

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Actor Deepika Padukone's sculpture has been placed at Athens airport as one of 'The Authentic Smiles of People of the World'

LEISURE P2

MATTER OF CONCERN

People with a history of allergic reaction should not have the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, British health officials said

INTERNATIONAL P10

PARTHIV RETIRES

Wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel brings the curtains down on his 18-year career in cricket, Wednesday

SPORTS P12



MSP guarantee? No, thanks

Govt offers written assurance on continuing MSP, other amendments; Farmer unions reject proposal

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 9: As thousands of farmers continue to protest at various borders of the national capital demanding the repeal of three new farm laws, the government Wednesday proposed to give a "written assurance" that the existing Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime for procurement will continue.



to consider with an open heart the objections which farmers have on the new farm laws.

"The government has tried to address the concerns of farmers with an open heart and with respect for the farming community of the country," it said.

The draft proposal has been sent to 13 farm union leaders including Joginder Singh Ugrahan of BKU (Ekta Ugrahan), one of the biggest among nearly 40 agitating unions.

Meanwhile, a delegation of opposition leaders Wednesday met President Ram Nath Kovind and sought repeal of the three farm laws.

The five-member delegation comprised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D Raja and DMK leader TKS Elangovan.

However, the farmers' unions rejected the proposal and said they would intensify their agitation until the government accepts their demand for a complete repeal of the three laws. They said that the agitation would be intensified and have called for a nationwide protest December 14.

The government also proposed to make necessary amendments on at least seven issues.

In a draft proposal sent to 13 agitating farmer unions, the government also said it is ready to provide all necessary clarifications on their concerns about the new farm laws enacted in September, but it did not mention anything about the main demand of protesting farmers for the repeal of the laws.

At a press conference later in the day, farmer leaders said there was nothing new in the government proposal and they will continue their protest.

Separately, Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said at a post-Cabinet media briefing that the government is sensitive to the concerns of farmers as he expressed hope that ongoing deliberations with them, which he termed a "work in progress", over the three agriculture-related laws will yield some results soon.

He said the government has held

several rounds of talks with the farmers agitating against the three legislations and is keen to resolve their issues.

Home Minister Amit Shah in Tuesday night's meeting with 13 union leaders had said the government would send a draft proposal on key issues raised by the farmers regarding the three farm laws, even though the meeting had failed to break the ice with farm union leaders who are insisting for repealing these laws.

The sixth round of talks between the government and farm union leaders, which was scheduled for Wednesday morning, has also been cancelled.

In the proposal, sent by Agriculture Ministry Joint Secretary Vivek Aggarwal, the government said is ready

GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSAL

On farmers' fears that mandis would weaken after the new laws, the government said an amendment can be made wherein state governments can register the traders operating outside mandis

On concerns that farmers may be duped as anyone can trade outside APMC mandis, the government said state governments can be given the power to register such traders

On fears that big corporates will take over farmlands, the



On attaching farmland under contract farming, the government said the existing provision is clear but still it can be clarified further if required

Govt caps school bag weight at 10% of kid's

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 9: School bags should not be more than 10% of the body weight of students across Std I to X and there should be no homework till class II, states 'Policy on School Bag 2020' of the Union Ministry of Education.

They should be lightweight with two padded and adjustable straps that can squarely fit on both shoulders and no wheeled carriers should be allowed. The policy even recommends that the weight of each textbook may come printed on them by the publishers.

The recommendations have been arrived based on various surveys and studies conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

The policy stated that data collected from 3,624 students and 2,992 parents from 352 schools, which include Kendriya Vidyalayas and state government schools were analysed. The 'Policy on School Bag 2020' made 11 recommendations on the weight of the bags, including



A new policy also states that there should be no homework upto Std II and a maximum of 2 hrs per week for Std III to V

adequate good quality mid-day meal and potable water to all the students so that they need not carry lunch boxes or water bottles.

The policy said there should be no bags in pre-primary. Recommending that total study time should be accounted for while planning the syllabus, the policy said while there should be no homework upto class II and a maximum of two hours per week for classes III to V, homework duration for classes VI to VIII should not exceed one hour a day and two hours a day for classes IX and above.

SHORT TAKES

BJP sweeps Raj local body polls

Jaipur: In a major shock to the ruling Congress in Rajasthan, the opposition BJP swept 1,989 seats in the recently-held panchayat samiti elections while the Congress was limited to 1,852 seats. The independents gained 439 seats, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) got five seats, CPI-M captured 26 seats in the elections while RLP got 60 seats, according to the state election commission website. The elections were held to 4,371 seats in 222 panchayat samitis spread over 21 districts. BJP's winning streak continued with panchayat samiti elections too.

3 militants killed in J&K encounter

Srinagar: Three unidentified militants were killed and a civilian injured in an encounter with security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir Wednesday, police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Tikken area of Pulwama district in the early hours of Wednesday following information about presence of militants there, a police official said. He said the search operation turned into an encounter after militants opened fire on the security forces, who retaliated.

Eco Retreat's 2nd edition unveiled

Bhubaneswar: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday inaugurated the second edition of Odisha Tourism's flagship Eco Retreat event at five locations namely Ramchandi beach in Konark, Satkosia, Bhitarkanika, Daringibadi and Hirakud. The event will continue till February 28. On this occasion, video messages of Chief Minister, Union Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel and Union PNG and Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan were displayed at all the locations. It was earlier scheduled for inauguration December 8 but had to be cancelled owing to the nation-wide strike.

'Reserve expired ore blocks for state PSUs'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: To ensure uninterrupted supply of ore to industry, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday urged Centre to reserve some of the expired working mineral blocks to state PSUs like Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC).

Naveen discussed the issue with Union Coal Minister Prahlad Joshi, Union Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and senior officials of the Central government via video conferencing.

During the meeting, he proposed reservation of some of the expired working mineral blocks under provisions of section 17A of the Mines and Mineral Development and Regulation (MMDR) Act.

Odisha has been one of the first states to conduct an auction of mineral blocks. However, there have been some glitches in com-



mencement of mining operations leading to disruptions in production and dispatch, Naveen said. As against a production of 123.8 MT (million tonnes) iron ore in Odisha from January 2019 to November 2019, total production in the same period in current year has been only 98.2MT.

Out of the recently auctioned 24 mines in Odisha only five have been able to start production and dispatch till date.

Odisha supports further mineral sector reforms and streamlining of procedures which will give a boost to the economy, Naveen told the Union ministers.

State throws weight behind farmers

Odisha govt to move Centre demanding implementation of Swaminathan committee recommendations on MSP

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: The State Cabinet Wednesday resolved to move Centre reiterating its demand for implementation of MS Swaminathan Committee's recommendations on Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops and doubling of farmers' income.

Headed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the Cabinet passed a resolution in this regard unanimously. The MS Swaminathan-chaired National Commission on Farmers had recommended that "MSP should be at least 50 per cent more than the weighted average cost of production."

"The state government considers that the MSP is an important tool for income generation of the farmers. The income of farmers needs to keep pace with the growth of income in other sectors and the rise in the costs of cultivation. The MSP



of any agricultural produce has to be fixed in a holistic manner so as to make farming operations profitable and to safeguard the farmers against all types of risks," Parliament Affairs Minister B K Arukha said.

Odisha has been dedicatedly working towards development of farmers and is committed to the doubling of farmers' income, he said, adding, all government policies and programmes, including the new Agricultural Policy 2020—SAMRUDHI, are aimed at achieving rapid agricultural growth through improved profitability, in-

clusivity and sustainability.

The State Assembly had earlier passed unanimous resolutions in this regard in 2017 and again in 2018. The Assembly, in March 2017, had unanimously adopted a resolution recommending the state government to urge the Centre to increase the MSP of common paddy to ₹2930 per quintal. Though the Speaker sought an appointment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in this regard, he is yet to respond.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet also approved tender for construction of a new 100-seat government medical college and teaching hospital at Phulbani and 650 bedded teaching hospital for government medical college at Koraput on turnkey basis. The tender has been awarded to M/s Shapoorji Pallonji and Company Pvt. Ltd at a cost of ₹680 crore. The project has been targeted for completion within a period of three years.

Govt to launch massive Wi-Fi networks soon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: The government has approved a framework for the proliferation of public Wi-Fi networks through PM WANI scheme, Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said Wednesday.

PM Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM WANI) would unleash a massive Wi-Fi revolution in the country, Prasad said.

This would entail a complete framework involving multiple elements—Public Data Office (PDO), Public Data Office Aggregators and app providers.



"No licence, no registration, and no fee would be applicable for the PDOs, which could be small shops or even Common Service Centres," Prasad told reporters after the meeting of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet has also approved the laying of undersea submarine optical fibre cable to provide high-speed broadband to Lakshadweep, he said.

"The Cabinet has approved laying of an undersea optical fibre cable to 11 Lakshadweep Islands to provide high-speed broadband internet connectivity," said Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar.

The Cabinet has approved Atmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana at an expenditure of 1,584 crore for the current financial year and 22,810 crore for the entire Scheme period.

Take care of 'Sundari', MP CM writes to Patnaik

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has written to Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik, urging him to ensure proper care of tigress 'Sundari' till it is shifted to the Kanha Tiger Reserve.

In a detailed letter, Chouhan said, "Until the tiger safari is made ready, the tigress was to be hosted at the Ghorela centre of the Kanha Tiger Reserve. Currently, an orphaned tiger has been conserved and protected at the centre. Hence, Sundari could be accommodated only after the area is free and subject to approvals from experts after the construction of safari." Chouhan said the tigress should be provided with a favourable en-

vironment, required for its overall growth and improvement.

He also said that tiger safaris are being developed in the Kanha Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh National Park and Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh after permission from the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Chouhan urged Patnaik to ensure that the tigress is looked after properly in Odisha's Satkosia

DELAY AFTER DELAY

CURRENTLY, AN ORPHANED TIGER IS BEING PROTECTED AT KANHA TIGER RESERVE. HENCE, SUNDARI COULD BE ACCOMMODATED ONLY AFTER THE AREA IS FREE

CHOUHAN SAID THE TIGRESS SHOULD BE PROVIDED WITH A FAVOURABLE ENVIRONMENT, REQUIRED FOR ITS OVERALL GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT



enclosure till that period.

Due to the long stay in an enclosure against the norms of NTCA, the tigress has lost her wildness, he claimed. "The experts' committee which visited Satkosia and examined 'Sundari' found that she might be a danger to the people residing in nearby areas as well to herself. She needs to be shifted to a bigger enclosure," he said.

Urging the Odisha CM to give the MP government some time for the relocation, Shivraj said, "I would like to request you that until conditions at Kanha Tiger Reserve become favourable for relocation, the tigress should be well protected in favourable conditions and an order into this regard should be passed from your end."

Notably, the Madhya Pradesh government sent a pair of big cats comprising a tiger named 'Mahavir' and tigress 'Sundari' in 2018. While 'Mahavir' was caught in a snare and died, 'Sundari' turned hostile and allegedly killed two persons and a bullock at Baghamunda and Tainsi villages inside the Satkosia reserve area. Then, the tigress was tranquilised in November 2018 and kept in the enclosure at Raiguda in the core area of the Satkosia sanctuary.

The translocation was part of India's maiden experiment of interstate tiger relocation under the joint project of the NTCA, Odisha government and Madhya Pradesh government. The plan was to increase the tiger population at Satkosia.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	46103.50 ↑ 494.99
NIFTY	13529.10 ↑ 136.10
DOLLAR	73.59 ↓ ₹0.02
EURO	89.33 ↑ ₹0.01
GOLD	₹49,542 ↓ ₹567
SILVER	₹64,000 ↓ ₹1192

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	31.2°C	31.6°C
MIN	17.6°C	15.8°C
Humidity	92%	84%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Mainly clear sky

leisure



TURNER MISSES HER LATE SON CRAIG AS MUCH AS EVER

Legendary singer Tina Turner says she misses her son Craig as much as ever. "Craig committed suicide about two years back, but I miss him as much as ever. It wasn't until his sudden death I realised that Craig faced serious mental health challenges," said the singer.

HALLE BERRY DEVASTATED OVER NATALIE DESSELLE REID'S DEATH

Hollywood star Halle Berry is devastated on hearing about the demise of actress Natalie Desselre Reid. Berry had starred with Reid in the 1997 comedy film, B.A.P.S.. She remembered the late actress as someone who always stayed positive.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You are likely to remain careful and watchful today, foretells Ganesha. And because you'll be invited to parties and other social events, your enthusiasm will remain buoyant. You will also strike the right balance between business and pleasure, says Ganesha.

TAURUS
It is more than likely that you will emerge victorious in all your meetings and outings today, predicts Ganesha. Your calm temperament will not let you flinch in the face of pressure. It is in your best interest to take some time to cope with all the stress, advises Ganesha.

GEMINI
You are on your way to falling in love. Your parents or children are likely to fetch you substantial gains, financially or otherwise. You may want to make a few changes at work, probably a new business strategy.

CANCER
Today, you will shift your entire focus on the problems plaguing your personal life, feels Ganesha. Your ability to nip a problem in the bud has helped you to have a good personal life so far. And today, you will have to use your skills to mend the strain in your relationship with your loved ones.

LEO
Even slender shoulders gain the strength when the time comes to handle responsibilities. And so shall you, says Ganesha, as today brings with it an increased amount of responsibility. You may find yourself drained of all your energy by the end of it.

VIRGO
You will charm people with your flexibility of thought and willingness to adjust today. Those under the spell of love will see an unexpected turn of events; but don't panic, as things will eventually work out in your favour. Some quality family time is also on the cards.

LIBRA
Somebody in a position of power at your workplace may decide to pick on you, just for fun. But your luck is strong, and no one but your own thoughts and misgivings can harm you. You shall find it relatively easy to come out of these troubles; much to the chagrin of those who wish otherwise, predicts Ganesha.

SCORPIO
If you have recently started a joint business venture, today you may take your first step towards sealing a profitable deal. However, you should buy some time before signing any contract today; also, be cautious that you do not get the short end of the stick.

SAGITTARIUS
Today, arranging meetings with customers and suppliers will eat into most of your time. Your patience will enable you to listen to suggestions and opinions offered by people. The result of all this, however, is slated to be most favourable and productive.

CAPRICORN
You have always been generous by nature, but your benevolent attitude will do you no good, warns Ganesha. People will try, almost blatantly, to take advantage of you, and for once, you will feel that being crafty and unrelenting would have helped keep those blood-sucking leeches at bay. But as the day progresses, you will thank the Almighty for all the precious things he made you the guardian of.

AQUARIUS
Today, you work hard and party harder! The morning sees you sweating it out at work, as you do your best to implement your plans. In the evening, you will don your best attire and get ready to have a gala time with your beloved. Ganesha says, you receive as much as you give.

PISCES
A highly productive day awaits you. You will be driven to succeed, and filled with energy and enthusiasm to achieve your goals. Meetings with your superiors ought to yield some much anticipated results, says Ganesha.

Odissi exponent gets doctorate degree from foreign varsity

POST NEWS NETWORK

BHUBANESWAR: Acclaimed Odissi dancer Srinibas Ghatuary was honoured with yet another Doctorate Degree and this time from Commonwealth Vocational University (CVU), Kingdom of Tonga November 30. His thesis *Implementation and Dissemination of 108 Karanas in Indian Classical Dance - an analytical study* was highly appreciated by CVU's Vice-Chancellor and Head of the Department, Indian bench.

A popular anchor, Ghatuary received his first Doctorate Degree in Odissi dance from Bangalore University. He was also awarded a D. Litt by Central American University becoming the only Odissi dancer from the state to receive this honour. Eminent singer Sangeeta Gosain, the head of Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre, in her reaction said, "Srinibas' work will reveal various unknown factors of Odissi and help the students as well as the fellow researchers."

Akademi awardee Priyambada Mohanty Hejmadi, also an Odissi exponent, considered Ghatuary a rare talent. "There are many performers in Odissi dance but a very few scholars in the field. Srinibas, a pride of Odissi, is certainly one of them," added Hejmadi.



9th Mumbai International Short Film Festival Period drama Paika Bidroha bags special jury award

NSDIans Manoj Mishra and Samaresh Routray have been portrayed as Jayee Rajguru and legendary Buxi Jagabandhu in the film



Poster of the movie Paika Bidroha

POST NEWS NETWORK

BHUBANESWAR: Akshay Parija Productions' period drama *Paika Bidroha* has won the special jury award at the prestigious 9th Mumbai International Short Film Festival 2020.

Known as the first war of independence in the Indian subcontinent, Paika Bidroha was an armed rebellion against the British East India Company's rule in 1817, much before the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. This film stars NSDIans Manoj Mishra as Jayee Rajguru and Samaresh Routray as the legendary Buxi Jagabandhu. The Paikas were alienated by the British regiment which took over the



IAF raises objection to Anil's AK vs AK

Mumbai: Indian Air Force (IAF) has raised objection to actor Anil Kapoor wearing the wrong uniform and using abusive language in his upcoming film, *AK vs AK*.

The IAF has also urged Netflix to remove the scenes with the discrepancies. "The IAF uniform in this video is inaccurately donned & the language used is inappropriate. This does not conform to the behavioral norms of those in the Armed Forces of India. The related scenes need to be withdrawn. @NetflixIndia @anuragkashyap72 #AKvsAK," read a tweet on the official Twitter handle of IAF.

The tweet was a response to Anil's post where he unveiled the trailer: "No more fooling the audience please. As promised, the REAL narrative of #AKvsAK from the REAL AK," he tweeted while sharing the trailer. In the film, Anil will be seen playing himself, and not an air force officer. As far as the uniform is concerned, *AK vs AK* is a film shot within a film - something which was highlighted in the trailer as well.

The film is directed by Vikramaditya Motwane, and slated to release December 24. Meanwhile, actor Anil Kapoor has apologised for unintentionally hurting IAF's sentiments after the organisation raised objection to certain scenes featuring the actor in his upcoming OTT film, *AK vs AK*.

Deepika's sculpture at Athens airport

Mumbai: Actress Deepika Padukone has been featured at Athens International Airport, in an exhibition of The Authentic Smiles of People of the World.

The Authentic Smiles Campaign was put together when the Athens International Airport resumed welcoming guests after a break due to Covid-19. Her fans in Athens can see the grey marble bust sculpture (inset) of the heroine. It is draped in a saree and is embellished with a choker necklace and a small bindi. The text reads: "Indian

Bollywood Actress smiles at Athens International Airport. Grey Marble, 2020 A.D."

Deepika also has a wax statue at the Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London.

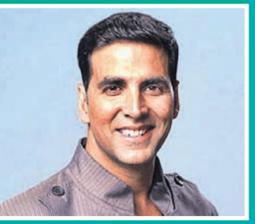
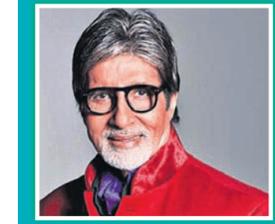
On the work front, she is awaiting the release of '83, and is also working on director Shakun Batra's next film.



Big B, Akshay, Alia among Forbes 100 Most Influential Celebs of Asia

Mumbai: Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Akshay Kumar, Ranveer Singh, Alia Bhatt and Hrithik Roshan feature in the Forbes list of Most Influential Celebrities on Social Media in the Asia-Pacific region. The list also mentions Katrina Kaif, Anushka Sharma, Jacqueline Fernandez, Shahid Kapoor, Madhuri Dixit, besides singers Shreya Ghoshal and Neha Kakkar.

In the inaugural 100 Digital Stars list, Forbes Asia highlights celebrities who, despite cancelled physical events and activities, managed to remain ac-

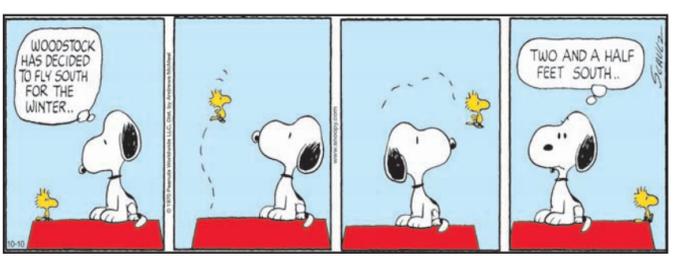


tive using social media to interact with their fans, raise awareness, inspire optimism and even helped causes like Covid-19 relief. The list comes

without any ranking. The list also includes international stars like Hugh Jackman, Chris Hemsworth, South Korean girl band

Blackpink, boy band BTS, actor and singer Jay Chou, Lee Min-ho and actors Mahira Khan, and singers Atif Aslam, Troye Sivan among others.

PEANUTS



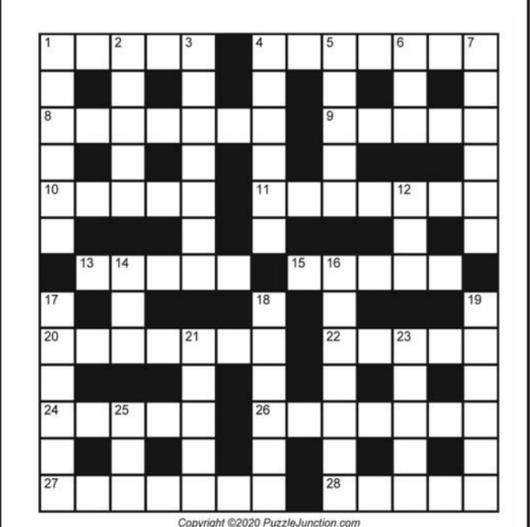
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



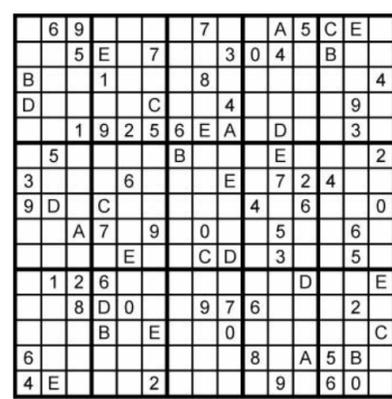
FUN post CROSSWORD



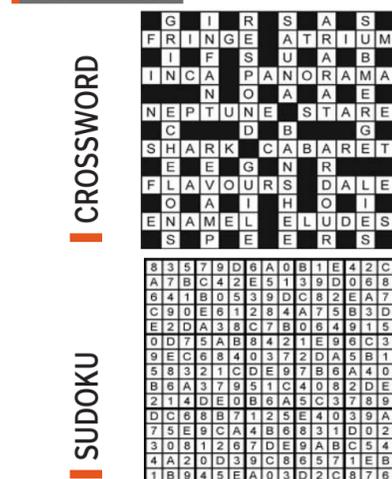
- Across**
- 1 Town square
 - 4 Ghastly
 - 8 Fruit-growing grove
 - 9 Weasel relative
 - 10 Small-minded
 - 11 Fires up
 - 13 Goes for the gold?
 - 15 Elbowroom
 - 20 Word of farewell
 - 22 Museum piece
 - 24 Bouquet
 - 26 Nipper, in Italy
 - 27 King of Israel noted for his wisdom
 - 28 Inhabit
 - Down**
 - 1 Punctual
 - 2 Fancy tie
 - 3 Dissect
 - 4 Spanish capital
 - 5 Circus performer
 - 6 Cricket club
 - 7 Means of escape
 - 12 Personal quirk
 - 14 Swelling reducer
 - 16 Egyptian landmark
 - 17 Leftovers
 - 18 Sweet thing
 - 19 Fish group
 - 21 Domain
 - 23 River of Orleans
 - 25 Furnace fuel

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, each row, column and box must contain the numbers 0 to 9 and the letters A to E.



SOLUTIONS



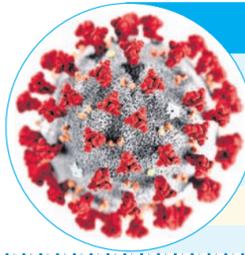
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



COMMUTERS' WOES

A road mishap on Madhupatna overbridge in Cuttack leaves vehicles stranded on the NH-16, Wednesday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	6,88,27,284	4,77,40,196	15,68,621
India	94,99,710	89,31,798	1,38,159
Odisha	3,22,299	3,17,412	1,789

NO YEARLY JOB ADS FROM OPSC NOW



Parliamentary affairs minister BK Arukha briefs the media

Unlike yearly advertisements of vacancies by OPSC, advertisements will be made only when there is a need for recruitment

The Cabinet decided to promulgate a new ordinance to amend the Odisha Professional Educational Institutions (Regulation of Admission and Fixation of Fees) Act 2007

Amendments made to existing cadre Rules, Odisha Engineering Service 2012 to bring in meritorious degree engineers under direct recruitment quota

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: The State Cabinet Wednesday approved several changes in recruitment rules to ensure timely and hassle-free filling of the vacant posts.

It has been decided to amend the Odisha Secretariat Service Rules 2016 to dispense with the existing mandatory provision of annual recruitment process under the rules.

Now, unlike yearly advertisements of vacancies by Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC), advertisements will be made only when recruitment is required. This was related to the appointment of Assistant Section Officers (ASOs) made through competitive exams by the OPSC.

Briefing media persons, Chief Secretary Asit Tripathy said that due to the existing provision, the OPSC has to relax the upper age limit for recruitment of ASOs as it is unable to conduct the examination each year. With this amendment, the Commission will no longer need to relax the age, he said. The Cabinet has also decided to promulgate a new ordinance to amend the Odisha Professional Educational Institutions (Regulation of Admission and Fixation of Fees) Act 2007 to pave way for nomination of a retired Orissa High Court judge by the Chief Justice of Orissa

HC as the Chairman of Fee Structure Committee in place of Vice Chancellor, BPUT.

The ordinance also entrusted the tasks of Industries department secretary to the secretary of Skill Development and Technical Education department.

Further, the Cabinet approved amendments to the existing cadre Rules, Odisha Engineering Service 2012. The new amendments plan to bring in meritorious degree engineers under direct recruitment quota. "It is decided to recruit through the score in Graduate Aptitude test in Engineering (GATE)," Tripathy said.

Govt to clear ₹250 crore power dues

BHUBANESWAR: The State Cabinet Wednesday said that government departments owe a total of Rs 250 crore electricity dues to the distribution companies (discoms) till March 2020 which it has decided to clear to ensure better management of finances.

There is Rs 220.87 crore outstanding energy bills till March 2020 against government consumers towards payment of arrears dues to discoms. Besides that, other charges on the dues are pegged at Rs 29.23 crore.

"Today, the Cabinet has approved the proposal for settlement of pending electricity dues

The panel also gave its stamp of approval to make changes to the Odisha Diploma Engineers' Service Rules 2012 to facilitate the process of making Water Resources department as the nodal department for all the engineering departments.

Drinking water projects for Bargarh

The Cabinet also approved tenders for execution of rural piped water projects in Bargarh district with a total expenditure of Rs 724.06 crore under Basudha scheme launched in 2017.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had assured the people of Bijepur to provide drinking water to them May 31, 2019. Realising the assurance, the Cabinet approved the projects, Parliamentary Affairs Minister said BK Arukha said.

The Cabinet has approved the lowest tender of L&T Ltd, Chennai amounting to Rs 508.75 crore for execution of one package of the project, he said. By execution of this package, 5,08,304 people of 349 villages under 95 GPs of five blocks of the Bargarh district will be provided with safe drinking water. The second package was awarded to KEC-Kaveri (JV), Warangal, India with a cost of Rs 215.31 crore. This package will provide drinking water to 2,29,064 people of 166 villages under 43 GPs of two blocks of the district.

of government departments till March 2020. This will clear the outstanding dues against government departments/offices till March 30 enabling payment of current dues in time."

The Cabinet also decided to give nod to conversion of bonds including interest accrued thereon to equity investment of government in Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Limited (OPTCL). This, the Cabinet said, is likely to increase the equity capital investment of government in OPTCL, thereby reducing the interest burden of OPTCL.

Identify stagnant water bodies for restoration, Collectors told

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: Following an order of National Green Tribunal (NGT), the state government has directed the District Magistrates (DMs) to identify stagnant water bodies of 0.5 acre area each for restoration.

Water Resources secretary Anu Garg has written letters to all the Collectors and secretaries of the departments concerned to take immediate steps for identification, inventorisation, physical verification, of stagnant water bodies in urban, rural, forest and mining excavated areas. The DMs

were also asked to check water quality and ensure geo-tagging of such water bodies.

"All existing stagnant water bodies in different geographical zones of the state and located in urban, rural, forest and mining excavated areas are to be brought into records and inventory to be made. The physical verification, geo-tagging and water quality analysis of such water bodies should be done," Garg said in her letter.

Thereafter, the government will prepare action plan for repair, renovation, restoration based on water quality of these water bodies, incorporating budgetary pro-

vision and time frame for implementation of the plan.

The NGT has issued several orders dated 10.05.2019, 25.02.2020 & 01.06.2020 hearing a plea filed by petitioner Haryana resident Lt Col (retd) Sarvadan Singh Oberoi seeking to restore Ghata Lake in Gurgaon besides restoration of 214 other water bodies and natural channels in the district and similar water bodies in Faridabad.

Subsequently, the tribunal had expanded the scope of the petition to the entire country, in the interest of protection of the environment.

FIREMEN & MACHINE



A robotic firefighting vehicle being demonstrated at the Odisha Fire and Disaster Response Academy in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

Hefty fine as minor found riding scooter sans helmet in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: Acting tough on a traffic rule violator, the Commissionerate Police Wednesday slapped a penalty of Rs 26,000 on the owner of a scooter, after a minor boy was caught riding the two-wheeler without a helmet in Khandagiri area here.

According to police sources, the scooter owner was fined Rs 25,000 as the rider was a juvenile and Rs 1,000 was fined for not wearing a helmet. The challan was issued in the name of Niranjan Dash of Forest Park area.

The scooter rider, Debasish Parida of Jagamara area, is below 18 years of age. He was riding the two-wheeler (bearing registration number OR-02 AG-0183). The scooter was seized under Section 207 of MV Act, as the rider failed to produce a valid driving licence (DL).

Eco Retreat 2.0 to boost tourism

The event will offer tourists a rare experience of staying in luxury tents and spending time in the lap of untamed nature

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday inaugurated the second edition of Odisha Tourism's flagship Eco Retreat event at five locations - Ramchandi beach in Konark, Satkosia, Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi and Hirakud.

The event will continue till February 28.

On this occasion, video messages of Chief Minister Patnaik, Union Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel and Union Petroleum & Natural Gas and Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan were displayed at all the locations.

It was earlier scheduled for inauguration December 8 but had to be cancelled owing to the nationwide bandh call given by farmers over the farm bills passed by the Centre.

The event will offer tourists a rare experience of staying at luxury tents and spending time in the lap of untamed nature with priceless surroundings. All the Covid-19 guidelines are being followed at these tents. Adventure activities, water sports and guided tours are part of this year's Eco Retreat.

The first edition of Eco-Retreat was held at the Ramchandi beach in 2019.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, "The success of the EcoRetreat model is evident from the enthusiastic response received by each of the EcoRetreats, across diverse locales - Bhitarkanika, Daringbadi, Hirakud, Konark and Satkosia. EcoRetreats-2020 will go a long way in encouraging tourists from across India to explore these beautiful destinations set deep in the hinterlands of Odisha."

In his message, the Union Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel reiterated his last visit and opined that Eco Retreat at Konark



Tourism Minister Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi at Bhitarkanika Eco Retreat

and Rann of Kutch are two glamping events in India which have drawn the attention of many in the country and outside. He appreciated the initiative of Odisha for taking such a novel initiative in organising the EcoRetreats in five locations amidst the global pandemic situations and wished all success. Pradhan, in his message, highlighted the tourism potentials of the state and hoped that such glamping events will unlock tourism potentials of the state.

School & Mass Education

Minister Samir Ranjan Das, Sports & Youth Services Minister Tusharkanti Behera, Jagatsinghpur MP Rajashree Mallik, Puri MLA Jayant Sarangi, Brahmagiri MLA Lalitendu Mohapatra, Tourism department commissioner-cum-secretary Vishal Kumar Dev, Puri ADM and other guests were present.

The Eco Retreat at Bhitarkanika was inaugurated in the presence of Tourism Minister Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi, Aul MLA Pratap Keshari Deb, Kendrapara MLA Shashi Bhusan Behera, Rajnagar MLA

Dhruva Charan Sahoo.

The Eco Retreat at Daringbadi was inaugurated in the presence of Kandhamal MP Achyuta Samant, G Udayagiri legislator Saluja Pradhan, Tourism director Sachin RamchandraJadhav, Kandhamal Collector D Brunda and others.

Likewise, the Eco Retreat at Hirakud was inaugurated in the presence of government's Deputy Chief Whip Rohit Pujari, Sambalpur MLA Jayanarayan Mishra, Rengali legislator Nauri Naik, OTDC Chairperson Shreemayee Mishra and RDC Niranjan Sahu.

Similarly, the Eco Retreat at Satkosia was unveiled in the presence of Badamba MLA Devi Prasad Mishra, Cuttack Collector Bhawani Shankar Chayani and others.

This year, altogether 145 cottages of different categories have been put up in five locations. The additional features in the current year at Ramchandi are sea surfing session, parasailing, e-scooter, open air restaurant, beach shack and others. Tourists with prior booking can avail the facilities. They can book accommodation at <https://ecoretreat.odisha-tourism.gov.in/en.html>.



A view of Daringbadi Eco Retreat

School closure affecting kids in a big way: Mohapatra

PARTICIPATING IN THE WORKSHOP, SOME EXPERTS ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE PREVAILING INEQUALITY IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL WEALTH IN INDIA

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: Former AIMS-Bhubaneswar director Ashok Mohapatra, Wednesday, said that the government is violating child rights and human rights by closing the schools in the state in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic.

Mohapatra said this at a workshop on "Human Rights: Covid-19 and India's Resilience" organized by World Human Rights Protection Organization on the eve of International Human Rights Day.

Mohapatra claimed that children are at low risk of getting infected by the novel coronavirus. "Despite this, schools have been shut for the last several months. The school closure is affecting the kids in a big way. This is a kind of human rights violation," he said.

The former director of AIMS-Bhubaneswar opined that greed and unethical practices are the main reason behind human rights violation. "Human beings need at



Dignitaries at the workshop on human rights

least four things - water, food, air and shelter—to survive. But many people in the country are struggling to get these four basic things, which is nothing but violation of their human rights," Mohapatra said.

According to him, the Covid-19 pandemic has made the human beings helpless. "Now we should come forward to help each other by following Covid-19 norms, including wearing of masks, social distancing and hand washing," he added.

Participating in the workshop, a few experts highlighted the prevailing inequality in the distribution of national wealth in India. The inequality in income and wealth distribution is also a violation of human rights, they asserted.

As per reports, India's richest 1 per cent of the population holds 42.5 per cent of national wealth while the bottom 50 per cent, the majority of the population, owns a meagre 2.8 per cent.

According to a report by Oxfam, India's top 10 per cent of the population holds 74.3 per cent of the total national wealth while the bottom 90 per cent holds 25.7 per cent of the same. India ranked at 144 out of 156 countries in the World Happiness Index-2019, the experts opined.

Former advisor to Election Commission, Bhagban Prakash, said that industrialists and corporate houses get more preferential treatment than farmers in the country.

TRADITIONAL FLAVOUR



Puffed rice snacks being prepared for the upcoming Dhanu Sankranti at Khannagar in Cuttack, Wednesday

REMEMBERING 'KANTA KABI'



People from various walks of life pay floral tributes to 'Kanta Kabi' Laxmikanta Mohapatra on the legendary poet's birth anniversary at PMG Square in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

Discussion on gender-based violence held in Gram Sabhas

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: A unique Gram Sabha on gender-based violence was organised across 17 districts in the state. The meetings were chaired by women. The objective of these Gram Sabhas was to ensure the involvement of women in Gram Sabha and place issues that concern them the most.

Thousands of women from more than 1,000 Gram Panchayats participated in these Gram Sabhas and discussed on women's rights and entitlements and gender-based violence that occurs in the society. The unique Gram Sabha concept was facilitated by the several CSOs together expressing their commitment to help end gender-based violence.

The formulation of the participatory Gram Panchayat Developmental Plan (GPDP) by the Gram Panchayats coincided with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

"Women can play a great role towards socio-economic and environmental change and ensure local



A Gram Sabha underway

The unique Gram Sabha will build confidence among women to know about the process and can ensure their participation on a massive scale

SHANTI BHOI | PRESIDENT, MAHILA SHRAMAJEEBE MANCHA, ODISHA

economic development and social justice. However, despite provisioning, participation of women in Gram Sabhas is very less and therefore, most of the women and gender-based issues are not being placed in these Gram Sabhas," said a participant.

"Therefore, the unique Gram Sabha will build confidence among women to know about the process and then can ensure their participation on a massive scale", said

Shanti Bhoi, President, Mahila Shramajeebe Mancha, Odisha. "Various issues such as lack of knowledge on rights and entitlements, process of Gram Sabha and struggle for an equal space in workplace and decision making platforms create barriers for women to place their issues in Gram Sabha which contributes to the increasing trend of gender-based violence against women and girls, child marriage, role of women's participation in governance mechanism. Therefore, these Gram Sabhas will symbolically send a message across societies on how empowerment of women will pave path for an equal world", said Ruchi Kashyap, Executive Trustee of Atmashakti Trust.

State logs 5 fresh Covid deaths



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: State's Covid-19 caseload climbed to 3,22,299 Wednesday after 386 people tested positive for the virus, while five fresh fatalities pushed Odisha's coronavirus death toll to 1,789, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said. The fresh cases were detected from 28 of the 30 districts of the coastal state.

Khurda district, comprising state capital Bhubaneswar, reported the highest of 50 single-day cases followed by Sundargarh (47) and Mayurbhanj (31). Koraput and Nabarangpur districts did not register any new infection during the last 24 hours, the senior official said. Of the fresh fatalities, two each were reported from Puri and Khurda. A 61-year-old woman of Sambalpur succumbed to the viral infection.

A total of 53 other Covid-19 patients have so far died due to comorbidities.

Khurda district alone has accounted for 306 deaths thus far, followed by Ganjam (245), Sundargarh (151), Cuttack (137) and Puri (110).



FILE PHOTO

IN NUMBERS

Khurda reported the highest of 50 single-day cases followed by Sundargarh (47) and Mayurbhanj (31)

Odisha has so far tested over 62.50 lakh samples for Covid-19 including 36,419 Tuesday

The positivity rate of Odisha is 5.16 per cent

While Khurda and Puri reported two deaths each, Sambalpur district lost a 61-year-old female to the viral infection

Twenty-five other districts reported below-100 fatalities.

It has tested over 62.50 lakh samples for Covid-19, including 36,419 Tuesday.

The positivity rate is 5.16 per cent, as per data released by the department.

Meanwhile, another 442 Covid

patients recovered in Odisha, taking the total recoveries in the coastal state to 3,17,412, according to data shared by the H&FW department.

The recovered cases include 53 from Angul, 43 from Sundargarh, 33 from Khurda, 33 from Rayagada and 30 from Mayurbhanj, the department said.

Meanwhile, India reported 32,080 new Covid-19 infections Wednesday, taking the total number of cases to 97,35,850. Also, with 402 new deaths, the toll mounted to 1,41,360. At present, the total number of active cases is 3,78,909 and as many as 92,15,581 people have recovered. India's daily Covid-19 count fell steeply Monday, with fresh cases dipping to 26,567. This was the lowest count since July 10.

On the vaccines front, one crore health care workers, two crore front-line workers including the police and armed forces, and about 27 crore people above the age of 50 years and those less than 50 years with associate comorbidities — these are the three groups who should be simultaneously vaccinated on priority depending on the availability of a vaccine, a high-level expert committee has recommended to the government.

"Every single Indian who needs to be vaccinated will be vaccinated," Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan, who co-chairs the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration of Covid-19 (NEG-VAC), said, talking about the recommendations.

DECISION ON SRIMANDIR REOPENING SOON

Puri: A final decision on reopening of Srimandir for devotees would be taken at a meeting of temple Chhatisha Niyog, the apex body of servitors, December 12, said sources in the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) here Wednesday. Earlier, there were reports that the 12th century shrine would be reopened for devotees by the third week of December. "The Chhatisha Niyog meeting December 12 would decide on the date of temple reopening and the number of devotees who would be allowed to visit the shrine in adherence to Covid-19 norms," said a servitor.

ECoR IS ALL GEARED UP TO TACKLE FOGGY WEATHER



Pic from internet

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: East Coast Railway (ECoR) has geared up its manpower to cope with the dense fog during night and early morning in various railway sections under its jurisdiction. In areas prone to be affected by fog, precautions have been taken regarding train running during the current season. Railways already have a well laid-down procedure regarding operation of trains during times of fog and dense weather condition.

During winter, in dense foggy weather, drivers (Loco Pilots) have been instructed to regulate train speed depending on visibility conditions for the safety of passengers and train movement. Apart from this, several precautions have also been taken and train running staff is being counselled by the

Railway Officers and Safety Counsellors to cope with the situations.

In areas prone to dense fog, luminous and fluorescent strips have been painted in OHE (Overhead Equipment) masts, Level Crossings and at busy traffic areas before an approaching 'Stop Signal' to warn the loco pilot that the train is approaching a stop signal and running in sensitive areas. The provision of this device has been of great help to the loco pilots who now can spot these luminous strips even during fog and get extra careful regarding the aspect of the approaching signal.

General Manager, East Coast Railway directed concerned officials of Safety Department of East Coast Railway headquarters to accord highest priority for safe train running during foggy weather. The loco pilots and guards have been in-

structed to ensure that, they should put the safety of the passengers at the top and should run trains at such reduced speed in foggy weather as they may feel confident and comfortable, even if it means loss of punctuality to the train.

Detonators are used in foggy weather or otherwise when visibility is severely impaired to provide an audible indication to the locomotive crew that the train is approaching a signal. These detonators are flat, disc-shaped metal containers, usually coloured red, which contain an explosive mixture that detonates with the application of pressure when the wheels of the locomotive pass over.

Station Managers have been provided with adequate detonators and advised to assess whether visibility is impaired badly enough to warrant the use of detonators.

The Guards of the trains have been counselled and instructed to watch that, the loco-pilot does not exceed the prescribed speed limit during fog. During night as well as in the thick foggy or tempestuous weather impairing visibility during day, a Red Tail Lamp of approved design displaying a flashing Red Light to indicate last vehicle check and device should be lit on the last vehicle as per provisions. Guards have been advised to use flasher lamps during daytime also during fog.

Lokayukta order on PPE 'scam' our victory: Cong

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: The state leadership of the Congress party Wednesday said that the recent order of the Lokayukta asking the Vigilance department to conduct inquiry into the alleged PPE scam was a victory of the party.

Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) President Niranjan Patnaik said that under the new revelations from the accused government officials, the ministers and the Cabinet itself has come under radar for the suspicious procurements done during COVID 19 outbreak.

Patnaik said, "During COVID outbreak, the state government in name of Covid management indulged in malpractices. We had made representations before the Lokayukta on the issue. Vigilance department has now been asked to examine the issue. The state government has put their views before the Lokayukta."

He said that the officials told the office that the purchases were vetted by a minister-level committee. It was also said that the Cabinet has

also approved of this. "Thus, it indicates that the scam has the Cabinet, ministers and others involved," he said.

"The entire Cabinet is now under radar before the Lokayukta. We have fought against the PPE scam. We have won our fight as our demands have been met and enquiry has been ordered accordingly. The government committees and several others key players of the government has now come under the radar," Patnaik said that as the Lokayukta does not have their own agency to investigate, the Vigilance department has been asked to investigate into the case.

"Our main allegations have been taken into account. We did not talk about involvement of ministers and Cabinet into this. The government officials themselves have told the office that ministers, ministers' panel and others have approved of the procurement and others works," he said.

Nevertheless, the OPCC President also thanked the people of Odisha for making the recent Bharat Bandh "a success by giving their support for the same."



FILE PHOTO

Govt issues clarification on UG, PG exams

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: The Higher Education department Wednesday issued a clarification regarding conduct of exams for UG and PG students in view of Covid-19 pandemic.

The Higher Education department's commissioner-cum-secretary, Saswat Mishra, said that the government's previous decision of not conducting examinations for undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students until the resumption of classroom teaching and completion

of syllabi will not be applicable if adequate number of physical cases had been held before the Covid-19 lockdown (prior to March 13) but examination have not been held.

Also, the previous decision will not be applicable for the exams conducted by Odisha State Open University.

Earlier, the state government December 7, 2020 had said that conduct of examinations for UG and PG students will be considered after the resumption of classroom teaching and completion of syllabi.

Brainstorming on a future-ready Temple City

BMC and EU come together to make Bhub ready for the future and discuss steps to be taken till 2050 for a sustainable growth

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) in collaboration with European Union organised an online workshop which saw participation of former Deputy Mayor of Spain discussing the roadmap and plans for the Smart City.

Anchored by Pedro Ortiz, the former Mayor and internationally renowned urban planner, the workshop will be held for two days. While the first was December 9, the second session will be held December 16. Aiming to deliver an implementable plan for the capital city, the workshop will combine global perspectives with local ideas by groups representing housing, transport, social development, environment and economic sectors.

During the first day of the workshop, the current status of the city



FILE PHOTO

in terms of mobility, environment, housing, social and economic activities were discussed. With 24 per cent of its population coming under youth category in 436 slums the process has already initiated to make them socially smart as per a project by Bhubaneswar Smart City Corporation Limited (BSCL).

"The purpose of the online workshop/webinar is to plan a forecast for Bhubaneswar in 2050 and integrated metropolitan cities. It will also include the influence over other cities and towns nearby. We also discussed the initiatives taken by the BMC and issues it faced during disasters and what steps were

We (also) discussed the initiatives taken by the BMC and issues it faced during disasters and what steps were taken to handle the same

PREM CHANDRA CHAUDHARY | COMMISSIONER, BMC

taken to handle the same," said BMC Commissioner, Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

It needs to be mentioned that the workshop which is part of India and European Union Urban Partnership (IEUP) is being held in collaboration between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the EU to support the smart and sustainable urbanisation in India.

Funded by EU itself, the partnership will support building capacity, transferring technology and

developing new insights in themes such as metropolitan planning, mobility and waste management in its initial three years.

Moreover, under the IEUP the two-day workshop is being participated by six Indian cities. While Bhubaneswar was the second city to conduct the online workshop, Kochi was first. During the workshop there will be about eight-10 project concepts to be developed as the outcome of the consultation in the above-mentioned five sectors.

It can also be added here that metropolitan cities contribute significantly to the overall GDP i.e. 25 per cent inhabitants of the metros deliver 75 per cent GDP. While rest 75 per cent contribute to the remaining GDP. Thus, the significance of metropolitan cities is immense with respect to economic and political aspects of development.

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Kendrapara: Tragedies galore, but no end to risky boat rides

With no bridges across rivers, thousands of people in 17 riparian panchayats are bound to ferry in country boats



Mahakalpara Youth Club said 17 panchayats including Padanipal, Ekamania, Sinhagan and Batighar have no bridges and people are bound to depend on country boats. Many boats do not have insurance and boatmen have no licences either. In cases of mishaps, passengers have no chances of getting compensations, he added.

Surendra Sahu of Rajnagar area said, "Over 40 unsafe boats operate during the peak tourist season in Bhitarkanika, Hukitola and other picturesque islands without fitness certificates. The forest department is not paying heed to this aspect."

He added that tourists usually risk their lives while crossing the water bodies replete with salt-water crocodiles. There is a need for precaution for tourists during tourists.

Boat owners are supposed to make provisions of life jackets for passengers and tourists. The forest department has made it mandatory for all private boat owners to get fitness certificates from the Inland Water Transport Department at Chandabali to carry visitors to Bhitarkanika.

The river ghats at Gupti, Chandabali, Khola and Jayanagar are the busiest ghats for tourists to Bhitarkanika. Similarly, the boats from the ghats at Jambo, Bahakuda and Kharinashi carry tourists to Hukitola and Batighar.

Locals said, some private boats are not designed to carry passengers to places in the Bay of Bengal. Many boats are operated by untrained youngsters in risky weather conditions. "After a tragedy in 2004, no step has been taken for safety of passengers," a local fumed.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Bikash Ranjan Das said, "All boat owners operating in Bhitarkanika have been directed to make insurance coverage of their boats."

ADM Basant Kumar Rout said boatmen are being made aware of the passenger safety while the administration will take strong action against boats if they are found violating safety rules.

Unsafe country boats without having adequate safety measures continue to ferry hundreds of tourists and locals across water bodies to go to Bhitarkanika National Park, Hukitola island, Habelikothi, lighthouse island, Barunei river mouth, Rangali, Talachua

Ten women and children had lost their lives in January, 2019 when the boat they were being ferried had drowned at Nipania. Such mishaps have been happening at regular intervals

Three months ago a country boat had overturned at Pitapata while five labourers were feared drowned. At this very place, 13 promising cricketers had met a watery grave while being ferried in a boat March 1, 2013

rivers, making people depend on country boats.

Sushil Kumar Rout of Mahakalpara said three months ago a country boat had overturned at Pitapata while five labourers were feared drowned. At this very place, 13 promising cricketers had met a watery grave while being ferried in a boat March 1, 2013.

Ten women and children had lost their lives in January, 2019 when the boat they were being ferried had drowned at Nipania. Such mishaps have been happening at regular intervals.

Pratap Kumar Tripathy of

POST NEWS NETWORK

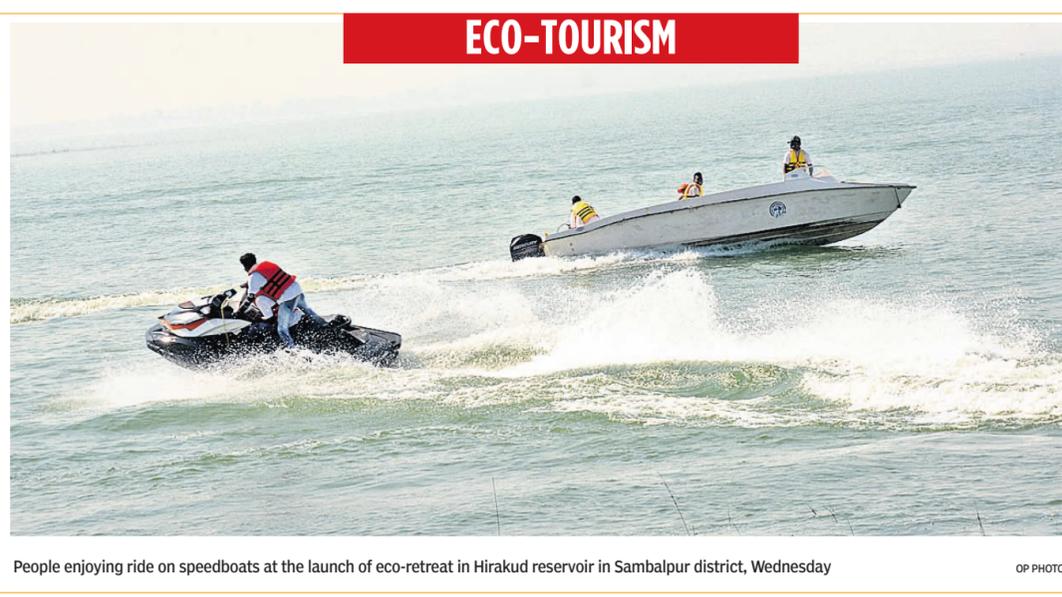
Kendrapara, Dec 9: Despite multiple boat mishaps in rivers, boats continue to ferry people in various rivers including in Hansua in Kendrapara district without adhering to safety rules, a report said.

Reports said, eco retreat organized by the tourism department has started at Nalitapatia near Bhitarkanika National Park. The festival will go on till February 28. During this time, tourists will visit Bhitarkanika, Hukitola, Habelikothi and Batighar. They will depend on country boats. It is often seen that boats are overcrowded. Despite the risk factor, the rules made in 2004 are not being followed. Mishaps continue to happen in rivers.

Notably, a ban had been imposed on passenger boats in Chilika lake after the mishap that claimed six lives some years back.

Unsafe country boats without having adequate safety measures continue to ferry hundreds of tourists and locals across water bodies to go to Bhitarkanika National Park, Hukitola island, Habelikothi, lighthouse island, Barunei river mouth, Rangali, Talachua and other places in the district.

According to reports, there are 249 panchayats in the district, but 17 of them do have bridges across



People enjoying ride on speedboats at the launch of eco-retreat in Hirakud reservoir in Sambalpur district, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

DA charge: PEO under Vig scanner

POST NEWS NETWORK

Padmapur, Dec 9: Vigilance sleuths Wednesday conducted a raid on the residence of Panchayat Executive Officer (PEO) Purandar Sahu of Daita Gram Panchayat in Bargarh district on charge of acquisition and possession of assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

A team of the anti-graft wing, Bargarh, reached Sahu's house Wednesday morning and began the search drive.

Verification of various documents of his movable and immovable properties was underway till the last report was filed. The exact amount of the disproportionate assets that the Panchayat official has possessed will be ascertained after completion of the raids.

Officials said, assessment of his assets is underway

Earlier on December 2, Vigilance officials raided multiple places associated with senior assistant Sanjukta Das at the office of Jagatsinghpur sub-collector on disproportionate asset charges.

Various incriminating documents were seized during the raid. The raid was carried out, as search warrants was issued by the Special Judge Vigilance, Sambalpur.

350.296 ha forest land to be acquired in Nabarangpur

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nabarangpur, Dec 9: Even as the Centre is pushing the Bharatmala Pariyojana, 904.32 hectares of government land and 350.296 hectares of forest land will be acquired for the project in Nabarangpur district, a report said.

Meanwhile, the district administration has started holding of public hearings on the project and land acquisition. Reports said, in the first phase, the government will complete road projects of 24,800 km by 2020.

Raipur-Vishakhapatna road project is one of the projects. Both government and private lands for the road will be acquired. The Odisha State Pollution Congrol Board (Rayagada) has started public hearings on the issue.

A part of the road admeasuring 365.033 km will be laid through the district (from Dhanra in Nabarangpur to Tumbigua in Koraput). Before carrying out the road construction, 240 km of the road need environment clearance.

The road project will pass through 70 villages in Nabarangpur and 59 villages in Koraput. The perimeter of the



BHARATMALA PARIYOJANA

road will be of 60 metre wide. In this part of the road project, 16 major bridges, 59 small bridges, 295 culverts and two tunnels will be constructed. Besides, several other facilities for crossing the road will be constructed. There will be toll plazas, parking areas and high mast lights. ₹8,092 crore will be spent for the project.

As per a survey, 904.32 hectares of government land and 350.296 hectares of forest land in the district will be acquired for the project. About 1100 people of 220 families will be affected by the project. Many houses will be removed while 76050 trees will be cut down.

The government has made a provision of ₹38.87 crore for compensation to land losers and their resettlement. However, land resettlement has not been done in the area.

President of the Bharat Kishan Sangh, Gopal Pujahari and president of the Krushak Sangh Sanraj Ganda said land settlement has not been done in Umerkote and Raighar areas.

"Many families will have to lose their homestead land and farmland for the project. Bengali refugees have been provided land and land pattas while local residents have not got pattas. Many people will have to suffer after losing their farmland," they lamented.

They demanded that the farmland losers should be provided with an equal measure of farmland. They have demanded that the road project be diverted from their area. However, Rajya Sabha MP Mona Khan said the road project will usher in development in the district.

Differently-abled raped by auto driver

Jagatsinghpur: An auto-rickshaw driver has allegedly raped a physically-challenged minor in Sadar police limits of Jagatsinghpur district Tuesday night. The accused, Gora Barik, a resident of Bangali Sahi, was arrested Wednesday. The victim was alone when the accused took her to a secluded place and raped her with life threat. Later, the victim narrated her plight to her family members following which they lodged a report at Sadar police station. The police arrested the accused Wednesday. He was sent to judicial custody as his bail plea was rejected.

2,684 driving licences frozen

Chhatrapur: Police have intensified vehicle checking and traffic violation in Ganjam from Tuesday. Driving licenses of 2684 people have been cancelled till October end. Ganjam police are collecting penalty of ₹2 lakh on an average from violators every day. This was tweeted by SP Brijesh Kumar. From January, crackdown on traffic rule violators will be intensified. Helmet use for drivers and pillion riders has been made mandatory. Licenses of 275 people were cancelled for drunken driving.

A bitter fate for sweet potato farmers; sell stock at a song

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, Dec 9: Sweet potato is harvested in huge quantities every winter in Keonjhar district. But the growers of this root vegetable more often than not burn their fingers due to lack of proper markets for their commodity.

The soil of this district is suitable for growing sweet potato. Farmers grow this in both plain and hilly regions. In winter, the crop is harvested.

Sweet potatoes produced by tribals in natural climate of hilly areas are always in demand. This root vegetable can be eaten by roasting it in the firewood oven or by boiling it. Some use it in preparing pancakes which are also very tasty.

In places such as Keonjhar Sadar, Champua, Patna, Bansapal and Telkoi blocks, sweet potatoes are grown in abundance. Non-government sources claim that about 50 tonnes of sweet potatoes are harvested annually in Keonjhar district.

According to principal of Pateswar College Suakati Ramakant Swain, sweet potato is very tasty and good for health as well. This is why during



Sweet potato currently trades at ₹20/kg in local market. But its price is three times higher in other cities

winter; it becomes a staple diet of tribal people.

Sweet potato currently trades at ₹20 a kilogram in Keonjhar market. But in cities like Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, this is being sold at a higher price - often two to three times higher.

With no direct marketing facility available farmers are forced to sell their crops at throwaway prices to middlemen. Traders earn a quick buck by procuring them from the framers here and selling them in towns and cities at much higher prices.

According to local people, if the government provides marketing and

storage facilities to preserve the vegetable, sweet potato farmers would be immensely benefitted.

Nirakar Naik, a sweet potato grower, said they are interested in growing sweet potato but they are incurring losses as they are forced to sell more than half of their harvest at far less price.

When contacted, deputy director, horticulture, Omprakash Rath said they had given sweet potato saplings to the farmers of different blocks. "As of now, they are selling their produce on their own. In the coming years, they will be linked to markets," he added.

Techie reaps rich harvest from veg farming

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatna, Dec 9: A youth working as a software engineer in Bangalore has found fulfillment in vegetable cultivation after he was forced to return home due to Covid-19 induced lockdown, a report said. Arabind Patra, a software engineer and a native of Tarnja village under Dharmagarh block in Kalahandi district, had to return home after lockdown was enforced in the whole country due to spread of the pandemic.

Patra, after returning home, is now doing his office work from home over last eight months and is devoting the rest of the time on cultivation.

Braving hardships, he has been able to grow chilies, cauliflower, tomato, brinjal and other vegetable on his three acre farmland which was earlier lying abandoned. He has become a successful farmer in the area and is an example for others to emulate.

Reports said he was hit hard by the pandemic. However, that did not

FRUITS OF LABOUR



Arabind Patra, a software engineer and a native of Tarnja village under Dharmagarh block in Kalahandi district, had to return home after lockdown was enforced in the whole country due to spread of the pandemic

He earns around ₹30,000 per month by selling vegetables. Patra has also been able to provide livelihood to seven to eight persons in the village by engaging them on his farmland

deter him from achieving his goal. He decided to give a try to cultivation on which he had never laid his hand as the majority of his time was devoted to studies and later his job.

Farming of various types of crops has given him a decent earning which has raised hopes among others in the area to try their hands in cultivation.

He earns around ₹30,000 per month by selling vegetables. Patra is not the only person to benefit from the cultivation but has been able to provide livelihood to seven to eight persons in the village by engaging them on his farmland. This has given them a sense of relief and has improved their financial condition when peo-

ple are struggling with job loss.

Patra plans to return to his workplace soon after improvement in condition for which he has delegated the charge of his farmland to some of his family members. However, when necessary he will personally visit the village and take care of his cultivation.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender No.: 08-KUR-TRD-OT-2020-21
Dt.: 02.12.2020

Name of the Work: PROPOSED NEW LINGARAJ SILO SSP IN CONNECTION WITH ELECTRIFICATION OF LINGARAJ SILO SIDING TAKING OFF FROM NTPC LINE AT TALCHER (TLHR) ON DEPOSIT BASIS.

Approximate Value: ₹ 1,04,37,981.99, EMD: ₹ 2,02,200/-

Tender closing date & time: upto 1300 hrs. of 28.12.2020.

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.ireps.gov.in

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD), Khurda Road
PR-396/L/20-21

boyanika
Odisha State Handloom WCS Ltd,
P.J.N Marg, Unit-iii, Bhubaneswar
E-mail-boyanikabbsr@yahoo.in, Ph-No - 0674-2395387

TENDER CALL NOTICE

No.2588 Dt.09.12.2020

Name of the work :- Construction of Exhibition Pavilion/Stalls, Front Gate, Stage, PH work, Electrification Work and other allied services for proposed National Level Handloom Expo at Unit-III, IDCO Exhibition Ground, BBSR. **The last date and time of submission of tender :- 23.12.2020 at 5.00 P.M.** Refer website for details- www.boyanika.com. All the information on this tender notice will be available from 10.12.2020 in the above website.

The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason thereof

Sd/-
Managing Director

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA No. A-341
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
BIDYADHARPUR CANAL DIVISION, BIDYADHARPUR
(E-mail ID: eebcddivision@gmail.com/toabp-elcwr.od@nic.in)
Bid Identification No. **EEBCD-15 of 2020-21**

Name of the Procurement Office	Name of Work	Bid Id No.	Tender Cost in Lakhs (Appx.)	Bid Security (Online)	Cost of Bid Document (Online)	Availability of Tender		Date of Opening
						From	To	
Executive Engineer, Bidyadharpur Canal Division, Bidyadharpur	Providing man power services for security arrangement for Salandi Dam at Hadagarh and Salandi Barrage at Bidyadharpur on contract basis through service provider for period from November - 2020 to March - 2021	EEBCD-15/01 of 2020-21	11.85	12,000/-	6000/-	14.12.20 11.30 hrs.	23.12.20 17.00 hrs.	24.12.20 11.30 hrs.

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website www.odisha.gov.in/www.dowrodisha.gov.in. Addendum/Corrigendum/ Cancellation if any required will be published in Govt. website only.
OIPR-32240/11/0004/2021 Sd/- Executive Engineer, Bidyadharpur Canal Division, Bidyadharpur

Each victory gained over oneself means new strength to gain more victories.

SRI AUROBINDO



POISON FROM SEA

Health and fitness advisors often emphasize on seafood for muscles, high protein and weight loss. Few of them have studied the immense health risks that come with eating seafood.

Mali Ston is an Adriatic Sea coastal town in Croatia, known all over the world for its unique farmed oysters, of which 5 million sell every year. For centuries, rows of oyster-filled underwater farm beds have spread through the bay. An annual oyster tasting feast has tourists pour in. In 2019 they have had to cancel it because the Institute for Marine and Coastal Research in Dubrovnik has detected norovirus in oysters. The virus has been caused by the sewage from the town pouring in all these years into the bay. Norovirus is a dangerous virus, causing over 20 million illnesses and hundreds of deaths annually. Symptoms, which include chronic vomiting and diarrhoea, can become very severe, very quickly, requiring emergency treatment.

Flame-grilled carp, seasoned with sauces and known as masgoof, is Iraq's national delicacy. Iraq produces 29,000 tonnes of carp each year, grown in farms along the Euphrates river. In 2018, millions of carp died overnight in fish farms. Samples of the dead fish, the water and sediment, sent to laboratories, confirmed the fish died of a virus caused by low temperatures, overstocking of fish farms and polluted river. Warnings have been issued by the government not to eat carp. Seafood is responsible for a large proportion of food-borne illnesses. These are caused by a variety of bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Chemicals, metals, marine toxins, and infectious agents have been found in seafood. The illnesses caused by these agents range from mild gastroenteritis to life-threatening conditions.

Some seafood are inherently more risky than others, depending on the environment from which they come, their mode of feeding and how they are prepared and served. All seafood are susceptible to surface, or tissue, contamination. Bivalve molluscs feed by filtering large volumes of seawater. During this process, they can accumulate and concentrate pathogenic microorganisms. Contamination of seafood by pathogens can occur when areas are contaminated with human sewage. Additionally, seafood may become contaminated during handling, processing, or preparation. Unlike meat and poultry, that are usually fully cooked, seafood is often consumed raw, or prepared in ways that do not kill organisms.

Seafood has been implicated in so many outbreaks of illnesses that data is collected by official agencies in every country. The Food and Veterinary Office of the European Union has initiated a Rapid Alert System for food. The source of danger, and the country of origin, are reported. Between 1992 and November 1997, the 71 seafood alerts from this system represented 42.5 per cent of all food alerts. These alerts have doubled and tripled since. Thirty-three different countries had exported seafood/fish on which an alert was reported. The highest alerts were received on fish sent from India. So you can imagine the state of seafood being sold within India. Thirty-four people died from poisoning by shellfish, and fish in Japan, in 1475 outbreaks of poisoning reported between 1987 and 1996.

In Canada 29 species of fish and shellfish, and/or seafood products, were implicated in seafood-borne illnesses. Ten countries, that had exported these fish to Canada, were implicated. India was one of them.

In the United States, from 1973 to 2006, over 500 outbreaks involving thousands of people, have taken place. Some of the pathogens responsible for seafood infections are:

Vibrio bacteria, which cause outbreaks of gastroenteritis. Symptoms include watery diarrhoea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting. V. vulnificus is particularly virulent, especially among patients with liver disease and iron storage disorders, who are at increased risk of invasive disease. Infections can lead to sepsis and severe wound infections. The fatality rate is about 50 per cent for bloodstream infections and 25 per cent for wound infections. In January 2007, vibriosis became a nationally notifiable disease.

Salmonella bacteria, which cause acute gastroenteritis, with symptoms including diarrhoea, abdominal cramps and fever.

Shigella bacteria in fish come from sewage in water. Clinical manifestations range from watery, loose stools, to more severe symptoms, including fever, abdominal pain and bloody diarrhoea. Complications include seizures in young children, toxic megacolon, Reiter's syndrome, and hemolytic-uremic syndrome.

Clostridium botulinum is characterised by an acute paralysis. Early signs and symptoms of botulism often include twitching, slurred speech, and difficulty in swallowing, progressing to descending weakness and paralysis. Foods identified in outbreak investigations have included fermented or salted seafood, especially salmon and whale.

Other toxin-forming bacteria: Staphylococcus aureus, Clostridium perfringens, and Bacillus cereus can form enterotoxins that cause acute gastrointestinal illness. Norovirus infection is characterised by diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea, abdominal cramps, headache, myalgias, and low-grade fever. Seafood, harvested from sewage-contaminated waters, has caused large outbreaks of norovirus gastroenteritis.

Hepatitis A virus is the most serious viral infection associated with seafood consumption. It is an acute illness associated with fever, malaise, jaundice, anorexia, and nausea; symptoms may last from several weeks to several months. However, deaths can occur. Outbreaks of hepatitis A virus infections, associated with oysters and clams, have been known since the 1960s. The largest reported outbreak occurred in China in 1988; almost 3,00,000 persons were infected after consuming clams harvested from a sewage-contaminated area.

Helminths: large, worm-like parasites that infect most marine animals. Clinical manifestations, associated with helminthic infections, range from no symptoms, to mild, chronic gastrointestinal symptoms, allergic reactions, and sometimes intestinal perforation. Infections are likely under-diagnosed and underreported, due in part to a lack of routine diagnostic tests.

Contamination through sewage is a common practice around the world, and especially in India. Right from production phase to packaging, transport and consumption, seafood is likely to be contaminated with bacteria, viruses and fungal infections. Intensive fish farming, which involve massive crowding of fish into pens, has substantially enhanced the incidence of seafood diseases in India and abroad.

Handling and packaging stage, seafood is often exposed to unhygienic handling by workers, bad storage conditions, irregular temperatures, addition of preservative compounds. With a heavily globalised food trade, the long journey seafood travels before reaching our plates, drastically increases the chances of it becoming dangerously contaminated.

At consumption stage seafood is often prepared in ways that do not kill organisms, or even many times eaten undercooked or raw - making it a particularly dangerous food. It is important that you understand the consequences of seafood consumption. If not for reasons of sustainability and animal welfare, look at seafood in terms of your own immediate health. People with underlying medical conditions such as liver disease, diabetes, or immunosuppressing conditions, are at higher risk of acquiring severe infection and should be especially careful. As waters grow warmer, seafood will get more and more dangerous to eat.

To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org

WISDOM CORNER

If you can dream it, you can do it.

WALT DISNEY

Leap, and the net will appear.

JOHN BURROUGHS

Well done is better than well said.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

FOCUS WEST

GETTING NATO BACK ON TRACK

US President-elect Joe Biden's nomination of Lloyd Austin, a recently retired four-star general, as Secretary of Defense is a further welcome sign that America has come to its senses and will, after January 20 next year, no longer seek to punish its friends and reward its enemies. To demonstrate this shift to the world, Biden should, immediately on taking office, rescind President Donald Trump's order last July to withdraw 12,000 US troops from Germany.



The Western alliance needs a US security guarantee for Germany and other European countries, but this cannot come at the cost of a Franco-German split, which would be another gift to Russian President Vladimir Putin



Melvyn Krauss

IT IS CLEARLY BAD FOR NATO AND EU UNITY WHEN THE UNION'S TWO MOST IMPORTANT MEMBERS ARE AT ODDS ABOUT AMERICA'S ROLE IN EUROPE

Without costing the US a penny, Biden would dramatically repudiate Trump's isolationism and throw a wrench into Russian President Vladimir Putin's divide-and-rule strategy in Europe. Reversing the troop withdrawal would also strengthen NATO, Germany, and Chancellor Angela Merkel - whose potential successor will be chosen in mid-January by her Christian Democratic Union (CDU) - as they battle Putin and homegrown anti-Western populists.

Trump claims that he wanted the US troops out because Germany was short-changing the NATO alliance on defense spending, compelling America to make up for the shortfall. But that is nonsense. And as one of the people who previously advocated it, I should know. For decades, Republican and Democratic presidents never cared that America was spending far more on NATO than Germany was. For a while, I was convinced that they should care, so in 1986 I wrote How NATO Weakens the West, a book about German defense free-riding. So gung-ho was I about this idea that I also wrote a commentary for The Wall Street Journal entitled, "It's Time to Change the Atlantic Alliance."

But never did I imagine that Trump would use my now-ancient strategic argument as a wrecking ball to demolish NATO solidarity and empower Putin. True, Germany may not be spending enough on defense; the French certainly think so. But the argument that Germany is making a fool of the United States with its

frugal defense spending is simply a fig leaf for Trump's determination to reward Putin while rebuking Merkel. Putin has long wanted a reduced US troop presence in Europe, and in Trump, he found a US president who was willing to collaborate with him.

My own thinking about NATO and Germany's contribution to it began to evolve not long after my book was published. While promoting it, I debated Lawrence Eagleburger, who was subsequently US Secretary of State under President George H.W. Bush, and met many serious, well-informed military people. I recognized then that what counted most for the US - and still does - is control over the structure and purpose of European defense, not its cost. The transatlantic Cold War-era 'bargain,' according to most US military experts, was that America would pay the lion's share of NATO's expenses in return for leadership of European defense.

In fact, I dropped the "Germans are playing us for suckers" line, born of my wish for an effective transatlantic alliance, when I abandoned the conservative populism that had influenced my early thinking. Moreover, evidence from the 1980s shows that

the military experts who criticised my book were right. The transatlantic disputes of that period were not about money, but rather over issues like sitting Pershing II missiles in West Germany to counter the Soviet Union's ballistic missiles. West Germans, because of their fraught history and strong peace movement, were wavering on the issue.

After much tumult, and true leadership on the part of the Social Democratic Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and his CDU successor Helmut Kohl, West Germany installed the Pershing IIs in 1983. And they served their purpose well: NATO traded them away in the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the Soviet Union, a key agreement in defusing the nuclear threat. The Pershing IIs were subsequently destroyed, and rumour has it that some of the scrap material wound up in special ball-point pens at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, which gave them out as gifts.

Although Trump failed to make German defense spending into a major political issue in the US, it has become a contentious subject in Europe. In a recent interview with Le Grand Continent maga-

zine, French President Emmanuel Macron - a staunch advocate of greater European sovereignty in defense matters - strongly criticised German defense minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer for publishing a commentary in Politico entitled "Europe still needs America." Europe would need America less, Macron implied, if Germany increased its defense spending.

It is clearly bad for NATO and EU unity when the Union's two most important members are at odds about America's role in Europe. The Western alliance needs a US security guarantee for Germany and other European countries, but this cannot come at the cost of a Franco-German split, which would be another gift to Putin.

France and Germany must heal their current defense rift, and America must maintain its security guarantee for Europe. The continent needs US boots on the ground, not only in Germany but throughout the Baltic states as well. One way out of the conundrum would be for Germany to contribute more to European defense budgets, thus providing a measure of the independence that France seeks, while keeping the US troops it wants.

Biden could start this process of reconciliation between France and Germany - and, more importantly, between the US and its NATO partners - by canceling Trump's planned troop withdrawal. He could then use the resulting leverage and his personal contacts (Biden has attended the annual Munich Security Conference for decades and knows nearly all of the key German foreign-policy players) to persuade Germany to spend more on European defense. The main aim of such a commitment would not be to placate America, but rather to boost Macron, a genuine friend of Germany.

The writer is a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

SPECTRUM SOCIETY

'La Peste': A novel for all times

'La Peste' or 'The Plague' is the story of Oran, a French prefecture in the Algerian coast, told through the lens of the doctor narrator, Bernard Rieux, an unassuming, soulless" where people are chiefly interested in matters mercenary, living mundane lives, totally unprepared for the disaster to come. Into this city arrives the bubonic plague in the form of rats spewing blood, dying by the hundreds and thousands, clogging streets, pavements, gutters. It is a matter of time before the city's populace is affected, the city is quarantined, and the people face the dreadful situation. A series of measures contain the citizens from their daily activities and many are in a state of disbelief, in wishful thinking and denial of reality. They say that the plague has vanished from the West and Camus adds sardonically "Yes everyone knew that except the dead." But the pestilence comes to stay and their forced inactivity limiting their movements throws them on the illusive memories of the past and the lives that used to be.

A group of men stand up against the plague presenting the human response to calamity. Their lives and

sorrows are meaningless in the face of the epidemic that unexpectedly interrupts their daily routine and into this scenario enter Dr Rieux and his band of men trying to save as many people as possible without hope but with empathy and commitment. "It is a never ending defeat." It is the collective battle against human suffering, the triumph of the human spirit, the capacity to recover from tragedy to contemplate and face death. Rieux says, "What's true of all the evils in the world is true of a plague as well. It helps men to rise above themselves." In this war against the plague there is no heroism and the only way to fight it is with common decency and decency meant doing ones job and relieving suffering. "There was nothing admirable about this attitude; it was merely logical." Among the faithful volunteers for Rieux were Tarrou, a traveller held up in Oran on account of the plague, who maintained a diary of the daily happenings that gives texture to Rieux's chronicle of the epidemic.

Tarrou is a philosopher with a tremendous personal and social responsibility towards amelioration of suffering and he seeks a larger peace than to be found in the preach-

ing of Father Panaloux who believes the plague is a scourge of God and we must continue to believe in Him in the midst of suffering. There is Grand an elderly civil servant passed over at his workplace, with a broken marriage and trying to create the perfect manuscript but never going beyond the first line for want of the right words, giving a helping hand to the doctor. There is Rambert, the journalist who came on an assignment to the plague ridden city waiting for a way to rejoin his wife. When he gets an opportunity to leave he doesn't, because he feels after what he has seen he belongs there with the doctor, and fighting the plague is everybody's business. And yet exigencies of service make them liable to the disease they were fighting and they were "gambling on their luck and luck is not to be coerced."

The work of Camus is a monument to human dignity and solidarity. The plague is not a punishment for anything deserved and it is difficult to understand the suffering of a child. "The agony of a child was humiliating to the heart and mind." "Suffering is random, it makes no sense, it is no ethical force, it is simply absurd and that

is the kindest thing one can say of it." In Camus' philosophy we are vulnerable to being randomly exterminated, by a bacillus, an accident or the actions of our fellow humans.

Rieux, all too human feels in the midst of his duties that a loveless world is a dead world and when one is weary of work and devotion to duty all one craves for is a loved face, the warmth and wonder of a loving heart. As the Plague runs its course and people are finding joy and life once again, Rieux receives the news his wife who was convalescing at the sanatorium out of Oran dies and he sees it as the extension of the suffering he has been witness to. In the end Rieux reflects, his experience of the plague translates to knowledge and memories of friendship and affection. The novel ends with a prophecy "the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture, and linen chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and perhaps the day would come when for the bane and the enlightening of men, it roused up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city."

Is this true democracy?

Sir, On 8 December, 2020, the Odisha government declared holiday for all government offices and added a phrase that all essential services will remain opened. All happy, obviously. Ever-cheating government officials get a day's rest approved by the government itself, general population is happy because emergency services won't be hampered, farmers and protesters are happy that our government has supported them and the government is happy that there won't be any serious chaos. Goal achieved and Ramarajya acquired! But as a taxpayer who has been paying tax heavily and sincerely for the past 18 years, I ask why the government didn't say how they are going to adjust the day's work - cancelling a holiday or a Sunday? Probably for this very reason even today people prefer to join a government job desperately. Has anyone pondered over the man-hour loss due to a day off? Certainly healthcare, police and the likes alone do not fall in the category of essential services now. An old retired person who had planned to visit a government office for his pension paper works had to wait for another day in uncertainty and anguish. What about the son who came all the way from another city to visit his ailing parents, who has to wait in the airport in anxiety for an extra hour? What about the vegetable vendor or the petty shopkeeper who was obstructed from going to work - can the government compensate for the loss? No, but it can distribute free rice and ration from the tax-payer's money. How can the government declare holiday for schools and government offices for an illegal act like a bandh? Where are we really heading to? Is this true democracy?

Dr. Viyatprajna Acharya, BHUBANESWAR

Don't drop your guard

Sir, The number of active COVID-19 cases in India dropping below four lakh for the first time in four and a half months must make the citizens breathe easier. The declining trend in the fresh cases suggests that the worst may be over for India. Daily fatalities also fell below 400 on Monday after over five months, even as there are no signs of a second peak in the country yet. But one must not drop the guard on the coronavirus yet and continue to take all precautions to keep the virus at bay. There is no scope for complacency in the battle against the pandemic.

NJ Ravi Chander, BANGALORE

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Setback for Cong as BJP sweeps Raj rural polls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, Dec 9: In a major shocker to Rajasthan's ruling Congress, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept 1,911 seats in the recently held Panchayat Samiti elections while it was limited to 1,781 seats.

The Independents got 425 seats, the Bahujan Samaj Party got 3 seats while the CPI-M captured 16 seats in the elections while the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party got 57 seats, according to the State Election Commission.

The results for 4,239 of the 4,371 seats were announced, with counting was still underway in the remaining.

The BJP's winning streak continued in Panchayat Samiti elections where they have won the Zila Parishad elections in 353 seats while the Congress was limited to 252. The CPI-M garnered two seats, the Independents 18 and RLP 10 seats.

"This victory is the people's stamp on BJP's rural policies. It reflects PM Narendra Modi's developed ideology for farmers and this victory also reflects the hard efforts made by BJP workers," BJP state president Satish Poonia said.



This victory is the people's stamp on BJP's rural policies. It reflects PM Narendra Modi's developed ideology for farmers and this victory also reflects the hard efforts made by BJP workers

SATISH POONIA | BJP STATE PRESIDENT

The Panchayat and Zila Parishad poll victories come at a time when Modi's policies were being protested against in Rajasthan by the Congress government which supported the Bharat bandh call by farmers Tuesday. "When they were pelting stones on BJP office as a part of Bharat Bandh, people voted against their two years of lawlessness," Poonia alleged. Also there was no implementation of farm loan waiver as promised by Congress leaders dur-

ing Assembly elections, the school fee issue, electricity bill issue were further left unresolved, he added.

"The outspoken Rajasthan PCC President Govind Singh Dotasara could not make Congress win in his own constituency. Also Health Minister Raghunath Sharma and former PCC chief Sachin Pilot could not win in their own home turfs. It seems that the Congress is losing its hold after two years in power," Poonia said.

State Election Commission conducted these elections in 21 districts - Ajmer, Banswara, Barmer, Bhilwara, Bikaner, Bundi, Chittaurgarh, Churu, Dungarpur, Hanumangarh, Jaisalmer, Jalore, Jhalawad, Jhunjhunu, Nagaur, Pali, Pratapgarh, Rajsamand, Sikar, Tonk and Udaipur.

The polls were held in four phases including November 23, 29, December 1, and 5.

BJP National president JP Nadda tweeted: "I thank the people of the rural areas of the state, farmers and women for putting their faith in the BJP in the Panchayati Raj and Zila Parishad elections in Rajasthan. This victory symbolises the trust of poor, farmers and workers in Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

New Gehlot-Pilot rift surfaces

THE TWO CONGRESS CAMPS IN RAJASTHAN THAT NEARLY COST THE PARTY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE STATE A FEW MONTHS BACK ARE AT IT AGAIN

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jaipur, Dec 9: The two Congress camps in Rajasthan that nearly cost the party the government in the state a few months back are at it again.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, while inaugurating a Congress office in Sirohi district recently, had said that the state government was saved from a crisis as the senior leaders suspended the rebels within the party fold.

He also accused the opposition BJP of restarting the 'game of thrones' yet again to topple his government.

The rebel leaders, he was insinuating at, were former Pradesh Congress Committee chief and his former deputy Sachin Pilot and the Tonk leader's loyalists, including Ramesh Meena and Vishvendra Singh who were suspended and removed as state ministers when Pilot with his 18 MLAs went to Manesar in open rebellion against the Gehlot leadership.

Gehlot's sudden comments have left all stunned. However, sources from the Congress camp revealed that the Rajasthan Chief Minister is planning to make political appointments and expand his cabinet. At this point, his camp doesn't want his former deputy and his team to be re-inducted and



hence comes this statement, sources said. All this as Congress lost big in the Panchayat body and Zila Parishad polls Wednesday as counting was still underway at several places. The central leadership has been in a damage control mode and has intervened on time before things were exaggerated.

Rajasthan in-charge Ajay Maken made an immediate statement soon after Gehlot's comments in Sirohi. He said that Pilot stands as an asset for the party contradicting Gehlot's claim and assured that the state government was safe.

The two statements made by Maken have become the most-discussed issue in political corridors. There are whispers about whether all was well between Gehlot and the Congress high command.

Gehlot has not visited Delhi after Pilot was inducted back into the party, after he nearly jolted Gehlot with a 'coup'.

The central leadership replaced Avinash Pandey (Gehlot camp) by Ajay Maken (from Rahul Gandhi's camp) after receiving feedback from the Pilot camp. Also a three-member team was formed to listen

to Pilot's grudges which had included KC Venugopal, Maken and the late Ahmed Patel.

Gehlot at that time had termed Pilot as 'nikamma and nakara' (incompetent and useless). However, with the intervention of veteran leaders like the late Patel, Pilot returned to the party.

Ever since there has been speculations that one of the two will have to be shifted to Delhi to make things smoother in the state.

Both camps, speaking to IANS, have denied it and termed such possibilities as 'rumours' and that both leaders were 'sons of the soil' and will stay put in the state.

Maken, this time quoted Priyanka Gandhi's statement, who had after the earlier crisis termed Pilot 'an asset for the party.'

All eyes are now set on who will get better appointments - Gehlot or Pilot camp - in the party.

Further, the state PCC which was dissolved post crisis also needs to be reconstituted. Maken said that the PCC shall be formed again by December 31 and by January 31, board and corporation presidents shall be appointed.

In fact, Congress state chief Govind Singh Dotasara also met Pilot soon after attending the meeting on political appointments which, sources said, left the Gehlot camp aggrieved further.

RESCUE ACT



Forest department officials attempt to subdue an injured Indian bison, reportedly attacked by dogs, on the premises of Mahatma Society at Kothrud in Pune, Wednesday.

Death penalty & speedy trial features of Maha's Shakti Act

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 9: In a bid to curb heinous crimes against women and children in Maharashtra, the state cabinet Wednesday approved a draft bill that has provisions for stern punishment, including death penalty, life sentence, and hefty fines, for the perpetrators, and also speedy trial.

The draft bill seeks to amend relevant sections of the IPC, CrPC and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act for the proposed law's application in the state.

The cabinet approved the draft bill at a meeting here and it will be tabled in the state legislature during its upcoming winter session, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh told reporters after the meeting.

A two-day winter session of the legislature begins in Mumbai from December 14.

He said the bill, to be called the 'Shakti Act', will come up for discussion and approval in both houses of the legislature.

It provides for completing probe in a case within 15 days and trial within 30 days, Deshmukh said.

After getting the house nod, the



bill will be sent to the Central government for approval and Presidential assent, Deshmukh said.

The provisions of the new law aim to control heinous sexual offences against women and children, the minister said.

It provides for completing investigation and trial within a stipulated time-frame and stringent punishment, including the death penalty and heavy fines, for culprits, Deshmukh said.

Special police teams and separate courts will be set up for investigation and trial of cases against women and children, according to

the draft bill.

The perpetrators, if found guilty, will be punished with imprisonment for life for not less than 10 years but may extend to the remainder of natural life or with death in cases which have characteristics of being heinous in nature, it said.

Under the proposed legislation, a sum of Rs 10 lakh will be given to an acid attack victim for plastic surgery and facial reconstruction and the amount will be collected as fine from the convict.

Investigation shall be completed within a period of 15 working days from the date of registration of an offence. Reasons for not doing so shall be recorded in writing by the investigating officer concerned and these may include inability to identify the perpetrator, it said.

Then the probe period will be extended up to seven working days. After a charge-sheet is filed, the trial shall be conducted on a day-to-day basis and completed within a period of 30 working days, according to the draft bill.

Some cases will be tried in-camera for recording of evidence of victims and witnesses who are vulnerable, it said.

BMC setting up new vaccine storage facility in Mumbai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 9: The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation is setting up a new COVID-19 vaccine storage facility at one of its buildings in Kanjurmarg area here, officials said Wednesday.

The new vaccine storage facility will be in addition to the existing cold storage facilities at four civic-run hospitals in the city, BMC's additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani told PTI.

The BMC has identified its own five-storey building at Kanjurmarg in the eastern suburbs for the new COVID-19 vaccine storage facility, which will be set up on its first floor, another civic official said.

Currently, the Sion Hospital, Nair Hospital, KEM Hospital and Cooper Hospital here have vaccine storage facilities, he said.

These hospitals have a limited vaccine storage capacity, which is sufficient for the ongoing vaccination programmes but inadequate for the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccination, Kakani said.

The civic body aims to make the facility at Kanjurmarg ready before this year-end and is initiating the process of procurement of coolers and freezers for the storage of COVID-19 vaccines at low temperatures, he said.

2.6 lakh healthcare employees to get vaccine first

Mumbai: Around 2.6 lakh government employees in the healthcare sector including doctors and nurses will get the coronavirus vaccine in the first round of inoculation in Maharashtra, an official said Wednesday.

The state government Wednesday held its first review meeting on the preparation for vaccination, where facilities of storage and transportation, finalization of lists of beneficiaries and setting up of vaccination booths were discussed, he said.

"There are some 2.6 lakh employees in the state working in the health sector who will get the vaccine dose in the first round. As many as 16,245 employees have been registered on the government's Co-vin portal," the official said.

"We are trying to make the vaccine storage facility ready before December 31," Kakani said.

The new vaccine storage facility is being set up considering the city's need for extensive COVID-19 vaccination, and it would be used for long-term, he said.

'Kisan Bagh' stirring Shaheen Bagh memories

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM THE NOW LEGENDARY SHAHEEN BAGH-STYLE OF AGITATION, SEVERAL FARMERS AND WORKERS GROUPS JOINED TOGETHER TO LAUNCH A 'KISAN BAGH' IN PUNE TO GET JUSTICE FOR FARMERS AND WORKERS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Pune, Dec 9: At the height of the 'Bharat Bandh' a day ago, a small event that started in a corner of the city has signalled a long winter of discontent among the farmers and workers in the country.

Taking inspiration from the now legendary Shaheen Bagh-style of agitation last year all over India, several farmers and workers groups joined together to launch a 'Kisan Bagh' in Pune, to get justice for farmers and workers in the country, the organisers said.

The brainchild of veteran social worker Babasaheb Pandurang Adhav, 90, revered as Baba Adhav and many others, the 'Kisan Bagh' started on a modest scale with 50 farmers sitting in protest outside the Pune Collectorate for the second day Wednesday.

"This is the first green shoot. From Thursday - the International Human Rights Day - it will start at Konkan Bhavan in Raigad, and later similar 'Kisan Baghs' shall come up in all regions of Maharashtra," Jan Andolan Sangharsh Samiti (JASS) Convenor Vishwas Utagi told IANS.

Though in a nascent stage, Baba Adhav feels the idea will pick up and similar 'Kisan Baghs' could mani-



fest across India "as farmers all over are angry."

"I have taken part in the Independence movement, the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, the Emergency and many other agitations but this is the first time that I have witnessed the urban population coming out in full support of the rural farmers and workers," Baba Adhav told IANS.

He pointed out how during lockdown, the farmers' produce, with the help of the workers, at great health risks, reached each and every household in the country, but they were

not even acknowledged by the Central government.

"Why can't the Centre declare them as an essential service category and extend benefits similar to the schemes for corona warriors," Baba Adhav demanded.

One of the organisers, Stremukti Andolan Sampark Samiti (SASS) chief Poornima Chikarmane said that Friday, 'Kisan Manch' (as it's known here), will host a group of women farmers and labourers who will speak on various issues concerning the three farm laws along with other academics or experts.

Utagi said that there are larger issues of farmers and workers since the past few years as over 6.20-crore MSMEs and SMEs have shut down, with more than 14 crore people rendered jobless.

"We want India to become a 'welfare state' for the common man, farmers and workers instead of only thinking about the prosperity of a handful of in-

government. If they don't revoke the three black laws unconditionally, there will be a 'Kisan Bagh' in every village in the country," warned Tiwari, who is advisor to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and accorded a minister status.

Swabhimani Shetkari Sanghatana president Raju Shetti said the JASS initiative would be implemented by him from tomorrow in farming centres.

"The Bharat Bandh of December 8 was a joint initiative of the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee of which we were all constituents. We shall also join the 'Kisan Bagh' for justice to the peasantry from Thursday," Shetti told IANS.

The organisers explain that under the guise of 'One Nation, Under One Market' the BJP is conspiring to destabilise the country's agro-economy and food security at the hands of a few big corporate houses which the masses have now realised and are standing solid with the farmers and workers.

All the leaders - Baba Adhav, Utagi, Chikarmane, Tiwari, Shetti - avowed that the 'Kisan Baghs' will continue till the Centre unconditionally repeals the "three black farmers laws and the 4 anti-workers laws."

I have taken part in the Independence movement, the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, the Emergency and many other agitations but this is the first time that I have witnessed the urban population coming out in full support of the rural farmers and workers

BABA ADHAV

of the day quote

The Goa Health Ministry has not been consulted vis-a-vis allowing Covid-19 positive persons to vote in the upcoming zilla panchayat polls
VISHWAJIT RANE | GOA HEALTH MINISTER

There were rising fears over the presence of heavy metals like lead and nickel in the drinking water. The government should immediately address these concerns and ensure proper drinking water supply through mobile mineral water plants and such measures
N. CHANDRABABU NAIDU | TDP NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Postings of officials in the state will now take place purely on the basis of merit
SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN | MP CM

SHORT TAKES

6 killed in MP

Chhatarpur (Madhya Pradesh): Six persons were killed when a multi-purpose vehicle they were travelling in fell into a well in Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. Three others were evacuated by passersby. The victims were returning from a wedding when the accident took place, the police said.

Four injured

Srinagar: Four civilians were injured Wednesday in a grenade attack by militants in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district. Police sources said militants targeted a vehicle of the security forces in the Singhpora area of Srinagar-Baramulla highway. "The grenade missed the target and exploded on the road injuring four civilians. They have been shifted to a hospital in the Pattan town", sources said.

Girl gangraped

Bilaspur: A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by four persons, including a boy, in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh, police said Wednesday. The incident took place last week and the accused, all residents of a locality where the girl lives, had recorded the act on a mobile phone. Threatening to upload her video on social media, they sexually assaulted the victim for the second time on Sunday, police said. Three of the accused, identified as Sheikh Ramzan, Sandip Rajak and Shishu Rajak, all aged 20, were arrested in the last two days, while their 16-year-old accomplice was detained, they said.

Tragedy averted

Ahmedabad: Oxygen leaked from one of the cylinders kept at a private hospital designated to treat COVID-19 patients in Ahmedabad city of Gujarat on Wednesday, said officials. Luckily, a tragedy was averted as fire brigade officials rushed to the spot and plugged the leakage in afternoon, said fire officer Jayesh Khadia.

3 Bihar SHOs suspended

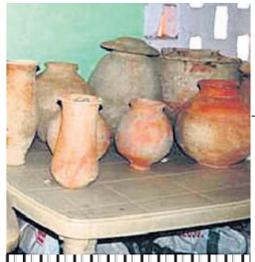
Patna: The Bihar Police has suspended three SHOs from service on the charge of failure to enforce the liquor ban law in their respective jurisdictions following orders by DGP AK Singh. "All of them have been suspended with immediate effect and high-level inquiry initiated to find out other irregularities committed by them in the past," said an official of the Prohibition Department in Patna.



If my movements are curbed due to 'security concerns' then why are Bharatiya Janata Party ministers allowed to campaign freely in Kashmir, while I've been asked to wait until culmination of DDC elections?
MEHBOOBA MUFTI | FORMER J&K CM

STUDY INFO

An analysis of fat residues in ancient ceramic vessels from settlements of the Indus Civilisation in present-day Haryana and Uttar Pradesh suggests that the prehistoric people of the time consumed meat of animals like buffalo, sheep and goat as well as dairy products



Farm laws: Oppn ups the ante

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: Opposition parties Wednesday met President Ram Nath Kovind and sought repeal of the three farm laws against which thousands of farmers have been protesting on various borders of the national capital.

The five-member delegation of opposition leaders included Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, NCP chief Sharad Pawar, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI general secretary D Raja and DMK leader TKS Elangovan.

The opposition leaders submitted a memorandum to the President that said, "We urge upon you, as the custodian of the Indian Constitution, to persuade your government not to be obdurate and accept the demands raised by India's annadatas."

The memorandum also said, "The new agri-laws, passed in Parliament in an anti-democratic manner preventing a structured discussion and voting, threaten India's food security, destroy Indian agriculture and our farmers, lay the basis for the abolishment of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and mortgage Indian agriculture and our mar-



A delegation of Opposition leaders comprising Sharad Pawar, Rahul Gandhi, D Raja, Sitaram Yechury, and TKS Elangovan called on President Ram Nath Kovind at Rashtrapati Bhavan and presented a memorandum

kets to the caprices of multi-national agri-business corporates and domestic corporates."

The memorandum to President further said that more than 20 different political parties, including many parties running state governments, have extended their solidarity with the ongoing historic struggle of the Indian peasantry and extended wholehearted support to their call for

a Bharat Bandh on December 8, demanding the repeal of the retrograde agri-laws and the Electricity Amendment Bill.

"We met President and informed him of our view regarding the three farm laws. We have asked for their repeal. We informed the President that it is critical that they are taken back," Rahul Gandhi told reporters after meeting President.

He said the way the farm laws

were passed in Parliament, "we feel it was an insult to farmers and that is why they are protesting in the cold weather against them". "The farmers will not relent and will continue their protests till the laws and taken back," he said.

The former Congress chief said the new laws appeared aimed at handing over the farming sector to the "friends of the prime minister", but the farmers are fearless and would not back off and will continue with their peaceful agitation.

NCP leader Pawar said various political parties have requested President that these farm laws should be repealed as they were not discussed with either stakeholders or in the Select Committee of Parliament. The former agriculture minister said not a single suggestion of opposition leaders raised in Parliament was accepted by the government and all these bills were passed in haste.

He said the MSP has not been mentioned in the new farm laws and that is why the farmers are disturbed. Yechury said, "We told President that the three farm laws were passed undemocratically in Parliament and have sought the repeal of these laws."

Over 60 envoys visit leading pharma cos



64 envoys from various countries arrive at Bharat Biotech to review the development of COVID-19 vaccine, in Hyderabad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad/New Delhi, Dec 9: Over 60 foreign envoys Wednesday visited Hyderabad-based leading biotech companies Bharat Biotech and Biological E Limited where they were apprised of India's vaccine development programmes in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Telangana government press release said envoys of 64 countries visited the facilities. Biological E Limited in a separate press release said around 70 Ambassadors and High Commissioners visited their facility at Genome Valley here and extensively discussed about Covaxin, a vaccine candidate for COVID-19.

A tweet by the Ministry of External Affairs said a visit of more than 60 Heads of Missions was arranged to the research and manufacturing facilities of the biotechnology firms. The project update on the vaccine was presented to the delegates by Dr Krishna Ella, Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Biotech.

In the presentation, the envoys were conveyed that 33 per cent of global vaccines are produced in genome valley in Hyderabad, sources said. Suchitra Ella, Joint Managing Director of Bharat Biotech said, "The development and clinical evaluation of Covaxin marks a significant milestone for novel vaccinology in India. Covaxin has garnered interest

from several countries worldwide for supplies and introduction. It is an honour to have with us today all the distinguished ambassadors of various countries. It not only makes us proud but also reminds us that the world is looking up to India in the common fight against the deadly pandemic."

Barry O Farrell, Australian High Commissioner who was part of the visiting dignitaries, said it was great to learn about the progress of the vaccine efforts by the two biotech firms. "Great to join @mea on a visit to Hyderabad to learn first-hand about progress of COVID vaccine efforts by Bharat Biotech & Biological E," he tweeted.

"#Hyderabad - the vaccine hub of Flag of India - produces a third of all vaccines manufactured globally. Witnessed first-hand the impressive research & manufacturing facilities at @BharatBiotech & @biological_e & the progress India is making in its COVID vaccine efforts...", he said in another tweet.

The Ministry of External Affairs has organised the visit to familiarise the foreign envoys about some key research and development activities being done by the country, an official release had earlier said.

The state government made fool-proof arrangements duly following all the COVID-19 protocols. The dignitaries were divided into two batches and were taken to the facilities separately.

Woman gangraped in hubby's presence

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Ranchi, Dec 9: In a shocking incident, a woman was gang-raped by 17 persons in the presence of her husband in Jharkhand's Dumka district, following which an FIR was lodged on Wednesday, police said.

The crime occurred in an area falling under Mufasil police station jurisdiction on Tuesday when the woman, mother of five children, was returning home along with her husband from a fair. The accused waylaid them on the way. They overpowered her husband and gang-raped her.

Senior police officials reached the police station after they came to know about the crime. Police launched a manhunt to arrest the accused. The woman was sent for medical examination.

COVID IMPACT



Jantar Mantar wears a deserted look due to low footfall amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic in Jaipur, Wednesday

MP COUPLE TRAVELS 200 KM FOR CORONA VACCINE TRIAL

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bhopal, Dec 9: A young couple from Indore in Madhya Pradesh has travelled nearly 200 km to state capital Bhopal to volunteer for the administration of coronavirus vaccine under third-phase trial at an institute here.

Their selfless act comes amid the shortage of volunteers for the pioneering cause. Manoj Rai said that he was associated with vaccination programme and travelled to the state capital often from Indore with regard to his official work.

Since the corona vaccine trial is underway at the People's College of Medical sciences and Research Centre here, he met the district authorities last week and came up

with the idea to volunteer for the vaccination. He was asked by officials concerned to come on December 8 for vaccination. After returning home, Manoj brought up the issue with his wife Pooja who - much to his surprise - also expressed her desire to volunteer for the noble cause.

Eventually, both reached Bhopal on Tuesday for their vaccination.

Manoj's parents Kantilal Rai and Sonabai also approved of the couple's decision and said that the ongoing vaccination development was in the interest of the country as a whole and one should therefore contribute to it.

Manoj said that after the completion of all medical formalities, he and his wife got themselves vaccinated.

Kejriwal under house arrest?

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: The AAP Wednesday alleged that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's movement is still "restricted" and the main gate of his residence remains closed by the Delhi Police, which denied the charge.

The AAP, which had Tuesday alleged that the Delhi Police put Kejriwal under house arrest after he met farmers protesting against the Centre's agriculture reform laws at the city's Singhu border, again claimed that it was being done at the behest of Amit Shah.

The Delhi Police had rejected AAP's charge against it as "totally baseless". Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, AAP spokesperson Raghav Chadha said there is an atmosphere of "undeclared emergency" around the chief minister's residence.

"I am telling you with full responsibility that the movement of



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is still restricted at the behest of the (Union) home minister. The main gate of the chief minister's residence is still closed," Chadha alleged. "In a way, there is an atmosphere of undeclared emergency. All this, just because we did not allow the stadiums to be converted into prisons for farmers," he alleged.

A senior police officer said there is no restriction on any kind of movement of the chief minister. "The police deployment outside the chief

minister's residence is part of security protocol," he said.

According to police sources, Kejriwal left his residence around 11 AM to attend a programme. Chadha claimed that Kejriwal's residence is still not fully opened and one door continues to remain closed because of the Delhi Police.

"The entrance that everyone uses to enter the CM's residence and meet him, remains closed even now. Access to that entrance has been blocked as 45 members of the BJP are camping outside the CM's residence, with active assistance from Delhi Police," he alleged.

"The CM's right to free movement, which is a fundamental right, has been curtailed," Chadha said. Chadha alleged, "This act of putting him under house arrest is purely an act of revenge because Arvind Kejriwal supported the farmers, because he made arrangements for toilets, water, warm clothes, food for them."

Crocodile visit triggers panic

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thrissur (Kerala), Dec 9: A crocodile knocking at your door may sound strange, but that is exactly what happened in a house in Kerala early Wednesday.

A family, living in this central district, opened the front door of their house in the morning as usual, only to find a giant crocodile in the verandah outside. The uninvited 'guest' paid a visit to the house of Shajan Thacheth located near the famed Athirapally waterfalls, the largest waterfalls in the southern state.

Shajan's wife, who opened the door by 5:00 am, was shocked at the sight of the aquatic reptile on their porch, which was the play area of their grandchild. The startled homemaker raised an alarm and awakened other members of the family who immediately alerted the forest department officials.

Hearing their cries, some neighbours and local residents also rushed to Shajan's house and tried to drive away the carnivore using a plastic pole. But, their attempts were futile as the reptile crawled under a sofa.

A video, in which the crocodile is seen biting a pole when someone tried to move it away, has gone viral now. Shajan said they heard some strange noise from the verandah during the wee hours and thought it might be a stray dog, but never imagined that it would be a crocodile.

A seven-member team of forest officials, with the help of some locals, first tried to force the reptile out of the premises and move it to the nearby Chalakkudy river. "But, the croc was reluctant to budge after crawling some distance. So, we tied its mouth and tail safely without causing any injury to the reptile and later released it near the waterfall," T A Ajikumar, forest officer, Charpa Forest Range, said.

It took three hours to capture and safely release the reptile, the official said adding that the local people were very cooperative.

What COVID? Life is all normal in Lakshadweep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kochi, Dec 9: The world may be in the grip of COVID-19 pandemic, disrupting daily schedules and robbing many of their weekend getaways, but life seems to be normal in the small Lakshadweep islands, which is yet to record the first positive case of coronavirus.

No masks, no sanitisers, and many rules of COVID-19 are not in place and every human activity, including marriages and public gatherings continue, thanks to strict Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that bars easy entry of people to the island in the Arabian Sea.

According to P P Mohammed Faizal, who represents the islands in the Lok Sabha, Lakshadweep has stayed off the COVID-19 pandemic since its outbreak earlier this year, reporting zero cases as of December 8. "So far not a single case of coronavirus has been reported

from Lakshadweep because of the exemplary precautionary measures we have taken", Faizal said.

Gaining entry to the 36 sq km island comes with its set of strict measures. Whether it is a common man, officials or people's representatives- they will have to fulfill the measures including mandatory seven-day quarantine at Kochi, the only point from where transportation via ships and helicopters to the Union Territory is allowed. Faizal said no COVID-19 restrictions have been imposed on the people in the islands.

"No masks, no sanitisers because it is a green area. Lakshadweep is the only place where the schools are open and classes are being conducted. From September 21 onwards, the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) has allowed to open the schools." "It is like normal. All the functions, including religious ones and others like mar-



riages are being held as usual. Everything is normal here", the two-time MP said.

The smallest UT in the country, Lakshadweep is an archipelago consisting of 36 islands with an area of 32 sq km. All the islands are 220 to 440 km away from the coastal city of Kochi in Kerala. According to Census 2011, it has a population of 64,000. Faizal said the moment Kerala reported the first case of COVID-19, also the country's first, in January, the local administration mounted a strict vigil. The

first concern was to stop the arrival of tourists- both international and domestic. "In the month of March 2019, we stopped it", the MP said. The administration then stopped the entry permit to each of the islands from the mainland and allowed access only to capital Kavaratti from Kochi with the approval of the administrator, officials said. By curtailing the issuance of entry permit, the administration could control the inflow of non-islanders to Lakshadweep, they added.

For the entry of islanders who work in other parts of the county and abroad, officials deployed in Lakshadweep and those who travel to mainland for treatment purpose, a standard operating procedure was formulated.

Accordingly, those who want to come to Lakshadweep will have to undergo seven days institutional quarantine in Kochi, with the administration bearing the cost involved in it. To ensure proper testing of samples of islanders quarantined in Kochi, the administration has provided a testing machine to the Kalamassery Government Medical College. "Those who tested negative will be allowed to come to Lakshadweep. Once they reach their particular island, again they have to be home quarantined for a week. That has been strictly monitored by medical and police departments," Faizal said.

of the day quote

The BJP government at the Centre is humiliating the elderly farmers repeatedly by calling them to different places without reaching a concrete solution. The people of the country are angry and keenly watching every move of the Central government. The BJP must stop being the middleman to fulfil the interests of some rich industrialists

AKHILESH YADAV | SP NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Although Kejriwal calls himself an 'Aam Aadmi' (common man), he is basically against common man. That is why his government has not paid dues of ₹1,30,000 crore to municipal corporations which would help in payment of salaries to sanitation workers, doctors, nurses and other employees

MANOJ TIWARI | BJP LEADER

Birthday greetings to Smt. Sonia Gandhi Ji. May God bless her with a long and healthy life

NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Jawan ends life

Raipur: A Border Security Force jawan allegedly committed suicide at his unit's camp in Naxal-hit Kanker district of Chhattisgarh Wednesday, officials said. Constable Swaraj P N, belonging to the BSF's 4th battalion, was found hanging from the ceiling of a mess at the Tactical Headquarters of his battalion stationed in Koyalibeda police station area around 6.30 am, a police official said. After being alerted, local police officials rushed to the spot and the body was sent for post-mortem, he said.

2 miners missing

Dhanbad(Jharkhand): Two miners are missing in Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) Khudiyi Kadan mine in Mugma area of the district after water flooded the underground mine, officials said Wednesday. The official said four miners were engaged in dewatering the mine on Tuesday. Pump operator Basiya Manjhi (56) and his assistant Manik Bauri (52) were found missing when all of a sudden water flooded the seam of the underground mine at around 4 am. Professional divers and NDRF teams on Wednesday launched rescue operation for the two missing miners after the local rescue teams failed to trace the two missing miners on Tuesday.

Boys found dead

Ahmedabad: Three minor brothers were found dead in a pond at a village in Gujarat's Vadodra district Wednesday, a day after they went missing, police said. Bodies of Sureshbhai Saniya's sons Mayur (13), Dhruv (10) and Uttam (8), were found floating in a pond at Koliyad village in Karjan taluka, an official from Karjan police station said.

Two arrested

Thane: Two women were arrested and four others rescued from a flesh trade racket in Mira-Bhayandar area of Maharashtra's Thane district, police said Wednesday. Acting on a tip-off, the MBVV police set up a decoy and raided a place in Uttan Dhavi Dongar on Tuesday, deputy commissioner of police Amit Kale of Mira-Bhayandar said. Two accused identified as Pinki Dubey (29) of Goregaon and Arpita Goshal (31) of Kalyan were arrested for supplying women for flesh trade, the official said.



Under Mr Modi, reform equals theft. That's why they need to get rid of democracy

RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

RECOVERIES CROSS 92 LAKH

India's COVID-19 caseload rose to 97.35 lakh Wednesday, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease crossed 92 lakh, pushing the national recovery rate to 94.66 per cent, according to the Union health ministry



Top court relief for IIT Bombay entrant

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 9: In a big relief to the 18-year-old student who was on the verge of losing a seat at IIT Bombay, the Supreme Court Wednesday directed the institute to grant him interim admission in an engineering course.

Siddhant Batra, a resident of Agra, had lost the seat for the four-year electrical engineering course after he "inadvertently" clicked on a "wrong" link, which was seeking consent to withdraw from the process.

A bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Dinesh Maheshwari and Hrishikesh Roy said: "List in the reopening miscellaneous week after the winter recess. In the meantime, by interim order, we direct that the petitioner should be permitted to



join the respondent-institution and pursue his course subject to fulfillment of all other formalities."

Batra, represented by advocate Pralhad Paranjpe, in his petition, sought direction to IIT to consider his case on humanitarian grounds.

He said he lives with his grandparents following the death of his parents, and submitted that he

Siddhant Batra, a resident of Agra, had lost the seat for the electrical engineering course after he "inadvertently" clicked on a "wrong" link, which was seeking consent to withdraw from the process

had worked hard to clear the IIT-JEE exam. Batra requested creation of an additional seat to undo his loss.

In his plea before the High Court, Batra submitted he had lost his father at a young age and lost his mother in 2018. The counsel for Director IIT Bombay drew the top court's attention to Rule 46 to sub-

mit that the Batra had frozen his seat as per the said rule and completed the process.

The court said: "He has then drawn our attention to Chapter XXIII which is the Withdraw Option to state that all the processes envisaged in Rules 56 to 59 have been completed by him and that he would file an affidavit with annexure setting out how the respondents (IIT Bombay) have completed the process."

Batra moved the top court challenging the Bombay High Court, which dismissed his plea on November 23, saying that it cannot intervene at this stage as all the seats for the course were full.

The High Court, citing the IIT Bombay submissions, had emphasised the admission rules had to be followed and Batra could apply next year for JEE (Advanced).

MATTER OF LIVELIHOOD



A farmer harvests cauliflower on the outskirts of Jammu, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

K'taka passes anti-cow slaughter bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, Dec 9: Amid bedlam, the controversial anti-cow slaughter bill was passed in the Karnataka Assembly Wednesday, with the Congress members staging a walk-out in protest.

The bill known as the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill-2020 seeks a total ban on the slaughter of cows in the state and stringent punishment to those who indulge in smuggling, illegal transportation, atrocities on cows and slaughtering them, BJP sources said.

"Yes, the bill has been passed in the Assembly," Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister J C Madhuswamy said. Besides cows and calves, the bill also intends to protect buffaloes and their calves less than 12 years of age. There is a provision to set up special courts for the speedy trial of the accused people. It also makes provision for setting up Goshala or cattle-sheds for the protection of livestock. Police have been given powers to conduct checking. The law also gives protection to those who protect these livestock. The bill was passed without any discussion as there was din in the House.

Ties under strain: Jaishankar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar Wednesday said China has given India "five differing explanations" for deploying large forces at the LAC, adding this violation of bilateral pacts has "very significantly damaged" their relationship that is now at its "most difficult phase" in the last 30-40 years.

The comments by Jaishankar during an online interactive session organised by Australian think tank Lowy Institute came against the backdrop of the over seven-month-long military standoff between India and China at the Line of Actual Control(LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

"We are today probably at the most difficult phase of our relationship with China, certainly in the last 30 to 40 years or you could



argue even more," Jaishankar said highlighting various aspects of the bilateral ties in the last three decades. "The relationship this year has been very significantly damaged." "We are very clear that maintaining peace and tranquility along the LAC is the basis for the rest of the relationship to progress. You can't have the kind of situation you have on the border and say let's carry on with life in all other sectors of activity. It's just unrealistic," he said.

Jaishankar further said, "We

have this problem because from 1988, our relationship had its hiccups, we had our issues and differences but the direction of the ties broadly were positive. "The external affairs minister said the relationship progressed in trade, travel and various other domains as both sides inked several pacts to maintain peace and tranquility along the LAC. "All of this was posited on the fact that while we were trying to solve the boundary question, we would maintain peace and tranquillity along the border areas," he said, adding there were incidents of arguments between patrols along the border "but you never had a major breach of understanding".

He said multiple agreements between the two sides were inked from 1993 with a commitment that both parties will not bring large forces to the border areas.

No stay on criminal conviction, no contesting polls, rules SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: A person stands disqualified from contesting polls under the election law if his conviction in a criminal case, in which a jail term of two or more years has been awarded, is not stayed, the Supreme Court said Wednesday.

The top court's observation came in a judgement by which it dismissed an appeal of Saritha S Nair against the rejection of her nomination papers for contesting Lok Sabha polls from Ernakulam, Kerala, by the returning officers in 2019 on account of her conviction and sentencing in two criminal cases related to the Solar scam in the state.

Hibi Eden of Congress party won the seat.

Nair had also moved the top court against rejection of her nomination papers on the same grounds for contesting Lok Sabha polls from Wayanad seat against Rahul Gandhi.

The plea was dismissed earlier on November 2 on account of non-prosecution.

A bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian trashed the contention of Nair that the rejection of her nomination papers was incorrect as her sentence of three years was suspended by appellate courts. The bench said that

the suspension of the execution of the sentence would not "alter or affect" the conviction and that therefore such a person would remain disqualified.

The top court was very critical of the Kerala High Court for holding the defects such as lack of proper verification, incomplete prayer and allegations against former Chief Minister as incurable in Nair's petition.

"The High Court committed a grave error in holding the three defects... As incurable. The defects are curable and as rightly contended by the counsel for the petitioner; an opportunity to cure the defects ought to have been given..." it said.

Sonia at 74 presides over 'weakest' Congress ever

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 9: Sonia Gandhi, who turned 74 Wednesday, has decided not to celebrate her birthday amid the farmers' distress and the Covid-19 pandemic.

She has asked her party workers to be involved in relief work instead. The party leaders are pouring in with birthday wishes. "Long life to her", Salman Khurshid wrote on social media; "Best wishes to Hon'ble Congress President and UPA Chairperson Smt Sonia Gandhi. May she be blessed with good health", Khurshid said.

Sonia Gandhi, who was born in 1946 in the Italian town of Lusiana Conco, is the longest serving President of the grand old party. Over the years she has seen both highs and lows but at this point, things are not well within the party

as an internal rebellion has been raging for sometime and the party has not been able to stop BJP's march in all forms of elections.

People raising doubt over the Gandhi family at the helm of the party has gained momentum like never before. However, she and her children are still the crowd-pullers. The G23, a group of 23 members, who wrote the infamous letter about reforms in the party is not relenting and has again raised their concern after the Bihar poll defeat.

Sonia Gandhi also lost her ace trouble shooter Ahmed Patel due to Covid just days back, and her detractors in the party have given her some time to grief it seems. As the Congress is bracing for polls in crucial states of Assam, West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu the party is also battling internal rifts within its fold.



The old guard is up against her son Rahul Gandhi's style of working and is not pleased with his decisions. In the raging farmers protest that has taken the national capital in a chokehold for days, the Congress is led by the Chief Minister of Punjab, who is spearheading this

movement. Rahul Gandhi despite taking early lead during his tractor yatra is missing in the final lap.

The party is going for presidential polls soon and insiders say if Rahul Gandhi throws in his hat he might get the post unchallenged but if he fields a candidate then

the post may not go uncontested.

While Sonia Gandhi who took over party leadership in 1998 and got the UPA government elected in 2004 was the most powerful person in the country till 2014, the party since has lost two consecutive general elections and have been reduced to a double digit. Party members have openly come out against the nomination culture and demanded election from block to the Congress Working Committee level to galvanise the party.

Suspended party spokesperson Sanjay Jha wrote an article ahead of her birthday and tweeted "It is a natural process of evolution, change. The once infallible Gandhi brand has become weak. It has been slow to adapt. They are no longer Congress's magic wand. They have become its kryptonite. It is time for change."

KARNAN TESTS COVID POSITIVE

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, Dec 9: Retired High Court Judge C.S. Karnan has tested positive for coronavirus and his condition is stable, said a top official of Stanley Medical College.

Karnan was arrested by the police and is in jail in connection with his social media offensive videos/posts with objectionable comments and threats of sexual violence against judiciary officials and their family members. After he felt unwell, he was taken to the hospital by the jail authorities.

"He came to the hospital on Tuesday. When a CT scan was taken we found some changes in his lung. Then RT-PCR test was done and the result came positive Wednesday" P.Balaji, Dean, Stanley Medical College said.

international



Any decision to impose sanctions against Turkey won't be of great concern to Turkey
RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN | TURKISH PRESIDENT

VENICE UNDER WATER

Venice's St Mark's Square was under water Tuesday after a newly installed system of mobile artificial dams failed to activate



of the day quote

Let's pay homage to 3 million killed & 200,000 or more women raped in erstwhile East Pakistan by the Pakistan army & religious militias in 1971 in most horrific episode in human history



T S TIRUMURTI | INDIA'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN AMBASSADOR

The targeted nature of Chinese government measures on Australian goods raises concerns about China's adherence to the letter and spirit of its ChAFTA (free trade agreement) and WTO obligations



SIMON BIRMINGHAM | AUSTRALIAN TRADE MINISTER

If there are conditions from the British side which we cannot accept, we are prepared to go down a road which is without an exit agreement



ANGELA MERKEL | GERMAN CHANCELLOR

SHORT TAKES

Call for mass testing in SK

Seoul: The governor of South Korea's most populous province called for mass testing for coronavirus Wednesday, as daily new cases centred in the densely populated Seoul area held at levels unseen since the outbreaks began earlier this year. South Korea is suffering a third wave of coronavirus outbreaks, and over the past week new cases have been consistently around 600.

Germany tracks COVID protesters

Berlin: German intelligence agents have placed under observation a group of protesters against coronavirus restrictions, citing the influence of radicals including far-right Nazi admirers. The domestic intelligence service in the southwestern Baden-Wuerttemberg region put the "Querdenken 711" group on a watch-list due to its increasing radicalisation, the state's interior ministry said Wednesday.

Floods in parts of Slovenia, Croatia

Ljubljana (Slovenia): Heavy rains have battered parts of Slovenia and Croatia close to the Adriatic Sea coast, causing floods and landslides, blocking roads and disrupting traffic. Persistent rain in coastal Slovenia Wednesday made the Dragonja river overflow its banks along the border with Croatia, blocking a key road in the area and forcing closure of a border crossing. A landslide brought down trees in the area of the port town of Koper and flooded regional roads, while rising Adriatic Sea waters submerged parts of nearby Piran.

Tight lockdown curbs in Ukraine

Kyiv: Ukraine will introduce tight lockdown restrictions in January, hoping to stop the rapid spread of COVID-19 infections, Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said Wednesday. The measures, which include the closure of schools, cafes, restaurants, gyms and entertainment centres and a ban on mass gatherings, will be in force from Jan. 8 to 24, Shmygal told the televised government meeting.

UK probes possible allergic reactions to Pfizer/BioNTech

AGENCIES

London, Dec 9: Britain's medicines regulator Wednesday issued a warning for people with "significant" history of allergic reactions to medicines, food or vaccines to the vaccine against COVID-19. The warning comes after two National Health Service (NHS) workers experienced "anaphylactoid reaction" symptoms shortly after being injected, but are now said to be recovering well. NHS England said all its trusts involved with the mass vaccination programme have been informed and from Wednesday, all patients scheduled to receive the vaccine will be asked if they have a history of allergic reactions.

"As is common with new vaccines, the MHRA have advised on a precautionary basis that people with a significant history of allergic reactions do not receive this vaccination after two people with a history of significant allergic reactions responded adversely," said Professor Stephen Powis, medical director for the NHS in England. An anaphylactoid reaction tends to involve a skin rash, breathlessness and sometimes a drop in blood pressure and both the NHS workers who experienced this are said



to have a history of serious allergies and carry adrenaline pens around with them.

"We have been advised by MHRA [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency] of two yellow card reports that may be associated with allergic reaction due to administration of the COVID-19 BNT162b2 vaccine," Pfizer UK said in a statement. "As a precautionary measure, the MHRA has issued temporary guidance to the NHS while it conducts an investigation in order to fully understand each case and its causes," it said. Dr June Raine, the head of the MHRA, told a joint select committee hearing on Tuesday that "real-time vigilance" will continue throughout the vaccine rollout process. "We know from the extensive clinical trials that this [allergy] was not a feature, but if we need to strengthen our advice now that we have had this experience in vulnerable popula-

tions, the groups selected as a priority, we get that advice out immediately," she said. Experts have indicated that such reactions are to be expected in rare cases with any vaccine, including the annual flu vaccine. Several thousand people became the first to be vaccinated against COVID-19 Tuesday, the day marked as V-Day or Vaccine Day in the UK. Indian-origin husband and wife couple, Hari Shukla, 87, and his wife Ranjan, 83, were among those on the prioritised list of recipients finalised based on those at the highest risk of death from the deadly virus. The NHS has announced that the vaccination programme will be expanded out of the 50 hospital hubs to general practitioner (GP) surgeries around the country from next week. Doses are expected to be delivered to around 200 GP surgeries initially to allow them to start next Tuesday, when over-80s will be invited first.

UK, EU head for supper showdown

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Brussels, Dec 9: Leaders of Britain and the European Union will meet Wednesday for a dinner that could pave the way to a post-Brexit trade deal - or tip the two sides toward a chaotic economic rupture at the end of the month.

Early-morning comments from both sides insisting that it was for the other to compromise only highlighted the difficult task ahead for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Within just a few hours they would need to unstick negotiations that are deadlocked on key aspects of the future relationship. British officials said they hoped political pressure from the top could break the logjam, but room was limited.

BREXIT TRADE DEAL

"Unless we see some movement on the EU side, then it will be very difficult," UK Cabinet minister Michael Gove told Times Radio. The bloc insists the UK needs to move to secure agreement.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said "there is still the chance of an agreement," but stressed that the EU would not compromise on its core principles.

Merkel told the German parliament that the bloc would "take a path without an agreement if there are conditions from the British side that we can't accept."

Heroic pilot Chuck Yeager dies

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Washington, Dec 9: Chuck Yeager, the first person to travel at a speed faster than the speed of sound, has passed away at the age of 97.

"It is w/ profound sorrow, I must tell you that my life love General Chuck Yeager passed just before 9pm ET," Victoria Yeager tweeted on her husband's account Tuesday.

"An incredible life well lived, America's greatest Pilot, & a legacy of strength, adventure, & patriotism will be remembered forever."

Yeager was born in 1923, in Myra, West Virginia. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in September 1941, was accepted for pilot training under the flying sergeant programme in July 1942, and received his pilot wings and appointment as a flight officer in March 1943 at Luke Field, Arizona, the US Air Force said on its website.

During World War II, Yeager distinguished himself in aerial combat over France and Germany during the years 1943-1945 by shooting down 13 aircraft, five on one mission, including one of

Germany's first jet fighters.

Yeager made history October 14, 1947, when he became the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound during his nine-year assignment as the nation's leading test pilot. He also became the first man to fly more than twice the speed of sound in level flight, flying the Bell X-1A December 12, 1953, the US Air Force said.

"Today's passing of Gen. Chuck Yeager is a tremendous loss to our nation. Gen. Yeager's pioneering and innovative spirit advanced America's abilities in the sky and set our nation's dreams soaring into the jet age and the space age," NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine said in a statement.

"Among many firsts in more than 60 years in aviation, Chuck was the first man to fly at the speed of sound, and his achievements rival any of our greatest firsts in space. Not content to rest on his laurels, he went on to break his own record and travel at Mach 2.44. But even before that he was serving his country heroically in World War II." Yeager's heroics have been immortalised in the book "The Right Stuff."



SMILE PLEASE



A girl with a balloon poses for a photo near a polling station during Ghana's presidential and parliamentary elections in Kyebi, Ghana

Biden details plan to combat nCoV

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Dec 9: US President-elect Joe Biden has said that in the first 100 days of his administration, he would mandate everyone to wear a mask, ensure 100 million COVID-19 vaccinations and reopen the majority of schools as he assured Americans that his "crisis-tested" team of experts will deliver better healthcare and revive the economy.

The US is in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has infected almost 15 million Americans and killed 286,000. Globally, there are 68.2 million COVID-19 cases and the pandemic has claimed more than 1.5 million lives. Announcing his national health team, Biden asked the Trump



administration to act now to purchase the doses it has negotiated with Pfizer and Moderna and to work swiftly to scale manufacturing for the US population and the world.

"This can be fixed. If it does, my team will be able to get at least 100 million vaccinations done in my first 100 days. Third, it should be a national priority to get our kids

West undermining our ties with India: Russia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, Dec 9: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has accused the US-led West of attempting to "undermine" Russia's close partnership and privileged relations with India.

Speaking at a meeting of the state-run think-tank Russian International Affairs Council via a video link Tuesday, Lavrov said the West is seeking to reinstate the unipolar world order that would include all states but for Russia and China with which it would deal later.

"Poles' like Russia and China are unlikely to be subordinate to it. However, India is currently an object of the Western countries' persistent, aggressive and devious policy as they are trying to engage it in anti-China games by promoting Indo-Pacific strategies, the so-called 'Quad'," he was quoted as saying by the Russian Foreign Ministry. The US, Japan, India and Australia had in 2017 given shape to the long-pending proposal of setting up the "Quad" or the Quadrilateral coalition to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region.

The US says Quad is not an alliance but a grouping of countries driven by shared interests and values and interested in strengthening a rules-based order in the strategically-important Indo-Pacific region. "At the same time the West



is attempting to undermine our close partnership and privileged relations with India. This is the goal of the US' very tough pressure on New Delhi in the military and technical cooperation area (with Russia)," the top Russian diplomat added.

In 2018, India and Russia announced that they have elevated their strategic partnership into a "special privileged strategic partnership". In October 2018, India had signed a \$5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, notwithstanding warning from the Trump administration that going ahead with the contract may invite US sanction.

The S-400 - known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system - can destroy incoming hostile aircraft, missiles and even drones at ranges of up to 400 km. Rejecting the objective trends towards the formation of a multipolar world, the US-led West has launched a "game," Lavrov said.

Pak determines price of Dilip, Raj's ancestral houses

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Peshawar, Dec 9: Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has determined the price of the ancestral houses of legendary Hindi film actors Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor in the heart of this city at Rs 80,56,000 and Rs 1,50,00,000 respectively.

The provincial government in September decided to purchase their ancestral houses to conserve the historic buildings which are in dilapidated condition and facing demolition threat.

The two buildings, located in the heart of this northern Pakistani city, have been declared as national heritage. Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar Muhammad Ali Ashgar, following a report of the Communication and Works Department, fixed the price of Dilip Kumar's four Marla house for Rs 80,56,000 (USD 50,259) while that of Raj Kapoor's six Marla house for Rs 1,50,00,000 (USD 93,529).

Marla, a traditional unit of area used in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is considered as equal to 272.25 square feet or 25.2929 square metres. The archaeology department has sent a formal request to the provincial government for releasing over Rs 2 crore for purchasing both the historic buildings, where the two greats of the Indian cinema were born and raised in their early days before the Partition.

Raj Kapoor's ancestral home, known as Kapoor Haveli, is situated in the fabled Qissa Khwani Bazar. It was built between 1918 and 1922 by the legendary actor's grandfather Dewan Basheswarnath Kapoor.

'Despite lockdowns, world heads to temperature rise'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Nairobi, Dec 9: A green pandemic recovery could cut up to 25 per cent off predicted 2030 greenhouse gas emissions and bring the world closer to meeting the two degree celsius goal of the Paris Agreement on climate change, said a new UN Environment Programme (UNEP) report Wednesday.

The UNEP's annual Emissions Gap Report 2020 reveals that despite a dip in the 2020 carbon dioxide emissions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the world is still heading for a temperature rise in excess of three degree celsius this century.

However, if governments invest in climate action as part of pandemic recovery and solidify emerg-

ing net-zero commitments with strengthened pledges at the next climate meeting - taking place at Glasgow in November 2021 - they could bring emissions to levels broadly consistent with the two degrees celsius goal. By combining a green pandemic recovery with swift moves to include new net-zero commitments in the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, and following up with rapid and robust action, governments could still attain the more ambitious 1.5 degrees goal. Each year the Emissions Gap Report assesses the gap between anticipated emissions and levels consistent with the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming this century to well below two degrees and pursuing 1.5 degrees celsius. The



report reveals that during 2019 the overall greenhouse gas emissions, including land use change, reached a new high of 59.1 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalent (GtCO2e). Global greenhouse gas emissions have grown 1.4 per cent per year since 2010

on an average, with a more rapid increase of 2.6 per cent in 2019 due to a large increase in forest fires. As a result of reduced travel, lower industrial activity and lower electricity generation this year due to the pandemic, carbon dioxide emis-

sions are predicted to fall up to 7 per cent in 2020. However, this dip only translates to a 0.01 degree celsius reduction of global warming by 2050. Meanwhile NDCs remain inadequate. A green pandemic recovery, however, could cut up to 25 per cent off the emissions the globe would expect to see in 2030 based on policies in place before Covid-19. A green recovery would put emissions in 2030 at 44 GtCO2e, instead of the predicted 59 GtCO2e - far outstripping emission reductions foreseen in unconditional NDCs, which leave the world on track for a temperature rise of 3.2 degrees celsius. Measures to prioritise in green fiscal recovery includes direct support for zero-emission technologies and infrastructure, reducing fossil fuel subsidies, no new coal

plants, and promoting nature-based solutions - including large-scale landscape restoration and reforestation.

The report finds that action on a green fiscal recovery has been limited. Nearly one-quarter of G20 members have dedicated shares of their spending up to three per cent of GDP to low carbon measures. There nonetheless remains a significant opportunity for countries to implement green policies and programmes. Governments must take this opportunity in the next stage of Covid-19 fiscal interventions, the report revealed. At the time of report completion, 126 countries covering 51 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions had adopted, announced or were considering net-zero goals.



Brand marketing and monetisation is going to be the core focus of ShareChat and we will direct our efforts towards elevating the brand positioning through strategic communications approach
FARID AHSAN | COO & CO-FOUNDER, SHARECHAT

OLA'S ELECTRIC 2-WHEELER RANGE IN NEW ZEALAND

Ride-hailing major Ola says it will launch its electric two-wheeler range in New Zealand which will support the NZ government's goal of bringing on road 64,000 new electric vehicles by the end of 2021



of the day uote

We invite all Indian issuers of GDRs/ADRS to list their depository receipts at NSE IFSC. We are committed to building a vibrant primary market ecosystem and active and robust secondary market for capital market products at GIFT IFSC
VIKRAM LIMAYE | MD & CEO, NSE

Since we entered into the Indian market in 2011, we have grown substantially after the acquisition of Modi Rubber, introducing a variety of products for passenger cars and commercial vehicles
KULDEEP SINGH | VICE PRESIDENT (MANUFACTURING), CONTINENTAL INDIA

Smartphone insurance is truly evolving as a great opportunity for the Indian general insurance industry, with India on the path to become the largest smartphone market in the world
ABHISHEK CHAUHAN | REDSEER CONSULTING HEAD - INDIA CONSULTING

Nod to ₹23Kcr loans for 9 states

So far nine states have successfully completed reforms in PDS and implemented One Nation One Ration System and thus, the Centre has granted permission for reform-linked borrowing

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 9: The Centre has granted permission of reform-linked borrowing worth ₹23,523 crore to nine states.

A Finance Ministry statement said that so far nine states have successfully completed reforms in PDS and implemented One Nation One Ration System - Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, Tripura and Uttar Pradesh.

"On completion of reforms, additional borrowing permission of ₹23,523 crore has been issued to them," it said.

In view of the challenges posed by the COVID 19 pandemic for mobilisation of financial resources, the Government of India has taken multiple measures to avail funds to states. These include grant of additional borrowing permission of 2 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the year 2020-21.

This has enabled the states to mobilise additional financial resources to fight the pandemic and maintain the standards of service delivery to the public. However, to ensure long-term debt sustainability and prevent any adverse impact on future, a part of the additional borrowing was linked to the States carrying out reforms in the sectors critical for service deliv-



- In view of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic for mobilisation of financial resources, the Centre has taken multiple measures to avail funds to states

- These include grant of additional borrowing permission of 2 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product in the year 2020-21

ery to the citizens. One of the sectors identified for reforms is the Public Distribution System. Out of the additional borrowing limit of 2 per cent of GSDP, 0.25 per cent is linked to implementation of 'One Nation One Ration Card system'. This was aimed to ensure that the beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other

welfare schemes, especially the migrant workers and their families, get ration from any Fair Price Shop (FPS) across the country.

Department of Food and Public Distribution in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is the nodal department to certify that a state has met the conditions stipulated for this reform. Further, to become eligible for additional borrowing, the states have to complete the reforms by December 31, 2020.

It is expected that many more states will complete this reform before the stipulated date, as per the ministry. In addition to the One Nation One Ration Card, other reforms specified as a precondition to avail additional borrowing are ease of doing business reform, urban local body or utility reforms and power sector reforms.

Agritech start-up ties up with FPOs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: India's fastest growing agritech startup DeHaat is collaborating with Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) in Odisha with an aim of connecting them and their member farmers to better market for various agri produce like corn, sweet potato, lemon grass oil and vegetables.

DeHaat has on boarded 10 FPOs of Odisha and working with them through its model of end to end agri offering for farmers. In last 12 months, the startup has started working with 7,800 farmers in districts like Mayurbhanj, Dhenkanal, Nuapada, Nabarangpur and helping farmers to get quality agri input like seed and crop protection at right price and right time.

Currently, DeHaat is serving over 3,50,000 farmers across Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, WB and Odisha. DeHaat also provides farmers with access to over 3,000 agricultural inputs, combined with AI-based customised crop advisory content of pest and disease management for major crops delivered via mobile app and call centers. The platform also aggregates corn, wheat, rice, fruits, and vegetables from farmers on their network and directly supplies to over 200 commodity bulk buyers, including retail chains, e-commerce players, FMCG giants, and SME food processors.

DeHaat was started by young alumni of IIT Delhi, IIT Kharagpur, IIM Ahmadabad, IIT-ISM Dhanbad and NIT Jamshedpur.

ICICI loans to Videocon an 'imprudent decision'

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 9: The scrutiny of the credit sanctions in the ICICI-Videocon loan case by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has highlighted these sanctions to Videocon Group between June 2009 and April 2012, as "imprudent."

This was when Chanda Kochhar was the bank's Managing Director and CEO. The loans were an "imprudent decision" and a clear case of "conflict of interest on her part", the Enforcement Directorate charge sheet mentions.

The 308 page charge sheet, filed by the financial probe agency in Special PMLA court here last month and witnessed by IANS, held that RBI official Malli Sudhakar, in a scrutiny report dated August 3, 2018 and in his statement to the agency October 16 this year, revealed that there was "conflict of interest" on the part of Kochhar.

Sudhakar had cited "absence of transparency in excluding the charge of securities and releasing existing security of Videocon Group taken by as collateral by ICICI Bank and imprudent decision in sanctioning of proposal to Videocon Group by ICICI Bank, of which Chanda Kochhar was Chairperson of recommending committee and member of sanctioning committee, when she was MD and CEO of the bank."

The ED contended that the RBI official, in his statement, reiterated that it was an "imprudent decision" by the ICICI Bank to in-



crease its exposure to Videocon Group by sanctioning fresh rupee term loan (RTL) of ₹750 crore.

Sudhakar further cited the release of security or non-creation of charge by ICICI Bank on the assets of the group.

"The primary security cover available with ICICI Bank in regard to Videocon Group declined from the existing 2.67 times to 1.67 times," he said.

He also claimed that there was a "conflict of interest" on part of ICICI Bank, as advocates and solicitors for the RTL agreement between the bank and the Videocon under debt consolidation were Amarchand and Mangaldas and Suresh A. Shroff and Company.

He claimed that the same firm was also appointed as the legal firm by the board of the bank to investigate into the alleged quid pro quo arrangement between Chanda and Videocon group reflecting conflict of interest.

SHORT TAKES

Centre releases ₹6Kcr to states

New Delhi: The Centre Wednesday said it has released the sixth installment of ₹6,000 crore to the states to meet the GST compensation shortfall. With this installment, a total amount of ₹36,000 crore has been released so far. Out of ₹6,000 crore released this week, an amount of ₹5,516.60 crore has been given to 23 states and ₹483.40 crore has been released to the 3 Union Territories (UTs) with Legislative Assembly (Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir and Puducherry) which are members of the GST Council, the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

Debt funds drive inflows into MFs

Mumbai: Despite the equity funds seeing outflow for the fifth consecutive month, the overall inflows into mutual funds crossed ₹30 lakh crore for the first time in November, driven by open-ended debt funds and market-to-market gains after a rally in the equity markets, according to a report. This had the industry-wide mutual fund assets expanding 6.3 per cent in November to settle at a record high of ₹30.01 lakh crore.

Covid vax to have differential pricing

New Delhi: Global pharma major Pfizer has said it will have differential pricing on its COVID-19 vaccine for different countries, as the company aims to make the vaccine available across the world. The company's Indian arm has sought emergency use authorisation (EUA) for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19 in the country from the Indian drug regulator.

FB India FY-20 revenue up 43%

New Delhi: Social media giant Facebook India's revenues grew 43 per cent year-on-year to about ₹1,277.3 crore in 2019-20, while its net profit more than doubled to ₹135.7 crore, as per regulatory documents. Its total income was ₹893.4 crore in the financial year ended March 31, 2019, according to Registrar of Companies filing - shared by market intelligence firm Tofler. The net profit increased by over 107 per cent to ₹135.7 crore in FY20 as compared to ₹65.3 crore in the preceding fiscal.

Employees left out as firms seek digital transformation



AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 9: As organisations seek digital transformation globally, many employees are often left behind in the process and are simply unaware how to contribute, a new survey said Wednesday.

Interestingly, there is still confusion at the top as even 14 per cent CEOs said they do not know how to get involved with the digital transformation (DX) process, according to the global study by Futurum Research.

The study revealed that 94 per cent of employees surveyed want to be more involved in digital transformation and almost half (44 per cent) of the general staff said they simply do not know how to help.

"Businesses should prioritise the tools and processes that break down operational silos and foster deeper collaboration to ensure all employees come along on this critical journey," said Don Schuerman,

CTO, Pegasystems.

"By nurturing a vibrant DX culture powered by the right solutions, organisations can help ensure that no employee gets left behind."

The global study surveyed executives, technology leaders and general employees from over 500 enterprises in North America and Europe on the role company culture plays in driving DX success.

A majority of business decision makers (68 per cent) believe that improving customer experience is the most important DX driver, followed closely by automating existing processes (67 per cent) and improving or updating processes (65 per cent).

"With the pandemic continuing to cause unparalleled uncertainty and disruption, businesses must examine every aspect of digital transformation to ensure they can keep pace and stay competitive," said Shelly Kramer, founding partner and senior analyst at Futurum Research.

FUEL BIZ DOWN BY 80 PC ON BANDH DAY IN STATE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 9: On the bandh day December 8, called by various organisations including farmers, in protest against Centre's new farm bills, the fuel business in the state was down by 80 pc.

Fuel associations said that the sector faced a loss of around ₹72.55 crore in one day in Odisha. According to Utkal Petroleum Dealers' Association, the industry suffered a loss of around ₹19.08 crore in petrol sales and ₹53.47 crore in diesel sales on strike day.

General Secretary of Utkal Petroleum Dealers' Association Sanjay Lath said, "On normal days, fuel sales reach to ₹89.70 crore of which petrol sales is ₹23.86 crore and diesel ₹66.84 crore in Odisha. The



loss was significant."

About 22,63,000 litres of petrol and 66,44,000 litres of diesel found no takers December 8. On an average, 28,29,000 litres of petrol and 83,05,000 litres of diesel are sold daily in the state.

"Out of the total, the state capi-

tal itself witnessed loss of ₹1.01 crore in petrol sales and ₹1.12 crore in diesel sales in one day. About 1.50 lakh litres of petrol is being sold in the city and diesel sales is around 2 lakh litres per day. The fuel sector usually generates revenue of 1.27 crore in petrol sales and ₹1.60 crore in diesel sales in the state capital.

After lockdown, fuel sales in the state had started to improve from August. In July, petrol demand was down by 34 per cent in state capital but recovered towards August.

OIL RISES ON VAX HOPES

LONDON: Oil prices rose Wednesday as news about COVID-19 vaccines lifted investor hopes for a recovery in fuel demand and outweighed concerns sparked by figures indicating U.S. oil inventories jumped last week. Brent crude rose 27 cents, or 0.6%, to \$49.11 a barrel by 1218 GMT. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude CL1> climbed 22 cents, up 0.5%, to \$45.82. The American Petroleum Institute (API) said Tuesday that U.S. crude oil, gasoline and distillate stocks rose sharply last week, with crude stocks jumping by 1.14 million barrels against analyst forecasts for a draw of 1.42 million barrels. Official weekly oil data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) is due later Wednesday. "Although vaccine roll outs have already begun in some countries, their impact will not be felt for a while yet," Stephen Brennock of oil broker PVM said.

'Limited credit impact' likely on Asia under Biden admin

THE MOODY'S REPORT ALSO SAYS THAT THE US POLICY TOWARDS CHINA IS UNLIKELY TO CHANGE DRAMATICALLY IN THE EARLY STAGES OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 9: The policies of US President-elect Joe Biden's administration may have a marginal impact on the credit conditions in Asia and is less likely to deepen trade linkages between the US and Asia, said a report by Moody's Investors Service.

The report also said that the US policy towards China is unlikely to change dramatically in the early stages of the Biden administration.

In addition, a renewed emphasis on improving relations with traditional allies in Asia is likely to confront the longer-term shifts in the economic and geopolitical balance that are increasing China's centrality to the region.

"In consequence, we expect the Biden administration's policies to have at the most a marginal impact on credit conditions in

Asia," it said.

It noted that outside China, Biden's policy may attempt to revive the "pivot to Asia" adopted by former President Barack Obama.

This policy aimed to increase diplomatic and investment ties with the region while retaining the strategic imperatives of closer security relations with Australia, India, Japan and some Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries.

However, the Biden administration is more likely to focus on boosting security alliances, with less emphasis on enhanced trade linkages.

"With Japan and Korea, we expect Biden to restore traditional relations under long-standing alliances, making them less transactional. As such, issues related to cost-sharing for military spending are not likely to be intertwined with trade issues, with the resulting invest-



ment certainty supporting the automotive and semiconductor sectors."

The US acting to moderate tensions between Japan and Korea should also help improve reciprocal trade for both countries. For Korea, however, geopolitical risk will remain elevated, with Biden likely to maintain a strategy of maximum pressure on North Korea.

Comprehensive Economic Partnership trade agreement, will accelerate intra-Asia trade flows and China's rising influence, with a positive credit impact for the most export-oriented sovereigns in Asia, it added.

The Moody's Investors Service report also said: "With the passage of major legislation, including Biden's proposed fiscal stimulus incorporating green infrastructure, remaining difficult irrespective of the outcome of the January 5 runoff elections in Georgia, we expect the US Federal Reserve will maintain a loose monetary policy to support economic recovery."

The Fed policy will support capital flows to some Asian emerging markets, which could in turn present policy challenges, including on exchange rate management, for those with large external imbalances.

The port-to-energy conglomerate said it only develops and operates grain silos for FCI

FCI, it said, controls the procurement and movement of food grains for the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The statement came as farmer groups in their agitation against the three farm reforms bills that among other things give farmers the freedom to sell their produce to anyone, alleged that the legislations were brought to favour Ambani and Adani.

Some farm groups have alleged that the Adani group is building grain storage facilities for hoarding food grains and selling them at a higher price later.

"We do not own any food grains procured from farmers, and are in no way connected to the pricing of grains," it said.

Adani Group said it has been in the business of developing and operating grain silos for FCI since 2005. It sets up storage infrastructure after winning competitive and transparent tender by the Government of India.



CR7 TOPS MESSI



ASTONISHING: Barcelona custodian Marc-Andre ter Stegen watches haplessly as the ball goes into the net from a Weston McKennie flying-volley at Camp Nou, Tuesday

Ronaldo scores two from the spot as Juventus exact sweet revenge on Barcelona beating the Spanish giants 3-0 at Camp Nou in their final Champions League group stage match

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Barcelona, Dec 9: Cristiano Ronaldo got the better of Lionel Messi by scoring two penalties to lead Juventus to a 3-0 win at Barcelona, dealing the Spanish side its first home defeat in the Champions League in seven years. Ronaldo Tuesday converted spot-kicks for Juventus' 13th-minute opener and a third goal early in the second half after US midfielder Weston McKennie doubled the advantage in the 20th.

Nou that remains empty because of coronavirus restrictions.

But only Ronaldo enjoyed the revival of their longstanding rivalry that enthralled fans for almost a decade when he played at Real Madrid before leaving for Italy in 2018.

Twice Ronaldo celebrated with his trademark leap, twist, and thrust of both arms downwards as he roared out his goals.

While Ronaldo benefited from errors by Barcelona's defense, Messi was left to carry the workload for the frustrated hosts. The Argentina star was unable to beat Gianluigi Buffon on his five strikes between the posts.

Juventus clinched first place in Group G on goal difference with the two sides finishing level on 15 points. Both teams had already qualified for the knockout round prior to the match.

Ronaldo was unable to play in Barcelona's 2-0 win in Turin in October after the Portugal forward had tested positive for COVID-19. Barcelona's record of 38 home games without a loss in Europe's top-tier tournament began in September 2013.



REACTIONS

RONALD KOEMAN: The defeat comes in the first 30 minutes. We started badly, with fear, lacking aggression. It seemed we'd gone into the game not to lose rather than to try and control the game. Juve pressed a lot, we didn't have control, defensively we were not good. We improved in the second half a lot. We lost the game in the first half-hour

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN: We didn't turn up. In the first half, they were all over us. We lacked everything: desire, attitude, wanting to run, to defend... everything was bad. It's our fault, we're the ones playing. We have to want to work hard and want to play. We have to want everything. That's the only way to move forward. We can look for excuse but it's time to leave that to one side and work hard

MARC-ANDRE TER STEGEN: We made mistakes that cannot happen. We're in a phase where if we slip up, we concede a goal. We haven't managed to have the rub of the green in that sense. We have to get out of this dynamic and work hard, which we are doing, to come out of this situation. We have to start games stronger. We have to concentrate on the league and try to get back as many points as possible and see how we go

CRISTIANO NEVER SAW LEO AS RIVAL

Barcelona: Cristiano Ronaldo insisted he never saw Lionel Messi as a rival after Juventus brushed past Barcelona in the Champions League. Ronaldo, who shared a brief embrace with Messi before the clash, said there was no rivalry between the two all-time greats. "I have always had a very cordial relationship with him," the Juve star told Movistar. "I shared 12, 13 or 14 years of award ceremonies with him. I never saw him as a rival. He always tries to do what is best for his team and me too. I always got along very well with him. But we know that in football, for the press, for the show, a rivalry is sought, but I have always gotten along well with him. I see him as always." Saying about Barcelona's struggle, he said: "Barcelona are going through a difficult time, but it is still Barcelona."

CL tie postponed as players walk off over alleged racism

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Paris, Dec 9: The Champions League game between Paris Saint-Germain and Basaksehir was postponed when players walked off the field after alleging that fourth official Sebastian Coltescu of Romania used a racial term when identifying an assistant coach.

Players from the Turkish team were furious Tuesday after assistant coach Pierre Webo was shown a red card by referee Ovidiu Hategan of Romania at Parc des Princes, saying Coltescu had used a racial term to describe Webo, who is from Cameroon, before he was sent off.

Basaksehir substitute Demba Ba demanded that the fourth official explain himself, while PSG players Neymar and Kylian Mbappe also demanded an explanation.

Basaksehir coach Okan Buruk said 'you are racist' to Coltescu. The score was 0-0 when the incident took place about 15 minutes into the match. UEFA said the match would resume Wednesday evening with new officials.

"Following an incident at tonight's (Tuesday) UEFA Champions League match between PSG and Basaksehir, UEFA has — after discussion with both clubs — decided on an exceptional basis to have the remaining minutes of the



match played tomorrow with a new team of match officials," UEFA said late Tuesday. "A thorough investigation on the incident that took place will be opened immediately," it added.

Television footage captured the exchange between the fourth official and the referee, with Coltescu telling Hategan that Webo should be reprimanded for his behavior on the sidelines: "Go and give it (the red card) to the Black one, this is not possible (tolerable), go and identify him, go verify, the Black one over there," Coltescu allegedly said, in Romanian, about Webo.

Webo was enraged and was heard to repeat at least six times "Why you say negro?" as he sought an explanation from Coltescu.

Moments later, Ba came off the bench and stood in front of Coltescu and said: "Why when you mention

a black guy, you have to say 'This black guy?'"

During the interruption, Basaksehir posted a message on Twitter against a UEFA backdrop with the message 'NO TO RACISM'. PSG defender Presnel Kimpembe, who was on the field during the game, also posted that message on his Twitter account.

Seven years ago, Hategan was in charge of a match between CSKA Moscow and Manchester City when City's black players were racially abused. City captain Yaya Toure directed referee Hategan toward fans making monkey noises at the English club's black players.

Michel Platini, UEFA's president at the time, requested an internal inquiry involving the referee to examine why guidelines were not followed to respond to discrimination incidents during matches.

Jorginho saves Blues the blushes

ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Dec 9: A second-string Chelsea side were held 1-1 at home by Krasnodar in the Champions League in a match where there was little at stake. Jorginho converted a penalty four minutes after Remy Cabella had put Krasnodar in front.

Chelsea had already qualified for the knockout stage as Group E champion, while Krasnodar knew it would finish third and play in the Europa League.

It was still a surprise at Stamford Bridge when Cabella gave Krasnodar the lead with a tidy finish in the 24th minute. Chelsea were punished for standing off the visiting attackers in the area, with center backs Antonio Rudiger and Andreas Christensen far too tentative.

Chelsea hit back almost immediately, however, with Jorginho burying a penalty in his trademark fashion to level at 1-1.

The Italy midfielder slotted home after



Jorginho in his midair stance while taking the spot-kick against Krasnodar, Tuesday

Tammy Abraham was fouled by Krasnodar defender Kaio. It was Jorginho's first penalty since missing in the 4-0 win in Krasnodar, in a failure that cost him Chelsea's main spot-kick duties.

The match was also notable as 19-year-old forward Tino Anjorin made his first start for Chelsea. He was one of 10 changes made by Chelsea coach Frank Lampard from Saturday's 3-1 Premier League win over Leeds.

EN-NESYRI BRACE HELPS SEVILLA BEAT RENNES

RENNES: Youssef En-Nesyri scored twice as Sevilla ended its Champions League group stage campaign with a 3-1 win over already eliminated Rennes. There was nothing at stake for either side at Roazhon Park, with Sevilla already through in second place behind Chelsea and Rennes guaranteed to finish last in Group E in their first Champions League campaign. Defender Jules Koukou put Europa League champions Sevilla ahead in the 32nd minute and En-Nesyri headed his team 2-0 up in first-half stoppage time. He added Sevilla's third goal in the 81st off a pass from Oscar Rodriguez. Rennes recorded 18 shots to eight for Sevilla, but couldn't make the chances count until 18-year-old forward Georginio Rutter scored a penalty on his Champions League debut in the 86th minute.

Le Fondre scripts Mumbai City win



Adam Le Fondre wheels away in celebration after scoring against Chennaiyin FC

AGENCIES

Goa, Dec 9: Mumbai City FC picked up their fourth consecutive win as they edged past Chennaiyin FC in their fifth match of the ISL season Wednesday at the GMC Stadium, Bambolim.

Jakub Sylvestr had handed Chennaiyin the lead in the 40th minute but Hernan Santana (45th) and Adam Le Fondre's (75th) strikes sealed three points for the Islanders.

The Marina Machans were dealt with a blow within first 20 minutes of the match as ace defender Enes Sipovic had to leave the pitch after picking up an injury.

Chennaiyin finally broke the deadlock in the 40th minute thanks to a brilliant effort from Chhangne who made a solo run down the

right flank beating three Mumbai players in the process and squared the ball in the centre and Jakub Sylvestr did not make a mistake in slotting the ball home.

The Islanders restored parity just a minute before the halftime whistle when Santana headed the ball in from Hugo Boumous' corner.

Chennaiyin's intensity dropped drastically in the second half as Mumbai commanded proceedings. Unlike the first half, the Islanders were proactive in their attacking third. Mumbai finally took the lead in the 75th minute thanks Le Fondre's strike. A long free-kick from Jahouh was kept in play by Borges inside the box and Boumous nudged it with his head towards an unmarked Le Fondre who comfortably placed the ball into the net.

Bajrang, Elavenil bag top honours at FICCI Awards

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: Tokyo Olympics-bound athletes – wrestler Bajrang Punia and shooter Elavenil Valarivan – bagged the top honours at the FICCI India Sports Awards 2020 held virtually this year.

Wrestling Federation of India and Paralympic Committee of India were jointly named as the best national sports federation, while the best para-athlete award was won jointly by Sundar Singh Gurjar and Simran Sharma. The coach of the year award was bagged by Radhakrishnan Nair of athletics.

The sports awards are an attempt by industry body, FICCI to acknowledge and recognise the contribution of sportspersons and various stakeholders who deliver excellent results throughout the year. Cricket legend Anil Kumble received the 'Best Company Promoting Sports (Private Sector)' award on behalf of his enterprise – Tenvic Sports.

CRICKET TOURNEY

Bhubaneswar: The Senior Men's Inter-District T20 League has been scheduled to start from December 14, Odisha Cricket Association (OCA) announced Wednesday. A total of 37 affiliated units will participate in this tourney. All the teams have been divided into six groups. The matches will be played at nine venues across Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

PARTHIV HANGS UP HIS GLOVES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 9: Parthiv Patel, one of the youngest to have played Test cricket for India at the age of 17, Wednesday announced his retirement from all forms of the game, three months short of his 36th birthday.

The baby-faced Parthiv, who made his Test debut under Sourav Ganguly, aged 17 years and 153 days, played 65 international games for the country, which included 25 Tests, 38 ODIs and two T20Is.

"Today, I announce retirement from all forms of cricket and as I bring down curtains on this 18-year-old cricketering journey, I feel heavier with gratitude for many," the 35-year-old Parthiv said in a statement on his official twitter and instagram account.

The left-handed batsman scored nearly 1,700 runs (1696) across formats with 934 runs (6 half centuries) coming in the longest format.

In ODIs, he scored 736 runs with four half-centuries and a highest score of 95. He effected 72 dismissals in Tests, which include 62 catches and 10 stumpings.

Parthiv burst onto the scene in early 2002, when he was sent to England after having played for India A in South Africa and even before he made his Ranji Trophy debut. "The BCCI showed generous amount of confidence and faith in a 17-year-old boy to play for India. I have enormous gratitude towards them for guiding me and hand holding me in the formative years of my young career," Parthiv further stated. In fact, he played his first Ranji



I feel at peace having played the game in its truest tenets with dignity and in the spirit of the game and most importantly with great camaraderie. As I walk away a proud man, having fulfilled more dreams than I thought possible, I hope to be remembered with that thought and find your support for my future endeavours

PARTHIV PATEL

Trophy after he was dropped from the India squad in 2004 due to below-par glove work on tours of Australia and Pakistan. He was thankful to all his captains and 'especially Dada', referring to BCCI president Sourav Ganguly.

Once MS Dhoni burst on to the scene, just like the other glove-men of that time, Parthiv also had

to play the catch-up game and be satisfied being the second keeper and at times playing as a specialist batsman.

He rediscovered himself as an opening batsman in white ball cricket and that's how he played a few ODIs for India during his second coming but chances were few and far between.

However, Parthiv like a true sportsman had always accepted that he can't blame Dhoni for his sporadic national appearances as both he and Dinesh Karthik got chances to cement their places before Dhoni.

But he did become a domestic legend and before retirement, played an astonishing 194 first-class games in which he had scored 11,240 runs with 27 hundreds at an average of 43 plus.

Add to it, 194 List A games and 204 T20 games, Parthiv had a long run but it was just that Dhoni was a few lightyears ahead as a performer.

But Parthiv did play for a lot of IPL teams, including Mumbai Indians, Chennai Super Kings, Royal Challengers Bangalore during the last 13 editions. Probably not getting a game in this IPL edition for RCB was decisive in his case.

"I want to thank the IPL franchises and their owners who made me a part of their teams and looked after me well," he said.

A long time leader of the Gujarat Ranji team, his finest hour would certainly be captaining his state to maiden Ranji Trophy triumph in 2016-17 season.

It was Parthiv, who with his leadership and ability to identify talent, made Gujarat from a middle-level domestic team to one of the best in the country.

Not to forget, he was one of the world's premier fast bowlers Jasprit Bumrah's first skipper at the senior level during the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy back in 2013, in which he made an impression to be picked for Mumbai Indians.