



SENSITIVE BOOTHS
Kendrapara administration has intimated the SEC that 43% of booths in the district are sensitive
STATE P5



IS LEADER KILLED
President Joe Biden confirms killing of a top IS leader during raids by US commandos in Syria
INTERNATIONAL P10



CONSCIOUS DECISION
India's U-19 skipper Yash Dhull says it was a conscious decision to bat steadily in the WC semifinal against Australia
SPORTS P12

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Facebook suffers \$230 billion loss
New York: The pivot to Meta isn't helping Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook. Markets directed their wrath on missing fundamentals - a sharper-than-expected decline in profits and a gloomy outlook - in the first earnings report of the newly christened company Wednesday. Shares opened Thursday down 25 per cent. This is a crash of about \$230 billion from the social media networking giant's market capitalisation. Zuckerberg personally lost 23.34 percent of his net worth. At \$87.7 billion, he slipped to No 12 in the Forbes real-time billionaires' index marginally behind Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani. **P11**

Ex-MLA, noted ornithologist no more
Sanakhemundi: Three-time legislator of Mohana Assembly constituency and Sanakhemundi royal family chief Uday Narayan Dev passed away Wednesday night while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Bhubaneswar, family members informed Thursday. He was 87. A famous ornithologist, Dev had been suffering old age related complications for the past few days. Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik condoled the sad demise of Dev and conveyed his sympathy to the bereaved family. Dev who was actively involved in social activities was elected as an MLA from Mohana in 1974, 1977 and 1980. Dev recently had unveiled his most exhaustive work on birds titled 'Bihanga Samhita'. **MORE P4**

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Schoolmate plotted student's kidnapping

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: A schoolmate of the abducted Ishan Agarwal had planned the entire kidnapping, a top police official informed Thursday. Giving this information, Bhubaneswar DCP Umashankar Dash said that the involvement of a school friend of the kidnapped has been found. One of the four accused arrested in the case is Dhaneswar Patra. He had provided necessary information regarding Ishan to other kidnapers for money, the DCP said. Dhaneswar tried his best so that Ishan could not recognise him. He used to cover his face to conceal his identity. Ishan could only identify Dhaneswar only after the latter's arrest, the DCP stated. "Cops managed to rescue Ishan unhurt. The police teams were properly armed to meet any eventuality as we were apprehending that the kidnapers might be armed as well," Dash said. The accused had kept Ishan and his mobile phone at separate places to confuse the police. Ishan's phone was with the third team of the kidnapers while another group was moving Ishan from one place to another. The team with the phone was also changing locations. Ishan was abducted by the miscreants from Laxmisagar area January 31 evening. "Two men initially called out my name. As they were wearing masks and hoodies, I could not recognise them. When I went near the vehicle, they grabbed me and pushed me into the vehicle," Ishan had told the police after his rescue. "They overpowered me and immediately clamped a cloth into my mouth, so I could not raise an alarm," he added.

MAN'S BEST FRIEND



BSF jawans pose with dogs used for tackling terrorism activities during a dog show at St Xavier's High School in Jeypore, Thursday

SKM urges farmers to 'punish' BJP in UP polls

The farmers had called off their stir against the agri laws in December last year. However, their demands still remain unfulfilled, the farmers' body alleged. "SKM has issued an appeal to farmers in UP to punish the BJP in the upcoming elections for betraying the farmers. The government has not fulfilled its promises. No committee has been formed yet for MSP and neither the cases against farmers have been withdrawn," Yadav informed. "We will organise press conferences at nine places, including Meerut, Kanpur, Siddharthnagar, Gorakhpur and Lucknow in the coming days. Pamphlets containing our appeal will be distributed across UP," added Yadav. He however, asserted that SKM will continue to remain apolitical. The contentious farm laws were repealed November 24, last year with the Union Cabinet approving a bill to nullify those. Earlier November 19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that the laws would be withdrawn and the main demands of the farmers will be met. The SKM-led protests, mainly at Delhi's borders had started in November 2020 and ended December 11, 2021. In the more than a year-long agitation more than 700 farmers had lost their lives. However, that did not act as an impediment for the agitating farmers. Fifty-seven farmer organisations have supported the call given by the SKM, Yadav said. He, however, clarified that the morchas has nothing to do with seeking votes for any party in the elections. SKM which spearheaded the farmers agitation against the new agri laws which were later rolled back, said their remaining demands, including setting up of a committee on minimum support price (MSP) and withdrawal of cases against farmers, remain unfulfilled.

Back to classrooms

It will be interesting to see how students from classes I to V react as they have not been attending physical classes for more than 2 years now



FRESH BEGINNING
Promotions up to Classes IX and from Class XI to Class XII can be through both off or online exams
Final examinations for Classes X and XII will be in offline mode, decision on this to be taken by the respective board.
Summer vacation holidays can be shortened to complete the various courses
Hostel facilities to be available for students from February 7
In view of the decreasing Covid-19 cases, the Odisha government has decided to reopen all educational institutions in a phased manner from February 7. Physical classes for students of Class VIII and above will resume from February 7 while schools will reopen for KG to Class VII students, February 14, Chief Secretary SC Mahapatra said here, Thursday. Due to three successive Covid-19 waves, schools for students up to Class V have remain closed for more than two years while higher educational institutions have been closed since January 10. All educational institutions, imparting any type of education of the level of Class VIII and above including schools, colleges, ITIs, polytechnics, degree and professional colleges and universities, will start physical classroom teaching February 7, Mahapatra said. Hostel and other residential facilities will also reopen on the same day. The decision to resume physical classroom teaching has been taken to mitigate the losses suffered by the students and in the larger interest of the community, Mahapatra informed. For the current academic year, school students can avail the option of online or off-line/hybrid teaching for their classes. For higher education institutions the guidelines that were in force before January 10, 2022 will continue. The concerned authorities/regulatory bodies can revise the academic calendar for this year, if required. They can also cut-short the summer vacation to complete the courses and take steps to bridge the learning gap, the Chief Secretary said. Examinations for classes up to IX and for promotion of students from Class XI to XII can be done through class assessment. Students will be allowed the option of taking the examination either through offline or online or hybrid mode depending upon the feasibility of the schools, he announced. However, the examinations for Classes X and XII will be conducted as per the orders and guidelines of respective boards, councils or regulatory authorities, Mahapatra said. Those in all probability will be in offline mode, informed Mahapatra. Examinations in higher education institutions, including technical and professional institutions will be conducted as per approved guidelines prevailing just before closure of these institutions January 10, 2022. **MORE P2**

POLICE RESCUE LOST CANDIDATE

Dhenkanal, Feb 3: Subrata Behera, 23 a samiti member candidate of Nuagaon panchayat under Hindol block in this district who had been missing for the last two days was rescued by police from an undisclosed location under Bhapur police outpost, Thursday afternoon. His family had earlier lodged a complaint that Behera had been kidnapped, at Kantabania police station. Police formed three teams and launched a search operation and rescued him around 1.00 pm. Police are questioning Behera at Jhargadia police outpost to find out the reasons as to why he had gone missing and whether any foul play is involved.

27.35% rise in GST mop-up

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: Odisha has recorded 27.35 per cent growth in GST collection during the month of January 2022 in comparison to the corresponding period of 2021, officials said here Thursday. The state has collected ₹3,995.40 crore in January 2022 as against ₹3,137.45 crore collected in January last year. The progressive GST collection up to January of the current financial year was ₹36,108.52 crore, while till January of last fiscal it was 23,226.91 crore thereby registering a growth of 55.46 per cent, they said. The State GST (SGST) collection has recorded a 47 per cent growth during the month of January 2022. The SGST collection during the month of January 2022 was ₹1143.14 crore against a collection of ₹777.71 crore in January, 2021. The progressive gross SGST collection till January 2022 is ₹10,239.39 crore as against ₹6,556.47 crore collected till January 2021 with growth rate of 56.17 per cent. There is also a collection of ₹965.92 crore in CGST, ₹1134.15 crore in IGST & ₹752.19 crore in Cess during the month of January 2022. The total collection of VAT (petrol & liquor) is ₹853.43 crore in January as against ₹835.23 crore during January last year with a growth rate of 2.18 per cent. Out of the above, collection from petroleum products is ₹657.99 crore while collection from liquor is ₹195.43 crore. Enforcement activities are being undertaken by the state GST Commissionerate as a deterrent to errant businessmen and to detect issues of fake invoice. During the current financial year, six accused have been arrested for producing fake invoices. **MORE P2**

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VIATION
SENSEX	58788.02	↓ 770.31
NIFTY	17560.20	↓ 219.80
DOLLAR	75.31	↑ ₹0.10
EURO	84.70	↓ ₹0.08
GOLD	₹47,970	↑ ₹48
SILVER	₹60,666	↓ ₹837

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP. MAX	30.5°C	30.2°C
TEMP. MIN	18.0°C	17.5°C
Humidity	86%	96%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Mainly clear sky	

Not 4, but 42 PLA troops died in Galwan clash: Report

Tension still lingers over the skirmish which occurred in June 2020. Since then both sides have positioned over 50,000 troops in the area



media researchers and the evidence provided by them. "It also shows extreme lengths Beijing has gone to in order to silence discussion about the battle - in particular, discussion about the true number of Chinese casualties," the report said. It stated that a large number of PLA soldiers perished by drowning while crossing a fast-flowing river in darkness. The report citing the researchers stated that the deadly June 15 battle was sparked over a temporary bridge, which Indian soldiers had erected across a stream of the Galwan river three weeks earlier, May 22. It said Indian and Chinese military officials had agreed to a 'buffer zone' along the border in an attempt to 'de-escalate the crisis' amid rising tensions. It states that despite creation of a buffer zone, China had been building 'illegal infrastructure' inside the zone. The PLA staff had been erecting tents and creating dugouts and had moved heavy machinery into the area. "According to a 'Weibo' user alias name Qiang who claims to have served in the area, the PLA was creating infrastructure in this buffer zone, violating the mutual agreement. The report stated: "On June 6, 80 PLA soldiers came to dismantle the bridge built by India. Another 100 troops accompanied them. "PLA did not adhere to its promise and instead of dismantling its own infrastructure as agreed upon, secretly dismantled the river crossing bridge constructed by the Indian army," the report said. The report which quoted several Weibo users stated: "At least 38 PLA troops were washed away and drowned that night when the clashes erupted. After the incident, the bodies of the soldiers were first taken to Shiquanhe Martyr Cemetery, followed by local ceremonies at the local towns of the killed soldiers. India had maintained that 20 soldiers were killed during the incident. Initially China reported zero casualty, but later revised the figure to five.

CHINESE ACTION REGRETTABLE: MEA

New Delhi: India announced Thursday that its chargé d'affaires in the Beijing Embassy will not attend the opening or closing ceremony of the 2022 Winter Olympics in the Chinese capital. This is because China is honouring a military commander involved in the Galwan Valley clashes. The personnel has been chosen as the country's torchbearer for the mega sporting event. External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi described the Chinese action of honouring the commander as 'regrettable'.

leisure



JLO, MALUMA PERFORM IN BITMOJI CONCERT

Celebrity actress-singer Jennifer Lopez and Colombian singer Maluma performed songs from their upcoming rom-com *Marry Me* in a virtual concert for the film Thursday. The two were seen as their characters of Kat Valdez and Bastian in the concert in front of a real-time Bitmoji audience.

IT'S A SIN WILL ADD TO DIALOGUE AROUND HIV/AIDS: NEIL HARRIS

Hollywood actor Neil Patrick Harris, who plays Henry Coltrane in the upcoming drama series *It's a Sin*, said he hopes the series will offer a new perspective to the audience on the subject of HIV/AIDS. The five-part series revolves around the HIV/AIDS crisis that hit the UK in 1980s and 1990s.



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ARIES
Today's events will be dominated by lots of friends. Life will seem to you to be a huge party, even if it is just tea that you are having together. However, Ganesh suggests that you set aside the evening for a special friend.

TAURUS
The desire to rule your community, your neighbourhood is likely to get hold of you, today. Don't get carried away by the idea and go bossing around. No one is likely to appreciate your acting high and mighty. Be sure. You will be creating a lot of enemies. You will be rejecting such thoughts and wait for the evening. A beautiful encounter with your partner or your sweetheart is distinctly in the cards.

GEMINI
Your career is finally on track and your dreams don't look too distant any more. A candlelit dinner with your spouse will leave you wanting for more. And you shall get more. A night to remember indeed. Ganesh, however, warns you to hold your horses or an imminent accident awaits you.

CANCER
Today, you will be keenly observing the games that people play. But your paranoia will work against you. Certain people are likely to use it to manipulate you and influence important decisions. Ganesh advises you to stay level-headed and jump to conclusions only after an unbiased analyses of the situation.

LEO
So what is it that inspires people to jump off a mountain with nothing but a parachute on their back? Guess you are going to find the answer to that question today, if not literally, then at least metaphorically. Ganesh foresees that you will indulge and find delight in valorous deeds today.

VIRGO
Love will bite you today. It will bleed, and break it in two. The ship of career will sight port soon, says Ganesh. Dinner in a candlelit ambience will only help raise your spirits.

LIBRA
Today, you seem to have the Midas touch, so every task you take in your hands is bound to be a success. You may also want to take time out to spend with your loved ones and lavish them with attention. Also, don't forget to hand out credit to others for their valuable inputs. It pays to be in people's good books.

SCORPIO
Your balancing skills may be called for today, as some of the important decisions of your life may come calling for judgement today. Later in the day, sudden and unexpected profits are on the cards. In the workplace, reputation and rewards may come for previous efforts. You are likely to remain energetic, enthusiastic and capable all throughout the day.

SAGITTARIUS
Ganesh foresees that today, you shall be more selfless and careful than ever. You might be slated to make some profit by involving yourself in shared actions. However, it comes naturally to you to mix business with pleasure, and you shall make the most of it.

CAPRICORN
Every venture is fraught with risks and accompanied by uncertainties, but if you have any inclination to start one of your own today, you won't be in two minds about it, says Ganesh. For the professionals, the day may bring recognition and accolades. This aside, your innate talent and knack for completing work on time will earn you the respect and goodwill of your seniors.

AQUARIUS
Fortune is mighty pleased with you, so go ahead and play roulette if you wish! Partnerships will work today, as will business deals. But somewhere, a dark sentiment may cloud your thinking. Ganesh says that you should enjoy yourself and take life a bit lightly.

PISCES
It is a day where you find yourself upbeat and optimistic about your future, says Ganesh. Your hopefulness spurs you on to splurge and indulge your spouse in the evening. Good times!

Mixed reactions to school reopening

The state government's decision to reopen schools for senior students from February 7 and those from KG to Class VII from February 14 has evoked mixed reactions from among parents and students in the state. While schools have welcomed the decision, parents are still skeptical about the wisdom of the authorities to reopen schools. Even students are not very sure if they should resume their classes. **Orissa POST** has spoken to some parents and students in the City to know about their reactions to the government's decision. A report.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: Educationists, parents and authorities of many schools have welcomed the decision of the state government to reopen schools from February 7 in the wake of the improvement in the Covid-19 situation in Odisha. The decision to reopen schools was announced by Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra, Thursday.



sanitise the school premises thoroughly as per standard operating procedure (SOP). "We are also talking to parents and taking their consent before allowing the kids back to school," she added.



Educationist **Basudev Bhatt** (pic above) said the decision of reopening the schools for Classes VIII to XII from February 7 and KG to Class VII from February 14 is a welcome step as the students need to have proper teaching before examination. Many Plus II students are holding protests over non-completion of courses before examination, he added.



Educationalist **Naba Kishore Pujari** (pic above) welcomed the decision. "Other states have already announced to reopen schools. The prolonged school closure has already brought adverse consequences on mental and physical health of children. However, we must provide a safe and conducive environment for children when they reintegrate into the school system. We should not force them to study hard in this context. Everything else can wait but education cannot," he said.

In response to the government's decision, SAI International Education Group chairperson **Silpi Sahoo** (pic above) said, "We are happy that the state government has announced to reopen the schools for Classes VIII to XII February 7. It is important for the students to come back to schools as the board exams are scheduled to be conducted in offline mode. We will follow the Covid protocol of the state government. Our students are eager to attend of-line classes as they were missing their friends and teachers."



BJEM School Principal **Sandhya Jena** (pic above) said they will

"Covid cases are coming down in the state and this is the right time for schools to reopen. Students are really suffering a lot in the absence of physical classes. We urge the government to take all required safety steps in this regard," said educationist **Prithish Acharya** (pic above).



concerned about going to school as I have not taken vaccines yet and in my locality some Covid cases have been reported. I think online classes will be better for us."



Educationalist **Naba Kishore Pujari** (pic above) welcomed the decision. "Other states have already announced to reopen schools. The prolonged school closure has already brought adverse consequences on mental and physical health of children. However, we must provide a safe and conducive environment for children when they reintegrate into the school system. We should not force them to study hard in this context. Everything else can wait but education cannot," he said.



Prasanna **Bisoi** (pic above), another parent, said schools and government must ensure that the schools remain safe for students. The school must arrange appropriate infrastructure and strictly follow guidelines such as wearing masks and sanitization.

concerned about going to school as I have not taken vaccines yet and in my locality some Covid cases have been reported. I think online classes will be better for us."



Sanjukta Mishra, a parent, said as parents we are still unsure of sending children to schools. We will review the situation and then we will decide to send our children. Although our children have taken vaccines, still many cases have been reported from among people who have already taken vaccines.

Students demand cancellation of Plus II exams

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: Protests by Plus II students demanding cancellation of board exams continued in the state including in the capital city Thursday.

Students gathered Thursday at Master Canteen and took out a rally towards official residence of School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash. The members of the Odisha Pradesh Chhatra Congress supported the protests and questioned the decision of the higher education department to hold the annual exams when the course is yet to be covered.

The students said physical classes could not be conducted owing to the Covid-19 situation. Although on-line classes were held, the entire syllabus could not be covered, they mentioned.

They alleged that their future would be at stake if the exams were held without completion of their curriculum. They demanded complete cancellation of the exams, asking what was the need for board exams in offline mode while classes were conducted online.

They demanded complete cancellation of the exams, asking what was the need for board exams in offline mode when classes were conducted online

The students also said that the Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) and the state government should announce their Plus II board exam results over marks scored in quarterly exams in their respective colleges. On January 27, students had protested at the same venue in Master Canteen.

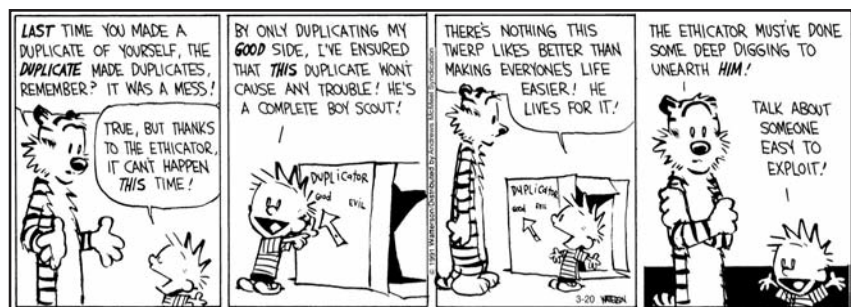
Meanwhile, there is a section of Plus II students who demand commencement of board examination. They had gathered near the Master Canteen Square recently to press for their demand for conducting of the board examination. They said they are prepared for the exam which should be held at any cost as "it is directly linked to their future."



PEANUTS



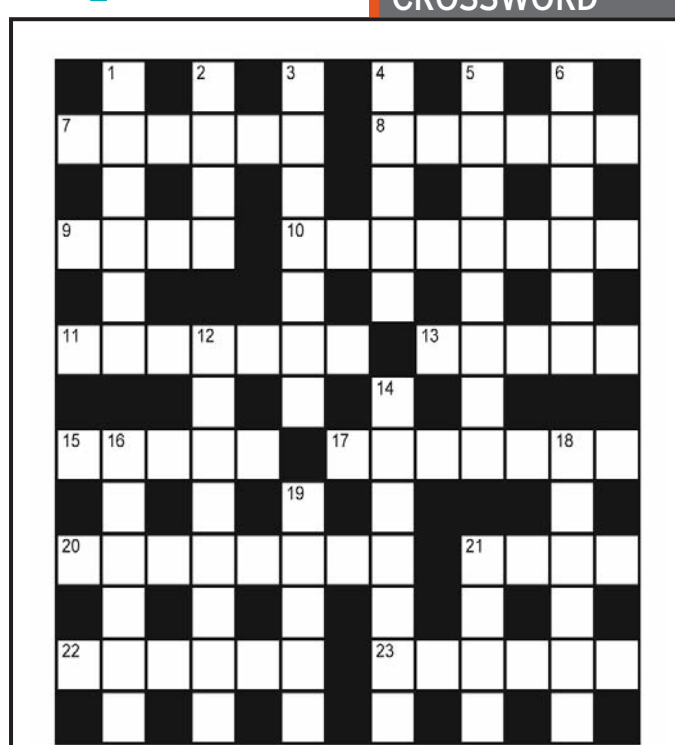
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



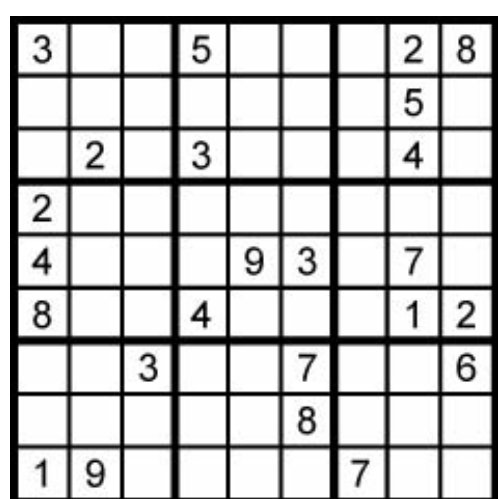
FUN post CROSSWORD



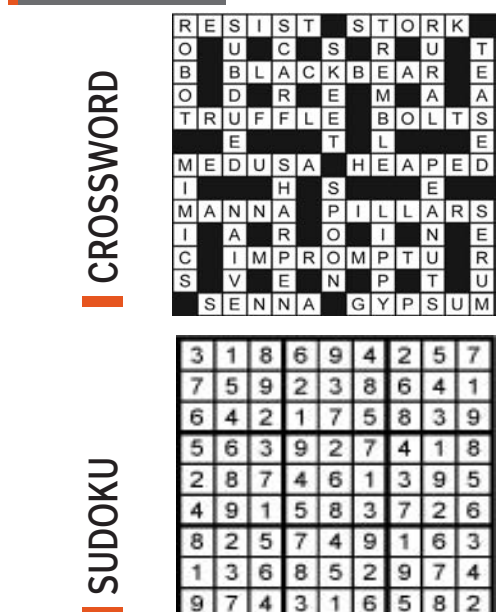
- Across**
- 7 Kind of disc (3-3)
 - 8 Carve
 - 9 Plummet
 - 10 Pilot's concern
 - 11 Steak and kidney, for one (4,3)
 - 13 Yarn beginning
 - 15 Massage target
 - 17 Used car, usually (5-2)
 - 20 Man of the Alps?
 - 21 Bit of smoke
 - 22 The "silent killer"
 - 23 Tailor's tool
- Down**
- 1 Request sweetener
 - 2 Seed covering
 - 3 Egyptian sight
 - 4 Some Romanovs
 - 5 Furnished
 - 6 Show one's face
 - 12 Endowed with special gifts
 - 14 Terra firma (3,4)
 - 16 Maps
 - 18 Vilification
 - 19 Corpulent plus
 - 21 Time span

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

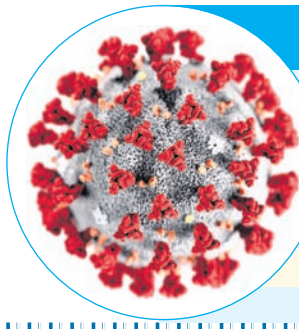
downtown



DEFT HANDS

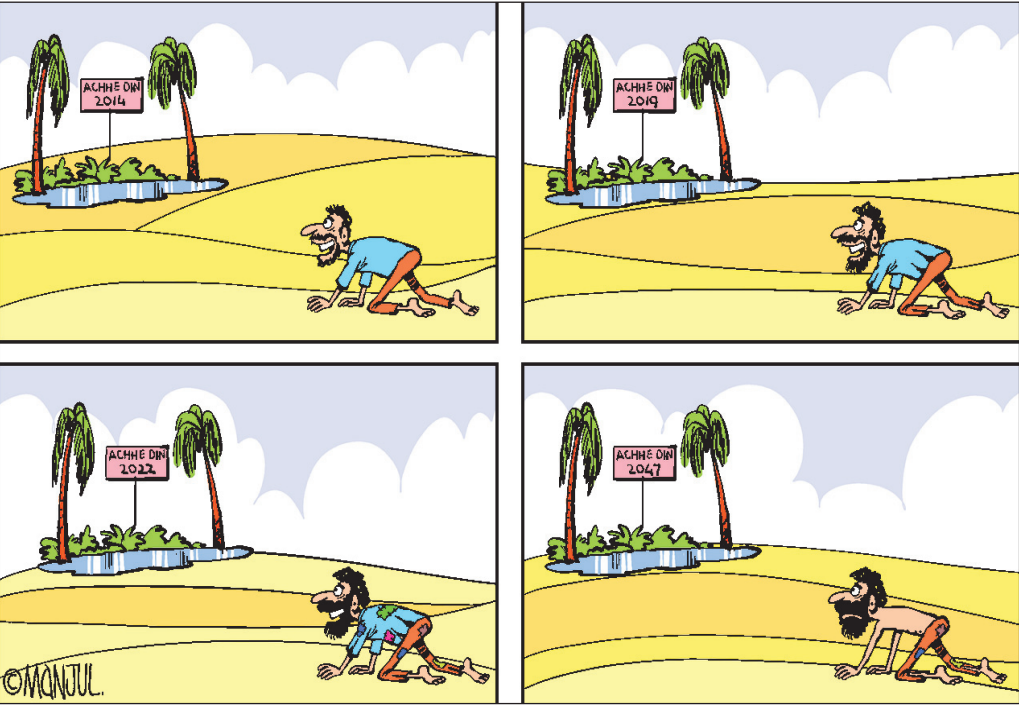
An artist giving finishing touches to the clay idols of Goddess Saraswati in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

COVID-19 TRACKER



	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	38,63,52,191	30,59,39,021	57,21,942
India	4,18,03,318	3,97,70,414	4,98,983
Odisha	12,59,405	12,22,867	8,666

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Vig raids on crorepati OSPCB chief engineer

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: Vigilance sleuths Thursday carried out simultaneous raids at several places related to Odisha State Pollution Control Board (OSPCB) chief engineer Rabi Narayan Prusty on allegations of amassing disproportionate assets (DA).

Vigilance teams searched Prusty's residential flat at Kalvik King Palace in Patia area, a flat in Gajapati Palace at Jagmohan Nagar in Jagamara area, a shop at Barabhuja Market Complex in Khandagiri area and a flat at Shreekhestra Bhakta Niwas, all in Bhubaneswar; his parental house at Nuapada under Nuagaon police limits in Ganjam and office chamber in the City. Moreover, the house of one of his relatives at Shreeram Vihar in Nayapalli area here was also raided. Vigilance sources said the sleuths have so far found two flats—one in Patia area and another in Nakhara area, a flat at Puri, a shop at Khandagiri and three plots in Khurda district. Prusty also has a four-wheeler, two two-wheelers, bank deposits to the tune of ₹70 lakh and 355gm gold ornaments.

Newborn found abandoned at Puri DHH toilet

POST NEWS NETWORK

Puri, Feb 3: A newborn girl was found abandoned at the toilet of the outpatient department of Puri district headquarters hospital (DHH) here Thursday. An employee of the DHH found the newborn while inspecting the toilet for sanitation work, sources said.

"The newborn has several injuries on her body. She has also certain other complications. She has been admitted to the childcare unit. An FIR in this regard has been lodged with the police," said an employee of the DHH.

Meanwhile, a team from the district Childline visited the hospital and discussed the issue with the hospital staff.

Centre cares for a few states only: BJD

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Thursday alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre is concerned about the Vikas (development) of a few states only.

The party also attacked the Centre for its step-motherly attitude towards Odisha.

"The structure of federalism is on the verge of extinction. We talk about equality, which means all states are equal and deserve equal opportunities, but this is far from reality today," said BJD MP Sasmit Patra.

The President mentioned about Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas and Sabka Prayas but the reality is that the Centre is not concerned about sabka vikas (development of all), Patra added.

Speaking during the motion of thanks to the President's address, the BJD MP said the Chief Minister of Odisha had written thrice to the Centre requesting it to open the Awas portal so that over six lakh families, mostly of the tribal ones, can be included under the PMAY-Gramin. However, the Centre did not open the portal in the last three years.

"This window of Awas portal was opened for Karnataka and around 25

The structure of federalism is on the verge of extinction. We talk about equality, which means all states are equal and deserve equal opportunities, but this is far from reality today

SASMIT PATRA | BJD MP

lakh families of the southern state were included under the PMAY-G. We appreciate that. But what is wrong with the people of Odisha.

The Union government did not open it for our people. The President said that 1.17 crore families were included in the PMAY-G. But, why the Centre did not include six lakh families of Odisha under the scheme," Patra sought to know.

The BJD MP also raised the issue of lifting of par-boiled rice from Odisha. Earlier, the Union government had expressed difficulty in lifting par-boiled rice under the Central Pool. He said around 22 lakh tonne par-boiled rice is pending for procurement by the Food Corporation of India.

BJD reiterates inclusion of 6L families under PMAY

NEW DELHI: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Thursday urged the Centre to open the Awas portal for Odisha to include over six lakh eligible families in the state under the Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G).

Speaking during the Zero Hour in Rajya Sabha, BJD MPs Sasmit Patra, Amar Patnaik and Sujet Kumar urged the Centre to show a non-partisan attitude and include over six lakh families of Odisha in the Awas portal.

Patra said the Chief Minister of Odisha had written thrice to the Centre requesting it to open the Awas portal so that over six lakh families can be included under the PMAY. However, the Centre did not open the portal, he said.

"As per the 2011 Census, around 9.20 per cent people in Odisha are



Scheduled Tribes. These tribal people are being affected by the denial of inclusion of additional 6.65 lakh families under the PMAY," Patnaik said.

As per the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, the level of satisfaction with monetary assistance is the highest in Odisha under the PMAY, Patnaik added.

"My party members have raised the issue several times in the House in the last two and half years. But a step-motherly treatment has been meted out to Odisha while the Centre opened the Awas portal for Karnataka," Patnaik said.

Kumar also urged the Centre to show a non-partisan attitude and open the Awas portal for Odisha.



ODISHA IN PARLIAMENT

Subhash seeks cut in GST on Tendu leaves

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MP Subhash Chandra Singh Thursday urged the Union government to reduce the Goods and Services Tax on tendu leaves.

Speaking during Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, the BJD MP said he has made a request regarding the plight of 10 lakh tendu leaf workers of Odisha who largely belong to Western Odisha.

"With the increase in GST to 18 per cent from earlier 5 per cent, the government of Odisha is incurring a loss of Rs 200 crore. The Union Finance Minister should consider the plight of the tendu leaf workers who are not confined to Odisha only; rather, this issue concerns our neigh-

bouring states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh as well," the BJD MP said. He requested the Centre to reduce GST on tendu leaves.

The BJD MP also wanted to know whether the Ministry of Textile considers introducing a course on handloom technology at the degree-level at the Institute of Technology at Bargarh.

"There is a diploma course at Bargarh and it is requested that the Institute of Technology be given the status of a degree college. I urge the government to consider all these issues. The prime identity of Odisha is its handloom and Sambalpuri saree. The problems/concerns of tendu leaves workers may be taken into consideration," he said.

Utilize virtual classrooms in colleges, principals told

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: The higher education department Thursday directed principals of several colleges to ensure effective utilization of virtual classrooms in their colleges.

Rajashree Mohanty, special secretary of the higher education department, in a letter sent to 100 colleges across the state, said the department had February 4, 2020 and November 8, 2021 had directed colleges to utilize virtual classroom in the teaching and the learning processes. Colleges were also directed to maintain a register and attendance records

of students for effective use of equipment. However, no information in this regard has been received by the department, the letter said.

The department has now directed the colleges to maintain the required log books in the prescribed format with students' attendance. Colleges were told to submit quarterly reports instead of monthly reports on periods taken in smart classrooms along with students' attendance. As a year has passed since the instruction was issued, you are requested to submit the quarterly reports regularly starting from fourth quarter of 2020 to the department for review.

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NEED TO CLOSE THE GAP IN CANCER CARE

Dr. Priyanka P. Nayak
Senior Consultant, Medical Oncology
SUM Ultimate Medicare, Bhubaneswar

World Cancer Day is celebrated every year on February 4 with the aim to significantly reduce illness and death caused by cancer. According to cancer statistics reports around 2.25 million people suffer from cancer and 12 lakh cases are reported every year. Usually cancer of the head and neck, lung, stomach and colon are common in men while women mostly suffer from breast cancer, head and neck cancer, lung and gastric related cancer.

The World Cancer Day theme for 2022-2024 is 'Close the Care Gap.' This campaign is all about understanding and recording the inequities in cancer care around the globe. This theme is very important for countries like India as low income countries have poor prognosis for cancer as compared to high income countries. The gap in cancer care is due to lack of awareness among general population and inequitable access to affordable curative services.

There are certain preventable (modifiable) cancer and non-preventable (non-modifiable) causes of cancer. The preventable causes are tobacco use (in form of cigarette and bidi smoking, gutka chewing etc). It increases the risk of head and neck, esophagus and stomach cancer. The other most important cause of cancer is obesity and physical inactivity which leads to esophageal, breast, colorectal and pancreatic cancer. The third most important cause is infection (Human Papilloma Virus, Hepatitis-B virus). So by quitting smoking, exercising daily, following a healthy food habit and vaccination many cancers can be prevented. Through screening modalities such as monthly breast self examination, annual mammography, pap smear exam etc the threat of breast and cervical cancer can be diagnosed at a very early stage. Complete cure from cancer is possible in these cases. **Adv.**



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Sparsh Hospital, Kantabada
(A unit of Sparsh Hospitals & Critical Care (P) Ltd.
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Ph. : +91 674 3501667/68

10-fold rise in rly allocation to Odisha, says Vaishnaw



POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Feb 3: Asserting that there would be no dearth of funds for development of railways in Odisha, Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw Thursday said the allocation to the state for the railway sector in Budget 2022-23 has gone up 10 times in comparison to the allocations made during the tenure of Congress-led UPA government at the Centre.

In 2022-23 fiscal, the BJP-led government has made the highest ever allocation of ₹9,734 crore to Odisha for the development of railways, which is 10 times more than the average annual outlay of ₹838 crore by the UPA government during 2009-14, Vaishnaw said.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi has allocated the highest amount of ₹9,734 crore for development of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has allocated the highest amount of ₹9,734 crore for development of railways in Odisha. This budgetary allocation is 10 times more than the annual average allocation made during the Congress government

ASHWINI VAISHNAW | RAILWAY MINISTER

railways in Odisha. This budgetary allocation is 10 times more than the annual average allocation made during the Congress government,” he added.

The minister said the allocation for railways sector in Odisha was enhanced to ₹4,126 crore per year during 2014-19 by the BJP-

led government. Giving details of funds allocated to Odisha during past few years, Vaishnaw said the Centre had provided ₹4,568 crore to Odisha in the financial year 2019-20, ₹5,296 crore in 2020-21 and ₹6,471 crore in 2021-22, which is 660 per cent more than the average annual budget outlay of ₹838 crore per year during 2009-14 period, the minister said.

The Union minister also said it is not feasible to create three new railway divisions in Odisha as per the demand raised by the state government in 2018 and 2019.

Replying to a query on the proposed wagon factory in Kalahandi, the Union minister said the project is pending due to delay in land acquisition. “Around 50 per cent of the required land has been acquired. The project work will resume once the state government provides the remaining land,” he said.

The minister also revealed that Vande Bharat train service will also run in Odisha. In the 2022-23 Budget, the Centre has announced to run 400 new Vande Bharat trains in the country.

Vaishnaw claimed land acquisition and forest clearance are major hurdles in the execution of major railway projects in Odisha. He urged the state government to expedite the land acquisition process.



Women under the banner of AIDWA stage a demonstration at PMG Square in Bhubaneswar denouncing the Union Budget 2022, Thursday.

OP PHOTO

With 18 more fatalities, state’s coronavirus toll reaches 8,666

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: Odisha Thursday recorded 3,629 new Covid-19 cases, five per cent more than the previous day, which pushed the tally to 12,59,405, the health department said in its bulletin.

Eighteen patients, including three each in Khurda, Cuttack, Bhadrak, Jagatsinghpur and Sundargarh, succumbed to the infection, the bulletin said. The toll mounted to 8,666.

Fifty-three Covid-19 patients have in the past died due to co-morbidities.

The daily positivity rate stood at 5.4 per cent. The state had logged 3,450 Covid-19 cases and 19 deaths Wednesday Khurda district, where Bhubaneswar is located, registered 716 new infections.

At least 515 children are among those newly infected in the state.



Odisha Thursday recorded 3,629 new Covid-19 cases, five per cent more than the previous day, which pushed the tally to 12,59,405

Both Khurda and Cuttack are in the Red Zone while six districts, including Sundargarh, Nuapada and Jajpur, are in the Yellow Zone with over 1,000 cases

THE DAILY POSITIVITY RATE STOOD AT 5.4 PER CENT. THE STATE HAD LOGGED 3,450 COVID-19 CASES AND 19 DEATHS WEDNESDAY. KHURDA DISTRICT, WHERE BHUBANESWAR IS LOCATED, REGISTERED 716 NEW INFECTIONS

Odisha currently has 35,306 active cases—9,694 of them in Khurda and 2,509 in Cuttack.

Both Khurda and Cuttack are in the red zone while six districts, including Sundargarh, Nuapada and Jajpur, are in the yellow zone with over 1,000 cases.

At least 6,067 patients recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 12,15,380, the department said.

As many as 66,702 sample tests were conducted in the past 24 hours, it added.

Noted educationist Chandrasekhar Sarangi dies at 85

BHUBANESWAR: Noted educationist and former Vice Chancellor of Shri Jagannath Sanskrit University in Puri Chandrasekhar Sarangi passed away here Tuesday, family sources said, adding he was 85. Born in October 1936 at Pantikhari Sasan under Odagaon tehsil of the present day Nayagarh district, Sarangi studied at Sarankul high school. After completing his intermediate at SCS College in Puri and BSc and MSc at Ravenshaw College, Sarangi obtained his PhD under the guidance of eminent botanist Dinabandhu Mishra. Sarangi started his teaching career in 1960 and served as Vice President of Board of Secondary Education, Odisha among other positions. Odisha is survived by two sons and wife. People from various walks of life including Governor Ganesh Lal, former students and colleagues mourned Sarangi's demise.



‘Birdman of Odisha’ breathes his last

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar/Berhampur, Feb 3: Uday Narayan Dev, former legislator, royal scion and a noted ornithologist who carved a niche for himself, died in Bhubaneswar, his family said Thursday.

He was 86 and survived by a son. Dev was suffering from old-age-related ailments for the last two days and was admitted to a private hospital for treatment.

He breathed his last on Wednesday night. Dev conducted research on the migration pattern of the birds who visit Chilika Lake. Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik was among the several political leaders who mourned Dev's demise.

Lookout notice against pvt firm chief

BHUBANESWAR: Lookout circular has been issued against managing director (MD) of Sambandh Finserve Private Limited, Deepak Kindo for his alleged involvement in a fraud case of over ₹100 crore, Odisha police said Thursday. His wife Amrita had been arrested in the same case January 30. On the request of the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Odisha police, the Bureau of Immigration (BoI) has issued the Look Out circular against Deepak, officials said Thursday. It has been done to prevent Deepak, who has been evading arrest from leaving the country through immigration check posts at airports/seaports. While investigating a ₹5 crore loan fraud case registered against Sambandh Finserve Pvt Ltd, the EOW found that the firm had collected over ₹100 crore from various finance institutions and misappropriated the same. All the loans from various financial institutions had been collected by using forged documents. Among those duped were lenders like DCB Bank, SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India), BOPA PTE Ltd (a Singapore-based company) and DIA Vikash Capital Pvt Ltd.

SUMMER FRUIT



A vendor arranges watermelon for sale at a stall in College Square area of Cuttack, Thursday

OP PHOTO

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LOST

I Yamin Ahemad Khan own plot No.- 2248/3448, Mouza: Jajarsingh, P.S.- Bux lane, Village: Nayakothi, Khordha- 752055 the saledeed No.- 397 being lost. Kindly contact if anyone finds it. Adv- NC Patnaik, M: 9853311189.

One of my Sale Deed has been missed vide Registration No- 1586/2002 somewhere while I was traveling from Baiganjuri to Bus-Stand Sonapur on 6th of December 2020. It hasn't been recovered since long. If it is found return me in the address below mentioned. Sanjib Kumar Praharaj, At-Dhankhandi, PO-Rundimahul, Dist.- Boudh, Mob.-9668546620.

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit before the Notary Public, Cuttack, I Asish Sharma, S/o-Bijay Kumar Sharma, residing at Hemraj Lane, Nayasadak, Purighat, Cuttack declare that my correct name is Asish Sharma but in Passport (K1001636) my name recorded as Asish Kumar Sharma, both names belongs to one person i.e. me.

CUO-MSSRF pact to boost research on biodiversity

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 3: The Central University of Odisha (CUO), Koraput Thursday inked a pact with MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai for academic collaboration to promote research on biodiversity, information, communication and extension, social science and anthropology.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed and exchanged between CUO Registrar Asit Kumar Das and MSSRF's Biju Patnaik Medicinal Plants Garden & Research Centre, Jaypore Director MM Hossain at CUO campus. CUO Vice Chancellor in-charge Sharat Kumar Palita and MSSRF Executive Director GN Hariharan among others were present, it was learnt.

Palita highlighted various objectives of the pact. “The benefits

Students and faculty of various departments of CUO will be benefitted from the initiative

of our joint research and collaboration should go to the common man. It needs to transform the life and livelihood of population, especially the tribals. The knowledge and research must be transformed from lab to land and land to lab. It is a historic occasion for working jointly towards agriculture and sustainable development of this tribal-rich region of Odisha,” added Palita.

Sources in the know said the MoU covers students, faculty and scientist exchange programme, joint project supervision and research guidance. Students and faculty of various CUO departments like Biodiversity and Conservation of

Natural Resources, Anthropology and Sociology will benefit from the MoU. In the long run, it may be extended to other related departments.

Hariharan elaborated the role played by the MSSRF towards the development of the nation. He said, “CUO is a premier educational institution of Odisha carrying out many research activities throughout the year. This MoU will translate these researches towards the development of people in the tribal-dominated Koraput region.”

Earlier, CUO had inked pact with the CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials (CSIR-IMMT), Bhubaneswar to cover collative research, and the exchange of knowledge, technical know-how and mentoring between the two institutions in areas of mutual interest like Biological and Allied Sciences, Environmental Sciences and Engineering, Pharmaceutical Sciences and Technology.

Explained: Why Covid-19 patients lose their sense of smell

INFECTION WITH SARS-COV-2 INDIRECTLY DIALS DOWN THE ACTION OF OLFACTORY RECEPTORS (OR), PROTEINS ON THE SURFACES OF NERVE CELLS IN THE NOSE

AGENCIES

New York, Feb 3: US researchers have found the mechanism behind the loss of smell among people infected with Covid-19.

The study may also shed light on the effects of Covid-19 on other types of brain cells, and on other lingering neurological effects of Covid-19 like “brain fog”, headaches, and depression.

Researchers from NYU Grossman School of Medicine and Columbia University found that infection with SARS-CoV-2 indirectly dials down the action of olfactory receptors (OR), proteins on the surfaces of nerve cells in the nose that detect the molecules as-

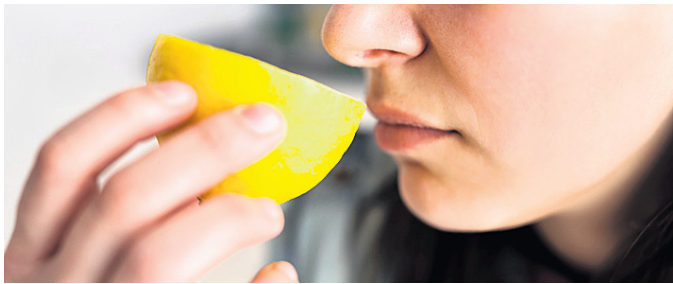
sociated with odours.

Experiments showed that the presence of the virus near nerve cells (neurons) in olfactory tissue brought an intruding of immune cells, microglia and T cells, that sense and counter infection.

Such cells release proteins called cytokines that changed the genetic activity of olfactory nerve cells, even though the virus cannot infect them, the researchers said.

“Our findings provide the first mechanistic explanation of smell loss in Covid-19 and how this may underlie long Covid-19 biology,” said Benjamin, Professor in the Department of Microbiology at NYU Langone Health.

“The work also suggests how



the pandemic virus, which infects less than 1 per cent of cells in the human body, can cause such severe damage in so many organs,” he added.

One unique symptom of Covid-19 infection is loss of smell without the stuffy nose seen with other infections like the common cold, re-

searchers said.

In most cases, the smell loss lasts only a few weeks, but for more than 12 per cent of Covid-19 patients, olfactory dysfunction persists in the form of ongoing reduction in the ability to smell (hyposmia) or changes in how a person perceives the same smell (parosmia).

To gain insight into Covid-19-induced smell loss, the team explored the molecular consequences of SARS-CoV-2 infection in golden hamsters and in olfactory tissue taken from 23 human autopsies.

The experiments confirmed that SARS-CoV-2 infection, and the immune reaction to it, decreases the ability of DNA chains in chromosomes that influence the formation of olfactory receptor building to be open and active, and to loop around to activate gene expression.

In both hamster and human olfactory neuronal tissue, the research team detected persistent and widespread downregulation of olfactory receptor building.

Further, the experiments in ham-

sters recorded over time revealed that downregulation of olfactory neuron receptors persisted after short-term changes that might affect the sense of smell had naturally recovered.

This suggests that Covid-19 causes longer-lasting disruption in chromosomal regulation of gene expression, representing a form of “nuclear memory” that could prevent the restoration of OR transcription even after SARS-CoV-2 is cleared.

In the next step, the team is looking into whether treating hamsters with long Covid with steroids can restrain damaging immune reactions (inflammation) to protect nuclear architecture.

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Man held for rape

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Feb 3: Police Thursday arrested a person on charge of raping a minor girl on the pretext of marriage.

The accused was identified as Seemanchal Behera of Purusottampur in Ganjam district. He was arrested after the survivor lodged a complaint at Baidyanathpur police station.

Police conducted a medical examination of the accused and the victim at MKCG Medical College and Hospital. The police also recorded the statement of the victim.

According to the complaint, the accused first proposed the girl and later entered into a physical relationship with her by promising to marry her.

He even took the girl with him and stayed with her in a rented accommodation at Ram Nagar. He also had sexual relationship with the victim repeatedly.

Later, the accused went back on his promise and severed the relationship with the girl.

Left with no option, the girl lodged a complaint at the Baidyanathpur police station.

The accused was nabbed and produced in the court.

Stir brewing for sugar mill revival

THE CLOSURE OF THE SUGAR MILL LED SIGNIFICANT DECELERATION IN THE GROWTH OF THE AGRARIAN ECONOMY OF THE REGION THAT WAS CATCHING UP PRIOR TO 2010

POST NEWS NETWORK

Deogaon, Feb 3: Peeved at the alleged callousness of the government in reviving the Bijayananda Cooperative Sugar Mill at Sagaripalli under this block in Bolangir district, the farmers and locals Thursday decided to hold a massive congregation March 28.

This was revealed during a press meet convened by farmer leaders here Thursday.

The leaders stated that the sugar mill was once perceived as the mainstay of the sugarcane farming in western Odisha districts.

However, the closure of the sugar mill led significant deceleration in the growth of the agrarian economy of the region that was catching up prior to 2010.

The closure of the sugar mill continued to hamper the farm incomes in Kalahandi, Bolangir, Nuapada, Boudh and Sonepur districts. Scores of farm-



ers were getting bountiful returns by selling the sugarcane to the factory.

Notably, the sugar factory was

commissioned in 1992 as Pony Sugar. However, it was closed in 2010 due to mismanagement and pending debt.

The sugar factory

THE STORY SO FAR

■ The sugar factory was launched in 1992 as Pony Sugar. However, it was closed in 2010 due to gross mismanagement and debt

■ The factory was revived again in 2010 and functional till 2014 with efforts of Jagneswar Babu, former president of the Odisha State Cooperative Bank

■ But the fate of the sugar factory plunged into uncertainty again in May 2014 following a failed midnight coup bid by a group of political leaders to grab the Chief Minister's post

in May 2014 following a failed midnight coup bid by a group of BJD leaders to grab the Chief Minister's post. The shutter was down again.

Although the locals have been pressing for revival of the sugar factory during the last eight years, what they are getting is only assurance and that too during elections.

“The government has been misleading the people on its revival. If the government does not take any step for revival of the factory by mid-March this year, a massive farmers’ rally will be organised against the government. We will also organise ‘Odisha Bandh’ over the issue,” Rajesh Bagarti, president of the Paschim Odisha Seva Sangh said.

Activists of Adivasi Mahasangh, members of Odisha Krushi Bhittika Silpa Karyakhyama Andolan, Chinikala Karmachari Sangh and other outfits have supported this plan.

BJP plea for security

Malkangiri: A delegation of the BJP Thursday met the Collector and the SP seeking security cover for its candidates contesting the panchayat elections. BJP leaders Balabhadra Majhi, Parsuram Majhi, Jayaram Pangi, Umerkote MLA Nityanand Gond, Ramesh Sahu, Shyamal Sunani and Nimai Chandra Pal apprised the Collector and the SP about abduction of their ZP candidate Pradip Madkani by unknown youths.

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Mr. Aakash Kumar Agrawal, Mr. Amar Kumar Agrawal, Mrs. Rajlaxmi Agrawal & Mrs. Rekha Kedia are the absolute owners of property at Khata no-2414/10803 & 2414/16854, plots no- 472/20449 & 473 of Area- Ac 0.190 decimals & Ac 0.300 decimals at Mouza /Tahasil- Baragarh.

The said owners are desirous of mortgaging the said property with Tata Capital Financial Services Ltd. Any person/s having any claim, interest concerning the above property or any objection whatsoever must notify the same to the undersigned with supporting documents within 7 (seven) days from this date where after any claim or interest therein shall be deemed to be waived and no further claim shall be entertained.

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Mob-985311189 / 0674-2972749
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92013595, JAIL ROAD, JHARAPODA,
GOVINDAPRASAD, BBSR-751006

STUDENTS' DEMO



Plus II students stage a demonstration outside the Sub-Collector's office in Nabarangpur, Thursday, demanding cancellation of offline examinations

Scribe threatens family with gun, detained

POST NEWS NETWORK

Basudevpur, Feb 3: Police Thursday detained a youth working as a reporter of a YouTube channel on charge of threatening his family members with an illegally possessed gun at Sabarpur in Basudevpur area of Bhatrak. Police seized the gun and a bullet. The accused was identified as SK Taujuddin, a resident of Sabarpur.

The arrest came after his father SK Salaumuddin lodged a complaint at Basudevpur police station.

Police have started an investigation into the matter: As per preliminary investigation, the youth came home brandishing the gun and threatened his family members with life Wednesday night over a family feud.

Further investigation into the matter is on, said IIC Amit Kumar Bhuyan.

BJD, BJP jittery about rebels

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhograi, Feb 3: With the panchayat elections drawing closer, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Bhograi Assembly constituency of Balasore district are jittery about the growing rebels within the parties.

The coastal Assembly constituency comprises 50 panchayats under six zilla parishad zones. BJD, BJP and Congress have fielded their candidates for sarpanch, samiti member and ZP seats.

As many as 18 candidates for ZP member, 182 for sarpanch and 159 samiti member posts are in the fray. In many panchayats, BJD and BJP have rebel candidates contesting as independents.

According to sources, frontline leaders of both BJD and BJP are deeply worried about these rebels, who can upset the apple cart of



the party nominees. Local political observers said that rebels in both the parties have the potential of tilting the election results to an unpredictable extent.

In 16 GPs, BJP nominees will face rebels as well as rivals from BJP and Congress.

As elections days are drawing closer, candidates have adopted various strategies to keep the voters in good humour and elicit their votes. If sources are to be believed, candidates are sponsoring feasts with provision of ‘wine-and-dine’ at night.

People of Sankhamedi village

■ In many panchayats, BJD and BJP have rebel candidates contesting as independents

■ Local political observers said that rebels in both the parties have the potential of tilting the election results to an unpredictable extent

under this block (near West Bengal border) are upset over territorial row. No one from the village has filed nomination for ward member posts.

Locals alleged that the state is not collecting revenue from the village over years while their children are unable to get caste and income certificates for pursuing higher studies.

Former ward member Ajay Jena said people are deeply worried about this issue.

Recently, holding a presser here, some candidates of Maheswarpur panchayat revealed their agenda of addressing issues related to drainage, housing and basic facilities.

Black flags shown to health minister

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jharsuguda, Feb 3: Health Minister Naba Kishore Das was caught off guard after some Youth Congress workers showed him black flags on Gumadera main road in this district, Thursday.

Das was on his way to attend a programme of Belpahar civic body when the incident occurred.

The Youth Congress workers shouted slogans like ‘go back’ and ‘murdabad’ against the health minister to highlight the poor healthcare facilities in the area.

Youth Congress worker Tahir Khan said the reason behind their demonstration is the negligence of the government towards



health services in the region.

He alleged that the state government has upgraded a government health centre at Belpahar into an urban PHC but it lacks adequate number of doctors and health workers. In this situation, patients visiting the centre are being shifted to other hospitals and healthcare facilities, he said.

He warned that the Youth Congress workers will take to the streets in coming days if the situation does not improve.

Red threat casts shadow on polls in Swabhimani Anchal

PEOPLE, CANDIDATES PANICKED; ADMIN AND BSF STEP UP VIGIL AS WELL AS PREPAREDNESS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri, Feb 3: Maoists have again pasted posters opposing the three-tier panchayat elections in Swabhimani Anchal under Chittrakonda block of Malkangiri district even as the administration is bracing for peaceful conduct of the polls, a report said.

Several posters issued by CPI-Maoist Division with warnings have been found at Jantri and Jantabai areas.

In the posters, the Left-wing ultras have threatened the candidates to stay away from contesting elections which has spread panic among the locals as well as candidates, even though the area is guarded by Border Security Force (BSF) jawans.

Notably, elections in Swabhimani Anchal could not be held owing to Maoist threat for the last 10 years. In 2017, panchayat elections could not be held in 18 panchayats under

this block due to the Red menace. After announcement of the poll schedule, political activities had picked up momentum and people were quite enthusiastic about exercising their franchise, but the fresh threat from the ultras through posters have dampened the spirit of the people.

Maoists still hold sway over 9 panchayats including Papulur and Kurmanur. This has thrown a challenge to the administration and the security forces ahead of the rural polls.

Meanwhile, preparations for panchayat elections are in full swing. The district police and the BSF have jointly thrashed out strategies to hold elections peacefully in Maoist-dominated areas.

Police and administrative officials of Chittrakonda, and senior officials of the BSF held a meeting at Hantalguda BSF camp and discussed ways to ensure peaceful polls.

43 PER CENT BOOTHS IN KENDRAPARA SENSITIVE

PANCHAYAT POLLS

■ As campaigning gathers momentum, cases of violence are also being reported from several areas

■ Recently, the house of a sarpanch candidate was set ablaze in Aul area

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Feb 3: Amid ongoing preparations for the forthcoming panchayat polls, the district administration has intimated the State Election Commission (SEC) that 43 per cent booths in Kendrapara are sensitive.

The district administration has also informed the SEC that elaborate security arrangements are being put in place to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections in these areas.

Of 3,698 booths in the coastal district, 1,574 have been identified as sensitive. Rajkanika



block has 96 sensitive booths out of 484 booths.

Sadar block has 71 sensitive booths, Mahakalpara 260, Derabish 191, Aul 194, Marshaghai 151, Pattamundai 165, Rajnagar 201 and Garadpur has 236 sensitive booths.

Meanwhile, cases of violence are also being reported from several areas. Recently, the house of a sarpanch candidate was set ablaze in Aul area. Four cases of political violence have been registered in Mahakalpara, Marshaghai and Garadpur areas. Some parts of Rajkanika have become more sensitive

over Kharasrota drinking water project while the issue of Bangladeshi immigrants is also a factor behind a tense Mahakalpara area.

Collector Amrit Raturaj said the administration has taken up a host of measures to maintain law and order after identification of the sensitive booths. “An order has been issued to install CCTVs at sensitive booths along with massive deployment of police force. Police will form teams to monitor the law and order. WhatsApp groups have also been created for quick sharing of information,” he added.

चिह्नको.सी.एन.-33004/99

REGD. NO. D.L.-33004/99

भारत का राजपत्र
The Gazette of India

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असाधारण
EXTRAORDINARY

भाग II-खण्ड 3-सब-खण्ड (ii)
PART-II-Section 3-Sub-section (ii)

प्रधिकार से प्रकाशित
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No. 217] NEW DELHI, MONDAY, JANUARY 17, 2022/PAUSHA 27, 1943

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

S.O. 221(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 lane etc.), maintenance, management and operation of NH16 in the stretch of road from Km. 117 to Km. 136.5 (Office of the Tahasildar, Bhatrak, At/Po/PS- Bhatrak, Dist- Bhatrak, Pin-756100, Odisha) in the district of BHADRAK 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, Bhatrak 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, 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 road from Km. 117 to Km. 136.5 (Office of the Tahasildar, Bhatrak, At/Po/PS- Bhatrak, Dist- Bhatrak, Pin-756100, Odisha) in the district of BHADRAK in the state of ODISHA.

State : ODISHA			District : Balasore		
Sl No	Survey/Plot No.	Type of Land	Nature of Land	Area (in Local Unit)	Area (in Hectare)
Taluk : Bhatrak					
Village : Asura-132					
1	91	Private	Sarad II	0.0350000(Acre)	0.0141643
2	92	Private	Chaka	0.0900000(Acre)	0.0364225
Village: Bahudarara-52					
3	4432	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
4	4433	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
5	4433/5290	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
6	4434	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0500000(Acre)	0.0202347
7	4704	Government	Rasta	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
8	4759	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
9	4760	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
10	4761	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
11	4762	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
12	4763	Private	Sarad Jala I	0.0150000(Acre)	0.0060704
Village: Baralpokhari-138					
13	3572	Private	Gharabari I	0.0020000(Acre)	0.0008094
14	3572/5090	Private	Gharabari I	0.0030000(Acre)	0.0012141
15	3572/5176	Private	Gharabari I	0.0050000(Acre)	0.0020235
16	3572/5177	Private	Gharabari I	0.0030000(Acre)	0.0012141
17	3572/5178	Private	Gharabari I	0.0030000(Acre)	0.0012141
18	3572/5179	Private	Gharabari I	0.0030000(Acre)	0.0012141
19	3572/5180	Private	Gharabari I	0.0030000(Acre)	0.0012141
20	3572/5252/5491	Private	Gharabari I	0.0040000(Acre)	0.0016188
21	3573	Private	Gharabari I	0.0120000(Acre)	0.0048563
22	3573/5091	Private	Gharabari I	0.0030000(Acre)	0.0012141
23	3574	Government	Rasta	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
24	3575	Government	Rasta	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
Village: Ranja-131					
25	1365	Private	Patita	0.1500000(Acre)	0.0607042
26	1368	Private	Rasta	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
27	1369	Private	Patita	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
28	1370	Private	Nala	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
29	1375	Private	Gharabari	0.1200000(Acre)	0.0485633
30	1376	Private	Chaka	0.0500000(Acre)	0.0202347
31	1377	Private	Chaka	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
32	1378	Private	Chaka	0.0700000(Acre)	0.0283286
33	1382	Private	Chaka	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
34	1383	Private	Chaka	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
35	285/5308	Government	Sarad Jala Dophasal I	0.1440000(Acre)	0.0582760
36	286	Private	Sarad Jala Dophasal I	0.0400000(Acre)	0.0161878
37	287	Private	Sarad Jala Dophasal I	0.0250000(Acre)	0.0101174
38	288	Private	Sarad Jala Dophasal I	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
39	295	Private	Pani Nala	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
40	296	Private	Sarad Jala Dophasal I	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
41	3098	Private	Patita	0.2400000(Acre)	0.0971267
42	368	Private	Chaka	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
43	373	Private	Gharabari	0.0320000(Acre)	0.0129502
44	378	Private	Patita	0.0400000(Acre)	0.0161878
45	379	Private	Chaka	0.0600000(Acre)	0.0242817
46	380	Private	Chaka	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
47	382	Private	Chaka	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
48	383	Private	Chaka	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
49	385	Government	Pradhan Pani Nala	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
50	420	Private	Gharabari	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
51	420/5062	Private	Gharabari	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
52	421	Private	Chaka	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
			Total	1.6720	0.6766

[F. No. NHA/BOT/110125/58/2005/PL/LA/NH-163A]
RAJESH GUPTA, Director

FOCUS UNION BUDGET

IGNORING THE POOR



In the absence of any cash transfers and inadequate employment situation, consumption is not likely to increase in the economy, particularly with high levels of inflation for which the government has no clear solution

intends to set up 200 TV channels for school education – this after the loss of education for two years, when schools are now gradually turning to off-line education! Too late indeed!

The government could have easily raised its expenditure on health and education, on employment generation, on investing in agriculture and for promoting MSMEs as well as for raising consumption of the poor by cash transfers – all to give a big boost to equitable development. This could have been achieved by taxing the rich. One clear message of the abnormally high and rising inequalities in wealth and incomes in the country was to increase taxation on the wealth and income of the rich to raise resources. The Budget however shows no changes in taxation. The wealth tax rate remains zero, income tax rates remain the same as the last year and there are no major changes in other tax rates. The increase in tax revenue is due to the buoyancy of the economy. The tax-GDP ratio in India is low. It was 10.7% in 2017-18 and it declined to 9.9% in 2020-21. This rate is perhaps among the lowest in the world at this GDP level. There is big scope to raise the ratio.

To conclude, the commitment of the government to the bottom 30-40% population seems to be very limited. The government's main focus is enriching the rich and the corporate sector by offering all kinds of due and undue wealth-enhancing favours to them. The government still considers high GDP as a major goal (for example, the target of reaching \$5 trillion economy) irrespective of the composition of this growth. This is not capitalism and nor is it a market-friendly development path. This is a distorted neo-liberal growth path that originates from a distorted political economy.

The writer is Director and Professor of Economics, Centre for Development Alternatives, Ahmedabad. Views are personal.

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The slogan with which the present government came to power was "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas", i.e. "growth for all by involving all." They assured inclusive growth, where all groups of people participate in the growth process and are all benefitted equitably. This happens when inclusion is embedded in the growth process, and when, in an unequal, poor economy like India, the increase in the incomes of the bottom 40% of the population is more than that of the rich top 10% of the population. However, as per the recently released Oxfam Inequality Report, in India, since 2015 more income has gone to the top 1% at the cost of the bottom 40%. The report shows that the richest 1 per cent of India's population holds 42.5% of the national wealth while the bottom 50% has a mere 2.8%. At present (2021-22), the 100 richest billionaires in the country have US\$ 775 billion wealth, and have lifestyles that are a stark contrast with the squalid living conditions of the bottom poorest 555 million (40%) population. The number of poor has increased from 59 million in 2020 to 134 million in 2021, while the number of billionaires also has increased by 40%. Clearly, the bottom 30-40% population is marginalised and excluded. This is certainly not Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas!



Indira Hirway

THIS IS A DISTORTED NEO-LIBERAL GROWTH PATH THAT ORIGINATES FROM A DISTORTED POLITICAL ECONOMY

Massive expansion of productive employment is one of the basic requirements for inclusive growth. However, the unemployment rate was already high (highest in the last 45 years) before the pandemic, and it increased further in the last two years. Even after some recovery, the unemployment rate is, as per the latest CMIE data, 7.9% in December 2021, of which 7.3% is in rural areas and 9.3% in urban areas. The Budget has offered no solution to this problem. The jump in capital expenditure under the PM Gati Shakti programme will, according to the Finance Minister, increase 60 lakh jobs in the coming five years. This amounts to 12 lakh jobs per year, which falls far short of taking care of the backlog of un-

employment. Infrastructural development is good, but it takes time to create sustained jobs. Also, the state governments that are expected to participate in the PM Gati Shakti programme are low in resources and particularly in capabilities. One is not sure how successful they will be in implementing this programme. As regards the rural areas, there is the MGNREGA scheme, which has proved to be a kind of a lifeline to the rural people. Now the MNRREGA funds have been cut by 25% to help the 'vikas' of the rural poor! With ₹20,000 crores wage dues that the government has to pay to the workers of the programme, rural employment is bound to suffer in the coming years. In the absence of any employment guarantee programme, the urban areas, where the unemployment rate is as high as 9.3%, are also likely to suffer. The urban unemployed will have no respite in the coming years.

In addition, the Budget has reduced food subsidies by a huge 28%, fertiliser subsidy by 11% and petroleum subsidies also by 11%. The budget for rural devel-

opment is reduced by 0.3% and the agricultural budget has increased by only 2.5%. Considering inflation, this increase may reduce the agricultural budget. MSMEs needed a big boost in the Budget. However not much is offered to this sector. The total consumption expenditure in the economy declined by 5% in the last year. In the absence of any cash transfers and inadequate employment situation, consumption is not likely to increase in the economy, particularly with high levels of inflation for which the government has no clear solution. The demand deficiency may persist in the coming years, restricting private investments on the one hand and intensifying the conditions of the population belonging to the bottom 30-40%.

As regards health and education, the allocation on health has increased by only 1%, which may be negative if we consider inflation. The budget for education has increased by 11%, which in real terms may be less. Both the budgeted data however do not meet the norms for the two sectors. What is surprising is that the government

End of Democracy

The emergence of illiberal politicians across the West has led to prophecies about the end of democracy. In the United States, Donald Trump is maneuvering to return to the White House in 2025, after attempting to overturn an election that he lost in 2020. In France, not one but two far-right populists are running for president. And in Italy, Matteo Salvini of the League and Giorgia Meloni of the post-fascist Brothers of Italy will be plausible contenders for the premiership when Italians go to the polls in 2023.

Like right-wing political and media operatives in the US, Salvini, Meloni, and Marine Le Pen of the French far-right National Rally have all paid homage to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. They have made no secret of their temptation to pursue his brand of illiberalism if given the chance.

Concerns about the future tend to be molded by our most vivid memories of the past. We learned from our parents and grandparents about the threat of fascism. And in recent years, we have watched authoritarian leaders come to power democratically, only to erode constitutional norms and institutions once in office. This 'electoral' model for establishing autocracy thus has come to seem like a potent threat.

But are we worrying about the right kind of democratic decline? In fact, a more immediate risk lies in the descent from democracy to ochlocracy, a term coined by the Greek historian Polybius during the second century BC to describe mob rule. Ochlocracy results from politicians using cheap gifts and seductive talk to attract voters who don't appreciate their freedom, because they have never experienced the abuses or repression of non-democratic governance. As Polybius explains in The Histories: "As long as some of those survive who experienced the evils of oligarchical dominion, they are well pleased with the present form of government, and set a high value on equality and freedom of speech. But when a new generation arises and the democracy falls into the hands of the grandchildren (...), they have become so accustomed to freedom and equality that they no longer value them. (...) So when they begin to lust for power and cannot attain it through themselves or their own good qualities, they ruin their estates, tempting and corrupting the people in every possible way. And (...) democracy in its turn is abolished and changes into a rule of force and violence."

Before Polybius, both Plato and Aristotle also agreed that democracy is potentially vulnerable to ever-changing and easily manipulated public moods. In our time, we call this populism, a label that allows us to shift all the blame for democratic backsliding onto individual populist figures like Trump, Le Pen, and Salvini. But while these politicians have fomented fear of immigrants and polarised public opinion, they are not operating in a vacuum. They owe their political successes to voters (and, in Trump's case, to many American conservative elites).

Twenty-first-century ochlocracy tends to go beyond classic populism to implicate broader swathes of public life. Three symptoms of this process stand out today. First, mainstream political parties have been hollowed out, with vaguer policy programmes and narrower pathways for new leaders to emerge. The Republican Party in the US is a case in point. But in the past two presidential elections, the Democrats also have continued to elevate long-time establishment stalwarts, even when the times seemed to call for new figures and fresh ideas.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson commandeered the storied Conservative Party, first by peddling lies about Brexit, and then by feeding the delusion that a divorce from the European Union would be easy and beneficial. It is no surprise that such a leader would feel invulnerable enough to host or attend parties while the rest of the country was in pandemic lockdown. The situation is no better in Italy, where no mainstream party has any credible internal democratic processes for selecting new leaders or devising a policy programme. The parties are so hapless that they regularly need to call in technocrats to manage complex crises, as happened with Prime Minister Mario Monti in 2011-13 and now Mario Draghi. Recent convulsions among and within parties to select a new head of state are further evidence of how dysfunctional Rome's political class has become. Only by re-electing President Sergio Mattarella, despite his reluctance, could parties break the stalemate.

A second major symptom of democratic decay is the degradation of the media. Democracy suffers when media organisations become partisan, polarised, and shallow (using sensationalism and fear in pursuit of market share). When a society is politically polarised, publishers and editors see a commercial opportunity in goading likeminded segments of the population. Fanning the flames becomes a business model. Especially in recent years, leading media outlets have found that it pays to take an unflinching position on controversial figures like Trump, Johnson, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, or Beppe Grillo, the founder of Italy's populist Five Star Movement. By becoming dependent on polarisation, media outlets have fed it, doing little to help form public opinion beyond short-term political conflicts. As Leslie Moonves, then the CEO of CBS, said of Trump's presidential candidacy in 2016, "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS."

A third symptom is the rise of social-media chatter as a dominant influence on politicians' views and decisions. As a journalist, I personally know prominent leaders who are addicted to Twitter and spend a considerable part of their days on it. Twitter becomes their reality, while their constituents continue to live in the real world. A political system with hollowed-out parties is more likely to succumb to such pressures. As the system increasingly fails to address long-term issues, trust in it erodes and public opinion becomes increasingly volatile, resulting in a now-familiar spiral of noise, ineffectiveness, negligent media, aggressive rhetoric, and shortsighted political programmes.

This is a formula for ochlocracy. Twenty-two centuries after his death, Polybius has our number.

The writer is an economics journalist and editor-at-large at Corriere della Sera.

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Federico Fubini

In recent years, we have watched authoritarian leaders come to power democratically, only to erode constitutional norms and institutions once in office

SPECTRUM GEOPOLITICS

Russia, Ukraine & India's balancing act

As Russia and Ukraine seem close to a war and the Western powers led by the US warn Russia against invasion of its neighbour, New Delhi is caught diplomatically in a delicate position. It could neither oppose Russia nor can it support the West. New Delhi fears losing Russia, an old friend, who may openly form an axis with China and is wary of offending the new friend America by not siding with it.



DK Giri

NEW DELHI SOMEWHAT SEES RUSSIA AS AN ALLY EVEN IN THE INDIA-CHINA FACE-OFF

Before we discuss and asses India's options, her stakes with each side, it is in order that we understand Russia's intentions and America's concerns. Russia had attacked Ukraine in 2014 and annexed Crimea, the Russian speaking territory of Ukraine. Since then, Ukraine has been in crosshairs between Russia and the West. The US wants to expand NATO into the East, after it has secured military hegemony of the West. The US is nudging Ukraine to join NATO, if that happens, NATO forces will be right at Russian borders. Therefore, Russia would do anything in its powers to prevent Ukraine from joining the NATO. In mid-December last year, Russia demanded a guarantee from the US "in writing" that NATO would not expand eastward, and Ukraine could never be a member of the

military alliance. It goes without saying that the US and its allies refused to budge and ruled out such eventuality.

President Vladimir Putin wants to reclaim the Soviet empire. Putin had called the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the last century." On Ukraine, Putin is even more sentimental as he considers Russians and Ukrainians are people with a common political and spiritual history. However, the shared history between Russia and Ukraine is indeed history.

At present, Ukraine is an independent country, and has tremendous geopolitical significance. It shares borders with four NATO countries. It has a strong economy, has major ports in Black Sea, and carries one of the biggest Russian gas pipelines to Europe. The bullying of Ukraine by Russia escalated recently. Russia would not want to lose its influence over Ukraine for the reasons cited above.

Where does India stand on this? It has neither voted for or against a motion to hold discussion in UN on Russia's military build-up at Ukraine borders. India abstained along with countries like Gabon and Kenya. Admittedly, India has had a long military supply arrangement with Moscow. New Delhi

somewhat sees Russia as an ally even in India-China face-off. There are a number of Indian students in Ukraine. At the same time, India is increasingly being dependent on America and its allies for trade and security.

Speaking at the UNSC meeting on Ukraine, India's Permanent Representative to the UN called for the immediate de-escalation of the situation while taking into account the security interests of all. He said: "India's interest is in finding a solution that can provide for immediate de-escalation of tensions taking into account the legitimate security interests of all countries and aimed towards securing long term peace and stability in the region and beyond." India, Kenya and Gabon abstained from a procedural vote on whether or not Ukraine would be discussed. China and Russia voted against. The US which initiated the meeting and nine other countries voted to hold the discussion.

India's Permanent Representative also reiterated its support for a July 2020 ceasefire, the 2014 Minsk Agreement and the Normandy Process. The Normandy Process refers to discussions held between Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France, who have met since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea. The

four countries met in Paris January 26 this year and are set to meet in Berlin in two weeks. The Minsk Agreement following the ceasefire was meant to end the war between Russia and Ukraine in the Donbas region of the latter. It was signed in 2014 by the Trilateral Contact Group comprising Ukraine, Russia and the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe represented by Germany and France.

All in all, India is calling for "quiet and constructive diplomacy" to de-escalate the tension between Russia and Ukraine, and the West. Will that work? I have written consistently in this column that India has to shed its balancing role and choose her corner. Or else, New Delhi may fall between two stools. It is not so prudent or strategic to be seen with just two other countries Gabon, and Kenya. India has to plan to join sooner than later the democratic world, as such occasions causing friction between the West and autocracies like Russia, China and North Korea, will keep popping up calling upon each country to take a stand. New Delhi cannot dither for long.

The writer is Professor of International Politics, JIMMC.

©INFIA

WISDOM CORNER

All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident. **ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER**

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment. **RALPH WALDO EMERSON**

What lies behind us and what lies ahead of us are tiny matters compared to what lives within us. **HENRY DAVID THOREAU**

LOL

A DOG FIGHT

A man walks into a bar one day and asks, "Does anyone here own that Rottweiler outside?" "Yeah, I do!" a biker says, standing up. "What about it?" "Well, I think my Chihuahua just killed him..." "What are you talkin' about?" the biker says, disbelievably. "How could your little runt kill my Rottweiler?" "Well, it seems he got stuck in your dog's throat!"



Targeting citizens

Sir, The Indian government bought Israeli spyware Pegasus in 2017 as part of a \$2-billion package for weapons including a missile system. The New York Times reported. Responding to the controversy in Parliament July 18, Union Minister Aswini Vaishnaw said the report was a 'sensational attempt' to malign Indian democracy and its well established institutions. 'He had said that India had established protocols when it comes to surveillance which were robust and had 'stood the test of time.' Why did the present government use a weapon against its own citizens?

Asit Mohanty, JAJPUR

Wasting people's money?

Sir, The Congress in Punjab has announced in its third list of candidates that Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi will contest from two constituencies in the Assembly elections. In the past too we have seen many political leaders from ruling as well as Opposition parties trying their luck in the political battle field from more than one place for both Assembly and Parliamentary elections. Are these political leaders who were supposed to become people's representatives not wasting people's money for their personal gains because if they win from both constituencies they will resign from one of the two and again there will be by-elections for it. It is high time a law should be brought to stop leaders from contesting more than one seat.

V Nagendra Kumar, HYDERABAD

No tax relief

Sir, It is really unfortunate that the Budget 2022-23 doesn't have anything for the salaried middle class which is a vital cog in the country's wheel of economic development. As the Budget was coming after the disastrous COVID-19 second wave, and amidst the on-going third wave, the salaried class, who are under severe pandemic pain, were earnestly looking for some 'painkiller' from Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's prescription. But disappointingly enough, the absence of any prescription from the economic doctor has only added to their sufferings. Individual tax-payers who contribute almost 40 per cent of direct revenues, had been expecting some tax relief to minimise the economic damage caused by the pandemic. But sadly they are let down. Meanwhile, the Finance Minister's remark that "not increasing the tax would be a relief in itself" is impudent and sounds brash, and her mere "apology" cannot mollify the anger and displeasure of the tax-payers.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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of the day quote

Eight years ago, PMO was being run from somewhere else. Today the PMO is strong enough to take bold decisions



MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI | MINORITY AFFAIRS MINISTER

SP is a supporter of anti-nationals. Goons is a small word for them



J P NADDA | BJP NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Followers of Dalit icon Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar should join the party's effort to oust the BJP from power so that democracy can be saved and people's right protected



AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

Six killed

Jammu: Six people were killed Thursday in a road accident in J&K's Kishtwar district. Police sources said a vehicle went out of the driver's control in Keshwan area of Kishtwar district after which it plunged into a gorge. "Five people travelling in the vehicle died on the spot while the 6th one succumbed while being shifted to hospital. "The names of six deceased people are: Abdul Lateef 42, Abdul Rehman 29, Ata Muhammad 22, Inam 45, Muhammad Arkham 29 and Zameer 18. "Police and troops of 26 Rashtriya Rifles rushed to the spot and started the rescue operation.

Ganja seized

New Delhi: A man was held with 610 kilograms of ganja (cannabis) worth Rs 40 lakh by the Crime Branch of the Delhi Police, officials said Thursday. A senior police official said the accused has been identified as Jasbir. The police got a tip-off that a huge consignment of ganja was being transported by a truck and the consignment was supposed to reach Delhi. A trap was laid and the truck was intercepted near Nirankari Grounds, Mukherjee Nagar. During the search of the truck, bags containing ganja were recovered. The police found a secret cavity created inside the truck, which was specially designed for the purpose of smuggling.

Pak intruder killed

New Delhi: The Border Security Force (BSF) Thursday said that it has killed one Pakistani intruder February 2 who crossed International Border and entered into Indian territory near Border Out Post (BoP) of KS Wala in Ferozepur Sector. According to officials at Force's Headquarters here, Wednesday, the troops deployed on the BoP observed some suspicious movement ahead of Border fencing from the Pakistan side in the area of KS Wala under Ferozepur sector.

Centre revises norms for reopening of schools

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Centre Thursday said the districts having less than 5 per cent Covid positivity rate can move in the direction of reopening schools but it is up to the state governments to take a call in this regard.

there is a contraction in the spread of infection which is heartening. There are 268 districts where the positivity is below 5 per cent. And clearly, these districts can move in the direction of non-COVID care and also in the direction of other economic activities as well as school reopening,"



Ministry of Education officials said schools are completely open in 11 states while they are reopened for mostly higher classes in 16 states

Noting that the pandemic situation has improved and there has been a consistent decline in new COVID-19 cases, Niti Ayog Member (Health) V K Paul said we have more confidence now to go in the direction of reopening schools

Noting that the pandemic situation has improved and there has been a consistent decline in new COVID-19 cases, Niti Ayog Member (Health) V K Paul said we have more confidence now to go in the direction of reopening schools.

Ministry of Education (MoE) officials said schools are completely open in 11 states while they are reopened for mostly higher classes in 16 states. They said following the "extensive" vaccination coverage, the ministry had in December revised the guidelines issued to state for reopening of schools.

Schools continue to remain completely closed in nine states, officials said, adding that all the states have vaccinated at least 95 per cent of the teaching and non-teaching staff, while few states have achieved 100 per cent vaccination coverage for them.

"The pandemic situation has improved. There are states and districts of concern, but overall

Paul said at a press conference. "The decision for reopening schools rests with the state governments, by the district administrations. But the broad issue is that we would still like to ensure that schools are opened and schools are run, according to protocols, standard operating procedures because we are still in the midst of the pandemic.

"By implementing SOPs, we can ensure safe conduct of schools, make physical learning possible, school activities, which lead to interaction development, possible. Teachers can feel safe because now in any case, as they are vaccine protected. So following the SOPs is the essence of the guidelines that the Union government has been issuing. And we believe these guidelines are adapted, these are considered directly by the state governments and decisions are taken for opening the schools," he added.

The historical responsibility of developed countries who have already polluted the environment must not be left out in any discussion on the present situation

BHUPENDRA YADAV | ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE MINISTER



KESHAV MAURYA FILES NOMINATION FROM SIRATHU

UP Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya Thursday filed his nomination papers from the Sirathu assembly seat in presence of BJP president JP Nadda and Apna Dal (S) leader Anupriya Patel



EVM TRAINING



Polling officials take part in Electronic Voting Machine training ahead of Uttar Pradesh Assembly election at a training centre in Prayagraj

Owaisi's car fired upon in UP

Owaisi's vehicle was near the Chhijarso toll plaza on the Hapur-Ghaziabad stretch of the National Highway 24 when the incident took place at around 6 pm

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ghaziabad, Feb 3: AIMIM chief and Lok Sabha MP Asaduddin Owaisi's car was allegedly fired upon in Hapur while he was returning to Delhi after attending election-related events in western Uttar Pradesh.

Owaisi's vehicle was near the Chhijarsi toll plaza on the Hapur-Ghaziabad stretch of the National



Highway 24 when the incident took place at around 6 pm, he said. No one was injured in the incident. Owaisi said while urging the Election Commission (EC) to ensure an independent probe into the incident.

The local Hapur Police said its multiple teams are investigating the case even as the inspector general of the Meerut zone was rushed in to supervise the probe, which has come barely a week ahead of the first phase of the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls.

"Some time ago, my car was fired at near Chhijarsi toll gate. Four rounds of shots were fired. There were 3-4 people, all of them ran away and left the weapons there. My car got punctured, but I moved to another car and left. We are all safe. Alhamdulillah," Owaisi tweeted in Hindi.

The Hyderabad MP said he had left Delhi in the morning for election-related programmes in Meerut and Kithore, where he held door-to-door campaigns for party's candidates. Owaisi's convoy had four cars, according to the MP.

Man steals police jeep, goes on 112 km joyride

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Dharwad, (Karnataka), Feb 3: A man, who stole a jeep from a police station in Karnataka's Dharwad district and went on a long joyride to fulfill his long-pending dream, has been arrested, police said Thursday.

The accused was identified as Nagappa Y. Hadappa, 45, a resident of Annigeri Town and working as a driver. He nursed a dream of driving a police jeep for many years. As a truck driver, he had travelled to all parts of the state as well as neighbouring states. But, his dream of going on a long ride in a police jeep remained unfulfilled.

Hadappa used to see the police jeep parked in the premises of Annigeri police station whenever he passed there. Early on Wednesday, he walked in and found that not only was the vehicle lying unlocked, its ignition key was also in place.

He thought this was the right time to fulfill his dream and drove away the police jeep as Inspector L.K. Julakatti had gone home after duty, and the two policemen on duty had dozed off.

He drove the jeep for 112 kilometres till Motebennur near Byadagi town and then parked it by the roadside and fell asleep. The local residents observed the stationary vehicle, suspected foul play and informed local Byadagi police. The police rushed to the spot and detained Hadappa.

Annigeri police were also informed and the jeep was handed over to them later.

Police suspect the accused is mentally disturbed and it is his first crime. A case has been registered and the accused sent to judicial custody.

India already facing trailers of future wars: Army chief

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 3: India is already facing trailers of future wars and it is being witnessed in information battlefield, cyber space and unsettled and active borders, said Indian Army chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane Thursday pointing out challenges from China and Pakistan.

Speaking at Pragyan Conclave at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies in Delhi about future wars, Gen Naravane said, "We are already witnessing 'trailers' of future conflicts. They are being enacted daily on the information battlefield, in the networks and cyber space. They are also being played along, our yet unsettled and active borders." He said that it is for us to 'visualise', the battlefield contours of tomorrow, based on these 'trailers'.

"If you look around, you will realise that the 'sci-fi' of yesterday, is the 'reality' of today," said General Naravane adding, "We too have to 'leap-frog' to the future, skipping many stages, to an entirely new configuration."

He said the paradigm shift in warfare is well acknowledged. "We are witnessing conflicts increas-



ingly transcending, time, space and force dimensions, and enveloping new frontiers," General Naravane said.

These wars blur the distinction, between combatants and non-combatants, front and rear; often avoid direct military engagements, and resort to extensive use of proxy actors. There are ongoing hostilities between States, in the Cyber, Information, Sub-conventional and Hybrid domains, without a formal pronouncement of War.

He points out that there is no

'M' Day or 'D' Day as has been the case earlier. These, along with Diplomatic, Informational, and Economic coercive activities, are already being prosecuted in the Grey Zone.

The aim remains to incapacitate the adversary, disintegrate his sources of power, and render the command and control systems ineffective, so as to make physical forces redundant. He pointed out that India has also observed, some Nations challenging the globally accepted norms, and the Rules Based Order. "This challenge has manifested in various forms of, creeping aggression and opportunist actions, to alter the status-quo, keeping the threshold below all out war," he said.

Talking about developments in Afghanistan, General Naravane said situation in Afghanistan have again brought to focus, the use of proxies and Non-State actors to decisive effects.

"These actors thrive on local conditions, innovatively exploit low cost options, to devastating impact and create conditions, that limit the full use of sophisticated capabilities, available to the State," he stated.

56 Indian fishermen freed by Lanka: Govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: Fifty-six Indian fishermen were released by Sri Lanka on January 25, the government said Thursday, insisting that both sides should ensure that there was no use of force against the fishing community under any circumstances. Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said in Rajya Sabha that India attaches the highest priority to the safety and security of Indian fishermen.

"On January 15, the external affairs minister discussed the issue of early release of Indian fishermen in Sri Lanka custody during his virtual meeting with Finance Minister of Sri Lanka," he said. As a result, 56 Indian fishermen were released by the Government of Sri Lanka on January 25 and currently, there are no Indian fishermen in Sri Lanka custody," Muraleedharan said.

He was replying to a question on the matter: The minister also said that the issue of fishermen was also taken up in Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla's discussions with the Sri Lankan dignitaries when he visited that country in October. "The need to deal with issues pertaining to fishermen in a humanitarian manner was reiterated to the government of Sri Lanka," Muraleedharan said. "It was also stressed that existing understandings between the two Governments in that regard must be strictly observed and both sides should ensure that there was no use of force under any circumstances," he said.

Why is India seeing surge in deaths despite low Covid cases?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 3: While the active caseload has reported a marginal decline in India, the country is seeing a surge in deaths due to Covid-19.

A week back on January 26, India reported 2,85,914 fresh cases and 665 deaths in 24 hours. Since then, there has been a constant dip in new infections. However, the number of fatalities has risen steadily.

On February 3, the country saw 1,72,433 infections and 1,008 deaths in a span of 24 hours. "Deaths lags about 2-3 weeks behind cases. It takes that much time for people to be severely ill, be hospitalised and managed there till they succumb to the disease," Shahid Jameel, Visiting Professor, Ashoka University, told IANS.

India is currently going through its third Covid wave triggered mostly



by the highly contagious Omicron variant. Globally, Omicron accounts for about 70 per cent infections at this time, with Delta accounting for about 30 per cent.

The variant, touted as majorly causing mild illness, had initially led to a spike in Covid case numbers, but the number of Omicron cases have been much less in India.

"The third wave in India is also mostly driven by Omicron. The Omicron figures are much less than daily positive cases because the former is determined only after genomic sequencing, whereas the latter is based on PCR and rapid tests," said Jameel, who is also Senior Research Fellow at Green Templeton College, Oxford University.

"Not all positive cases are sequenced to determine the variant virus," he added. India is expected to see a peak in the wave in early to mid-February.

"The peak will differ in different states and should eventually start to flatten by the end of March," Dr. Kiran K. Kulirankal, from Division of Infectious Diseases, at Amrita Hospital, Kochi, said.

However, it is too early to predict the end of Covid, he noted. Kulirankal contended that although initial data

shows Omicron variant to be highly transmissible but less severe than Delta, this is not the case while considering high risk groups.

It comprises the elderly, immunocompromised, patients with chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, uncontrolled diabetes, those on immunosuppressive medications and patients with malignancy.

"The weakened immune system fails to prevent the progression of the disease to its severe form leading to increased morbidity and mortality," Kulirankal said.

He advised protecting the high-risk group as well as the general population with vaccinations and following proper Covid protocols such as hand washing, avoiding unnecessary travels, avoiding public gathering, and maintaining physical distancing.

भारत का राजपत्र
The Gazette of India

जसाधारण
EXTRAORDINARY
भाग II - खण्ड 3 - उप-खण्ड (II)
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MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS
NOTIFICATION
New Delhi, the 25th January, 2022

S.O. 335(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 lane etc.), maintenance, management and operation of NH16 in the stretch of land from Km 98 to Km111 (Office of the Tahasildar, Bhandaripokhari, At/Po/PS- Bhandaripokhari, Dist-Bhadrak, Pin-756120, Odisha) in the district of BHADRAK 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, Bhandaripokhari 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 98 to Km111 (Office of the Tahasildar, Bhandaripokhari, At/Po/PS- Bhandaripokhari, Dist- Bhadrak, Pin-756120, Odisha) in the district of BHADRAK in the state of ODISHA

Sl. No.	Survey/ Plot Number	Type of Land	Nature of Land	Area (in Local Unit)	Area (in Hectare)
Taluk : Bhandaripokhari					
Village : Dakshinabar-42					
1	1193	Private	Patita	0.0150000(Acre)	0.0060704
2	1194	Private	Gharabari	0.0800000(Acre)	0.0323756
3	1196	Private	Sarad Jal II	0.0550000(Acre)	0.0222582
4	1453	Private	Gharabari	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
5	1455	Private	Gharabari	0.0100000(Acre)	0.0040469
6	1456	Private	Gharabari	0.0400000(Acre)	0.0161878
Village : Shasan-32					
1	1122	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.0450000(Acre)	0.0182112
2	1124	Private	Gharabari	0.0250000(Acre)	0.0101174
3	1125	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.0400000(Acre)	0.0161878
4	1126	Private	Jalasya-II	0.0450000(Acre)	0.0182112
5	1126/1476	Private	Gharabari	0.0350000(Acre)	0.0141643
6	1132	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.1450000(Acre)	0.0586807
7	1133	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.0450000(Acre)	0.0182112
8	1134	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.0500000(Acre)	0.0202347
9	1135	Private	Gharabari	0.0200000(Acre)	0.0080939
10	1135/1437	Private	Gharabari	0.0250000(Acre)	0.0101174
11	1135/1452	Private	Gharabari	0.0450000(Acre)	0.0182112
12	1145	Private	Gharabari	0.0300000(Acre)	0.0121408
13	1146	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.0850000(Acre)	0.0343990
14	1149	Private	Sarad Jal I	0.0400000(Acre)	0.0161878
15	1150	Private	Chaka	0.0150000(Acre)	0.0060704
			Total	0.9000	0.3642

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

UPPER CASTE ATROCITIES

TN Guv returns govt Bill seeking NEET exemption

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Feb 3: Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi has returned to the state government, an Assembly bill seeking exemption to the state from the National Entrance cum Eligibility Test (NEET), saying it went against the interests of rural and economically poor students.



The Governor is of the opinion that the Bill is against interests of the students, specially the rural and economically poor students of the state

Supreme Court in Christian Medical College, Vellore Association Vs. Union of India (2020) also has comprehensively examined the issue specially from the Social Justice perspective and upheld NEET as it prevents economic exploitation of poor students and is in furtherance of social justice, it added.

The Governor has returned the bill and the report of a High Level committee constituted by the state government in this connection to the Assembly Speaker M Appavu, a Raj Bhavan release said.

The Governor after detailed study of the L.A.Bill.No.43 of 2021 for admission to Undergraduate Medical Courses seeking exemption from NEET, and the Report of the High Level Committee constituted by the State Government in this regard, which is the basis for the Bill and also examining the pre-NEET status of social justice in medical admission especially for students coming from socially and economically poor background, is of the opinion that the Bill is against interests of the students specially the rural and economically poor students of the State.

Hence, the Hon'ble Governor has returned the Bill to the Hon'ble Speaker, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly February 1, 2022, giving detailed reasons, for its reconsideration by the House, it said. The

Eight Dalit families convert to Islam

THE CONVERTED PEOPLE ALLEGE THAT THE UPPER CASTE HINDUS ATTACK THEM REGULARLY AND ONCE IN EVERY SIX MONTHS, SOME OR OTHER INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE DALITS ARE REPORTED IN THE VILLAGE OF DOMBUCHERI

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, Feb 3: Forty people from eight Dalit families in Theni, southern Tamil Nadu have embraced Islam after they found living amongst the upper caste Hindus a nightmare.

The conversion occurred a couple of days before at Dombucheri village in Bodinayakanur town in Theni district and Islamic priests solemnised the conversion.

Incidentally, Bodinayakanur is the constituency of the former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and senior leader of the AIADMK, O Panneerselvam.

Those converted said that they were continuously attacked by Upper caste Hindus who don't allow them to drink tea or coffee from local restaurants and wayside tea shops citing the lower caste status. The neo converts charge that while the men were beaten up, the Dalit girls were teased and lewd comments and gestures were made at them while they were walking on the streets.

Rahima (32) who was earlier Veeralakshmi while speaking to IANS said, "We are forced to convert. We are being teased, beaten,

insulted, and not being allowed to walk in the same street where Upper caste Hindus walk. Our parents and grandparents suffered this ignominy and we decided that enough is enough. We are now Muslims and we don't find any demarcation here."

Raheema's husband Mohammed Ismail, who was Kalaikannan earlier, said that he was beaten up in November 2021 during the Deepavali celebrations by upper caste men and he decided to convert to Islam after the incident. He said that he was mercilessly beaten up when he bought a motorbike, by the upper caste men and said that the Dalits in the villages of Tamil Nadu were living a life of misery.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Tamil Puligal Party's Theni north secretary told IANS that he was Varimuthu earlier and converted to Islam fifteen years ago. He said, "The reason for conversion is nothing but the atrocities on Dalits by the caste Hindus. We were not even allowed to walk on the streets through which they walk. Since fifteen years, I am getting respect after converting to Islam and this is what a man wants."



The new religious conversion row to Islam is following the Madras High Court ordering a CBI inquiry into the suicide death of a Plus Two girl student alleging forced religious conversion

It may be recalled that in Meenakshipuram village of Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, 180 Dalit Pallavar families had converted to Islam February 19, 1981, creating a major uproar across the country with international media reporting on the untouchability

However, interestingly, ten years after the conversion, by 1991 almost 900 people of the 1,100 converted from 180 families returned to the Hindu fold citing a lack of fulfillment of promises

However, Hindu Munnani denied the upper caste atrocities being the reason behind conversions and said that Islamist parties like the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) and its offshoot Popular

Front of India (PFI) are forcing people to convert to Islam by luring them with several freebies and those who resist are threatened.

Arjun while speaking to IANS said, "We are reaching out to the

Dombucheri village people of Theni district. We will convince them against this and all will be well within a few days."

It may be recalled that in Meenakshipuram village of Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, 180 Dalit Pallavar families had converted to Islam February 19, 1981, creating a major uproar across the country and international media had also reported on the untouchability that was dormant in India. Those who converted to Islam alleged that they were attacked by the majority Thevar community and that conversion was their last resort to escape the torment at the hands of upper-caste Hindus.

However, interestingly, ten years after the conversion by 1991 almost 900 people of 1,100 converted from 180 families returned to the Hindu fold citing a lack of fulfillment of promises.

The new religious conversion row to Islam is following the Madras High Court ordering a CBI inquiry into the suicide death of a Plus Two girl student alleging forced religious conversion. The BJP and Hindu Munnani had come out strongly on the matter.

Dubai ruler's tweet in Malayalam goes viral, Vijayan replies in Arabic



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 3: A tweet in Malayalam by Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, soon after his meeting with Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the Emirates, has gone viral on social media as several expatriate Malayalis shared it on their virtual platforms.

Besides the tweet, the Dubai ruler also shared the picture of the reception given to Vijayan at the venue of the Dubai Expo

Besides the tweet, the Dubai ruler also shared the picture of the reception given to Vijayan at the venue of the Dubai Expo 2020

Wednesday. The tweet was later shared by Vijayan on his Twitter handle.

The UAE shares a special relationship with Kerala. Keralites are playing a significant role in the economic and developmental growth of Dubai and the UAE, he wrote in Malayalam.

Interestingly, the Chief Minister replied to Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid thanking him through an Arabic tweet: "Humbled by your hospitality and warm welcome..." Vijayan wrote, adding that the southern Indian state would like to further strengthen the association with the UAE and Dubai.

During their meeting Wednesday, the Chief Minister thanked Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid for his country's support in the development of Kerala, a CMO release said. He also sought more investments for Kerala, promising a better business-friendly environment in the southern Indian state.

Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai; Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister of UAE and Deputy Ruler of Dubai; Sheikh Ahmad bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman of Emirates Airlines Group and President of Dubai Civil Aviation and other officials were present on the occasion.



A worker screen-prints flags of various political parties, for advertising in the upcoming Coimbatore Corporation elections, in Coimbatore

PFI PHOTO

THANJAVUR GIRL SUICIDE CASE

TN moves SC against CBI probe in conversion case

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Tamil Nadu government has moved the Supreme Court challenging the Madras High Court order directing a CBI probe into suicide of a 17-year-old girl on her father's petition amid allegations of forced conversion.

The father of the deceased has also filed a caveat requesting the apex court not to pass any order, without hearing him in the matter.

In a video, the girl purportedly stated that her school warden allegedly asked her to convert to Christianity, but she turned down the request and since then, she was troubled.

The 17-year-old girl, studying at a school in Michaelpatti, consumed poison January 9 and died January 19 at a hospital. The police have registered a case.

The Tamil Nadu government, through the DGP, challenged the validity of the order passed by a single judge bench of the high court's Madurai bench.

The high court ordered the transfer of the case to the CBI, days after a 45-second video was released in which the girl is purportedly heard saying the warden of a Christian residential school asked her parents to convert to



Christianity. It also made strong observations against the Tamil Nadu government and Thanjavur district police over their attempts to disrupt the investigation.

The Tamil Nadu government, in the petition, has questioned the order, citing that the police and the Education Minister had ruled out a conversion angle in the matter.

On January 21, the girl's father filed the petition seeking a CB-CID probe but later he sought a CBI probe.

The mobile phone which was used to record the girl's video has been sent to a forensic lab in Chennai for examination on the court's directions.

Tamil Nadu to declare 17 water bodies as wetlands

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, Feb 3: The Tamil Nadu government will notify 17 water bodies spread across 2,672 hectares in the state as wetlands under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017.

The draft notification seeking comments from the public will be issued in February 2022 itself, according to information from the state government sources.

Kadabakulam spread across 706 hectares, Thirumeni lake in 310 hectares, Penugondapuram lake in Krishnagiri (199 hectares) are the prominent water bodies that will be notified. Other water bodies spread in Erode, Tiruvannamalai, Tiruchi, and Namakkal districts will also be notified.

The notification will lead to conservation of these water bodies on the basis of site-specific strategies, and a comprehensive list of activities to be regulated and permitted will be developed for specific wetlands. Solid waste dumping, industrial effluent dumping, and encroachments will be prohibited once these water bodies are notified as wetlands.

The draft notification will be issued in February 2022 itself and the public will be given 60 days to submit their comments.

Sources in the Tamil Nadu state wetland authority told IANS



that if there are no major objections, a final gazette notification will be issued.

The National Atlas prepared by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has marked that the state has 43,916 wetlands, including 5,013 natural wetlands spread across more than nine lakh hectares. This is around 6.92 per cent of the state's geographical area.

Deepak Srivastava, member secretary, Tamil Nadu State Wetland Authority told IANS: "Of these wetlands shown in the National Atlas prepared by the ISRO in 2011, several were abused and many disappeared. The first objective of the state wetland authority is to protect the wetlands that are remain-

ing, and of the 5,013 wetlands, if 1,000 are less encroached or untouched, we will notify them as soon as possible to check further degradation."

The Tamil Nadu government has recently launched the Tamil Nadu Wetlands mission aimed to identify and map 100 wetlands in five years and restore the ecological balance. The wetland mission has been earmarked a total budget of Rs 150 crore for its activities.

The Chennai-based National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management will be roped in for mapping and demarcating the 150 wetlands and to prevent them from further degradation.

Bureaucrat, jailed in Ker gold smuggling case, pens book

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 3: A month after the Kerala government had revoked his suspension, top bureaucrat M Sivasankar, who was arrested by the central agencies in the sensational gold smuggling case, is coming out with an autobiographical book narrating his version on the controversial episode.

Titled as 'Ashwathamavu Verum Oru Aana' (Ashwathama is just an elephant), the book is published by noted publisher DC Books.

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's former principal secretary was keeping away from media glare even after he was re-inducted into the service January 4 after a year-long suspension.

Interestingly, the announcement was made by the publisher Thursday, which is the first anniversary of a local court granting him bail February 3, 2021 after keeping him in jail for 98 days in connection with the infamous case that had triggered a political turmoil in the state.

The book is expected to hit the shelves Saturday, sources said.

According to excerpts from the book, released by television channels, the senior bureaucrat who was arrested in the case in 2020 has rejected all the charges levelled against him by the central agencies. Sivasankar, in the book, claimed



that he had made no illegal intervention in the gold smuggling incident and never made any undue favour for Swapna Suresh, the prime accused, in the case.

He also alleged that he was targeted and haunted by the media over the incident.

The officer, in the book, claimed that he was shell-shocked to know that Suresh, who was a close friend of him for three years, was a participant in smuggling. Sivasankar also charged in the book that there was pressure upon the investigating agencies to drag Chief Minister into the case and he was arrested to get a statement against Vijayan.

Sivasankar, who was the former principal secretary to CM Vijayan and former IT Secretary, was suspended from service after his links with Suresh had surfaced.

He was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Customs in the cases relating to the sensational gold smuggling through diplomatic channel, money trail and dollar smuggling.

of the day quote

Two India's are: 1. People enjoy high-class society life, attend rave parties, frequent vacation trip to foreign destinations and enjoy very colourful life. 2. People live simple life in India, remain with the needy people all the time, think Indian and follow Indian traditions

KIREN RIJU | LAW MINISTER

The ministry is planning to issue chip-enabled e-passports to citizens with advanced security features. The e-passport features contactless smart card technology, including an embedded Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) chip embedded in the front or back cover or page of the passport

V MURALEEDHARAN | MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Samajwadi Party (SP), which was in power from 2012 to 2017 in the state, only "usurped money" in the name of development and the Akhilesh Yadav government's development is seen in the boundary walls of 'kabristan' (graveyard)

YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CM

SHORT TAKES

Man kills wife

Seraikela (Jharkhand): A 35-year-old woman was crushed to death with a stone allegedly by her husband in Seraikela-Kharswan district after she refused to give him money to buy liquor, a police officer on Thursday said. The accused, Sudhir Mahato, found sitting beside the body, was arrested from the site of the incident, along the banks of a river in Guhila village of the district. Officer-in-Charge Manohar Kumar said. Mahato had taken his wife Pushpa to the riverside on Wednesday evening, when an altercation ensued between them over demand for money to buy liquor, police officer said.

Fisherman killed

Visakhapatnam: A fisherman was killed in an attack by a huge Black Marlin fish in the Bay of Bengal off Visakhapatnam coast. The fisherman was attacked by the giant fish with its spear-like snout when he along with four others was fishing in the deep sea 60 nautical miles from the shore. The incident, said to be the first of its kind in the region, occurred on Wednesday.

Two Customs officials held

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Wednesday said that they have arrested a Superintendent of Customs from Motihari in Bihar and a Computer Operator for demanding and accepting bribe of Rs 50,000 from a man. A CBI official said that a case was registered against Deepak Kumar Chaudhary, the superintendent of Customs and the computer operator Anand Kumar on the complaint of a man who alleged that the duo were demanding a bribe of Rs 90,000 which was 30 per cent of seizure value of goods (Rs 3 lakh) from him.

Dubai-bound man arrested

New Delhi: A Dubai-bound Indian national was caught by the Customs at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport for smuggling foreign currency worth Rs 21 lakh by concealing it in the fake cavity of his bag. A senior Customs official said that the man was held on February 1. The official said that the man was carrying Saudi Riyals, which he was hiding in the false cavity of his bag. He was about to take a flight for Dubai when he was caught.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement in the context of Union Budget is contrary to reality and the country will have to bear the consequences of the government's "wrong policies"
ASHOK GEHLOT | RAJASTHAN CM

MAHA BOARD FIRM ON OFFLINE EXAM

Amid demand by students for cancellation of offline examinations due to the COVID-19 situation, the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Thursday made it clear that the exams for Class 12 and 10 will be conducted in offline mode



Reports alleging 'vax fraud' misleading: Centre

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Union Health Ministry Thursday said that some reports in the international media alleging a "vaccination fraud" and further claiming that people are being fraudulently registered as double vaccinated without receiving both doses are misleading and completely ill-informed.

"There have been some media reports in international media alleging a 'vaccination fraud' and further claiming that people are being fraudulently registered as double vaccinated without receiving both doses. These reports have also alleged that the vaccination 'figures were being manipulated'. It is clarified that such media reports are not only misleading but are completely ill-informed, and without any basis," said the ministry in a statement.

The ministry said that India's na-



tionwide Covid vaccination drive is supported with a strong technology backup provided by Co-WIN digital platform that has performed exceptionally in the last more than one year of the Covid vaccination drive. All the Covid vaccinations are recorded in this digital platform.

Co-WIN system is an inclusive platform / system and has been designed keeping the limitations and challenges of mobile and Internet availability across the country. Necessary features and flexibility, to ensure that every eligible individual has the access to vaccination, regardless of any of

physical, digital or socioeconomic barriers to access, have been incorporated in Co-WIN, the ministry added in the statement.

The ministry clarified that the beneficiaries have been empowered to make necessary corrections in their records on Co-WIN. The "Raise an issue" module in beneficiary dashboard allows the beneficiaries to make corrections apart from changes in basic demographic details like name, age, gender and photo ID.

"It needs to be appreciated that even with its very large population, India has successfully implemented its nationwide Covid vaccination programme and administered more than 167 crore doses as on date, covering more than 76 per cent of the eligible population above 18 years with both the doses," said the ministry clarifying on the reports.

Hijab row spreads to more colleges

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bangalore, Feb 3: Showing no signs of abating, hijab row in Karnataka has spread to more colleges as girl students wearing hijab or burqa were stopped at the entrance of the Bhandarkars' College of Kundapur in Udupi district of the state on Thursday morning.

The girl students who came to the college wearing burqa or hijab were stopped at the entrance by the Principal of Bhandarkars' College. The Principal told students that as per the government order and college guidelines they will have to come in uniform to the classes. The girl students argued that they have been coming to the college in hijab for a long time and they must be permitted. But the entry was denied.

The administration of Bhandarkars' College on Wednesday had also denied permission to students who came to classes in saffron shawls. These groups of students were also stopped at the entrance. The students raised slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram' after which a tense situation prevailed in the campus.

Meanwhile, Araga Jnanendra, Karnataka Home Minister stated that the directions have already been given to the police department to take up the investigation on communal forces behind the hijab row in the state. "The investigation is underway. We will not spare the elements which come in the way of unity of this country," he stated.

"Nagaq, burqa, hijab, saffron or green shawls are not allowed in the classrooms. The minister for Education has already stated that uniforms are compulsory. There should not be any divisive factors in the academic environment. There are mosques, churches and temples for religious practices," the Home Minister explained. "With these developments, the etiquette of integrity is being challenged," he said.

S. Angara, the District In-Charge Minister of Udupi, reacting to Bhandarkar college incident said that he has just taken charge of



Hijab row which has been confined to one college in Udupi has now spread to more colleges in Karnataka causing concern in the department of Education as well as parents and student community

the district. "There will be one rule for all schools and colleges. I will discuss the matter with the District Commissioner. The matter will also be discussed with the Education Minister and the Chief Minister. Once I get the details, I will take action," he stated.

Hijab row which has been confined to one college in Udupi has now spread to more colleges in Karnataka causing concern in the department of Education as well as parents and student community. The development is also taking a communal turn threatening the academic atmosphere of the state.

The state government has set up a high level committee to decide whether to allow hijab wearing students in classrooms. Until the report is submitted, the government has asked students to attend classes in uniform without wearing hijab. However, Muslim students, defying the order, tried to attend classes wearing hijab in the Government Girl's Pre-University College of Udupi. They were sent back.

Road rage case against Sidhu: SC adjourns hearing

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Supreme Court Thursday adjourned hearing on a plea seeking review of its May 15, 2018 verdict, letting off Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu with a mere Rs 1,000 fine in a 1988 road rage case where a Patiala resident had died, till after the February 20 Punjab Assembly elections.

A bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Sanjay Kishan Kaul cited a letter circulated by Sidhu's counsel seeking adjournment in the matter. Senior advocate P. Chidambaram, representing Sidhu, submitted that a new advocate on record has been engaged in the matter and he was informed of the matter late last night. As he urged the bench to list the matter for hearing after February 21, Justice Khanwilkar said there is a statement in the letter that the matter was listed unexpectedly, but it was already on the advanced list.

The bench queried Chidambaram: "You want adjournment till what date?" He requested for four weeks adjournment in the matter. The bench told Chidambaram that the matter was notified much earlier, notice on review petitions were issued in September 2018, but the accused has not filed a reply so far.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, representing the petitioner, said the other party was served in September and requested the bench to hear the matter after two weeks.

As Justice Kaul quipped: "Two weeks are crucial for him (Sidhu)", the bench told Luthra: "You haven't come since 2018 and now you want the matter to be heard after 2 weeks? Nothing will happen if the matter is not heard for 2 or 4 weeks."

After a brief hearing in the matter, the top court scheduled the hearing in the matter on February 25.

Two Customs officials held

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Wednesday said that they have arrested a Superintendent of Customs from Motihari in Bihar and a Computer Operator for demanding and accepting bribe of Rs 50,000 from a man. A CBI official said that a case was registered against Deepak Kumar Chaudhary, the superintendent of Customs and the computer operator Anand Kumar on the complaint of a man who alleged that the duo were demanding a bribe of Rs 90,000 which was 30 per cent of seizure value of goods (Rs 3 lakh) from him.



A girl walks on a snow-covered pavement during light snowfall on the outskirts of Srinagar

PTI PHOTO

SC junks plea to postpone GATE-2022

The GATE tests the understanding of various undergraduate subjects in engineering and science for admission into the Masters Programme and Recruitment by some PSUs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: The Supreme Court Thursday refused to postpone the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering Exam (GATE) scheduled to be held on February 5 amidst COVID-19 restrictions in many parts of the country.

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud, Surya Kant and Vikram Nath dismissed a batch of pleas, saying that postponing GATE just 48 hours before the scheduled examination will result in "chaos and uncertainty" and it cannot play with careers of students, who have prepared for it.

"The plea for postponement of



GATE examination barely 48 hours before the scheduled date February 5, 2022, is replete with a potential for chaos and uncertainty, in the lives of students who have registered for the examination. There is no overarching reason why this court in exercise of jurisdiction under Article 32 of the constitution should supplant the duties and functions of the regulatory authorities, who have taken a decision to hold the examination," the bench said.

"On a considered perspective of the position and consistent with the circumspect which must be exercised by this court in interfering with academic matters, we are not inclined to entertain a petition

under Article 32 of the constitution. These petitions are accordingly dismissed," it added.

At the outset, the bench said, "We cannot start postponing exams like this, everything is opening up now. We cannot play with the careers of the students like this. One of the petitioners before us is a coaching centre".

It said that it is a matter of academic policy as to when examination should be held and court cannot enter this arena. Advocate Pallav Mongia, appearing for one of the petitioners, said that nine lakh students are appearing in the GATE examination and authorities have imposed restrictions in many

states. The bench noted that nine lakh students are to appear in the examination and around 20,000 students have signed an online petition for postponing of the examination. "The students have prepared for it and the court cannot play with the careers of the students by postponing the examination," the bench observed, adding that the first and second wave of COVID was something different.

"Only statutory authorities can look into this. Students have burnt midnight oil and prepared for the examination. Examination is on February 5 and if we stay the examination now, then there will be chaos in the country", it said. Justice Surya Kant pointed out to the counsel that how can the court interfere with the examination?

Advocate Satpal Singh, appearing for a petitioner, said that there are lockdowns and night curfews in many cities and IIT Kharagpur says even students with mild symptoms can be debarred. He said petitioners are only seeking postponement of the exam by a month.

The bench said that how is he so sure that the situation will be better after a month.

UP SCHOOLS THREATEN TO STOP ONLINE CLASSES

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Feb 3: Nearly 250 educational institutions under the Unaided Private School Association (UPSA) have threatened to stop online classes and withdraw support during the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election process if the state government does not order resumption of physical classes.

The UPSA said it would wait till February 6 after which it would discontinue all online classes. It has been opposing the state government's decision on closure of schools by saying that when all public places like parks, markets, railway stations and malls are open, then why schools should remain closed where Covid-19 safety

norms are being followed. The government had issued directives regarding closure of all schools in Uttar Pradesh for offline classes from January 16 to 23. Later, the closure was extended till February 6 considering the Covid-19 situation and schools were asked to conduct online classes.

"The government is calling students for various programmes where Covid-19 safety protocol is being ignored then why it is not allowing schools to conduct classes on the campus," asked UPSA president Anil Agarwal.

He said excessive interference of government in the functioning of private schools, be it fee hike, use of school vehicles in elections, or delay in fee reim-

bursement to schools for admissions under the Right to Education, was adversely impacting the standard of education.

"The government's directive to schools to not to increase the fee will not be accepted. We will increase the fee according to the UP Fee Regulation Act," he added. Agarwal said schools had to suffer huge financial losses due to pandemic as a number of students had left schools.

The UPSA fears having to shut down their institutions if the state government does not allow them to increase fees. Agarwal, who is managing director of the St Joseph Group of Institutions, said: "A large number of private schools in Uttar Pradesh have no option but



to shut down their schools if the state government does not allow them to increase fees and reopen

completely from February 7. "There was no salary revision of our teachers and staff because

schools were not allowed to increase fees. This is affecting their performance. In these trying times, a few member schools will be forced to shut down if the government does not let them increase fees for the third successive year."

Gita Gandhi Kingdon, also president of City Montessori School (CMS), said: "There has been no increase in fees for three years. And it is difficult to deny increment to teachers and staff who have been working in the pandemic." The UPSA said that efforts are being made by schools so that voting percentage increases in the upcoming assembly Elections. "But we will do all this only when schools will be allowed to reopen from February 7," said Agarwal.

international

of the day quote

I think we all agree or should agree that violent crime is a serious problem
JEN PSAKI | WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

Investors, policymakers and firm managers should essentially just write off the (January jobs) report as a one-time set of noise that will not alter the underlying strong trend in hiring and the tight labor market
JOE BRUSUELAS | CHIEF ECONOMIST AT RSM

A coup in Mali was 'contagious' and had set a dangerous trend that led to subsequent coups in the region
NANA AKUFO-ADDO | PRESIDENT OF GHANA

SHORT TAKES

Adulterated cocaine kills 20
Buenos Aires: Apparently adulterated cocaine killed 20 people and seriously sickened 74 others in Buenos Aires, health officials said early Thursday as authorities searched frantically for the remainder of the deadly batch to get it off the streets before it is consumed.

US testing robot patrol dogs
San Francisco: The US is testing quadrupedal robot dogs on its southern border to offer US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) a helping hand as the territory is vast and monitoring it is critical for the nation's security.

19 frozen to death
Istanbul: Turkish authorities Thursday found seven more dead bodies near Turkey's border with Greece, raising to 19 the number of migrants who have frozen to death at the frontier.

Russian build-up in Belarus is biggest in 30 years: NATO

- Kremlin again accuses US of escalating tensions
Russia now has more than 100,000 troops stationed near Ukraine's northern and eastern borders
NATO has no intention of deploying troops to Ukraine should Russia invade, but it has begun to reinforce the defences of nearby member countries -- notably Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland
The 30-nation military alliance also plans to beef up its defences in the Black Sea region near Bulgaria and Romania

Brussels, Feb 3: NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg expressed concern Thursday that Russia is continuing its military build-up around Ukraine, and that it has now deployed more troops and military equipment to Belarus than at any time in 30 years.
Meanwhile, more high-level diplomacy unfolded in Moscow and Kyiv amid deep uncertainty about Russia's intentions.



IMF approves \$1bn loan tranche for Pak

Islamabad, Feb 3: The International Monetary Fund has approved the completion of the sixth review of its stalled \$6 billion programme for Pakistan, paving the way for an immediate disbursement of about \$1 billion loan tranche for the cash-strapped country.
The IMF's Executive Board held a meeting in Washington DC Wednesday to consider Pakistan's request for completion of the sixth review and release of a \$1 billion tranche under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

Secretary Blinken condemned the DPRK's recent ballistic missile launches, which were in violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions
NED PRICE | US STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESPERSON

AFGHANS FLEEING TO IRAN
From October 2021 through the end of January 2022, more than a million Afghans have fled to Iran as the economy has collapsed in the war-torn nation, The New York Times reported citing researchers. Aid organisations estimate that around 4,000 to 5,000 people are crossing into Iran each day

UNIQUE CEREMONY



People try to catch lucky beans scattered by celebrities during the Mame-maki, a bean throwing ceremony at Zojoji Buddhist temple in Tokyo. The ritual believed to bring in good luck and drive away evil is performed annually to mark the beginning of the spring in the lunar calendar

ISIS leader killed in Syria raid: US

Amman/Washington, Feb 3: A US military raid in northwestern Syria overnight killed the leader of the Islamic State jihadist group, President Joe Biden said Thursday, in an operation which he said showed Washington's determination to go after terrorist groups.
Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Quraishi, had led Islamic State since the death in 2019 of its founder Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was also killed when he detonated explosives during a raid by US commandos.

13 ultras, 7 soldiers killed in attacks on security posts in Pak

Karachi, Feb 3: Armed assailants attacked two security forces camps in Pakistan's restive southwestern Balochistan province, triggering an intense exchange of fire in which at least 13 terrorists and seven soldiers were killed, the Army said Thursday.
The attacks, claimed later by the banned Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), took place in Panjgur and Noshki districts Wednesday.



People inspect a destroyed house following an operation by the US military

US slams China on picking PLA soldier as torchbearer

Washington, Feb 3: A top US lawmaker Thursday described as "shameful" China picking a PLA soldier, who was part of the military command that attacked Indian soldiers in the Galwan Valley in 2020, as a torchbearer for the Beijing Winter Olympics.
Republican Senator Jim Risch, a Ranking Member of the powerful US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also said that the US will continue to support the sovereignty of India.

In Africa, at-home tests are scarce, costly

ZIMBABWE INTRODUCED FREE WALK-IN TESTING CENTERS IN NOVEMBER 2020, BUT SUPPLIES ARE TIGHT AND THE COUNTRY STILL HAS NO NATIONAL PROGRAMME TO DISTRIBUTE AT-HOME TESTS

Harare, Feb 3: For millions of people in rich countries, Covid-19 self-tests are abundant and free, including in Britain, Canada, France and Germany. But most people across Africa have limited access to them.
Zimbabwe introduced free walk-in testing centres in November 2020, but supplies are tight and the country still has no national programme to distribute at-home tests.

demic. The situation is similar elsewhere across the continent - and in parts of Asia and Latin America with few, if any, opportunities for people to easily test themselves.
Perhaps the biggest obstacle to making inexpensive, self-tests widely available in the developing world is that the World Health Organisation has yet to issue guidance on their use.



want to use the tests until they get that guidance," said Brook Baker, a professor at Northeastern University who advises the WHO and others on equitable access to Covid-19 medicines and tests.

The omicron surge appears to have peaked across Africa, as it has in other parts of the world. In the last week, the WHO says Africa recorded at least 125,000 Covid cases and 1,600 deaths, although that is likely an undercount due to the lack of testing.
Baker and other experts have estimated the self-testing kits might not be widely available in the developing world until sometime next year.

health professionals in developing countries. In an open letter to WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, more than 100 organizations last week called on the UN agency to speed its release of the self-testing guidelines, saying that 85% of infections are likely going unnoticed in Africa.

Japan border policy keeps thousands of foreigners in limbo

Tokyo, Feb 3: More than a year ago Sebastian Bressa finished his paperwork to become a language teacher in Tokyo and made plans to quit his job in Sydney. His life has been in limbo ever since.
Japan has kept its door closed to most foreigners during the pandemic, and the 26-year-old Australian is one of hundreds of thousands denied entry to study, work or see their families.
Japan has become one of the world's most difficult countries to enter and some are comparing it to the locked country, or "sakoku", policy of xenophobic warlords who ruled Japan in the 17th to 19th centuries.



business

of the day quote

The 2021 annual revenue of \$18.5 billion marked the company's return to double-digit annual revenue growth for the first time since 2015

BRIAN HUMPHRIES | CEO, COGNIZANT

We have set up this new business arm with this strategic thought process and we aim to first educate companies on the importance of being climate conscious and then onboard them to adopt sustainable practices

MANISH DABKARA | CMD & CEO, ENI ENERGY SERVICES

We are glad to partner with Apollo Tyres for the deployment of EV charging stations across their commercial & passenger vehicle zones. This partnership reflects our commitment to developing and expanding the electric vehicle ecosystem in the country

PRAVEER SINHA | CEO AND MD, TATA POWER

SHORT TAKES

Sugar output up 5.64% in Oct-Jan

New Delhi: The country's sugar production is estimated to have increased by 5.64 per cent to 18.70 million tonne (MT) during the October-January period of the ongoing marketing year 2021-22 from over the year-ago period, industry body ISMA said Thursday. Sugar mills had manufactured 17.70 MT of sugar in the corresponding period of the previous 2020-21 marketing year, it said. According to the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), sugar production in UP (country's top sugar producing state) remained lower at 5.03MT during the October-January period of this marketing year, compared with 5.44MT in the year-ago period.

IEX power trade volume rises 16%

New Delhi: Power trade volume increased 16 per cent year-on-year to 8,652 million units (MU) at Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) in January. "The Indian Energy Exchange achieved 8,652 MU volume January 22 comprising 7,245 MU in the conventional power market, 280 MU in the green power market and 1,126 MU (11.26 lakh certificates) in the REC market. Overall, the Exchange achieved 16 per cent YoY volume growth in across all its market segments during the month (January)," an IEX statement said. The day-ahead market volume at 5,280 MU saw a 5 per cent YoY decline.

GAIL logs highest quarterly profit

New Delhi: State-owned GAIL (India) Ltd Thursday reported its higher quarterly net profit in three months to December 2021 as a rise in natural gas prices helped improve its margins. Net profit of Rs 3,287.99 crore or Rs 7.40 per share, in October-December 2021 was more than double as compared to Rs 1,487.33 crore or Rs 3.30 a share, in the same period a year back, the company said in a statement. The profit was 15 per cent higher than the preceding quarter.

Hero Electric ties up with Axis Bank

New Delhi: Hero Electric said it has tied up with Axis Bank to offer retail financing solutions for its entire product portfolio. The customers can opt for two-wheeler financing across the company's network of over 750 dealers. Through this partnership, Hero Electric customers can now avail numerous value-added financial benefits, the company said.



In January, we have already exceeded the 9 per cent mark. We are confident that from 9 per cent to 20 per cent in the period between now and 2025 is doable

HARDEEP SINGH PURI | OIL MINISTER

COURTESY CALL

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) president Sanjiv Mehta (R) and senior VP Subhkrant Panda, who is the MD of Indian Metals Ferro Alloys Limited, call on Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at New Delhi, Thursday. Sitharaman is scheduled to address the National Executive Committee of FICCI Sunday, sources said



LIC's embedded value over \$66.82bn

While there has been speculation about the number in Indian media - from as low as \$53bn to as high as \$150bn - this is the first time the govt, which owns 100% of LIC, has commented on the matter

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 3: State-run Life Insurance Corporation of India's (LIC) embedded value has been finalised at more than Rs 5 trillion (\$66.82 billion), a government official who is overseeing what is expected to be the country's largest IPO said Thursday.

Investors are eagerly waiting for the government to indicate LIC's embedded value - a measure of future cash flows in life insurance companies and the key financial gauge for insurers - when it releases the initial public offering (IPO) draft prospectus, expected in a matter of days.

The embedded value will help establish the market valuation of LIC and determine how much money the government raises in the floatation. That will be crucial for the government to help meet its divestment targets and keep its fiscal deficit in check. "I would say the embedded value could be more than Rs 5 trillion and the enterprise value will be multiples of that," Tuhin Kanta Pandey, secretary, department of divestment, told Reuters in an interview.

Pandey said the government planned to issue a draft IPO prospectus to investors as early as next week. PM Narendra Modi's government slashed its divestment target to Rs 780 billion (\$10.43 billion) in the year ending in March, from an earlier budgeted target of Rs 1.75 trillion. It is banking on LIC's initial public offering to meet its revised target.



LIC has majority share of the life insurance market in the country

The government hopes to raise as much as \$12 billion from LIC IPO

The proceeds are expected to help government bridge a deficit gap this fiscal year

Government has so far raised about Rs 120 billion by selling stakes in other companies

LIC is not likely to issue fresh shares in the primary market and the entire issuance is likely to be sold in the secondary market

It is the LIC moment for Indian markets and it will add depth. I don't see any need for capital for LIC, it is sufficiently capitalised

TUHIN KANTA PANDEY | SECRETARY, DIPAM

3 CPSEs to be privatised next FY

The government will move ahead with strategic sale of Shipping Corporation, BEML and BPCL in the next financial year, besides initial public offering of three public sector companies, including ECGC, a top government official said. Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said the next year's target would be met by a mix of minority stake sale in CPSEs, listing of CPSEs and strategic sale. "We have got multiple financial bids for Pawan Hans, we have to go further on that process. Shipping Corp, BEML and BPCL are in financial bids stage. HLL Lifecare and PDIL are in EoI stage. Besides, next fiscal we will go for listing of ECGC, WAPCOS and National Seeds Corporation and some minority stake sale, but there we might have less bandwidth," Pandey told PTI. The government is selling 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL, 63.75 per cent in Shipping Corporation of India, 26 per cent in BEML and 51 per cent in Pawan Hans. State-owned ONGC too is selling its 49 per cent in the company.

"I don't see any need for capital for LIC, it is sufficiently capitalised," he said, adding LIC could sell its stake in IDBI Bank in the next fiscal year. Under the current plans, the government would keep

its majority of its stake in the LIC. The stake cannot come below 51% by law and that will be retained, he said, and even in 5 years it could not sell more than 25% of its stake in LIC.

BIGGEST WIPEOUT IN US HISTORY

Meta shares tank 25%; valuation dips \$230bn

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New York, Feb 3: The pivot to Meta isn't helping Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook. Markets directed their wrath on missing fundamentals - a sharper-than-expected decline in profits and a gloomy outlook - in the first earnings report of the newly christened company Wednesday.

Shares opened Thursday down 25 per cent. This is a crash of about \$230 billion from the social media networking giant's market capitalisation. Consequently the bloodbath, Zuckerberg personally lost 23.34 percent of his net worth. At \$87.7 billion, he slipped to No. 12 in the Forbes real-time billionaires index

-marginally behind India's Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani.

Meta confirmed that it expected revenue growth to slow because users were spending less time on its more lucrative services. It cited inflation as a weight on advertiser spends and estimated that ad-tracking changes introduced by Tim Cook's Apple last year would cost it some \$10 billion this year.

Meta lost about a million daily users globally and stagnated in the US and Canada, two of its most profitable markets. Zuckerberg is also betting on VR headsets, AR glasses and virtual worlds, known as the metaverse, in which users might live and work.

'Crypto will never be a legal tender'

El Salvador is the only country which has adopted Bitcoin as legal tender

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: Cryptocurrency will never be a legal tender, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan said Thursday clearing the air on the legality of private digital currencies in the market.

The 2022-23 Budget has given a clarity on taxation of virtual digital assets and proposed to impose a 30 per cent tax on gains made on such trades, besides subjecting crypto transactions, beyond a threshold, to 1 per cent TDS.

In an interview, Somanathan said just like gold and diamond, despite being valuable, are not a legal tender, private cryptocurrencies too will never be a legal tender. "Crypto will never be a legal tender. Legal tender means by law it is accepted in settlement of debts. India will not be making any crypto asset as a legal tender."



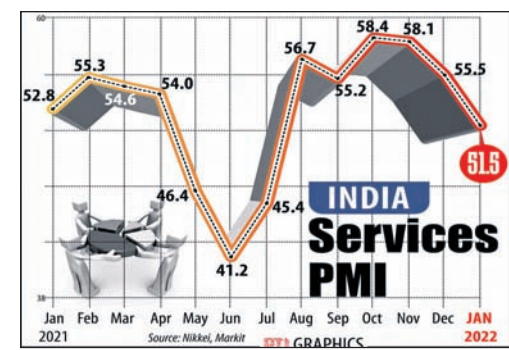
Only 'Digital Rupee' of the Reserve Bank will be a legal tender in India," Somanathan said.

Asked why the government has not listed private crypto regulation bill for the ongoing Budget session, despite listing it in the previous Winter Session in December, Somanathan said "it was felt that wider consultation is necessary before the legislation is brought on what should be the nature of regulation, should there be a regulation or should it be only taxation."

"We are in a democracy. In a democracy, the government starts

COVID IMPACT

Services growth at 6-month low in Jan



REUTERS

Bangalore, Feb 3: India's dominant services sector expanded at its slowest pace in six months in January as restrictions due to a new wave of Covid-19 cases and surging prices weighed on demand, a private survey showed.

The IHS Markit Services Purchasing Managers' Index slumped to 51.5 in January from 55.5 in December, far below the 53.0 expected in a Reuters poll of economists but still above the 50-mark separating growth from contraction.

"The escalation of the pandemic and reintroduction of curfews had a detrimental impact on growth across the service sector," noted Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at IHS Markit.

"Both new business and output rose at slight rates that were the weakest in six months."

The new business sub-index was at its weakest since August as con-

sumers stayed home amid rising coronavirus cases, curbing domestic demand.

International demand remained gloomy and contracted for a twenty-third month, as it has since the onset of the pandemic. However, the contraction was moderate and the slowest in this sequence.

"Concerns about how long the current wave of COVID-19 will last dampened business confidence and caused job shedding. Firms were also alarmed about price pressures," added De Lima.

The rate of inflation was one of the highest since data collection started in December 2005 and is likely to reinforce views that the Reserve Bank of India will raise interest rates next quarter in a bid to cool price pressures.

The slowdown in both manufacturing and services activity pushed the composite index to a six-month low of 53.0 last month from 56.4 in December.

Banks act against Future Retail for missing payments

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 3: Lenders to Future Retail, the company being fought over by Reliance Industries and Amazon.com Inc., have told India's Supreme Court that its assets should be put up for auction after it missed payments.

They also said they have started classifying loans to the country's second-largest retailer as non-performing and would have to make combined provisions of Rs 80 billion - Rs 90 billion (\$1.1 billion-\$1.2 billion) due to the non-payment.

"Let it be subjected to an open bid... This is the only solution," Rakesh Dwivedi, a lawyer acting for 30 or so of Future's lenders, told the Supreme Court judges, citing the prolonged litigation so far between Future and Amazon.

Dwivedi added that Future's two suitors - Amazon and Reliance - could then bid for the retailer's assets. The court did not hand down any decisions Thursday and said it will hear the matter again in due course.

Future failed to complete a planned \$3.4 billion sale of its retail assets to Reliance after business partner Amazon successfully argued in arbitration and in court that the Indian retail giant violated certain non-compete contractual terms.

Future has said it was unable to pay Rs 35 billion (\$470 million) it owed to lenders 31 December as it could not sell certain small stores due to the row with Amazon.

Last month, Future Retail filed legal action against its lenders to stop them from initiating insolvency proceedings, hoping to acquire more time to make its payments.

'HISTORIC RECORD'

Direct tax collections to breach target: CBDT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: Direct tax collections are expected to breach the revised target of Rs 12.50 lakh crore and set an all-time high and "historic record" by the end of this financial year in March, CBDT Chairman JB Mohapatra has said.

Multiple reasons like "easing" of tax compliance processes for tax payers and enhanced ability of the taxman in data processing were cited by him for mopping up these high-volume of collections under two major heads - corporate tax and personal income tax.

"As we speak, the direct tax collection numbers stand at Rs 10.38 lakh crore so it is only Rs 70,000 crore less from the BE (budget estimate) numbers of Rs 11.08 lakh crore. This number, at this point in time, is better than the last year's total collections," Mohapatra said. He also said that "the department never crossed Rs 11.18 lakh crore in its history."

"This year we are going to breach Rs 12 lakh crore... Our target is Rs 12.50 lakh crore (revised estimates) and we have good confidence of achieving the target and probably exceeding it," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) chief said.



With two months still to go for the March 31 fiscal end, Mohapatra said the target looked well within reach.

Out of the total direct tax collection target of Rs 12.50 lakh crore for the 2021-22 fiscal given by the government to the Income Tax (I-T) department, Rs 6.35 lakh crore is expected to come from the corporate tax category, while Rs 6.15 lakh crore is expected from personal income tax collections.

The CBDT head said the tax department was in "good space" this time due to a variety of measures undertaken in the direct taxes col-

lection system over the last few years, both for the taxpayer and the tax authority. "We have not been in this space for a long, long time. This is because we have done things to ease the tax compliance and we have confidence in the data processing abilities of the I-T department," he said.

Also, the consolidation and formalisation of businesses, the interplay of resource sharing among various agencies like the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, Sebi and other agencies are "helping us build the repository of data so we are leveraging on each other's intelligence", CBDT chief noted.

EMAMI FOUNDERS PAVE WAY FOR NEXT GENERATION

EMAMI, WHICH OWNS BRANDS LIKE BORO PLUS AND ZANDU BALM, IS AN INDIAN MULTINATIONAL CONGLOMERATE HEADQUARTERED IN KOLKATA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Feb 3: Consumer brand leader Emami Limited Thursday



said its key management control will be passed on to the next generation and its founders, RS Goenka

and RS Agarwal will step down from their positions. Their sons Mohan Goenka and

Harsha Agarwal will take over as vice-chairman and managing director of the company. Mohan Goenka is the eldest son of RS Goenka and Harsha Agarwal is the younger son of RS Agarwal.

The founders will continue to be on the board of the company. RS Goenka will serve as its non-executive chairman and R S Agarwal as chairman emeritus from April 1 without any remuneration.

Sushil K Goenka will step down from his current position as managing director of Emami Ltd and will serve as a whole-time director.

The other siblings of the promoter hold positions of direc-

tors in the company with separate responsibilities.

"The Board therefore found them to be deserving candidates and re-designated Mohan Goenka and Harsha V Agarwal and whole time directors as vice-chairman-cum-whole time director, chairman-cum-whole time director and vice chairman cum-managing director respectively, effective 1st April, 2022 to steer the organisation forward, subject to shareholders' approval," the company said in a statement.

Mohan Goenka & Harsha Agarwal, the next generation who are taking over the company, have been working as whole-

time directors of Emami for over two decades.

"Emami Ltd has been the fruit of our love and passion of creating an indigenous organisation with a difference. It has been our privilege to serve the company and we are grateful to our board for their continued guidance, our team members for their zeal and passion for Emami and helping build and grow the company that we all can be proud of," the founders said.

The company was founded in the mid-1970s in West Bengal when two close friends left their high profile corporate jobs to set up a cosmetic manufacturing unit in Kolkata.

Dhull 'played' it safe

The plan was to bat steadily, not try too many shots, says India skipper after 96-run win over Australia in the ICC U-19 World Cup semifinal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Osborn, Feb 3: India U-19 skipper Yash Dhull says it was a conscious decision to steady the ship by batting till the 40th over alongside Shaik Rasheed without taking much risk, which helped them notch a 96-run win against Australia in the semifinals.

Off to a shaky start after opting to bat, India were struggling at 37/2 when Dhull walked in. The skipper struck a sublime run a ball 110 and stitched a game-changing 204-run partnership with his deputy Rasheed (94) to post a formidable 290/5.

The target ended up being too steep for Australia as they were bowled out for 194 in 41.5 overs. With the 96-run victory four-time champions India cruised to their fourth consecutive final.

"The plan from me and Rasheed was to bat till the end, and it worked. The idea was to bat steadily, not to try too many shots, and to bat past the 40th over," Dhull said at the post match presentation.

Dhull and Rashid were eventually dismissed off successive balls in the 46th over. "Myself and Rasheed bat well together, we combine well and it showed. Rasheed and me had a good partnership and we had good partnerships lower down as well," he added.

The captain was lavish in his praise for the team and specially Rashid, who along with Dhull and a few others had contracted COVID-19 during the group stages of the tournament.

"The way in which the boys are playing is good. Rasheed is mentally very strong. We were in the bubble together and he is always mentally prepared."

With his 110-run knock, Dhull became the third Indian captain to score a U-19 WC ton after former India skipper Virat Kohli and Unmukt Chand and the youngster described it as "a proud moment".



India set up crown date with England

OSBORN: Skipper Yash Dhull gave a glimpse of his rare talent with a well-paced 110 (110b, 10x4, 1x6) which guided powerhouse India into its fourth consecutive U-19 World Cup final with an emphatic 96-run win over Australia here. Dhull shared a game-changing 204-run stand with his deputy Shaik Rasheed (94, 108b, 8x4, 1x6) to fire India to a formidable 290/5 after opting to bat Wednesday. Indian bowlers then performed their roles to perfection to bowl Australia out for 194 in 41.5 overs. Lachlan Shaw's fine 51 (66b, 4x4) came too late in the day for Australia. Pacers Rajvardhan Hangargekar (0/26) and Ravi Kumar (2/37) were impressive in the first powerplay before spinners Nishant Sindhu (2/25), Vicky Ostwal (3/42) and Kaushal Tambe (1/32) dominated the opposition in the middle overs. Record four-time champions India face England in the final Saturday and will be aiming to extend their dominance in the competition. Dhull became the third Indian captain to hit a hundred in the tournament history after the illustrious Virat Kohli (2008) and the prodigious Unmukt Chand (2012).

Australia U-19 skipper Cooper Connolly felt the game went away from them in the last 10 overs when India scored over a 100 runs to post an intimidating total.

"Going into the last 10, we thought we were in a good position, but they scored 100 and thus 290 was a bridge too far. The experience was good but the only problem was the bubble. The way we played spin was good and we just got better with every session. There's a lot of positives. We adapted well to conditions pretty quickly, every session got better," Connolly said.

Langer's evaluation fair: Pat



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Feb 3: Australia Test captain Pat Cummins feels his country's cricket board is doing the right thing by evaluating head coach Justin Langer's performance before deciding on his contract extension as players too go through the same process at regular intervals.

Langer, under whose tutelage Australia hammered England in the Ashes and also won the T20 World Cup for the first time last year, has been in service for the past four years. Cricket Australia will be considering a contract extension for him Friday.

Cummins insisted that he enjoyed working with Langer but it was only "fair" that the coach goes through an "evaluation process". "It's in Cricket Australia's hands," Cummins was quoted as saying by the 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

Cummins said speculation surrounding Langer's job was not healthy and he did not want to add to it. "JL's been doing a fantastic job, he's been there for four years, his contract is obviously up soon, they're just going through an evaluation process at the moment, which I think is fair, the right thing to do."

"We all get evaluated all the time as cricketers. It's part of a high-per-

formance environment. That process is happening, it's a decision for Cricket Australia and we just have to wait. That's Cricket Australia's job, it's not my job. I've really loved my time working with JL," said Cummins.

While former teammates like Matthew Hayden, Shane Warne and Adam Gilchrist have come out in support of Langer's contract extension, there has been media speculation about resentment towards him among current players, although no one has openly criticised the coach.

HEALY BACKS 'COACH' LANGER
Legendary wicketkeeper Ian Healy feels Cricket Australia will renew head coach Justin Langer's contract because if they sack him after his successful stint, it will make the game look "stupid".

Langer, whose contract is due to end in June, guided Australia to its maiden T20 World Cup title last year and a dominant 4-0 Ashes victory recently. He is in the midst of discussions with CA regarding his future role.

"The coach is nowhere near as important as any major player. You can change the coach much easier than you can change a senior player," Healy told 'Sen Radio'. "(However), the game is going to look stupid if they sack Justin Langer, but I don't think they'll

sack him," Healy added.
The 57-year-old, who kept wickets for Australia in 119 Tests between 1988 and 1999, feels the discussion between the two parties could be revolving around number of years in Langer's new contract.

"They might manage him out by giving him two years and he wants more, he's probably informed them of what he wants. He might be playing that side, (saying) he wants four years, and they (CA) are saying, 'You can't have four years, we'll give you two and now we've bumped it up to three, will you accept that?' There might be a stalemate on those fronts, but let's see what the reasons are," Healy said.

Healy believes if the senior players do vote in favour of a new coach they will have a lot of explaining to do. "Gee, there's going to have to be some big explanations from Pat Cummins, from Aaron Finch, from Steve Smith, and these senior players who have voiced their feelings," Healy continued.

"I don't know which way (they voiced their feelings), but it seems like they're not on board, or they weren't, but from all reports they got on board and they got winning again."

"So, cricket will look stupid (if Langer doesn't get renewed), the powerbrokers will look stupid that means," he added.

SANIA, BOPANNA INCLUDED IN TOPS CORE GROUP TILL ASIAD



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: Indian tennis stars Sania Mirza, Rohan Bopanna, Ankita Raina and Ramkumar Ramanathan were Thursday included in the core group of athletes under the Sports Ministry's Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) till the Hangzhou Asian Games later this year.

The decision to include quartet for support under TOPS was taken at a meeting of the Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell after re-

ceiving a request from the All India Tennis Association (AITA).

Besides, the MOC also approved ₹3.62 lakh to teenage archer Manjiri Alone for purchase of a recurve bow set. She won bronze in the 2021 World Archery Youth Championships in Wrocław, Poland in August last year.

The MOC also sanctioned a proposal worth ₹4.31 lakh for para pistol shooter Singhraj Adhana, who won a silver and a bronze in the Paralympic Games in Tokyo, to stay and train at the Karni Singh Shooting Ranges from February 10 to March 25. The cost includes ₹2.26 lakh for ammunition for the 25m and 50m events.

According to a statement issued by SAI, coach JP Nautiyal, who is already with Manish Narwal in the Tughlakabad range, will extend his stay by 10 days to assist Singhraj Adhana.

Skeet shooter Gurjot Singh's proposal for ammunition and clay targets worth ₹2.68 lakh was approved as also teenage air rifle shooter Rudranksh Patil's proposal for equipment worth ₹1.03 lakh.

Roger, Rafa to play Laver Cup



ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Feb 3: Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal both say they will play in the next edition of the Laver Cup. Federer, who has been sidelined since July because of an injured knee, and Nadal, fresh off earning his men's-record 21st Grand

Slam title at the Australian Open, said in a statement Thursday they will represent Team Europe in London September 23-25.

"I'm really looking forward to getting back into competition later this year and Laver Cup is very much part of my plan," said Federer, whose management company

founded the competition.

Federer said Nadal messaged him last year suggesting they play doubles together again in the Laver Cup. They teamed up to win a doubles match during the first Laver Cup in 2017.

"If we're able to possibly share the court one more time as a doubles pairing, then this would be a truly special experience for us both at this stage in our careers," Nadal said.

This will be the fifth Laver Cup. Neither Federer nor Nadal took part in 2021. Federer, 40, has not competed since undergoing surgery on his right knee for the third time in 11/2 years not long after losing in the Wimbledon quarterfinals July 7.

In November, he said he did not expect to be able to play at the All England Club this year and it is still uncertain when—or, truly, if—he will return to Grand Slam action.

Nadal, Federer and Novak Djokovic all were tied at 20 major championships until Sunday. That's when Nadal moved ahead by coming back after dropping the opening two sets to beat Daniil Medvedev in the final at Melbourne Park.

India contingent manager found negative in retest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Feb 3: A day after testing positive for COVID-19, the manager of India's Winter Olympics contingent, Mohammad Abbas Wani, has returned negative results in two retests conducted in the last 24 hours, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) said Thursday.

Wani was found COVID-19 positive upon his arrival at the Beijing Airport here on Wednesday. IOA president Narinder Batra said the official has now returned negative in the last two tests.

"The manager of Indian team Abbas Wani tested negative in the 2 tests done on him in last 24 hours. Hence, the entire Indian contingent in Beijing is Covid free," Batra said.

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.

New-look Barca attack face Atlético test

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Feb 3: Barcelona's revamped attack will host an Atlético Madrid side seeking to restore its once vaunted defense Sunday in the Spanish league at Camp Nou.

Struggling to score since the exits of Lionel Messi and Antoine Griezmann last summer, Barcelona went shopping during the January transfer window and brought in three forwards from the English Premier League.

In came former Arsenal striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang as a free agent. Adama Traoré came back to his boyhood club on loan from Wolverhampton, and Ferran Torres was secured on a transfer from Manchester City.

Torres has already played three matches for Barcelona, while Aubameyang and Traoré could make their debut against Atlético.

Now it falls on coach Xavi Hernández to figure out how to fit his new players into an already large squad that earlier in the season featured Memphis Depay and Ansu Fati in attack before they



ADAMA TRAORE

were injured.
Barcelona is used to dueling with Real Madrid for the league's most potent attack but ranks seventh for scoring this season. Xavi has had to be creative in forming his front lines.

Depay, who leads Barcelona with eight goals, and the 19-year-old Fati, the player the club is hoping can be a future star, are both out



PIERRE-EMERICK AUBAMEYANG

with nagging muscle injuries. Their places have been a mix of youths from Barcelona's reserve team including Ferran Jutglà, Abde Ezzalzouli and Ilias Akhomach and the scarcely used Luuk de

MATCHES REDUCED FOR TEAMS

Ranji first phase from February 10



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 3: The first phase of the much-anticipated Ranji Trophy will take place from February 10 to March 15 before the premier domestic event takes a break during the IPL and resumes from May 30 to June 26 for the knockouts, BCCI secretary Jay Shah informed state units Thursday.

Shah's letter made it clear that it is set to be one of the shortest first-class seasons with most teams getting to play only three matches which effectively means that increased match fees will not have an impact on most of the teams that will be ousted at the group league stage.

As this agency reported earlier, four teams each have been divided into eight elite groups while the remaining six form the plate division. The new pay slabs offer those who have played 40-plus games ₹60,000 per day, a significant hike from the previous ₹35,000 per day scale. Those with experience of 21 to 40 matches will get ₹50,000 per day.

The tournament will have 64 games in 62 days with the first phase comprising 57 matches and the second stage having seven knock-out games, including four quarterfinals, two semifinals and the final.

The elite group matches will be played in Rajkot, Cuttack, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Trivandrum, Delhi, Haryana and Guwahati. Plate league matches will be held in Kolkata, requiring nine bio-secure bubbles for nine venues.

Each team from elite group, barring one, will qualify for the quarterfinals. The lowest ranked qualified team from elite group will play the plate toppers in the sole pre-

quarterfinal.

The tournament was cancelled for the first time ever last season and this year, the third wave of COVID-19 forced the BCCI to postpone the scheduled start of January 13. The last red ball game in the country took place in March 2020.

In his letter to state units, Shah wrote: "I am pleased to share that we are now truly set to resume both international and domestic cricket with full thrust. We have waited patiently for the grip of the pandemic to loosen and the time has come for our cricketers to take centre stage all over again."

"The structure of revised Ranji Trophy format is now ready. We have spread out the Ranji Trophy to nine different venues across the country to mitigate any cross transmission risk while also ensuring that bio-bubbles are not overburdened."

The bubbles have been breached in the past including during the IPL but Shah said the board has contingency plans in place.

"While the persistent virus has still breached the bubble, we have factored in contingency plans drawing from our past experience while formulating this structure," Shah wrote.

Two stadiums will be used in each of the venues in elite groups while three stadiums will be used in Kolkata for the plate group.

Delhi has been clubbed in Elite H group also comprising Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh with the games to be held in Guwahati.

Defending champions Saurashtra will make the road journey to Ahmedabad for their group fixtures. They are in Elite D alongside Mumbai, Odisha, Goa.