



PC's PRIORITY

Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas says she is looking for people who are peaceful and can give love

LEISURE P2



LONGEST RECORDED FLASH

A bolt of lightning which stretched nearly 770km in the US in 2020 is the longest recorded single flash, says WMO

INTERNATIONAL P10



NEERAJ NOMINATED

Neeraj Chopra gets nomination for prestigious Laureus 'World Breakthrough of the Year' award

SPORTS P12

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LIC IPO in March, says DIPAM

New Delhi: The government is likely to file draft papers for the mega initial public offering of LIC with market regulator Sebi by next week, Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Secretary to the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) said Wednesday. He informed that the approval of the insurance regulator is awaited, post which the draft prospectus, detailing the size of the share sale, will be filed. The issue, after approval of Sebi, is likely to hit the market in March, stated Pandey. LIC's listing is crucial for the government to meet the lowered revenue estimates of ₹78,000 crore for the current fiscal.



Renowned poet breathes his last

Bhubaneswar: Noted poet and Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award winner Professor Pramod Kumar Mohanty passed away here, Wednesday morning. He was 82. Mohanty was conferred with the prestigious award in the year 2008 for 'Asaranti Anasara', a collection of poems. He also won the 63rd Annual Bishuba Samman, an award instituted by former Odisha Chief Minister Harekrishna Mahatab and 'Prajatantra Prachar Samiti', Cuttack. A native of Bagalpur, Cuttack, Mohanty was a teacher of psychology while poetry was his passion. He had authored 10 anthologies in Odia. Among his famous works are 'Kramasha', 'Devipada', 'Akatakata', 'Shyahi Chhita', 'Akshyara Seba' and 'Chitra Chitraka Chitrapedi'.

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IDOLS IN DEMAND



Ahead of Saraswati Puja, a customer buys an idol of the goddess at Dolamundai Square in Cuttack, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

DECKS CLEARED FOR ULB POLLS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: The State Election Commission (SEC) has set the ball rolling for the much awaited elections to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs). Elections have not been conducted to the ULBs since 2018 even though the tenures of the civic bodies have expired. At present, administrators are looking into the development aspect and daily affairs of the civic bodies.

The SEC is likely to announce the dates in March after the panchayat polls which is scheduled to be held in five phases between February 16 and 24. The counting and declaration of results will take place February 26, 27 and 28. The delimitation and reservation of seats in the ULBs have been completed. The polls will be held in three municipal corporations, 48 municipalities and 59 notified area councils (NACs).



ADITYA PRASAD PADHI

"All district collectors have submitted the delimitation and reservation lists to the commission. Odisha government has also furnished the delimitation and reservation lists of three municipal corporations. Therefore, the process for holding ULB polls can start now," State Election Commissioner Aditya Prasad Padhi said Wednesday. Of the total 1,756 wards, 688 wards are unreserved while 122 are reserved for SCs, 171 for SC women, 49 for STs and 133 for ST women. A total of 613 wards have been reserved for women. **MORE P4**

₹9.7K cr for Odisha in Railway Budget

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: In the Railway Budget for the 2022-23 fiscal, the East Coast Railway (ECOR) has got ₹10,316 crore. It is an increase of 62 per cent over last fiscal's allocation of ₹6,375 crore. Odisha on the other hand, have got an allocation of ₹9,734 for development of railway projects.

For new tracks ₹1,805 crore has been allocated for 2022-23. It is 16% more than last year's budget allotment of ₹1553.35 crore.

Among the new tracks are Angul-Sukinda Road (98.7km, ₹475 crore), ₹85 crore for Haridaspur-Paradip (82km), ₹891 crore for Khurda-Bolangir, ₹250 crore for Talcher-Bimlagarh (154km), ₹13.8 crore for Jeypore - Malkangiri (130km), ₹81 crore for Jeypore - Nabarangpur (38km) and ₹10 crore for Nuapada-Gunupur new broad gauge line up to Theruvali (79.15km).

For doubling of tracks a total of ₹4236.95 crore has been allocated, an increase of 110 per cent than the amount (₹2020.57 crore) given in the last fiscal.

Some of the important ongoing doubling track projects are Khurda-Barang - 3rd line (35 km, ₹164 crore, Sambalpur-Talcher (174.11km, ₹172.5 crore and Sambalpur-Titilagarh (182.1km ₹99.53 crore).

For improving and modernising the signal system ₹49.76 crore has been provided which is 103 per cent more than last fiscal's allotment of ₹24.50 crore.

For road over bridge/under-bridge constructions a total of ₹567.12 crore has been provided in the 2022-23 fiscal. For other electrical work including TRD, the budgetary grant for the same period is ₹937 crore.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



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Kidnappers caught after thrilling chase

In the 36-hour long operation, police used latest technology to zero in on and nab the 4 miscreants while ensuring the safety of the victim

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: It was as if a few scenes from a Hindi movie potboiler were being enacted. First there was the abduction, then the chase and finally the freeing of the kidnapped with the arrest of four of the accused. It couldn't have been a more nerve jangling 36 hours for all those involved.

Twin City Commissionerate Police arrested Wednesday four persons for allegedly kidnapping the son of a businessman in the state capital. They had demanded a ransom of ₹30 lakh to free the victim. However, their plans went awry due to the prompt action by the police, Commissioner Saumendra Priyadarsi informed.

Ishan Agarwal, a BBA student was having tea at a stall near Jharpada when he was abducted at gunpoint by three youths Monday evening. Ishan was studying in



The four accused in police custody

Bangalore, but had come down here as his institute had closed down due to the third wave of the pandemic. The youths forced Ishan into a car and fled the spot.

The kidnappers then phoned Ishan's father Ramrup Agarwal and demanded ransom. They also sent a picture of Ishan with a knife being held at his throat. Ramrup then filed a complaint with the Laxmisagar police station and the cops swung into action.

Four police teams were formed to handle the case. However, what made the job of the police doubly difficult was that the kidnappers were operating in three groups. One group held Ishan captive, the other would in turn contact the third team which then would call up Ishan's father, police said.

Using the latest technology, the police finally managed to trace the

group that was holding Ishan captive. He was finally rescued from a forest in Sunakhala area on Khurda-Nayagarh border Wednesday. Even though four of the accused have been arrested, three others are still at large.

The accused have been identified as Ram Krishna of Berhampur, Santosh Rout of Sambalpur, Dhanswar Patra of Nayagarh and Mustaq Ali of Khandagiri locality here. Police said all the four are professional kidnappers and were involved in a similar case in Berhampur. Police have also seized a car, sharp weapons and five mobile phones from the accused.

"After kidnapping the youth, the miscreants held him hostage in a car and continued to move, from Bhubaneswar to Khurda and Berhampur and then from there to Nayagarh. The miscreants travelled nearly 800kms after kidnapping the youth," informed Priyadarsi.

"One of our teams managed to be on their trail. It covered around 700kms, successfully nabbed the kidnappers and freed the victim," Priyadarsi added. He said that police will produce all the four in court Thursday to seek their custodial remand for seven days.

Budget lacks thrust on employment: SJM

The RSS-affiliate has also demanded complete ban on cryptocurrencies and said digital currency may create money-laundering issues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: The RSS-affiliated Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) criticised the Union Budget 2022-23 as it 'lacks a push for employment'. However, it also said that a 'quantum jump' of 35 per cent in capital expenditure, taking it to over ₹7.5 lakh crore, can improve the future growth prospects in India. The body noted with concern that 'very limited efforts' have been taken towards promotion of small scale industries and creation of employment in Indian.

"Union Budget 2022-23 is good for growth, but lacks push on employment," the SJM said in a statement. "Swadeshi Jagran Manch expresses its concerns for very limited efforts towards promotion of small scale industry and creation of employment in the country."

The RSS body said there was 'an urgent need' to promote self-employment in India for which central as well as state governments need to push entrepreneurship development programmes and infuse more funds for small busi-

CRISIL shoots down GDP growth figures

Mumbai: Domestic rating agency CRISIL estimated FY23 real GDP growth at 7.8 per cent as compared with the 8.5 per cent projected in the Economic Survey. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget proposals focused on loosening the purse strings by boosting capital expenditure and going slow on fiscal consolidation are aimed in the right direction, the rating agency said. "All said, risks to India's economic outlook are still skewed towards the downside," it said. CRISIL estimated the growth to slow to 7.8 per cent in FY23 from the 9.2 per cent in FY22.

nesses 'which can motivate the youth to start their own enterprises'. There is also a need for an entrepreneurship development centre in each district of India, the SJM said.

The SJM also said that it is against digital currency. It noted that the budget has provided for taxing income from virtual digital assets at the rate of 30 per cent.

However, it said that 'looking at the dangers of national security, the menace of money-laundering and other related dangers emanating from the transactions in cryptos, ban on private crypto currencies is the only solution'.

Odisha govt sacks corrupt IAS officer

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: The Odisha government has dismissed senior IAS officer and former managing director of the Odisha Rural Housing Development Corporation (ORHDC), Vinod Kumar from service on corruption charges. This action was taken after the corruption charges levelled against Kumar were found to be true. The Centre also accorded necessary clearances to this effect, official sources said here Wednesday.

Kumar is a 1989-batch IAS officer. He is accused of sanctioning funds of ₹33.34 crore through unfair means in the aftermath of the Super Cyclone. At that time, he was serving as the MD of the ORHDC. As a result, the Odisha government suffered huge financial losses.

Following this, the Odisha government had filed 27 vigilance cases against Kumar. He has been convicted in two of the cases. Earlier in July 2018, the official was convicted by the Vigilance court here on charges of cheating and corruption during his tenure.

VIG GLARE ON ANOTHER BABU

Bhubaneswar: Odisha Vigilance officials raided Wednesday six places simultaneously in connection with allegation against Nuapada Assistant Civil Supplies Officer (ACSO) Ratnakar Sethy regarding possession of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. Till the time of writing this copy huge amount of cash and gold and silver jewellery have been unearthed by the vigilance officials. So far assets worth ₹6.73 crore has been unearthed officials said.

Vinod had sanctioned loans by showing undue favour to various fictitious real estate firms and NGOs without conducting verifications for housing reconstruction after the Super Cyclone. Sources said he did not have the authority to sanction the loans. It should be stated here that the Odisha government has always taken strong action against corruption. As per its 'zero tolerance towards corruption' policy, the state has recently given compulsory retirement to a senior IFS officer Abhay Kanta Pathak.

BCCI expecting ₹45K cr windfall from IPL

Many new entities like Amazon, Disney Star, Facebook are keen to enter the IPL arena. This is certainly going to spark a bidding war with the BCCI set to make a kill

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 2: The BCCI is expecting a windfall from the media rights deal ahead of IPL-15. Several networks, such as Sony Sports Network, global giants Disney Star Network, Reliance-Viacom 18 and Amazon among others, are in the fray to grab the IPL media rights.

The rights will be up for grabs for four years (from 2023 to 2027) and are likely to be sold through an e-auction in the last week of March.

Sources said that the BCCI could earn almost three times the sum it grossed for the 2018-2022 cycle when Star India bought the rights for more than ₹16,347 crore. The BCCI now expects the sum to triple in the 2023-27 cycle. Reports say it could be in the range of ₹40,000 to ₹45,000 crore.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly had estimated that the rights will be sold for approximately ₹35,000 crore. However, sources pointed out that it will be much more than that.



"Indian cricket is up for a bumper harvest from the sale of new cycle of IPL rights. Don't be surprised if it touches (₹) 40,000 to 45,000 crore. Let's wait for the magic to unfold," a BCCI official said Wednesday.

The BCCI could release the media rights tender to coincide with the IPL 2022 mega auction scheduled to be held in Bangalore, February 12 to 13.

Disney Star Network has stated that they are more than keen to bid for the rights for the next cycle. "Sports business for us is in an investment mode and we won't shy away from investing heavily. We are going to be bullish on all rights renewals including IPL," K Madhavan, president of 'The Walt Disney Co India and Star India' has been quoted as saying by a website.

With several names in the fray, grabbing the media rights could

lead to a bidding war. Two more entities, Reliance-Viacom 18 and Amazon, are likely to apply along with Sony Sports Network. Sony too has expanded after its merger with Zee and clinching the IPL property could give a huge boost to the network.

Reliance-Viacom 18 could signal their entry into the big Indian cricket market with an ambitious bid for the IPL media rights, while Amazon Prime have already declared their intention to wholeheartedly go for the same. It has started streaming cricket events. Other big names doing the rounds for digital streaming include Facebook and Google.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	59558.33	↑ 695.76
NIFTY	17780.00	↑ 203.20
DOLLAR	75.59	↓ ₹0.08
EURO	84.78	↑ ₹0.20
GOLD	₹47,810	↓ ₹155
SILVER	₹61,497	↑ ₹139

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	31.2°C	31.6°C
TEMP MIN	16.0°C	14.5°C
Humidity	87%	88%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Mainly clear sky	

leisure



SIMON COWELL HOSPITALISED AFTER SECOND BIKE CRASH

Veteran producer and reality TV judge Simon Cowell, who broke his back in a bike accident in 2020, suffered another mishap last week and was hospitalised. "Simon was on the e-bike when it slipped on a wet patch," a source close to Cowell told *The Mirror*.

VICTORIA HAS EATEN 'SAME THING' EVERY DAY FOR 25 YEARS: BECKHAM

Fashionista Victoria Beckham, who has been married to former footballer David Beckham since 1999 rarely deviates from a diet of fish and vegetables. "Unfortunately I'm married to someone that has eaten the same thing for the last 25 years. Since I met her she only eats grilled fish and steamed vegetables," said David.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today, you need to access every bit of your mental agility. Quick and spontaneous decisions are the need of the hour. But a word of caution from Ganesh: take advice, as these decisions could have long-term implications, especially if they involve money.

TAURUS

You are likely to become too ambitious today and strive to outdo others. So says Ganesh. You will be over eager to do some thing big, lay your hands on something precious and valuable. Though you are quite likely to succeed to some extent you over enthusiasm may land you in serious problems that may affect your persona; and private life.

GEMINI

You are likely to take a break from daily routine. A pleasure trip to recharge your batteries is on the charts, predicts Ganesh. Winning favours from members of the opposite sex comes naturally to you. If you love someone, you will make your move today. Evening will be about doing medication, and getting attuned to yourself or maybe your sweetheart.

CANCER

Ganesh portends that you will remain invincible and unbeatable throughout the day. However, today will be as boring and uneventful as it gets. It will be just another day at office, and an equally simple day at home.

LEO

Sometimes, it takes courage to be honest and admit to your failures. Doing so only goes a long way in establishing your credentials as a real person, feels Ganesh. So understand that, while it is only human to make mistakes, it takes more than that to accept them.

VIRGO

A renewed zest for life will bring in a transformation in you. It is a good time to let people know how important and intelligent - yes, you can be both - are. Your eminence will be obvious as you show how things are meant to be done.

LIBRA

Good news! You will be a people's person today. Close friends, relatives and family - you seem to want to spend your time with all of them today, says Ganesh. Better news? Your romantic brilliance will be at its peak today as your fancy takes wings and creativity flows freely in manners that seem irresistible.

SCORPIO

A cascade of let-downs will dent your confidence and shake your determination, says Ganesh. But don't let these failures affect you as they are temporary. At work, your subordinates may force you to take drastic measures.

SAGITTARIUS

You nearly become a superhero in the eyes of your near and dear ones, says Ganesh. And what more? You loving your new avatar. Good news is on its way as promotion or increment is on the cards.

CAPRICORN

You may not get as popular as Romeo did, but your exceedingly romantic nature will earn you quite a reputation, not to forget the hypnotic effect it will have on your sweetheart, says Ganesh. On the flip side, troubles will chase you everywhere; you are likely to face problems with your business rivals and health condition, but your mind will be on guard always, giving you an edge over your opponents.

AQUARIUS

Today is an important day in the larger scheme of things. You may finally decide to buy a home, change your job, or marry! Sudden and unexpected profits are on the cards too. Reputation and rewards are all yours today.

PISCES

You are human enough to make mistakes, and humble enough to admit them, and it is this honesty that people admire in you. Your affectionate nature will see you excel at tending to the needs of your family members today, says Ganesh.

PC's quest for 'Peace'

Actor Priyanka Chopra says she is looking for people who are peaceful and can give love

Los Angeles: After announcing the birth of her baby girl, actress Priyanka Chopra graced her first magazine cover.

Priyanka Tuesday posed for a number of photos and appeared in a number of behind-the-scenes videos which were all shared online by *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*. Priyanka expressed her gratitude for her family and thought on how the pandemic has affected her.

Priyanka said, "Seeing the havoc that this pandemic created around the world, I think peace is of utmost importance at the moment. And I know that in my life, that's become my quest."

She went on to say, "That's all I

look for. I'm looking for people that give love, I'm looking for people that are peaceful. I'm gonna surround myself with just joy and light. And as a human being, it changed me as I'm sure it changed most of us. I don't know if I can do that chaotic pace and chaotic world anymore. I want to prioritize what's important."

In January, Priyanka Chopra and Nick Jonas shared a joint statement on their social media accounts announcing the birth of their daughter.

Meanwhile, Priyanka is gearing up for *Text For You*, and *Citadel* next. AGENCIES



'Have dated many useless boyfriends'

Mumbai: Taapsee Pannu and Tahir Raj Bhasin will soon be seen in the film *Loop Lapeta* which is all set to release February 4 on Netflix. The film promises to be an adventurous ride through a sticky situation where a girlfriend is on a mission to rescue her boyfriend. As the plot unfolds, a series of events constantly prompts the lovers to make choices that define their future.

Ahead of the release of the film, when Taapsee was asked how would she define a useless boyfriend, she said, "Someone like Satya (Tahir's character in *Loop Lapeta*), who knows to make money only from gambling."

Further when asked, if she has ever dated any useless boyfriend, the actress responded, "Yes, many".

Loop Lapeta is the Hindi adaptation of Tom Tykwer's celebrated cult classic *Run Lola Run* and the directorial feature film debut of Aakash Bhatia. The film also brings together the best of both genres - comedy and thriller - with a pinch of action, making this the perfect entertainer that'll have audiences hooked. AGENCIES



What makes Ayushmann humble

Mumbai: Actor Ayushmann Khurrana, who has never shied away from touching upon taboo subjects, says he feels humbled if he has set an agenda for content in the country.

Ayushmann has played gay man on screen (*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*), played a bald hero (*Bala*), played a hero with erectile dysfunction (*Shubh Mangal Saavdhan*), a sperm donor (*Vicky Donor*), tackled how every body type should be celebrated (*Dum Laga Ke Haisha*), backed a film about the inclusivity of the transgender community in India through *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*.

Asked to comment on how he has been the only star driving important social conversations in the country for the last five years through his content-pole cinema, Ayushmann says, "I have always felt that films that not only entertain people to their fullest but also leave a message for everyone to ponder over in the most

unique and fun way, are movies that are the most engaged with and discussed heavily."

He adds, "In my pursuit to find the best scripts that the Hindi film industry can make, if I have found myself projects, directors and film-makers to set an agenda for content in my country, then I'm deeply humbled."

IANS



Free Red Bull energy drinks for frontline Covid warriors

Cuttack: The student marketers of Red Bull Energy Drinks, a well known caffeinated beverage brand, recently distributed chilled cans of the drinks among the frontline Covid warriors - doctors, nurses and other medical staff members - at a hospital here.

The initiative was undertaken as a token of appreciation and gratitude towards the selfless and relentless services of the frontline warriors to the affected people. The idea was to make sure that each and every working mem-



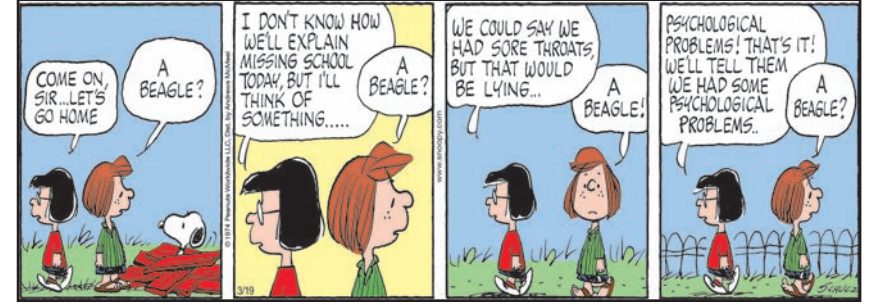
ber of the hospital was energised as they all work for extended hours due to Covid-19.

Red Bull Odisha is offering free cans to the active members of various hospitals, police stations and media houses in the state to mo-

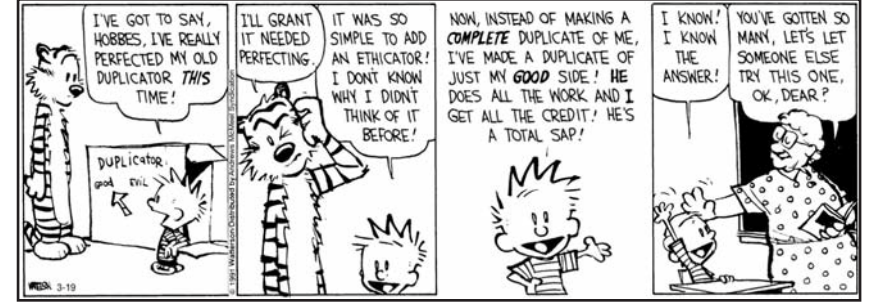
tivate them. The student marketers carried hand sanitiser bottles, put on double face masks and carried their double vaccination certificates to comply with the Covid guidelines laid down by the authorities. PNN

FUN post

PEANUTS



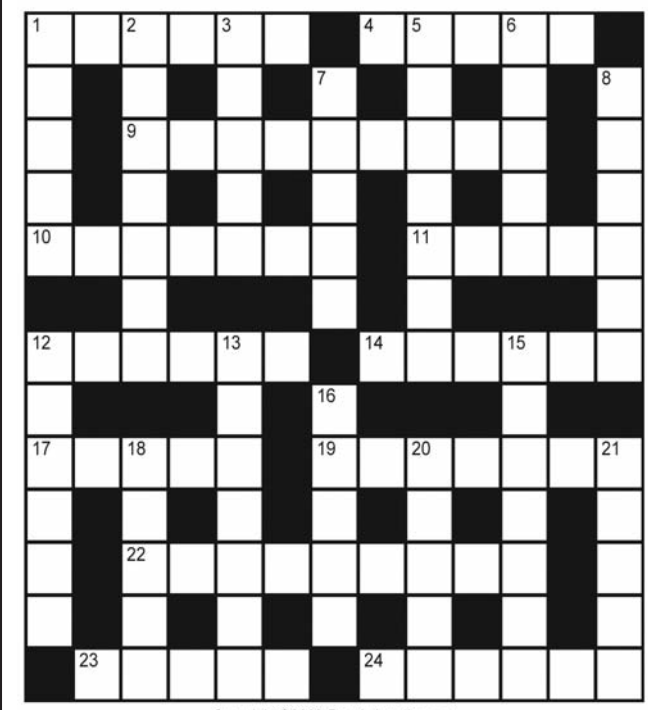
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



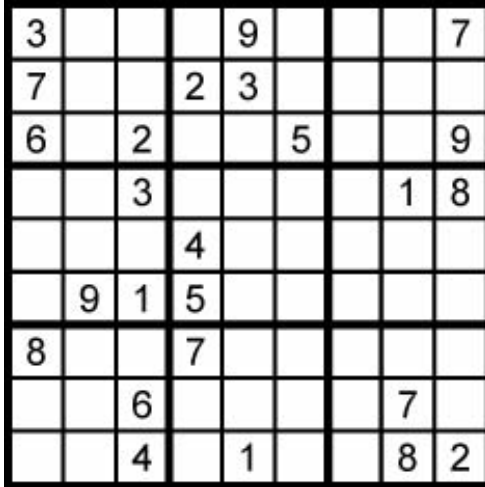
CROSSWORD



- Copyright ©2022 PuzzleJunction.com
- Across**
- 1 Withstand
 - 4 Baby bird?
 - 9 Common forest denizen (5,4)
 - 10 Prized edible fungus
 - 11 Lightning units
 - 12 One of the Gorgons
 - 14 Piled
 - 17 Heavenly gift
 - 19 ___ of Hercules
 - 22 Off-the-cuff
 - 23 Medicinal plant
 - 24 Plaster of Paris starter
- Down**
- 1 Man of steel?
 - 2 Tamed
 - 3 Winter warmer
 - 5 Shiver and shake
 - 6 Bucolic
 - 7 Shooting sport
 - 8 Razzed
 - 12 Copies
 - 13 Intensity
 - 15 Pub handouts
 - 16 Eating utensil
 - 18 Gullible
 - 20 Impertinent
 - 21 Red Cross supply

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



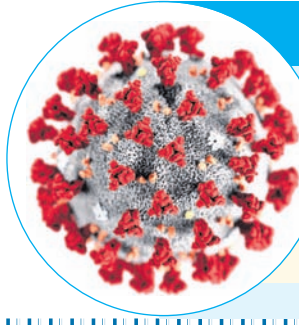
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



HOLY LOGS

Logs from Daspalla forest in Nayagarh district reach the Holy City, Wednesday, for construction of chariots for this year's Rath Yatra



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	38,30,21,870	30,34,71,920	57,08,447
India	4,16,30,885	3,95,11,307	4,97,975
Odisha	12,55,776	12,15,380	8,648

Allocation for MGNREGA down by 25 per cent: Jena



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Panchayati Raj Minister Pratap Jena Wednesday said the allocation towards Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the Union Budget 2022-23 is much less than the last year's budgetary allocation.

This year's Budget has allocated ₹73,000 crore for MGNREGA, which is much less in comparison to the last year's allocation of ₹98,000 crore, Jena said.

"It is almost 25.51 per cent less than the last year's figure. It is not true to say that the demand for

It is not true to say that the demand for wage employment under MGNREGA is decreasing. Many people in Odisha have returned home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has raised the demand for wage employment under the rural job guarantee scheme in our state

PRATAP JENA | PANCHAYATI RAJ MINISTER

wage employment under MGNREGA is decreasing. Many people in Odisha have returned home due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has raised the demand for wage employment under the rural job guarantee scheme in our state. Approximately 50 per cent of this year's allocation will be spent for clearing last year's liability under the scheme," Jena added.

Wage employment under MGNREGA is the need of the hour. Enhanced allocation for the rural job guarantee scheme could create more wage employment and thereby reduce the migration for jobs. "Odisha had created 20.81 crore

man days of work under MGNREGA during 2020-21 fiscal, which is 187 per cent higher than the previous year's figure of 11.14 crore man days. We have so far created 18 crore many days of work under the scheme in the current financial year. This shows that there is huge demand for wage employment under MGNREGA in Odisha," Jena said.

Earlier, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had also expressed concern over reduction in funds for the rural jobs guarantee scheme in this year's Union Budget. Reduction in MGNREGA funds in this situation is not going to help poor people, he said.

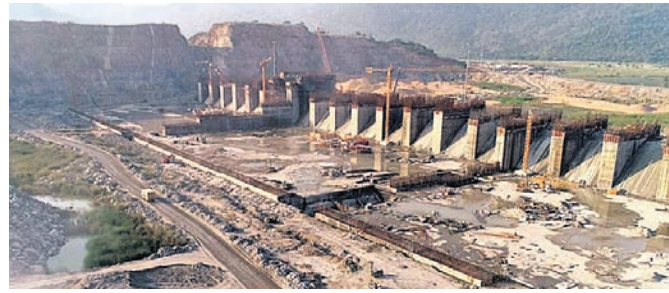


LORD'S PADMA BESHA

Decorative pieces being taken to Srimandir for the Padma Besha ritual of Lord Jagannath, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

Polavaram to hit 1,002 families in Odisha: Centre



POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Feb 2: At least 1,002 families in Odisha would be affected once the multi-purpose Polavaram project, which is being constructed in Andhra Pradesh, gets operational.

This was revealed by the Union Tribal Affairs Ministry in response to a question asked by Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MP Sasmit Patra in the Rajya Sabha. The ministry said 1,002 project-affected families, of which 913 belong to tribal community, would be affected in Odisha.

"The Project Proponent Authority has informed that the project envisages construction of protective embankments in the territory of Odisha and Chhattisgarh to avoid submergence. However, if protective embankments are not constructed in the territory of Odisha

& Chhattisgarh, the number of project affected families (PAFs) in Odisha State would be 1,002, out of which 913 PAFs belong to tribal community," the ministry told the Rajya Sabha.

The ministry also said the total number of project displaced families (PDFs) in Andhra Pradesh stands at 1,06,006, out of which 56,504 comprising of 1,64,752 persons belong to tribal community.

Significantly, an original suit filed by Odisha against Andhra Pradesh over the Polavaram project is still pending in the Supreme Court.

In 2007, Odisha had filed the original suit in the apex court against the Andhra Pradesh challenging the multi-purpose Polavaram project, being constructed by the latter on Godavari River. Odisha alleged that the proj-

Nuapada-Gunupur rail extension yet to get nod: Railway Minister

The extension of Nuapada-Gunupur rail line up to Therubali, which was included in the 2017-18 Budget, has not been sanctioned yet.

Responding to a query on the new railway division at Rayagada, the minister said chief transportation planning manager of East Coast Railway was nominated as nodal officer to undertake planning and preparatory work for setting up and operationalisation of the new railway division.

Detailed project report has been submitted by the ECoR and an umbrella work titled 'Creation of new South Coast Railway Zone and new Rayagada Division in East Coast Railway' has been included in Budget 2020-21 under capital expenditure at an estimated cost of ₹170 crore, the minister added.

"The Odisha government has agreed to provide land only. The detailed project report has been prepared. The cost of the project has been pegged at ₹1,398 crore. The project has not been sanc-

tioned yet and no time line has been fixed for making it operational," the minister said.

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

State registers 19 fresh fatalities

The infections plunged by 53.5 per cent from 7,416 a week ago as the state had logged 3,086 cases and 17 deaths Tuesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Odisha's Covid-19 tally rose to 12,55,776 Wednesday as 3,450 people tested positive for the infection, 364 more than the previous day, a Health department bulletin said.

Nineteen more patients succumbed to the infection, taking the state's coronavirus death toll to 8,648, it said. The daily test positivity rate (TPR) stood at 5.84 per cent as 59,040 samples were examined in the last 24 hours.

The infections plunged by 53.5 per cent from 7,416 a week ago. The state had logged 3,086 cases and 17 deaths on Tuesday. Khurda district, of which state



Capital Bhubaneswar is a part, registered the highest number of new cases at 714. A total of 436 children are among the new patients in the state, the Health bulletin said.

Three children, including a four-year-old boy in Cuttack, are among the fresh fatalities. Bhubaneswar and Puri recorded two deaths each. Fifty-three other patients have died

due to comorbidities to date.

The active cases declined to 37,762, including 10,467 in Khurda, which is in the red zone along with Sundargarh and Cuttack, where current infections are over 2,500 each.

At least 7,767 patients recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 12,09,313, it added.

ODISHA'S COVID-19 TALLY ROSE TO 12,55,776 WEDNESDAY AS 3,450 PEOPLE TESTED POSITIVE FOR THE INFECTION, 364 MORE THAN THE PREVIOUS DAY

KHURDA DISTRICT, OF WHICH STATE CAPITAL BHUBANESWAR IS A PART, REGISTERED THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF NEW CASES AT 714. A TOTAL OF 436 CHILDREN ARE AMONG THE NEW PATIENTS IN THE STATE



ODISHA IN PARLIAMENT

'DREAMS' TO COMBAT RISING DRUG MENACE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: The twin city Commissionerate Police Wednesday launched 'Dreams' (De-addiction, reformation and entrepreneurial assistance for making a safe society), an ambitious initiative that aims at combating the rising drug menace in the City by reforming drug addicts, who are mostly found involved in crimes.

As part of the initiative, the Commissionerate Police, in association with the Odisha Mining Corporation and the Indian Institute of Education & Care, will identify the drug addicts, mostly in the slums here, facilitate their treatment at de-addiction centres, arrange counselling sessions for them and help them get employment opportunities.

Most of the drug addicts, who are habitual offenders, are from



Senior police officials including twin city police commissioner Saumendra Priyadarshi and Bhubaneswar DCP Umashankar Dash release a booklet on 'Dreams', Wednesday

The Commissionerate Police, in association with the Odisha Mining Corporation and the Indian Institute of Education & Care, will identify the drug addicts, facilitate their treatment at de-addiction centres, arrange counselling sessions for them and help them get employment opportunities

family members," said a police official. The twin city police has set a target to reform at least 4,000 youths, who are in the clutches of drugs,

slums here. "After walking out on bail, they commit crimes again. We'll include them under the initiative after taking consent of their

family members," said a police official.

The twin city police has set a target to reform at least 4,000 youths, who are in the clutches of drugs,

Take call on school reopening within 2 months: High Court

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Feb 2: The Orissa High Court Wednesday directed the state government to take a lawful decision regarding reopening of schools, which have been shut due to the prevailing Covid-19 situation.

The HC has directed a Revenue and Disaster Management department secretary to take a decision in this regard within two months.

Petitioner Ranjita Mahapatra had sought the HC intervention for reopening of schools with strict adherence to the Covid-19 protocol.

The petitioner had informed the court that the state government has allowed bars, restaurants and



shopping malls to run their business by adhering to the Covid-19 guidelines. This apart, the three-tier panchayat elections is being conducted in the state amid the pandemic, stated the petitioner.

The petitioner had told the court that the school closure has affected the education of thousands of children.

Rain may lash many districts for 2 days

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) Wednesday predicted moderate rain and thunderstorm in several parts of the state for the next two days.

It also issued a 'Yellow warning' for thunderstorm and lightning in several districts. "Dense fog is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Gajapati, Ganjam, Khurda, Puri, Nayagarh and Kandhamal in the next 24 hours," said IMD.

It said thunderstorm with lightning is very likely to occur at one or two places over several places including Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Bargarh between Thursday and Saturday.

Huge Cov hospital waste threaten health, environment: WHO

The report calls for reform and investment including through reduction in the use of packaging that has caused a rush for plastic and the use of protective gear made from reusable and recyclable materials

Discarded syringes, used test kits and old vaccine bottles from the Covid-19 pandemic have piled up to create tens of thousands of tonnes of medical waste, threatening human health and the environment, a World Health Organization report said Tuesday. The material, a portion of which could be infectious since coron-



avirus can survive on surfaces, potentially exposes health workers to burns, needle-stick injuries and disease-causing germs, the report added.

Communities close to poorly-managed landfills can also be affected through contaminated air

The WHO report estimates that some 87,000 tonnes of personal protective equipment (PPE), or the equivalent of the weight of several hundred blue whales, has been ordered via a UN portal up until November 2021 - most of which is thought to have ended up as waste

from burning waste, poor water quality or disease-carrying pests, it added.

The report calls for reform and investment including through reduction in the use of packaging that has caused a rush for plastic and the use of protective gear made from reusable and recyclable materials.

It estimates that some 87,000

The report also mentions some 140 million test kits with a potential to generate 2,600 tonnes of mostly plastic trash and enough chemical waste to fill one-third of an Olympic swimming pool

In addition, it estimates that some 8 billion vaccine doses administered globally have produced an additional 144,000 tonnes of waste in the form of glass vials, syringes, needles, and safety boxes

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chemical waste to fill one-third of an Olympic swimming pool.

In addition, it estimates that some 8 billion vaccine doses administered globally have produced an additional 144,000 tonnes of waste in the form of glass vials, syringes, needles, and safety boxes.

The WHO report did not name specific examples of where the most egregious build-ups occurred but referred to challenges such as the limited official waste treatment and disposal in rural India as well as large volumes of faecal sludge from quarantine facilities in Madagascar.

Even before the pandemic, around a third of healthcare facilities were not equipped to handle existing waste loads, the WHO said. That was as high as 60 per cent in poor countries, it said. REUTERS

Three Odia migrant workers rescued from Saudi Arabia



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Three Odia migrant workers, stranded in Saudi Arabia and subjected to inhumanely treatment, were rescued Wednesday by Odisha-Mo Parivar, an association of Odias with its members present across the world. As per sources, five migrant workers from Jajpur used to work in a hotel named Shurfat Alhind Indian Restaurant, Saudi Arabia. They were being treated inhumanely by the employer. Organizational Secretary (BJD) and Jajpur MLA Pranab Prakash Das, upon getting the information, intimated the same to Odisha-Mo Parivar.

Meanwhile, Arun Kumar Praharaj, the SPOC member of Odisha-Mo Parivar at Bahrain, stepped in to resolve the matter. Praharaj coordinated with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to rescue the migrants from the employer's custody.

It can be mentioned that since November last year, Praharaj & Odisha-Mo Parivar have been working relentlessly for the rescue, with active participation of Union Minister of Education, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan and MP Sasmith Patra.

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Odisha-Mo Parivar is now working on rescuing the remaining two migrant workers from Saudi Arabia.

Dharmendra Pradhan and MP Sasmith Patra.

Sources said that Praharaj made logistical arrangements from Dubai to Kolkata and after reaching Kolkata International Airport, Pramod Mohanty, SPOC member of Odisha-Mo Parivar in Kolkata, made logistical arrangements for the workers to return to their native place in Jajpur. Bhaba Prasad Das, brother of Pranab Prakash Das, along with other villagers were present with the family members during the arrival of the three migrant workers.

Meanwhile, Odisha-Mo Parivar is now working on rescuing the remaining two migrant workers from Saudi Arabia.



Puri Collector Samarth Verma along with other officials inspecting preparations for the upcoming Magha Saptami festival at Chandrabhaga, Wednesday OP PHOTO

Budget: Outfits cry less thrust on social sector



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Several social outfits and intellectuals in Odisha have claimed that the social sector was given less priority in the Union Budget 2022-23, tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Parliament Tuesday.

Outfits like Odisha Budget and Accountability Centre (OBAC) and Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) have expressed their views on Budget 2022-23 after analysing various provisions announced by the Finance Minister.

As per their analysis, this year's Budget is ahead of the last year's Budget proposals in terms of setting a long-term agenda for economic development. This is evident from the increased allocation towards capital expenditure from

₹6,02,711 crore in 2021-22 fiscal to ₹7,50,246 crore in 2022-23 financial year, which is expected to boost the economy.

The total expenditure for this fiscal has been pegged at ₹39,44,909 crore, which is 4.64 per cent more than the last year's figure. Thrust on natural farming, boost to FPOs and incentives for start-ups are some of the positive steps in the Budget, they opined. On the other hand, the social sector did not get adequate attention in the Budget proposal, they said.

According to them, the rural India suffered a lot during the pandemic and the unemployment rate went up in the country. It has been observed that the MGNREGA provided the much needed relief to the labour force in this critical time.

However, the budgetary allocation towards MGNREGA has been reduced by ₹25,000 crore from ₹98,000

crore in 2021-22 fiscal to ₹73,000 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal. Similarly, there is a decline in allocation towards jobs and skill development.

Last year, the Centre had allocated ₹2,753 crore for skill development, which has come down to ₹2,688 crore this year, they claimed. There was a demand to raise allocation to the health sector in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic. The Centre has allocated ₹85,915 crore in this fiscal against ₹74,602 crore in last year.

This year's Budget has allocated ₹37,800 crore for the NRHM against the last year's allocation of ₹37,130 crore. Allocation towards Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna has been pegged at ₹7,857 crore while the Centre had allocated ₹6,401 crore for this purpose last year. The long standing demand for allocation of 2.5 per cent of the GDP towards the health sector is yet to be addressed, they said.

JSW ambulance life-saver for rural pregnant women

POST NEWS NETWORK

Barbil, Feb 2: It was about midnight of December 31, 2021, when a 20-year-old Nansi Munda went into labor in rural Nuagaon of Joda block. While Nansi was in extreme pain, the picture was bleak.

After failing to access transportation services, relatives sought immediate help from JSW's Nuagaon dispensary for ambulance support to shift her to Healthcare facility at Joda. Ambulance response was instant and she was shifted just in time.

"It is my first child and I was completely terrified for my baby's health and mine too. I thought we both are going to die," Nansi said after her successful recovery.

She also said, "At that moment it wouldn't have been possible to hire a vehicle for the transportation or wait for 108 services. We rushed to JSW's ambulance as it was close to us."

The transport of pregnant women to an appropriate health

facility plays a pivotal role in preventing maternal deaths and keeping MMR in check. Project coordinator Manoj Katal, who oversees the ambulances services, said, "We get maximum request for labor cases."

JSW in association with Camp organisation has helped shape the ambulance services into a lifesaving program for expecting mothers and new born babies.

Under the CSR initiative, JSW Group flagged off five ambulances services in October, 2021 to five areas located near its mines.

The company has deployed ambulances support to mines areas like Nuagaon, Narayanposhi, Jajang, Ganua and Bhadrashahi of Keonjhar and Sundargarh districts.

The ambulances have provided uninterrupted transportation services to 42 pregnant women of five areas in the past two months.

As many as 26 pregnant women from Nuagaon, 10 from Ganua, two from Jajang, three in Bhadrashahi and one from Narayanposhi have availed the service.

16-yr-old detained for raping minor

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Feb 2: Police Wednesday detained a 16-year-old boy on charge of raping an 8-year-old girl at a place under Khetrarajpur police limits here.

The accused was produced before a juvenile justice board and remanded to a probation home in

Rourkela. The accused lured the survivor and her brother for a walk.

Later, he dropped her brother on the way and took the girl to an isolated place and forced upon her. The girl narrated her ordeal before her mother after reaching home. Later, her father lodged a complaint at Khetrarajpur police station.

250-bedded Sparsh hosp at Kantabada

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 2: Sparsh Hospital inaugurated a 250 bedded Multi-Specialty State-of-the-art hospital at Kantabada, Chandaka with an intrinsic mission to make quality health care reach the deprived strata of Odisha.

The state government's vision to prioritise quality health care through BSKY will be spearheaded by Sparsh Hospital, Kantabada.

A Sparsh official said that the hospital always patronises all social schemes of Central and State Governments relating to health care. "We believe cost need not be a hindrance to quality health care. We are committed to spread the message of three Cs - 'Cost being affordable', 'Care being service' &



'Compassion being natural' - through our healing touch," the officer said.

The 'Sparsh' Kantabada will house all modern health care facilities including but not limited to Oncology, Gastroenterology, ENT (Head & Neck), Neuro, Neuro Surgery, Orthopedics, Spine Surgery, Nephrology, Obstetrics & Gynecology, Pediatrics & NICU, Bariatric, Lab Investigation, 24x7 Pharmacy, Blood Bank. Along with hospital, Sparsh also launched Sparsh Pharmacy centre.

Rising marine heatwaves impacting Indian monsoon rainfall: Study

Roll revision for ULB polls soon

CONTINUED FROM P1

Padhi said the SEC will soon carry out revision of electoral roll. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has revised the electoral roll January 1, 2022 and has sent the Assembly seat-wise roll January 5, based on which the roll for the ULBs will be revised, Padhi informed.

A notification issued by the Commission stated that the primary voter list will be published February 10 and objections will be invited for six days from February 11 to 16. The final electoral roll will be published on February 24 and submitted to SEC after four days on February 28.

Padhi said that there will be no addition of new names to the voter list as it has been revised January 1 and corrections will be made, if required. The Housing and Urban Development department had issued January 31, last year the final list of reservations for offices of chairpersons of municipalities and NACs. A total of 54 chairperson posts in these ULBs have been reserved for women.

The posts of mayor in Bhubaneswar and Baramunda Municipal Corporations have been reserved for women candidates while it is unreserved in CMC.

The researchers claim the study to be the first in demonstrating a close link between marine heatwaves and atmospheric circulation and rainfall

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 2: Marine heatwaves are on the rise in the Indian Ocean, leaving an impact on the Indian monsoon rainfall, according to a study by researchers of the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

This is the first time a study has demonstrated a close link between marine heatwaves and atmospheric circulation and rainfall, the researchers claimed.

Since the frequency and intensity of the marine heatwaves are increasing, there is a need to enhance the ocean observational arrays and update weather models, they said. Such heatwaves are periods of extremely high temperatures in the ocean.

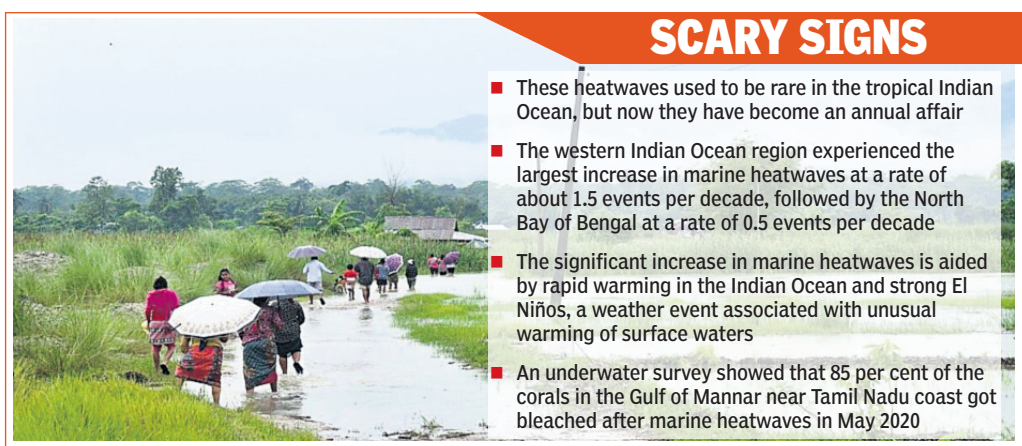
These events cause habitat destruction due to coral bleaching, sea-grass destruction and loss of kelp forests, affecting the fisheries sector adversely, as per the study led by climate scientist Roxy Mathew Koll and published in the journal 'JGR Oceans'.

The study found that marine heatwaves impact the monsoon by reducing rainfall over the central Indian subcontinent, while enhancing it over the southern peninsula.

The researchers reported a significant increase in marine heatwaves, aided by rapid warming in the Indian Ocean and strong El Niños (weather event associated with unusual warming of surface waters). An underwater survey showed that 85 per cent of the corals in the Gulf of Mannar near Tamil Nadu coast got bleached after marine heatwaves in May 2020.

Since the frequency, intensity and area covered by the marine heatwaves are increasing, we need to enhance our ocean observational arrays to monitor these events accurately, and update our weather models to skillfully predict the challenges presented by a warming world

ROXY MATHEW KOLL | LEAD RESEARCHER & CLIMATE SCIENTIST, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TROPICAL METEOROLOGY, PUNE



Though recent studies have reported their occurrence and impacts in the global oceans, they are least understood in the tropical Indian Ocean, the study said. "These heatwaves used to be

rare in the tropical Indian Ocean, but now they have become an annual affair. The western Indian Ocean region experienced the largest increase in marine heatwaves at a rate of about 1.5 events per decade, followed by the North Bay of Bengal at a rate of 0.5 events per decade," the researchers said.

"During 1982-2018, the western Indian Ocean had a total of 66 events while the Bay of Bengal had 94 events," they said.

Marine heatwaves in the western Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal are found to result in drying conditions over the central

SCARY SIGNS

- These heatwaves used to be rare in the tropical Indian Ocean, but now they have become an annual affair
- The western Indian Ocean region experienced the largest increase in marine heatwaves at a rate of about 1.5 events per decade, followed by the North Bay of Bengal at a rate of 0.5 events per decade
- The significant increase in marine heatwaves is aided by rapid warming in the Indian Ocean and strong El Niños, a weather event associated with unusual warming of surface waters
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heatwaves are increasing, we need to enhance our ocean observational arrays to monitor these events accurately, and update our weather models to skillfully predict the challenges presented by a warming world," he said.

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology is an autonomous institution of the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences. Notably, the southwest accounts for about 75 per cent of the country's rainfall, impacting the economy, which is still mostly based on agriculture. A study, conducted as part of the Climate Change programme under the Department of Science and Technology and published last year, found that the intensity of severe cyclonic storms in the North Indian Ocean region has shown an increasing trend in the past four decades.

The increasing intensity of severe cyclonic storms with major socioeconomic implications was due to atmospheric parameters like higher relative humidity, especially at mid-atmospheric level, weak vertical wind shear as well as warm sea surface temperature, the study had said. This indicates the role of global warming in bringing about this increasing trend, it had suggested.

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JEYPORE-NABARANGPUR LINK

Railway project hits land hurdles

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nabarangpur, Feb 2: The state government delaying the land acquisition for Jeypore-Nabarangpur railway line has put the project on the back-burner, District Bar Association secretary Rama Prasad Patra told mediapersons here, Tuesday.

- The Centre and the state government had signed an agreement after the Railway Board gave its approval for the project to be built at a plan outlay of ₹748 crore in 2017
As per the agreement, the state government is liable to provide land for the rail route while the cost of the project will be shared by the Centre and state government

Patra said he had received a letter from deputy secretary of East Coast Railway (ECoR) UK Mishra saying that the project sanctioned in FY 2016-2017 has been delayed as the state government is yet to acquire the land for the purpose.

The work will start once the state government provides land, Mishra said in the letter. It has been over six years since the Centre and state government signed an agreement but there is hardly any progress on the rail project. The project work will move ahead if the Centre and the state government display promptitude, Patra said.

He said even though the Railways had proposed for land acquisition in 2018, the same has been delayed. He urged the district administration and state government to look into the bottlenecks in land acquisition and do the needful.

Meanwhile, survey for 41.90km of rail route has been

completed, the ECoR deputy secretary has mentioned in his letter. Reports said 21 hectare government and 89 hectare private land in Nabarangpur district, and 81 hectare government, 248 hectare private and 12 hectare forest land in Koraput district will be acquired for the railway project.

The Centre and the state government had signed an agreement after the Railway Board gave its approval for the project to be built at a plan outlay of ₹748 crore in 2017. As per the agreement, the state government is liable to provide land for the rail route while the cost of the project will be shared by the Centre and state government.

Railway stations will be built at Podalguda in Nabarangpur district and Jayantigiri, Borigumma and Kaliaguda in Koraput district.



REPRESENTATIVE PICTURE

NEWS IN BRIEF

IIC suspended over gold heist

Koraput: DGP SK Bansal Wednesday suspended the IIC of Narayanpatna police station, Ranjit Sahu, on charge of helping a buyer of stolen gold to escape. Addressing a presser here, Koraput SP Varun Guntupalli told the media that disciplinary action has also been taken against Gopal Reddy, a home guard. Police had arrested a goldsmith and seized 400 gm gold in connection with the theft of around 1.6 kg of mortgaged gold ornaments from the State Bank of India's Laxmipur branch in Koraput district in January this year. It was alleged that the IIC had helped the goldsmith to evade police arrest.

7 get life for murder

Nayagarh: A local court here awarded life imprisonment to seven persons after convicting them of murdering a samiti member's husband of Kendudhipi under Sarankul police limits in this district. District and sessions judge Rupashree Choudhury also slapped a fine of ₹10,000 on each of the convicts after pronouncing them guilty. The convicts had attacked Nakula Bantha, the husband of Kendudhipi samiti member Pushpanjali Bantha, over political rivalry February 13, 2016.

Man jailed for rape

Baripada: A POCOS court here Wednesday sentenced a 42-year-old man to 10 years of imprisonment for raping a 6-year-old girl in Mayurbhanj district seven years ago. Baripada POCOS Court Judge Sumita Jena also imposed a fine of ₹5,000 on Gurubha Sardar. The court directed the District Legal Services Authority to pay ₹2 lakh to the rape survivor as compensation. The incident happened January 3, 2015.

Voters in Korei get ration card withdrawal threat

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, Feb 2: With the campaign for the upcoming three-tier rural polls in Jajpur district hitting feverish pitch, voters here have been warned that they must support a particular party or else their ration cards will be withdrawn.

RURAL POLLS

- The political equation in Korei block, a BJD bastion, is swinging towards another party which has perturbed the ruling party leaders
Apart from using PDS dealers, local leaders and party workers of BJD have also been threatening the voters, it was alleged

This was revealed during a meeting of the public distribution system (PDS) dealers held recently at Kuakhia under Korei block. The dealers said they were instructed by the party leadership to warn the voters accordingly.

Sources said the political equation in Korei block, a bastion of the BJD, is swinging towards another party which has perturbed the ruling party leaders. Apart from using PDS dealers, local leaders and party workers have also been directly threatening the voters, said sources.

Korei block has as many as 28 panchayats, three zilla parishad (ZP) zones and 408 wards. BJD has obtained all three ZP seats in 2017 panchayat elections. However, BJP secured good percentage of votes.

In zone-1 of Korei block, BJD got 54 per cent of votes and 45 per cent each in zone-2 and 3. On the contrary, BJP secured 27 per cent of votes in zone-1, 29 per cent in zone-2 and 33 per cent in zone-3.

The 2017 panchayat poll results had its reflections on the 2019 general elections. BJD's MLA candidate Ashok Bal bagged 73,403 votes (49.6 per cent) from the block while BJP's Biswajit Nayak obtained 42,679 votes (28.4 per cent). Congress was in third position with its candidate Bandita Parida securing 28,487 votes (19.25 per cent).

It is pertinent to mention here that Korei block has 32,946 ration cardholders.

POLL BOYCOTT CALL BY 4 KORAPUT VILLAGES

POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput, Feb 2: Scores of people in four villages of Koraput district have decided to boycott the upcoming panchayat polls alleging that welfare schemes of the government have been eluding them.

They have put up a banner on the village outskirts, announcing their decision about the poll boycott.

People of Kolab, Chandaiguda, Thatuguda and Dumuriguda villages under the Sadar block have alleged that they do not have good roads while safe drinking water has been distant dream for them.

"We are weary of reminding the administration about the misery as we are being deprived of basic facilities.

People of Kolab, Chandaiguda, Thatuguda and Dumuriguda villages under the Sadar block have warned of boycotting the rural polls

There is no point in taking part in the panchayat polls," they rued.

No one filed nomination in two

wards of these villages, while they are not allowing candidates to campaign for sarpanch and zilla parishad posts in their villages. They have the same allegation that they get promises just before elections which are forgotten conveniently by the leaders.

Notably, people of these villages had announced poll boycott in 2019 general elections, but Koraput MLA

Raghuram Padal, in the presence of then sub-collector, had given written assurance to the people that their issues will be resolved after the elections.

The residents of the four villages gathered at Kolab outskirts and discussed their issues. They have put up a banner, displaying their displeasure.

भारत का राजपत्र The Gazette of India सौ.जी.-डी.एल.-अ.-25012022-232904 CG-DL-E-25012022-232904 असाधारण EXTRAORDINARY भाग-II खण्ड 3-उप-खण्ड (ii) PART II-Section 3-Sub-Section (ii) प्राधिकार से प्रकाशित PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

नई दिल्ली, मंगलवार, जनवरी 25, 2022/भाग 5, 1943 NEW DELHI, TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2022/MAGHA 5, 1943

MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS NOTIFICATION New Delhi, the 25th January, 2022

S.O. 339(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 NH16 in the stretch of land from Km. 150 to Km. 180 (Soro, 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 Soro 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 NH16 in the stretch of land from Km. 150 to Km. 180 (Soro, Balasore) in the district of BALASORE in the state of ODISHA

State: ODISHA District: BALASORE

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Taluk: Soro

Village: Barahampur

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Village: Brahmana Sahi-89

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Village: Itua-118

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Village: Kamarpur-101

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Village: Mulesar-117

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Village: Talanagar-166

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Village: Uttarsar - 100

Table with 6 columns: Sl. No., Survey/Plot Number, Type of Land, Nature of Land, Area (in Local Unit), Area (in Hectare)

Total 5.4265 2.1961 [F. No. NHA/BOT/1102/58/2005/PL/LA/NH-16/3A] RAJESH GUPTA, Director

“ We are always surrounded by the things of which we think.

THE MOTHER



New-Old Cold War

Few parts of the world paid as high a cost during the Cold War as Southeast Asia. The superpower conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union divided the region into pro- and anti-communist camps, spawning five wars in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam over four decades. Today, US-China competition is fueling a so-called 'new cold war' with familiar structural characteristics.

In fact, the Sino-American great-power confrontation is a continuation of an unfinished ideological struggle, this time pitting the US-led and Western-based alliance system against a China-centric global network of client states, many of them with various shades of authoritarian governance. The Soviet Union lost the Cold War, but China is now giving the West a run for its money in the sequel. And Southeast Asia will once again be a major theater.

For about two decades following the end of the Cold War, America seemed to enjoy a 'unipolar' moment enabling it to reshape the global order, and free markets and democratisation spread around the world. But liberal democracy and market capitalism were subsequently weakened from within, particularly following the 2008 global financial crisis, enabling a growing challenge by alternative models of authoritarianism and state-directed economic development.

The vaunted Western promise of liberty and prosperity was increasingly discredited by an accelerating concentration of wealth and power, deepening social divisions, and seemingly intractable political polarisation. Electorates became more skeptical and disillusioned about what democracy and capitalism could deliver – an alienation compounded by runaway globalisation and rapid technological change.

Southeast Asia was not immune to these trends. Many people in Thailand, the Philippines, and elsewhere, resentful that their incomes and living standards had fallen behind, were attracted to populist or authoritarian alternatives.

Populist leaders around the democratic world bypassed established centers of power such as the media and the traditional political class, connecting directly with voters. Significantly, many of Asia's populists, once elected, had little effective rule of law to constrain them.

Enter China, whose appeal thrives on the shortcomings of Western democracy and free-market capitalism. China's model is still Leninist, but while the Communist Party of China exercises centralised political control along totalitarian lines, the country's economic development and management are market-consistent (though not market-driven). China thus challenges and frustrates the Western model of liberal democracy and market capitalism in unprecedented ways.

The ideological battle that the Soviet Union previously waged with the West has taken on a new form with the rise of China, which feels entitled, even destined, to reclaim its glorious past. But the inherent contradictions between political totalitarianism and market-consistent capitalism make China strong and weak at the same time. No other modern state has been able to have its cake and eat it by imposing centralised control and repressing individual rights and freedoms while running a successful market economy that improves its people's living standards.

One might argue that the Chinese state drives a capitalist economy in the same way that Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan pioneered state-led capitalism from the 1960s to the 1980s. The major difference is that the latter countries were strong US allies and partners that developed well-consolidated Western-style democracies. China is neither a US ally nor democratic, and very possibly never will be.

The Soviet Union confronted the US in proxy conflicts, such as the Indo-China wars, but eventually lost the Cold War because it could not keep up with the West's more dynamic capitalist economic development. China has yet to confront the US directly in military terms, despite its unprecedented arms build-up, preferring to keep its powder dry for clashes over trade and technological innovation.

But, like the US three decades ago, China is trying to reshape the global system in line with its preferences. The resulting face-off between the new East and the old West would be best settled through a process of compromise and accommodation that accords China a greater international role and prestige befitting its global weight. If denied, China will likely become resentful, self-righteous, and belligerent. But, because the parameters of such accommodation are fluid, the new cold war will continue to play out.

Nowhere will the impact of this new superpower tussle be more evident and consequential than in Southeast Asia, which is increasingly divided over what China stands for and how to respond. China appears to have the upper hand in the region for now. But the COVID-19 pandemic may soon expose fundamental flaws in China's system, because, having committed to elimination of the coronavirus, it cannot fully reopen its economy.

Meanwhile, the US and other democracies' current high infection numbers could eventually enable them to cope with COVID-19 more effectively. If they can capitalise on that possibility, it would rebalance the new cold-war struggle in Southeast Asia and elsewhere.

The writer is a professor and Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Political Science in Bangkok.

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WISDOM CORNER

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.

THOMAS A. EDISON

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

HELEN KELLER

There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self.

ALDOUS HUXLEY

WORDSWORTH

Ruckus

It's certainly American in origin, though it's now widely known throughout the English-speaking world. There are hints that ruckus grew out of earlier words, likewise of obscure ancestry. Rook, perhaps, a Scottish word recorded from 1808 that meant a quarrel or uproar. Or ruction, of much the same sense, which appeared at about the same time and was a dialect term of Scotland, Ireland and parts of England. Either could have been taken to the US by emigrants. Some writers have suggested that ruckus was created within the US by blending ruction with rumpus, a noisy disturbance or row that's recorded from the middle of the previous century. Ruck is known in British English as a term in rugby for a loose scrum and also for a quarrel or fight. These look like shortened forms of ruckus. The latter is indeed thought to be from ruckus (though the rugby one might have influenced its creation) but the other has a separate origin. It's from a Scandinavian word for a pile or stack, usually of fuel, its first use in English. By the sixteenth century, it described a crowd of people or a close-packed group of horses, but without implications of violence.

FOCUS UNION BUDGET

THE FLAWED DIGITAL PUSH



The issues of transaction cost, safety, security, vulnerability to fraudulent activities, and anonymity will decide the uptake of the Central Bank Digital Currency



Debashis Acharya

IF INDIVIDUALS, BANKS, AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS START LENDING AND BORROWING IN CRYPTOS, THE EFFICACY OF RBI'S MONETARY POLICY WILL BE IN DANGER

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman delivered her shortest ever Budget speech using a digital tablet Feb 1, 2022. The word 'digital' appears 35 times in this Budget speech with several proposals to promote India's digital economy and fintech. But the retail investors in crypto currencies/assets must have been disappointed to some extent. The speech doesn't use the word 'crypto' but proposes a scheme of taxation in respect of the digital virtual assets. The details of these assets are given in Chapter III of the Finance Bill. The income from transfer of any virtual digital assets meaning cryptocurrencies or similar virtual currencies/assets shall be taxed at the rate of 30 per cent. In an opinion piece dated August 29, 2021, in this newspaper, I did discuss such a possible move by the government. What we see in the Budget could be the result of a year-long lobbying by the crypto exchanges or an induced policy move. But the scheme is very stringent since, "No deduction in respect of any expenditure or allowance shall be allowed while computing such income except cost of acquisition. Further, loss from transfer of virtual digital asset cannot be set off against any other income." The transaction details will also be captured via TDS on payment made at the rate of 1 per cent above a threshold. The gift of such assets shall also be taxed.

The Central Bank Digital Currency, India's digital rupee is also going to see the light of day soon. The discussion on crypto by the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has always gone with possible introduction of CBDC. But the purpose of holding cryptocurrencies and CBDC for a retail agent or an individual is very different. The former is held as a risky asset to reap high returns whereas the latter is legal tender in digital form. Thus, CBDC is supposed to replace cash as a medium of exchange. A few years ago, the Institute for Business in the Global Context estimated the cost of cash dependency in India at ₹21,000 crore on account of currency operations including cost of printing new currency, cost of currency chest, and cost of main-

taining supply to ATMs. The Ratan P Watal committee report of the Govt of India in 2016 set the objectives and rationale towards a less cash economy. Since then, both the supply side and demand side factors have resulted in a digital payment to GDP ratio of about 15% in the last 10 years, indicating an increase of about 9%. Coming to cryptocurrencies, at present we see crypto literacy taking place through peer-to-peer learning, advertisements in different online platforms including Swiggy. The other day, I saw an Uber taxi carrying CoinDCX advertisement with the celebrity Ayushman Khurana. In the past, crypto exchanges have gone out of the way to lure customers and attract investments.

How is this Budget proposal on crypto tax and CBDC going to change the behaviour of the retail investor or the common man exposed to such advertisement-based literacy campaigns? Let's look at India's digital payments landscape. The Digital Payments Index constructed by the RBI captures the extent of digitisation of payments across the country. This index for March 2021 stands at 270.59 as against 207.84 for March 2020. There has been rapid adoption and deepening of digital payments across the country in recent years. The huge growth of UPI payments also speaks of the accelerated adoption of digital payments in this country. Almost every pushcart

vendor has his QR code hanging in the cart, happily accepting payment through UPI. In fact, most of them prefer UPI payments for a variety of reasons. As of December 2021, UPI has been a great success with 282 live banks, transaction volume of 4566 million and transaction value of ₹8,26,848 crore. In view of this understanding CBDC may not be difficult for the public. The adoption of CBDC once introduced will depend on its relative merits compared to the digital payment modes people are using today, say UPI. In general, the issues of transaction cost, safety, security, vulnerability to fraudulent activities, and anonymity will decide the uptake of CBDC. Moreover, the potential users need to have the details. T Rabi Sankar, Dy Governor, RBI says in one of his recent speeches: "RBI is currently working towards a phased implementation strategy and examining use cases which could be implemented with little or no disruption." We will have to wait for details on CBDC such as the underlying technology of CBDC, distribution mechanism i.e., directly by RBI or through commercial banks, wholesale, or retail, and most importantly the degree of anonymity.

Why should people hold crypto in days to come in view of the excessive volatility in its prices/returns and the 30% tax imposed now? The government has sent a strong message saying that cur-

rency issuance will always remain a sovereign function. The use of the word "digital virtual asset" signifies that cryptocurrency are assets and investment in them is best left to the wisdom of investors. It's up to the investors to decide their exposure to these risky assets in their investment portfolio. Left to an individual investor the decision will depend on returns, risk, and the tax imposed. The exchanges may celebrate perceiving the tax scheme as legalisation of crypto. But the future is uncertain since a lot depends on how people respond to the crypto tax in evolving market conditions. We don't have any detailed regulation in place except the amended clause, 47A, in Section-2 of the Income Tax Act. Given the high volatility in prices of these currencies, the concern on financial stability remains. The provision of TDS will build the much-needed database on crypto to decide future course of policy action. Finally, increased use of such private virtual digital assets reminds me of Benjamin Friedman's prediction. If individuals, banks, and financial institutions start lending and borrowing in cryptos, the efficacy of RBI's monetary policy will be in danger. And yes, for the common man, I would still say, "Be aware of cryptos."

The writer is Professor, School of Economics, University of Hyderabad. Views are personal.

SPECTRUM PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Pills not enough, vaccination must



Sanjib Kumar Karmee

AS COVID PILLS MAKE THEIR WAY INTO PHARMACIES, SCIENTISTS ARE WORKING RELENTLESSLY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF NEW POTENTIAL DRUGS THAT COULD BE ADDED TO THE TOOLBOX

The COVID-19 pandemic is wreaking havoc across the world. So far, several vaccines have been developed and vaccination drive against the coronavirus disease is in full swing. Getting the pandemic under control requires a multidirectional approach; including development of vaccines, drugs, and cell therapies. Many drug companies, life science industries, academic research groups, and health organisations are closely working to identify drugs for the treatment of COVID-19.

Drug discovery against SARS-CoV-2 is a challenging and vital process. Typically, it requires more than five years to evaluate a drug's ability to produce the desired result (efficacy) and the type and likelihood of adverse effects (safety). According to reports, different categories of therapeutic candidates are being explored; such as, antibodies, antivirals, cell-based compounds, RNA-based compounds, repurposed compounds, and others (viz. anti-inflammatory, antimalarial, interferon, protein-based, antibiotics, and receptor-modulating compounds).

At the end of 2021, two antivirals Molnupiravir and Paxlovid were approved for emergency use in the US and the UK. Molnupiravir is developed by Merck, New Jersey, and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, Miami, Florida. Clinical trial results indicate that it can reduce hospitalisations and deaths by 30 per cent as compared with people who took placebos. Earlier, it was believed that Molnupiravir would be a game changer. However, clinical trial experiments revealed less than expected efficacy of the drug. Also, it is reported that Molnupiravir's mechanism of action may pose safety risks. Molnupiravir functions by introducing errors into the coronavirus' genetic code, which prevents replication of the virus. In India, after the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) cleared Molnupiravir as a COVID-19 drug, ICMR chief Bahram Bhargava said: "The US has approved it based on only 1,433 patients with a three per cent reduction in moderate disease when given in mild cases. However, we have to remember that this drug has major safety concerns. It can cause teratogenicity and mutagenicity and

cause cartilage damage and be damaging to the muscles. More importantly, if given to a man or a woman, contraception will have to be maintained for three months as the child born during that period could have problems with teratogenic influences."

More recently, Pfizer's COVID-19 pill Paxlovid is in the news. It is made up of nirmatrelvir and ritonavir, which are administered together orally. Paxlovid's mechanism of action is different from that of Molnupiravir. Nirmatrelvir synthesised by Pfizer is designed to block the activity of the main protease (Mpro)—an enzyme that the coronavirus needs to replicate. Ritonavir (a strong cytochrome P450 (CYP) 3A inhibitor) helps slow the metabolism or breakdown of nirmatrelvir; so that it remains in the body for a longer period at higher concentrations to combat the virus. It is worth noting that ritonavir is an FDA approved drug that has been used as a pharmacologic boosting agent for anti-HIV medications. According to Chemical & Engineering News: "Paxlovid's existence is remarkable, considering that its antiviral ingredi-

ent—originally called PF-07321332 and recently dubbed nirmatrelvir—wasn't even a sketch in a medicinal chemist's lab notebook two years ago. The antiviral went from an idea to the first clinical test in a person in 12 months—a breathtaking pace at which to deliver a bespoke drug candidate."

As COVID-19 pills make their way into pharmacies, scientists are working relentlessly for the development of new potential drugs that could be added to the treatment toolbox. Possibly, the ongoing research could lead to highly effective drug cocktails (a combination of drugs) which will help to eliminate the virus. Also, it is difficult for a virus to develop resistance towards a multidrug combination than a single drug. The available COVID-19 drugs are not a substitute for vaccination. Even though a few medications are available for people for emergency uses, it is important for everyone to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as per their country's protocol. It is important to have layers of defence against this viral threat.

The writer is a scientist. Views are personal.

Wooing Central Asia

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Sir, Security and stability in India and its neighbourhood depends on several factors. One of them is the mutual cooperation between India and the Central Asian countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated this important aspect in the virtual summit between India and the Presidents of the five Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – at New Delhi. These are small countries alright, but being rich and fertile sources of oil and natural gas they hold great importance in bilateral trade and commerce. Apart from the trade equation, since three strategically located countries – Iran, Afghanistan and China – border the Central Asian nations, the region holds great interest for India. However, India is not the only country that is wooing Central Asia. Russia, China and Afghanistan are also at it. Also, India's trade worth with the Central Asian countries is less as compared with that of China with these countries. So, more needs to be done than mere talks but New Delhi has struck the right chord with the heads of these countries. Integrated and stable extended neighbourhood is India's dream. Both sides have agreed to setup two important joint working groups on Afghanistan and Chabahar Port in Iran. Evidently, Kabul cannot be kept away in the broad scheme of things pertaining to international importance after the Taliban invasion of Afghanistan. Similarly, India is looking at the Chabahar Port as an alternative route to the Central Asian countries. The Chabahar working group will provide New Delhi an opportunity to bolster its ties with Tehran as well. Summits on the lines of the "India-Central Asia virtual summit" are expected to be held once in every two years. The roadmap for the next three decades between India and the Central Asian states promises putting in place a robust mechanism that fosters connectivity and cooperation.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Disappointing Budget

Sir, The Union Budget 22-23 has again disappointed the salaried class, pensioners and employees in the organised sector. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman kept the income tax slabs unchanged while allowing taxpayers two years to update their returns. One may recall that income slab rates have remained unchanged for nearly a decade, with the middle class bearing the brunt of taxation. With the value of the rupee depreciating every year, this is a bitter pill to swallow.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE



“We want all regional parties to come together and defeat the BJP in 2024. We want everybody to come together and fight against the BJP and defeat it. Our motto is the BJP has to be defeated”

MAMATA BANERJEE | TMC CHIEF

MANDAVIYA CYCLES TO PARL

Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya Wednesday rode a bicycle to reach Parliament ahead of the Rajya Sabha proceedings. However, this is not the first time that the Union Minister cycled to reach Parliament from his house. On several occasions earlier, he has cycled to send across a message for health awareness



of the day quote

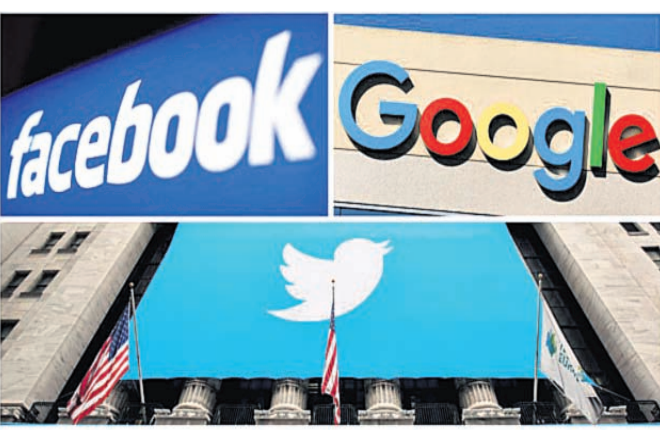
I urge the industry to avail the full corpus. As per the trend, only ₹50 crore is likely to be spent from it

I had planned to go to Delhi tomorrow (Thursday), for a meeting with Members of Parliament from the state there, but on the request of all our MPs I will go to Delhi Monday

The BJP is indulging in politics of negativity. The SP-RLD tie-up stands for brotherhood. Those talking of the Kairana exodus, will have to migrate out of UP after the polls

‘Must act to control fake news’

New Delhi, Feb 2: A meeting between executives from social media giants Google, Twitter and Facebook and Information ministry officials on content moderation and fake news control Wednesday, got prickly as the government strongly put its views forward.



India ticks off tech firms for not removing ‘fake news’-sources
Indian officials tell Google to relook at internal rules
India worried takedown orders damage public image-sources
Google told India they can keep such requests private-source

During the meeting, senior tech executives told the officials that they take adequate measures to remove or curb the spread of misinformation on their platforms, and act on legally-valid content removal requests, said the sources. The officials told Google to review its internal guidelines to remove fake content automatically, said the sources.

The officials also said the government was disappointed that big social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, weren't detecting and removing such content on their own. Instead, the government was forced to order takedowns, opening it to criticism and damaging its public image, the officials said during the meeting, according to the sources.

Executives from Google told the I&B officials that one way to resolve that was for the ministry to avoid making takedown decisions public. The firms could work with the government and act on the alleged fake content, which could be a win-win for both sides, Google said, according to one of the sources.

The idea was summarily rejected by the government officials, who said the takedowns also publicise how the companies weren't doing enough to tackle fake news on their own, the person said.

Zydus Cadila starts supply of vax to govt



New Delhi, Feb 2: Ahmedabad-based vaccine manufacturer Zydus Cadila Wednesday announced that it has started supplying Covid vaccine ZyCoV-D to the Centre.

The company has started the supplies of its Covid-19 vaccine ZyCoV-D, to the Government of India against their order from its newly-commissioned state of the art, Zydus Vaccine Technology Excellence Centre at the Zydus Biotech Park in Ahmedabad, Zydus said in a statement.

It is also planning to make the vaccine available in the private market, it added. ZyCoV-D is a three-dose vaccine administered intradermally using the painless PharmaJet needle free system on day 0, day 28 and day 56. It will be priced at ₹265 per dose and the applicator being offered at

₹93 per dose excluding GST. A Plasmid DNA vaccine, it, when administered, produces the spike protein of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and elicits an immune response mediated by the cellular and humoral arms of the human immune system playing a vital role in protection from disease as well as viral clearance.

Zydus VTEC manufactures the drug substance for the needle-free vaccine. The manufacturing process and in process material transfers within the plant are automated. Zydus has also entered into a definitive agreement with Shilpa Medicare Ltd, a contract manufacturing organisation, to produce the vaccine.

The company has also entered into an agreement with Enzychem Lifesciences of South Korea for the manufacturing license and technology transfer for the vaccine.

SHORT TAKES

Fire breaks out in oil tank

New Delhi: A major fire broke out in an oil tank at a factory in Ghuman Hera area of southwest Delhi Wednesday. Fire Department received a call about the incident at around 5 a.m. Fire tenders were immediately rushed to the spot following the information. A senior official of the department said that the fire had broken out in an oil tanker and it could have turned into a major incident.

Inmate commits suicide in jail

Gurugram: A 26-year-old inmate of Bhandari jail here committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree inside the jail premises, a police official said Wednesday. The police said, Vijay Pal, who was arrested last month, was facing trial in a case registered against him under relevant sections of the IPC at Farrukhnagar police station of Gurugram. According to the police, Vijay Pal complained to the jail warden about his ill health late Tuesday evening.

Famous snake rescuer still critical

Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala's famous snake rescuer Vava Suresh, who is fighting for his life at Kottayam Medical College hospital after being bitten by a cobra, has shown signs of improvement but continues to be critical, doctors attending on him said Wednesday. Speaking to mediapersons, hospital superintendent TK Jayakumar stated that Suresh is responding to the treatment and is conscious, but continues to be on the ventilator.

FESTIVE FERVOUR



An artist prepares an idol of goddess Saraswati ahead of the upcoming festival of Basant Panchami also called Saraswati Puja in Amritsar

Death toll rises to 5, SIT begins probe

Dhanbad/Ranchi, Feb 2: After extricating five bodies from an abandoned coal mine in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district, government authorities and the Eastern Coalfields limited Wednesday called off the rescue operation, while locals and leaders of political parties claimed more people were still trapped under the debris. The district administration and ECL management have barricaded Gopinathpur colliery in Nirsra block, and a Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by Superintendent of Police (Dhanbad-Rural) Reeshma Ramesan has launched a probe. ‘There are no chances of finding anybody in the debris. The rescue operation has been stopped and the spot has been barricaded. A probe has been initiated by the SIT to ascertain the reasons behind the mishap,’ said Sub-Divisional Police Officer Pitamber Singh Kharwar. At least 24 people have died in accidents, including illegal mining, at ECL's mines in Nirsra since 2019, an official said. Dhanbad Deputy Commissioner Sandip Kumar said those killed in the Gopinathpur incident, including four women, were not illegal miners, and they had gone to the abandoned open cast mine just to collect residual coal lying around. He assured the families of those killed that no FIRs will be lodged against them. The scene of the tragedy is around 45 km from the Jharlia coalfields where scores of underground fires are still blazing in hollowed out mines, as coking coal worth crores of rupees goes up in smoke every year. The first of the fires was detected in the early 20th century. Some could be extinguished while many still burn.

India gets 2 new Ramsar sites

New Delhi/Gurugram: Two new Ramsar sites were announced and a ‘National Wetland Decadal Change Atlas’ was released on the occasion of World Wetlands Day 2022 here Wednesday. With the announcement of Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat and Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh as the latest Ramsar Site, i.e., wetlands of international importance, India now has 49 Ramsar Sites. World Wetlands Day February 2 marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on the same day in 1971 in the Iranian city of Ramsar. The theme for this year is ‘Wetlands Action for People and Nature,’ which highlights the importance of actions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands for humans and planetary health. All 49 Ramsar Sites together now cover 10,93,636 Ha, the highest in South Asia. Bakhira Wildlife Sanctuary provides a safe wintering and staging ground for a large number of special Central Asian Flyway while Khijadia Wildlife Sanctuary is a coastal wetland with rich avifaunal diversity providing a safe habitat to endangered and vulnerable species.

TERRORIST KILLED IN J&K ENCOUNTER

Srinagar, Feb 2: A terrorist who was killed in an encounter between terrorists and security forces at Nadigam area in Jammu and Kashmir's Nadiem district on Wednesday has been identified, officials said. Police said based on a specific input generated by Shopian police regarding the presence of terrorists in Nadigam area of Shopian, a joint cordon and search operation was launched by the police, army and the CRPF. During the search operation, as the joint search party proceeded towards the suspected spot, the hiding terrorist fired indiscriminately upon the joint search party which was retaliated effectively leading to an encounter. ‘In the ensuing encounter, one terrorist was killed and his body was retrieved from the site of encounter. He has been identified as Umar Ishaq Malik alias Musa son of Ab Ahad Malik resident of Bomang Shopian linked with proscribed terror outfit HM,’ police said. As per police records, Ishaq Malik was a categorised terrorist, and he was active since 2020. He was involved in several terror crime cases including attacks on security forces and civilian atrocities including recent attack on ASI Shabir Ahmad at Amishijipora Shopian.

EAST COAST RAILWAY Tender No. MCSW-Abrasive-21-22-22 Name of the Work: ABRASIVE BLASTING OF ICF BG COACH BOGIE FRAMES AND COMPONENTS FOLLOWED BY APPLICATION OF RED OXIDE ZINC PRIMER AT CARRIAGE REPAIR SHOP, MANCHESWAR FOR A PERIOD OF 36 (THIRTY SIX) MONTHS.

NCC GROUP HEADQUARTER, CUTTACK FILLING UP OF CIVILIAN POSTS BY EX SERVICEMEN AND CIVILIANS IN UNIT RUN CANTEN LOCATED AT CUTTACK Applications are invited from desirous Ex Servicemen (registered with Zila Sanik Board) and Civilians residing in the State of Odisha for the following vacs:

F. No. 17(20)/2021-PL/NGT Government of India Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Policy and Law Division NGT Cell Level-III, Jal Wing, Indira Paryavaran Bhavan, Jor Bagh Road, Aliganj, New Delhi-03

WAR AGAINST COVID-19

Vaccines saved around 1L lives during 3rd wave

ABOUT 14,756 COVID-19 DEATHS HAVE OCCURRED IN INDIA DURING THE THIRD WAVE AND THE MODEL PROJECTED ABOUT 93,000 DEATHS WOULD HAVE OCCURRED WITHOUT THE VACCINES

New Delhi, Feb 2: Covid-19 vaccines prevented more than 90,000 deaths during the third wave, December 28, 2021 to January 31, 2022, according to a research report by the SBI. About 14,756 Covid-19 deaths have occurred in India during the third wave and the model projected about 93,000 deaths would have occurred without the vaccines. To understand the importance of vaccines, the report tested a two stage least square (2-SLS) panel model with 20-major states considering the daily data during the third



ship with the usage of the vaccine. The adverse event may be any unfavourable or unintended sign, abnormal laboratory finding, symptom or disease. The very low AEFI rate of 0.005 per cent for Covid-19 vaccine in India is an achievement and an in-

dication of effectiveness of India-made vaccines. In India as of November 2021, 49,819 adverse events (or side-effects) were reported of which 47,691 were minor; 163 severe and 1,965 were serious side-effects. In January 2022 India recorded 3,899 AEFI cases. In US, as against India, a total 9.5 lakh adverse events were reported post Covid-19 immunization according to VAERS database. Top five side-effects in the order of fever, joint pain, dizziness, fatigue and headache accounted for 1.7 lakh (or 18 per cent) adverse events. The AEFI rate for US is around 0.18 per cent. The report said with the gov-

ernment's efforts, India has achieved the highest vaccination of 2.26 crore in a day (September 17, 2021) and cumulatively vaccinated more than 166 crore of eligible adults, 70 per cent fully (both the doses) and around 92 per cent with single dose. Compared to the developed countries, India has vaccinated highest number of people in a year. Further, the government has extended the vaccination to the age group of 15-18 years starting January 3, 2022, with more than 50 per cent of eligible population in this age group having received their first dose of the vaccine.

INSULT TO NATIONAL ANTHEM

Mumbai court issues summons to Mamata

Mumbai, Feb 2: A Mumbai court Wednesday issued summons to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and directed her to appear before it March 2 in a case of allegedly showing disrespect to the National Anthem during her visit to the city.

The court said it is prima facie evident from the complaint, video clip in the DVD and video clips on YouTube links that she sang the National Anthem and stopped abruptly and left the dais

Anthem during her visit to the city. He demanded that an FIR be registered against her.

The court said it is prima facie evident from the complaint, verification statement of the complainant, video clip in the DVD and video clips on YouTube links that the accused sang the National Anthem and stopped abruptly and left the dais.

This prima facie proves that the accused has committed an offence punishable under Section 3 of the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.

Though the accused is the chief minister of West Bengal, she was not discharging her official duties (during the event in Mumbai). Thereby, this act of the accused, though she is the chief minister of West Bengal, does not come under her official duty. Therefore, sanction is not required and there is no bar to proceed against the accused, the court said.

Banerjee was on a visit to Mumbai last year during which she met leaders of the ruling Shiv Sena and the NCP in Maharashtra. Gupta had claimed Banerjee violated the Union Home Ministry's order of 2015, which states that whenever the National Anthem is played or sung, the audience shall stand to attention.



Vivekanand Gupta approached the metropolitan magistrate's court at Mazgaon here in December 2021 with a complaint, alleging that Banerjee, who is also head of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), had showed disrespect to the National

MVA flays Union Budget

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit every sector of the economy especially the MSMEs or jobs while dependence has increased on agriculture, but nothing has been said to address these critical issues



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Feb 2: In a sharp critique of the Union Budget 2022-23 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, leaders of Maharashtra's ruling MVA Tuesday slammed it as an aimless, disappointing and meaningless exercise while continuing the tradition of meting out injustice to the state.

Leading the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) charge, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said the budget has been a let-down on all fronts for all sections of society, despite high expectations owing to the havoc caused by coronavirus in the past two years.

While lauding the Centre's move to allocate Rs 15,000 crore interest-free loans to states for capital expenditure and hiking the provision for next year to Rs 1 lakh crore, Thackeray urged that the government should not impose

The budget is full of hollow announcements and even the claim of it being a blueprint for 25 years development will go up in the air like similar ones of 'Make In India' or 'Atmanirbhar India'

UDDHAV THACKERAY | CHIEF MINISTER, MAHARASHTRA

AJIT PAWAR | DEPUTY CM AND FINANCE MIN

tough conditions for this or the states would not get any benefits from the increased limits.

Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar said that the budget is full of hollow announcements and even the claim of it being a blueprint for 25 years development will go up in the air like similar ones of 'Make In India' or 'Atmanirbhar India'.

Accusing the Centre of continued injustice, Pawar said the government collected a total GST of Rs 220,000 crore in the current fiscal including Rs 48,000 crore from Maharashtra, but in return, the state got back only Rs 5,500 crore, and urged all the MPs from the state to take the issue with the Central leaders.

Congress legislative party leader and Revenue Minister Balasaheb Thorat said while unemployment has skyrocketed to its highest levels ever, the government is showing false dreams

'AIMLESS, MEANINGLESS'

of new 60 lakh jobs without any strategy, either to protect existing jobs or for opening up newer employment opportunities.

He labelled the budget as frustrating on all fronts with nothing for farmers, labourers, middle-class, small traders, women, unemployed, students, Dalits or minorities barring the select few industrialist friends of the BJP government and eyeing the upcoming Assembly elections in five states.

Shiv Sena's farmer face, Kishore Tiwari attacked the budget for keeping mum on burning issues of the peasantry like economic problems afflicting farmlands, hiking the MSP, promise to double the farmers' incomes, crop insurance, crop loans, but instead resorting to slash subsidy on foodgrains for the poor which is unjust.

He said the Centre has not said anything on how it will credit MSP directly to the farmers, or the increased production costs considering the spiralling prices of fertilisers, seeds, diesel, and overall inflation.

The government is looting farmers by imposing GST on agricultural tools, it talks about Rs 6,000 given to farmers under Kisan Sanman Yojana, but keeps silent on its claims of doubling farmers' income by 2022, Tiwari added.

State Congress President Nana Patole said joblessness is at its peak in the past 45 years and though the BJP had promised 2 crore jobs every year, the reality was more than 3 crore people became jobless during the BJP rule.

There is no recruitment for government posts, no opportunities in other sectors, and so the figure of 60 lakh jobs is as fake as the 2 crore jobs, shattering the dreams of the youth, he said.

'Won't talk Cabinet reshuffle in public'



Bommai is in a fix over the issue as Cabinet rejig will have direct consequences on the 2023 Assembly elections

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bangalore, Feb 2: Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai Wednesday said that he won't discuss the issue of Cabinet reshuffle in public, indicating the pressure he is facing over the issue.

Answering a question to reporters whether the issue of Cabinet reshuffle would be taken up during his New Delhi visit post the union budget, Bommai curtly said, "The issue can't be discussed in public. I don't want to have any open discussion on the matter."

Ruling BJP legislators in Karnataka have raised their voice for sacking of sitting ministers who are not responsive and providing them an opportunity to serve as ministers in the interest of the party ahead of 2023 Assembly elections.

Though the High Command is occupied with elections of five states, senior BJP legislators like Tippa Reddy, Abhay Patil,

Basavanagouda Patil Yatnal and MP Renukacharya have demanded immediate Cabinet expansion and have also stated that if it is not done in two months, then it is not required.

Bommai is in a fix over the issue as Cabinet rejig will have direct consequences on the elections. To his comfort, senior cabinet ministers KS Eshwarappa and Bhyrathi Basavaraj have said that they are ready to step down if the party asks them. However, sources in the party say that it is going to be a roller coaster ride for CM Bommai as well as the party.

CM Bommai was supposed to go to New Delhi Thursday and has stated that on the request of MPs, he is taking a trip to the national capital coming Monday. Four posts in the Cabinet have been kept vacant and senior leaders are aiming for them. Some of the legislators are demanding the Gujarat model of cabinet reshuffle of resting old horses and providing opportunities to young faces.

Knowing well about the consequences, Bommai had earlier stated that the matter is seized with high command and they are aware of the demands by legislators. Whenever he is being called to discuss it, he will convey the concerns of the BJP leaders.

Where was Maharashtra FM in pre-budget meeting?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 2: Minister of State (MoS) for Finance Dr Bhagwat Karad made a sensational revelation that Finance Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Rao Pawar, who is also the deputy Chief Minister of the state, was absent in state finance ministers' pre-budget meeting called by Union Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman to know the budget expectations from the state governments.



union finance ministry know about their financial requirements, but unfortunately Maharashtra's finance minister Ajit Rao Pawar didn't attend the meeting, even after repeated calls," revealed MoS Dr Bhagwat Karad.

This verbal spat started after Ajit Pawar commented that his state got nothing in this union budget-22, despite having a Union minister of state for finance from Maharashtra. This was actually a direct comment on MoS finance

Karad, who hails from Maharashtra. Dr Karad specially pointed out the pre-budget consultations with the Finance Ministers of States and Union Territories (with Legislature) for Union Budget 2022-23, chaired by the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman December 30. The meeting was attended by Union Minister of State for Finance, Chief Ministers, Deputy Chief Ministers, Finance Ministers, Ministers and Senior Officers from the States and Union Territories (with Legislature) and the Union Government.

"He (Ajit Pawar) is the finance minister of Maharashtra, why didn't he come when he had an opportunity to convey his state's expectations before the Union finance ministry regarding the union budget-22? They sent an IAS officer, who didn't have any idea about the budgetary expectation of the state, what is the use," added Karad.

FLOCK OF FLAMINGOS



Flock of flamingos on a wetland, in Seawoods area of Mumbai, Wednesday. World Wetlands Day is celebrated each year February 2 to raise awareness about wetlands

Street dog given farewell after youth ran car over it



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bangalore, Feb 2: Hundreds of animal lovers participated in the last rites of Lara - the street dog who was killed after a youth deliberately ran his luxury Audi car over it. Sandalwood actress turned politician Ramya also joined the crowd assembled to mourn the demise.

an ambulance. Gayathri, who fed Lara since she was a puppy, was also present. School children also joined the mourning and condemned the death by holding posters against animal cruelty. They also brought flowers for the deceased canine.

Actress Ramya speaking after the cremation stated, "Accidents do happen. Human beings do commit mistakes. But, in this case, the dog has been run over deliberately. We couldn't tolerate this act. Laws regarding animals are not strict in

our country. The accused pay Rs 50 and come out. Empathy is not be only for human beings, it should also be there for the animals."

She urged the government to strengthen the laws against animal cruelty.

Earlier, condemning the act, Ramya had appealed on social media for animal lovers to attend the cremation of Lara. After the cremation, she thanked people who loved and cared for Lara. She said they inspired her.

Karnataka police have booked

FIR against a 23-year-old youth for deliberately running his luxury Audi car on Lara, while it was sleeping by the roadside. The accused was identified as Adhi, son of an industrialist and belongs to a political family. He was arrested and given bail on the same day.

The case was lodged at Siddapur police in Bangalore on the complaint by MS Badri Prasad, a resident of Jayanagar, where the incident took place. According to the complaint, the accused had taken reverse and deliberately ran

his car over the sleeping dog.

The complainant has stated that the accused Adhi drove purposefully with an intention of killing the street dog. The dog was found dead Tuesday morning. The complainant had asked for legal action against the youth for the crime. The investigation is on.

The case has been booked under Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 Section 11, IPC Section 428. The CCTV footage has gone viral on social media and provoked outrage among the public.

B'llore animal activists face threats

Canine lovers, who are fighting a case against a politically influential accused who deliberately ran his car and killed a street dog in Bengaluru, have allegedly been threatened that they 'would also meet the same fate as the street dog'. The Karnataka Police have booked an FIR against 23-year-old Adhi for deliberately running his luxury Audi car on a street dog named 'Lara', while it was sleeping by the roadside. Adhi was arrested later and given bail on the same day. The CCTV footage of the incident has gone viral on social media and provoked outrage among the public. Badari Prasad Margasahayam, former corporate consultant and animal activist, who filed the complaint against Adhi, told IANS that the associate who came to negotiate regarding the withdrawal of complaint had threatened them. "We asked the associate to send the accused directly, as we wanted him to know what he had done was not fair, absolutely unacceptable and atrocious," he said. "The person who was negotiating got irked and threatened Manjari, a member of the squad, that we will also meet the same fate as the street dog," he explained.

Kick out students who insist on Hijab in class: Sriram Sena chief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hubballi, Feb 2: Amid row over Hijab (Islamic headscarves) in some schools in Karnataka, Sriram Sena chief Pramod Muthalik Tuesday said the insistence for wearing them, ignoring the uniform shows 'terrorist mindset' and such students should be kicked out of the school.

"This obduracy has the mindset of taking them (students) to the level of a terrorist. Now they say Hijab, next they will ask for Burqa (veil), further they will insist on Namaz and mosque. Is this a school or your religious centre," he told reporters here.

He asked the government not to allow any public discourse on the issue and take steps immediately. "What I say is that without giving chance for public debate, they (students asking for Hijab) should be issued a transfer certificate and kicked out. This mindset is most dangerous," Muthalik said.

The right wing leader said the school management should strictly tell the girls that there is no need to come to school wearing Hijab.

Noting that uniform means uniformity and equality, Muthalik

Girls wear 'hijab', boys 'saffron' to college

Mangaluru: While the row over wearing 'hijab' (head-scarf) at a government pre-university college in Udupi, 56 kms from here, continues with a student moving court on the issue, another similar controversy erupted at a college 40.8 kms away at Kundapur. Apparently, a few girl students attended the college wearing the 'hijab' at Kundapur. This prompted 100 boys to wear saffron shawls. This happened Wednesday. Realising the gravity of the situation, Kundapur MLA Halady Srinivas Shetty held a meeting with the college authorities and the students. The meeting failed to arrive at a consensus as the parents insisted that their children have the right to wear hijab. The authorities made it clear that students should stick to a uniform rule.

said the dress code is introduced so that there is no display of upper and lower caste or religious identities. "You have freedom at home to do whatever you want but once you step into the school, you have to abide by the rules and regulations of your school," he said.

of the day quote

There are now two distinct Indias, one India is for the extremely rich people - for those who have immense wealth, immense power, for those who don't need a job, those who don't need water connection, electricity connections, but for those who control the heartbeat of the country...The gap is widening between the two

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

While repealing the farm laws, the way he (PM Modi) said he failed to convince the other farmers reflected his sensitive approach towards farmers

RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

The DPCC too has been further strengthened by hiring 30 Junior Environmental Engineers for the first time in almost three decades

GOPAL RAI | DELHI ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

16 jawans injured in bus accident

Surat: At least 16 jawans of the State Reserve Police (SRP) were injured after a bus they were travelling in rammed into a stationary truck in Gujarat's Surat district Wednesday, police said. A total of 27 jawans were travelling in the bus and they were supposed to leave for Uttar Pradesh from Surat for election duty, Kosamba police station's inspector J D Vaghela said.

2 Maoists killed in encounter

Patna: Two Maoists were killed in Bihar's Jamui district after an intense encounter with CRPF's Cobra battalion, SSB and STF Wednesday morning. The team was headed by district SP Sushil Kumar.

Fake call centre busted, 3 held

Gurugram: The chief minister's flying squad on Wednesday busted a fake call centre here, an official said. The call centre was operating in office number 406 on the 4th floor of Tower number 1 of DLF Corporate Greens, Sector 74A here. It mostly used to cheat the US nationals through gift cards and to generate pop-ups and charged \$500 to \$2,000 from the victims, the police said.

Bizman having Chinese links held

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Wednesday said it has arrested a businessman, Anas Ahmed, in a money laundering case related to fraud committed through mobile phone-based apps. An official said that Ahmed is partner in two accused firms namely H&S Ventures Inc and Clifford Ventures. These two firms are responsible for collection of Rs 84 crore from the people.

Naravane speaks to Oz Army Chief

New Delhi: Army Chief Gen MM Naravane Wednesday held a telephonic conversation with his Australian counterpart Lt Gen Rick Burr with a focus on bilateral defence cooperation. The defence and strategic ties between the two countries have been on an upswing in the last couple of years. "General MM Naravane #COAS had telephonic interaction with Lieutenant General Rick Burr, Chief of Army, #AustralianArmy and discussed issues of bilateral defence cooperation," the Army tweeted.



Their (BJP) policies are focused on promoting casteist, capitalist and narrow-minded agendas of the RSS. This has resulted in an environment of religious tension and hate in Uttar Pradesh

MAYAWATI | BSP CHIEF

SHOCKING REVELATION

A total of 321 people, including 22 in 2021, died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks since 2017, the government said Wednesday



All parties fielded candidates with criminal history in UP: ADR

AGENCIES

Lucknow, Feb 2: The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) which has analysed the affidavits filed by 615 candidates out of the total 623 for the first phase of polls in Uttar Pradesh, has found that almost all parties have fielded candidates with a criminal background. Among the major parties, 21 out of 28 candidates analysed from Samajwadi Party, 17 out of 29 candidates from Rashtriya Lok Dal, 29 out of 57 candidates from BJP, 21 out of 58 candidates from Congress, 19 out of 56 candidates from AAP, have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

There are 12 candidates with declared cases related to crime against women. Out of 12 candidates, one candidate has declared cases related to rape (IPC Section-376). Those having serious criminal cases against them include 17 from SP, 15 from RLD, 22 from BJP, 11 from Congress, 16 from BSP and five from AAP. The directions of the Supreme Court have apparently had no impact on the political parties in selection of candidates in Phase one of the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections. Releasing the report, ADR said that all major parties contesting in the first phase of elections have given tickets to 15 per cent to 75 per cent candidates who have declared criminal cases against themselves. The Supreme Court in its di-



rections dated February 13, 2020 had specifically instructed political parties to give reasons for such selection and why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates. As per these mandatory guidelines, the reasons for such selection have to be with reference to qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate concerned. During the recent state assembly elections held in 2020-21, it was observed that political parties gave unfounded and baseless reasons like popularity of the person, good social work, cases are politically motivated etc. These are not sound and cogent reasons for fielding candidates with tainted backgrounds.

Lucknow, Feb 2 (IANS) The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) which has analysed the affidavits filed by 615 candidates out of the total 623 for the first phase of polls in Uttar Pradesh, has found that almost all parties have fielded candidates with a criminal background. Among the major parties, 21 out of 28 candidates analysed from Samajwadi Party, 17 out of 29 candidates from Rashtriya Lok Dal, 29 out of 57 candidates from BJP, 21 out of 58 candidates from Congress, 19 out of 56 candidates from BSP and 8 out of 52 candidates from AAP, have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

Among the major parties, 21 out of 28 candidates analysed from Samajwadi Party, 17 out of 29 candidates from Rashtriya Lok Dal, 29 out of 57 candidates from BJP, 21 out of 58 candidates from Congress, 19 out of 56 candidates from BSP and 8 out of 52 candidates from AAP, have declared criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits. There are 12 candidates with declared cases related to crime against women. Out of 12 candidates, one candidate has declared cases related to rape (IPC Section-376). Those having serious criminal cases against them include 17 from SP, 15 from RLD, 22 from BJP, 11 from Congress, 16 from BSP and five from AAP.

PLA tortured Arunachal youth, says MP Tapir Gao

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Itanagar, Feb 2: The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) that handed over Arunachal Pradesh youth Miram Taron to the Indian Army January 27 -- nine days after he was allegedly abducted, had tortured the teenager while he was in its custody, Lok Sabha member Tapir Gao claimed Wednesday. Gao, who represents the Arunachal East constituency, said that the PLA had tortured Miram, and kept him blindfolded, tied his hands, gave electric shocks, adding the teenager was also subjected to other inhuman treatments.



"Violating the international law, the PLA cruelly tortured Miram Taron in their custody. Earlier, several PLA personnel, Chinese citizens including woman were captured in the Indian territory, but the Indian Army immediately handed over them to the Chinese authority with full dignity," the parliamentarian told IANS.

Nitesh Rane surrenders, sent to police custody



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 2: BJP MLA Nitesh Rane Wednesday surrendered before a court in the Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra in an alleged attempt to murder case and was remanded in police custody till February 4, his lawyers said. Nitesh, son of Union minister Narayan Rane, had withdrawn his bail plea from the Bombay High Court earlier in the day. He subsequently surrendered before the Sindhudurg court, said special public prosecutor Pradip Gharat. The prosecution then sought his police remand. District and additional sessions judge (Sindhudurg) R B Rote had Tuesday rejected Rane's bail application, saying it was "premature and not maintainable". The court had also held that custodial interrogation of Nitesh Rane was necessary as probe into the attempt to murder case was "incomplete". The case pertains to an alleged attack on Shiv Sena activist Santosh Parab during the campaigning for the Sindhudurg District Co-op-

erative Bank elections. The BJP MLA had claimed that he was being targeted by the ruling Shiv Sena (which heads the MVA coalition government in Maharashtra) as it felt slighted by an incident of mocking outside the state legislature complex here last December. It was political vendetta, he had alleged. A Shiv Sena MLA had alleged that Nitesh Rane made 'meow meow' sound to mock minister and Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray on December 23 during the winter session. Nitesh's father Narayan Rane, a former Shiv Sena leader, is a bitter critic of his former party and its leader, chief minister Uddhav Thackeray. Earlier on Wednesday, the BJP MLA's lawyer Satish Maneshinde told Justice C V Bhadang of the high court that he would like to withdraw the application seeking bail. "The applicant intends to surrender and wants to join the investigation. This is despite the fact that the applicant still has five more days of protection from arrest granted to him by the Supreme Court on January 27," Maneshinde said.

66 students seek Prez's nod for euthanasia

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Saharanpur (UP), Feb 2: In a shocking development, the students of the Glocal Medical College have written to President Ram Nath Kovind, seeking his permission for euthanasia. The students are troubled by the closure of their university which has been de-recognised by the Medical Council of India (MCI). In their letter, the students said that the city-based Glocal Medical College admitted 66 students for its MBBS course in 2016. However, just three months later, the institute was de-recognised. The letter claimed that the college management kept them in the dark about this, and continued the course for five years. They said that after exercising all possible options, including moving the Allahabad high court, the

students are hopeless, and, therefore, seek to end their lives. Responding to these allegations, Glocal University vice chancellor Aqeel Ahmed claimed that though the college wants the students to complete their degree, it was, in fact, on the appeal of these students that the MCI cancelled the No Objection Certificate (NOC) granted to it. "They filed a writ petition in the high court, and then in the Supreme Court. On both occasions, the plea was dismissed. Despite this, we continue to stand with our students," Ahmed said. As per the reports, the MCI had debarred the Glocal Medical College owing to its poor infrastructure. In September 2020, the UP government had sought directives from the Union Health Ministry for the transfer of MBBS students from this medical varsity to other colleges.



RIISING INDIA: Navy ships fire weapons during Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral R. Hari Kumar's (unseen) visit to review operational preparedness of the fleet, which included weapon firings and Special Forces operations, at the Eastern Naval Command in Visakhapatnam

42 terror groups banned under UAPA: Govt

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 2: A total of 42 terror outfits have been banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and 13 organisations declared unlawful associations, the Parliament was told Wednesday. Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, in a written reply to a question by Rajya Sabha member A. Vijayakumar, said that 42 terrorist organisations have been listed in the first schedule under the Act, while 31 individuals have been listed as terrorists under the fourth schedule.

He also said law enforcement agencies of the Centre and the states keep continuous watch on the activities of all such organizations and individuals and take action against them as per the law. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019 has added the provision of designation of individuals as terrorists, thereby reducing the chances of regrouping of the leaders/members of the banned organisations under other names, Rai added.



Veteran actor Ramesh Deo dies at 93

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Feb 2: Veteran Hindi film industry and Marathi cinema actor, director and producer, Ramesh Deo, whom film buffs will remember for his roles in hits such as Anand and Mere Apne, died here of a heart attack Wednesday. Deo was 93. He was not keeping well for some days, his son and well-known Marathi actor Ajinkya informed the media. He leaves behind his wife, Seema, also an actor, and two sons, Ajinkya and Abhinav, the film director who helmed Game and Delhi Belly. The handsome actor, born in Amravati, Maharashtra, January 30, 1926, celebrated his 93rd birthday three days ago and a number



of his well-wishers went on Twitter to celebrate the fact. The character actor is best remembered by Hindi film fans for his role of a doctor in Anand (1971), the Hrishikesh Mukherjee film starring Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan, and in Gulzar's Mere Apne (1971), where Meena Kumari, Vinod Khanna and Shatrughan Sinha played the lead

characters. Over five decades, Deo essayed a number of roles in a wide range of Hindi films, right up to 'Jolly LLB' (the black comedy with Arshad Warsi and Boman Irani) in 2013 and Sunny Deol's 'Ghayaal Once Again' in 2016. Deo's main love, however, remained Marathi cinema. His debut film, where he had a cameo, was 'Patlachi Por' in 1951. His actual innings in a lead role started with 'Andhala Magto Ek Dola' in 1956. Deo worked in more than 250 films, produced over a dozen of them and directed several others. He had several awards to his credit, including the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' at the 11th Pune International Film Festival in 2013.

Now, politics of wine flows freely in Maharashtra

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Feb 2: Frustrated over the Opposition's attempts to 'ferment' its proposal to permit wine sale through supermarkets and large shops in the state, the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi hits back at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), lock, stock and barrel, and labelled it as a party of 'drunkards'. As the state government Wednesday formally uncorked the wine policy, MVA leaders slammed the BJP leaders for their hypocritical and 'fake' opposition to the new proposal, which is touted to benefit and spell 'cheers' for the fruit farmers in the state. Slamming the BJP, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) national spokesperson and state minister Nawab Malik ques-

tioned the 'double-standards' of the BJP vis-a-vis the new wine policy. "If this policy can be implemented in Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Goa, then why not in Maharashtra? In MP, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has even permitted bar licences for people at home," Malik said, referring to the three BJP-ruled states. Going a step further, the NCP leader said: "The BJP is the country's biggest party of 'alcoholics'. Their leaders, including Union ministers, own liquor manufacturing factories, run bars and liquor shops, but are indulging in bigotry now." Joining the debate, Congress state spokesperson Atul Londhe said that BJP leaders not only love liquor, but their Bhopal MP Prayaga Singh Thakur is even promoting alcohol with her com-



ments 'thodi thodi piyo' (drink moderately), and MP has already become a 'madya-state' (liquor-state). "The BJP will discard its dual standards and if they are really serious about this, they should en masse surrender all their liquor licences to the government immediately, or else support the MVA policy which is taken for the farmers'

welfare," Londhe said. Claiming that the BJP's dichotomy and anti-farmer stance stands exposed, the Congress leader said that in the Union Budget 2022-2023, the government has slashed the provisions for rural development, agriculture, irrigation and even veterinary sectors. Kishore Tiwari, Shiv Sena's

farmer face who has been accorded MoS status, attacked the BJP for its "one-point agenda" of targeting the MVA without looking into its own backyards like MP, Haryana and Goa, or without knowing the difference between "wine and liquor". The Sena leader said that if the BJP leaders are genuinely opposed to alcohol, all their top leaders should go to Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi at Raj Ghat (New Delhi) and take an oath to implement "total prohibition" in the BJP-ruled states before commenting about other states. "I openly challenge the BJP Leaders of Opposition Devendra Fadnis and Pravin Darekar to make a demand to MP Chief Minister Chouhan, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Goa CM

Pramod Sawant to withdraw their free-for-all liquor policies before playing 'wine politics' in Maharashtra," Tiwari said. On January 27, the state cabinet presided over by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray took a significant decision to allow the sale of wine (ONLY) manufactured in the state to be sold through a single counter in supermarkets or retail outlets admeasuring minimum 1,000 sq ft or above. The proposal has whipped up a foamy storm in the state with the BJP labelling it as the 'MVA's special love for the liquor industry' and warning that it would not permit Maharashtra to degenerate into a 'wine-state', while AIMIM MP Syed Imtiaz Jaleel threatened to vandalise such outlets, among others.

international

of the day quote

Last night, we bombed targets in three different locations and they could not even find a hole to escape to

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN | TURKISH PRESIDENT

A new dawn of normalising relations. After a period of cold relations, Somalia & UAE are now on a progressive path to solve their differences & resume the brotherly ties

MOHAMMED HUSSEIN ROBLE | SOMALI PM

Everything will change dramatically overnight if there will be legalisation of marijuana. In Israel alone the market would be huge

EHUD OLmert | FORMER ISRAELI PM

SHORT TAKES

Turkish jets hit Kurdish positions

Ankara: Turkish warplanes struck suspected Kurdish insurgent positions in Iraq and Syria early Wednesday in a new aerial offensive that Ankara said aimed to protect Turkey's borders from "terrorist threats". The airstrikes killed at least four people, a Britain-based war monitoring group reported, and drew condemnation from US-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters who said the attack came days after the Kurdish-led forces in Syria battled Islamic State group militants.

12 migrants die from cold

Ankara: The bodies of 12 migrants who froze to death were found near Turkey's border with Greece, the Turkish interior minister said Wednesday, accusing Greek border guards of pushing them back over the frontier. Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu said tweeted that the 12 were among 22 migrants who were pushed back into Turkey by Greek border guards. He said they were found near the Ipsala border crossing between Turkey and Greece "without shoes and stripped of their clothes."

Khan to attend Beijing Olympics

Islamabad: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan will travel to China Thursday to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympic Games and meet China's top leadership, including President Xi Jinping. Beijing is hosting the Winter Olympics amidst a diplomatic boycott by the US and allies over human rights allegations against Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang province. Khan, who has been invited by the Chinese leadership, will be accompanied by a high-level delegation including members of the Cabinet and senior government officials, according to Foreign Office.

Winter storm in wide swath of US

Austin: A major winter storm with millions of Americans in its path brought a mix of rain, freezing rain and snow to the middle section of the United States on Wednesday as airlines canceled hundreds of flights, governors urged residents to stay off roads and schools closed campuses. The blast of frigid weather, which began arriving Tuesday night, put a long stretch of states from New Mexico and Colorado to Maine under winter storm warnings and watches. On Wednesday morning, parts of Oklahoma, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan saw freezing rain, sleet and snow.

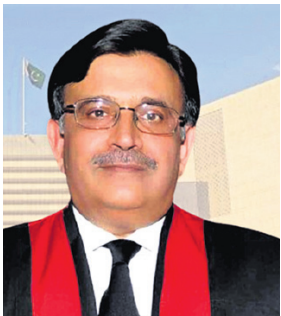


Let's imagine Ukraine is a NATO member and starts these military operations. Are we supposed to go to war with the NATO bloc? Has anyone given that any thought? Apparently not

VLADIMIR PUTIN | PRESIDENT, RUSSIA

PAK'S NEW CHIEF JUSTICE

Justice Umar Ata Bandial was sworn in as the 28th Chief Justice of Pakistan at a ceremony held at the Presidential Palace in Islamabad Wednesday. Pakistan President Arif Alvi administered the oath to Justice Bandial in the presence of Prime Minister Imran Khan



Afghan varsities reopen; women to sit separated

REUTERS

Jalalabad, Feb 2: Afghanistan's public universities Wednesday opened for the first time since the Taliban took over the country last year, with female students joining their male counterparts heading back to campus.

The Taliban administration had not officially announced its plan for female university students, but education officials told Reuters women were permitted to attend classes on the proviso they were physically separated from male students.

A Reuters witness in the eastern city of Jalalabad saw female students entering via a separate door at Nangarhar University, one of the large government universities opening this week.

Under its previous rule from 1996 to 2001, the hardline Islamist Taliban

Under its previous rule from 1996 to 2001, the hardline Islamist Taliban had barred women and girls from education.

The group says it has changed since resuming power Aug 15 as foreign forces withdrew, but has been vague on its plans and high school-aged girls in many provinces have still not been allowed to return to school. Some private universities have reopened, but in many cases female students have not been able to return to class.

The international community has made education of girls and women a key part of its demands as the Taliban seek more foreign aid and the unfreezing of overseas assets.



A girl sits in front of a bakery in the crowd with Afghan women waiting to receive bread in Kabul, Afghanistan REUTERS

WAITING FOR BREAD

Iran's state TV streaming site hit by hackers

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, Feb 2: A streaming website that features Iranian state television programming has acknowledged suffering technical issues amid reports that dissident hackers played an anti-government message the platform.

Televestion said it suffered "infrastructure" irregularities Tuesday and suffered an archive failure, without elaborating on the cause.

The problems came as a video message circulated online claiming to be from a self-described group of hackers called "The Justice of Ali in Farsi. In the video, which Farsi-language news networks abroad say played on the streaming platform, a masked man appears and a muffled voice says Iran's government "will no longer silence us."



"We'll burn hijabs. We'll burn their pictures and propaganda posters," the man says. "We will break their idols. We will reveal their palaces so that the people can punish them." "The Justice of Ali" did not immediately respond to a request for comment via an account it used in an earlier conversation with The Associated Press. In August it released footage showing grim conditions at Iran's notorious Evin prison it claimed it obtained through a hack.

US to send troops to east Europe to counter Russia

REUTERS

Washington/Moscow, Feb 2: US President Joe Biden has approved sending additional forces to eastern Europe, two US officials told Reuters Wednesday, as Washington reinforces its allies against what it describes as a Russian threat to invade Ukraine.

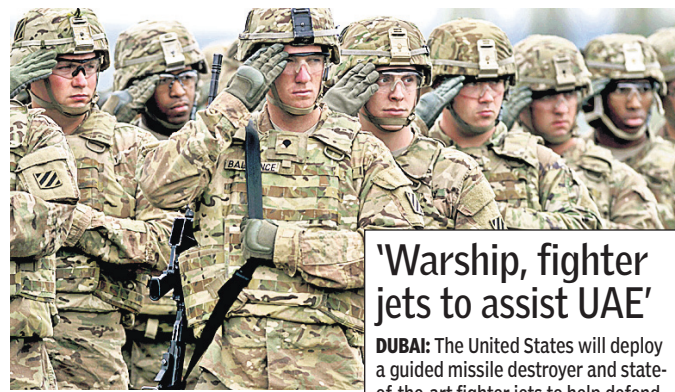
US troops set to deploy to eastern Europe within days

Scathing comments about UK signal no mood for compromise

West fears Russia planning an invasion; Moscow denies this

Washington offers talks but rejects main Russian demands

One of the officials said about 2,000 American troops would deploy from the United States to Poland and Germany, while around 1,000 troops now based in Germany would head to Romania. In signs that, publicly at least, Russia is in no mood to signal compromise, the Kremlin mocked British Prime Minister Boris Johnson as utterly confused and ridiculed British politicians for their stupidity and ignorance. Moscow, which has amassed more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine's borders, denies any plan



to invade its neighbour but says it could take unspecified military measures if demands are not met, including a promise by NATO never to admit Kyiv.

The Kremlin turned its rhetorical fire on Johnson, who cancelled a phone call with Putin Monday to answer questions in parliament about boozing events in his Downing Street office during the COVID-19 lockdown. Johnson visited Kyiv Tuesday, where he accused Russia of holding a gun to Ukraine's head.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia had not announced any phone call with Johnson but added, "it makes sense to speak to anybody. Russia and President Putin are open to communicating with everyone. Even to someone who is utterly confused, he is prepared to provide exhaustive explanations." Russia's foreign ministry went fur-

'Warship, fighter jets to assist UAE'

DUBAI: The United States will deploy a guided missile destroyer and state-of-the-art fighter jets to help defend the United Arab Emirates after a series of missile attacks by Yemeni rebels, a US statement said Wednesday. The deployment, to "assist the UAE against the current threat", follows a phone call between Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the US embassy in the UAE said. The UAE, part of the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemen's Iran-backed Huthi rebels, suffered its third missile attack in consecutive weeks Monday. The guided missile destroyer USS Cole will partner with the UAE Navy and make a port call in Abu Dhabi, the statement said, while the US will also deploy fifth-generation fighter planes.

ther, mocking Foreign Secretary Liz Truss for saying Britain was sending supplies to its Baltic allies across the Black Sea - two bodies of water that are on opposite sides of Europe.

SL signs \$500mn credit line with India for fuel

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Colombo, Feb 2: Sri Lanka was handed temporary relief from energy shortages and rolling blackouts Wednesday with a \$500 million loan from India to finance urgent oil purchases for the cash-strapped nation.

The island's economic woes have left thermal power generators unable to keep the lights on and disrupted transport networks, as traders run desperately low on foreign currency to fund imports.

Frequent breakdowns at a huge coal power plant have compounded unannounced electricity cuts and households are also struggling to source cooking gas and kerosene. Officials said a formal agreement was being signed Wednesday after two weeks of talks, in addition to a recent \$915 million in foreign exchange support.

An Indian diplomat said talks were underway on another \$1 billion credit line to fund urgently needed food and medicine imports from India.

The \$500 million is for Sri Lanka to purchase petroleum products from Indian suppliers, the official said.

Sri Lanka's economy is also seeing a scarcity of rice, automotive parts and cement, with supermarkets forced to ration some staple foods. The shortages pushed food inflation to a record 25 percent last month.

Tourism is a key foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka but the



Lanka is facing a severe foreign exchange crisis after the pandemic hit the island nation's earnings from tourism and remittances

sector has collapsed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The government has shut overseas diplomatic missions to save money and a broad ban on imports has been in effect for nearly two years to conserve foreign currency.

Three international rating agencies have downgraded the island since late last year on fears it may not be able to service its \$35 billion sovereign debt.

Sri Lanka has sought more loans from Beijing to help repay its existing Chinese debt, which accounts for about 10 percent of the country's external borrowings.

Authorities have borrowed heavily from China for infrastructure projects in the past, some of which ended up as costly white elephants.

Saudi moves to redefine Islam-bearing green flag

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, Feb 2: Saudi Arabia is inching toward changes that govern its national anthem and green flag, which is emblazoned with a sword and inscribed with Islam's creed as the birthplace of the faith.

Late Monday, the kingdom's unelected consultative Shura Council voted in favour of changes, state-run media reported. It comes as the country's young crown prince em-

phasises Saudi nationality and national pride.

While decisions by the council have no bearing on existing laws or structures, the vote is significant because its members are appointed by the king and their decisions often move in lockstep with leadership.

Other state-linked media reported that the changes favour amending the system governing the flag, the slogan and the na-



tional anthem, but not its contents. The council has not disclosed further details.

Local media outlets also reported the proposed changes aim to more clearly define the proper uses of the state emblem, raise awareness about the importance of the flag and anthem and protect the flag from infringement or neglect.

Last week, Saudi police arrested four Bangladeshi men for violating the Saudi flag, which carries the Islamic creed, after they were alleged to have dumped it in garbage.

The state-run Saudi Press Agency reported only that the Shura Council voted to approve a draft amendment to a nearly 50-year-old royal decree governing the flag. The amendment was proposed by council member Saad al-Otaibi and studied by a subcommittee before it was discussed among council members.

The proposal comes amid rapid reforms that have transformed the once ultraconservative country.

WMO declares 770-km lightning as longest ever recorded

The WMO Archive of Weather and Climate Extremes maintains official records of the world, hemispheric and regional extreme records associated with a number of specific types of weather

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New York/Geneva, Feb 2: A bolt of lightning that stretched nearly 769 kilometres across three US states in 2020 or equivalent to the distance between London and the German city of Hamburg has been declared as the longest recorded single flash by the World

Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The record lightning struck April 29, 2020 across Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas in the southern US, with the exact length at 768 km, or 477.2 miles, experts at the UN's intergovernmental agency said Tuesday.

The longest single flash covered a horizontal distance of 768 ± 8 km across parts of the southern United States 29 April 2020.

This is equivalent to the distance between New York City and Columbus Ohio in the United States or between London and the German city of Hamburg, the WMO said in a press release.

The greatest duration for a single lightning flash of 17.102 ± 0.002 seconds from the flash that developed continuously through a thunderstorm over Uruguay and northern Argentina 18 June 2020, it said.

The new record for the longest



detected mega flash distance is 60 kilometres more than the previous record, with a distance of 709 ± 8 km across parts of southern Brazil 31 October 2018.

Both the previous and new record used the same maximum great cir-

cule distance methodology to measure flash extent.

The longest duration mega flash had a previous duration of 16.73 seconds which was derived from a flash that developed continuously over northern Argentina 4 March

The record lightning struck April 29, 2020 across Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas in the southern US, with the exact length at 768 km

2019, 0.37 seconds shorter than the new record. The findings were published in the Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, the WMO said.

"Lightning is a major hazard that claims many lives every year. The findings highlight important public lightning safety concerns for electrified clouds where flashes can travel extremely large distances," said WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas. The new record strikes occurred

in hotspots for Mesoscale Convective System (MCS) thunderstorms, whose dynamics permit extraordinary megaflashes to occur - namely, the Great Plains in North America, and the La Plata basin in South America.

Noted lightning specialist and committee member Ron Holle noted, "these extremely large and long-duration lightning events were not isolated but happened during active thunderstorms. Any time there is thunder heard it is time to reach a lightning-safe place."

The only lightning-safe locations are substantial buildings that have wiring and plumbing; not structures such as a beach or bus stop. The second reliably safe location is inside a fully enclosed metal-topped vehicle; not dune buggies or motorcycles.

business



It is a reflection of our confidence in the future of India, its digital economy, our desire to build products there, which we think will help us globally
SUNDAR PICHAI | CEO, ALPHABET AND GOOGLE

OIL PSUs TO SPEND ₹1.11L CR CAPEX

State-owned oil firms such as ONGC and IOC will invest over Rs 1.11 lakh crore in the next fiscal year starting April as they supplement the government's massive spending programme to spur economic growth. ONGC, IOC, GAIL, BPCL, HPCL and OIL will together make a 7.4 per cent higher capital expenditure in the 2022-23 fiscal



of the day quote

For 10th month in a row, April 2021 to January 2022, India has posted over \$30 billion of exports. It is a record, we have already crossed \$334 billion of exports which is more than the highest ever that India has done in full 12 months period

PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

The talent base (in India) is quite significant and strong, and through that, we are able to drive a significant amount of value to a lot of our global customers - all from India

LINGRAJU SAWKAR | PRESIDENT, KYNDRYL

The budget has announced major support measures, which will provide a fillip to the growth of exports from the leather and footwear industry

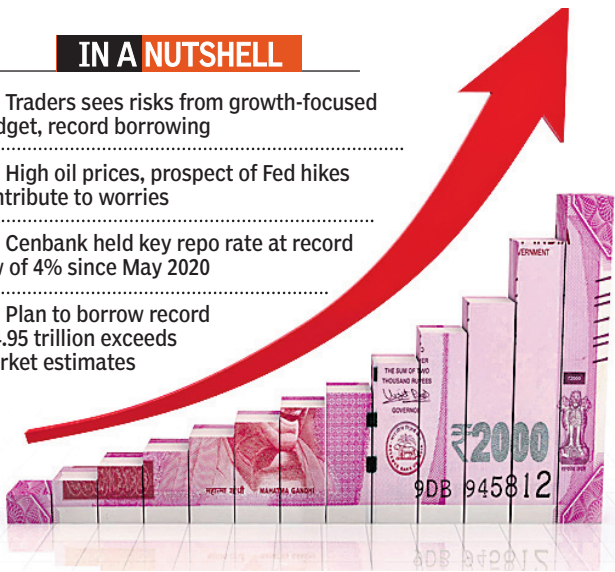
SANJAY LEEKHA | CHAIRMAN, CLE

Budget sparks concerns on inflation, tighter rates

REUTERS

IN A NUTSHELL

- Traders see risks from growth-focused budget, record borrowing
- High oil prices, prospect of Fed hikes contribute to worries
- Cenbank held key repo rate at record low of 4% since May 2020
- Plan to borrow record ₹14.95 trillion exceeds market estimates



New Delhi, Feb 2: India's growth-focused budget for the upcoming fiscal year, on the back of record market borrowing, has fuelled worries among bond traders who fear the central bank may now be forced to act on the inflationary risks, despite its dovish policy stance.

Coupled with global crude oil prices at seven-year highs and expectations for the US Federal Reserve to raise rates more aggressively, traders fear the government's plans mean the Reserve Bank of India may need to act sooner rather than later.

India announced capital expenditure of Rs 7.5 trillion (\$100 billion) for 2022/23, or 2.9% of gross domestic product, an increase of 35.4% from the last fiscal year.

The government is also set to borrow a record Rs 14.95 trillion, exceeding market expectations for a maximum of Rs 12 trillion to Rs 13 trillion.

"We expect the RBI to focus on reining in inflation to 4% from current high levels through next year with domestic growth on a relatively better footing and assuming no surprises on the Covid-19 front," said Upasna Bharadwaj, an economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank.

India's central bank has held its key repo rate at a record low of 4% since May 2020, and assured markets it will continue to keep its policy stance accommodative until economic recovery is firmly entrenched.

Consumer prices accelerated to a five-month high of 5.59% in December; however, close to the upper end of the central bank's mandated inflation band of 2% to 6%.

"The RBI should look to revise their accommodative stance as a countermeasure to the expansionary budget," said Sandeep Bagla, the chief economist officer at Trust Mutual Fund.

"The longer RBI waits to normalise, the more markets will lose the confidence in RBI's ability to control inflation and inflation expectations," Bhardwaj said a policy review due Feb 9 should undertake a one-shot hike of 40 bps in the reverse repo rate so as to restore normalcy and provide clarity.

"However, sentiment in the bond

The budget definitely makes RBI's job tougher from the yield management perspective

YUVIKA SINGHAL | ECONOMIST, QUANTECO RESEARCH

markets has weakened further post the budget and hence, RBI may prefer to postpone the decision to the April policy," she added.

Economists believe the benchmark bond yield, which has risen about 45 bps in 2022, after last year's rise of 55 bps, is likely to keep heading higher in the near term, in the absence of open market operations or liquidity-neutral operations.

Economists polled before the

'Budget short on structural reform announcements'

India's budget for the fiscal beginning April focuses on giving a boost to the ongoing economic recovery through a sharp increase in capex spending but is short on major growth-enhancing structural reform announcements, Fitch Ratings said Wednesday.

The deficit targets present in the Union budget 2022-23 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Tuesday "are a bit higher than our forecasts when we affirmed India's 'BBB-/Negative sovereign rating in November," said Jeremy Zook, Director and Primary Sovereign analyst for India, Fitch Ratings.

While it was widely expected that the fiscal deficit will be lower than the targeted 6.8 per cent of the GDP in the current fiscal

year ending March 31, 2022, Sitharaman put the number at 6.9 per cent.

"Our expectation of modest fiscal outperformance in (current) FY22 from last year's budget target appears unlikely to materialise, with the budget flagging a revised deficit of 6.9 per cent of GDP against our 6.6 per cent forecast," Fitch said. "The planned 6.4 per cent of GDP FY23 deficit is also higher than our previous 6.1 per cent forecast."

"This budget illustrates the government's focus on giving a boost to the ongoing economic recovery through a sharp increase in capex spending while relying on economic

growth and buoyant revenues to achieve its fiscal sustainability objectives," Zook said.

budget had expected the repo rate to be raised 25 basis points in the June quarter and then go up by a total of 75 bps over the next fiscal.

The reverse repo rate was forecast to be raised at next week's

policy review and increase by a total of 90 bps in FY23. Six economists and market participants said they now expect a swifter pace and quantum of rate hikes as the RBI alone must tackle inflation.

SHORT TAKES

Exports, imports up over 23% in Jan

New Delhi: India's merchandise exports in January 2022 rose to \$34.06 billion, higher by 23.69 per cent on a year-on-year basis, preliminary data showed Tuesday. Exports in January 2021 stood at \$27.54 billion. According to the data furnished by the Commerce and Industry Ministry, last month's exports rose by 31.75 per cent over January 2020. As per the data, India's merchandise imports last month increased by 23.74 per cent to \$52.01 billion over \$42.03 billion in January 2021, a rise of 26.38 per cent over \$41.15 billion reported for the corresponding month of 2020.

HDFC Q3 net rises 13% to ₹5,837cr

New Delhi: HDFC Ltd Wednesday reported a nearly 13 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit at Rs 5,837 crore for the quarter ended December 2021. The country's largest mortgage lender had posted a net profit of Rs 5,177 crore in the corresponding period a year ago. "For the quarter ended December 31, 2021, the consolidated profit after tax attributable to the Corporation stood at Rs 5,837 crore as compared to Rs 5,177 crore in the previous year," HDFC said in a release.

Domestic 2W sales dip 21%

Mumbai: The domestic two-wheeler sales witnessed 21 per cent year-on-year decline in January, even as the segment registered a 14 per cent sequential growth in domestic wholesale volumes, according to credit ratings agency ICRA. The numbers are based on the data released by six major original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). ICRA said in a statement Wednesday. The low year-on-year sales volume in January, highlights the adverse impact of price hikes, fuel inflation, and Omicron-related concerns on consumer sentiments, said an official.

K'taka clears 88 projects

Bangalore: Giving a big push to growth, the Karnataka industries department has approved 88 industrial projects worth Rs 2,367.99 crore that is expected to generate jobs for over 10,904 people in the state, Murugesha R Nirani, Minister for Large and Medium Scale Industries said Wednesday. These projects worth Rs 799.1 crore are expected to create employment opportunities for 3,237 people in the state.

Coal crunch at alarming levels: AAI

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 2: With no relief in sight despite coal stocks running critically low and production disruptions looming across the Indian aluminium sector, the Aluminium Association of India (AAI) has approached the Ministry of Coal, urging the immediate resumption of adequate coal rakes for the highly power-intensive Aluminium industry.

In its representation to the Ministry, the AAI has lauded the combined efforts by the Ministry of Coal and CIL in reviving domestic coal production, which has helped ease the coal supply crisis for the Power Sector. The steps undertaken by the Ministry increased the overall daily rakes dispatched from 242 rakes/day in September 2021 to 289 rakes/day in December 2021. This has drastically strengthened the coal stocks of the Power Sector to around 10 days, a marked im-



provement from a mere 2-3 days in the months of Sept-Oct last year.

However, this has come at enormous cost to the Captive Power Plants (CPP)-based industry and the worst impacted is the Indian aluminium industry, which continues to see depleting coal stocks of only 3-4 days, abysmally low compared to the prescribed level of 15 days for the sector.

Struggling to cope with this prolonged crisis since the second quarter of this fiscal year, the AAI has now sought the Ministry's support to ensure adequate supplies to the CPPs.

ITR to have separate column for crypto

The government is working on legislation to regulate cryptocurrencies, but no draft has yet been released publicly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: Income tax return forms from next year will have a separate column for making disclosures on gains made from cryptocurrencies and paying taxes, Revenue Secretary Tarun Bajaj said Wednesday.

The government will from April 1 charge a 30 per cent tax plus cess and surcharges, on such transactions in the same manner as it treats winnings from horse races or other speculative transactions.

In an interview with PTI, Bajaj said gains from cryptocurrencies were always taxable and what the Budget proposed is not a new tax but providing certainty over the issue.

"The provision in the Finance Bill is related to taxation of virtual digital assets. It is to bring certainty in taxation of cryptocur-

DIGITAL ASSETS UNDER LENS



rencies. It does not convey anything on its legality which would come out once the Bill (on regulating such assets) is introduced in Parliament," he said.

The 30 per cent plus applicable cesses and surcharge of 15 per cent on income above Rs 50 lakh will have to be paid on income from cryptocurrencies, he said adding

They are in a grey area. It's not illegal to buy and sell crypto. We have now put in a taxation framework that treats crypto assets the same way we treat winnings from horse races, or from bets and other speculative transactions

TV SOMANATHAN | FINANCE SECRETARY

It was always taxable, I am not saying it's not a new tax, I'm bringing certainty in tax. Now if you show crypto in the ITR form, you will have separate head crypto and it will charge you 30 per cent tax

TARUN BAJAJ | REVENUE SECRETARY

the income tax return form from next year will have a separate column to declare gains from crypto.

"Next year ITR form will show a separate column for crypto. Yes, you will have to disclose," he said.

"The Government was very clear that it has to push for a tax on income from crypto assets. So we have brought in maximum rate and levied 30 per cent, with an applicable surcharge. We have also

brought in TDS, so we will now track the transactions," Bajaj said.

Gains from crypto are chargeable to income tax even at present, Bajaj said, adding the Assessing Officer will assess the ITR based on crypto income that the assessee has shown.

"If somebody says it's a long-term capital gains tax (LTCCG), it is a business income and hence liable to 30 per cent tax," he said.

BIZ BUZZ

PNB holds Swachata Pakhwada

Bhubaneswar: Swachata Pakhwada was observed in all the offices of Punjab National Bank, Bhubaneswar Zone from Jan 16, 2022 to Jan 31, 2022. During this fortnight programme, the staffs of Zonal Office took part in cleanliness drive under the leadership of the Zonal Manager, Sanjeev Bhardwaj, to clean the surroundings of Zonal Office Building at Jagamara, Bhubaneswar. Earlier, all the staff members had taken pledge to remain committed towards cleanliness and to propagate the message of Swatch Bharat Mission in their area. Zonal Manager Sanjeev Bhardwaj sensitised the staff members of Zonal Office about the importance of cleanliness and directed them to avoid single use of plastic and to maintain Swachata in their surroundings.



OGB employees stage protests

Bhubaneswar: Association of Odisha Gramya Bank Officers (AOGBO) and Odisha Gramya Bank Employees Association (OGBEA) representing officers and employees of Odisha Gramya Bank (OGB) staged demonstration in front of NABARD and IOB, Regional Office Jan 27, 2022 and Jan 28, 2022 respectively. The association had already given the strike notice for fulfillment of 12 pending demands, which they claimed that current management of the Bank is not keen to resolve with mutual discussion. They alleged that management is not providing basic infrastructure to branches and implementing unfair labour policies with an autocratic mindset. The officers and employees of the Bank have decided to go on strike for one day Feb 7, 2022 followed by two-day strike Feb 16, 2022 and Feb 17, 2022, if the management did not meet the demands. Due to the stubborn nature of Bank management rural people of Odisha are going to face lot of difficulties during the strike, said an official.



Digital rupee can be exchanged for cash

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Wednesday said the digital rupee, proposed in the union budget, could be exchanged for cash and will open new opportunities in the fintech sector.

Addressing the 'Atmanirbha Arthavyavastha' (self-reliant economy) symposium organised by the BJP, he said the central bank digital currency or the digital rupee will make online payments more secure and risk free and boost digital economy in the years to come.

"The digital rupee will be the digital form of our physical rupee and will be regulated by the RBI. This will be such a system that will enable exchange of physical currency with digital currency," Modi said at the virtual symposium that was attended by chief ministers of BJP-



PM Modi said the launch of CBDC will make digital payments and online transfer of funds more secure and risk free

ruled states and party workers across the country.

"Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) will strengthen the digital economy. If anyone makes a payment in digital currency you will be able to change it to cash," he said.

Modi said the launch of CBDC will make digital payments and online transfer of funds more secure and risk free. "This will also lead

to ease in development of global digital payment systems," he said.

He said the digital rupee will revolutionise the fintech sector by creating new opportunities and lessen the burden in handling, printing, logistics management of cash. Finance Minister had announced that India will launch a 'digital rupee' in 2022-23 using blockchain and other technologies.

Death knell for Mark Zuckerberg's cryptocurrency dreams

A ONCE-AMBITIOUS BUT NOW FALTERING FACEBOOK-BACKED DIGITAL CURRENCY PROJECT KNOWN AS DIEM IS DEAD AND ITS ASSETS SOLD TO BANK HOLDING COMPANY SILVERGATE CAPITAL FOR \$200 MILLION

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

San Francisco, Feb 2: Facing regulatory hurdles, the cryptocurrency dream of Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg is officially over as the company has sold its digital coin known as Diem for around \$200 million to Silvergate, a crypto-focused bank.

Originally launched as Libra and later renamed as the Diem Association, the cryptocurrency initiative faced regulatory backlash, and the US Federal Reserve was a key opponent to Diem launching. "Despite giving us positive sub-



stantive feedback on the design of the network, it nevertheless became clear from our dialogue with federal regulators that the project could not move ahead. As a result,

the best path forward was to sell the Diem Group's assets, as we have done today to Silvergate," said Diem Networks CEO Stuart Levey. "We remain confident in the

potential for a stablecoin operating on a blockchain designed like Diem's to deliver the benefits that motivated the Diem Association from the beginning," he added.

Over the coming weeks, the Diem Association and its subsidiaries expect to begin the process of winding down. The Libra Association in December 2020 decided to change its name to Diem Association in a bid to reinforce its organisational independence.

The Diem Association (Diem means day in Latin) also had its subsidiary called Diem Networks to serve as the payment system op-

erator: Facebook and 20 partner organisations formally joined the digital currency project during a meeting in Geneva in October 2019.

In a move to win regulators' hearts, the association had announced that its cryptocurrency will offer stable coins backed by just one nation's currency, meaning some coins offered would serve as the equivalent value of a dollar or a euro.

However, several heavyweights pulled out of the Libra project, like PayPal, Mastercard, Visa, Mercado Pago, eBay, Stripe and Booking Holdings and Vodafone over privacy concerns.

NEERAJ NOMINATED FOR LAUREUS

Dhull, Rasheed help India U-19 post 290/5

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, Feb 2: Olympic gold medal-winning javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra was Wednesday nominated for the prestigious Laureus 'World Breakthrough of the Year' award, making him the first Indian to be featured in the short-list for this category.

He was clubbed alongside tennis stars Daniil Medvedev and Emma Raducanu among others.

The 23-year-old Chopra last year became only the second Indian to win an individual Olympic gold medal and first in track and field in Tokyo with a throw of 87.58 metres in his second attempt. The performance catapulted him to superstar status in India and also brought him worldwide acclaim.

"It's a great honour for me to be recognised in the wider sporting world for what I achieved in Tokyo. From being a kid in a small village in rural India who only took up sport to get fit, to standing on top of an Olympic podium, it's been quite an eventful journey so far," Chopra said in a statement issued by The Laureus Academy.

"I feel privileged to be able to represent my country and win India medals at the global stage, and now to have this recognition from Laureus and be considered alongside such exceptional athletes is a really special feeling."

He is now only the third Indian to fetch a Laureus nomination after cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar and wrestler Vinesh Phogat.

Phogat was nominated in the 'Laureus World Sporting Comeback' category for the year 2019, while Tendulkar won the 'Laureus best sporting moment in the last 20 years' in 2020.

The moment in consideration was Tendulkar's teammates lifting him on their shoulders after India won the 2011 ODI World Cup at home.

A panel of more than 1,300 sports journalists and broadcasters of the world have selected the nominees in each of the seven categories for this year's Laureus World Sports Awards.

The winners will be revealed in



April, following a vote by the Laureus World Sports Academy, the world's ultimate sports jury, made up of 71 of the greatest sport-

ing legends of all time.

At the 2016 World Under-20 Championships, Chopra won the gold medal.

Also nominated with Chopra for the Breakthrough Award are FC Barcelona's football prodigy Pedri, the 19-year-old who was voted best

young player at the Ballon d'Or; Yulimar Rojas, who broke the 26-year-old triple jump world record, and swimmer Ariarne Titmus, who twice beat champion Katie Ledecky at 200 and 400m in Tokyo.

The battle for the Laureus World Sportsman of the Year Award will be one of the most competitive ever.

The short-list features NFL star Tom Brady, Bayern Munich's prolific goal-scorer Robert Lewandowski, new Formula One World Champion Max Verstappen, tennis World No.1 Novak Djokovic, and two of the greatest Olympians – swimmer Caeleb Dressel, who won five gold medals in Tokyo, and Eliud Kipchoge, who won back-to-back marathon gold medals.

Several top-notch Olympic performances dominate the Laureus World Sportswoman of the Year category. Elaine Thompson-Herah matched fellow Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt with gold medals in the 100, 200 and 4x100 metres relay; Allyson Felix passed Carl Lewis as the most decorated track and field US Olympian; Australian swimmer Emma McKeon's four gold and three bronze tied the record for the most medals ever won by a woman in a single Olympic Games; and American swimmer Katie Ledecky won two more gold and two silver medals.

Italy's men's football team is among the frontrunners for the Laureus World Team of the Year Award after their victory in Euro 2020. There are two other football nominees – the Argentina men's football team, including Lionel Messi, who won the Copa America; and FC Barcelona women's football side, who won their first Champions League.

They are joined by China's Olympic diving team, who won gold medals in seven of the eight events, the Milwaukee Bucks, inspired by Giannis Antetokounmpo, who ended their 50-year wait for a second NBA championship, and the Mercedes-AMG Petronas Formula One Team which won a record eighth consecutive Constructors' World Championship.



CRUCIAL PARTNERSHIP: Yash Dhull (L) and Shaik Rasheed run between the wickets during their third-wicket stand, Wednesday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Osborn, Feb 2: Skipper Yash Dhull (110, 110, 10x4, 1x6) gave a glimpse of his enormous talent with a superbly-crafted hundred while deputy Shaik Rasheed ideally complemented him with 94 (108b, 8x4, 1x6) as India scored a mammoth 290/5 against Australia in the second semifinal of the ICC U-19 World Cup here Wednesday.

Dhull was able to complete a fine century but Rasheed fell short of the mark by six runs as they added 204 runs for third wicket to pile up a score that might well be beyond Australia's reach.

He also became third Indian captain to hit a hundred in the tournament history after illustrious Virat Kohli and the prodigious Unmukt Chand, also hailing from Delhi.

India opted to put runs on the board after winning the toss, knowing it wasn't the easiest of pitches to bat on. Australian pacers bowled well in the opening powerplay and the fact that Indian openers Ankrish Raghuvanshi (6 off 30) and Harnoor Singh (16 off 30) were also overtly defensive, helped them build pressure.

William Salzmann rocked Raghuvanshi's off-stump with a beauty that straightened after pitching. Harnoor, who has not met the

high expectations he set for himself, tried to pull a rising ball on leg stump from Tobia Snell only to glove it back to the wicketkeeper, leaving India at 37/2 in the 13th over.

India's two best batters, Dhull and Rasheed, then got together to lift the team out of a spot of bother. Playing only their third game of the tournament after missing two due to COVID, Rasheed and Dhull showed maturity beyond their age to build the innings.

After Dhull's departure, Rasheed could not get to a deserving hundred after being caught at backward point off Nisbet.

Australia were sloppy in the field through the innings. Rasheed was dropped on 24 and missed an easy run out chance of Dhull who was batting on 74.

With two set batters gone in quick succession, the flow of the innings was slightly disrupted before Nishant Sindhu (12 n o), Dinesh Bana (20 n o) and Rajvardhan Hangagekar (13) came up with the big shots in the death overs. The last over from pacer Tom Whitney included as many as 27 runs in-cluding three sixes and two fours.

BRIEF SCORES

India U-19 290/5 (Yash Dhull 110, Shaik Rasheed 94; Jack Nisbet 2/41, William Salzmann 2/57) v Australia U-19. Match to continue.

England U-19 end 24-yr wait Argentina put Colombia in tight spot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

North Sound (Antigua), Feb 2: Fancied England kept their nerve to reach the ICC U-19 World Cup final after prevailing over Afghanistan by 15 runs in an exciting last-four clash here, ending a 24-year wait for the side.

Spinner Rehan Ahmed became the hero for the Young Lions, taking three wickets in the penultimate over at a crucial point when their opponents needed just 18 runs from the last 10 balls Tuesday.

It was a remarkable turnaround for England from the previous tournament just two years ago in South Africa when they finished ninth. As for Afghanistan, they will head to the Coolidge Cricket Ground for

the third-place playoff. Rain delayed the first of the two super league semi-finals at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Ground after England won the toss and chose to bat. Once both sides were eventually able to take to the field here, it was Afghanistan who made the stronger start.

Jacob Bethell, who lit up the quarter-final tie with 88 against South Africa last week, was trapped LBW by Naveed Zadrán, an early sign that England faced a difficult task.

Skipper Tom Prest then joined vice-captain Bethell in making an early departure, reducing them to 56/2, as the Young Lions struggled to command with the bat.

George Thomas did steady the ship with an excellent 50 after a

slightly nervy introduction at the crease, but was later beaten by a fine delivery from Noor Ahmad. And when William Luxton was clean bowled by Izharulhaq Naveed, Pres's team were five wickets down having barely put 100 runs on the board.

However, the rain came again to delay play for a further half hour and led to revised conditions of 47 overs per side. England's back-end partnership of 95 from George Bell and Alex Horton then managed to put a different dynamic on their innings.

The duo attacked the Afghanistan seamers fiercely which managed to lift the final total to 231. The earlier interruptions from the weather meant Afghanistan had a revised DLS target to match this score and chasing their first ever U-19 World Cup final, they knew a good start was needed to seize control of the game.

The 44th over for England appeared to have turned the game when two no balls in a row gifted their opponents eight runs, before Abdul Hadi (37 not out) smashed a huge six to take them to 200.

But Ahmed's late flurry and a nerveless final over from Boyden carried England over the line to their first first U-19 World Cup final since 1998 in South Africa, when they lifted the trophy.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sao Paulo, Feb 2: Colombia will need a miracle to play in the next World Cup after its 0-1 loss to Argentina in South American qualifying.

Lautaro Martinez scored the only goal of the match in Cordoba in the 29th minute Tuesday after he was left alone in the penalty box by two Colombia defenders. Goalkeeper Camilo Vargas made several important saves, including three shots by veteran Angel Di Maria.

Argentina did not count on superstar Lionel Messi, who is still recovering from COVID-19. But the team — and Brazil — have already secured their places in the World Cup.

Colombia is in seventh place with 17 points. Peru, currently in fifth place with 20 points, will play later against Ecuador in Lima. If the Peruvians win, the closest rival to Colombia in a qualifying position will be Uruguay, with 22 points.

Uruguay has two games left: Peru at home and Chile away. Colombia's last rivals are less dangerous, Bolivia at home and Venezuela away.

"This is not over, we want to go at it until the end," Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda said in a news con-



Argentina striker Lautaro Martinez celebrates his goal against Colombia

ference. "Maybe we need more clarity in the midfield and also in our finishing. We miss that energy."

South America has four direct spots in the World Cup. The fifth position will play an international playoff against an Asian team for a berth.

Leader Brazil thrashed Paraguay 4-0 at home with goals scored by Raphinha, Philippe Coutinho, Antony and Rodrigo. Coach Tite did not count on an injured Neymar playing, and also used the game to test out other players like Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni did.

Earlier, Chile beat Bolivia 3-2 in the altitude of La Paz thanks to two goals by Alexis Sánchez and another by Marcelino Núñez. The result kept the Chileans in contention in sixth place with 19 points and nearly ended the chances of the hosts, who remain with 15 points. The Bolivian goals came from Marc Enoumbe and Marcelo Martins.

"This was a reward to our efforts, but it doesn't finish here," Chile striker Sánchez said. Chile's final challenges will be at Brazil and home against Uruguay.

The Uruguayans gave new coach Diego Alonso his second consecutive win on the job — a 4-1 hammering of Venezuela. Rodrigo Betancur, Giorgian de Arrascaeta, Edinson Cavani and Luis Suarez all scored for Uruguay. Venezuela's only goal was from Josef Martínez.

Third-place Ecuador could secure its direct spot with a win at Peru. The two final rounds of South American qualifiers will be played in the end of March.

Fixtures for remainder of ISL season unveiled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Margao, Feb 2: The Indian Super League (ISL) Wednesday unveiled the revised fixture list for the ongoing event with the organisers incorporating all the matches that were postponed due to COVID-19 outbreaks last month in the schedule that begins February 9.

ATK Mohun Bagan will face Jamshedpur FC in the final match of the regular season at the P.J.N Stadium here March 7, according to the revised fixture drawn by the league organisers Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL).

"Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) today released the revised fixture list for 25 matches, from February 9 onwards, for the Hero Indian Super League (ISL) 2021-22 season. The League has incorporated the matches that were postponed in January into the re-

drawn calendar," the ISL said in a statement.

There will be three additional double-headers, all Saturdays (February 19, February 26, and March 5) to accommodate the six games that were suspended.

The matches were earlier suspended due to multiple COVID-19 cases in the teams with the worst hit being Kerala Blasters, ATK Mohun Bagan and Jamshedpur FC.

In the final five weeks of the league season, multiple teams will be fighting for the top spot and for the reward of representing India in the 2023 AFC Champions League.

The matches postponed due to the COVID outbreak were Jamshedpur FC vs Mumbai City FC, ATKMB vs Odisha FC, Kerala Blasters FC vs ATKMB, Hyderabad FC vs Jamshedpur FC, Kerala Blasters vs Mumbai City FC and ATKMB vs Bengaluru FC.

Sreejesh eyes World Cup medal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 2: At 33, PR Sreejesh is in the twilight of his career, but the veteran Indian hockey goalkeeper is in no mood to call it quits anytime soon as he is eyeing a World Cup medal to add to his Tokyo Olympics bronze before deciding the future course of his career.

Sreejesh, who made his senior team debut in 2006, is regarded as one of the finest goalkeepers in world hockey. Sreejesh, who captained the national team to the quarterfinals of the 2016 Rio Olympics, was also a part of the 2014 gold medal-winning Asian Games squad but his most cherished dream was fulfilled in last year's Tokyo Olympics when India won a historic bronze after a hiatus of 41 years.

But the senior custodian is still not satisfied as he aims to win a World Cup medal next year before taking a call on his future, which includes the 2024 Paris Olympics.



"The Olympic medal was a dream but I still have a chance to better the colour of the medal. 2022 is very important for us which starts with the FIH Pro League and then we have the Commonwealth Games and the Asian Games," said Sreejesh, who became only the second Indian after women's team skipper Rani Rampal to win the 'World Games Athlete of the Year' award.

"The Asian Games will give us a direct berth in the Paris Olympics, so there is as an added motivation. In the last World Cup, we couldn't

qualify for the semifinals, so winning a medal in the World Cup will complete my goal."

For Sreejesh, setting short-term goals is his priority now, saying the day he feels lack of motivation towards the game, he will not hesitate to call it quits.

"Our focus now is on the next Olympic cycle which starts this year. First we will have the Pro League which will help in creating a strong base for us. For a goalkeeper, age is not a big barrier. It's about how passionate you are about the game. Personally, I am not setting any long-term target. My short-term goal next is the World Cup to be held in India," he said.

Asked what still drives him to wake up every morning and go through the grind, Sreejesh said: "Wearing the blue jersey is not possible for everyone. Only a lucky person gets that opportunity but for that, you need to work hard and that's what gives you the motivation."

INDIA CONTINGENT MANAGER FOR WINTER GAMES TESTS +VE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Feb 2: The manager of India's Winter Olympics contingent, Mohammad Abbas Wani, has tested positive for COVID-19 upon arrival at the Beijing Airport here.

Abbas Wani is a part of the six-member Indian delegation at the Winter Olympics where Jammu and Kashmir skier Arif Khan is the only athlete from the country to have qualified this time. Arif will be competing in Slalom and Giant Slalom events during the Games.

The contingent also includes Harjinder Singh as its chef de mission, Ludar Chand Thakur as alpine coach, Puran Chand as technician and Roop Chand Negi as team official.

"I am in quarantine in my hotel room at Olympic village & have been asked to restrict my movement within the room only until the results of my 2nd Covid test. I am completely fine & asymptomatic,"

he tweeted. Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra informed about Abbas Wani's positive COVID result and said chef de mission Harjinder is coordinating with the Winter Olympics organisers for a re-test.

"The manager of the Indian contingent Mr. Abbas Wani tested COVID positive at Beijing Airport. The chef de mission Mr. Harjinder Singh is coordinating for a re-test. The athlete and his coach have been shifted to another flat to avoid any interaction," Batra said.

The Winter Olympics will be held from February 4 to 20. Meanwhile, China Wednesday fielded Qi Fabao, the regimental commander of the People's Liberation Army, who was injured during the June 2020 border skirmish with Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh, as a torchbearer for the Games Torch Relay.