



KANGANA'S ADVICE

Actor Kangana Ranaut takes to Instagram urging her fans to take care of themselves after recovering from Covid-19

LEISURE P2



SPOOKY OBJECT IN SPACE

Astronomers discover a strange spinning object in the Milky Way which they say is unlike anything they have ever seen

INTERNATIONAL P10



BARTY REIGNS SUPREME

Ash Barty wins Australian Open, ending a 44-year drought for Aussie women at their home Grand Slam tournament

SPORTS P12

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EC BANS EXIT POLLS IN UP

Lucknow: The Election Commission has banned all exit polls pertaining to the coming Assembly elections from 7am February 10 to 6:30pm March 7. In a statement issued here Saturday, UP's Chief Electoral Officer Ajay Kumar Shukla said that conducting the exit polls, its publication in print or electronic media or its publicity has been banned from 7am February 10 to 6:30pm March 7. Any person who violates the order will be punished with a two-year jail term or fine or both. Meanwhile, a case has been filed against 250 people in Pilibhit, including BJP MLA Sanjay Gangwar, for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct, police said Saturday.



ODISHA SHIVERS IN BITTER COLD

Bhubaneswar: A late bout of the winter chill swept Odisha Saturday, with a cold wave gripping some districts and the minimum temperature plunging in many places. At least 15 weather stations logged a minimum below 10 degrees C as the northwesterly dry and cold winds prevailed over the region, a bulletin stated. The mercury dropped significantly at some places in coastal Odisha and it was below normal at many areas across the state, the Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre said. Kandhamal shivered under intense cold as Daringbadi hill station and Phulbari town recorded 6 degrees C each, the lowest in the state. **MORE P3**

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A BAMBOO LIFELINE



Residents of Ikda village under Khalina panchayat of Jaleswar block in Balasore have built a bamboo bridge on a 200-ft nullah to connect with the rest of the world after the administration didn't heed to their repeated pleas

STATE LOGS 15 COVID DEATHS, HIGHEST SPIKE IN 5 MONTHS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: Odisha Saturday registered 15 Covid-19 fatalities, the highest daily spike in deaths in nearly five months, pushing the state's toll to 8,575, a Health department bulletin said.

The state's Covid-19 tally rose to 12,41,068 as 4,842 people tested positive for the infection Saturday, 215 less than the previous day. The daily spike in new cases was the lowest since January 11, and it plunged by 45 per cent from 8,845 a week ago. The state had registered 5,057 cases and 10 fatalities Friday.

Khurda district, of which state Capital Bhubaneswar is a part, reported 1,253 infections followed by 443 in Cuttack. As many as 671 children are among the new patients.

The coastal state's daily TPR dipped to 7.58 per cent as 63,871 samples were examined in the last 24 hours

Three fatalities each were recorded in Khurda and Ganjam. Fifty-three patients have died due to comorbidities so far. The number of active cases dipped to 58,533, including 19,743 in Khurda, which is in the red zone along with Sundargarh and Cuttack, where the number of current infections is over 2,500 each.

At least 10,511 more patients recuperated from the disease, taking the recoveries to 11,73,907. Health Services Director Bijay Mohapatra said that both Delta and Omicron variants were present in the coronavirus cases. "During a recent sample survey, it was found that around 25-30 per cent cases are caused by Delta strain, which is more severe," Mohapatra told reporters. The situation has improved, but the danger has not abated yet, he added.

Khandagiri Mela off this year too

BHUBANESWAR: For the second consecutive year, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) cancelled the popular Khandagiri Mela in the state Capital following a surge in Covid infections and prevalence of the Omicron variant. The Magha Saptami Mela organised every year at Khandagiri here is celebrated with much fanfare, attracting denizens and small scale vendors from across the state. **MORE P3**

SBI suspends circular on recruitment of pregnant women

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 29: After facing criticism from various quarters, the country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) Saturday decided to suspend its circular on recruitment of pregnant women.

The SBI recently reviewed its 'Fitness Standards for Recruitment in the Bank', including norms for pregnant women candidates. Under the new rules, a woman candidate with more than three months pregnancy will be considered 'temporarily unfit' and can join the bank within four months after delivery.

The move elicited criticism from various quarters, including from labour unions and Delhi Commission for Women.

In view of the public sentiments, SBI has decided to keep the revised instructions regarding recruitment of pregnant women candidates in abeyance and continue with the existing instructions in the matter, the bank said in a statement.

In its latest medical fitness guidelines for new recruits or promotees, the bank said a candidate would be considered fit in case of pregnancy which is less than three months.

"However, if pregnancy is of more than 3 months, she will be considered temporarily unfit and she may be allowed to join within 4 months after delivery of child," as per the medical fitness and ophthalmological standards for new recruits and promotees dated December 31, 2021.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Him again? How many times did I tell you there are no takers for him now. You better sculpt the new heroes now!

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP. MAX	25.7°C	26.2°C
TEMP. MIN	11.2°C	12.0°C
Humidity	90%	74%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Mainly clear sky	

OPPN ACCUSES CENTRE OF SNOOPING, TERMS IT AS 'TREASON'

Report on Pegasus sparks controversy

■ The New York Times report says India bought Pegasus spyware from Israel as part of a defence deal worth \$2 billion in 2017

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 29: A New York Times (NYT) report claiming India bought Pegasus spyware as part of a USD 2 billion defence deal with Israel in 2017 triggered a major controversy Saturday with the Opposition alleging that the government indulged in illegal snooping that amounted to 'treason'.

The Opposition parties indicated that they would raise the issue strongly in the Budget Session of Parliament starting Monday. The Congress launched an all-out attack on the government over the report, accusing it of deceiving Parliament, duping the Supreme Court, hijacking democracy and indulging in 'treason'.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said on Twitter, "The Modi Government bought Pegasus to spy on our primary democratic institutions, politicians and public.

Government functionaries, opposition leaders, armed forces, judiciary all were targeted by these phone tapping. This is treason." "The Modi Government has committed treason," he alleged.

The Congress said it intends to raise the issue in the Budget Session and demand accountability from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP government on the floor of Parliament.

The principal opposition party also urged the Supreme Court to take suo motu cognisance of the matter and initiate appropriate penal proceedings against the government for attempting to "deliberately and knowingly deceive" it.

Shashi Tharoor, senior Congress leader and chairman of the parliamentary panel on communications and information technology, told PTI, "The government has chosen not to be responsive to the IT Committee about Pegasus, and

This implies prima facie our Govt misled Supreme Court and Parliament. Watergate??

SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY | BJP MP



SINGH DUBS NYT 'SUPARI MEDIA'

Reacting to the report, Union minister Gen (Retd) VK Singh called the NYT 'Supari Media'. Singh, Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways and Civil Aviation, said on Twitter: "Can you trust NYT? They are known 'Supari Media'."

The stand taken by a number of BJP members - not to permit a quorum when the issue was to be discussed - has also meant that the Committee has made no headway in establishing the facts."

BJP MP Subramanian Swamy suggested that "Modi government must rebut New York Times revelations today that it did indeed subscribe by payment from tax payers money of ₹300 crore to spyware Pegasus sold by Israeli NSO company."

URBAN POLLS

Bhub, Berhampur to get women Mayors

■ Final notifications regarding urban polls were issued after inviting objections and suggestions from all the stakeholders concerned

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: Ahead of the elections to the urban local bodies (ULBs), the state government has completed the delimitation of wards and reservation of seats in three municipal corporations - Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Berhampur. As per the notifications, the mayoral posts of civic bodies in Bhubaneswar and Berhampur have been reserved for women.

The Housing and Urban Development department has issued four notifications listing out reservation of seats in these ULBs and delimitation of wards.

Final notifications were issued after inviting objections and suggestions from all concerned stakeholders, officials said Saturday.

As per the notification, the mayor seats for Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) and Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC) have been reserved for women candidates while that of the Cuttack Municipal Corporation (CMC) has been kept unreserved. The reservation was made in accordance with the Odisha Municipal Corporation Act, 2003. Similarly, the BMC has been divided into 67 wards while CMC has 59 wards and there are 42 wards under BeMC.



In BMC, 38 wards have been reserved for various categories including women. Out of this, three corporator seats are reserved for SC (women), as many for SC, two for ST (women) and another for ST.

Similarly, 33 corporator seats in CMC area have been kept reserved. Of these, four are reserved for SC (women), three for SC and one for ST (women). Out of 23 reserved corporator seats under BeMC, two seats have been reserved for SC (women), as many for SC and one for ST (women).

Other reserved seats in the three corporations are for women candidates.

According to sources, the state government is planning to conduct the much delayed urban polls soon after the completion of the panchayat elections.

3 of J'khand phishing racket nabbed in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: The Odisha Crime Branch (CB) has arrested three cyber criminals who were operating a 'Jamtara Gang' like phishing racket from Rasulgurh area of the Capital city. The accused were identified as Pradhum Kumar Mandal, 20 and Krishna Kumar Mandal, 19, of Giridih, and Chetlal Mandal, 28, of Dhanbad in neighbouring Jharkhand.

The accused were targeting scores of people from across the country and defrauding them through online tricks. Speaking to media persons, ADG of CB Sanjeeb Panda said the trio,



The accused - Pradhum, Krishna Kumar and Chetlal

posing themselves as students, had been staying in a rented accommodation at Rasulgurh since December 28, 2021. Pradhum and Chetlal are Class IX dropouts while Krishna is pursuing his graduation in Political Science.

The CB officials were tipped off about the suspicious behaviour of the accused, who were living lav-

MODUS OPERANDI

- The trio used to collect bank customer details from third party in Kolkata and other areas, and purchase pre-activated Sim cards from various sources
- They would contact people from various states and send bulk SMSes or calls impersonating bank officials
- The cyber criminals transfer money from the accounts of the victims to payment platforms like Google Pay & PhonePe

ishly despite having no 'ostensible means of income'. Later, the CB started keeping track of their activities. The accused, who were trying to flee along with their baggage, were collared by the cops late Friday night.

Police seized 11 mobile phones, two laptops, one tab and two debit cards from their possession. As many as 33 SIM cards were registered in the names of different persons in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal-Kolkata telecom circles.

During probe, the police found that the trio used to collect bank customer details from third party in Kolkata and other areas, and purchase pre-activated SIM cards from various sources. They would contact people from various states and send bulk SMSes or calls impersonating bank officials. They used to target those who click on the links sent to their mobile phones.

The accused had reportedly contacted 4, 38,834 persons using the SIM cards. They would later withdraw the money from the victims' accounts by using the credentials collected on the pretext of updating their KYC or bank accounts, said CB sources. They used to transfer money from the accounts of the victims to their accounts through digital payment platforms like Google Pay, PhonePe and Paytm. They would purchase gift vouchers with the money to buy expensive items.

HUNGER FORCES AFGHANS TO SELL KIDNEY: REPORT

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kabul, Jan 29: Faced with starvation amid the prolonged humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and the subsequent economic collapse, some people in Herat province are being forced to sell their kidneys in order to feed their families, a media report said.

According to the TOLO News report, these residents from Injil district have sold their kidneys in black market for a paltry sum in order to survive amid the dire poverty. "We sell our kidneys if someone buys in order to bring

something for our children to eat," said one of the residents.

Among those who have been selling their kidneys are children and women.

According to the law of the country, selling organs or parts are the body is illegal, but these families say that they have no other options to survive.

"We are happy, the security situation is good, but prices are a bit high in the country," another resident told TOLO News.

The sale of kidneys due to poverty in some parts of Herat made headlines last year also.

leisure



JONI WANTS SONGS OFF SPOTIFY AS COVID ROW SNOWBALLS

Legendary singer Joni Mitchell has now joined Neil Young in demanding her music be removed from Spotify over Covid misinformation concerns. "Irresponsible people are spreading lies that are costing people their lives," the Canadian singer said.

SINGER CHRIS BROWN SUED FOR DRUGGING AND RAPING WOMAN

Singer Chris Brown is being sued for rape in California, with his alleged victim claiming he drugged her and attacked her on a yacht at rap mogul Diddy's Florida home. The woman, identified in court papers only as Jane Doe, is demanding \$20 million in damages from the star.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You will pay attention to the voice of your inner self today. This will help you implement all your plans perfectly. You will not only be jovial, but you will also not let disappointments cow you down. Ganesh says not only today, but you can summon this quality whenever you like.

TAURUS
This day, Ganesh sees you brimming with pep and vigour. You'll be feeling playful and frisky and will want to amuse yourself, keep others amused. You are likely to hang out with old friends and cronies and will love very second of it. Long breezy drives on the wide open roads, jungle treks are distinctly in the cards.

GEMINI
Today, you will realise that close relationships need care and concern to grow, predicts Ganesh. You will have new responsibilities and achieve huge profits in all your dealings. Pay special attention to your personal health.

CANCER
There is every possibility that today, you will be probing and prying about your future, predicts Ganesh. A visit to a well-known astrologer cannot be ruled out. Also, you are likely to consult a doctor. It is all due to your bad lifestyle and habits. You had better improve your lifestyle.

LEO
Fortune smiles on but a few, and when it does, it can take you to places you have never even dreamt of. Today is an exceptional day, in the sense that Lady Luck is backing you in all earnestness. So go with the flow and take your chances. You will find, much to your delight, that success is easy to achieve when you are willing to work hard and have luck guiding you.

VIRGO
If being humanitarian needed a definite physical form, you are most likely to be nominated. Such is the mix of values and practicality today, says Ganesh. Devise strategies to achieve more productivity. See the bigger picture, says Ganesh. This is not difficult considering you have a broad vision - with or without the glasses.

LIBRA
All things passionate seem to engulf you today. It is one of those moments when chance dictates every possibility of a new romantic love episode in your life. The last time a moment like this came by, Romeo met Juliet. Ganesh expects you to try hard to please your heartthrob. Also, you may want to spruce up and pay special attention to your looks.

SCORPIO
A happening day where a lot may happen today, suggests Ganesh. Grey hairs will teach valuable lessons, so keep your ears open to bosses and elders. Seniors will extend their best possible cooperation to you. Stay clear of courtrooms, warns Ganesh, lest the legalities sink you deep.

SAGITTARIUS
Personal grooming will be on your mind today. A small fortune may be spent on enhancing the way you look, especially on a new hair-do. Retail Therapy is on the cards, and you may indulge spending on clothes and jewellery.

CAPRICORN
It's difficult to keep calm and have a control over your temper in times of distress, but today, you will prove all who surrendered to the whims of adversity wrong, foresees Ganesh. You will be unfaltering in dealing with problems, and will overcome them with ease. At home, you will be content and at peace, and this will also reflect in your work, adding to your already high efficiency.

AQUARIUS
The day seems normal as you are unlikely to encounter unpleasant situations, says Ganesh. The high point of the day will be your consummate skill with which you will handle mundane tasks. Ganesh reminds you of the saying, "Success is one percent inspiration and 99% perspiration."

PISCES
Fear is a part and parcel of life, and while it can not be eliminated, it can certainly be tamed, and that is what you will be doing today. All your suppressed audacity will be on full display, says Ganesh.



Salman releases his track Dance With Me

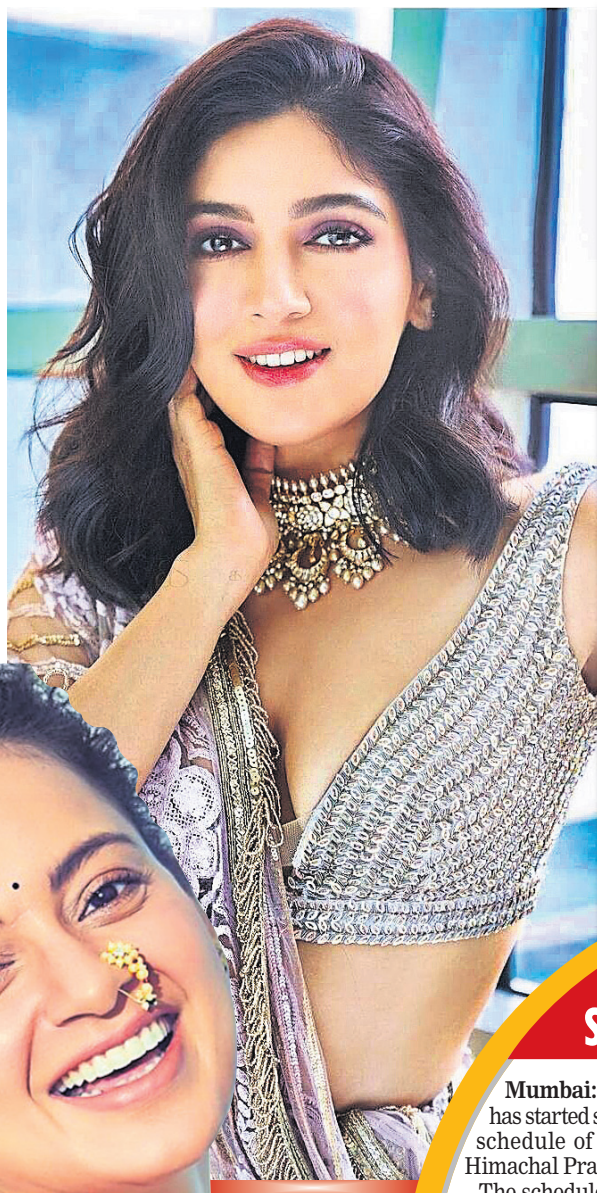
Mumbai: After unveiling the teaser of the song *Dance With Me* Friday, superstar Salman Khan finally unveiled the song Saturday.

The superstar took to his social media handle to unveil the highly anticipated song and ever since the release, his fans have been flooding the comments section with praises for it.

Sung by Salman and composed by the ace music composer duo Sajid-Wajid, *Dance With Me* promises to be an electrifying dance number.

Salman took to Instagram and wrote: "#DanceWithMe song out now... Suno dekho aur batao kaisa laga (listen and tell me how is it)."

The actor looked his stylish best in the song, combined with his melodious voice.



Bhumi on why she took up Badhaai Do role

Mumbai: Actress Bhumi Pednekar has revealed why she took the decision to star in *Badhaai Do*. She says her decision to do the film was based on the fact that she gets to sensitively portray a character and give voice to a subject that will be an eye-opener.

Bhumi said: "I'm really proud that content filmmakers, making differential and clutter-breaking subjects, feel I can help a project that is unique and bring their vision to life."

"I thrive on pushing myself constantly and my decision to do *Badhaai Do* was based on the fact that I get to sensitively portray a character and give voice to a subject that will be an eye-opener for India."

The versatile actress added: "*Badhaai Do* is a hot franchise that

balances commerce with content. It is really exciting to be an actor in these times because such subjects are being backed by big producers who want to create a change in society.

"As a human being, I'm drawn to subjects that can lead to a positive impact on people and be a catalyst for social good. I hope *Badhaai Do* does just the same. I can't wait for people to watch this film because it is truly, truly endearing."

Directed by Harshvardhan Kulkarni, *Badhaai Do* pairs Rajkumar Rao opposite Bhumi.

The film releases in theatres on February 11. Bhumi will next be seen in Anubhav Sinha's *Bheed*, Ajay Bahl's *Ladykiller*, Shashank Khaitan's *Govinda Aala Re* and Akshay Kumar and Aanand L. Rai's *Raksha Bandhan*.

KANGANA'S advice for people with post-Covid conditions

Mumbai: Actress Kangana Ranaut, who is quite active on social media, recently shared a word of advice to everyone who is dealing with post-Covid-19 problems. The actress had earlier tested positive for the deadly virus and she was in home quarantine for 14 days.

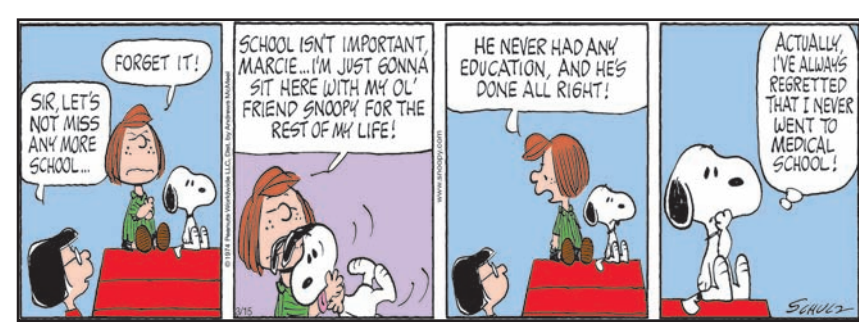
She took to her Instagram story and penned a long note for her fans Saturday. Kangana, in her note, asked everyone to take care of their body after recovering from Covid.

Her post read, "All those who have had covid or the vaccine please check your vitamin d3 and b12 levels, start these supplements regardless, also work on strengthening your body and organs...through yoga, daily walks or any other form of exercise that you do, add meditation or pranayam to it... you may not know what your body is struggling with unless it's tested by work, circumstances or situations. take care of yourself."

Meanwhile, Kangana recently visited her *Tiku Weds Sheru* actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui's new house in Mumbai. Nawazuddin has designed his new bungalow himself. The *Queen* actress was all praise and she also congratulated him for the new house.

On the work front, Kangana will be soon seen in *Dhaakad*, *Tejas* and the sequel of *Manikarnika*.

PEANUTS



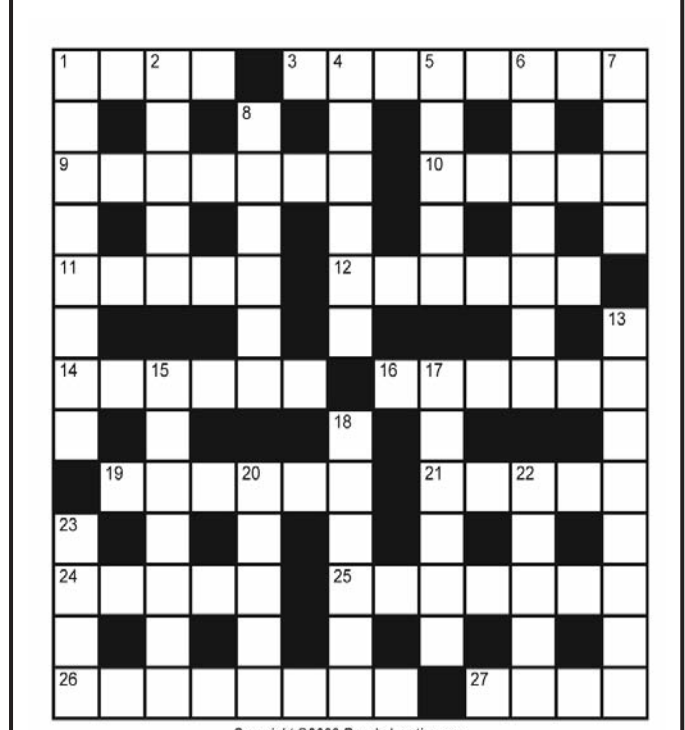
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



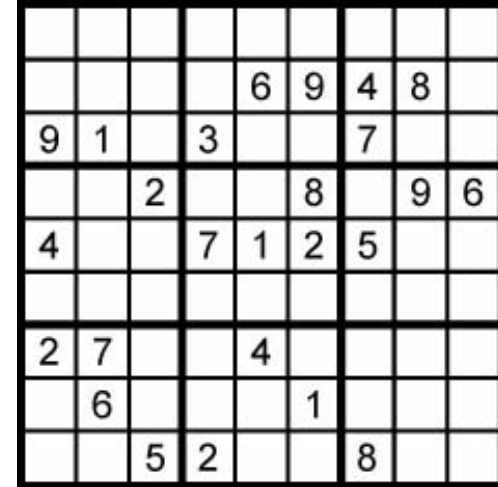
FUN post CROSSWORD



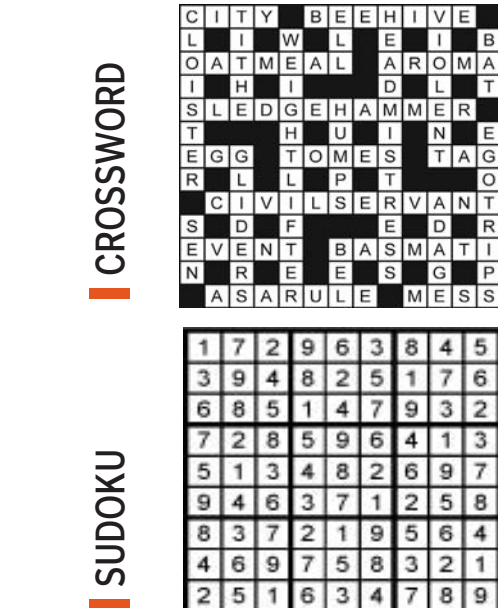
- Across**
- 1 Back of the neck
 - 3 Octopus appendage
 - 9 Bullfight figure
 - 10 "Vamoose!"
 - 11 Fencing move
 - 12 Halvah ingredient
 - 14 Variety of limestone
 - 16 Misgivings
 - 19 Punctual (2,4)
 - 21 Chain of hills
 - 24 Concert venue
 - 25 Fan palm
 - 26 Impeded
 - 27 Style of poker
 - Down**
 - 1 French pastry
 - 2 Pie choice
 - 4 Exit
 - 5 Wild boar features
 - 6 Chewy candy
 - 7 Stately trees
 - 8 Start
 - 13 Gave in
 - 15 Light source
 - 17 Disobedient
 - 18 Hub
 - 20 Ludicrous
 - 22 Train stop
 - 23 Trodden track

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

WINTER CHILL TO STAY



FILE PHOTO PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: A late bout of winter chill swept Odisha Saturday...

the lowest in the state, it said. The minimum temperature dropped by 6 notches from normal to settle at 9°C in Angul and by 5.8 points to 8°C in Bhawanipatna in Kalahandi districts.

the next two days, according to the weather office. It warned that the cold wave would prevail in Kandhamal, Angul, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Deogarh, Boudh and Nabarangpur during the next 24 hours.

Meanwhile, the office of the state Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) issued an advisory for the district Collectors and Municipal Commissioners for the cold wave. There is increased likelihood of cold related illnesses among people, which may get aggravated due to prolonged exposure to cold...

Criminal attacks cops during arrest in City

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: A notorious criminal reportedly attacked the staff of Lingaraj police station here when the cops tried to arrest him in Kapileswar area of the city Friday evening.



Three cops sustained serious injuries in the attack. However, police after a skirmish overpowered and arrested Tiku.

MAN GETS 20 YEARS' OF JAIL FOR RAPING MINOR

Cuttack, Jan 29: A fast track court here Saturday sentenced a man to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment after convicting him in the rape case of a minor girl in Mahanga area of Cuttack district.

The court has directed the Cuttack district legal services authority to pay a compensation of ₹4 lakh to the victim

Khandagiri Mela off this year too



A file photo of Khandagiri fair in Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: For the second consecutive year, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) cancelled the popular Khandagiri Mela in the state Capital following a surge in Covid infections and prevalence of the Omicron variant.

every year at Khanadgiri here is celebrated with much fanfare, attracting denizens and small scale vendors from across the state. Popularly known as the Khandagiri Kumbha Mela, the event is unlikely to take place in view of the Covid-19 pandemic this year too.

will not be possible due to the expected large congregations which will endanger public safety. Hence, we request people of Bhubaneswar to cooperate with the administration and adhere to all the Covid-19 guidelines including social distancing for the safety of the citizens."

"We have already been hit hard by the lockdowns and pandemic. This is the second time we have to cancel our plans. We understand the Covid situation but the government should look to compensate us as this is our only source of income," said Prasant Sahoo, organiser of an opera party.

'AirVaidya staves off infections'

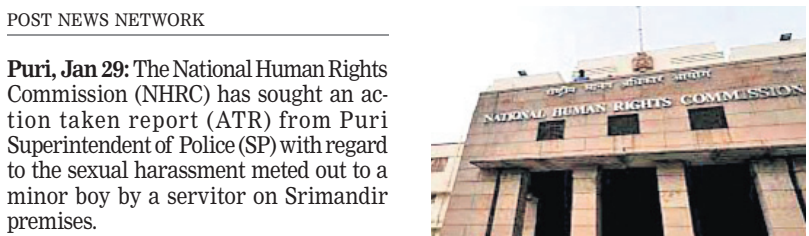
New Delhi, Jan 29: Researchers at Banaras Hindu University have found that anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties of the fumes of 'AirVaidya' herbal incense sticks can be effective in preventing air-borne infections.



KRC Reddy, Professor in the Department of Rasa Shastra (Ayurveda), Institute of

Medical Sciences, BHU, who led the research, said. Though dhoopan, a medicinal therapy has been described in Ayurveda compendia for ages for its potency in antimicrobial, anti-fungal, anti-viral action, in the backdrop of rising Covid-19 cases, this is the first scientific study.

NHRC seeks ATR from Puri SP on sexual offence



Puri, Jan 29: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought an action taken report (ATR) from Puri Superintendent of Police (SP) with regard to the sexual harassment meted out to a minor boy by a servitor on Srimandir premises.

A senior servitor had sexually harassed the minor boy on the shrine premises several times last year. The accused had threatened the victim of dire consequences, if he reveals the incident to anyone.

SBI STATE BANK OF INDIA STRESSED ASSETS RECOVERY BRANCH, POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Property) [Rule-8 (1)]

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WORLD LEPROSY DAY

FRESH LEPROSY CASES RAISE CONCERN IN STATE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: Despite Odisha declaring itself leprosy free, identification of fresh cases largely among children during Covid crisis is now seen as a worrying trend with health experts calling for increased awareness and treatment to nip in the bud.

As someone who has closely worked on leprosy programs in Odisha, the National Program Manager of Fairmed India Bijoy Kumar Swain said, "Lack of awareness and discrimination has spurred leprosy cases in Odisha. This makes detection and treatment of the disease even more challenging. The misconceptions associated with leprosy transmission and treatment often add to the already high disability burden. The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated the situation. Guidelines with respect to isolation, social distancing and initial restrictions on movement created challenges for patients in accessing healthcare services, and limited active surveillance contributed to lesser number of cases being detected."

It can be mentioned that in leprosy, the bacteria are transmitted through little droplets from the noses and mouths of infected per-



According to National Leprosy Eradication Programme (NLEP) report for 2020-2021, there were 6,148 new leprosy cases detected in Odisha and 421 of these cases were children

The report suggested that a three-month long house-to-house survey conducted last year in the state to identify people with Covid symptoms led to the finding of 1,625 confirmed leprosy cases

Moreover, according to the National Health Profile (NHP) released by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in 2019, the prevalence rate in Odisha was second highest in the country after Chhattisgarh

sons. If left untreated, it affects the nerves and muscles in the hands and feet of the patient, eventually

leading to the extreme deformities and permanent disability that have become stigmatising symbols associated with leprosy. If detected on time, majority of the cases can be cured between 6 to 12 months. The multi-drug-therapy (MDT) donated to World Health Organization (WHO) and provided free of cost by the government has successfully treated 16 million leprosy patients since its introduction.

While the disease has all but disappeared from most parts of the world, newer cases continue to resurface in different parts of India. Reports suggest that India accounts for over half (almost 60 per cent) of the world's new leprosy cases despite the south Asian country declaring to have eliminated leprosy as a public health problem in 2005.

Commenting on the rise of cases in Odisha, an official from the state government said, "We have designated one trained personnel at each block level who is supporting the health workers for leprosy related activities in his respective area. Moreover, Odisha is utilising its government district hospitals for leprosy surgeries, unlike most of the other states where majority of the surgeries happen at private hospitals," the official said.



Fire brigade and bystanders dousing the blaze in the pantry car of the Gandhidham-Puri Express, Saturday, after separating the cart from the front and rear portions of the train near Nandurbar railway station, Maharashtra

Fire in Gandhidham-Puri Express pantry car

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 29: A fire broke out in the pantry car of the Gandhidham-Puri Express train Saturday when it was near Nandurbar railway station in Maharashtra, but nobody was injured in the incident, officials said.

The blaze erupted around 10.35am when the Odisha-bound

train (12993) was entering the railway station, a statement issued by chief spokesperson of the Western Railway said.

The train had 22 coaches and the pantry car was the 13th one. After the blaze, the pantry car was separated from the front and the rear portion of the train by around 10.45am. Fire extinguishers available at the station and inside the train were used

for dousing the flames, it said, adding that nobody was injured.

The fire brigade was immediately informed and its personnel arrived at the spot at 11am, it added.

A medical team, paramedical staff and senior railway officers rushed to the site to take stock of the situation, the statement said.

A police official said, "Due to the fire, smoke engulfed the pantry

car, which triggered panic among the passengers and a few of them even jumped out of the train as it was moving slowly. The train was soon brought to a halt."

The fire was doused by around noon, he said, adding that the cause behind the blaze is being ascertained.

Nandurbar district, located in northwest Maharashtra, is around 450 kms from Mumbai.

Anadrome Systems to make gears for Army, Air Force

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: Odisha-based Anadrome Systems has bagged the contract to supply advanced defence equipment to the Indian Army and the Air Force, officials said.

The company will supply 125 Manoeuvrable Expendable Aerial Targets (MEAT) and associated equipment worth Rs 96 crore, under the Make in India-II category, meant for research and development projects, they said. "Such endeavours will further boost the Make in Odisha program of the state, which is keen to promote defence, aerospace and other new-age industries," Anadrome Systems MD Anant Bhalotia said Friday.

Commenting on the development, Brig (ret'd) L C Patnaik said such initiatives will attract more MSMEs to participate in defence projects, which will ultimately reduce the import burden and promote the indigenous defence manufacturing sector of India.

SOA holds FDP on artificial intelligence

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 29: A five-day faculty development programme (FDP) on 'Advances in Artificial Intelligence' was organised at the Institute of Technical Education and Research (ITER), the faculty of engineering and technology of Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (SOA) here.

Around 200 professors, researchers, faculty members and students from within the country and abroad participated in the virtual program conducted by the department of Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE).

The programme was organised with the help of All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE). ECE department professor Mihir Narayan Mohanty coordinated the programme that commenced January 21.

Researchers used a novel Xenon gas scan method to pick up lung abnormalities in coronavirus patients who have not been hospitalised but still experience breathlessness.

Breathlessness is a symptom in most long Covid patients, but it has been unclear whether this is linked to other factors such as changes in breathing patterns, tiredness, or something more fundamental

Lung abnormalities have been discovered in long Covid patients suffering from breathlessness, according to a study that raises the possibility that coronavirus may cause hidden damage to the lungs that is not detected with routine tests.

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TAKING STOCK

5T Secretary VK Pandian flanked by Puri Collector Samarth Verma and other officials inspects the construction of Shree Setu project in the Holy City, Saturday

OP PHOTO

NOBLE GAS INDEED

Xenon MRI finds lung abnormalities in long Covid patients

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tiredness, or something more fundamental

The Explain study, a pilot study involving 36 patients, suggests there is significantly impaired gas transfer in the lungs to the bloodstream in long Covid patients - despite other tests including CT scans coming back normal.

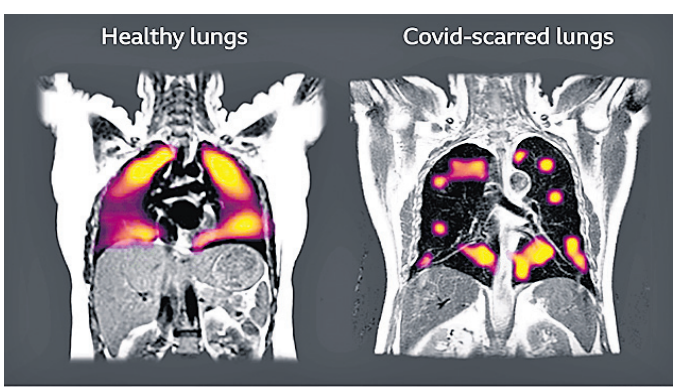
"We knew from our post-hospital Covid study that Xenon could detect abnormalities when the CT scan and other lung function tests are normal. What we've found now is that, even though their CT scans are normal, the Xenon MRI scans have detected similar abnormalities in patients with long Covid," said Fergus Gleeson, the study's chief investigator.

"These patients have never been in hospital and did not have an acute severe illness when they had their Covid-19 infection. Some of them have been experiencing their symptoms for a year after contracting Covid-19," said Gleeson, who is also a professor of radiology at the University of Oxford and consultant radiologist at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The professor said there were important questions to answer such as how many patients with long Covid will have abnormal scans, the significance of the abnormality that has been detected, the cause

of the abnormality, and its longer-term consequences. "Once we understand the mechanisms driving these symptoms, we will be better placed to develop more

effective treatments," Gleeson said.



Source: Oxford University

Xenon follows the pathway of oxygen when it is taken up by the lungs and can tell us where the abnormality lies between the airways, gas exchange membranes and capillaries in the lungs. This multicentre study is very exciting, and I really look forward to it helping translate lung MRI methods that we have developed further towards clinical use in the UK

JIM WILD | HEAD OF IMAGING & PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD, SOUTH YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

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of the abnormality, and its longer-term consequences. "Once we understand the mechanisms driving these symptoms, we will be better placed to develop more

effective treatments," Gleeson said.

The study, which involves teams from Sheffield, Oxford, Cardiff and Manchester, had 36 participants split into three groups. The full study will recruit around 400 participants.

Emily Fraser, Respiratory Consultant who leads the Oxford Post-Covid Assessment Clinic, said these are interesting results and may indicate that the changes observed within the lungs of some patients with long Covid-19 contribute to breathlessness.

"However, these are early findings and further work to understand the clinical significance is key. Extending this study to larger numbers of patients and looking at control groups who have recovered from Covid should help us to answer this question and further our understanding of the mechanisms that drive long Covid," Fraser said.

Jim Wild, head of imaging and professor at the University of Sheffield, said Xenon MRI was uniquely placed to help understand why breathlessness persists in some patients post Covid-19 infection.

"Xenon follows the pathway of oxygen when it is taken up by the

lungs and can tell us where the abnormality lies between the airways, gas exchange membranes and capillaries in the lungs. This multicentre study is very exciting, and I really look forward to it helping translate lung MRI methods that we have developed further towards clinical use in the UK," Wild said.

"More than a million people in the UK continue to experience symptoms months after having Covid-19, with breathlessness one of the most commonly reported symptoms. This early research is an important example of both the committed effort the UK research community is taking to understand this new phenomenon, and the world-leading expertise that community contains," said Nick Lemoine, Chair of NIHR's Long Covid funding committee and Medical Director of the NIHR Clinical Research Network.

The study received government funding and is being supported by the National Institute for Health Research's (NIHR) Oxford Biomedical Research Centre. Its findings, which have not been peer-reviewed, were posted on the bioRxiv pre-print server.

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SHORT TAKES

Cronepati teacher in Vigilance net

Rayagada: Vigilance sleuths raided the house of a primary school teacher and unearthed assets worth over ₹1 crore on a charge of amassing properties beyond his known sources of income.

Panchayat polls: Migrants' return sparks fears of Covid spike in Ganjam



FILE PHOTO

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Jan 29: Homecoming of migrant workers in hordes from Surat city to vote in the upcoming panchayat polls has sparked fears over further spread of Covid-19 in Ganjam district, a report said.

Residents apprehend that the return of the migrants might lead to a repetition of last year's Covid situation while the epidemic is now on the decline in the district.

Lakhs of people hailing from Polsara, Beguniapada, Khallikote, Hinjilicut, Aska, Sanakhemundi blocks and other areas in the district usually work in cotton mills and other establishments in Surat city of Gujarat to earn a living.

Even though they work in Surat, their names are still in the voters' list of Ganjam. Leaders of various political parties are making all necessary arrangements of their return to the district to vote for their candidates in the elections.

The migrant workers returning home were seen crowding at Berhampur, Chhatrapur, Khallikote and Ganjam railway stations.

On their arrival at the railway stations, they are being welcomed by the ruling party representatives. It is alleged that no thermal screening is being conducted on their arrival at the railway stations which might lead to return of the last year's pandemic situation in the district.

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Leaders of various political parties are making all arrangements of their return to the district to vote for their candidates in the polls. Lakhs of migrants have returned home

Migrant workers returning home were seen crowding at Berhampur, Chhatrapur, Khallikote and Ganjam railway stations

On the other hand, the campaigning for panchayat elections has remained a lacklustre affair due to Covid restrictions imposed in the state.

Accompanied by limited number of supporters, candidates have launched the door-to-door campaign and are trying to woo the voters in their favour.

The ruling BJD candidates are on the campaign trail highlighting the developmental programmes of the state government to lure the voters while the opposition BJP and Congress have termed the claims of the ruling party as false and a political gimmick to grab votes.

Brown sugar worth ₹35L seized, 3 held

Balasure: Three people, including a woman, have been arrested and brown sugar worth ₹35 lakh has been seized from their possession in Balasure district, police said Saturday.

ZP candidate dies in Keonjhar

Keonjhar: A Zilla Parishad candidate in Dhenkikote area of Keonjhar district died following a brief illness, Saturday. The deceased was identified as Anadi Singh, a candidate of ruling BJD from Zone-8 of Dhenkikote under Ghatagaon block.

Diarrhoea breaks out in Jharsuguda village; one dies, 25 critical

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jharsuguda, Jan 29: A youth died while over 25 persons were critically affected by diarrhoea that broke out at Kuhakunda village under Lakanpur block in Jharsuguda district on the fringes of Chhattisgarh, Saturday.

The deceased was identified as Umesh Goud, 22. All the critical people have been admitted to various healthcare facilities including VSS Institute of Medical Sciences and Research (VIMSAR), nursing homes, Lakanpur CHC and Kanakota PHC.

On being informed, a team of doctors led by chief district medical officer (CDMO) Dr Dolamani Patel and medical officer Dr

Baikunthanath Kashyap of Lakanpur CHC rushed to the village and started treatment of the affected persons.

The district health department is holding special camps and distributing ORS, halogen tablets and medicines to the villagers. The health officials also advised the people to keep their houses and surroundings clean and to spray bleaching powder in wells and drains to check spread of further infection.

Apprehending contamination of water sources, officials of rural water supply and sanitation department are providing drinking water in tankers to the villagers. A medical team was sent to the village to find out the exact cause behind the deteriorating health of the villagers, the CDMO said.

FRAUD IN NOMINATION WITHDRAWAL

BDO among four booked, SDPO starts probe

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dasmanthpur, Jan 29: A sarpanch aspirant whose nomination was found withdrawn on his forged signature on the last date of nomination withdrawal, lodged a complaint against four people including the Dasmanthpur BDO at local police station in Koraput district.

According to the complaint, Iswar Gadba had filed his nomination for sarpanch in Phulabada panchayat under Dasmanthpur block. On the last day of the nomination withdrawal, he was shocked to find that his nomination was withdrawn.

"A case was registered against Makar Golori, Dambaru Gadba, Ramesh Khara and the BDO under sections 419, 420, 468, 471, 188 and 34 of IPC," said IIC Bijayraj Majhi.

Meanwhile, Koraput SDPO Manoj Pujari started an investigation into the matter at the block office and found that the signature of Iswar Gadba was forged. It was also found that the CCTV footage during the nomination withdrawal was damaged.

Man gets lifer for killing wife

Balasure: A man was awarded life imprisonment by a court in Balasure Saturday for killing his wife over dowry. District and Sessions Judge Bhagbana Pradhan also imposed ₹5,000 fine on convict Jadunath Nayak.

Female elephant dead in Similipal; anthrax suspected

Baripada: A female elephant was found dead in Champagad forest under Pithabata range of Similipal sanctuary in Mayurbhanj district. The animal was suspected to have died of anthrax. Meanwhile, the forest department has started an investigation into its death and sent blood sample of the deceased animal to Dehradun.

Vig finds assets worth ₹1.41crore

Rajagpur: Vigilance sleuths conducted simultaneous raids and detected properties worth ₹1.41 crore associated with Managing Director (MD) of a cooperative society in Rajagpur of Sundargarh district, a source said Saturday.

5 Deogarh panchayats vow to not allow polls

POST NEWS NETWORK

Deogarh, Jan 29: No nomination had been filed in five hilly panchayats under Tileibani block in Deogarh district due to stiff opposition from people alleging lack of mobile network, education and healthcare facilities in the region.

On the other hand, the people of Jharagoda, Paraposi, Gandam, Dimirikuda and Jharmunda panchayats located in a hilly terrain under Tileibani block gathered at Jhargueria playground and decided

SEC ORDERS FURTHER NOMINATION FILING

that they would not allow any aspirant to file nomination for the upcoming panchayat elections.

Angry locals had earlier warned of boycotting polls and announced their decision through public address systems, urging people not to file nominations.

They lamented that over years, they have been suffering in the communication, education and healthcare fronts. Mobile network has been a dream for them while their wards are unable to study due to network inaccessibility, they rued.

Indian Overseas Bank VEHICLE AUCTION SALE NOTICE. REGIONAL OFFICE: 2nd Floor, Vijaya Bhawan, Engineering School Road, De-Paul School Campus, Berhampur - 760010. This is informed to the following borrower, legal heirs that in spite of several notices issued by bank, they have not repaid the bank dues...

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DATE OF AUCTION : 17.02.2022. Place of Auction : At the respective branch | Time : 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm. Term and condition of auction: 1. Intending bidders may visit the above mentioned branches with their PAN card & Aadhaar card along with a photograph, valid photo identify proof and address proof on the auction date as per the time indicated above.

FOCUS BANKING

BAD BANK BENEFICIARIES



Ultimately the bad bank may prove to be a good opportunity for loan evaders and to those who want to buy bank-financed units cheap

borrowers heavily and defaults payment while another company comes forward to take over the unit paying a nominal amount. For instance, the Twin Star of Vedanta Group offered to take over Videocon's loan of ₹35,000 crore (₹64,938 crore with other claims) for ₹2,962 crore and the lenders accepted the offer, about 95% haircut, before the NCLT.

Bank Employees Federation of India says that the bad bank (NARCL) is for the resolution of large size loans defaults of the private corporate houses. It points to the ₹10.83 lakh crore worth corporate loan write-off during the past five years, a fact the government didn't mention while boasting of ₹5 lakh crore recovery. Against 396 cases involving ₹6.82 lakh crore resolved under IBC till June, only about ₹2.45 lakh crore was recovered resulting in the write-off of a staggering 64% of the claims.

As per the KV Kamath Committee, the corporate sector debt worth ₹15.52 lakh crore has come under stress after COVID-19's spread. With a pre-COVID pile-up of ₹22.20 lakh crore it becomes ₹37.72 lakh crore which is equal to 72% of the banking sector debt to industry and 37% of total non-food bank credit.

But why this huge NPA pile-up and its unabated rise? Is it not because of the bad and reckless lending and without adequate collateral? Lending was bad and the corrective steps were ineffective with little recovery but big haircuts. The new bad bank, too, is unlikely to yield any better results. Ultimately the bad bank may prove to be a good opportunity for loan evaders and to those who want to buy bank-financed units cheap. Given the will, the government can address the root causes of the malady and can ensure proper lending and full recovery from the borrowers themselves, not minuscule amounts through bad banks and ARCs.

The writer is a development economist and commentator on economic and social affairs.

How good, or, how bad will be the bad bank which is going to start functioning soon? Since the esoteric explanations of government and bank experts are unintelligible to a lay mind, dumbing down the bad bank's character is essential to judge its utility or futility.

To deal with the huge bad loans—the nonperforming assets (NPAs)—and thereby to cleanse the banks' balance sheets, the Indian government, as per its 2021-22 Budget announcement, has got a bad bank, the National Asset Reconstruction Company Limited (NARCL), incorporated under Companies Act July 7, 2021. The public sector banks will hold 51% of this bank's capital; the RBI granted a license to it as an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC) October 4. In tandem, came the India Debt Resolution Co Ltd (IDRCL) as an Asset Management Company (AMC) with private-sector lenders holding 51% of its shares. The NARCL and IDRCL combination is known as a bad bank.

While the public sector ARC acquires the bad loans, the private sector AMC resolves/manages them and the public sector banks are not happy with the private sector's dominance of IRDCL while the RBI is understood to be unenthusiastic about the dual structure; so, some tinkering with the scheme is likely before the actual take off.

The Mechanism
The banks transfer their bad loans to the bad bank against some agreed sum, most likely a paltry sum compared to the loan outstanding. The banks will be happy with whatever they get since they have no hope of any recovery otherwise. Also, they can show fewer NPAs to build up the clientele's trust.

The mounting NPAs have disastrous consequences for the economy as a whole besides the damage they cause to the bank's stakeholders—the depositors and other customers and shareholders. The NPA pile-up estimate in the banks as of March 2021 was

₹8.35 lakh crore; of it, 77.9% belonged to big borrowers. A further rise is forecast, ₹11 lakh crore by March 2022. The RBI's Financial Stability Report of July 2021 put the Gross NPAs of Scheduled Commercial Banks at 7.48% in March 2021 and a further rise to 9.80% under the baseline scenario and to 11.22% under severe stress scenario by March 2022. The increasing trend of bad loans calls for the increased need to reduce them, even through the bad bank mechanism.

The bad bank idea and ARCs are not new. Several Expert Committees including the Narasimham Committee of 1991 and 1998 and the Andhyarujina Committee of 1999 have directly or indirectly recommended a separate arrangement to hive off bad loans.

India now has 28 ARCs with ₹5.2 lakh crore Assets Under Management by March 2021. The RBI's Committee on ARCs (September 2021) found their performance not satisfactory; the lenders could recover only 14.29% of their outstanding bad loans transferred to ARCs between 2004 and 2013. Also, their recovery method was disappointing in that it did not facilitate the business revivals in 80% of the deals.

Several other government ini-

tiatives, to deal with the bad loans, like the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR), the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act, 1985 SICA (repealed in 2003), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC), the Recovery of Debt due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 (RDDBFI Act) and the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002 did not do much better either.

That the banks are not going to benefit much from the new bad bank is evident in the earmarking of the funds. The government is giving ₹30,600 crore worth of Security Receipts (SRs), a guarantee to pay to the banks in case the bad bank fails to pay within five years while the bad bank is paying ₹5,400 crore upfront. So, the total ₹36,000 crore equals 18% of the ₹2,00,000 crore acquisition of the bad bank. That means an 82% haircut to the banks.

Corporate Bonanza
The bank trade unions and other critics say with concrete evidence that the bad bank is going to be one more route to help the corporate defaulters. There are examples of big borrowers benefiting from the bad loans: one company



PSM Rao

THAT THE BANKS ARE NOT GOING TO BENEFIT MUCH FROM THE NEW BAD BANK IS EVIDENT IN THE EARMARKING OF THE FUNDS



Aakar Patel

The reason that Jinnah and Pakistan and Muslims are raised by the BJP is that it has worked for them in the past. And for this reason it will continue to be used

“We must watch over our thoughts. A bad thought is the most dangerous of thieves.”
THE MOTHER



Jinnah, Pak & UP

I have not been to Uttar Pradesh in some time, and what I am saying is not based on material that is recent or on any groundwork I have done recently. However, it is interesting to see the patterns of voting in the state over the last few years to arrive at what the possibilities are in that state's election.

In 2012, the Samajwadi Party won a full majority in Uttar Pradesh with a vote share of 29 per cent. Remarkably it was not the BJP but the BSP that came second, with 26 per cent vote share. The BJP, which was then led by Uma Bharati, had only 15 per cent.

Two years later in 2014, the BJP remarkably tripled its vote share (along with alliance partner Apna Dal) to 42 per cent. On its own the BJP had about 40 per cent.

We can attribute this to two things: one is the leadership and charisma of Narendra Modi, which brought voters across northern India towards the BJP. The second was communal violence in western Uttar Pradesh. In August and September 2013, Muzaffarnagar and Shamli saw a series of episodes of extreme violence and rape which polarised the region and sent thousands of people, mostly Muslims, into relief camps. This polarisation remained for a long time and the BJP campaign of 2014 and 2017's assembly elections used the violence to mobilise. The Hindu newspaper reported in March 2017, that the Jat vote was split and taken away from the Lok Dal by the BJP. The report said the Jats were told that their vote against the BJP would only "aid and ensure formation of a government by Muslims," adding that an "audio recording of Amit Shah's meeting with the Jat leadership, which was strategically leaked, had quite an impact on the community. It actually scared the community and got at least half of the Jats to its side by the time the Jat-dominated lands went to polls February 11. Finally it was Hindu consolidation in the BJP's favour."

The BJP took the state, again taking about 40 per cent of the vote. The other thing that was supposed to be a factor in this election was the economy. Voting happened in February 2017, only weeks after Demonetisation and extreme distress across India especially among the poor. But this did not appear to affect the BJP negatively and the party continued its dominance.

Interestingly, the Samajwadi Party retained its 2012 winning vote share of 29 per cent on the seats it contested. The Bahujan Samaj Party lost vote share in this election. The two rivals, SP and BSP, then united in the 2019 election and this time it was thought by many that the BJP would get a tough fight in UP. This did not happen and the BJP again increased its vote share to close to 50 per cent and swept the state. The external factor this time was thought to be India's attack on Pakistan. The strike on Balakot came at the end of February and voting happened a few weeks after that. Of course, we do not know to what extent that was a specific factor just as we do not know how much Demonetisation did or did not contribute to the 2017 results.

We can assume, given how much focus there was from the BJP on communal polarisation in 2017, that this is the primary driver of its politics and its vote banks. Uttar Pradesh's chief minister tweeted this about the BJP's opponents on 28 January: "They are worshippers of 'Jinnah', we are worshippers of 'Sardar Patel'. Pakistan is dear to them, we sacrifice our lives on Maa Bharati." One day before this, defence minister Rajnath Singh had said this: "I do not know why Pakistan's founder Jinnah's name is often invoked during elections. Those who want to politicise this... in UP's politics, Jinnah's name should not be invoked. Instead, we should talk of farmers' sugarcane." The reason that Jinnah and Pakistan and Muslims are raised by the BJP is that it has worked for them in the past. And for this reason it will continue to be used.

The broad patterns tell us that to sweep UP, the BJP has to retain its vote shares of the past three elections. But to merely win it, the party can do so while losing some vote share, and perhaps up to as much as 10 per cent. The Samajwadi Party appears to be headed for a record vote share for itself, but it is unclear whether even this will be able to stop the BJP from a repeat. Again, I am not saying this on any ground evidence, merely looking at the numbers of the past.

The last thing to do here is to see if there are any external factors. These are the farmers' protest, which ended in November after one year. Then there is the current agitation against the Union government on the issue of Railways and other Central jobs. A little farther back are the visuals of corpses in the Ganga during the second wave of COVID last year. Will all of this become irrelevant in front of communal polarisation? It is likely that the results of this election will give us the answer to this question.

The writer is Chair of Amnesty International India.

WISDOM CORNER

- Don't go through life, grow through life. **ERIC BUTTERWORTH**
- There is no cosmetic for beauty like happiness. **MARIA MITCHELL**
- Don't watch the clock; do what it does. Keep going. **SAM LEVENSON**

WORDSWORTH

Rodomontade

This is a delightfully imitative word, that rolls swaggeringly off the tongue, like the boastful or inflated talk or behaviour that it describes. It was created from Rodomont, the name of the boastful Saracen king of Algiers, in two famous Italian romantic epics, Orlando Innamorato of 1485 by Count Matteo Boiardo, and the sequel of 1516, Orlando Furioso by Ludovico Ariosto. English borrowed the word rodomont in the sixteenth century as a way to describe an extravagant boaster or braggart. Our form appeared in the following century. At first it meant a single brag or boastful act, so that one could speak in the plural of rodomontades. In that form, the first known user was John Donne, in 1612: "Challengers cartells, full of Rodomontades." Later it became both an adjective and a verb and a mass noun that refers to the whole business of making your point by laying it on rather too thick. In that sense, it turns up in many works of literature, including The Tenant of Wildfell Hall by Anne Brontë: "She knows what she's about; but he, poor fool, deludes himself with the notion that she'll make him a good wife, and because she has amused him with some rodomontade about despising rank and wealth in matters of love and marriage, he flatters himself that she's devotedly attached to him."

LOL

Bragging about old times

Two men were boasting to each other about their old army days. "Why, my outfit was so well drilled," declared one, "that when they presented arms all you could hear was slap, slap, click." "Very good,"



conceded the other, "but when my company presented arms you'd just hear slap, slap, jingle." "What was the jingle?" asked the first. "Oh," replied the other offhand, "just our medals."

SPECTRUM ECOLOGY

Effects of China's island-building

With US and Chinese warships increasingly playing chicken, and China transforming atolls and outcroppings into militarised artificial islands, the South China Sea presents a striking picture of Sino-American strategic competition. But China's expansive assertion of offshore sovereignty is not only challenging others' territorial rights and free navigation of international sea lanes. It also is threatening a central feature of the Southeast Asian ecosystem, and thus the region's economic future.

China has refused to submit its territorial claims to international review, even though six of the 10 countries surrounding the South China Sea have claims to various rocks, shoals, reefs, and resources within its 1.4 million square miles. China also has ignored the Permanent Court of Arbitration's (PCA) 2016 ruling affirming the Philippines' historic rights to the Spratly Islands and dismissing China's outsize claim to some 90% of the South China Sea (based on the so-called nine-dash line).

For Southeast Asia's 600 million people, the territorial crisis in the South China Sea is not some distant future concern. China's actions already are harming the region's maritime ecosystems and livelihoods. That is the key lesson of

the book Dispatches from the South China Sea: Navigating to Common Ground, by James Borton of the Johns Hopkins Foreign Policy Institute. Putting aside geopolitics considerations, Borton focuses on the ground truth: Chinese exploitation of the South China Sea is threatening the region's future through the ecological, environmental, and economic damage that it is causing.

Fishing is at the heart of Borton's tale. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, 15-56% (depending on the country) of all animal protein consumed in Southeast Asia comes from the neighbouring seas. And the global market reflects this bounty. Though it accounts for only 2.5% of the planet's ocean surface area, the South China Sea produces 12% of the world's fish catch. According to Borton, half of the world's 3.2 million registered fishing boats operate there.

While overfishing is a growing global problem, China clearly contributes to it disproportionately with its long-distance fishing fleet of 2,500 ships (a number that rises to 17,000 if one counts unregistered and illegal vessels). Borton marshals first-hand accounts from fishers, officials, and researchers to show how the South China Sea's vital resources are being degraded. Around 2,500 species of fish in-

habit its waters, but since 2000, catch rates have declined by 70%, and large fish stocks have shrunk by 90%.

For years, China has unilaterally declared fishing bans, supposedly to protect fish stocks. And in 2021, it adopted a new law empowering its coast guard to use force against alleged violators from neighbouring countries. And yet, while China's maritime militia has driven other countries' boats elsewhere, Chinese fishing operations in the world's proscripted zones have continued, such that China alone hauls in 20% of the world's annual catch.

The ecological effects of China's island-building are no less troubling. The South China Sea was once home to one-third of the world's coral reefs, but according to Borton, around half have already been lost. Coral reefs around the world are being degraded by the effects of climate change. But as the PCA noted in its 2016 ruling, China has accelerated this destruction in the South China Sea, by dredging up more than 100 square miles of healthy coral reefs to create artificial islands.

The Chinese government has refused to provide basic information about the ecological impact of its island building, even as it expands its territorial claims elsewhere in Asia. And its strong-armed tactics and steady mili-

tarisation of its newly created offshore real estate hardly suggest that it intends to share data, much less play a constructive role in preserving the region's ecosystems.

Borton is certainly correct that citizens and scientists ought to collaborate to find ways to bridge the political divide in the South China Sea. But, given China's intransigence, businesses may be better positioned than governments to take the steps he proposes. From start-ups to technology giants, the private sector is creating new tools that will shed more light on the situation. Satellite systems and artificial intelligence are already being used to collect and analyse massive amounts of climate data for clients and researchers. Microsoft, Google, and Amazon are gathering and publishing more climate data, and business leaders like BlackRock CEO Larry Fink are pushing companies to align their operations with the global climate agenda.

But while Borton has offered a clear overview of the crisis in the South China Sea, comprehending the problem is no guarantee that those with the means to address it will take up the challenge.

The writer served as the CIA's director of public affairs.
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Kent Harrington

FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA'S 600 MILLION PEOPLE, THE TERRITORIAL CRISIS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA IS NOT SOME DISTANT FUTURE CONCERN

Technology of future

Sir, Metaverse will be a technology that will replace the internet. It is actually a combination of two words, meta and verse. Meta means beyond, the word verse is derived from the word universe. We actually use this word for an artificial world. When we use the internet, we use two dimensional screens, but metaverse is a world we are lost in and it is through three dimensional screens. In 1922, 'Snow Cross' novelist Neil Stephenson coined the term 'metaverse' to describe a 3D virtual space in his novel. Metaverse is a digital world that is created using a variety of technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, cryptocurrency, and the internet. Think of social media as it exists today, but metaverse is more integrated and immersive. Combining virtual reality and augmented reality enables more real digital experiences than the current social media universe is capable of. Experts say linking yourself to metaverse is dangerous for humanity. This is because virtual reality throws people into a holistic digital environment. The development of technology cannot be stopped, but if it is not used for the benefit of the human race, then it is a bell of danger for human civilization. The main danger of this technology is that if we think of a fantasy world as true, it will destroy the ability of the brain to think. We need to be careful about this.

Asit Mohanty, JAJPUR

No de-escalation

Sir, China is trying to mislead India on the border row by slamming the US and cautioning it to stay out of the course. This is obvious and unsurprising to expect from the Chinese side. It is in cognisance of China that the Pentagon provides India, the satellite images of the areas transgressed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its troops buildup near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at regular intervals. Therefore to deny India at the global front any material evidence of its expansionist policy, Beijing wants to avoid intervention from the West. It was in the interest of both the sides to disengage the troops and avoid further escalation of tensions at the LAC. But after a series of provocations including the renaming of places and the abduction of a 17-year-old Arunachal boy, China seems to be in no mood of de-escalation.

Tushar Anand, PATNA

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

national

of the day quote

On one hand there are parties which are only doing dirty politics, corruption and trading barbs. On the other hand, there is an honest party, the AAP, which has come out with a clear agenda for Punjab's development and future

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP CHIEF

While the active cases in most of the states and the positivity rate have shown a fall in the last two weeks, we still need to be vigilant and not lower our guard

MANSUKH MANDAVIYA | UNION HEALTH MIN

RailTel is committed to play a major role in the digital transformation activities taking place in the country and in the Digital India Initiative of the government

PUNEET CHAWLA | RAILTEL CMD

SHORT TAKES

Punjab BJP leader Mittal joins SAD

Chandigarh: Veteran Punjab BJP leader and former minister Madan Mohan Mittal Saturday joined the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the presence of party President Sukhbir Singh Badal here. The veteran leader, who was instrumental in cementing communal ties after a period of strife along with former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, said he has always stood alongside Badal, who is a symbol of unity, and would also stand alongside Sukhbir Badal, who is carrying forward the same legacy.

Two labourers die from electrocution

Gurugram: Two labourers have died and one was injured after being electrocuted while working in an under-construction building located in IMT Manesar, sector-8, Gurugram Saturday morning, police said. According to the police, the incident took place at plot no 14 of IMT Manesar, Sector-8 at around 11.30 am Saturday. The workers were making iron ladder-shaped shuttering which touched the mainline of electricity passing above, due to which current flowed in the shuttering and the labourers came in contact with it.

2 Nigerians held with drugs cache

Bangalore: Two Nigerian men were arrested with a huge cache of drugs worth ₹3 crore in the city, Saturday. Acting on a tip-off, police Thursday arrested Sixtus Uchec (30) and Chukwudem Henry (34), who were residing in Horamavu in the city. Police seized 1.5 kg Ecstasy crystals, 120 grams black MDMA, 16.5 kg MDMA mixed water, 300 gram weed oil and a car.

Covid patient dies as fire breaks out in Bengal hospital

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Burdwan, Jan 29: An elderly Covid-19 patient was killed after fire broke out at the Burdwan Medical College and Hospital in West Bengal Saturday morning, officials said.

The deceased, Sandhya Mondal (60), was admitted to a Covid ward of the hospital, where the blaze erupted around 4.30 am, they said.

Other patients in the ward were safely moved to another wing, hospital sources said.

Hospital authorities doused the blaze before fire brigade personnel arrived, the sources said. A relative of Mondal claimed that she had called for help when the fire broke out all of a sudden, but nobody came to her rescue.

A five-member team has been constituted to investigate the cause of the fire, Hospital Superintendent Tapas Kumar Ghosh said.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in West Bengal assembly Suwendu Adhikari alleged that hospitals in the state have turned into a death trap for patients, and demanded a thorough inquiry into the incident.

"WB Health Minister's apathy towards the safety and wellbeing of the patients admitted in Govt Hospitals is evident from the fact that incidents of fire emergency have become a common occurrence. The Hospitals as if 'House of Lac' have become death trap for the unfortunate patients," the Nandigram MLA tweeted.

He also demanded a compensation of Rs 50 lakh for the next of kin of the deceased. Reacting to Adhikari's remarks, Trinamool Congress MP Mougata Roy said the state government has provided improved healthcare to people, which was lacking during the tenure of previous governments in the state.



A wrestler who loses sometimes bites or pulls. These people (BJP) have already lost. The real surprise will come from Gujarat where elections are to be held after Uttar Pradesh

AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF

ARMY COMES TO RESCUE

Deployed to guard the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, Army jawans carried a pregnant woman for kilometres on shoulders to help her to reach a hospital, official said. The Army personnel responded promptly and with the help of locals evacuated the woman to the nearest civil hospital on a charpoy, they said



SKM to observe 'Day of Betrayal' on Jan 31

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 29: The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) announced Friday that it will observe January 31 as a 'Day of Betrayal' across India with large-scale protest demonstrations at district and block levels.

"All the farm unions associated with the Morcha will observe this protest with great fervour. It is expected that this programme will be organised in at least 500 districts of the country," SKM, a consortium of farmers' organisations, said in a statement after the meeting of its coordination committee.

"In the protest demonstrations January 31, a memorandum will also be submitted to the Union government. The preparation for this programme was reviewed during the meeting," the statement said.

The SKM had taken a decision to this effect in its review meeting held January 15. The farmers claimed that the government has handed them deceit.

COVID 3RD WAVE

Risk persists despite signs of plateau in India: WHO

The Health Ministry said Thursday that early indications of Covid cases plateauing have been reported in certain geographies in the country but the trend needs to be observed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 29: Even though some cities or states in India may be beginning to see plateauing of Covid-19 cases, the risk persists and focus must be on reducing transmission and implementing situation-specific measures, senior WHO official Poonam Khetrapal Singh said.

Responding to a question that coronavirus cases have started plateauing in India, Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region said the risk of Covid-19 remains high and no country, irrespective of their current transmission scenario, is out of the woods yet.

"Hence, even though some cities or states may be beginning to see plateauing of cases, the risk persists. We need to continue to remain vigilant. Our focus must be on reducing transmission. Implementing situation-specific public health and social measures and increasing vaccine coverage—that's the way forward for all countries in the ongoing pandemic," Singh told PTI in an interview.

On January 21, the country reported a total of 3,47,254 new Covid-19 cases after which the daily infection count has been reducing. A decline in Covid cases and positivity rate has been especially observed in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Odisha, Haryana and West Bengal.



The risk of Covid-19 remains high and no country, irrespective of their current transmission scenario, is out of the woods yet. Hence, even though some cities or states may be beginning to see plateauing of cases, the risk persists

DR POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH | REGIONAL DIRECTOR, WHO, SE ASIA REGION

Delta variant, she said Omicron is able to more rapidly infect the tissues of the upper respiratory tract rather than the lungs, which may also help the spread of this variant.

There appears to be a lower risk of severe disease and death following Omicron infection as compared to other variants. However, due to the very high numbers of cases, many countries have seen a significant increase in the incidence of hospitalisation, putting pressure on healthcare systems, she said.

Compared to the COVID-19's activity rate has been especially observed in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Odisha, Haryana and West Bengal.

Asked if the pandemic is entering in endemic stages, Singh said, "Currently we are still in the midst of the pandemic and the focus should be to curtail the virus spread and save lives."

By becoming endemic doesn't mean that the virus will not be a cause of concern, she said.

Compared to the COVID-19's activity rate has been especially observed in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Odisha, Haryana and West Bengal.

IAS officer arrested in TET exams scam case

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Pune (Maharashtra), Jan 29: In a shocking turn, the Pune Police have arrested an IAS officer in connection with the sensational statewide Teachers Eligibility Test (TET) that was unearthed last year, officials said here Saturday.

The IAS officer is Sushil Khodwekar, currently posted as Agriculture Department Deputy Secretary at Thane and functioned with the same designation in the School Education & Sports

Department when the alleged TET irregularities were being perpetrated.

Khodwekar, 43, of the 2011 IAS batch in the Maharashtra cadre, was produced before a local court and remanded to police custody till Monday, January 31, with the total number of arrests going up to more than 30 so far comprising officials and private persons.

Besides Khodwekar, the Pune Police had earlier arrested two Maharashtra State Council of Examinations (MSCE)

Commissioner Tukaram Supe, former MSCE Commissioner Sukhdeo Dere, education consultant Abhijit Sawrikar, and Director of GA Software Pritesh Deshmukh, which had been awarded the contract for the TET and other government exams.

Police investigations have revealed that the marks of at least 7,880 candidates appearing for the TET in 2018 and 2020 had allegedly been 'increased' by manipulating the entire evaluation process, against huge monetary gains.

3 tonne of medical relief sent to Afghan

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 29: India has supplied three tonnes of essential life-saving medicines to Afghanistan in the fourth batch of medical assistance to the war-torn country and will provide further humanitarian help to the people there in form of medicines and foodgrains in coming weeks, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Saturday. In a statement, the MEA said India stands committed to continuing its special relationship with the people of Afghanistan and providing humanitarian assistance.

As part of our ongoing humanitarian assistance, India supplied the fourth batch of medical assistance consisting of three tonnes of essential life-saving medicines to Afghanistan. The same was handed over to the Indira Gandhi Hospital, Kabul, it added. Prior to this, India has supplied three shipments of medical assistance, consisting of 500,000 doses of Covid-19 vaccine and essential life-saving medicines to Afghanistan that was handed over to the WHO and Kabul's India Gandhi Children Hospital.

In the coming weeks, we would be supplying more batches of humanitarian assistance consisting of medicines and foodgrains for the people of Afghanistan, it added. India has not recognised the new regime in Afghanistan and has been pitching for the formation of a truly inclusive government in Kabul besides insisting that Afghan soil must not be used for any terrorist activities against any country.



A healthcare worker takes swab sample of a vendor for the Covid-19 test, at a wholesale fruit and vegetable market, in Jammu, Saturday

BEATING THE RETREAT CEREMONY

Dazzling drones, projection mapping show add colour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 29: As a cold zephyr blew across the historic Vijay Chowk, multiple colours dotted the sky with around 1,000 drones taking flight, a projection mapping show with myriad hues depicted the country's 75 years of independence and foot-tapping tunes filled the air, marking another colourful Beating the Retreat ceremony Saturday.

From the drones show to projection mapping show, this year's ceremony also presented quite a few firsts. For the first time in more than 70 years, popular and favourite hymn of Mahatma Gandhi 'Abide With Me' did not echo at the Vijay Chowk, where dignitaries and people, wearing masks gathered amid pandemic clouds. The hymn was dropped by the government on the grounds that

playing more Indian tunes would be appropriate in view of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', a move that has been criticised by Opposition parties.

The hymn was replaced by the popular patriotic song 'Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon', which was written by Kavi Pradeep to commemorate the supreme sacrifice made by Indian soldiers during the 1962 Indo-China war.

This year's ceremony was conceptualised, designed, produced and choreographed under the 'Make in India' initiative.

All said, the sky dazzled with drones, fabricated through indigenous technology, as the show lasted for around 10 minutes along with synchronised background music. A projection mapping show to commemorate 75 years of independence on the



walls of North Block and South Block, added colours to the ambience.

Foot-tapping music by the bands of Indian Army, Navy, Air Force and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) filled the air. They also stood in various formations.

The entry band played the 'Veer Sainik' tune, followed by Pipes & Drums Band, CAPF Band, Air Force Band, Naval Band, Army Military

Band and Massed Bands.

To celebrate the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', new tunes were added to the ceremony. These included 'Kerala', 'Hind ki Sena' and 'Ae Mere Watan Ke Logon'.

President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Army chief Manoj

Mukund Naravane, Navy chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and Air Force chief Air Marshal V R Chaudhari and various other dignitaries were present at the ceremony.

The drone show was organised by the startup 'Botlab Dynamics' and supported by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi and the Department of Science & Technology.

A centuries-old military tradition, Beating the Retreat dates back to the days when troops disengaged from a battle at sunset. As soon as the buglers sounded the retreat, the troops ceased fighting, sheathed their arms and withdrew from the battlefield.

Those present to witness the ceremony carried eco-friendly invitation cards. With a note of serenity, 'Sare Jahan se Acha' song concluded the event and the gathering slowly dispersed.

रजिस्ट्री सं. डी.एल.-33004/99 REGD. NO. D.L.-33004/99

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MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS
NOTIFICATION
New Delhi, the 17th January, 2022

S.O. 232(E).- In exercise of powers conferred by sub-section (1) of section 3A of the National Highways Act, 1956 (48 of 1956) (hereinafter referred to as the said Act), the Central Government, after being satisfied that for the public purpose, the land, the brief description of which is given in the Schedule below, is required for building (widening/two lane with paved shoulder/four laning etc.), maintenance, management and operation of NH-16 in the stretch of land from Km. 180 to Km. 199.141 (A/Post- Srikrushnapur, PS- Remuna, Dist- Balasore) in the district of BALASORE in the state of ODISHA, hereby declares its intention to acquire such land.

Any person interested in the said land may, within twenty-one days from the date of publication of this notification in the Official Gazette, object to the use of such land for the aforesaid purpose under sub-section(1) of section 3C of the said Act.

Every such objection shall be made to the Competent Authority, namely, Tahasildar, Remuna in writing and shall set out the grounds thereof and the Competent Authority shall give the objector an opportunity of being heard, either in person or by a legal practitioner, and may, after hearing all such objections and after making such further enquiry, if any, as the Competent Authority thinks necessary, by order, either allow or disallow the objections.

Any order made by the Competent Authority under sub-section (2) of section 3C of the said Act shall be final.

The land plans and other details of the land to be acquired under their notification are available and can be inspected by the interested person at the aforesaid office of the Competent Authority.

SCHEDULE

Brief Description of the land to be acquired with or without structures falling NH-16 in the stretch of land from Km. 180 to Km. 199.141 (A/Post- Srikrushnapur, PS- Remuna, Dist- Balasore) in the district of BALASORE in the state of ODISHA.

State : ODISHA		District : BALASORE			
Sl. No.	Survey/Plot Number	Type of Land	Nature of Land	Area (in Local Unit)	Area (in Hectare)
Taluk: Remuna					
Village: Hiratikiri-227					
1	1350	Private	Sarad II	0.0120000(Acre)	0.0048563
Village: Madagodasahi-249					
1	199	Private	Sarad III	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
2	200/385	Private	Gharabari	0.0120000(Acre)	0.0048563
3	200/387	Private	Gharabari	0.0050000(Acre)	0.0020235
4	200/419	Private	Gharabari	0.0060000(Acre)	0.0024282
5	306	Private	Patita	0.0070000(Acre)	0.0028329
6	308	Private	Adi	0.0600001(Acre)	0.0242817
7	308/375	Private	Adi	0.0250000(Acre)	0.0101174
Village: Seragada-248					
1	2863	Private	Gharabari	0.0180000(Acre)	0.0072845
2	970	Private	Sarad I	0.0340000(Acre)	0.0137596
3	970/3403	Private	Sarad I	0.0250000(Acre)	0.0101174
4	973	Private	Sarad I	0.0060000(Acre)	0.0024282
Total				0.2200	0.0890

[F. No. NHAI/BOT/11012/58/2005/PL/LA/NH-16/3A]
RAJESH GUPTA, Director



TMC mulls motion against Bengal Guv

The Governor, who has crossed swords with the government over several issues since assuming charge, recently accused the CM and Speaker of transgressing constitutional norms



Kolkata, Jan 29: The TMC is mulling over the option of bringing a motion against West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar during the upcoming Budget session in the Assembly, party sources said. According to the sources, a discussion on the possibility of bringing a censure motion against the governor is currently underway in the party. "We are planning to bring a censure motion against Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar. The way he has been insulting the Assembly and the speaker is unprecedented in the political history of Bengal. But we also need to check with constitutional experts on whether such a motion can be brought against the governor; its consequences," a senior TMC MLA privy to the development said. Dates of West Bengal Budget session are yet to be announced. TMC deputy chief whip Tapas Ray said nothing has been decided as yet, but the "governor's actions and his interference in state-re-

lated matters are unacceptable". "Never in Bengal's history, has the speaker been humiliated in such a way. The conduct of the governor deserved to be condemned," he told PTI. A censure motion, generally moved by the opposition, refers to an expression of strong disapproval or harsh criticism of government's policies or an individual minister by the legislature. The ruling party can also move it to criticise or condemn something. Reacting to the development, Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari said his party would oppose such a move by the TMC. "If the ruling party plans to bring such a motion against the governor, we would oppose it tooth and nail. It is the governor who is regularly humiliated by the state government," he said. The governor, who has crossed swords with the Mamata Banerjee government over several issues since assuming charge in the state,

recently accused the chief minister and speaker of transgressing constitutional norms by not providing him the information he had sought on multiple matters. Amid the ongoing acrimony, the ruling TMC Thursday said it is likely to bring a substantive motion against Dhankhar in Rajya Sabha during the upcoming Budget session of Parliament. A substantive motion is a self-contained, independent proposal submitted for the approval of the House and drafted in such a way as to be capable of expressing a decision of the House. January 25, the Governor, after paying floral tributes at the statue of B.R Ambedkar on the Assembly premises, had described the political condition in Bengal as "horrible and frightening." A day later, Speaker Biman Banerjee said his office might henceforth enquire about the purpose of Dhankhar's voluntary visit to the Assembly.

KMC facing financial problems

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Jan 29: A few hours after the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) issued a notice to stop pension of all the employees who have retired after September 2021 due to fund crunch, Mayor Firhad Hakim admitted that the corporation has financial problems but denied accepting the authenticity of the notice. "Those who are supposed to get pensions are getting pensions. The pension is getting delayed for the people whose papers are still in the process. There is no reason to say that the new pensioners will not be given any pension. We are enquiring into the whole thing to find out who has given the notice and under whose instruction," Firhad Hakim said in a programme Friday.



"We have a financial obligation of Rs 1,000 crore but that does not mean we will withhold pension," he added. Friday evening, the KMC gave a notice announcing their inconvenience to give the pension to the employees who have retired after September 2021 because of the fund crunch. Not only the retired employees but the civic body has failed to give money to the daily wage labourers and contract staff for the last eight

months making it evident that the financial situation of the urban body is in shambles. The situation is such that the KMC authorities cannot say when they would be able to regularise the pension and make payments to the contract labourers and contract staff. "Right now, it is impossible when the financial situation will normalise. We are trying to solve the situation," a senior KMC official said.

Sources in the corporation said that 640 employees who had retired since September last year are coming to the corporation everyday for the pension. This is creating a huge chaos in the corporation. They are not getting any in-

formation regarding their pension. "This might have created the confusion," an official said but he failed to substantiate the reason behind the notice.

BJP leader Shamik Bhattacharya said, "BJP didn't go to put up the notice and so it was some from Trinamool Congress who gave the notice. The financial situation of the corporation is exposed."

Firhad Hakim who became the mayor of KMC for the second time has already informed that the financial situation of the corporation is not healthy and everyone will have to work with some constraints.

Accepting the challenge, he took certain steps to better the financial

situation of the corporation. The corporation asked for a loan of Rs 700 crore from the state government and Asian Development Bank gave the corporation a loan of Rs 2,000 crore.

Though the corporation thought to overcome the difficulties through this but now it is evident that it was not enough for the corporation to tide over the problem.

According to financial experts, the financial problem of the corporation cannot be separated from that of the state because the pathetic financial condition of the state will inevitably reflect on the financial health of the civic body.

The state had taken a loan from the open market for the third time in this month making it evident that it is struggling hard to negotiate the expenses caused by the social schemes launched by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

According to the statement issued by the Reserve Bank of India, the state borrowed Rs 3,000 crore from the open market Monday - third time in this month taking the total borrowing to Rs 6,500 crore in this month - the second highest state after Uttar Pradesh to borrow such a huge amount from the market. Earlier, the state had borrowed Rs 3,500 crore in two installments in this month.

Bengal Governor summons Chief Secretary again

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 29: West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar has yet again summoned Chief Secretary (CS) HK Dwivedi to Raj Bhavan January 31 to get a briefing on an incident in Jhargram district involving Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Suvendu Adhikari.

Adhikari, in a letter to Dhankhar, had said he was prevented from visiting Netaji in Jhargram, where he sought to pay respect to those killed in firing some 11 years ago.

Earlier, too, the governor had summoned Dwivedi to seek details of the incident, but the chief secretary did not turn up for the meeting.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar also sought to know under whose directions Chief Secretary HK Dwivedi sent messages informing about his inability to respond to his call in the past

In a statement Friday, which was later shared on Twitter by the governor, Dhankhar said, "Evasive and diversionary response rendered by the CS on January 25 as regards the significant issue of stopping the LoP Suvendu Adhikari near Netaji on January seven in spite of categorical and firm judicial directives, is worrisome and concerning."

Dhankhar also sought to know under whose directions the chief secretary sent messages informing about his inability to respond to his call in the past.

He warned that the top official was being provided the last opportunity to give a comprehensive response regarding any case... "failing which will be presumed that the CS is working in complete disregard of the lawful directives of the governor's office and his actions are deliberate and intentional violation of the All India Service (Conduct) Rules, 1968, as a result of which serious consequences will follow in due course."

The chief secretary is also to render full explanation of his acts of omission in this case all through, Dhankhar said.

He alleged that despite this warning, the response of Dwivedi was dilatory, diversionary and certainly derogatory to his office.

Manipur gets freight train connectivity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 29: With the first freight train reaching Manipur, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday said this will enhance the state's commerce and connectivity as goods from there will reach all parts of the country. The freight train arrived at the Rani Gaidinliu station in the north-eastern state January 27, days after a passenger train from Silchar in Assam reached the Bongaichungpao railway station in Manipur, where assembly polls will be held in two phases February 27 and March 3.

"Transformation of the Northeast continues. Manipur's connectivity will be enhanced and commerce will be boosted. Wonderful products from the state can travel all over the nation," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter tagging a post of Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region G Kishan Reddy.

The Union minister along with

his tweet also shared a video of the freight train arriving at the station.

"Historic day for Manipur and entire North East, after 75 years of India's Independence, first goods train reaches Rani Gaidinliu Railway Station, Tamenglong in Manipur. The Narendra Modi government is committed to enhancing infrastructure connectivity and economic prosperity in the NER (northeast region)," Reddy tweeted.

Earlier this month, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw did an aerial survey of the Jiribam-Imphal new line project in Manipur.

The project, which includes the country's longest train tunnel, will connect Imphal with Guwahati.

He said that Rs 7,000 crore has been allocated this year for ongoing railway projects in the north-east. Saturday, sharing pictures of the freight train, Vaishnaw tweeted, "As committed".

He also tagged a January 5 tweet of his which said, "Goods train will start rolling by end of this month up to Kaimai Road railway station."

Taking to Twitter, the Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh Friday said, "In yet another milestone, the first ever goods train reached Rani Gaidinliu Railway Station, Tamenglong yesterday. The improvement in railway connectivity, under the close supervision of Hon' PM Sh @narendramodiji, will immensely improve the socio-economic condition of Manipur."

FOR A CAUSE



Members of United Guardians Association form a human chain during their protest demanding immediate reopening of schools and colleges, in Kolkata, Saturday. PTI PHOTO

Over 500 migratory birds perish in Tripura

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Agartala, Jan 29: Forest and wildlife officials continued their study and inspection for the second day Friday after the carcasses of over 500 migratory birds were found at the famous Sukh Sagar lake in southern Tripuras Gomati district, top officials said.

Tripura's Principal Chief Conservator of Forests Dvijendra Kumar Sharma said the officials are busy collecting information, samples of dead birds and trying to ascertain the reasons behind their deaths. "The officials are examining all possible reasons for the death of the migratory birds. We are also sending the samples of the dead birds to the laboratories to ascertain the cause of the death of the birds," Sharma told IANS. Every year during the winter



season, lakhs of migratory birds of different species fly down to Sukh Sagar and other lakes and water bodies of Tripura from different parts of the country and abroad. This year too was no exception as the winged guests came to the northeastern state. Though the officials are yet to as-

certain the reason behind the birds' deaths local people suspect that they might have died of insecticides used in the nearby paddy fields. Local people said that every year thousands of migratory birds come to Sukh Sagar but they had never witnessed such a horrific sight where a large number of migratory birds were found dead

Poachers might have poisoned the water body with pesticides, and the migratory birds, which have been coming from abroad, might have died after consuming the water of the century-old lake

at one time. They estimated that over one thousand migratory birds might have died in the lake.

Sub Divisional Forest Officer Kamal Bhowmik after conducting a preliminary investigation said that the carcasses of the migratory birds have been sent for post mortem to Agartala.

'Better late than never': Padma for 102-yr-old Gandhian

A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF VINOBA BHAVE, SHAKUNTALA CHOWDHARY HAS BEEN THE 'HEART AND SOUL' OF THE GANDHIAN INSTITUTIONS SINCE 1947

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Jan 29: The Padma Shri might have come quite late to Assam's 102-year-old Gandhian Shakuntala Chowdhary, but for her family and well-wishers, it is "better late than never", and they have urged the authorities to hand over the award to the centenarian here.

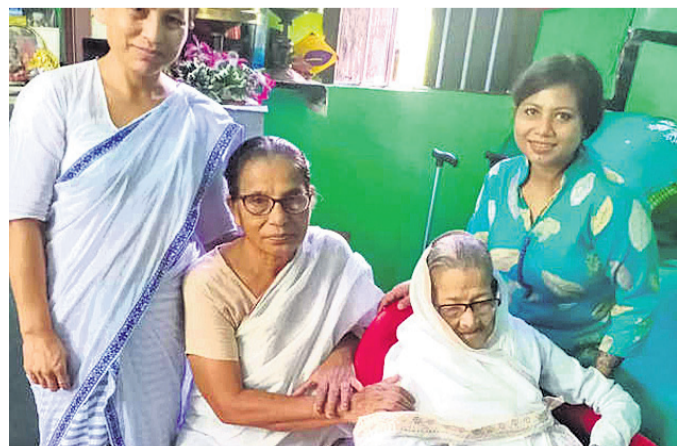
Chowdhary quietly lives her twilight years with fading memories of a life devoted to selfless service, truth, simplicity and non-violence, ensconced at the Sarania Ashram where Mahatma Gandhi had stayed during his last visit here in 1946.

"We are very happy that she has been awarded the Padma Shri but it should have been given to her

much earlier... now she is not in a condition to travel to the national capital to receive it," Coordinator of Kasturba Gandhi National Memorial Trust (KGNMT) Kusum Bora Mokasi told PTI.

A close associate of Vinoba Bhave, Chowdhary has been the "heart and soul" of the Gandhian institutions since 1947, bringing about immense change in the lives of many young girls and women across the state and has won several accolades, including the Jannalal Bajaj Award.

"Earlier, she would get angry if we discussed awards and said it was her duty to serve society, but now we are not even sure if she has realised that she has been hon-



ouored with the Padma Shri," Mokasi said. Considering her age,

"we request the authorities to present the award at a simple cere-

mony at the Sarania Ashram", she added. Chowdhary might not be aware of the development, "but we are repeatedly telling her about it, so that there can be some semblance of comprehension", her niece Chandana Choudhury Barua told PTI.

"Many people have called us, saying the award has come too late, but it is better late than never. We hope she will be given the award here so that she can receive it herself," Barua said.

The centenarian, however, is happy to receive the bouquets from well-wishers who came to congratulate her, as she greets all with folded hands and at times with 'Mahatma Gandhi ki ja'i' in a soft voice.

Born into an enlightened family in Guwahati, 'Shakuntala baido', as she is affectionately called, was a bright student who went on to become a teacher, and it was during her stint at Guwahati's TC School that she came into contact with another Gandhian Amalprova Das, whose father had donated his Sarania Hills property for setting up the ashram.

Das had urged Chowdhary to join her to help run the Gram Sevika Vidyalaya and manage the Assam Branch of KGNMT, following which she became the office secretary, entrusted with the task of running the Trust's administration. She simultaneously worked as a teacher at the Vidyalaya.

of the day quote

A few years ago, teachers were asked to ensure that people did not defecate in the open and embarrass the government over its questionable open defecation free claims. Now they have come up with another foolishness

They are not talking about good days by removing problems of livelihood, unemployment and inflation, among others, but are seeking votes by talking about religion-caste discrimination and hate speech, which is not right at all

I want to ask the people of Muzaffarnagar and of western Uttar Pradesh if they have forgotten the riots? If the same mistake is done, then those who instigated the riots will sit on the seat of power in Lucknow, but if 'lotus' is elected, there will be no riots

SHORT TAKES

Militants shoot policeman dead
Srinagar: Militants Saturday shot dead a policeman in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said. J-K Police head constable Ali Mohammad was fired upon by militants at around 5.35 pm near his residence at Hasanpora in the Bijbehara area of Anantnag, a police official said. He said Mohammad was shifted to a hospital in critical condition where he succumbed. The area has been cordoned off and a hunt launched to nab the assailants, the official said.

Producer nabbed for raping actress
Bangalore: Karnataka police have arrested a Kannada film producer and actor on charges of committing rape on co-actress on pretext of promise of marriage, here on Saturday. The arrested person is identified as Harshavardhan aka Vijayabhargav. The accused had produced and acted as lead in 'Vision 2023', a Kannada movie. The complainant co-actress has stated that she had friendship with the accused for two years. She said that after promising of marriage he exploited her sexually for two years.

GCC files FIR against MLA
Chennai: The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has filed a police complaint Saturday against Tiruvottiyur MLA of the DMK, KP Shankar who had allegedly beaten up a corporation Assistant Engineer Wednesday, and stopped a road tarring work. The GCC authorities told IANS that they would post the assistant engineer at the head office of the corporation to ensure his safety. The DMK has removed KP Shankar as the west district secretary of Tiruvottiyur after the party organising secretary and Waterworks minister, S Duraimurugan conducted an inquiry and reported against the legislator.

Wife, lover get life term for killing man
Jamshedpur: A court in Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district Saturday sentenced three persons, including a woman and her lover, to life imprisonment for killing her husband here three years ago. Additional District Judge-4 Rajendra Kumar Sinha had on January 27 convicted Sweta Das, her lover Sumit Singh and their accomplice Sonu Lal for the murder of Tapan Das.



Akhilesh Ji, no matter how much perfume you sprinkle to hide the wrongdoings, good smell will not emanate. Of the SP candidates declared some are fighting from jail, while others are on bail

'ELECTION KING' AGAIN FILES PAPERS FOR POLL

Known by the moniker 'Election King', K Padmarajan filed nomination for the local body elections scheduled for February 19. This is the 227th time he is filing the papers. With the highest number of contests, he found place in record books as the most unsuccessful candidate



Over 170 homeless died of extreme cold in Delhi: Report

At least 172 homeless persons have died of the extreme cold in Delhi in the past 28 days, a report compiled by the Centre for Holistic Development (CHD), an NGO, showed

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, Jan 29: At least 172 homeless persons have died of the extreme cold in Delhi in the past 28 days, a report compiled by the Centre for Holistic Development (CHD), an NGO, showed. The CHD has claimed to have written a letter, containing the detailed report to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is also the chairperson of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), requesting that proper arrangements should be

made for homeless people during the winters. According to a CHD official, homeless people at places like Sarai Kale Khan, Asaf Ali Road, Kashmere Gate, Azadpur, Nizamuddin, Okhla, Chandni Chowk and Delhi Gate, sleep in the open in large numbers. On January 25 the NGO had claimed that at least 106 people, most of them homeless, died in Delhi due to extreme cold. However, DUSIB has denied the report, adding that the board takes a very good care of the homeless people in the city.



This January, Delhi witnessed extreme cold weather due to a western disturbance. Delhi witnessed the coldest day

Delhi witnessed the coldest day in January in nine years Tuesday as the maximum temperature plunged 10 degrees below normal

in January in nine years Tuesday as the maximum temperature plunged 10 degrees below normal and settled at 12.1 degrees Celsius, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). Similarly, the national capital

and its adjoining areas received a significant amount of rainfall this month. Delhi has recorded 88.2 mm of rainfall in January this year, which is an all-time record. The city recorded its highest rainfall in 122 years after the capital city received 88.2 mm of rain in the first month of the year. Taking cognizance of the report, BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor tweeted that once again the Kejriwal government failed the homeless people of the national capital. This news is very upsetting, he added.

Modi praises India-Israel ties as Pegasus row back

Though India had recognised Israel Sept 17, 1950, full-fledged diplomatic relations between the countries were established Jan 29, 1992



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, Jan 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Saturday said there cannot be a better time to set new goals for taking forward India-Israel relations and asserted that the cooperation between the two countries has played a key role in the growth stories of the two nations. In a special video message on the completion of 30 years of full-fledged diplomatic relations between India and Israel, Modi said this period has been very important for both countries. He also said that the people of India and Israel have always shared a special relationship. Though India had recognised Israel September 17, 1950, full-fledged diplomatic relations between the countries were estab-

lished January 29, 1992. Since then, the bilateral relations developed into a multifaceted strategic partnership. Earlier this week, Israel's envoy to India Naor Gilon had said the 30th anniversary of India-Israel diplomatic ties is a good opportunity to look ahead and shape the next 30 years of relations. He exuded confidence that the close cooperation between the two countries in different fields will only grow further in the coming years. India's Ambassador to Israel Sanjeev Singla said, "We are proud to mark the 30th anniversary of our bilateral relations and look forward to using the special logo throughout the year to celebrate this special milestone."

Emphasising that friendship and trust are not only positive traits but also real assets, the foreign ministers of India and Israel in a joint op-ed for an Israeli daily Friday had said the two countries have worked together to deepen their roots for the last three decades, delving together to find solutions to common challenges, including in the security sector.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid contributed a joint piece, Deepening Roots for Israel Hayom to mark 30 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Incidentally, a New York Times report claiming that India bought Pegasus spyware as part of a USD 2 billion defence deal with Israel in 2017 triggered a major controversy Saturday with the Opposition alleging that the government indulged in illegal snooping that amounted to treason. A government source, however, said the matter related to the Pegasus software was being monitored by a committee under the Supreme Court - headed by retired Supreme Court judge R V Raveendran - and its report was awaited.

CLEAN INDIA?



Garbage dumped on the Miramar beach in Panaji, Saturday

REET PAPER LEAK CASE

Raj govt suspends state school board chairman; BJP demands CBI probe

Jaipur, Jan 29: The Ashok Gehlot government Saturday sacked the chairman of Rajasthan Board of Secondary Education, Ajmer, DP Jaroli, and suspended the Board secretary Arvind Kumar Sengwa in connection with the paper leak during the teachers' recruitment exam (REET) in September.



Gehlot, in the meeting, also decided to constitute a committee headed by a retired judge of the high court to give suggestions for ensuring that papers leak incidents do not take place and exams are conducted in a fair manner; official sources said. However, former chief minister and BJP leader Vasundhara Raje renewed her party's demand for a CBI inquiry in the matter. In a statement, she said that the fairness and transparency of examinations should be beyond every doubt. "It is very worrying that the investigating agencies have brought Shiksha Sankul under suspicion in the REET paper leak case. The criminal corruption exposed in the REET exam is shocking," Raje said. The offices of the education department are located at the Shiksha Sankul building.

Bihar: School teachers asked to keep eye on liquor consumption

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
Patna, Jan 29: The Bihar government has directed the teachers of government schools to keep an eye on the consumption of liquor, manufacturing units, smuggling, and provide information to the officials on the toll free numbers. Sanjay Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary of Education Department of Bihar government has written a letter Friday to deputy directors of all zones, district education officers, and district education officers of primary, middle and higher secondary schools of Bihar to implement the same in their respective jurisdictions. As per the directive, the principals, teachers, contract teachers and teachers of Madrasas to collect the information about consumption of liquor, manufacturing units, smuggling, transportation and other opera-



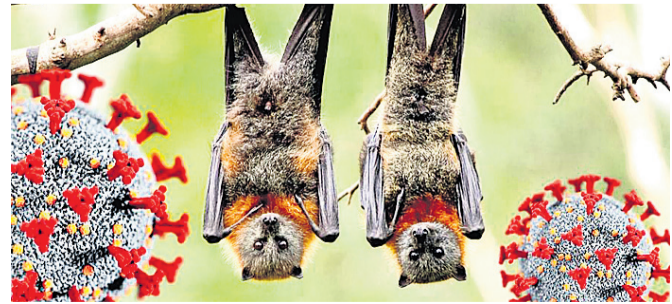
tions of mafias and informed on toll free numbers. "We have issued two cell phone numbers 9473400378 and 947300606 and toll free numbers 18003456268/15545 for them. We will keep the identity of teachers completely secret," Sanjay Kumar said. "We have also directed the teachers to not allow any person to use

EDU MIN CLARIFIES
Bihar Education Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary has clarified that the department has only appealed to the government teachers to keep an eye on the consumption of liquor in the state. It was just an advisory. "We have not given any target to teachers or they are not under any pressure to pass the information to authority about liquor consumption. We have just appealed to them to inform us if they see any mischief in their respective jurisdictions. They do not require additional duty to monitor liquor consumption," Chaudhary said. school premises for consuming liquor," he said. In the last 15 days, three major liquor-related incidents have taken place in Nalanda, Saran and Buxar districts.

NeoCov: Doctors advise people not to panic

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi, Jan 29: Even as reports emerge of a new lethal variant called 'NeoCov' that requires only one mutation to infiltrate human cells, doctors Saturday advised people not to panic. NeoCov has been discovered by scientists from the Wuhan University in China in a bat population in South Africa. While it has only been known to spread among these animals to date, the variant has shown the potential to penetrate human cells in the same way as the SARS-CoV-2 virus. "Currently, there is no direct evidence that NeoCov affects the

human body, and we should not panic or get stressed," Dr Rahul Pandit, Member of National and Maharashtra's Covid-19 Taskforce. "There are many viruses in the world that are yet to be discovered and whose characteristics are not known. We are going through a challenging time and should focus on managing the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. I advise people not to panic, keep their guard up and follow Covid-19 appropriate protocols," added Pandit, who is also Director-Critical Care, Fortis Hospitals Mumbai. According to the research on NeoCov, posted on preprint and not been peer-reviewed yet, the variant carries the combination of



Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus (MERS)-CoV mortality rate (where one in every three infected persons may die) and the current SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus' high transmission rate. "It is only one mutation away from becoming dangerous for humans," the researchers said. But, Dr Dhiren Gupta from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi stated that the variant's transmission to humans is still a "scientific speculation" and "hypothesis". "This NeoCov is very different from SARS-CoV virus (sarbecovirus)

There are many viruses in the world that are yet to be discovered and whose characteristics are not known. We are going through a challenging time and should focus on managing the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. I advise people not to panic, keep their guard up and follow Covid-19 appropriate protocols

and belongs to merbecovirus which is a different genus. It cannot infect human ACE2 (scientists are speculating if it can combine with SARS and start affecting humans). This is a hypothesis raised by scientists (which is not unusual in science)," Gupta said. He added that the theory that one out of three may die is just a hypothesis, which made headlines on social media. "It's just a hypothesis turning into sensationalist doomsday predictions," Gupta said. Even the World Health Organization (WHO) has said that the question of whether the NeoCov coronavirus poses a threat to humans, requires further study. "Whether the virus detected in the study will pose a risk for humans will require further study," the health body was quoted as saying to TASS news agency.

international



The Taiwan issue is the biggest tinder-box between China and the US. If the Taiwanese authorities, emboldened by the US, keep going down the road for independence, it most likely involve China and the US, in a military conflict

FIRST CAT

The dog-loving Bidens have finally fulfilled a key White House pledge -- they got a cat. The political pussycat is a short-haired tabby named Willow, said a spokesman for Jill Biden. Pictures posted by the first lady on Twitter showed the pet prowling in the presidential residence



of the day quote

Koalas are one of Australia's most loved and best recognised icons ... and we are committed to protecting them for generations to come

Germany has kept control over the Covid-19 pandemic situation despite the latest outbreak caused by the new Omicron variant. We had expected high case numbers

The conditions of our intervention, whether military, economic or political, have become harder and harder to manage. In short, we are not prepared to pay an unlimited price to remain in Mali

SHORT TAKES

NZ PM isolates after exposure

Wellington: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said late Saturday she is self-isolating after coming into close contact with a person infected with the coronavirus. The exposure came on a flight from the town of Kerikeri to the largest city of Auckland. New Zealand's Governor-General Cindy Kiro was also on the Jan 22 flight and has also gone into isolation.

Finnish diplomats' mobiles hacked

Stockholm: The mobile devices of Finnish diplomats working abroad have been hacked with the use of sophisticated spyware, Finland's government said Friday, and the Nordic country's spy chief said a "state actor" was likely to blame. The Finnish Foreign Ministry said the victims were targeted through Pegasus software developed by Israeli spyware company NSO Group.

UN releases \$2mn funds for Yemen

United Nations: The UN has released \$20 million in emergency funds for 270,000 people in Yemen, including those who were displaced by the recent airstrikes, a spokesman said. UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths allocated the money from the Central Emergency Response Fund to support the humanitarian relief for people in Marib, al-Jawf and Hadramout.

Emergency in Thai after oil spillage

Bangkok: The governor of a province in eastern Thailand Saturday declared a state of emergency after an oil slick washed up on a sand beach, shutting down restaurants and shops in a setback for the pandemic-hit tourism industry. Some 20-50 tonne of oil are estimated to have leaked Tuesday night in the Gulf of Thailand from an undersea hose used to load tankers at an offshore mooring point owned by the Star Petroleum Refining Co.

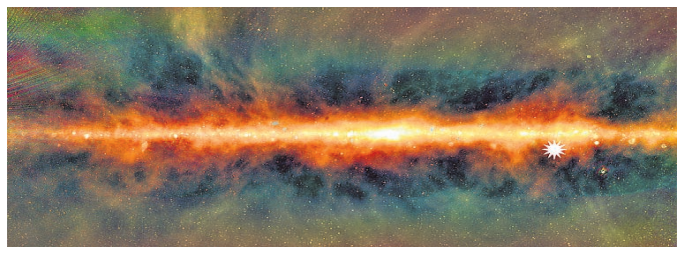
Astronomers detect spooky object in Milky Way

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Sydney, Jan 29: Australian researchers have discovered a strange spinning object in the Milky Way they say is unlike anything astronomers have ever seen. The object, first spotted by a university student working on his undergraduate thesis, releases a huge burst of radio energy three times every hour.

The pulse comes "every 18.18 minutes, like clockwork," said astrophysicist Natasha Hurley-Walker, who led the investigation

'UNLIKE ANYTHING EVER SEEN'



after the student's discovery, using a telescope in the Western Australian outback known as the Murchison Widefield Array.

Finding this object was "kind of spooky for an astronomer," she said, "because there's nothing known in the sky that does that."

If you do all of the mathematics, you find that they shouldn't have enough power to produce these kind of radio waves every 20 minutes. It just shouldn't be possible

NATASHA HURLEY-WALKER | ASTROPHYSICIST

The object may be something researchers have theorised could exist but have never seen called an "ultra-long period magnetar". On the question of whether the

powerful, consistent radio signal from space could have been sent by some other life form, Hurley-Walker conceded. "I was concerned that it was aliens."

But the research team was able to observe the signal across a wide range of frequencies. "That means it must be a natural process, this is not an artificial signal," Hurley-Walker said.

"More detections will tell astronomers whether this was a rare one-off event or a vast new population we'd never noticed before," Hurley-Walker said.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE TENSIONS

US deploys troops to Eastern Europe

Western officials say Russia has also mustered more air and sea assets in the region, creating a complex threat like none seen since the Cold War.



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Washington, Jan 29: US President Joe Biden sought to maintain pressure on Russian leader Vladimir Putin over Ukraine Friday, announcing a small troop deployment to eastern Europe even as top Pentagon officials backed a renewed push for diplomacy.

Neither Putin nor his European and American counterparts had until now appeared ready to give ground in the weeks-long crisis, the worst in decades between Russia and the West.

In Washington, Biden nevertheless said he would soon send a small number of US troops to bolster the NATO presence in eastern Europe as tensions remain heightened.

The United States already has tens of thousands of troops stationed across mostly Western Europe. At the Pentagon, top officials urged a focus on diplomacy while saying that Russia now had enough troops and equipment in

place to threaten the whole of Ukraine. Any such conflict, warned the top US general, Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley, would be "horrific" for both sides.

"If that was unleashed on Ukraine, it would be significant, very significant, and it would result in a significant amount of casualties," Milley said.

But speaking alongside Milley, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said war could still be avoided.

"Conflict is not inevitable. There is still time and space for diplomacy," said Austin. "Mr Putin can do the

Ukraine President urged Western leaders to avoid stirring "panic" over the massive Russian troop buildup. He pointed to the need to "stabilize" Ukraine's already battered economy

British PM Boris Johnson will step up diplomatic efforts over the Ukraine crisis with a visit to the region next week and a call with Putin in a bid to avoid bloodshed

While we don't believe that President Putin has made a final decision to use these forces against Ukraine, he clearly now has the capability. This is straight out of the Russian playbook. They're not fooling us

LLOYD AUSTIN | DEFENSE SECRETARY, US

right thing as well," said Austin. "There is no reason that this situation has to devolve into conflict."

Russia has massed troops on Ukraine's border, and Putin has said that the United States and NATO have not addressed Moscow's main security demands, though he was ready to keep talking.

'Int'l military assistance for Ukraine optimistic'

Kiev: Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said that the international military assistance to his country is "optimistic" amid tensions with Russia. "I cannot tell the exact amount of aid received, but I can say that it is more optimistic than the media report," Reznikov told a Parliament meeting. Ukraine has already received three batches of military assistance from the US aid package worth \$200 million and anti-tank weapons from Britain, Reznikov said, adding that Kiev is also waiting for support from Baltic countries, Canada and Denmark, reports Xinhua news agency.

BA.2 variant 1.5x more contagious

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Washington, Jan 29: The BA.2 sub-variant of Omicron, dubbed with the moniker "Stealth Omicron", is 1.5 times more transmissible than the original strain, according to a study led by Danish researchers. Omicron, which is also referred to as B.1.1.529, has three main substrains, BA.1, BA.2, and BA.3, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Researchers at Denmark's Statens Serum Institut found that BA.2 appeared to be one and a half times more contagious than BA.1. "Of course, we follow the devel-

opment closely, and if BA.2 is more contagious, it may mean that the wave of infections will be higher and will extend further into February compared to the previous projections," said Tyra Grove Krause, an infection epidemiology expert.

As of January 26, BA.1 was still the most common Omicron sub-variant worldwide, accounting for 98 per cent of cases at that time, the SSI said.

'ONE FOR THE RECORD BOOKS' Winter storm slams US East Coast

REUTERS

New York, Jan 29: The northeastern United States was walloped by a fierce winter storm Saturday that threatened to drop more than two feet (60 cm) of snow while packing high winds, prompting governors in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and other states to declare states of emergency.

The Nor'easter, which moved up the East Coast after forming in the Atlantic Ocean off the Carolinas, blanketed a large swath of New England with heavy snowfall, with some coastal areas of New Jersey



already recording 15 inches (38 cm) of accumulation.

"It's high winds, heavy snow, blizzard conditions - all the elements of a classic nor'easter," New

Over 5,000 US flights were cancelled between Friday and Sunday

York Governor Kathy Hochul said, warning of frigid temperatures overnight. "This could be life-threatening," she added.

"This storm is looking like it

could be one for the record books," Boston Mayor Michelle Wu said in a CBS TV interview Saturday. "We are not only expecting a whole lot of snow, but it is going to come down really quick in the most intense hours," he added.

The National Weather Service has issued a blizzard warning for the Boston metropolitan area and its nearly 4.9 million residents, predicting "whiteout conditions" and damaging winds.

The storm hit nearly 44 years to the day after a monstrous blizzard crippled New England in 1978.

Kins of 9/11 victims stake claim to Af frozen funds

THE TALIBAN-LED GOVERNMENT IN AFGHANISTAN HAS BEEN DEMANDING GLOBAL RECOGNITION AND ALSO RELEASE OF AT LEAST \$10 BILLION WORTH ASSETS OF AFGHAN CENTRAL BANK, SETTLED ABROAD

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New York, Jan 29: Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, United States seized the Afghan governments assets held abroad, which are now being demanded by the Taliban-led government as their rightful claim.

However, as the debate over the matter prolongs, families of the victims of 9/11 twin tower attacks have now come out with claims of billions of US dollars as compensation from the Afghan frozen assets.

As per details, families of at least 150 victims of the 9/11 attacks have staked claim to at least



\$7 billion in frozen assets held by the Federal Reserves of New York.

They claimed that they were awarded the sum by a federal judge in 2012, following a default judgment against the defendants, including

the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden and Iran, none of whom ever showed up in the court.

The case, referred to as "Havlish case", named after plaintiff Fiona Havlish, whose husband worked

on the 101st floor of the South Tower, have maintained that they have finally got the ability to enforce the ruling of the court.

The argument raised by the victims' families has convinced the federal judge to begin the process of seizing the money from the frozen Afghan government assets.

While the deadline for the Joe Biden administration to respond ended Friday, a federal judge granted its request and gave an extension till February 11, 2022, to ensure that its position is made clear on the matter.

"The government may say we are taking all the money and then there's going to be litigation over

that. Or they might say, we will give it all to you, and then we're happy and we go to the next stage of how to distribute it. Or they might do something in between - like half the money can go to the victims and the other half to go as humanitarian aid for Afghanistan," said Andrew Maloney, a lawyer representing a group of 9/11 families in a case referred to as the "Ashton case".

Other than that, the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have also frozen about \$1.2 billion in aid money for Afghanistan, since the Taliban took over control of the country 15 August, 2021.



With production technologies rapidly unbundling themselves, Indian companies cannot become world-class enterprises unless they are part of or at the centre of regional value chains

RUDRENDRA TANDON | MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

EPFO ONBOARDS AIR INDIA

Retirement fund body EPFO has onboarded Air India Ltd for social security benefits like PF, pension and insurance and has received contributions for about 7,453 employees for the month of December from the airline, a labour ministry statement said Saturday



of the day quote

We are working on the addition of new 35,000 tonne per year specialty based PVC capacity at Cuddalore to supplement our existing 66,000 tonne capacity at Mettur

RAMKUMAR SHANKAR | MD, CHEMPLAST SANMAR

It would be extremely helpful if, in the Budget, TDS rate for fintech startups is reduced to 1 per cent. This will free up much-needed working capital without costing the exchequer because the TDS is refunded in any case for loss making companies

KAPIL MEHTA | CO-FOUNDER, SECURENOW

The Port has prepared an action plan covering all activities of the Port including cargo handling, storing, evacuation and many other activities related to environmental protection

SANJAY SETHI | CHAIRMAN, JNPT

IMF urges El Salvador to lower Bitcoin push

The IMF expressed concern over El Salvador's growing exposure to Bitcoin's volatility and urged greater transparency

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, Jan 29: The International Monetary Fund said Friday that El Salvador should dissolve the \$150 million trust fund it created when it made the cryptocurrency Bitcoin legal tender and return any of those unused funds to its treasury.

The recommendation was part of the international lender's report on El Salvador's economy and went beyond its statement earlier this week urging El Salvador to drop Bitcoin as legal tender.

The trust fund was intended to allow the automatic conversion of Bitcoin to US dollars — El Salvador's other currency — to encourage people wary of adopting the highly-volatile digital currency.

The IMF also recommended eliminating the offer of \$30 as an incentive for people to start using the digital wallet "Chivo" and increasing regulation of the digital wallet to protect consumers. It suggested there could be benefits to the use of Chivo, but only using dollars, not Bitcoin.

"In the near-term the actual costs of implementing Chivo and



What we emphasize in the report is that having a digital wallet, that allows people to make digital means of payment and keep their savings there, especially in US dollars, can bring benefits to the economy as well as to growth but again, I'm emphasizing US dollar because bitcoin price is volatile

ALINA CARARE | HEAD OF THE IMF'S MISSION IN EL SALVADOR

operationalising the Bitcoin law exceed potential benefits," the report said.

Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment, but in recent days Bukele has been dismissive of the IMF's rec-

ommendation's concerning Bitcoin. Government officials told the IMF that the launch of "Chivo" had significantly increased financial inclusion, drawing millions of people who previously lacked bank accounts into the financial system. They also spoke of the parallel

AFTER NEARLY DOUBLING IN VALUE LATE LAST YEAR, BITCOIN HAS PLUNGED

EL SALVADOR AND THE IMF HAVE BEEN NEGOTIATING \$1.3 BILLION IN LENDING FOR MONTHS

tourism promotion targeting Bitcoin enthusiasts. The government did not see a need to scale back the scope of its Bitcoin law, but agreed regulation could be strengthened, according to the report.

Bukele led the push to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender alongside the US dollar. El Salvador's Legislative Assembly made the country the first to do so in June and the Bitcoin law went into effect in September.

After nearly doubling in value late last year, Bitcoin has plunged.

El Salvador and the IMF have been negotiating USD 1.3 billion in lending for months. Carare did not say if the possible loan would be held back if El Salvador continued using Bitcoin as legal tender.

When asked, Carare said, "we continue to have a strong engagement with the government of El Salvador."

BUDGET 2022-23

\$40bn for food & fert subsidy likely: Sources



REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 29: India is likely to set aside about 3 trillion rupees (\$40 billion) on food and fertiliser subsidies in its budget next week for 2022/23, officials said, roughly the same amount the government budgeted for this fiscal year ending in March.

India's subsidy bills have spiralled due to pandemic relief measures for the poor and a sharp rise in global prices of chemicals. New Delhi has already raised fertiliser subsidies twice in this fiscal year, and sources said that its payouts for 2021/22 could be its highest yet.

In the budget Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is due to present Tuesday, the government will allocate 1.1 trillion rupees to fertiliser subsidies, and 2 trillion rupees to food subsidies, three officials told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The fertiliser ministry had sought assistance of as much as 1.4 trillion rupees for 2022/23, another official said.

For the current fiscal year the finance ministry had budgeted 835 billion rupees for fertiliser subsidies, although the real allocation could rise to a record 1.5 trillion rupees.

The bulk of fertiliser subsidies are used to provide urea at a cheaper government-fixed rates to farmers. The government also provides a fixed amount of subsidy to companies for selling other fertilisers

Global fertiliser prices have surged over 200% over the last 12 months after record rises in the price of the two main energy sources - coal and natural gas - used to produce the crop nutrients

at lower rates to help farmer, a key vote bank. For food subsidies, India had budgeted 2.43 trillion rupees in 2021/22 although the government later provided an additional 600 billion rupees. India usually revises its budget for fertilisers and food subsidies upwards in the last few months of a fiscal year.

The 3 trillion rupee budget allocation for food and fertiliser subsidies is still higher than average in the seven years since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power, but far below what could be up to 4.8 trillion rupees that the government spent on the same this year.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sought to meet his long term goal of reducing subsidies by tackling corruption and mismanagement. Any reduction in subsidies will affect a vast voter base of farmers that accounts for nearly 60% of the population.

SHORT TAKES

Power demand to rise by 8-10%

New Delhi: India's electricity demand is now expected to rise in the range of 8-10 per cent during FY22, said HDFC Securities. The brokerage house had earlier predicted a 12 per cent rise in power demand in FY22. Accordingly, the downward revision of demand expectation is largely due to a prolonged winter and disruptions in demand caused by the rising corona cases in January 2022. Notably, the overall demand has increased by 9.5 per cent on year-on-year (YoY) basis in the "YTD FY22" period. "The proposed Electricity Amendment Bill 2021 is now delayed as the Centre has dropped the DBT on power subsidies from the same, besides dropping the provision of creating a new Electricity Contract Enforcement Authority," HDFC Securities said in a report.

Trade unions defer nationwide strike

New Delhi: A joint forum of central trade unions on Saturday said it has deferred its scheduled February 23-24 nationwide strike against government policies by a month in view of the third wave of the pandemic and state assembly polls. Friday, an online meeting of the joint platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and Sectoral Federations/Associations decided to defer the two-day nationwide strike to March 28-29, a joint statement said. November 11, 2021, the National Convention of Workers had decided to organize a nationwide strike on February 23-24 during the Budget Session of Parliament.

ICAI seeks 14 tax, accounting reforms

Kolkata: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has sought about 14 tax and accounting reforms in the upcoming Union Budget. The suggestions essentially aim at making laws simple, fair, transparent. Less litigious and user friendly, ICAI president Nihar N Jambusaria said. "There are about 14 suggestions from our end submitted to the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) for consideration," he said on the sidelines of an international conference of CA students. The suggestions include permitting carry back of losses and introducing suitable legislative amendments for its application. It is relevant for hospitality, passenger transport and some other sectors.

SBI gets approval for setting up 'bad bank'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Jan 29: The approvals required for setting up National Asset Reconstruction Company (NARCL) and India Debt Resolution Company (IDRCL), including from the RBI, have now been received, lending major SBI said Friday. Accordingly, both the companies are ready to commence their business.

In her Budget speech last year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the setting up of a "bad bank", including an asset reconstruction company and asset management company, to take over the existing stressed debt of banks.

Notably, a total of 38 accounts aggregating Rs 82,845 crore have been identified for transfer to NARCL.



However, the transfer will happen in a phased manner.

"Under Phase I, about 15 accounts, aggregating Rs 50,335 crore, are expected to be transferred in the current financial year, ie, on or before March 31, 2022," SBI said in a statement.

Besides, SBI said that IDRCL is

expected to bring in superior resolution techniques, preserve the value, show-case brown field assets and attract domestic as well as foreign investors and alternate investment funds, among others.

"This will maximise the value for all the stakeholders. This mechanism is also expected to free up

capital for the lending banks for deployment," SBI said.

According to the statement, both the companies have their respective boards in place, consisting of seasoned professionals from the market.

"To start with, both companies are having their MD and CEOs on secondment basis. Padmakumar Nair, a chief general manager from SBI's stressed assets vertical, will manage NARCL, while Manish Makharia, head of alternate investment fund, SBI Funds Management Pvt Ltd, will be heading IDRCL," the statement said.

"Subrata Biswas, the nominee director on the board of NARCL, will be the interim chairman, while Diwakar Gupta continues as the chairman of IDRCL," it added.

GLOBAL WOES

FII's pumped out \$13.5 billion from equity mkt since Oct '22

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Jan 29: Higher bond yields as well as a potential US Fed rate hike sparked a global risk-off sentiment, leading to elevated FII outflows in India, said Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

According to the brokerage house, \$13.5 billion in FIIs' outflows have taken place in the secondary markets since October 2021.

"Domestic equities have also borne the brunt of rich valuations after a relentless rally post the bottom in March 2020," the brokerage house said. "While the Nifty-50 has corrected just 8 per cent from its October 2021 peak thus far, it is hiding the stress in the broader markets."

Besides, it cited concerns around the cost of "equities going up" has taken a brutal toll on high growth stocks belonging to the Tech do-



main, with recently listed digital IPOs coming off 25-50 per cent off their recent highs. "The spike in crude oil prices to \$90 per barrel has further soured sentiment in India."

Furthermore, it said that with ultra-easy monetary policy set to reverse the course globally and in India, "we expect the equity markets to remain volatile as they adjust to the higher cost of the capi-

tal environment".

"This, in our view, would keep testing the expensive valuation multiples enjoyed by a section of the market in question. This is true for companies that lack profit or cash flow visibility in the near future - as rising interest rates would suppress the valuations of companies where positive cash flows have been modelled only into the distant future."

Musk: Biden treats Americans 'like fools'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

San Francisco, Jan 29: Tesla CEO Elon Musk said that US President Joe Biden "is treating the American public like fools" after Biden met with executives from rival car companies.

Biden invited GM CEO Mary Barra and Ford CEO Jim Farley to the White House along to discuss his administration's \$1.75 trillion Build Back Better legislation.

The massive spending bill would bump up the \$7,500 tax credit to \$12,500 for union-made electric vehicles and would also make GM and Tesla eligible for the existing tax credit again.

"Companies like GM and Ford are building more electric vehicles here at home than ever before," the president tweeted after the meeting, prompting the response from Musk that Biden was treating the American public "like fools". Musk also tweeted that "Biden is a damp [sock] puppet in human form" and "Starts with a T, Ends with an A, ESL in the middle."

Mundra Port berthed biggest container vessel to call India

MUNDRA PORT, INDIA'S BIGGEST COMMERCIAL PORT BY VOLUMES, IS A DEEP-WATER, ALL-WEATHER PORT, EQUIPPED TO HANDLE DRY BULK, BREAK BULK, PROJECT CARGO, LIQUID, CONTAINERS, AUTOMOBILES AND CRUDE OIL

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 29: Adani CMA Mundra Terminal Pvt Ltd (ACMTPL) a joint venture between Adani Ports & SEZ Ltd and CMA Terminals at Mundra, berthed APL Raffles, making it the largest container vessel to call India.

APL Raffles is one of the largest vessels in the fleet of CMA CGM. Built in 2013, this 1,76,727 DWT, 17,292 TEUs capacity vessel is 397.88 metre long and 51 meter wide. This is almost equivalent to

four football fields.

This is another important milestone for Mundra Port. In 2021, Mundra Port became the largest container port in India, and now the port has berthed, at one of its terminals, the largest container vessel to call India. The call of APL Raffles not only endorses the capabilities of the port to handle large container vessels, but also reiterates the role of ACMTPL in boosting trade between India and its key trading partners.

At the time of berthing the ves-



sel's draft was 14.8 m, displacement 2,01,548 MT and had a cargo of

13,159 TEUs on board. The ship has arrived from Middle East carry-

ing imports from Gulf, Greater China and Southeast Asia. The vessel exchanged close to 4,000 TEUs of import, export and transshipment containers while it was berthed at Mundra Port. APL Raffles will continue her onward journey to Far East Asia.

Mundra Port continues to attract large size ships consolidating its position as the most preferred gateway of Indian EXIM cargoes, especially agri products and manufactured goods. Other significantly large container vessels which have called on Mundra

Port are MSC Regulus which has an LOA of 366.45 m MSC Valeria which has an LOA of 366 m.

The port offers 26 berths and two single-point moorings with an annual capacity to handle 248.82 MMT cargo with dedicated terminals for different cargo and commodity types.

Mundra Port, India's biggest commercial port by volumes, is a deep-water, all-weather port, equipped to handle dry bulk, break bulk, project cargo, liquid, containers, automobiles and crude oil.

BARTY ENDS 44-YR DROUGHT

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, Jan 29: Ash Barty recovered from 1-5 down in the second set to win the Australian Open final 6-3, 7-6(7-2) over Danielle Collins on Saturday, ending a 44-year drought for Australian women at their home Grand Slam tournament.

Barty was the first Australian woman into the singles final here since Wendy Turnbull in 1980 and is now the first Australian champion since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

The top-ranked Barty now has major titles on three surfaces, adding the hard court at Melbourne Park to her win on grass at Wimbledon last year and on

clay at the French Open in 2019. "This is just a dream come true for me," the 25-year-old Barty said. "I'm just so proud to be an Aussie."

Evoque Goolagong Cawley, a tennis icon with seven Grand Slam titles and a trailblazer for Indigenous athletes from Australia, was a surprise guest to present the champion's trophy to Barty, who is part of a new generation of Indigenous stars.

O'Neil was involved in the night, too, after carrying the trophy into the stadium for the pre-match ceremony. "I'm an incredibly fortunate and lucky girl to have so much love in my corner," Barty said, thanking her coach and support team, her family, the organizers and the crowd. Barty had-

dropped a set and had only conceded one service game through six matches, against American

Amanda Anisimova in the fourth round.

The 28-year-old Collins was the fourth American to take on Barty in four consecutive rounds. Barty had beaten Anisimova, Jessica Pegula and 2017 US Open runner-up Madison Keys in straight sets.

Collins had spent more than four hours longer on court than Barty in her previous six matches, having to come back from a set and break down to beat Danish teenager Clara Tauson in the third round and rally from a set down to beat Elise Mertens in the fourth.

Barty took the first set after saving a break point in the fifth game and then breaking in the next. Not to be outdone, Collins hit back quickly with her high-intensity game, breaking Barty's serve in the second and sixth games to take a 5-1 lead. Collins twice served for the set and twice was within two points of leveling the match and taking her first Grand Slam final to a deciding set.

But Barty launched a comeback, picking up the energy from an almost full house in Rod Laver Arena, despite government restrictions on ticket sales in the COVID-19 pandemic.

She won five of the next six games to force a tiebreaker and then took control by racing to a 4-0 lead. "As an Aussie, the most important part of this tournament is being able to share it with so many people," Barty said.

"This crowd is one of the most fun I've ever played in front of. You relaxed me, forced me to play my best tennis."

Barty congratulated Collins and told her she "absolutely" belonged in the Top 10, adding: "I know you'll be fighting for many of these in future."

The run to the final was the best at a Grand Slam so far for Collins, who reached the semifinals in Australia in 2019 and the quarterfinals at Roland Garros.

She paid tribute to her longtime mentor Marty Schneider and her boyfriend Joe Vollen, who were in the stands for support.

"Thank you for believing in me," she said, crying. "I haven't had a ton of people believing me in my career. To support me every step of the way means everything to me."



Rafa, Medvedev chasing history



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne, Jan 29: Since Wimbledon ended last July, there's been so much discussion in tennis about the first man to win 21 Grand Slam titles.

The focus has been almost entirely on Novak Djokovic's bid; almost none of it on Rafael Nadal. With the first Grand Slam title of 2022 to be determined Sunday, it's Nadal who is just one win away.

He'll play the Australian Open final against US Open champion Daniil Medvedev, who is aiming for back-to-back major titles and his own, albeit smaller, piece of history.

So long in the making, so many months off the tour for Nadal, and so much drama around Djokovic's deportation the night before his Australian Open title defense was due to begin, makes the race for 21 so much more compelling.

Nadal, only last month, wasn't even sure if he'd get to Australia after long hours of frustrating and intensive rehabilitation on his foot injury that can never be fully fixed, and a bout of COVID-19.

"For me, it's all about the Australian Open more than anything else," Nadal said. "Being very honest, for me it's much more important to have the chance to play tennis than win the 21, no?"

Nadal is tied for the record, 20, with the absent Djokovic—a nine-time Australian Open champion who had his visa revoked for fail-

ing to meet the country's strict COVID-19 requirements — and Roger Federer, who still recovering from right knee surgery.

Nadal moved to 20 with his French Open title in 2020. Federer, now 40, has been stuck on 20 since winning the 2018 Australian title. Djokovic moved from 17 to 20 with titles in Australia, Roland Garros and Wimbledon in 2021. He was one win victory from making it to 21 — and completing a calendar-year Grand Slam — until he lost to Medvedev in the US Open final.

Medvedev lost to Nadal in five sets in the 2019 US Open final — his first at a Grand Slam — and lost to Djokovic in straight sets in the 2021 Australian Open final, before beating the Serbian star in straight sets at New York in September.

Any debate about which of the Big Three players will be considered the greatest of all isn't a concern for him.

Nadal is also trying to block out all the noise. He's said more than once that this Australian Open is his primary focus, and his life's work and meaning ultimately won't be overshadowed by who finishes up with the most major titles.

He hasn't changed anything about his ultra competitiveness on the court which, he says, is embedded in his DNA. But he's more conscious now of being grateful for being back on tour after times when he thought a foot problem might prematurely end his tennis career.

Starc 'was' on verge of quitting cricket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Jan 29: Not long before an incredible turnaround culminated in him winning Australia's men's cricketer of the year award, Mitchell Starc was on the verge of quitting the sport.

Starc was not taking the number of wickets expected of a pacer of his calibre. He was also leaking plenty of runs on the field and, off it, he was losing his father to cancer.

While Starc managed to keep his cricket going despite a below-par outing against India in the 2020-21 Test series at home, he lost his father to the dreaded disease soon after.

"Obviously last year was particularly tough on and off the field," Starc was quoted as saying by foxsports.Com.Au after winning the Allan Border Medal, the highest individual award in Australian men's cricket.

Looking back at the tumultuous phase, he added, "I probably didn't play the cricket I wanted to and, at certain stages, I probably didn't



He ended the Ashes as one of

the team's key performers in its 4-0 drubbing of England. Starc played in all the five Ashes Tests and finished with 19 wickets at an average of 25.37.

"I think, what was it? It was a straight half-volley on leg stump I think someone (Warne) said," said Starc on the criticism from the legendary Australian spinner.

"What would you like me to speak to him (Warne) about? It doesn't interest me at all. He's (Warne) entitled to his opinion. I'm just going to go about my cricket the way I'd like to, and I've got my family support networks and I get to play cricket with some of my best mates, so I'm pretty comfortable with where I'm at," said Starc.

Starc, who took 43 wickets across all formats in the 12-month period, edged out all-rounder Mitchell Marsh by one vote.

He is only the fifth fast bowler since its inception to win the award, joining Pat Cummins, Mitchell Johnson, Brett Lee and Glenn McGrath. It was double delight for Starc as he also won the men's ODI Player of the Year.

Teen Unnati stuns Malvika

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cuttack, Jan 29: Fourteen-year-old Unnati Hooda kept her calm in a hard-fought straight-game victory over Indian Open finalist Malvika Bansod to enter the women's singles final of the Odisha Open here Saturday.

The 14-year-old Unnati pipped Malvika 24-22, 24-22 in a nail-biting 50-minute semifinal clash at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium. Malvika has been in good nick recently, having defeated her idol Saina Nehwal at the India Open earlier this month before losing to PV Sindhu in the final of the Syed Modi International last week.

She had also defeated junior World No.1 Tasnim Mir in the pre-quarterfinals here. The win against Malvika would be a huge confidence booster for Unnati, who is ranked 418th in the world.

In the other women's singles semifinal, World No.163 Smit Toshniwal upset fifth seed and higher-ranked Ashmita Chaliha, 21-19, 10-21, 21-17 in one hour one



minute to set up a summit clash with Unnati.

Priyanshu Rajawat and Kiran George advanced to the final of the men's singles event with contrasting wins. While Priyanshu wrapped up proceeding with a 21-17, 21-14 straight game victory over Kaushal Dharmamer in 36 minutes, Kiran had to dig deep and came from behind to win 19-21, 21-



12, 21-14 against compatriot Ansal Yadav.

The men's doubles pair of Ravikrishna PS and Sankar Prasad Udaykumar prevailed over compatriots Vasantha Kumar Ranganatha and Ashith Surya 21-12, 18-21, 21-18 to advance to the final.

They will face Malaysians Nur Mohd Ayub Azriyn and Li Khim

Wah, who notched a 15-21, 21-18, 21-17 over the Sri Lankan duo of Sachin Dias and Buwenna Goonethilleka, in the summit clash Sunday.

Also sealing a final's berth was the eighth seed Indian women's doubles duo of Sanyogita Ghorpade and Shruti Mishra with a 10-21, 21-18, 21-17 win over the Indo-Australian pairing of Srivedya Gurazada and Ishika Jaiswal.

They will take on the fifth seed pairing of Treesa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand, who brushed aside compatriots Arul Bala Radhakrishnan and Nila Valluvan 21-9, 21-6. The mixed doubles duo of MR Arjun and Treesa Jolly also advanced to the final with an easy 21-9, 21-9 win over compatriots Balkeshari Yadav and Swetaparna Panda.

With the win, Arjun and Jolly set up a summit clash with the Sri Lankan pair of Sachin Dias and Thilini Hendahwa, who dispatched Indians Maurayan Kathiravan and Kuhan Balashri, 21-8, 21-17 in little less than half an hour.

Lakshya, Malvika to lead India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 29: India Open champion Lakshya Sen and Syed Modi International finalist Malvika Bansod will lead the Indian men's and women's squad in the Badminton Asia Team Championships to be played at Shah Alam, Malaysia from February 15-20.

The Badminton Association of India (BAI) announced a new look team for the continental team championship giving importance to the performances in the two All India Ranking tournaments played in Chennai and Hyderabad last month.

The players were selected on the basis of aggregate ranking points scored in the two events. "We have been considering domestic tournaments for selection for a while now and selecting players in the top 25 world ranking directly. But with most senior players recovering from Covid and injury, it is a good opportunity for us to give the bench strength opportunities to make their mark in the tournament," BAI secretary Ajay Singhania said in a statement.



bronze medal in the last edition of the tournament in Manila, Philippines while the women's team was withdrawn due to the pandemic as most players were not willing to travel then.

The men's doubles charge will be led by Kerala's PS Ravi Krishna and Udaykumar Shankarprasad, who also impressed with their performance against the experienced Malaysian combination of Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi at the

TEAMS
MEN'S SINGLES: Lakshya Sen, Mithun Manjunath, Kiran George, Raghu M;
MEN'S DOUBLES: PS Ravi Krishna/Udaykumar ShankarPrasad, Amsakarunan Hariharan/Ruban Kumar, Dingku Singh Konthoujam/Manjit Singh Khwairakpam.
WOMEN'S SINGLES: Malvika Bansod, Aakarshi Kashyap, Ashmita Chaliha, Tara Shah;
WOMEN'S DOUBLES: Simran Singhi/Khushi Gupta, V Nila/Arubala, Aarshi Sara Sunil/Riza Mahreen.

India Open. The combination of Simran Singhi and Khushi Gupta along with the experienced Aarshi

Sara Sunil and Riza Mahreen would look to make a mark in women's doubles.

India bowl B'desh out for 111

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Coolidge (Antigua), Jan 29: Left-arm seamer Ravi Kumar bowled a sensational opening spell as India restricted defending champions Bangladesh for a meagre 111 in only 37.1 overs in the last quarterfinal of the ICC U-19 World Cup here Saturday.

Son of a CRPF personnel, Uttar Pradesh-born Ravi, who has followed footsteps of his illustrious state senior Mohammed Shami to ply his trade for Bengal, ended with excellent figures of 7-1-14-3 on a tacky track where batting wasn't the easiest of jobs.

Bangladesh were 56/7 at one stage before SM Mehrob (30) and Ashiqur Zaman (16) added 50 for the eighth wicket to take the team past 100-run mark.

In fact, this is the same ground where Afghanistan defended a lowly total of 134 against Sri Lanka in the opening quarterfinal the other day.

India won a good toss and Ravi made full use of the moisture underneath with initial movement in the air helping team's cause.

Ravi, who has the natural ability to bring the ball back into right-handers, had right-handed Mahfijul Islam (2) beaten all-ends up to an inswinger in the second over. His opening partner left-handed



Ravi Kumar is congratulated by a teammate after taking a wicket, Saturday

Iftakher Hossain (1) was done in by the slowness of the track as he tried to square cut and was held at point by vice-captain Shaikh Rasheed.

One drop batter Prantik Nawrose (7) was not at all comfortable during his stay and was late into the drive to a delivery that swung away only to offer a catch to Kaushal Tamble in the slips. Down at 14/3 in the eighth over,

there was no coming back for Bangladesh boys as they started losing wickets at regular intervals.

Left-arm spinner Vicky Ostwal (9-1-25-2) was consistent as ever with his flight and dip which was not very easy for the opposition batters.

BRIEF SCORES: Bangladesh U-19 111 (SM Mehrob 30; Ravi Kumar 3/14, Vicky Ostwal 2/25) v India U-19. Match to continue.