



KEEN OBSERVATION

Actor Avantika Dassani says every actor wants to play a grey character because that's how humans are

LEISURE P2



TORCHBEARER ROW

Amid flak over torchbearer, China said his selection met the 'standards' to pick up participants for the event

INTERNATIONAL P10



MESSI ON TARGET

Lionel Messi ends goal drought in Ligue 1 as he scores one and sets up another in PSG's win over title holders Lille

SPORTS P12

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21-day furlough to Dera chief ahead of polls

Chandigarh: Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, who is lodged in Sunaria jail in Haryana's Rohtak district, was granted a three-week furlough Monday, officials said. The granting of a three-week furlough to Singh ahead of the state elections has raised eyebrows in the state. Singh has been granted a 21-day furlough by the state's jail administration. Last year too, the Dera chief had been given emergency parole from sunrise to sunset to meet his ailing mother. Singh, 54, is serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his women disciples in his 'ashram' in Sirsa. He was convicted in August 2017 by a special CBI court in Panchkula. The Sirsa headquartered Dera has a large number of followers in poll-bound Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

HC allows Varsha to retain Parl spouse ID card



Cuttack: The Orissa High Court Monday stayed a Lok Sabha secretariat order that asked actress Varsha Prasad to surrender her parliament identity card, which was issued to her as the spouse of Kendrapara MP Anubhav Mohanty. Justice Biswanath Rath passed the interim order while adjudicating over a writ petition filed by Prasad. Mohanty had requested the Lok Sabha secretariat to withdraw his estranged wife's spouse identity card, apprehending that it could be misused. After getting the notification from the Lok Sabha secretariat, she challenged it in the high court. Issuing notices to the respondents, including Mohanty, the court fixed March 15 for the next hearing.

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State sees lowest fresh coronavirus cases since Jan 5

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: Odisha recorded 20 more Covid-19 deaths Monday, while 1,497 people tested positive for the pathogen, the Health department said. The daily positivity rate dropped to 3.18 per cent from 3.48 per cent the previous day, a bulletin stated. Bhubaneswar reported five new fatalities followed by four in Kalahandi and three in Cuttack district, it said.



The infections are the lowest since January 5 and it plunged by 55 per cent from 3,329 a week ago. The state had logged 2,106 Covid-19 cases and 23 deaths Sunday. Khurda district reported the highest number of cases with 251 infections. As many as 283 children were among those newly infected in the state. The Covid-19 toll mounted to 8,754 and these are confirmed as deaths to the disease after an audit. Fifty-three other Covid-19 patients have died due to comorbidities so far, according to data. The active Covid-19 cases declined to 21,525, including 4,622 in Khurda, which is in the red zone. Sundargarh, Cuttack and Jajpur districts are in the yellow zone with over 1,000 cases. As many as 3,624 patients have recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours. The Covid-19 tally rose to 12,68,308, including 12,37,976 recoveries, it said.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

How come I am more venomous than you? You see, I keep listening to those election speeches

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	57621.19	↓ 1023.63
NIFTY	17213.60	↓ 302.70
DOLLAR	74.67	↑ ₹0.03
EURO	85.36	↓ ₹0.07
GOLD	₹48,150	↑ ₹226
SILVER	₹61,787	↑ ₹938

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	29.7°C	30.2°C
TEMP MIN	14.0°C	14.0°C
Humidity	72%	84%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Dry weather most likely

TO FINALLY GO DOWN



The Supreme Court Monday said the demolition work for the two 40-storied towers constructed by Supertech in Noida will begin in two weeks. PFI PHOTO

SEND KIDS TO SCHOOLS, CM APPEALS TO PARENTS

Children have been confined to houses for two years sans friends and fun. Now, along with study, children will have fun, meet friends and play games, says Naveen



Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: With the opening of schools, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday appealed to parents and guardians to send their children to their schools by following Covid-19 protocols. Schools for Class VIII and above students have reopened in the state Monday while schools for students up to Class VII will reopen from February 14. Addressing the students, teachers and parents, Naveen said, "Today is a historic day for all of us. After a gap of about two years, the school bells rang in the state.

The children went to schools today. This has been made possible by the blessings of Lord Jagannath, your cooperation, and the sacrifice of the Covid warriors." For the past two years, normal life has been affected due to the Covid pandemic. The opening of schools is a good sign that the situation is back to normal, he said. Children have been confined inside the house for two years without friends and fun. But, now, along with study, the children will have fun, meet friends and play games, he further said, adding, "We would move forward again." Appealing to students not to be

Public meeting with 300 persons allowed; now, 20 persons can participate in door to door campaigning; liquor to be banned on counting days, says SEC

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: With the improvement in the Covid-19 situation in the state, the State Election Commission (SEC) has partially relaxed the restrictions imposed on campaigning for the ensuing Panchayat polls. The commission has allowed conduct of outdoor meetings with participation of maximum 300 persons for campaigning during the panchayat election in the state. Addressing media persons here Monday, State Election Commissioner AP Padhi said public meetings can be organised by the political parties/contesting candidates with prior permission of the appropriate authorities with maximum 300 persons in open ground subject to strict observance of Covid-19 protocols i.e. compulsory use of face mask and social distancing. Now, the candidates can conduct door-to-door campaigning

with a maximum of 20 persons including the candidate, he said. Earlier, only five persons were allowed in door-to-door campaign. However, all other restrictions imposed on holding bike rally, cycle rally, Padayatra will continue to remain in force, he said. Padhi, who held a review meeting with the collectors Monday morning, said, the precautionary dose has been administered to about 80 to 90 per cent polling staff while others will get the dose in next 2 to 3 days. On preparation of ward-wise Electoral Roll for the urban polls, he said the final draft list will be published on February 10. The SEC has also conveyed a meeting with leaders from all political parties on

Campaign curbs eased



that day for smooth conduct of the election to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), which is likely to be held soon after the Panchayat Poll. Meanwhile, Excise Commissioner Ashish Kumar Singh has banned sale, transport and distribution of liquor in the respective Blocks during polling and counting of votes. Following the instruction of the SEC, Singh has written a letter to all collectors to ensure closure of licensed premises for retail sale of foreign liquor, IMFL and country liquor in the constituency area and adjoining areas during the period of 48 hours ending with the hour fixed for the conclusion of poll up to day following the poll day. The

polling is scheduled to be held on February 16, 18, 20, 22, and 24. As per the order, no liquor shops, hotels, restaurants, clubs and other establishments selling, serving liquor will be permitted. Non-proprietary clubs, star hotels, restaurants and hotels run by anyone, even if they are issued different categories of licenses for possession and supply of liquor will not be permitted to serve liquor on these days. Intensified joint raids by excise, police and forest personnel will be carried out to avert any liquor related issue. Similarly, Collectors have been asked to declare counting days (February 26, 27 and 28) as dry days ensuring closure of licensed premises for retail sale of foreign liquor; IMFL and country liquor within respective blocks on the days of counting. As per schedule, counting will be completed on the first day of counting in 15 blocks as they have got one Zilla Parishad constituency in the block. Similarly, 126 blocks have two Zilla Parishad constituencies each and their counting will be completed February 26 and 27 while counting in remaining blocks will be done on all three days of counting.

Aadhaar not mandatory on CoWIN portal: Centre to SC

One of the nine identity docs including passport, DL, PAN card, voter's card, ration card can be produced for vaccination

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Centre Monday told the Supreme Court that Aadhaar card is not mandatory for registration on CoWIN portal for COVID-19 vaccination. A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Surya Kant was informed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that one of the nine identity documents including passport, Driving Licence, PAN card, Voter's Card, Ration card can be produced for vaccination. The apex court took note of the submission and disposed of a plea filed by Siddharthshankar Sharma who claimed that Aadhaar card was being mandatorily insisted upon for administering COVID-19 vaccination on the CoWIN portal.

The apex court had October 1, 2021 issued notice to the Centre on the PIL. "Pursuant to this court's order dated October 1, 2021, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has filed an affidavit which records that Aadhaar card is not mandatory for registration on CoWIN portal and one of the nine identity documents can be produced... It is also recorded in the affidavit that a provision has been made for other category of persons who may not have identity cards in their possession like prison inmates, inmates at mental health institutions etc," the bench said. "Counsel for Union submits that about 87 lakh people without ID cards have been vaccinated. The grievance of the petitioner that he was denied vaccination for non production of Aadhaar card has been dealt in the affidavit. The health ministry addressed a letter to health secretary, Maharashtra, to take action against the concerned private vaccination centre which denied vaccination to the petitioner."

Owaisi rejects 'Z' security offer again



New Delhi, Feb 7: Rejecting Union Minister Amit Shah's security proposal, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi Monday said he does not like people with arms around him and that he was a "free bird". The Hyderabad MP further said that the value of his life is not more than 22 people who died during the protest against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Shah Monday requested the AIMIM president to accept Z category protection, saying he still faces security threat. "Today in Parliament, Home Minister Amit Shah asked me to accept Z category security. I want to say to him that value of my life is not more than 22 people who died during the CAA protests. I don't like people with arms around me," he said. The AIMIM leader further said that he was a "free bird" and that he wants to live freely. Making a statement in the Rajya Sabha Monday over the incident of firing at the carcade of Owaisi February 3, Amit Shah further said that two people have been arrested and the Union Home Ministry has sought a report from the Uttar Pradesh government. "An FIR has been lodged in the Pilkhaha police station in UP and the local police are investigating the case with all seriousness and minutely. Two unidentified people had fired on the carcade. He came out safe but there were three bullet marks on the lower portion of the vehicle," Shah said.

'Hijab' row hots up, Karna CM appeals for peace

Ahead of the HC hearing on the row today, Bommai has appealed to everyone to maintain peace, saying his govt would take steps after the court order

ing hijabs and explained the government order to them. But the students insisted on wearing the headscarves, and were asked to go to a separate room arranged for them. Education Minister BC Nagesh said students who insist on hijab-wearing will not be allowed into the government educational institutions. Then, he asked some students protesting on the street outside the college to sit in a separate room but they were not imparted lessons. "Protesting on the road is a nuisance. So they were asked to sit in a room but under no circumstances they were allowed to sit in the classrooms (with hijab) or separate classes were held for them," Nagesh said.



Girls sitting on the road is not Indian culture, he said and went on to say: "Indian culture has given women a respectable position. Hence, a separate room for them... The innocent children aren't aware

A group of students came in a procession Monday wearing saffron shawls. They were prevented from entering the premises by their principal and the police personnel there. The students said they will wear the shawls if hijab-wearing girls were allowed in class. They agreed to enter the classes by removing their shawls only after the principal assured them that no hijab-wearing student will be allowed. Two persons were arrested on the charge of brandishing knives during the hijab-saffron shawl protest by students, police said. They were arrested near the college on a tip-off that five people arrived at the spot with lethal weapons to create communal tension on Friday, police sources said.



SUSAN SARANDON REGRETS HER TWEET ABOUT POLICE

Actress Susan Sarandon regrets posting a meme about police which earned her heavy criticism. The actress, who has been an outspoken critic of police brutality, admits it's 'insensitive' and 'disrespectful' to compare cops who attended a funeral to 'fascists'.

HELEN MIRREN RESPONDS TO 'JEWFACE' CRITICISM

Helen Mirren, who plays Israeli prime minister Golda Meir in an upcoming biopic, has broken her silence on the debate around her casting. In an interview she reportedly said: "It was certainly a question that I had, before I accepted the role."



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today nostalgia tinges your mood, and this reflects in your dealings at work, where others see your softer side. You even spend carefully, seeming to be wiser regarding your savings. Ganesh sees profits for cashiers and money lenders.

TAURUS

Today is a perfect day to relax and enjoy your health, feels Ganesh. However, precaution should be the buzzword while dealing in money matters. You may develop a new interest in jewellers, artists, bankers and orators. Dinner will be laced with all the deserving delicacies of a hearty meal.

GEMINI

It is a good day for you to participate in cultural events and group activities, predicts Ganesh. You are likely to be an important part of some convention or joint venture, but don't get too bogged down by it. In the evening, you may take a fancy to fine arts, such as drawing or classical music.

CANCER

Ganesh suggests you not to be sentimental or hasty. Try to handle things deftly in stead of dodging bad episodes or turning a blind eye to them. You will give priority to domestic and private life in stead of career or business aspects.

LEO

You will feel more emotional today and share your feelings with your friends and near ones. For those who are searching for a life-partner, this might be the time when you will get hitched. You will develop a new perspective on some issues in the office. Your day will be different than normal, says Ganesh.

VIRGO

You will begin your journey on the long, hard road to success, predicts Ganesh. Hard work will be the key to any progress that you make. Avoid short cuts, and all the toil and trouble will pay off with rich returns as recognition and rewards will come your way.

LIBRA

Today promises a definite sense of pride and joy from children who bring home glory, says Ganesh. Fiscal gains are also on the cards, and you may consider it worthwhile to put your money into lucrative businesses. Money-lenders and stock brokers are likely to make handsome earnings on this charming and enchanting day.

SCORPIO

You may expect the day to be as dull and mundane as those boring repeat telecasts of sitcoms. But remember, it's not always going to be grey! The dance of planets will usher in new change for a better tomorrow. Keep hoping and who knows you may stumble upon something very interesting, says Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS

You will find yourself rubbing shoulders with Lady Luck today. Sharpen your multi-tasking skills as you will keep busy and have only occasional moments of respite. Good will and green print, you might find them both with ease and in abundance, predicts Ganesh.

CAPRICORN

You are in hot water, but do not lose hope during these turbulent times. Maintain a calm head over your shoulders and deal with the problems, guides Ganesh. Also, do not jump to conclusions or be argumentative with the people around you, as you may end up being at the losing end.

AQUARIUS

Get ready for a gala evening as you will party at the smallest excuse! You may toast a friend's success, or may be ecstatic about finding your lost pet. Otherwise it's the usual, says Ganesh. You plan a bit and march ahead successfully in your business or profession.

PISCES

The apple of your eye is what you will have your sights set on today. It is likely that you will find yourself attending a Parent-Teacher meet, says Ganesh. However, fortunately, it is likely only to receive news about how proud your children are making you.

Asha's 'Didi and I' post wins hearts



Childhood images of Lata Mangeshkar and Asha Bhosle

Mumbai: Veteran singer Asha Bhosle Monday shared a childhood picture with her sister, singer Lata Mangeshkar. She wrote, "Bachpan ke din bhii

kya din the. Didi and I," with a heart emoji.

Shradhdha Kapoor's brother, actor Siddhant Kapoor commented, "Love you, aaji."

AR Rahman called the picture 'adorable'. Hrithik Roshan and Shruti Haasan dropped heart emojis under the post.

Lata Mangeshkar passed away February 6 due to multiple organ failure, weeks after she was hospitalised for COVID-related complications. Lata Mangeshkar was given a funeral with complete state honours. Asha Bhosle accompanied her mortal remains to Shivaji Park in Mumbai where she was laid to rest.

Several celebrities including Amitabh Bachchan, Shradhdha Kapoor, and Bhagyashree visited the Mangeshkar residence to pay their respects. Shah Rukh Khan, Javed Akhtar, Ranbir Kapoor, and Vidya Balan and hundreds of celebrities across spectrums attended Lata Mangeshkar's last rites at Shivaji Park. IANS

When Lata threatened to leave Mumbai

Mumbai: Nearly two decades ago, Lata Mangeshkar and her kin managed to put their foot down and stalled a significant flyover project of Maharashtra government in south Mumbai.

The proposed 4-km-long flyover would have cut through the narrow Pedder Road, linking the Haji Ali Junction with Girgaum Chowpatty to decongest traffic in that area.

However, the flyover would have passed virtually above the home of Lata Didi at

Prabhukunj at the Pedder Road corner.

Lata Didi, along with younger sibling Asha Bhosle expressed their displeasure to successive state governments on the project - which ultimately never took off - after it was conceived in 2000.

At one point, she even threatened to 'quit Mumbai' and settle in Pune or Kolhapur if the government of the day went ahead with the project.

All Chief Ministers since then didn't dare raise the issue with her ever. IANS



Sanya shares her unique journey in upcoming film



Mumbai: Actress Sanya Malhotra, who will be soon seen in the upcoming crime thriller *Love Hostel*, revealed that the film allowed her and her co-actors to explore the depths of their respective characters and that it was a unique journey which helped her to become one with the character. Commenting on the same she said, "I think setting myself up

for challenges has always driven me! *Love Hostel* really pushed us to dig deep within ourselves to become one with the character. It was one terrific and exhilarating journey!"

Talking about her co-actors Vikrant Massey and Bobby Deol, she said, "Vikrant is such a fine actor and so great with his craft. Bobby Sir is just sheer joy to work with. It was truly an enriching experience working under the direction of Shanker sir."

The actress mentioned that she is experiencing nervous energy before the film's release, "Now I am bursting with good nervous energy just waiting for the film to release now. The lead up is always fun, full of anticipation and excitement." IANS



Avantika finds colour in grey space

Mumbai: For actress Avantika Dassani, who is all set to make her debut with the upcoming series, *Mithya*, the grey zone of her character sealed the deal. The debutante was instantly drawn to the project because of the flaws that her character comes with.

Shedding light on her character in the series, the actress said, "We actually had a list of pros and cons and Rhea's grey character made it to the pros list and not to the cons list simply because it is a well written character."

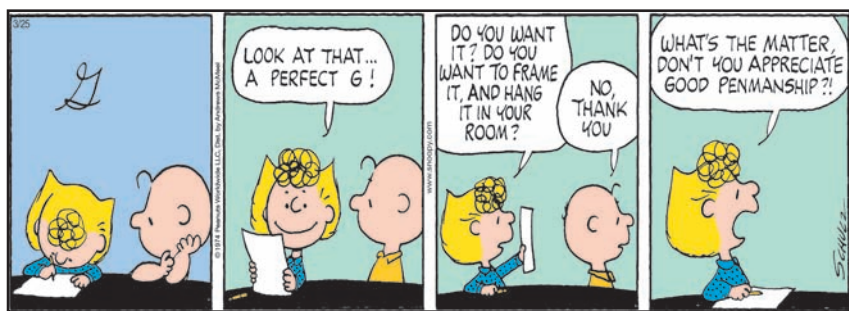
Talking about what she found appealing in the character, she shared, "Yes, it's an unconventional and risky choice but I think that's exactly what excites an actor to play a grey character because that's how humans are. In real life, we are all shades of grey. She is explosive and she drives the plot in an interesting way."

Lauding the show creators and writers for sketching such a good character, she said, "Her relation with all the characters in the show is also very interestingly designed and very well developed by our amazing writer and the entire team." IANS



FUN post

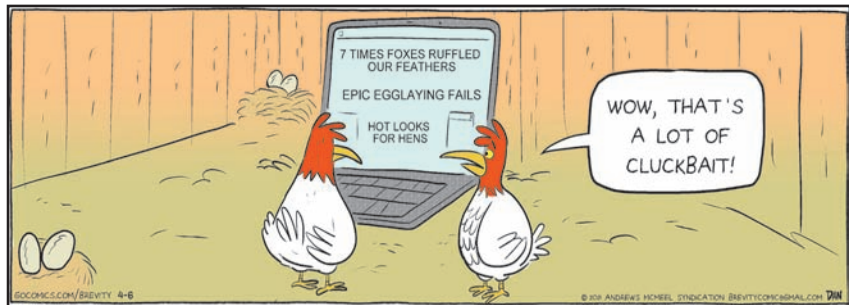
PEANUTS



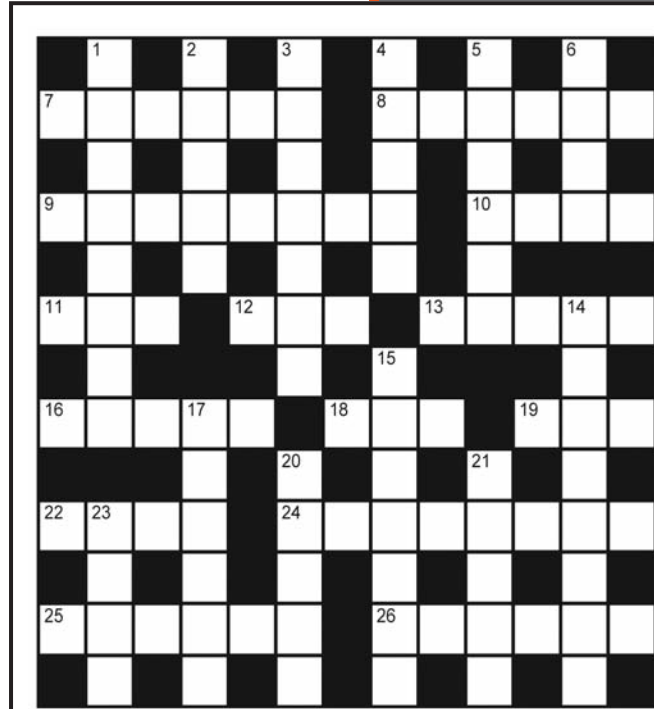
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



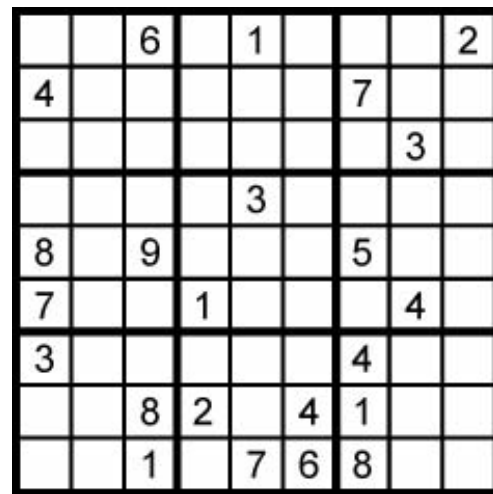
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Squirm, usu. in pain
 - 8 Horse, e.g.
 - 9 Hit man
 - 10 Box office take
 - 11 Stable diet?
 - 12 Excavate
 - 13 Bad move
 - 16 Water suppliers
 - 18 Watch chain
 - 19 Mischief-maker
 - 22 Colourless
 - 24 Defeat using the grey cells
 - 25 Old hairpiece
 - 26 St. Vitus, for one
 - Down**
 - 1 Australian city
 - 2 Recipe direction
 - 3 Leave on a voyage (3,4)
 - 4 Blood vessels
 - 5 Avid (4,2)
 - 6 Shoelace problem
 - 14 Primitive eel-like fishes
 - 15 Play wear
 - 17 Drudgery
 - 20 Edible mushroom
 - 21 Planetary shadow
 - 23 Coral ridge

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



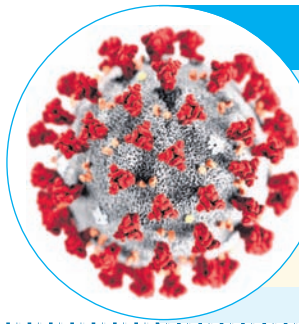
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



MAGHA SAPTAMI

Khandagiri in Bhubaneswar witnesses a footfall on Magha Saptami, Monday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	39,67,87,860	31,54,24,278	57,60,851
India	4,22,72,014	4,06,60,202	5,02,874
Odisha	12,68,308	12,41,597	8,754

After STA, BMC goes Pushpa way to promote cleanliness

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: Hit by the latest fad, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Monday, jumped into the bandwagon of spreading awareness among citizens with help of popular dialogue from the recent blockbuster movie Pushpa: The Rise.

The Telugu origin movie starring Allu Arjun has found a special liking with its audience breaking several records in Indian cinema. Apart from an engaging story, a number of punch lines have quite impressed the moviegoers.

In a bid to spread awareness among denizens for keeping their surroundings clean and green in the Capital city, the BMC used one of such punch lines from the movie: 'Din Ho Ya Raat, Main Jhukega Nah!' (Day or Night, I won't bend) to 'Din Ho Ya Raat, Mai Kachra Bahar Phekega Nah!' (Day or Night, I won't throw garbage outside). The post included a picture showing Allu Arjun aka Pushparaj in



The STA had January 28 used a similar approach to warn traffic offenders. STA's picture message read, "Pushpa Ho Ya Pushparaj, Bina Helmet Ka Challan Sabka Katega."

his iconic pose from the movie in which he has multiple times delivered the iconic dialogue.

The civic body of the state's Capital adopted the filmy approach to spread awareness to ensure cleanliness in Bhubaneswar. The BMC Monday tweeted, "Never Ever Throw Garbage Outside! Always put it in a dustbin & hand it over to the Safaiwalas to keep your surrounding & city clean and green."

Earlier January 28, the State Transport Authority (STA) also used a similar approach to warn traffic offenders. STA's picture message read, "Pushpa Ho Ya Pushparaj, Bina Helmet Ka Challan Sabka Katega."

Further, the STA post read, "#Pushpa or #PushpaRaj rule is same for all. Always wear a helmet while riding a bike. Else, not only you will pay fine but also you will endanger your life."

GIVING WAY



An excavator pulls down a structure, claimed to be the last one within the 75-metre radius of the Srimandir, for the ambitious heritage corridor project in Puri, Monday

History-sheeter held for burglary

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Feb 7: The twin city Commissionerate Police Monday arrested a notorious criminal for a burglary in Badambadi area here.

Hemant Kumar Das, 59, a resident under Lingaraj police limits in Bhubaneswar, has been taken into custody over burglary of gold jewellery and Rs 50,000 in cash from the residence of Pratap Chandra Das in Badambadi area a few days back. ACP Amarendra Panda said in a press meet.

Around 60 gram gold and silver jewellery and Rs 22,000 in cash have been recovered from his possession, Panda said, adding at least 110 cases of thefts and burglaries have been pending against the accused at various police stations in the state.

The senior police official said that they have also arrested Baidyanath Sahoo, 37, of Barang area here on charges of purchasing the booty from the accused. Sahoo has around nine similar cases registered against him with different police stations in Odisha, said Panda. Hemant was active in West Bengal and Maharashtra as well, it was learnt.

Notification out for Berhampur Univ VC appointment

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: The Higher Education department Monday issued an advertisement for appointment of Vice Chancellor of Berhampur University.

In the advertisement, department secretary Saswat Mishra informed that applications are invited from eligible candidates below 63 years of age (as on May 1, 2022) for the position of Vice Chancellor of Berhampur University, Berhampur, Odisha.

He added that the applicant should be a distinguished academician of proven academic and administrative excellence and a well-rounded personality with a minimum of 10 years of experience as Professor in a University system or 10 years of experience in an equivalent position in reputed research and / or academic organisation.

The post carries a pay of Rs 2,10,000 with Special Allowance of Rs 11,250 per month and other usual allowances such as Dearness Allowance. Provision of pay protection is available for candidates of a Central or State Government Public University or Institution. The tenure of the Vice Chancellor will be four years from the date he/she assumes office or till he/she attains 67 years of age, whichever earlier.

The applicants are required to apply in the prescribed application paper through email attachment (only in pdf format) to our email ID (hedsec.od@nic.in) mentioning "Application for the post of Vice Chancellor of Berhampur University" as the subject of the email.

Schools, colleges reopen as Cov cases dip in state



Students of Capital High School in Unit-III area of Bhubaneswar attend a class, Monday

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: After remaining shut for almost a month in the wake of the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions across the state reopened Monday with strict adherence to Covid protocols.

All schools for students of Class VIII and above, colleges, ITIs, polytechnics, professional institutions and universities resumed physical classes while adhering to the Covid-19 guidelines. Hostels in colleges and universities reopened a day before, it was learnt.

The class timing for students of Class IX to XII in schools under the School and Mass Education (S&ME) department is 10am to 4pm, while it is 9am to 1pm for students of Class I to VIII who are set to attend in-person classes from February 14 after almost two years now due to the pandemic, it was learnt.

On the first day, S&ME Minister Samir Ranjan Dash visited a few schools, reviewed the arrangements in place and interacted with

the students there. Dash assured the students of the safety measures in place at the educational institutions by the state government to keep Covid at bay.

Dash said though classroom teaching has started, students can opt for online mode of teaching being facilitated by the schools.

The S&ME Minister said examinations for Class X and XII will be conducted as per the orders and guidelines of respective regulatory authorities in offline mode.

Meanwhile, students seemed excited over attending physical classes after nearly a month.

Ashutosh Mallick, a Class VIII student, highlighted the pros of attending physical classes. "Physical classes are very important as they help us clear the doubts by interacting with teachers directly," he said.

Buxi Jagabandhu English Medium School principal Sandhya Jena said that they have ensured sanitisation of the school premises as per the standard operating procedure.

"We're also talking to parents and taking their consent before al-

All schools for students of Class VIII and above, colleges, ITIs, polytechnics, professional institutions and universities resumed physical classes while adhering to the Covid-19 guidelines

The class timing of Class IX to XII in schools under the S&ME department is 10am to 4pm, while it is 9am to 1pm for Class I to VIII students who are set to attend in-person classes from February 14

lowing the children to resume physical classes," Jena said, adding that all of the school employees are vaccinated.

Earlier, the Centre had suggested the states to go for reopening of schools in districts with a positivity rate of less than 5 per cent.

Out of the 24,45,407 students (in Class VIII and above) in 37,533 schools across the state, 14,42,790 students attended physical classes on the first day.

The attendance of higher secondary and secondary classes was highest at 85 per cent and 91 per cent respectively in Deogarh. In case of elementary schools (Class-VIII), Kendrapara topped with 77 per cent attendance, it was learnt.

On Monday, Odisha recorded 20 more Covid deaths, while 1,497 people tested positive for the pathogen. The daily positivity rate dropped to 3.18 per cent from 3.48 per cent the previous day. The infections are the lowest since January 5 and it plunged by 55 per cent from 3,329 a week ago. The state had logged 2,106 Covid cases and 23 deaths Sunday.

1.23 crore unorganised sector workers availed social security schemes

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Feb 7: At least 1.23 crore workers of unorganised sectors have benefited in Odisha by various social security schemes launched by the Union government, Minister of State for Labour and Employment Rameswar Teli said Monday.

The Union Minister's response came in a question asked by Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MP Chandrasekhar Sahu in the Lok Sabha. The BJD MP had sought details of informal sector workers likely to be covered under the social security scheme in Odisha and the steps taken by the Union Government to ensure the last mile delivery of benefits of various social security schemes to the informal sector workers.

The Union Minister informed the House that at least 1.23 crore workers of the unorganised sector of the State of Odisha have benefited under various social security schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan pension scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna and the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojna.

The minister said that as many as 1,70,936 workers benefited from the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan pension scheme as on January 28 while 31,45,850 benefited under the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojna till October last year. At least 89,84,859 workers benefited under the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojna till October 2021.



ODISHA IN PARLIAMENT

Vigilance arrests Narsinghpur IIC

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: A police inspector was arrested in Cuttack district Monday for accepting a bribe to arrest the accused in an SC/ST case, the Vigilance directorate said.

Acting on a complaint, a trap was laid and the inspector in-charge (IIC) of Narsinghpur police station was caught in his office accepting the Rs 20,000 bribe. The police officer had demanded the money to arrest the accused in a case lodged in September under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the directorate added. Simultaneous searches were later launched at Gardia's residential house in Sambalpur and few other places.

A case has been lodged under the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act and investigation is on, it added.



Khurda man loses ₹50k to ATM fraud

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: An unknown fraudster has duped a person of Rs 50,000 on the pretext of helping him use his debit card in an SBI ATM kiosk in Pokhariput area under Airport police limits here, an official said Monday.

A case has been registered in this regard on the basis of a complaint lodged by the victim Gumanidhi Behera of Kalarajhara of Khurda district.

Behera, who has been staying at Tarini Sahi in Kargil slum area of the City had gone to deposit cash at the ATM kiosk at Pokhariput Saturday afternoon. The victim,

being unfamiliar with the procedure of ATM cash transactions, sought the help of the alleged individual present nearby.

The accused took the ATM card from Behera but returned it after a few minutes saying that cash could not be deposited due to some technical glitch in the machine. He just handed over a mini statement to Behera and left the place.

Behera upon returning home found a message on his mobile notifying the withdrawal of money to the tune of Rs 50,000. Behera later came to know that the man, whom he sought help from, actually siphoned off the amount using his card details.

Similarly, unknown miscreants duped a 33-year-old Gauranga Charana Mohanty by issuing a credit card against his savings bank account from the Damana branch of SBI recently without his knowledge and using it. The victim lodged a complaint in this regard at the Cyber Crime police station at the Bhubaneswar DCP office Monday.

Similar ATM card frauds, under the guise of helping gullible card holders, were reported in the City in 2020. Police had also arrested a noted fraudster Sambhav Kumar Acharya from Kanan Vihar area in September 2020 for duping victims adopting similar tactics.

Privacy, data breach searches up more than 20% in '21: Google

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: Searches related to privacy and data breaches on Google grew by more than 20 per cent in 2021, across places as diverse as Australia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia and Singapore, the company informed Monday.

Over the past two years, millions of people throughout Asia-Pacific have started using the Internet for the first time, lifting the region's online population to more than 2.5 billion.

"As we mark Safer Internet Day on February 8, we're focused on the ways Google can help protect people in Asia-Pacific as they go about more of their lives and work online," said Scott Beaumont, President, Asia Pacific at Google.

He said that Google's responsibility for Internet safety goes beyond its own tools and technology.

"Keeping people online is a shared challenge, not something

SAFER INTERNET DAY



GOOGLE ENGINEERS AND OTHER EXPERTS, MANY BASED IN ASIA-PACIFIC, HAVE ALSO DEVELOPED SECURITY CHECKUP AND PRIVACY CHECKUP TOOLS, WHICH PEOPLE CAN USE TO STRENGTHEN THEIR SECURITY AND PRIVACY SETTINGS

that any one organization can do alone. One of the most powerful ways we can help protect people is

by equipping them with the skills and knowledge to navigate the Internet safely," he stressed.

This year, through Google.org which is its philanthropic arm, the company is supporting non-

profit organisations in Asia-Pacific with approximately \$5 million in grant funding to raise awareness about security and media literacy and promote positive online habits among underserved communities. This builds on the more than \$11 million that Google.org has committed to digital responsibility initiatives over the past five years.

"Organisations Google.org has supported include Maarif Institute - whose Tular Nalar programme with MAFINDO and Love Frankie is helping educators and young people in Indonesia become more media-literate - and Internews in India, whose FactShala initiative with Data Leads is helping people evaluate online information critically," said Beaumont. Google engineers and other experts, many based in Asia-Pacific, have also developed Security Checkup and Privacy Checkup tools, which people can use to strengthen their security and privacy settings.

Naveen lauds state for TIOL National Taxation Award '21



EARLIER JULY 1, 2017, THE BANIIYAKAR-ODISHA WAS RENAMED AS THE COMMISSIONERATE OF CT & GST, ODISHA

THE ORGANISATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF GST/VAT/CST AND PT IN THE STATE

Chief Minister wrote, "Congratulate @Baniykar as #Odisha has been selected to receive TIOL National Taxation Award 2021 (Gold) as the best reformist state and Gold Award in GST/State VAT Category. Odisha has been selected based on the responses received from citizens and taxpayers #OdishaLeads."

"Odisha has been selected as the best reformist state for industrial infrastructure and skill development, citizen service through technology, ease of doing business, stamp duty rationalisation, support to trade and industry, reforms in electricity and renewable energy promotion, and municipal taxation," Naveen wrote in another follow-up tweet.

Earlier July 1, 2017, the Baniykar-Odisha was renamed as the Commissionerate of CT & GST, Odisha.

The organisation is responsible for the administration of GST/VAT/CST and PT in the state.



Naveen Patnaik congratulated the Commissionerate, also known as Baniykar-Odisha, for being selected for the feat. Taking to twitter, the elated



Justice Durga Prasanna Choudhury inaugurating Maa Sarala Sadan on behalf of Bande Utkal organisation near Bangali Sahi Mutt in Cuttack, Monday

Regional Science Centre to reopen today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: After the reopening of the Pathani Samanta Planetarium here, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Planetarium in Burla and Pathani Samanta Museum in Khandapara, the Regional Science Center (RSC), Bhubaneswar, decided Monday to welcome public from February 8 on all days from 9.30am to 6.00pm while following Covid-19 protocols.

"Wearing of mask for the entire period of the visit shall be compulsory for the visitors, excluding children below 5 years," said Somen Ghosh, Project coordina-



The Pathani Samanta Planetarium, Bhubaneswar and the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Planetarium in Burla will run with 50 per cent seating capacity in every show. Wearing of masks throughout the visit shall be compulsory for the visitors

SUBHENDU PATNAIK | DEPUTY DIRECTOR, PATHANI SAMANTA PLANETARIUM

Earlier, in what would be good news for space lovers and space enthusiasts, the aforementioned planetariums and museums across the state had declared their reopening from February 8, on all days except Mondays, with strict adherence to Covid safety protocols.

Deputy Director of Pathani Samanta Planetarium here Subhendu Pattnaik said that planetariums will run with 50 per cent seating capacity in every show.

Wearing of masks throughout the visit shall be compulsory for the visitors, he added.

tor of RSC. Earlier, due to the resurgence of Covid in the state, the RSC was closed for public from January 10.

"We will reopen with a modified museum experience designed to celebrate science in a safe and welcoming environment," Ghosh added.

JSW Group placed in World Business Council for Sustainable Development

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: JSW Group, one of the country's leading business houses, has joined over 200 forward-thinking companies as the newest member of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD).

JSW will be represented in WBCSD by Seshagiri Rao, Joint Managing Director and Group CFO, who also sits on the board of directors of JSW Steel.

He will also take part in the WBCSD CFO network, which is driving higher ESG performance within companies, and more effective disclosure to capital markets, JSW Steel said in a filing to BSE.

The JSW Group is a USD 13 billion multinational conglomerate headquartered in India.

JSW's innovative and sustainable presence in various sectors including steel, energy, infrastructure, cement, paints, venture cap-

JSW is committed to harmonising our business operations with the welfare of the planet enabling growth, sustainably. At JSW, we remain committed to creating a 'Better today, Stronger tomorrow'. We are excited to join WBCSD to collaborate and drive transition for a better world for all

SESHAGIRI RAO | JOINT MANAGING DIRECTOR, GROUP CFO, JSW

ital and sports is helping the group play an important role in driving India's economic growth.

The group strives for excellence by leveraging its strengths and capabilities, including a successful track record of executing large capital-intensive and technically complex projects, differentiated product mix, state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities, and a greater focus on

pursuing sustainable growth.

With a culturally diverse workforce spread across India, the USA, Europe and Africa, JSW Group directly employs nearly 40,000 people. It also has a strong social development focus aimed at empowering communities around its operations.

JSW is progressing across markets with innovation, digitalisation and sustainability as its key anchors. With efficient integrated operations and a clear vision for the future, JSW is executing its strategic growth plan in line with the growing steel demand.

"The wide spectrum of innovation, robust ESG commitments, and a drive to be #BetterEveryday, enable JSW to consistently create responsible value, for everyone. JSW has carved a sustainability vision and has a sustainability strategy along with key focus areas...Which help them steer their way for a sustainable planet," the filing said.

REMINISCING POET'S GLORY



Members of the Sarala Sahitya Sansad observing death anniversary of Adikabi Sarala Das at the poet's statue in Sarala Bhawan near Biju Pattnaik square in Cuttack, Monday

Annual exhibition held at DAV Unit-8

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: DAV Public School Unit VIII, Bhubaneswar arranged the Annual School Exhibition "Ally Tech - Vision of a Better Solution" virtually recently.

Vice Chancellor of the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), Bhubaneswar, Pavan Kumar Agarwal was the Chief Guest of the event. More than 200 Projects were presented by students of different classes across different subjects.

"Students displayed their creativity and innovative ideas through PPTs and models. The school, through this exhibition, aimed at providing students with an array of learning experiences," said school Principal Ipsita Das.

Agarwal on the occasion said that he was impressed with some of the projects showcased by the students. He added that achievers always know how to transform an obstacle into an opportunity and through this exhibition the students will be able to showcase the creativity and innovation.

'Just 15% of global coastal regions remain intact'

THE RESEARCHERS URGE GOVERNMENTS AND CUSTODIANS OF THESE ENVIRONMENTS TO PROACTIVELY CONSERVE THE VALUABLE REMAINING INTACT COASTAL REGIONS THAT THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR, WHILE RESTORING THOSE THAT ARE DEGRADED

Only 15 per cent of coastal areas around the world remain intact due to pressures caused by human activity, according to a study which highlights the need for urgent coastal rehabilitation and conservation on a global scale. An international team led by researchers at the University of Queensland (UQ) in Australia mapped the impact of human-caused pressures on coastal regions to identify those that are already highly degraded, and those that remain intact. The findings, published in the journal Conservation Biology, provide valuable insights into the widespread impacts of human activity on Earth's precious coastal ecosystems.

"Coastal regions contain high levels of biodiversity and are relied upon by millions of people for ecosystem services such as food and storm protection," said Brooke Williams, from the University of Queensland. "Our results show that we need to act quickly and decisively if we hope to conserve those coastal regions that remain intact, and restore those that are heavily degraded, especially if we are going to mitigate the effects of climate change," Williams said.

The researchers noted that the rate at which these regions are de-



grading poses massive threats to not only coastal species and habitats, but also to the health, safety and economic security of countless people who live or rely on coastal regions around the world. The team found that, of the 15.5 per cent of coastal areas that remain intact as of 2013, Canada was responsible for the largest expanse of coastal region that stood intact. "Other large expanses are lo-

Our results show that we need to act quickly and decisively if we hope to conserve those coastal regions that remain intact, and restore those that are heavily degraded, especially if we are going to mitigate the effects of climate change

BROOKE WILLIAMS | RESEARCHER, UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

cated in Russia, Greenland, Chile, Australia, and the United States," Williams said. "Coastal regions containing seagrasses, savannah, and coral reefs had the highest levels of human pressure compared to other coastal ecosystems," she added.

The collaborative research approach, which involved looking at two datasets -- one, which focused on human impacts on land, and the other which observed human impacts from a marine perspective -- offered a clear vision about

what the next steps should be, the researchers said.

"While we already knew how important it is to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services in these coastal regions, being able to clearly see how rapidly and how far this degradation has spread is truly eye-opening," said UQ's Amelia Wenger, a collaborator of the research.

"Understanding why coastal ecosystems are under pressure can help us design and implement more targeted management strategies, and hopefully slow this degradation down and even turn it around," Wenger said.

The researchers urge governments and custodians of these environments to proactively conserve the valuable remaining intact coastal regions that they are responsible for, while restoring those that are degraded.

"We think our dataset will be a vital tool in achieving that ambition, which is why we are making it publicly available and free to use," Wenger added. PTI

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Clamour for tourism hub tag to Dhenkanal's 'Hati-Girida'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Dhenkanal, Feb 7: Hundreds of residents here have demanded tourist destination status to 'Hati-Girida' in Anantapur reserve forest area of Dhenkanal district.

Sources said Hati-Girida (a typical jumbo captive centre) was constructed nearly 160 years ago in the reserve forests of Anantapur to make docile the wild elephants. Its construction dates back to the reign of erstwhile Dhenkanal ruler Bhagirath Mahendra Bahadur. The pachyderms were being trained and domesticated there.

The captive centre is located 4km away from Gundichanali village. A visitor can reach the village after covering about 5km from Kamakhyanagar block headquarters. After walking the distance on a forest road from Gundichanali, a visitor has to pass over a bamboo



bridge across Ramial river to reach Hati-Girida.

Hati-Girida was built at a location where three hills unite. Billed as the lone captive centre of undivided Dhenkanal district during the Gadajat period, Hati-Girida is situated amidst beautiful sylvan settings.

According to social activist Rajeeb Lochan Singdeo, "If developed with suitable infrastructure, the historic place will attract tourists

Billed as the lone captive centre of undivided Dhenkanal dist during the Gadajat period, Hati-Girida is situated in beautiful sylvan settings

throughout the year."

Zilla Sakriya Nagarika Parishad, a local outfit, had earlier submitted a memorandum to the district administration and Forest and Environment department seeking transformation of the ancient and vast captive centre into a tourist hub.

Many locals including Pradyumna Rath, Krushna Chandra Dwivedy and Ramachandra Sahu urged the Dhenkanal administration and the Forest department to take immediate steps in this regard.

RAIL ROKO AT BHADRAK



Residents of Dagarasahi stage a rail roko near Bhadrak railway station, Monday, demanding an overbridge at the railway level crossing. The rail roko disrupted train services for hours

SHORT TAKES

Suicide bid: Woman records statement

Behampur: A woman, who attempted suicide along with her three-year-old daughter by jumping into a well over alleged dowry torture, recorded her statement in a local court 18 months after the incident, Monday. The kid succumbed to the injuries while the woman, identified as Bijayalakshmi Sahu, 34, survived. The woman recorded her statement in the court of judicial magistrate first class (JMFC) Sonali Mohanty. She alleged that she tied the knot with Seemanchal Sahu under Bada Bazaar police limits in 2013. She was staying with her husband in a rented accommodation at Jagannath Vihar. Later, she gave birth to a baby girl. However, she took the extreme step October 8, 2020 due to the torture and harassment by her husband over dowry, she alleged. She was rescued by the fire services and police personnel.

Cattle trafficking rampant in Balasore

Jaleswar: Cattle trafficking to West Bengal through Jaleswar border in Balasore district has been on the rise allegedly due to negligence of the police and local administrative officials, said sources. The traffickers pack the bovines like sardines in containers, pickup vans and trucks and transport them to the slaughter houses of neighbouring West Bengal and elsewhere. It is alleged that a well-oiled racket is working behind the illegal trade. Even many youths are involved in this business and earn a hefty sum. Locals claimed that conducting frequent raids and establishment of cattle shelters (goshalas) in the bordering areas could go a long way in preventing cattle trafficking. Rojalini Behera, IIC of Jaleswar police station, said raids are being conducted but they have to send the seized cattle to Balasore as there is no cattle shelter at Jaleswar.

SR CITIZENS GET ID CARDS



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sundargarh, Feb 7: The district police here Monday resumed the drive to distribute identity cards among senior citizens for social security and rapid police assistance during emergencies. Superintendent of Police (SP) Sagarika Nath gave away the ID cards to over 150 senior citizens at a function organised at Town police station here.

The meeting was held in adherence to Covid-19 guidelines.

The drive was launched during the second wave of the pandemic when the district police identified over 100 elderly people in Sundargarh, Rajgangpur and Biramitrapur towns, and distributed the ID cards and other assistances among them. The SP said senior citizens can avail police assistance by dialling the helpline number mentioned in the ID cards.

NGT orders action against illegal rly siding

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, Feb 7: The eastern bench of National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) to conduct a probe into the illegal railway siding on Mesco Steel plant premises at Kalinganagar in this district and impose penalty on the firm for aggravating pollution in the area, a report said.

The bench comprising judicial member B Amit Sthalekar and expert member Saibal Dasgupta passed the order February 3. The matter came up for hearing at the apex green body after Pratap Jena, a local, filed a petition alleging that the railway siding on Mesco Steel plant premises is operating without consent.

The petitioner alleged that the railway siding is operating even after the expiry of consent to operate period fixed by SPCB. The NGT admitted the petition and registered a case 52/2021/EZ for hearing.

Hearing the petition, the bench



Railway siding

POLLUTION AT KALINGANAGAR

- The railway siding transporting such toxic material comes under red category for which consent to operate is required from SPCB
- The SPCB granted conditional permission to run the railway siding for a period of six months
- The SPCB, while granting permission, had asked the siding authorities to sprinkle water and establish effluent treatment plant to combat pollution
- However, the authorities continue to operate the railway siding in violation of the SPCB order

directed the SPCB to conduct a probe into the operation of railway siding and stop all activities in it.

Moreover, the bench also directed the SPCB to take punitive action against Mesco Steel and fix penalty on it for environmental degradation. The regional officer of SPCB, Kalinganagar was also directed to submit the action-taken report on the next date of hearing

scheduled for March 15.

Earlier, the green body heard the matter July 7, 2021 and directed the SPCB to issue notices to Mesco and JSW firms within four weeks. The state government, Jajpur Collector, SPCB, Kalinganagar ADM, managing directors of Mesco Steel, JSW and Paradip Transport Pvt Ltd are respondents in the case.

The petitioner approached the green body after the SPCB failed to act against the Mesco railway siding for severe pollution.

According to the complaint, the Mesco Steel plant has remained shut since January 2020. However, the railway siding has been in operation without having environmental clearance or consent to operate from SPCB.

JUNAGARH-DHARMAGARH RAILWAY LINE EXTENSION

Locals fume as Kalahandi gets short shrift from Centre

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatana, Feb 7: Locals and various outfits have alleged that the Centre has not made any allocation for extension of Junagarh-Dharmagarh railway line in Kalahandi in the Union Budget 2022-23 and has neglected the district in the railway sector.

Social media is abuzz with allegations that Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has betrayed the people of the district while Kalahandi MP Basanta Panda has failed to prevail upon the Union government to make budgetary allocation for the district.

The Union Railway Minister was on a two-day visit to Kalahandi district beginning August 21, 2021. During his visit, people had urged him for extension of the railway line from Junagarh to Dharmagarh. The demand for the extension of the 19km-long railway line from Junagarh to Dharmagarh will also be considered, the minister said.



REPRESENTATIONAL PICTURE

Addressing a presser, the Union Railway Minister had said that his primary objective was to augment the railway infrastructure in Kalahandi district and other backward regions of the state.

He had announced about commencement of a railway project from Junagarh to Ambaguda soon and assured that expansion of Junagarh-Dharmagarh railway line will be expedited.

Locals also said the minister had assured that the Railway ministry would start working on the proposed loco periodical overhauling (POH) workshop at Narla as soon as the state government provides land for the purpose. Though the ministry had sanctioned the proj-

ect in 2017-18, its implementation has been hanging fire. Of the 300 acres required for the POH workshop, the state government has so far provided only 141 acres, it was learnt.

The locals also drew the attention of Vaishnaw towards poor internet connectivity in the region. They demanded setting up of more number of mobile towers and a software technology park at Bhawanipatna, which was sanctioned in 2014.

Panda said ₹2.95 crore has been sanctioned for expansion of Dharmagarh railway line. There would be budgetary allocation once the survey is completed, he added.

Flood fear grips riparian villagers of Kendrapara



POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Feb 7: Residents Monday pitched for immediate repair of embankments of Luna and Karandia as the rivers often eat into 13 island villages under five panchayats during floods.

This has been a perennial problem for the locals. Despite running from pillar to post, their demands are yet to be met. As landslides happen very often on the embankments, the threat is there for 13 villages of getting washed away, the residents rued.

This has become a major political issue for the candidates ahead of three-tier rural polls. On the other hand, local voters resented that the ruling party has not kept

its promises so far.

The riparian villages come under Garadpur, Marshaghai and Derabish blocks of Kendrapara district. Five panchayats - Bangalpur, Indalo, Jalapoka, Aitipur and Basapur - are situated in the river island, while Luna and Karandia rivers have touched the 13 villages. Embankments of the two rivers are in a crumbling state and there are landslides too, said the villagers, Mahadev Swain, Uttam Samal and Pratyush Nayak.

Flood waters enter the villages and severely damage the crops. "Scores of houses have been washed away by the ingress of river water, thanks to dilapidated embankments. Seeking a permanent solution to the problem, we had met the local MLAs and also Water Resources department officials. Construction of the embankments was not given priority and politicians forgot their words given to us times and again," some of the local villagers said.

Notably, ahead of the panchayat elections, around 18,000 voters from the island villages have strongly demanded reconstruction of the embankments.

Ganjam's solar-powered dry fish plant gathers dust

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, Feb 7: A solar-powered dry fish plant in Ganjam district is gathering dust due to lack of maintenance and wrong site selection, according to a report.

The plant was built 10 years ago at Agastinuagaon under this block to help fishermen in the district prepare dry fish. However, it is lying idle without being put into use. Moreover, lack of timely maintenance and wrong site selection have rendered it redundant.

Reports said the objective of the plant was to help fishermen save time and money in preparing dry fish which could have been more otherwise. After its construction, the administration handed over its charge to women self-help groups (SHGs), said sources.

The SHG members were asked to prepare dry fish by putting the



raw fish collected from the fishermen in the plant. However, a few months after its operation, the plant developed technical snags and later became dysfunctional.

No step was taken for its repair following which it became redundant. Sources said this happened as women SHGs were not imparted adequate training to op-

erate the plant while they also shut down the plant midway as they failed to make any profit.

Later, cyclonic storm Phailin dealt a severe blow to the plant by

The plant was built 10 years ago at Agastinuagaon to help fishermen in the district prepare dry fish

It is lying idle without being put into use. Lack of timely maintenance and wrong site selection have rendered it dysfunctional

No step was taken for its repair following which became redundant

Local fishermen have demanded to renovate the plant and shift it to a seaside village for their benefit

blowing away its shed in October 2013. Since then authorities have not taken any step to renovate the plant.

Local fishermen have demanded to renovate the plant and shift it to a seaside village for their benefit.

HOCKEY CENTRE WITH SYNTHETIC TURF IN LIMBO

POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, Feb 7: Construction of a hockey centre with synthetic turf here in Ganjam district has been pushed into uncertainty due to a reported delay in transfer of ownership of the project.

Although tender has been assigned to a firm, work is yet to start as the land acquired for the project has not been demarcated and handed over for construction.

As per sources, the district administration has identified 3.1-acre land of khata no-475 for the proposed project at Sitarampur mouza under Chhatrapur tehsil. The land belonging to the Home department has an old police department building on it which needs to be demolished before transfer of the ownership of the land.

Earlier, the district Collector had written to the additional home secretary to transfer the ownership of the land from Home department to state Sports and Youth Services department March 2, 2021.

Ashok Kumar Mishra, the head of IDCO's Behampur division, has also written to the Ganjam ADM to direct the Home department officials to demolish the building.

Mishra has also written to the Ganjam SP to take expeditious steps in this direction. Mishra has also said that necessary arrangements will be made to demolish the building.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender No. C/SBP/FSLR/18311/1/22
Name of Work: CONTRACT FOR LEASING OF FSLR-1ST COMPARTMENT OF 04 TONS CAPACITY IN TRAIN NO. 18311 (SAMBALPUR-BHUBANESWAR) FOR THE PERIOD OF 05 YEARS.
Reserve Price Per Trip: ₹ 9,954/-, EMD: ₹ 1,00,000/-, Tender document cost: ₹ 1,180/- (including 18% GST), Period of contract: 5 years.
Tender closing date & time: at 1100 hrs. of 22.02.2022.
Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.
Complete details & tender documents will be available at website www.reps.gov.in
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PR-783/M/21-22

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No. 35/ET/SBP/ENGG/2021-22 Dtd.: 02.02.2022
(1) e-Tender No. 32-eT-DENC-SBP-21
Name of work: REPAIRS TO 05 MAJOR BRIDGES VIZ. BR. NO. 293, 295, 306A, 309 & 387 IN SARLA-DUNGRIPALI ROAD SECTION UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/BALANGIR IN SAMBALPUR DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹ 2,15,88,195.12, EMD: ₹ 2,58,000/-
(2) e-Tender No. 33-eT-DENC-SBP-21
Name of work: REPAIRS TO 04 MAJOR BRIDGES VIZ. BR. NO. 195, 198, 220 DN & 235 DN IN SARLA-DUNGRIPALI ROAD SECTION UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/CENTRAL/ SAMBALPUR IN SAMBALPUR DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹ 1,31,00,563.22, EMD: ₹ 2,15,500/-
(3) e-Tender No. 34-eT-DENC-SBP-21
Name of work: REPAIRS TO VARIOUS LEVEL CROSSING ROAD SURFACES IN SARLA-DEOGAON ROAD SECTION UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/CENTRAL/ SAMBALPUR IN SAMBALPUR DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹ 72,39,741.34, EMD: ₹ 1,44,800/-
Completion period of the work: 10 Months (for Sl. No. 1 & 2) & 06 Months (for Sl. No. 3).
Tender closing date & time: at 1500 hrs. of 25.02.2022 (for all tenders).
No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website http://www.reps.gov.in
Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigenda issued for this tender.
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.), Sambalpur
PR-782/M/21-22

FOCUS VEGANISM

PLANT LIBERATION?



It would be foolish to exclude the possibility that plants have some physical basis for consciousness that we do not yet know about. But even if plants were as sensitive to pain as animals, it would still be better to eat them than to eat meat

needs, and cognitive abilities of animals, especially those we want to use for our own ends – applies to plants, too? Consider the three reasons I gave for believing that animals can feel pain, which I claimed do not apply to plants. Both the fact that plants do not show pain behaviour, and the apparent absence of an evolutionary advantage to consciousness for stationary organisms, could be met by the claim that they do respond to stresses, but on a much longer timescale than animals. They may not have a central nervous system, nor the neurons that form the physical basis of consciousness in animals, but they have substances like dopamine and serotonin, which function as neurotransmitters in animals.

There is still much that we have to learn about both plants and consciousness. At this stage of that learning process, it would be foolish to exclude the possibility that plants have some physical basis for consciousness that we do not know about.

This does not vindicate the Scottish butcher's justification for eating meat. Not only does the second of the responses I made in *Animal Liberation* still stand; we now know that eating plant-based foods will significantly reduce our contribution to climate change. But it is a reason for thinking about plants a little differently, keeping in mind the possibility that more may be going on than we are aware of, and acting accordingly by minimising the harm we do to them, when the costs of changing our behaviour are not significant. On a larger scale, of course, we also know that forests and other forms of vegetation are essential for preserving biodiversity, not only for ourselves but for other animals as well.

The writer, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is the author of Animal Liberation.

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“Every day, thousands of innocent plants are killed by vegetarians. Help end the violence. Eat meat.” These words, written last month by an Edinburgh butcher on a blackboard outside his shop and shared on a vegan Facebook group, led to a heated online discussion. Some condemned the butcher for seeking to blur an important line between beings capable of suffering and those that are not. Others took it as a joke, as the butcher said he had intended it. But jokes can make serious points.

“How do you know that plants can't feel pain?” I was often asked when I stopped eating meat. In 1975, in the first edition of *Animal Liberation*, I offered two distinct responses. First, I argued, we have three strong reasons for believing that many nonhuman animals, especially vertebrates, can feel pain: they have nervous systems similar to our own; when subjected to stimuli that cause pain to us, they react in ways similar to how we react when in pain; and a capacity to feel pain confers an obvious evolutionary advantage on beings able to move away from the source of the pain. None of these reasons applies to plants, I claimed, so the belief that they can feel pain is unjustified.

My second response was that if plants could feel pain, even if they were as sensitive to it as animals, it would still be better to eat plants. The inefficiency of meat production means that by eating it we would be responsible not only for the suffering of the animals bred and raised for that purpose but also for that of the vastly larger number of plants they eat.

That second response clearly still stands. Estimates of the ratio of the food value of the plants we feed to animals to the food value of the edible meat produced range from 3:1 for chickens to 25:1 for beef cattle. I don't know if anyone has ever tried to calculate how many

plants a cow eats before being sent to market, but it must be a very large number. Increasing interest in plant science, however, has cast some doubt on my first response. Peter Wohlleben's 2015 worldwide bestseller, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, sparked popular attention to the issue. Wohlleben, a German forester, writes that trees can love, fear, make plans, worry about future events, and scream when they are thirsty – claims that have been repudiated by many scientists, some of whom signed a petition with the heading, “Even in the forest, it's facts we want instead of fairy tales.” When questioned, Wohlleben himself often backs away from his attributions of mental states to plants.

That plants are sentient, in the literal meaning of the word – able to sense something – is obvious from the fact that they grow toward

sunlight. Some are also sensitive in other ways. As a child, I enjoyed touching the leaves of a *Mimosa pudica*, or “touch-me-not” bush, that my father had planted in our garden, to see the leaves close in response. And the carnivorous Venus flytrap has sensitive hairs that trigger the trap when an insect touches them.

But is there something that it is like to be a plant, in the sense that there is something that it is like to be a chicken, or a fish, or (possibly) a bee? Or is being a plant like being a rock – in other words, there is no subject of experience? In *Animal Liberation*, I argued that plants are like rocks, and not like chickens or fish. (I was agnostic about bees, though I have not been indifferent to the question). Isn't it possible that my argument there – that we frequently underestimate the awareness,



Peter Singer

THE INEFFICIENCY OF MEAT PRODUCTION MEANS THAT BY EATING IT WE WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE NOT ONLY FOR THE SUFFERING OF THE ANIMALS BRED AND RAISED FOR THAT PURPOSE BUT ALSO FOR THAT OF THE VASTLY LARGER NUMBER OF PLANTS THEY EAT

Hijab & Education

The great are strongest when they stand alone, a God-given might of being is their force.

SRI AUROBINDO



The hijab controversy that has erupted in educational institutions in Karnataka is a disturbing development, to say the least. In a communally surcharged climate that has been prevailing in India for the past few years it is unfortunate the way the right to education and the right to religious freedom are being mixed up in the row over wearing hijab by Moslem girl students in several districts of Karnataka. The socio-religious tension triggered by the ugly incidents in some schools and colleges in Udupi, Kundapur and Byndoor is aggravated with BJP and Congress leaders and state ministers trying to fish in troubled waters. The communal overtone follows a set pattern each time major elections in state Assemblies are to take place. This time, when elections in crucial states such as Uttar Pradesh and Punjab are round the corner, it seems the intent is to whip up communal frenzy by targeting a sensitive, visible, religious symbol – the hijab – the scarf Moslem women wear round their heads as part of their religious practice. Interestingly, though Punjab will go to the polls, the religious symbol of the Sikhs – the turban – has not been targeted, though some schools in UP and Uttarakhand a few years back tried to ban wearing of large turbans by school students in the states.

The right to profess religion and the right to education clashed when Moslem students wearing hijabs were denied entry by authorities into a government pre-university college last week at Kundapur in Karnataka's Udupi district. The students forced their way into the college premises flouting the authorities' strict orders that wearing hijab would not be allowed as per the status quo on the dress code issued by the state government. State Education Minister BC Nagesh added fuel to fire when he said the girl students had not been wearing the hijab earlier. According to him, the entire issue cropped up early January when six students attended classes wearing hijab in violation of the dress code in classrooms at the government girls' pre-university (PU) college at Udupi. The controversy snowballed into a political slanging match between the BJP and the Congress when Karnataka state ministers intervened in the matter. As a mark of protest against allowing Moslem students to wear hijab inside the educational institution, boys, seemingly instigated by right wing outfits, also started to wear saffron scarves and raise religious slogans. Since such scarves have never existed as religious symbol, some institutes ordered the boys to remove them and follow the dress code. But the question is whether the practice of wearing the religious symbol of one particular faith is a result of mixing education and politics on the grounds of religion. The BJP seized the opportunity to make political capital of the issue when the Congress leader and MP Shashi Tharoor supported the protesting Moslem girls and asked some blunt questions about religious attire. For example, one of his loaded questions was, “if the hijab is disallowed, what about the Sikh turban? The Hindu's forehead mark? The Christian's crucifix?”

The Indian Constitution provides 'Freedom of Religion' as a fundamental right guaranteed by Articles 25 to 28. Every citizen of India has a right to practice and promote their religion peacefully. However, as a bitter truth, numerous incidents of religious intolerance have resulted in riots and violence, such as anti-Sikh massacre in 1984, the anti-Hindoo riots in 1990, Gujarat riots in 2002, anti-Christian riots in 2008 and very recent Delhi riots in 2020.

The BJP governments have been showing the proclivity of branding protesters in academic institutions, who challenge the government's fiat, as either terrorists or having links with terrorist outfits both inside and outside the country. The same tendency is being displayed in the hijab case as well. Though the Karnataka High Court is all set to hear the hijab-related writ petition February 8, the state government has now started to probe the six girls of Government PU College in Udupi, who are demanding permission to wear the hijab inside the classroom. BJP MLA Raghupati Bhat has stated state Home Minister Araga Jnyanendra asked the police to probe any links that the girls and their parents may have with other organisations. Any meetings attended by the girls and their call records will be under scrutiny. As if to confirm the by now well know pattern, the MLA asserts it is important to ascertain if the girls are acting on behalf of any international or terror organisations. On the other hand, two people have been arrested for carrying arms into a protest on the hijab row. The police are on the lookout for another three. The appearance of such elements during students' agitation has also been part of a known scenario in Delhi and elsewhere as well.

At this stage an interesting development is the decision of one educational institution of Karnataka to let in protesting hijab-wearing girls students, though they were accommodated in a separate room and not in their usual classroom. This is explained as a move to prevent escalation of trouble before the court ruling.

The Karnataka High Court's verdict is being eagerly awaited. Sober minds are the need of the hour to prevent bigots and their political handlers from inflicting fresh wounds on the nation in the name of religion, reaping political dividends and destroying the country's age-old tradition of pluralism.

WISDOM CORNER

- “The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.” ERNEST HEMINGWAY
- “If you love life, don't waste time, for time is what life is made up of.” BRUCE LEE
- “Doing the best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment.” OPRAH WINFREY

WORDSWORTH

Rumbledethumps

This name for a traditional dish of northern England and the Scottish borders was in the news early in 2009 because Gordon Brown, the British prime minister, contributed a recipe for it to a fundraising book in aid of Donaldson's, a school for the deaf near Edinburgh. Brown stated that it's his favourite food, a claim that was widely derided as recession chic. Rumbledethumps has often been described as Scottish bubble and squeak (whose name incidentally, comes from the noise it makes when cooking): a traditional dish, often of leftovers, whose key ingredients are potato and cabbage. It can be eaten on its own or as an accessory to meat. Though the food, and its name, seemed to be unfamiliar to the journalists who wrote about the PM's recipe, it's known to many in England because Sainsburys sell it as a ready meal in some of its bigger supermarkets. However, that includes swede (rutabaga), which rings more truly with the old Orkney recipe called clapsnot. Modern recipes for rumbledethumps cover it with melted cheese or add other flavourings such as bacon, onion or leek. The dish resembles not only bubble and squeak, but also the Irish colcannon, another dish based on potatoes and cabbage, pounded together in a mortar and then stewed with butter. Its name derives from cole, cabbage; the rest of the word is of uncertain origin, although the Oxford English Dictionary notes “it is said that vegetables such as spinach were formerly pounded with a cannon-ball.” The name clapsnot surely implies something similar, as does the related Irish dish called champ (meaning to crush and chew). It does seem that its name really is a combination of rumble and thump. The idea is supported by an old sense of rumbled: the OED points out that it was used to mean a foodstuff that has been scrambled or mashed (one citation refers to rumbled eggs, another to refer to what we would now call mashed potatoes).

SPECTRUM SOCIETY

The pandemic of violence against women



Vandana Sharma & Isabela Salgado

TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, GOVERNMENTS MUST DO MORE THAN PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR SURVIVORS

Violence against women and girls increases during periods of crisis. So, it could come as no surprise that COVID-19 has added to the risk of gender-based violence. Even before the pandemic, one in three women worldwide reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. But, by confining women at home with their abusers, pandemic-related lockdowns have increased their exposure to violence. Lockdowns have also contributed to economic stress, and diminished women's access to the resources and support systems that help them escape abusive relationships.

In April 2020, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for action to address gender-based violence during the pandemic. This call was supported by 146 countries. That same month, the United Nations Population Fund estimated that every three months of lockdown would result in an extra 15 million cases of violence against women and girls.

Eighteen months later, there is evidence that governments responded to Guterres' appeal. Data tracked by the UNDP show that, of 4,968 COVID-19 policy measures, 853 focused on violence against women. In the US, for example, millions of dollars in pandemic-relief spending are being directed to strengthen urgently needed resources – such as

shelters, psychological services, and housing assistance – that address the immediate needs of women experiencing violence. But these efforts alone will not stop violence from occurring. To end violence against women and girls requires effective prevention strategies that target its root causes. Such programmes address pervasive inequalities and power differentials – especially gender norms that justify and normalise violence against women and girls.

There are plenty of examples of effective and proven approaches to preventing violence against women that can be implemented even during a global pandemic. A large body of evidence – including best practices and robust assessments generated over several decades – demonstrates which approaches work best. In particular, randomised impact evaluations can guide decisions on how to build healthy, violence-free populations.

One type of effective, evidence-based approach is facilitated gender dialogues. These conversations help men and women examine and challenge inequitable gender norms and roles, and practice relationship skills in safe spaces. One such programme in Ethiopia, called Unite for a Better Life (UBL), was conducted within the context of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony, a traditional forum for community-based discussion. A randomised evaluation showed that UBL can reduce intimate partner vi-

olence by up to 50% when delivered to groups of men. UBL led to more equitable relationships, including greater joint decision-making, men's involvement in domestic tasks like cooking and childcare, and increased communication between partners on sensitive topics like sexuality. The benefits of the programme spread beyond participating households. Positive effects, including reduced violence, were observed even among community members who had not joined UBL sessions. This research shows just how crucial it is to include men in prevention efforts. Similar interventions, such as those implemented under the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls programme, provide further evidence in support of participatory dialogues that engage men.

Other promising approaches, highlighted in UN Women's RESPECT Women framework, include school-based curricula, microfinance or savings and loans programmes to empower women, and social-marketing or media interventions. The latter include radio and television programming in the form of 'edutainment', which integrates social-change messages into storylines. Randomised evaluations in Uganda, Mexico, and Nigeria have shown that edutainment can reduce acceptance of violence against women and its incidence, while also encouraging reporting.

Media-based campaigns offer a low-cost way to reach many people remotely. For example, UBL's podcast-based adaptation was designed for humanitarian crises where people may be on the move and unable to join in-person sessions. These podcasts can be shared easily and accessed on a basic mobile device. Additional work is needed to understand how other programs can be adapted effectively to help people in times of crisis, like the pandemic; but the existing evidence offers a place to start.

There is no time to waste. Policymakers need to use the available evidence to expand effective prevention programmes and support their adaptation to new contexts. And additional research and evaluation of novel or untested prevention strategies is essential.

To end violence against women, governments must do more than provide support for survivors. They also must invest in and implement effective violence-prevention programmes that challenge harmful gender norms and promote healthy, equitable relationships.

Vandana Sharma is global health researcher at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Isabela Salgado is senior policy associate in the Crime, Violence, and Conflict sector at J-PAL Global.

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Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

The eternal singer

Sir, This refers to “Melody Queen falls silent” (*Orissa POST*, Feb 7). Iconic singer Lata Mangeshkar, the nightingale of India, who has charmed the people across the world with her melodious voice will always keep ruling the hearts of people for all times to come. Lata's death marks the end of an era in music. Perhaps, she must have been the most recorded voice in history. She ruled the world of music for decades and the magic of her voice will live forever. Lata was an idol for everyone. She had sung around 50,000 songs as a playback singer in films in 14 different Indian languages. Her songs have been a part of all of us and her voice is engrained in every Indian and we will all cherish her forever.

Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit, AHMEDABAD

Uncle Pai on silver screen

Sir, It is really delightful to know that a film is being made based on the life of Anant Pai, the creator of the globally famous 'Amar Chitra Katha' series of comic books. It is truly a tribute to this great Indian who is called the father of Indian comics. Indian children of the 1970s, 80s and 90s can never forget ACK and their Uncle Pai who moulded the hearts of the children of that era inculcating in them our rich Indian culture. The teens of that era can never forget the pleasure they had browsing through the pages of those wonderful comic books. Anant Pai created those books in order to show the young Indians the route to their roots after sadly noting the ignorance of the teens regarding their great Indian culture and heritage. He proved that reading not only refreshes, it even moulds an individual's character and thereby the society. Pai's ACK and Tinkle beautifully taught the children the very rich legends, mythologies and history in the most suitable way - through graphics. Reading ACK was fun, entertainment and education - everything together.

M Pradyu, KANNUR

Foregone conclusion

Sir, The Congress party picking Charanjit Singh Channi as the Punjab chief ministerial candidate was a foregone conclusion. Congress leader and former party president Rahul Gandhi preferred Channi over incumbent state Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu, who has been nurturing chief ministerial ambitions. The Congress hopes that it could win votes by projecting Channi as a Dalit leader. Punjab has the highest percentage of the Dalit population in the country. But the development could further intensify infighting in the party.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

national

of the day quote

The unease of doing business. The pain of jobless youth. The compulsive lies of Modi Government. #KiskeAccheDin

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

It is strange that those who issued orders of shooting on devotees of Lord Ram are talking about the Ram Temple today

PRAKASH JAVADEKAR | BJP LEADER

When the Samajwadi Party was in power in Uttar Pradesh, electric lines were used only to dry clothes, and now, it is going around promising 300 units of free electricity to the people

KESHAV PRASAD MAURYA | UP DEPUTY CM

SHORT TAKES

Militant killed

Srinagar: An unidentified militant was killed in an encounter with security forces in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir Monday, police said. The encounter broke out between militants and security forces at Nambal in the Awantipora area of the district this evening, a police spokesperson said. He said an unidentified militant was killed in the exchange of firing between the two sides. Further details of the incident are awaited, he added.

Woman ends life

Gurugram: A lawyer has committed suicide at her rented accommodation in the Sector 108 area of Gurugram. In a suicide note, the 34-year-old Preeti Jaiswal, a resident of Kota, Rajasthan, has blamed her live-in partner Vijay Rana for mental and physical harassment which she said forced her to take the extreme step, the police said. The police recovered the suicide note from the woman's room wherein she has accused the man of physical and mental harassment.

Farmer killed

Etah (UP): A 58-year-old farmer was attacked and killed by a stray bull while he was protecting his crop on a rented field in Uttar Pradesh's Etah district. Residents of Daulatpur Giloli village found Rampal Singh Katheria's body in the field on Saturday. His mortal remains were handed over to his family by the police after an autopsy on Sunday. Sub-Divisional Magistrate Alankar Agnihotri said: "We have asked the teshildar to submit a detailed report on the entire matter."

Three charred

Sultanpur (Uttar Pradesh): A Lucknow-based stationary shop owner and his two employees were charred to death when their car hit a divider and caught fire on the Purvanchal Expressway in Sultanpur district late Sunday night. The incident took place near milestone 127 under Gosaiganj police station. The deceased were identified as Aditya Kothari, who was owner of the stationary shop in Aliganj area. The other two were identified as Pankaj Kashyap and Vikram Singh. The police, however, were not able to ascertain the ages of the deceased.

Farmer dies

Pilibhit (UP): A 60-year-old farmer, who was staying up in his field to guard against stray cattle, is suspected to have died of cold in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit district. On Saturday night, the farmer, Chote Lal, was sleeping on a charpoy in a thatched hut in his field located in Patrisiya village of Barkheda area.



Nothing is going to change if you give another five years to either BJP or Congress. All they would do is fill their coffers

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CM

INDIA CROSSES 170 CR VAX MARK

India's vaccination drive against Covid-19 achieved another milestone as it crossed 170 crore mark Monday



Congress crossed all limits amid Covid: PM



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday launched a no-holds-barred attack on the Congress, saying the Britishers have gone but the party has made the "divide and rule" policy its character and has become the "leader of the tukde-tukde gang". Replying to the debate in Lok Sabha on Motion of Thanks to President Ram Nath Kovind's address to the Parliament, Modi said the Congress "arrogance" has not gone away despite multiple electoral defeats and its "misdeeds" seem to indicate that it has made up its mind not to come to power for the next 100 years. The Prime Minister said the Congress "crossed all limits" during the COVID pandemic. During the first wave, when people were following lockdowns and COVID norms, the Congress was standing at Mumbai Station and scaring innocent labourers into fleeing to their native states, he said. "You have committed a big sin," he added. During his nearly 100-minute speech, he also accused the opposition party of indulging in "blind opposition" and strengthening separatism. It is true that criticism

is the ornament of a vibrant democracy, but "blind opposition" is an "insult to democracy", he said. The Prime Minister noted that if the BJP loses one election its ecosystem works on it for months and slammed the Congress, saying that after so many defeats, "neither your arrogance goes away, nor your ecosystem allows your arrogance to go away". Modi said it would have been good if the Opposition would have accepted and welcomed with an open heart whatever the country has achieved by 'Sabka prayas'. Hitting out at the Congress, Modi said, "Sometimes a thought comes to my mind, with their statements, their programmes, their misdeeds, the way you speak and connect with issues, it seems you have made up your mind of not coming back to power for 100 years. Nobody does this." "If they had little hope that people would bless them they would not have done so. However, if you have only decided to (not come back to power) for a hundred years, I have also made preparations," he said. Modi asked that if his government is talking about being vocal for local, is it not fulfilling the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi.

9 KILLED IN AP ACCIDENT

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Amaravati, Feb 7: Nine people returning from a wedding were killed when a car in which they were travelling was hit by a truck in Andhra Pradesh's Anantapuram district.

Father of the bride was among those killed in the accident that occurred near Budagavi village of Urvakonda mandal on Sunday night, police said. According to police the victims were returning home from a wedding in Bellary, Karnataka.

The tragedy occurred when a truck coming from the opposite direction rammed into the car on Anantapuram-Bellary highway between Budagavi and Kottalappali villages. A police officer said all the occupants of the car were killed in the collision. Police had a tough time in retrieving bodies from the badly mangled car.

The deceased include bride's father Venkatappa Naidu (58), who is state secretary of BJP Kisan Morcha. He along with other relatives was returning her home in Nimbagallu village after attending wedding of her daughter in Bellary.

The other deceased were identified as Swati (38), Jaswanth (12), Jhanvi (12), Saraswati (60), Ashok (30), Shivamma (30) and Subhadramma (60). Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed grief over the accident and announced ex-gratia from Prime Minister's National Relief Fund to the families of the deceased.

"Pained by the loss of lives due to a tragic accident in Ananthapuramu district, AP. Condolences to the bereaved families. An ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of the deceased," tweeted the Prime Minister Monday.

Big jolt to BJP in Tripura

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Agartala, Feb 7: In a major political jolt, two more dissident MLAs of the ruling BJP - Sudip Roy Barman and Ashish Kumar Saha who are strong critics of Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb for the past more than two years -- on Monday resigned from the Assembly and the party before leaving for Delhi to decide their next course of action.

After submitting their resignation letters to Tripura Assembly Speaker Ratan Chakraborty, both Roy Barman, a former minister, and Saha told the media that they have also sent their resignation letters to the BJP's state President Manik Saha. "We are going to Delhi today (Monday) and will come back here on Saturday, then we will tell you everything in detail about our future political course," Roy Barman told the media just after submitting resignation letters to Chakraborty and before leaving for the national capital.

He said: "The BJP government led by Deb utterly failed to deliver the goods. An autocratic rule has been prevailing in the state. A reign of terror has been going on in the state. People are in serious distress. We want to work for the people as we are unable to do this while remaining in the BJP".

Sources close to Roy Barman and Saha said that they might meet



Bharatiya Janata Party MLAs Sudip Roy Barman and Ashish Kumar Saha speak to the media after submitting their resignation papers to Tripura Legislative Assembly Speaker Ratan Chakraborty in Agartala

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and other leaders in Delhi and may join the party Roy Barman and Saha, strong critics of Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb and other BJP leaders, were earlier in Congress before joining TMC in 2016 and then to BJP next year (2017). Earlier, BJP MLA Ashish Das after strongly criticising the saffron party and its leadership including Chief Minister, joined the Trinamool Congress (TMC) on October 31, 2021 following which he was disqualified from Tripura Assembly by the Speaker on January 5 (this year).

BJP, on the other hand, downplayed the resignations of Roy Barman and Saha and said that

the duo's quit from the Assembly membership would not be any constitutional crisis in the state. "It was in the expected line that Roy Barman and Saha left from the Assembly membership and the party. They have been openly criticising the chief minister and other party leaders. Their resignation from the Assembly and the party has no importance to BJP," state BJP spokesman Nabendu Bhattacharjee told the media.

Roy Barman and Saha and three other BJP MLAs - Ashish Das, Diba Chandra Hrangkhawl and Burba Mohan Tripura -- in August last year held a big gathering in Agartala which was attended by many local BJP leaders and workers.

ON WARPATH



Police personnel try to stop BJP workers during their protest march against the West Bengal government in Kolkata

DCGI nod to SII's proposal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has approved Serum Institute of India's proposal to manufacture a vaccine against omicron variant of coronavirus for examination, test and analysis, official sources said Monday.

"With reference to your application, please find herewith the permission to manufacture SARS-CoV-2 rS Protein (COVID-19) recombinant spike protein nanoparticle vaccine (omicron variant) for examination, test and analysis under the provisions of New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules, 2019 to manufacture the test batches of the drug/drugs mentioned therein," an approval order issued on February 4 stated.



Director, Government and Regulatory Affairs at the SII, Prakash Kumar Singh had put in an application to the DCGI on January 6 stating the Pune-based firm, in collaboration with Novavax Inc, is working on the development of a vaccine against omicron, an official source said, adding that the SII has obtained permission and licence to manufacture SARS-CoV-2rS drug substance for examination, test and analysis.

"... The new coronavirus variant 'omicron' has already been reported in more than 60 countries and is spreading very fast worldwide and in our country also. Our CEO, Dr Adar C Poonawalla is very concerned about protection of citizens of our country and world at large against coronavirus and its new variants and we are relentlessly working on development of SARS-CoV-2 rS Protein (COVID-19) Recombinant Spike Nanoparticle Vaccine (omicron variant). "Development of this vaccine shall be another example of vaccine production strength of our country in line with the clarion call of our prime minister 'Making in India for the World' and shall further keep our country's flag flying high globally," Singh had stated in the application," the source said.

JNU gets its first woman VC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Ministry of Education Monday appointed Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, Professor Politics and Public Administration at Savitribai Phule Pune University, as Jawaharlal Nehru University's (JNU) first female Vice-Chancellor (VC).

Handing over the charge to Pandit, the outgoing VC and Chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC), Professor M Jagadish Kumar, said: "I am happy to inform that Professor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, from the Department of Politics and Public Administration at Savitribai Phule Pune University, has been appointed as the next Vice-Chancellor of JNU. She is the first female vice-chancellor of the university. I wish her success in her new role."

Pandit, who was born in Russia's St. Petersburg, is fluent in English, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Kannada, Malayalam and Konkani. She did her schooling from Chennai and topped the state. She also did her B.A. in History and Social Psychology in 1983 from Presidency College in Chennai and did a diploma in Social Work from California State University. Pandit is also a gold medalist.

She is the second female Vice-Chancellor of a central university in Delhi selected by the Education Ministry.

Sukesh shifted to another jail



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: The silk stocking conman -- Sukesh Chandrashekhar -- is back in the news with fresh charges of bribing three Tihar Jail officials.

The conman has once again tried to bribe the staff of Tihar Jail No 4. Confirming the development, Director General (Prison) Sandeep Goel told IANS that Sukesh had allegedly deposited an amount of Rs 1.25 lakh into an inmate's brother's bank account.

It was officially learnt that the police probing multi-millionaire conman were finding it difficult to understand how Sukesh has been bribing the officials. Two weeks ago, when cops found that some money had been deposited into an account of some inmate's brother:

"We are getting an inquiry conducted and have transferred three staff from the jail," the DG Prisons said. The three jail staff includes two Assistant Superintendents

who have now been sent to the district lines of the jail headquarters. Meanwhile, the senior-most prison official informed that as a precautionary measure, the lodgement of inmate Sukesh Chandrashekhar has also been changed to another jail. "We have transferred him from Jail No 4 to 1," the official said.

Last month, the Economic Offence Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police had written to Tihar Jail authorities to take action against 82 jail officials who allegedly helped inmate Sukesh by providing him luxurious facilities inside the prison. In the letter, accessed by IANS, the EOW had mentioned the names of all the 82 jail officials.

During the probe, the CCTV footage of ten cameras of Rohini Jail were collected and examined and it was found that the view of CCTV cameras installed in the barack of accused Sukesh was completely blocked by curtains and mineral water bottles.

TRINAMOOL HOPING TO BE KING MAKER IN GOA

After 10 years in power, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant-led BJP also faces severe anti-incumbency, especially in the wake of a series of corruption allegations against his ministers and MLAs

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi/Panjim, Feb 7: A week ahead of polls in Goa, the Trinamool Congress has stepped up its campaign and is trying to impress voters in a way that party

could be in the game of thrones in the state. Some party members hope that the TMC along with its ally, will win half a dozen seats and be relevant in the state, post elections.

Sources said that the party has intensified its campaign on selected seats where the party thinks it can win and has reinforced more leaders to micro manage the last leg of the campaign.

However, TMC leaders make it clear that they are here to win. Party leader Ashok Tanwar said, "I have been camping from last one month and I can say that people want positive change and it is the TMC which could deliver on people's aspirations." When asked how many seats the

party will win, Tanwar claims TMC will be comfortable in forming the government. But despite being in the fray, the Trinamool



Congress (TMC) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) could not make it to the last lap, as political observers feel, the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress appear to have taken the centrestage in the coastal state, just like in 2017 elections.

However, the TMC leaders hope that the party will make inroads. Luizinho Faleiro, former Chief Minister and now in TMC, says, "people will vote for the party. Every vote that you cast for a candidate of the Goa TMC is a leap forward towards a brighter future for us all." The 2022 polls however are a bit

different with the absence of late Manohar Parrikar.

After 10 years in power, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant-led BJP also faces severe anti-incumbency, especially in the wake of a series of corruption allegations against his ministers and MLAs.

The BJP hopes to get votes of the all the sections of the society. "This time too, the minority will vote for Goa in a big way. A priest in Saligao was present for the office inauguration of Jayesh Salgaonkar. He prayed and gave him blessings. We have also given 12 tickets to minority (candidates). They are getting a good response from the majority and the minority communities," Sawant claimed.

While the Congress has more or less banked on the new faces since it has also been impacted by desertion of a section of its leadership base to the BJP, TMC and AAP. The party strategy is being worked out by senior poll observer P. Chidambaram who is dedicating time and has roped in many leaders for the election campaign including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to woo women.

"This time the BJP will come down from 13 to 8. Their number will be below 10. They do not seem to have understood the popular resentment," said ex-CM and Congress leader, Digambar Kamat. The state goes to polls on February 14 and counting is on March 10.

TRIPURA VIOLENCE

SC slams cops for sending notices despite its order

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Surya Kant warned the counsel for the state that if Tripura Police does not refrain from harassing people, it will summon the Home Secretary and the concerned police officials



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Supreme Court Monday slammed Tripura Police for sending notices to people for social media posts over alleged communal violence in the state despite its interim restraining order.

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Surya Kant warned the counsel for the state that if Tripura Police does not refrain from harassing people, it will summon the Home Secretary and the concerned police officials.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by journalist Samiullah Shabbir Khan against a notice issued by Tripura Police seeking his appearance under Section 41A (Notice of appearance before police officer) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

"Inform the Superintendent of Police not to harass people like this. Why should somebody be required to run to the Supreme Court? What else is this if this is not harassment..."

"Otherwise, we will call SP to court and make him answerable if we find he's trying to evade compliance by issuing notices to the people. We'll ask everybody to appear before this court including your Home Secretary, once we have passed an order covering the issue

you must show responsibility," the bench observed. Advocate Sharukh Alam, appearing for Khan, stated before that the top court January 10 passed an interim order restraining the police from acting against the journalist's tweets.

"I didn't request for dasti notice so physical service is still incomplete. That order hasn't reached the Superintendent of Police. I was issued a notice under Section 41A asking me (Khan) to appear before Agartala today. That order was well reported," Alam said.

The counsel for the Tripura government requested that the matter be adjourned for two weeks.

The apex court then said, "What do you mean hold over for two weeks when you have issued notice for today?"

The apex court directed Tripura Police not to take further steps with regard to a notice seeking appearance of Khan in the matter.

"The counsel for the petitioner, states that the order dated 10 January 2022 passed by this court, though reported widely, has formally remained to be served on the superintendent of police. Be that as it may, a notice under section 41 A of the CrPc dated 20 January 2022 was issued... Requiring the attendance of the petitioner today."

"Since the petitioner has already been protected by the previous order of this court dated 10 January 2022, no further steps shall be taken in pursuance of the notice under section 41 A, pending further orders. Counsel for the state of Tripura, shall communicate both the copies of the present order and the previous order dated 10 January 2022 to the superintendent of police," the bench said.

The top court on January 10 had restrained Tripura Police from acting on its notice to Twitter Inc with regard to a journalist's tweet about alleged communal violence in the state.

November 17 last year, the top court had directed Tripura Police not to take any coercive action against the three civil society members, including a journalist, in connection with an FIR lodged under the harsh UAPA provisions against them for allegedly bringing facts through social media posts about targeted violence against the minority community in the state.

Last year, the north-eastern state witnessed incidents of arson, looting and violence after reports emerged from Bangladesh that the Hindu minorities there had been attacked during Durga Puja on allegations of blasphemy.

Census of Myanmarese refugees in Mizoram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Aizawl, Feb 7: The Mizoram government is currently undertaking a census of Myanmarese nationals, who took refuge in the north-eastern state after fleeing their country following a military coup in February last year; a senior minister said Monday.

Around 18,000 people from Myanmar are now staying in Mizoram and they will be provided with identity cards by the state administration, Home Minister Lalchamliana said.

"We want to maintain proper documentation of the Myanmarese nationals for which a census is currently being conducted by district administrations where they have taken shelter," he told PTI.

According to Lalchamliana, around 2,000 more people reportedly entered the state in the last one week in the wake of violent clashes between the Myanmar army and civilian defence forces in Chin state.

A large section of the people of Myanmar who have taken refuge

INFLUX OF PEOPLE

Six Mizoram districts - Champhai, Siaha, Lawngtlai, Serchhip, Hnahthial and Saitual - share a 510 km long international border with Myanmar's Chin state

A large section of the people of Myanmar who have taken refuge in the state belong to the Chin, also known as the Zo, community. They share the same ancestry and culture as the Mizos of Mizoram

The Myanmar nationals have been lodged at community halls, schools, relief camps set up by NGOs and villagers while many were also accommodated by their local relatives

in the state belong to the Chin, also known as the Zo, community. They share the same ancestry and culture as the Mizos of Mizoram. Chin is also a state in western Myanmar.

"With this fresh influx, about 18,000 Myanmar nationals are currently staying in different parts of



Mizoram," Lalchamliana said quoting the police record.

He said that the state government has so far released ₹80 lakh to help the refugees on humanitarian ground as the Centre could not directly provide assistance to them.

India is not a signatory to the UN Convention on refugees. Of the 11 districts of Mizoram, Champhai has the highest number of Myanmarese people at 7,810, followed by Lawngtlai (3,761) and Aizawl (1,916).

Saitual district hosts the lowest number of such refugees at 53, official sources said.

The Myanmar nationals have been lodged at community halls, schools, relief camps set up by NGOs and villagers while many were also accommodated by their local relatives.

Six Mizoram districts - Champhai, Siaha, Lawngtlai, Serchhip, Hnahthial and Saitual - share a 510 km long international border with Myanmar's Chin state.

ROYAL ARRIVALS



Two Royal Bengal tiger cubs who were born four days ago at the Assam State Zoo-cum-Botanical Garden, in Guwahati, Monday. With these cubs, the Royal Bengal tiger population in the zoo has gone up to 9.

Has Sidhu polarised Punjab once again?

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: Ever since he visited Pakistan and hugged its army chief, 'nationalist' Indians have been deeply offended and spoken out against Navjot Singh Sidhu's allegedly pro-Pakistan views.

The sentiment seems to have seeped into Punjab, says a CVoter survey conducted for IANS across the state covering all social and religious groups, apart from party supporters.

The dislike for Sidhu amongst non-Sikhs and even non Jat-Sikhs is palpable. Respondents were asked the question: Has Sidhu proven to be an asset or a liability for the Congress? As many as 54.3 per cent of Dalit Sikhs consider him a liability. That's not surprising given the barbs Sidhu has been throwing at the Dalit Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, going public suggesting that party bosses in Delhi want a weak leader and Chief Minister they can control. More than 42 per cent of Hindu voters also find him a liability, as do more than 46 per cent of BJP supporters. The funny thing is that



40.3 per cent of Congress supporters think Sidhu is a liability while 34 per cent consider him an asset.

The respondents were further asked: To what extent do you blame Sidhu for the infighting in the Congress? The maximum blame came from Hindu voters amongst whom 67 per cent of the respondents either blamed Sidhu entirely or to a large extent. When asked who was a better leader between the two: Captain Amarinder Singh and Sidhu, the highest percentage among all social and religious groups, 48.5 per cent of Hindus, clearly preferred the Captain. That should worry the Congress because while AAP was already threatening to take away a chunk of Sikh votes, the newly-formed alliance between the Captain and the BJP threatens to take away a chunk of Hindu votes.

With Channi, Congress eyes Dalit votes in other states too

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: With Charanjit Singh Channi, the Chief Ministerial face in Punjab, the Congress eyes Dalit votes in other states too - Uttarakhand and Goa which are going to polls February 14. The party does not have high stakes in UP but it could make inroads in the Dalit vote bank which is with the BSP.

The Congress leaders belonging to the community are happy that the party has taken a big step forward. Leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, who missed the Karnataka bus twice said, "The announcement of the name of Charanjit Singh Channi as the CM candidate of Punjab by Rahul Gandhi is a big step taken by the Congress party towards social justice and empowerment of Dalits. I applaud this decision and hope the people of Punjab support this historic decision."

Kharge too belongs to the SC community and has been stalwart in the state but was overlooked.

After a Dalit CM in Punjab, the Congress is eyeing gains in Uttarakhand but it is unlikely that the party will get much trac-



tion in UP as Mayawati is a formidable force in the state and non-Jatav Dalits have mostly aligned with the BJP.

Political observers believe the decision of the Congress in Punjab, which is witnessing a five-corner contest, is to woo the Dalit Sikh votes that constitute 32 per cent, under the leadership of three-time legislator Channi, the state's first Dalit Chief Minister.

Channi after the announcement said, "I sincerely thank the Congress High Command and people of Punjab for bestowing their trust in me. As you have seen us work so hard in the last 111 days to take Punjab forward, I assure you to take Punjab and Punjabis on the path of progress with new zeal and dedication."

But the Congress politics is not limited to just Punjab. The party wants to gain maximum traction in the hill state of Uttarakhand and also tap the public which is upset with BSP Supremo Mayawati. The Congress has already distributed ticket to the people who are from the lower strata or have been victimized.

With this Congress is trying to bring back its traditional voters - the Scheduled Caste, Minority and Brahmin which are scattered in three parties in the state which sends highest number of MPs to the Lok Sabha. The Congress has just one MP from the state while in 2009 it had 23, highest in recent times and was the number one party in terms of the MPs but later it could not hold on and the situation became worse.

AAP to gain the most from Cong infighting

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: Voters across social, religious and political divides seem to suggest that the Aam Aadmi Party led by Arvind Kejriwal and its Punjab Chief Ministerial candidate Bhagwant Mann are set to benefit the most from the constant infighting that seems to have engulfed the state unit of the Congress, according to a CVoter survey for IANS carried out in the state.

In 2017, though the AAP was considered favourite to win the Punjab Assembly elections, it came a distant second behind the Congress led by Captain Amarinder Singh in the state. But with the Captain gone from the party and other top leaders busy fighting and criticising each other, the AAP is once again fancying its chances. A tracker poll being run by CVoter since 2021 has consistently shown that AAP will emerge as the largest party in a hung Assembly, narrowly missing the majority mark.

Respondents were asked the following question: Which party has gained the most due to the infighting within the Congress? Overall amongst all respondents, 57.5 per cent were of the opinion that AAP will benefit; 21.1 per cent said it would be the Akali Dal-led alliance, while 15.6 per cent thought the BJP-PLC (new party formed by the Captain) will benefit.

Amongst political parties, as many as 62 per cent of Congress supporters said the AAP will benefit, just 5 per cent less than AAP supporters. Even more worrisome for the Congress is 63.4 per cent Dalits saying the AAP will benefit the most. The current Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi is the first Dalit chief minister of the state. Even among Sikhs, close to 54 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that AAP will benefit the most from the Congress infighting. It seems the party seems to be bestowed with an unexpected gift just before the elections.

'Development antidote to terrorism in Manipur'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Imphal, Feb 7: Manipur Minister Thongam Biswajit Singh, second-in-command in the BJP government after Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, said that through multi-pronged strategies, creating infrastructure, enhancing job avenues for the educated youths, working with the regional aspirations are some of the key areas which we need to associate in the strategy to resolve militancy with initiatives for peaceful dialogue," the minister told IANS in an interview.

"Implementation of a proper rehabilitation (of the surrendered militants) policy will also be pivotal." He said: "Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

2017 all-out efforts have been made to contain militancy and the drug menace.

"Extremism in the state is a decades old problem. It needs a multi-pronged strategy to resolve. Creating developmental infrastructure, enhancing job avenues for the educated youths, working with the regional aspirations are some of the key areas which we need to associate in the strategy to resolve militancy with initiatives for peaceful dialogue," the minister told IANS in an interview.

and Home Minister Amit Shah, we have paved the way for moving forward. Same is with drug smuggling and drug abuse, we will not let our youths, the future of the nation, get ruined by narcotics." "Our commitment against drug



smuggling has yielded results and we will carry it forward. The security forces in Manipur including Assam Rifles often seize illegal drugs worth crores of rupees smuggled from neighbouring Myanmar."

Manipur has over 40 outlawed insurgent groups, a majority of them lying low following signing of suspension of operations agreements

operations agreements with the government. Besides militancy, smuggling of varied drugs from Myanmar is another big problem for Manipur and other northeastern states. The security forces last year seized drugs including highly addictive 'methamphetamine' tablets commonly known as 'Yaba' and heroin worth over ₹1,000 crore in Manipur after these were smuggled from Myanmar. Many Indian and Myanmarese drug peddlers were arrested. Defence sources said that narcoterrorism is a major source of finance for the terrorist groups based in Myanmar and it has linkages with the other players in the 'Golden Triangle'.

Guwahati, Feb 7: Assam will withdraw all COVID-related restrictions from February 15 as the pandemic situation has improved with the number of cases declining, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Monday.

School board examinations, municipal elections, by-elections to the Majuli assembly constituency and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) polls will be held over the next two months, Sarma announced at a press conference here.

Students appearing for the board examinations must get both doses of vaccine, he said.

There will be no night curfew, malls and cinema halls will open with full capacity, and weddings can be held through the night but guests must be double vaccinated,

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sarma said. Wearing masks will be mandatory at all places, he added. Sarma also announced that his government has decided to provide Bihu committees a financial aid of ₹1.5 lakh to organise the functions for seven days so that they do not collect donations from traders and businessmen who have suffered huge losses due to the pandemic. Rongali Bihu will be celebrated in the state without any restrictions, he said.

"We have decided to provide financial aid to the Bihu committees who are organising functions for more than ten years to reduce the financial burden on traders and businessmen," the chief minister said.

The deputy commissioners have prepared a list of such committees and the aid will be provided accordingly, he said.



of the day quote

I have requested for interest-free loan of ₹1 lakh crore to states under the capital grant. About ₹3,800 crore to ₹4,000 crore will come to the state

Field candidates who are committed to the welfare of society for the upcoming municipal elections

The Puducherry CM should write to the Prime Minister, Union Home and Health Ministers respectively registering the territorial government's objection to NEET and reject the system of holding the entrance exam for selection of medical students

SHORT TAKES

Two arrested

Kanpur: Nearly 1,878 endangered turtles have been seized and two men of Kashmiri origin arrested in the Chakeri area of the city by the Special Task Force's (STF) Kanpur unit.

Man held in UP

Varanasi: The UP Special Task Force (STF) have arrested Sunny Bhardwaj- one of the four criminals involved in looting ₹70 lakhs from a bank in Mulund area of Mumbai on February 2.

Heroin seized

Jaipur: Rajasthan Police have recovered 14.74 kg of heroin from Panchla village in Barmer district, bordering international border with Pakistan.

Army porter dies

Jammu: An army porter died Monday after falling from a tree in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district.

One killed

Patna: A 57-year-old woman was killed and two others critically injured after a high speeding SUV mowed them down in Patna.



The money meant for widow pension or the disabled was distributed among office bearers of the Samajwadi Party

RS PAYS HOMAGE TO LATA

The proceedings of the Rajya Sabha Monday was adjourned for an hour as a mark of respect to Lata Mangeshkar



BJP redefining religion: Priyanka

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Panaji, Feb 7: Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Monday accused the BJP of trying to redefine religion and dictating women what to wear in India.

Speaking at an election rally in the St Cruz assembly constituency in North Goa, Priyanka also accused the Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party of trying to split the anti-BJP vote.

"...we believe that the conversation between us has to be about development. It has to be about progress. It has to be about education, health, jobs, and women's safety. This is the conversation that should take place.

The Congress leader's comment comes days after hijab-wearing students were debarred from entering an educational institute in Karnataka.



It is redefining your religions for you. That is not what it should be. The conversation in every election, with every political party, must be on what they are going to provide for you and your development," Priyanka said.

The Congress leader also trained her guns at the political parties like the AAP and TMC, who are participating in the February 14 assembly polls.

They have not come here to make Goa progress," she said. "Because all the parties have come to destabilise your governments, those that come from outside, cannot run Goa.

Speaking at an election rally in the St Cruz assembly constituency in North Goa, Priyanka also accused the Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party of trying to split the anti-BJP vote.

The Congress leader's comment comes days after hijab-wearing students were debarred from entering an educational institute in Karnataka

Govt unveils Mission Indradhanush 4.0

The Mission will have three rounds and will be conducted in 416 districts which will include 75 districts identified for Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav across 33 States/UTs in the country



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: India is implementing the largest immunisation programme globally where annually more than 3 crore pregnant women and 2.6 crore children are covered through the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

Mandaviya said that only with the collective efforts of the Centre, the states and beneficiaries, shall we be able to achieve the target of full immunization coverage

risk and hard-to-reach areas and protect them from vaccine preventable diseases", Mandaviya said. Under Mission Indradhanush, all vaccines under Universal Immunisation Program (UIP) are provided as per National Immunisation Schedule.

The Union Health Minister virtually launched the IMI 4.0 portal and released the Operational Guidelines for IMI 4.0, "Strengthening Immunization in Urban Areas framework for Action" and a handbook for "Mahila Arogya Samiti on Urban Immunization".

Emphasising on the need of 'Sabka Prayas' and 'Jan Lok Bhaagidaari' to achieve the goal of universal immunisation in the country, Mandaviya said that only with the collective and collaborative efforts of the Centre, the States and beneficiaries, shall we be able to achieve the target of full immunization coverage in the country.

COVID PRECAUTION



Students sanitise their hands before entering the premises, after schools reopened following ease in Covid-induced restrictions in New Delhi

7 soldiers trapped in Arunachal

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Feb 7: Seven Indian Army personnel, part of a patrol, are reported to have been trapped in an avalanche in the high altitude area of Kameng Sector in Arunachal Pradesh.

Search and rescue operations are currently underway. Specialised teams have been airlifted to assist in rescue operations, the force said.

The area has been witnessing inclement weather with heavy snowfall since the last few days, the force said.

Arunachal Pradesh is generally divided into Kameng area on the west and Rest of Arunachal Pradesh.

Indian Army Eastern Command handles the 1,346 kilometers long Line of Actual Control (LAC), including Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

This command has three corps - 33 Corps (Sikkim), four Corps (Kameng Sector) and three Corps (Rest of Arunachal Pradesh) to handle the LAC.

SP fields Subhawati against Yogi

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Lucknow, Feb 7: The Samajwadi Party Monday released a list of 24 candidates, naming Subhawati Shukla, wife of BJP leader, late Upendra Dutt Shukla, from Gorakhpur.

Subhawati Shukla's husband was known to be against Yogi Adityanath and had lost the 2018 by-election after Yogi Adityanath resigned from the seat after he became chief minister.

party cadres. Besides, Subhawati is sure to get the backing of Brahmin voters since the Thakur-Brahmin hostility in the region is well known.

The SP list also named Nandita Shukla, widow of former BJP leader Ghanshyam Shukla, from Mehnon in Gonda, Vikrama Yadav from Kushinagar, H.N. Patel from Sagdi in Azamgarh, Saurabh Singh from Vishwanathganj in Pratapgarh and Kaushal Singh from Nautanwa in Maharajganj.

17% candidates have criminal record: ADR

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Dehradun, Feb 7: Uttarakhand has followed the old practice of fielding criminals and nearly 17 per cent of the candidates in the ongoing Assembly elections have criminal backgrounds.

According to a report released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), all major parties contesting in the elections have given tickets to 17 per cent to 33 per cent candidates who have declared criminal cases against themselves.

Battle for Uttarakhand



Individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates.

In Uttarakhand, out of the 626 candidates analysed, 107 (17 per cent) candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves. In the 2017 Assembly elections, out of 637 candidates analysed,

91(14 per cent) had declared criminal cases against themselves.

As a result of this, 13 out of 70 constituencies have been declared as 'Red Alert Constituencies'. Red alert constituencies are those where three or more contesting candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves.

Nearly 61 candidates in these elections face serious criminal cases. In the 2017 Uttarakhand elections, 54 candidates had declared serious criminal cases against themselves. Among the major parties, candidates having criminal cases include Congress where 11 out of 70 candidates belong to this category.

SC to resume physical hearings twice a week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Supreme Court Monday revived its Modified Standard Operating Procedure and said all the matters listed on Wednesdays and Thursdays would be heard in the physical presence of lawyers and litigants in courtrooms only.

The decision has been taken in view of the significant decline in the number of COVID-19 cases and positivity rate. The top court said it has decided to revive the Modified SOP notified on October 7, 2021, from February 14, 2022.

"In view of the significant decline in the number of COVID-19 cases and positivity rate, and in the light of the various instructions issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority, Government of NCT of Delhi vide Order dated February 4, 2022, the Chief Justice of India, in consultation with the Committee of Judges, has been pleased to direct that the Modified Standard Operating Procedure notified on October 7, 2021, for hearing before the Court shall stand revived, and all hearings before the Court from February 14, 2021, shall be in accordance with the said Modified Standard Operating Procedure notified on October 7, 2021," a notice said.

BJP ensures Karhal is no cakewalk for Akhilesh

Though the caste equation is completely tilted in favour of Akhilesh, the BJP is banking on non-Yadav OBCs for support

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Karhal Mainpuri (UP), Feb 7: For Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, contesting elections from Karhal will no longer be a cakewalk and this, the BJP has made sure by fielding Union Minister S.P. Singh Baghel from here.

Though the caste equation is completely tilted in favour of Akhilesh, the BJP is banking on non-Yadav OBCs for support.

There is an estimated 1.4 lakh Yadavs of the total 3.7 lakh voters in the Karhal constituency.

The Dalit votes in the constituency are around 70,000 and the BJP arithmetic is to play the 'Hindu First' card and erase the caste lines between Dalits and non-Yadav OBCs.

Samajwadi bastion and since 1993, the SP has never lost the election here.

Located about five kilometres from Sefai, the native village of Akhilesh Yadav, Karhal has a strong emotional connect with the Yadav family.

Dhanraj Yadav, a local teacher, says, "Apart from the Yadav factor which dominates undoubtedly, people know that by voting for Akhilesh, they are electing a chief minister and it is this that is making all the difference. The Yadav family has always been with the people and we reach out to them with our problems."

The BJP candidate, S.P. Singh Baghel, 61, will be challenging a member of the Yadav family for the third time in the electoral battle from Karhal.



tested against Akhilesh Yadav in 2009, Dimple Yadav in 2009 (bypoll) and Akshay Yadav in 2014 from Firozabad. Baghel, incidentally was in the security of Mulayam Singh Yadav when he was sub-in-

spector with the Uttar Pradesh Police and it was Mulayam who had ushered him into politics.

Sushil Tyagi, a local resident, said, "Baghel is a betrayer. Why does he have to contest against the

family which made him what he is today. He would have just been another policeman on the streets if Netaji (Mulayam) had not ushered him into politics. The people in Karhal are emotionally connected with the Yadav family and Baghel's candidate is not being looked upon very kindly."

Nevertheless, BJP cadres are working overtime to campaign door-to-door for Baghel and bring down the victory margin of Akhilesh.

"We want to ensure that Akhilesh remains pinned to this constituency and fight for the margin. You never know, he may even bite dust if Dalits join hands with non-Yadav OBCs here," said a BJP functionary.

Baghel belongs to the Dhargar sub caste in Dalits and is confident of getting the Dalit votes.

international

of the day quote

I have decided to set up a government-appointed commission of examination to investigate in depth the violation of the civil rights and privacy of citizens in the years in question



OMER BAR-LEV | MINISTER OF PUBLIC SECURITY, ISRAEL

The national cabinet has decided today Australia will reopen our borders to all remaining visa holders February 21 of this year



SCOTT MORRISON | PRIME MINISTER, AUSTRALIA

Iran has so far received no proposed text from the US in the Vienna talks on the restoration of a 2015 nuclear deal



HOSSEIN AMIR-ABDOLLAHIAN | MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, IRAN

SHORT TAKES

Ex-Prez leads in Costa Rica polls

San Jose: Former Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres is leading in the country's presidential election, while a runoff is looming as no clear winner has emerged as of Monday, according to the latest data from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). With 79.96 per cent of the ballots counted, Figueres of the National Liberation Party, who was the country's President from 1994 to 1998, was leading with 27.29 per cent of the votes, Xinhua news agency reported citing figures from the TSE.

Dubai to charge for plastic bags

Dubai: The city-state of Dubai announced Monday it would begin charging a fee on plastic bags used in the sheikhdom, with an aim of outlasting them entirely in two years over environmental concerns. A statement from the government-run Dubai Media Office said a 25-fil (6 cent) charge would start July 1.

Experts to visit Fukushima plant

Tokyo: A team of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency will visit Japan's wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant next week to review plans to begin releasing more than a million tons of treated radioactive water into the sea, a mission the government hopes will assure people of the plant's safety. The team of about 15 experts will meet with government and utility officials during their Feb. 14-18 mission, which includes a visit to the Fukushima Daiichi plant, industry ministry officials said Monday.

13 killed in bus mishap

Jakarta: Thirteen people were killed and eight others wounded in a bus accident in Indonesia's Yogyakarta province, Spokesman for the National Search and Rescue Office, Yusuf Latief told Xinhua over phone. The accident occurred Sunday in Bantul district at about 13:00 local time (0600 GMT), and all the victims were rushed to three nearby hospitals, the Spokesman said.

Immigrants rescued

Tunis: The Tunisian Maritime Guard rescued 163 illegal immigrants off the country's eastern coast, the Tunisian Ministry of Defense has announced. The illegal immigrants were rescued from a sinking boat off the town of El Louza in the province of Sfax Saturday evening, according to a statement.



The Falklands are part of the British family and we will defend their right to self determination. China must respect the Falklands' sovereignty

LIZ TRUSS | FOREIGN SECRETARY, UK

SHOCKING REVELATION
Pakistan's current crippling economic condition is taking a major toll on the educated youth, of which more than 31 per cent are unemployed and are unsure about the future opportunities amid the deteriorating situation, a new report has revealed



Ukraine crisis talks move to Moscow & Washington

The buildup of an estimated 100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine has fueled Western worries of a possible offensive

AGENCIES

Moscow, Feb 7: International efforts to defuse the standoff over Ukraine intensified Monday, with French President Emmanuel Macron holding talks in Moscow and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Washington to coordinate policies as fears of a Russian invasion mounted.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan warned Sunday that Russia could invade Ukraine "any day" triggering a conflict that would come at an "enormous human cost."

Russia has denied any plans to attack its neighbour but demands that the US and its allies bar Ukraine and other former Soviet nations from joining NATO, halt weapons deployments there and roll back NATO forces from Eastern Europe. Washington and NATO reject those demands.

French President Emmanuel Macron, told Russian President Vladimir Putin at the start of talks in the Kremlin today that he aimed to avoid war and build trust. "I'm happy to have this opportunity to have a deep discussion on all these issues... And to start building an effective response," he added.

Putin, in turn, hailed France's role in shaping European security and noted that his talks came on a day when the countries signed a friendship treaty 30 years ago.

"I realise that we share concern about what's going on in Europe in the security sphere," Putin told Macron, adding that he appreciates his efforts to help ensure "an equal security in Europe" and broker a settlement to the Ukrainian crisis.

Macron, who heads Tuesday to Ukraine, spoke by phone Sunday with US President Joe Biden on "ongoing diplomatic and deterrence efforts," according to the White House. Before the meeting, Macron said: "I don't believe in spontaneous miracles." Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, described the visit as "very impor-



Russian President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron in Moscow, Russia

Emmanuel Macron called for de-escalation as he sat down for talks with Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin

Amid tensions presidential advisers from the four countries met in Paris January 26

The security and sovereignty of Ukraine or any other European state cannot be a subject for compromise, while it is also legitimate for Russia to pose the question of its own security

EMMANUEL MACRON | FRENCH PRESIDENT

tant," but sought to temper expectations, saying "the situation is too complex to expect a decisive breakthrough after just one meeting." Continuing the high-level diplomacy, Scholz is to meet with Biden later Monday in Washington before travelling to Kyiv and Moscow February 14-15.

Sullivan, the national security adviser, reiterated Sunday that the Russian Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany "will not move forward" if Russia attacks Ukraine.

Biden and Scholz are expected to address the pipeline during their first face-to-face meeting since Scholz became the head of the German government nearly two months ago.

Ahead of the visit, the White House sought to play down Germany's refusal to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine, bolster its troops in Eastern Europe or spell out which sanctions it would support against Russia — a cautious stand that has drawn criticism abroad and inside Germany.

White House officials, who briefed reporters ahead of the

meeting on the condition of anonymity, noted that Germany has been a top contributor of non-military aid to Ukraine and has been supportive of the US decision to bolster its troop presence in Poland and Romania to demonstrate its commitment to NATO.

German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht said Monday it will add up to 350 troops within a few days to about 500 already a part of a NATO battle group in Lithuania. "With this, we are strengthening our contribution to forces on NATO's eastern flank and sending a very clear signal of unity to our allies," she said. Britain said it was sending 350 troops to Poland to bolster NATO forces, joining 100 Royal Engineers already there.

Biden already has deployed additional US Troops to Poland, Romania and Germany, and a few dozen elite US troops and equipment landed Sunday in southeastern Poland near the border with Ukraine, with hundreds more infantry troops of the 82nd Airborne Division set to arrive.

Israel police used Pegasus to hack phones: Report

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Jerusalem, Feb 7: Police used Pegasus spyware to hack phones of dozens of prominent Israelis, including a son of former premier Benjamin Netanyahu, activists and senior government officials, an Israeli newspaper reported Monday.

The bombshell revelation is the latest from the business daily Calcalist, which had previously reported that police used Pegasus without court authorisation against leaders of an anti-Netanyahu protest movement.

Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai said that "following the recent publications" he had asked Public Security Minister Omer Barlev to establish "an external and independent commission of inquiry, headed by a judge," to probe the allegations.

"To the extent that the commission finds irregularities and failures, they will be dealt with in accordance with the law," Shabtai said in a statement.



Pegasus is a malware product made by the Israeli firm NSO at the centre of a months-long international scandal following revelations that it was used by governments worldwide to spy on activists, politicians, journalists and even heads of state. Israel had come under fire for allowing the export of the invasive technology to states with poor human rights records, but the Calcalist revelations have triggered a domestic scandal and multiple state investigations.

Prior to Monday's report, the attorney general, state comptroller and the justice ministry's privacy watchdog have all announced probes into the potential use of Pegasus on Israelis.

In its latest report, Calcalist said dozens of people were targeted who were not suspected of any criminal conduct, and without police receiving the necessary court approval.

Move to field Galwan soldier as torchbearer met standards: China

DUBBING THE CHINESE ACTION REGRETTABLE, INDIA BOYCOTTED THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WINTER OLYMPICS FRIDAY, AND DECLARED IT WILL NOT ATTEND THE CLOSING CEREMONIES OF THE GAMES



AGENCIES

Beijing, Feb 7: Amid widespread criticism over its move to field a PLA soldier involved in the border clash with Indian soldiers at the Galwan Valley in 2020 as a torchbearer for the Winter Olympics, China said Monday that his selection met the "standards" to pick up participants for the event and it should be viewed in an "objective and rational light".

China in a provocative move fielded Qi Fabao, the regimental commander of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), who was injured during the June 2020 clash in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh, as a torchbearer for the Olympics Games Torch Relay, which led India to diplomatically boycott the opening ceremony of the games Friday.

In New Delhi, External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had described the Chinese action of honouring the commander as "regrettable".

Top US lawmakers have also described the Chinese move as "shameful" and "deliberately provocative". 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.

Asked at a media briefing here Monday whether fielding Qi in the torch relay went against China's view that Olympics should build bridges, Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said, "I want to stress that the torch bearers of the Beijing Winter Olympics are broadly representative and they meet relevant standards".

"We hope relevant sides can view it in an objective and rational light," he said. To a follow-up question whether the move ignored India's sensitivities, Zhao said, "what I want to say is the relevant sides can view the choice of the torch bearers in objective and rational light and don't read too much into it from a political perspective".

On Thursday, MEA spokesperson Bagchi said that China has chosen to "politicise" an event like the Olympics and that the Charge d'Affaires of the Indian embassy in Beijing will not be attending the opening and the closing ceremonies of the Beijing Winter Games.

Twenty Indian Army personnel laid down their lives in the Galwan clashes that marked the most serious military conflicts between India and China in decades.

SL: 56 Indian fishermen to be moved to detention centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Colombo, Feb 7: The 56 Indian fishermen, released by a Sri Lankan court in the northern Jaffna peninsula last month, will be shifted to an immigration detention center here Monday after completing their Covid quarantine period, the prison authorities said.

Prison Superintendent and Spokesman Chandana Ekanayake told PTI Sunday that the Indian fishermen have spent the isolation period in the prison-run Covid-19 quarantine centre in Iyakkachchi in the Northern province since their release January 25. "Some of them were found Covid positive,

A court January 25 ordered the release of 56 Indian fishermen who were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy

now their quarantine period has ended," Ekanayake said, adding that they would be moved to an immigration detention center in Colombo Monday. A court January 25 ordered the release of 56 Indian fishermen who were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters in mid-December in the seas south of Mannar.

BUSHFIRES RAGE IN AUSTRALIA

AGENCIES

Canberra, Feb 7: Multiple bushfires continued to rage in the state of Western Australia (WA) Monday with more emergency warnings issued.

The fires have threatened several towns in the state in the past few days, with residents from some areas, including the small railway town of Hester, being warned to leave before it was too late, reports Xinhua news agency.

All residents within 500 metres of Timber Treathers in Hester are to evacuate immediately due to toxic materials being dispersed by wind. The state's Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) said Monday that Hester



is no longer under direct threat from the bushfire, but it remains in the emergency area along with many other newly-reported dangerous fires.

The latest warnings were also placed for residents from the state's southwest Shire of

FOREST FIRE RAGES ACROSS KENYA PARK

Forest rangers and volunteers battled flames and strong winds on Sunday to stop a fierce fire raging across Kenya's Aberdare national park for nearly 24 hours. The blaze broke out Saturday night, according to an official working for Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the government body in charge of national parks, who said the fire was "moving very fast".

"You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. There is a threat to lives and homes," the DFES said.

PHILIPPINES ELECTION

LATE DICTATOR'S SON AIMS TO RESTORE FAMILY PRIDE

REUTERS

Manila, Feb 7: As frontrunner in the Philippines' presidential race, the son of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos appears poised to complete a remarkable rebranding of the family name 36 years after a "people power" uprising ended his father's autocratic rule.

With official campaigning beginning Tuesday, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., 64, holds a double-digit lead in the polls, three months ahead of the May 9 elections. His push for the presidency has been aided by what political analysts say has been a decades-long public relations effort to alter public perception of his family and supporters. Critics accuse the Marcoses of attempting to rewrite history.

"What we are witnessing right now is nothing short of a counter-

revolution," said Richard Heydarian, an author and academic who specialises in politics.

Since the family's return from exile in the 1990s, Marcos has served as governor and congressman of the northern Ilocos Norte province, his father's bailiwick, before winning a seat in the Senate in 2010.

His sister is a senator and a former governor and former congresswoman, and his mother, Imelda, who ran unsuccessfully for president in 1992, was elected to Congress for four terms.

The return of a Marcos to Malacanang, the presidential palace, is unthinkable for millions of Filipinos, but over half the country's more than 60 million voters are 40 or under, and did not live through the Marcos regime and its oppression and plunder. Ferdinand Marcos Sr., with



Former senator Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos Jr and son of late former dictator Ferdinand Marcos is greeted by his supporters upon his arrival at the Supreme Court in metro Manila, Philippines April 17, 2017

Imelda by his side, was president for nearly two decades, ruling as a

that has become renowned around the world. Marcos Sr. and Imelda, known for her vast collection of artwork, jewellery and shoes, were accused of amassing more than \$10 billion while he was in office.

During his rule, 70,000 people were imprisoned, 34,000 were tortured, and 3,240 were killed, according to Amnesty International.

More than 11,100 victims of human rights abuses during the Marcos regime were paid compensation using millions from Marcos Swiss bank accounts, part of the family's ill-gotten wealth recovered by the government.

Among them was Loretta Ann Rosales, a political activist who was tortured and sexually abused during the Marcos regime and is now one of several complainants seeking to bar Marcos Jr. from the presidential race.

"We thought we had gotten rid of the Marcoses," said Rosales, who is also a former chairperson of the human rights commission. "I want him disqualified."

LACK LEADERSHIP: Marcos Jr. has questioned the Amnesty data and rejected long-standing narratives of oppression and failed government in his father's rule. He and his family have shunned questions about past atrocities and instead touted what their supporters claim as a 'golden age'.

The younger Marcos, also known as Bongbong, did not comment for this story. He has in the past spoken highly of his father, calling him his "idol", while expressing admiration for his "style of work", his qualities as a strong leader, and his "love for the Filipino" people, traits he said he has inherited.



India's dependence on imports for meeting thermal coal demand has sharply reduced. In FY23, this demand shall be met from CIL, SCCL and coal production from captive coal blocks
PRALHAD JOSHI | COAL MINISTER

'WORK FROM ANYWHERE'

Meesho, an e-commerce firm backed by SoftBank and Facebook, Monday said it will permanently allow all its employees to work from home, office or any location of their choice. "We have studied multiple future work models to arrive at this novel boundaryless approach. In the future, this will also give talent across the globe an opportunity to build for Bharat with Meesho," Meesho Chief HR Officer Ashish Kumar Singh said



of the day quote

The hospitality sector is likely to recover well in 2022 even as uncertainty around different Covid variants and waves continue



JAIDEEP DANG | MD OF HOTELS AND HOSPITALITY GROUP, JLL

India is witnessing increasing digitization with people getting greater and easier access to financial services. This has led to a shift in consumers' financial behaviour -- from cash to e-wallets and UPI



RAJIV KUMAR | VICE CHAIRMAN, NITI AAYOG

We plan to further increase our volumes and footprint in overseas markets, especially SAARC, GCC and Africa. Exports have been a strong focus for us to de-risk from cyclical in the Indian market



AMANDEEP SINGH | HEAD OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, ASHOK LEYLAND

India led Asia-Pacific in fintech investments

THE 2021 FIGURE ALSO REPRESENTED A 74 PER CENT JUMP FROM 2019'S PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS

New Delhi, Feb 7: India extended its lead in the fintech investments in the Asia-Pacific region with \$5.94 billion raised across 236 deals in 2021, a new report showed Monday. The country also attracted the most funding in 2020, with \$1.50 billion raised across 118 deals. According to the 'APAC Fintech Funding Report' published by S&P Global Market Intelligence, venture capital in-

vestments in Asia-Pacific-based fintechs surged to a record high of \$15.69 billion in 2021, more than double the prior year's figure of \$5.87 billion. Notably, India-based payment intermediaries that enable online and offline merchants to accept various payment methods were the top three fundraisers in 2021, with each firm completing multiple funding rounds during the year. Pine Labs raised \$700 million across two fundraises, Razorpay



Software drew in \$535 million from three investment rounds, and Resilient Innovations, which operates as BharatPe, completed two equity rounds totaling \$477 million.

Payment companies drew in the largest sum, accounting for 45 per cent of the aggregate transaction value in 2021

Fintechs in Asia-Pacific sealed 754 deals in 2021, up 81 per cent and 49 per cent from 2020 and 2019, respectively. Fintech startups in Southeast Asia netted \$4.7 billion

across 217 transactions, up from \$1.13 billion across 118 deals in the prior year, the findings showed. In 2022, private markets will continue to be a crucial source of financing for fintechs as looming interest rate hikes and ensuing stock market volatility cloud the outlook for IPOs. "While we believe that venture capitalists are likely to remain invested in the fintech space, the uncertain market conditions may nudge them toward mature fintechs," it added.

India seeks reasonable oil prices, says minister

India is 85% dependent on imports to meet its oil needs and domestic petrol and diesel prices are linked to international oil rates

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: As international oil prices near \$93 per barrel for the first time in 7 years, India Monday said it strongly prefers responsible and reasonable pricing and has conveyed serious concerns over crude oil price volatility.

"There have been major fluctuations in international prices of crude oil and petroleum products in recent few months," Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Rameswar Telu said in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha.

India is 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs and domestic petrol and diesel prices are linked to international oil rates. But for the last over three months, despite a spurt in international oil prices, petrol and diesel prices have not been changed ahead of elections in crucial states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

"The Government has been taking up the issue, bilaterally with crude oil-producing countries with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and with heads of other international fora to convey India's serious concerns over crude oil price volatility, and India's strong preference for

Government has been taking up the issue, bilaterally with crude oil-producing countries, with OPEC and with heads of other international fora to convey India's serious concerns over crude oil price volatility

RAMESWAR TELU | MINISTER OF STATE FOR PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS



International oil prices near \$93 per barrel for the first time in 7 years

International prices of petrol considered in pricing in the country have risen from \$79.55 per barrel in December 2021 to \$102.40 January 2022

International prices of diesel considered in pricing in the country have risen from \$78.48 per barrel to \$104.62 in the same period

Oil Min Hardeep Singh Puri said the basket of crude oil India buys has risen from \$71.32 as of December 2021 to \$89.41 in January

responsible and reasonable pricing for consumer countries," Telu said.

To a separate question, Telu said prices of petrol and diesel are market-determined with effect from June 26, 2010, and October 19, 2014, respectively. "Since then, the public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) have been taking appropriate decision on pricing of petrol and diesel on the basis of international product prices and other market conditions," he said.

He said the World Oil Outlook 2021, the flagship publication by

OPEC, has projected that the oil demand in India is expected to reach around 11 million barrels per day by 2045 as compared to approximately 4.9 million barrels per day in 2021.

"Government is taking various steps to provide for the energy security including Tamil Nadu, through, inter alia, increasing domestic production of oil and gas in all states, diversifying import sources to new countries and regions; and diversifying energy sources beyond traditional hydrocarbons to emerging fuels like ethanol, compressed biogas, hydrogen etc," he said.

'Time ripe for reverse repo hike'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 7: Citing the massive spike in credit growth during the first half and the steeper fall in deposits and the resultant rise in term money rates, coupled with the record high borrowings, an SBI report has called for a 20 bps increase in reverse repo rate outside the MPC ambit so that the central bank find buyers for the flooding new debt papers.

The budget 2023 has pegged the



Centre's gross borrowing at a record Rs 14.3 lakh crore and for the FY22 at Rs 10.5 lakh crore, lower than Rs 13.5 lakh crore this fiscal, while together with the states, the gross borrowing will be Rs 23.3 lakh crore and net will be Rs 17.8 lakh crore. The budget seeks to pay back Rs 3.1 lakh crore next fiscal, up from Rs 2.7 lakh crore this fiscal.

Given this and the rising interest scenario elsewhere and along with the fact the budget did not speak about the government bond inclusion into global bond indices, Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser at SBI, feels that the RBI cannot but hike the repo rate by 20 bps outside the MPC meeting because rising deposit rates means lending rates will also have to go up else banks will have to cut into their margins.

Sensex nosedives 1,024 pts; PSUs gain

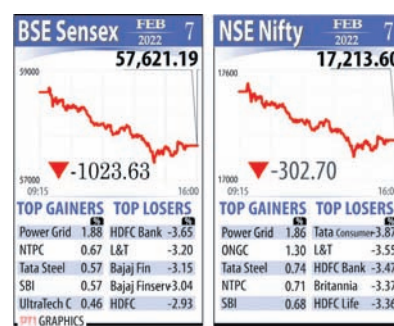
INVESTORS' WEALTH TUMBLED BY OVER ₹5.82 LAKH CRORE IN THREE DAYS OF MARKET DECLINE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Feb 7: Equity benchmark Sensex crashed 1,024 points to end below the 58,000-level Monday as investors fretted over policy tightening by central banks amid elevated inflation. Unabated foreign fund outflows added to the gloom, traders said.

Declining for the third straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex plummeted 1,023.63 points or 1.75 per cent to finish at 57,621.19. Similarly NSE Nifty slumped 302.70 points or 1.73 per cent to 17,213.60.

The Sensex has now shed 1,937.14 points in three sessions, with the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms plunging by over Rs 5.82 lakh



TOP REASONS

- Financial, private bank stocks weigh
- IT stocks continue to be under pressure
- Weak cues from global markets
- Concern over rate hike by US Federal Reserve
- RBI's bi-monthly monetary policy in focus

crore during the period. HDFC Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack in Monday's session, tumbling 3.65 per cent, followed by L&T, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC, Kotak Bank and Wipro. Only five counters managed to

close in the green - PowerGrid, NTPC, Tata Steel, SBI and Ultratech Cement, climbing up to 1.88 per cent. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Sunday announced postponing the meeting of the rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee (MPC)

by a day in view of Maharashtra declaring a public holiday February 7 to mourn the death of legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar.

The MPC meeting was scheduled for February 7-9. With the postponement, the policy meeting will now begin Feb 8 and the outcome would be announced Thursday. The BSE midcap and smallcap gauges skidded up to 1.25 per cent. Global equities were mixed after strong US jobs report raised concerns over faster rate hikes by the Federal Reserve.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Tokyo and Seoul ended with losses, while HK and Shanghai were positive. Bourses in Europe were trading with gains in mid-session deals.

Irregular sales worth billions fire up wild NFT market

SEVERAL BIG COMPANIES, FROM COCA-COLA TO GUCCI, ARE TESTING THE TEMPERATURE WITH THEIR OWN NFTS

REUTERS

New Delhi, Feb 7: On January 12, an image of a computer-generated pixelated person was sold for about \$50.6 million worth of cryptocurrency on a new online marketplace that caters for non-fungible tokens (NFTs). It gets stranger.

Five minutes later, the same "Meebit" NFT - a virtual character clad in purple shorts and green sneakers - was sold back from the buyer to the original seller for

around \$49.6 million. Confused? Welcome to the weird and wild world of NFTs, a new breed of crypto assets that represent digital items, from images and videos to clothing for avatars. They have exploded in popularity over the past year as part of a fledgling and largely unregulated economy for the much-hyped metaverse.

The Meebit, which can be used as a profile picture, was exchanged between two cryptocurrency wallets - which are anonymous. Although the underlying blockchain technology creates a public record when an NFT is sold, it doesn't record the names of those involved. A person can own multiple wallets, acting as both buyer and seller in a trade.

The digital character was among dozens of NFTs on the LooksRare marketplace that were



There is a lot of activity happening between a couple of wallets - let's say wallet one selling to wallet two, and then wallet two reselling it. It's quite likely that this is not real demand, that these trades are not organic

MODESTA MASOIT | DAPPRADAR'S FINANCE AND RESEARCH DIRECTOR

sold back and forth between a small number of wallets in quick succession for unusually high

prices last month, according to a Reuters review of publicly available blockchain records.

NEXT BIG THING?

The NFT industry attracted \$25 billion worth of sales volume in 2021. In the art world, just over \$1 in every \$20 of revenue at top auction houses last year came from NFTs. Such transactions are not illegal in this nascent industry because there are no equivalent rules governing NFTs.

Authorities worldwide are worried that the rise of crypto assets more broadly could undermine financial systems, promote crime and harm investors

Since Jan 11, for example, another Meebit NFT - this one with a sporty outfit and ponytail - has been passed between three wallets in over 100 sales, mostly in the \$3-15 million range. In the week of Jan 12-19, a "Loot" bag NFT, representing virtual equipment for online adventure games, was exchanged across 75 sales between two other wallets, for \$30,000-\$800,000 a time.

The activity has helped LooksRare generate at least \$10.8 billion in trading volume since it

launched in early January, according to data provided by market tracker DappRadar.

The top 27 most expensive recorded sales across the whole NFT industry in January, totalling \$1.3 billion, came from just two wallets transacting on LooksRare, according to DappRadar data as of Jan 31, while the top 100 sales, worth \$2.3 billion, came from 16 wallets trading on the platform. LooksRare describes itself as "the community-first NFT marketplace with rewards for participating".

MESSI ENDS GOAL DROUGHT

10-man Barca thrash Atletico



Ben Arfa, who had an unhappy two-year spell at PSG from 2016-18, made a lively debut for Lille after joining the 10th club of his fluctuating career.

Central defender Sven Botman equalized in the 27th, turning in a cross following Ben Arfa's superb run down the left. Ben Arfa showed great skill skating past Angel Di Maria, despite having little space, then flicking the ball while off-balance to the waiting Botman. It was a belated reminder of the 34-year-old Ben Arfa's exquisite yet perhaps wasted talent.

Grbic then made another inexplicable error as he failed to move for a corner, clumsily letting it drift over him as center back Presnel Kimpembe scored from close range. He was not at fault on PSG's third goal, yet his defense was. It failed to clear the ball and allowed it to land at the feet of Messi.

The Argentina star showed his trademark skill to dink it over Grbic. Messi hit the crossbar with a free-kick on the stroke of halftime.

Pereira's deflected strike fortuitously flew past Grbic in the 50th, but there was nothing lucky about Kylian Mbappe's superb curler from 20 meters midway through the second half.

Earlier, Nice missed its chance to take second place and the automatic Champions League spot when it lost 1-0 at home to struggling Clermont. Winger Elbasan Rashani scored for promoted Clermont in the 77th minute as Nice stayed one point behind second-place Marseille.

In other matches Sunday, coach Julien Stephan's Strasbourg continued its fine form by beating Nantes 1-0 at home to move into fourth spot and a Europa League place. Veteran midfielder Dimitri Lienard netted in the 73rd.

Stephan's former side Rennes remains one back in fifth after winning 2-0 at home to Brest, with striker Gaetan Laborde and winger Martin Terrier grabbing their 11th league goals.

Reims routed Bordeaux 5-0, while the game between Troyes and Metz ended at 0-0. Also, Lorient beat Lens 2-0.



MEMORABLE OUTING: Barcelona scorers (from R) Ronald Araujo, Dani Alves and Gavi joins Jordi Alba for celebration after the left-back levels the score against Atletico Madrid, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madrid, Feb 7: Barcelona showed why it shouldn't be discarded just yet as a threat in Spanish football. The Catalan club beat Atlético Madrid 4-2 in the Spanish league to end a five-game winless run against Diego Simeone's team Sunday.

Barcelona overtook Atlético to move to fourth and is back in the Champions League qualification places for the first time since the third round. Real Madrid later increased its gap at the top over Sevilla to six points by beating Granada 1-0 at home.

Barcelona played well to take a big lead before hanging tough while playing more than 20 minutes with a man down. Xavi Hernández's team conceded early but rallied to a 4-1 lead before Atlético threatened to get back into the game in the second half.

Luis Suárez — playing in front of Barcelona fans at the Camp Nou Stadium for the first time since joining Atlético — pulled the visitors closer in the 58th, then Dani Alves was sent off with a straight red card in the 69th after video review saw him stepping on Yannick Carrasco's leg

from behind.

Barcelona hadn't beaten Atlético since a league match in December 2019. It had gone 11 consecutive matches without defeating either Atlético or Real Madrid in any competition.

Atlético hasn't beaten Barcelona at the Camp Nou since 2006. Simone's team paid the price for a dreadful performance by its defense. It was coming off a league win over Valencia but had lost its previous three matches in all competitions. Atlético's defense usually ranks top in the league but it entered the weekend as the 11th-best in goals conceded.

Barcelona came into the game one point behind Atlético in the standings. It trails third-place Real Betis by two points and second-place Sevilla by nine points. Barcelona is 15 points behind Madrid with a game in hand.

It was Atlético that got on the board first after Suárez set up Carrasco's shot from inside the area in the eighth minute. Barcelona equalised two minutes later with a superb volley from Jordi Alba from one of the corners of the area following a pass by Alves.

Gavi Páez put the hosts ahead with a header in the 21st after a cross by Adama Traoré, and Araújo added to the lead from close range off the rebound of Gerard Piqué's header that hit the crossbar.

Alves scored his first goal since returning to Barcelona with a low strike from inside the area in the 49th before Suárez pulled Atlético closer with a header about 10 minutes later. Suárez didn't celebrate after the goal and gestured to Barcelona fans for forgiveness by putting his hands together.

Forward Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, signed at the end of the transfer window, replaced Traoré in the 61st.

REAL STRUGGLE
Real Madrid had a hard time against relegation-threatened Granada, with Marco Asensio scoring the winner in the 74th. Madrid had been winless in its last two matches, being eliminated by Athletic Bilbao in the quarterfinals of the Copa del Rey and held by Elche to a draw at home in the league. Carlo Ancelotti's team was without Karim Benzema and Vinícius Júnior, its top two forwards this season.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris, Feb 7: Lionel Messi had one of his best games for Paris Saint-Germain as the runaway leader profited from bad goalkeeping to win 5-1 at defending champion Lille and move 13 points clear in the French league.

while the third was well taken by the record seven-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi in the 37th minute for only his second league goal since joining from Barcelona. Lille caused PSG problems but defended poorly. PSG drew and lost to Lille last season without scoring a goal. Lille conceded only 23 goals during that victorious campaign, but stand-

out goalkeeper Mike Maignan's departure to AC Milan has proved costly and Lille has already allowed 35.

The difference was evident when Lille goalkeeper Ivo Grbic made an awful blunder in the 10th, spilling a routine cross from the left into the path of Danilo Pereira for a tap-in. Former France winger Hatem

Odisha FC keep semifinal hopes alive with SCEB win



PNN & ISL

Goa, Feb 7: Odisha FC fended off a strong challenge from SC East Bengal (SCEB) to record a 2-1 win in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the Tilak Maidan Stadium. The result keeps the outfit in the hunt for the top-four places by elevating them to sixth place.

Jonathas (23rd minute) gave the Kalinga Warriors an early lead that lasted until Antonio Perosevic (64th) scored the equaliser in the

second half. Javier Hernandez (75th) regained the lead for OFC with a precise finish which proved to be the winner in the end.

In the early stages of the match, Odisha FC piled a lot of pressure and was finally rewarded with an early goal from Jonathas. The cross for the goal was provided by Hernandez who made room on the right flank and served the ball on a platter for the striker who tapped in from close range.

The best chance to score the equaliser fell to Perosevic two minutes before the hour mark. A long ball from deep saw the forward find room behind the defensive line but his volley had too much elevation. However, the Croatian made no mistake from a similar opportunity a few minutes later and scored the equaliser with a low finish into the bottom right corner.

Nevertheless, Odisha regained the lead 10 minutes later through Hernandez. The midfielder received a lay-off from Jonathas who turned from scorer to provider. The right-footed shot from the Spaniard took a slight deflection before swerving into the back of the net.

Debutants' day out for Juve



MAKING STATEMENTS: Juventus' goal scorers Dusan Vlahovic (L) and Denis Zakaria wheel away in celebration after the latter's strike, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Venice, Feb 7: Dusan Vlahovic made a dream debut for Juventus, scoring the opening goal in a 2-0 win over Verona in the Italian league. Juventus moved to fourth in the standings with 45 points, Verona is ninth with 33.

The coveted striker completed a 70-million-euro (USD 80-million)

transfer from Fiorentina January 28 on his 22nd birthday. At his new club, he wears the No.7 shirt vacated by Ronaldo.

Vlahovic, a Serbia international, scored with a clinical finish, lobbing onrushing Verona goalkeeper Lorenzo Montipo in the 13th minute. He's joint top of the Serie A scoring charts, along with Lazio's Ciro Immobile with 18 goals.

Another new signing for Juventus, Switzerland midfielder Denis Zakaria, who joined from Bundesliga's Borussia Mönchengladbach, doubled the lead with a low shot past Montipo in the second half. Wearing a protective mask, striker Victor Osimhen scored on his first start since November as Napoli beat 10-man Venezia 2-0 to move level on points with second-place AC Milan.

Napoli and Milan trail Serie A leader Inter Milan by one point after Milan rallied late to beat their city rival 2-1 Saturday. Inter has a game in hand.

The 23-year-old Osimhen, who suffered a serious injury in a clash of heads with Inter's Milan Skriniar in November, headed in the opening goal in the 58th minute. It was the sixth Serie A goal for the Nigeria international this season and 10th in all competitions. He returned to the squad from injury last month.

In a lively finish, defender Tyrone Ebuehi received a straight red card following a VAR review for a high tackle on Dries Mertens five minutes into stoppage time before substitute Andrea Petagna made it 2-0 another five minutes later.

Mane's Senegal beat Salah's Egypt for title



Sadio Mane poses with the African Cup trophy, Sunday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Yaounde (Cameroon), Feb 7: Sadio Mane finally delivered a first African Cup for Senegal, and Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah could do nothing about it but stand and watch.

Mane drilled the decisive penalty in a shootout into the bottom left corner to beat Salah and Egypt in Sunday's final in Cameroon and make up for missing a penalty early in the game.

Senegal won the shootout 4-2 after it ended 0-0 after extra time. Salah, who was supposed to be his team's final penalty taker, didn't get a say in the shootout after two of his teammates missed.

Senegal had lost two finals previously including against Algeria at the last African Cup of Nations in Egypt in 2019, when Mane was left inconsolable.

This time Mane provided the winning moment. He raced off to joyously celebrate with teammates but also returned to spend some time consoling Salah, who was in tears.

The final at the Olembe Stadium in Yaounde was billed as a battle between Liverpool forwards Mane and Salah, who were both searching for their first major title with their country.

But it never reached the heights of a classic despite the presence of



Mane consoles his Liverpool teammate Mo Salah after the match

the two superstars. That was even after the final started with drama when Senegal won a penalty inside the opening five minutes for Mohamed Abdelmonem's foul on Saliou Ciss.

When it became clear that Mane was going to take it, Salah went over to goalkeeper Mohamed Abou Gabal to give him some advice while covering his mouth with his hand. That appeared to irritate Mane, who interrupted their conversation and pointed with his hand toward the right corner of the goal.

In the end, Mane blasted the seventh-minute penalty straight down the middle and Abou Gabal blocked it. Senegal continued in that vein to miss a series of other chances, with Abou Gabal starring as Egypt's last line.

All three of Egypt's knockout games before the final also went to extra time, and two of them to penalties, and Egypt seemed to be playing for another shootout in a bid to win a record-extending eighth African title.

But Mohamad Lasheen had Egypt's fourth penalty saved by Mendy, leaving Mane to win it and Salah to drop his head and start wiping away tears with his shirt. Salah has now lost two African Cup finals after Egypt couldn't hold onto a 1-0 lead and lost 1-2 to Cameroon in 2017.

Peng gives controlled interview at Winter Games

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Beijing, Feb 7: Nothing to see here, move on. That was the message that Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai delivered Monday in a controlled interview in Beijing that touched on sexual assault allegations she made against a former high-ranking member of China's ruling Communist Party.

Her answers — delivered in front of a Chinese Olympic official — left unanswered questions about her well-being and what exactly happened. The interview with French sports newspaper L'Equipe and an announcement that International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach met Peng for dinner this weekend seemed aimed at defusing sustained international concerns about the three-time Olympian and former No.1-ranked tennis doubles player. Those concerns have threatened to overshadow the Winter Olympics underway in Beijing.

Peng told L'Equipe that the concerns were the result of "an enormous misunderstanding." But the format of the interview appeared to allow for no sustained follow-ups, with questions submitted in advance and a Chinese Olympic committee official sitting in on the discussion, translating Peng's comments from Chinese.

Large parts of the hour-long interview, conducted Sunday in a Beijing hotel and organized through China's Olympic committee with the IOC's help, focused on Peng's playing career. At age 36, and after multiple knee surgeries, Peng said she couldn't envisage a return to top-level professional tennis.

The newspaper published her comments verbatim — which it said was another pre-condition for the interview — in question-and-answer form. Photos of Peng during the interview showed her wearing a red tracksuit top with "China" in Chinese characters on the front.

L'Equipe asked Peng about sexual assault allegations that sparked the controversy in November. The allegations were quickly scrubbed



from her verified account on a leading Chinese social media platform, Weibo. In her lengthy post, Peng wrote that Zhang Gaoli, a former vice premier and member of the ruling Chinese Communist Party's all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee, had forced her to have sex despite repeated refusals. Her post also said they had sex once seven years ago, and that she developed romantic feel-

ings for him after that.

The interview with L'Equipe was her first sit-down discussion with non-Chinese media since the accusation. She walked back the original post. "Sexual assault? I never said that anyone made me submit to a sexual assault," the newspaper quoted her as saying. "This post resulted in an enormous misunderstanding from the outside world," she also said. "My wish is that the meaning of this post no longer be skewed."

Asked by L'Equipe why the post disappeared from Peng's account, she said: "I erased it." "Why? Because I wanted to," she added.

The obvious follow-up question of why she posted in the first place wasn't asked.

The IOC also worked Monday to defuse the situation. It said Bach dined with Peng Saturday, a day after Chinese President Xi Jinping opened the Winter Olympics. The IOC said Peng also attended the China-Norway Olympic curling match with IOC member Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe.