DRS decision in the third and final Test here.

Pant's (100 not out off 139 balls) fourth Test hundred constituted for more than 50 per cent of India's shoddy second innings total of 198 with Kohli's 29 off 143 balls being the second highest individual score.

With an easy target of 212 to chase, South Africa were 101/2 at stumps as their dogged skipper Dean Elgar (30) was finally out tickling down the leg side giving India some breathing space going into the fourth and probably the final day of the series.

With 111 runs left, the match is expected to end early Friday either way but at this moment Proteas look way ahead.

With eight batters failing to reach even double figures, no amount of excuses would be enough for India when they analyse the below par show along with the new team management's decision to carry over-the-hill out of form seniors, which only compounded problems. It's up to the bowlers now.

This was the first Test match in 145-year-history where all 20 batters of one team were caught.

Contentious DRS, Kohli loses cool

It was in the 21st over that R Ashwin lighted one that straightened enough after pitching as Elgar was beaten trying to play a forward defensive stroke. Straight



BRIEF SCORES
INDIA 223 & 198
(Rishabh Pant 100 n o;
Marco Jansen 4/36,
Lungi Ngidi 3/21, Kagiso
Rabada 3/53);
SOUTH AFRICA 210 & 101/2
(Keegan Petersen 48
batting, Dean Elgar 30;
Mohammed Shami, 1/22,
Jasprit Bumrah 1/29).
Match to continue.

umpire Marais Erasmus gave it leg before but Elgar went for DRS, which surprisingly ruled that the ball would miss the leg stump.

It seemed a howler and more so a technical one rather than umpiring which left the Indian team very angry. Funnily enough Elgar, after seeing that he was beaten,

had started walking before he came back. An angry Kohli kicked the ground in disgust and then used the stump microphone to good effect.

One of the players (not confirmed) even said: "Whole country is against eleven players." Another one chimed in to say, "broadcasters are here to make money boys".

Pant's day out

The day belonged to Pant as he scored a hundred which was as good as one would ever see and what stood out was his immaculate shot selection. He was aggressive without being reckless and fearless without being careless.

There was a rasping square cut off a rising one from Kagiso Rabada (3/53). There was the audacious down the track cover drive off Duanne Olivier and that six over long-on off Keshav Maharaj came just an over before lunch.

These were all shots that one associates with the dashing keeper-batter but what was exemplary was his use of discretion as to what kind of deliveries he would attack.

In between defending the good balls, he drove Maharaj out of the attack with a one-handed slog sweep and a six over long-off. When Olivier dug one short at his pace, it was pulled for six as he hit six fours and four sixes in all.

Kohli's presence during a 94-run stand definitely helped and he had that guiding light in the middle to go about his job.

Once Pant had unsettled the line and length of the Proteas pace unit, Elgar opened the field allowing them to rotate the strike but once Kohli perished outside the off-stump, it was only Pant who had to take the burden.

The other highlight was his batting with the tail, taking a single off either the fourth or fifth delivery shielding the Number 9, 10 and 11 as much as possible.

If Pant's learning from his mistake was one good aspect, same couldn't be said about Cheteshwar Pujara (9) and Ajinkya Rahane (1) as they put their careers in serious jeopardy.

End of the road for 'PuRane'!

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 13: A few days back, after their umpteenth failure, Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane were trending on social media with the hashtag being 'PuRane' (old).

Now, social media is a platform for outrage almost 24x7 and it is very easy to call the latest trend as the "proverbal outside noise", which the Indian cricket team management does not like taking note of.

But after five failures in six completed knocks in South Africa, the two veterans surely seem to have played their last Test for India for some time.

It will be a travesty if two among the trio of Hanuma Vihari, Shreyas Iyer and Shubman Gill (recovering from a shin injury) don't make it to the playing eleven in the two-Test series against Sri Lanka in February-March.

Rahane's tally stands at 136 at an average of 22.66 and Pujara is even worse with only 124 at 20.66. In all likelihood, the statistics will be the final nail in the coffin when Chetan Sharma and his colleagues pick the squad for the next Test series in India.

More than anyone else, the duo knows that time indeed has run out for them. Never ever has Indian cricket establishment given such a long rope to two individuals like the one being given to Rahane and Pujara.

So what is the problem with Pujara and Rahane? It's a two-fold issue of technical issues which have also been compounded by mental cobwebs.

The most abused word in Indian cricket is 'process' and perhaps the favourite of most cricketers when questions that are difficult to address are thrown at them.

"I trust my process," is a catchphrase that one hears often in Indian cricket. But in case of Rahane and Pujara, it can be said



that the process has clearly not worked for a while now.

Both of them have been getting out in the same fashion match after match but there seems to be no corrective measures taken and at times it seems they have no clarity as to how they want to play - fearless cricket or defensive.

In case of Pujara, whose range of strokes is very limited, bowlers have worked him out providing him with very little room to play the square cut and over time, he has now missed out on half volleys which used to be duly pat-tered back to the fielders at cover or mid-off.

Add to it, the go-slow approach that worked in earlier years isn't working as batters around him

aren't scoring as many runs which is also putting him under more pressure.

In case of Rahane, the footwork is in a mess, as pacer after pacer bowling slightly back of length on the off-stump channel is able to get him out without much effort. As a result, he has become a walking wicket and perhaps fit to be axed in the next selection meeting.

However, in Indian cricket, strange things have happened even though one will have to rub their eyes in disbelief if Pujara and Rahane add to their 95 and 82 Tests respectively.

If that happens, it will be a disservice to the Iyers and Viharis, waiting for some semblance of security.

Malvika knocks idol Saina out

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 13: Two-time Olympic medallist shuttler PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and HS Prannoy advanced to the quarter-finals but the promising Malvika Bansod ended her idol Sania Nehwal's campaign at the Yonex-Sunrise India Open here Thursday.

Former champion and 2012 Olympic bronze medallist Saina suffered a 17-21, 9-21 straight game loss to her 20-year-old compatriot Malvika.

Malvika, ranked 111th, took 34 minutes to see off the former World No.1, becoming only the second Indian to beat Saina since 2017 in any international tournament. Coming back from knee and groin injuries, Saina, who had won her first round match on Tuesday, was happy with the her movement on the court but said she had a lot of catching up to do on the fitness front. Earlier, the top seed Sindhu had no problem dispatching fellow India Ira Sharma 21-10, 21-10. She will meet compatriot Ashmita Chaliha, who got the better of French shuttler Yaelle Hoyaux 21-17, 21-14, in the quarterfinal Thursday.

Malvika will next take on fellow Indian Aakarshi Kashyap in the quarterfinals. Aakarshi had defeated compatriot Keyura Mopatin

21-10, 21-10 in another women's singles second round match.

In the other women's singles pre-quarterfinals, third seed Jia Min Yeo of Singapore got the better of Anupama Upadhaya 13-21, 21-17, 21-12 while USA's Lauren Lam defeated Tanya Hemanth 21-18, 21-11.

World championships bronze medallist Sen also moved to the quarterfinals after defeating Felix Burestedt of Sweden 21-12, 21-15. He will take on compatriot HS Prannoy in the last eight.

Prannoy received a walkover as his opponent Mithun Manjunath withdrew from the tournament after testing positive for COVID-19. Sameer Verma's campaign also came to an end in the men's singles as he retired midway during his second-round match against Brain Yang of Canada due to calf strain.

In the day's other matches, men's singles world champion Loh Kean Yew defeated Joo Ven Soong 21-12, 21-12 to reach the quarterfinals, where he was also joined by Malaysia's NG Tze Yong.

In the men's doubles, the second seed pairing of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty defeated compatriots Shyam Prasad and S Sunjith 21-9, 21-18. They will face the unseeded duo of Hee Yong Kai Terry and Loh Kean Hean of Singapore.



Blues reach League Cup final

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Jan 13: Just like in his first season in charge, Thomas Tuchel will be leading Chelsea into another final. Antonio Rudiger's header sealed a 1-0 victory in the second leg of the League Cup semifinals Wednesday to complete a 3-0 aggregate win over Tottenham.

Chelsea's display was again so commanding that Tottenham offered little threat, aside from having two penalties and an equalizer correctly overturned by VAR.

That should trouble Antonio Conte, two months into his reign as Tottenham manager with a

squad ill-equipped to win a first trophy since beating Chelsea for the 2008 League Cup.

Chelsea is into a 15th final since then, including the FA Cup won by Conte in 2018 to complete his two years in charge of Chelsea.

In the February 27 League Cup final, the west London club will play Arsenal or Liverpool, who meet in their delayed first leg Thursday. Tuchel will be looking to add to the European Cup he won in May while experiencing a more memorable day at Wembley after losing the FA Cup final last season.

Despite the chance of using the second-tier competition to end

Tottenham's trophy drought, it wasn't the strongest-possible team deployed by Conte with an eye on Sunday's north London derby against Arsenal and the bid to make the Premier League's top four.

Captain Hugo Lloris was rested on the bench, with Pierluigi Gollini deputizing to make his first appearance in goal since an embarrassing loss to Slovenian minnows Mura in November.

The Italian could be faulted for the goal, flapping in the air as he missed the attempt to punch clear a corner from Mason Mount that went off the back of Rudiger's head into the net.

100TH WIN FOR LOS BLANCOS OVER ARCH-RIVALS

Real edge past Barca to seal Cup final spot



A GOAL TO REMEMBER: Federico Valverde celebrates after scoring the winner for Real Madrid's 100th win over rivals Barcelona, Wednesday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Riyadh, Jan 13: Federico Valverde scored in extra time to give Real Madrid a 3-2 win over Barcelona for its 100th victory over its storied rival and a spot in the final of the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Barcelona twice equalised in regular time Wednesday but couldn't recover after Valverde scored from close range on a breakaway eight minutes into extra time.

Defending Super Cup champion Athletic Bilbao will face Spanish league champion Atlético Madrid in the other semifinal Thursday. The Spanish Super Cup is being

played in Saudi Arabia again after the coronavirus pandemic transferred last year's edition back to Spain. The competition was moved to Saudi Arabia — and expanded from two to four teams in a "Final Four" format — as part of a deal reportedly worth 30 million euros (USD 34 million) a year until 2029.

The changes drew criticism from human rights activists and complaints from fans who preferred the competition stayed in Spain. Among those complaining was Athletic midfielder Raúl García, who said this week it made "no sense" to play the games away from Spain.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Yuki goes down in Oz Open qualifiers

MELBOURNE: Indian tennis player Yuki Bhambri suffered a straight sets defeat to Czech Republic's Tomas Machac in the Australian Open qualifiers here Thursday, meaning the year's first Grand Slam will have no Indian participation in the singles main draw. Bhambri lost his second round qualifying match 1-6, 3-6. Tuesday, Ramesh Ramesh's 23rd attempt at cracking the singles main draw of a grand slam had ended in a first round defeat. In the women's singles, Ankita Raina was blown away by Ukrainian Lesia Tsurenko 6-1, 6-0.

Sanchez seals Inter win over Juventus

MILAN: Substitute Alexis Sánchez scored with the last kick of the match to help Inter win the Italian Super Cup with a 2-1 victory over bitter rival Juventus after extra time. Sánchez's goal, helped by an error from the Juventus defense, sparked scenes of wild celebration at San Siro Wednesday as almost every member of the Inter bench ran onto the field to embrace Sánchez in the far corner. Lautaro Martínez had converted a penalty in the first half to cancel out Weston McKennie's opener for Juventus in an entertaining game.

Djoko in Australian Open draw amid visa row

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, Jan 13: Novak Djokovic now knows he'll face fellow Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic in the first round of his Australian Open title defense, if he's allowed to play.

Djokovic's visa status dominated attention until the moment the draw was conducted Thursday, after a postponement of 75 minutes, to determine the brackets for the men's and women's singles draws at the first major tennis tournament of 2022. He was still in limbo after it.

The Australian immigration minister was still considering whether to deport the nine-time and defending Australian Open champion, who is not vaccinated against COVID-19.

If he's allowed to stay, Djokovic's bid for a men's record 21st major title could mean a quarterfinal against No.7-ranked Matteo

Berrettini and possibly a semifinal against Rafa Nadal or third-seeded Alexander Zverev.

He is tied with Nadal and Roger Federer on 20 Grand Slam titles, missing a chance for the all-time record when he lost the US Open final to Daniil Medvedev last year.

Medvedev, who also ended Djokovic's run at a calendar-year Grand Slam with that win in New York, is on the opposite end of the draw as the No.2 seed in Australia.

A finalist here last year, he could meet local favorite Nick Kyrgios in the second round, and also No.5 Andrey Rublev, No.9 Felix Auger-Aliassime, John Isner in his quarter of the draw. He's seeded to meet No. 4 Stefanos Tsitsipas in the semis.

On the women's side, top-ranked Ash Barty and defending champion Naomi Osaka ended up in the same section of the draw, meaning two of the best players in the tournament could meet in a fourth-



round match that could have the feeling of a final. After that, No.5 Maria Sakkari or No.9 Ons Jabeur could be waiting in the quarterfinals.

French Open champion Barbora Krejickova and No.8 Paula Badosa are in the same half of the draw, along with 2020 champion Sofia Kenin, who has a tough opener against fellow American Madison Keys and could meet No. 18 Coco Gauff in the third round.

In the other half of the draw, No.2 Aryna Sabalenka has a first-round meeting against wild-card entry Storm Sanders and is seeded to WTA Finals winner Garbine Muguruza in the semifinals.

Muguruza is in same quarter as US Open champion Emma Raducanu, who opens against 2017 US Open winner Sloane Stephens, and three-time major winner Simona Halep.

The draw ceremony was delayed amid uncertainty over Djokovic's visa status.