



**EXCITED GADOT**  
Hollywood star Gal Gadot says she is glad that Indian actor Hrithik Roshan has enjoyed her film *Wonder Woman* **LEISURE P2**



**CONG ALLIANCE WITH LEFT**  
Cong high command has given its nod for an alliance with Left parties for the Bengal Assembly polls next year **TWO STATES P8**



**nCoV DAMPENS CHRISTMAS**  
Celebrations in Europe were scaled back after a new variant of coronavirus was detected in the UK **INTERNATIONAL P10**



**IRREGULAR by MANJUL**  
Not sure about Govt nod for your vaccine. See, it's effective on everyone including its critics & protesters!

**SHORT TAKES**  
**Khurda temples to reopen January 3**

**Bhubaneswar:** The Khurda district administration Thursday issued an order allowing reopening of temples in the district from January 3. The District Collector, Sanat Kumar Mohanty, Thursday, issued the order and said that all religious institutions in Khurda except Lingaraj temple and temples coming under the territorial jurisdiction of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) will be allowed to reopen January 3. The order, however, said that the approvals are subject to compliance of some of the norms which the temples need to ensure. **P3**

**Maoists call Odisha bandh on Dec 28**

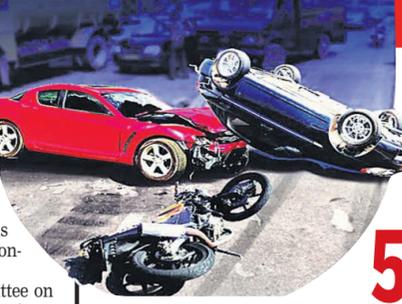
**Malkangiri:** Outlawed Maoists have given an Odisha bandh call December 28 protesting the recent deaths of several Maoist cadres during exchange of fire with security forces. Releasing an audio clip in this regard, CPI-Maoist Odisha Committee spokesperson Sonali said the rebels will give befitting reply to the deaths of the cadres. Terming the deaths as killings by SOG and DVF jawans, she warned of destroying the police informers' network. The Maoists have rejected Odisha DGP Abhay's appeal to the rebels for surrendering before police, she said. **P5**

**2 militants killed in J&K encounter**

**Srinagar:** Two militants were killed in an encounter with security forces in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir Thursday, police said. Security forces launched a cordon-and-search operation in Wanigam Payeen in the Kreeeri area of Baramulla district in north Kashmir Thursday morning following information about the presence of militants there, a police official said. He said the search operation turned into an encounter after the militants fired upon the forces, drawing retaliation.

## Alarming rise in road mishap fatalities during Sept-Oct

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Despite repeated instructions from the Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety, the state government has failed to check road mishap deaths in Odisha. As a result, fatalities increased by 27.5 per cent during festive months – September and October – this year compared to the corresponding period last year. The Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety had directed the states to reduce fatalities by 50 per cent by 2020 taking 2014 as the base year. However, there has been a steady rise in the number of fatalities in Odisha due to road accidents from 3,931 (2014) to 5,333 (2019), an increase of about 36 per cent. Odisha, which was ranked 16th among states vis-à-vis road mishap fatalities in 2014, was placed 12th during the period 2014-2019.



**FACT FILE**  
According to data prepared by the Crime Branch, **872** people were killed in road accidents during September and October, 2020, while **684** death cases were reported during same period in 2019. **50** above road mishap fatalities occurred in districts like Cuttack, Khurda, Ganjam, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh

*The fatality rate has been 100 per cent or more in the districts like Nuapada, Malkangiri, Koraput and Kandhamal*

According to data prepared by the state Crime Branch, 872 people were killed in road accidents during September and October, 2020, while 684 deaths were reported during same period in 2019. Barring nine districts, road mishap fatalities increased in all districts. The rise has been 100 per cent or more in the districts like Nuapada, Malkangiri, Koraput and Kandhamal. More than 50 fatalities occurred in Cuttack, Khurda, Ganjam, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh.

The officials have been asked to initiate stringent enforcement against people charged with over-speeding, drunk driving, not using helmets and using mobile phones while driving. "Utmost care must be taken that vehicles are not parked on road which is a major cause of accident during winter season. You must ensure suspension of DL for violation of helmet law," the secretary instructed. Further, the Collectors have been asked to submit reports within 15 days as to why the fatalities have increased in the districts abnormally and mention about supports required for bringing down the fatality rate. In view of the increased fatalities, the government has also decided to review the enforcement performance of the districts on a daily basis.

**Puri, Sambalpur and Sonepur:** Commerce and Transport secretary Madhu Sudan Padhi Thursday has written to all Collectors, SPs, DCP (traffic) and RTOs to intensify enforcement activities and focus on avoiding road mishap fatalities. "Enforcement plays an important role in reduction of accidents and fatalities. The CB report indicates the miserable enforcement performance of most of the districts," Padhi said in his letter. Huge government funds have been spent for procuring interceptor vehicles, breathe analysers, barricades etc. to intensify enforcement and save human lives. In addition, huge amounts are being spent towards wages of contractual staff engaged to operate these equipment. However, the equipment are not being utilised properly, he said.

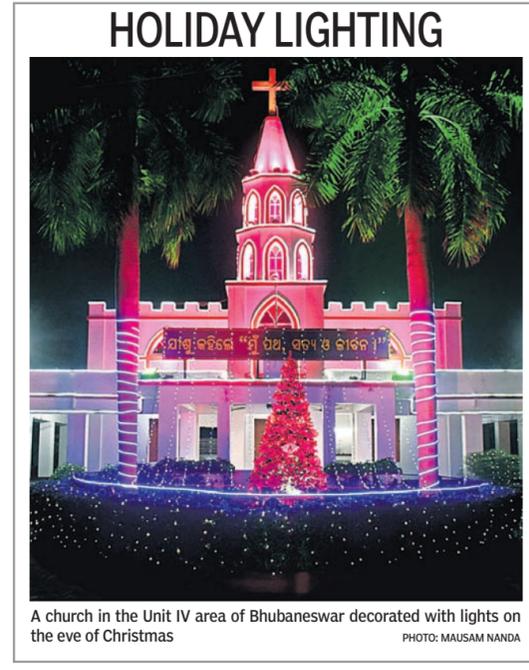
**PARI MURDER CASE**  
Orissa HC asks SIT to submit charge-sheet

**Cuttack, Dec 24:** The Orissa High Court Thursday directed the Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Odisha Crime Branch probing the sexual assault and murder of 5-year-old girl Pari at Jadupur village in Nayagarh district to submit charge-sheet. Meanwhile, two separate petitions were filed in the High Court Thursday by lawyer Padmalaya Mohapatra and Bharatiya Bikash Parishad seeking a CBI probe into the case and compensation of ₹25 lakh for the girl's family. The High Court posted the matter for next hearing January 12.

The child had gone missing while playing in front of her house July 14. Later July 23, her decomposed body was found packed in a sack behind her house near a pond. The SIT has arrested one Saroj Sathy of the locality for allegedly sexually assaulting and murdering the girl. A report from Nayagarh said the SIT chief Arun Bothra has said that it will not seek any further remand of the prime accused. Speaking to the media, Bothra said the 'gamchha' (towel) recovered from the house of the accused will be sent to Bhubaneswar for forensic examination. Bothra visited Jadupur village Thursday – the last day of remand of the prime accused Saroj Sethi. The prime accused had confessed during previous interrogation that as the minor girl started bleeding from her nose when he strangled her, he had used the towel to wipe the blood. **MORE P5**

## Farmers turn down Centre's invitation

*Govt not serious on our demands: Farmers*  
**Press Trust of India**  
**New Delhi, Dec 24:** Farmers protesting the agriculture laws have turned down an invitation to resume talks, saying they are uninterested in returning to the negotiating table unless the Centre is willing to consider the repeal of the three controversial legislations. Leaders representing the 40 farmers' unions camped around Delhi over the past month said their demands - which include a legal guarantee for MSP (minimum support price) - could not be considered individually. The unions, which have organised themselves under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha, are expected to meet Friday and frame a formal response to the Centre. "The government is not serious about our demands... they are writing letters every day. The new letter is nothing but propaganda against us... to give the impression that we are not interested in talks. The government should put repeal of the laws on the agenda for fresh dialogue," Shiv Kumar Kakka, a senior farmer leader, said. Kakka said legal guarantees of MSP are a key demand for the farmers, who fear that this safety net will be scrapped once the new laws are put into practice. The centre has offered only written assurances that procurement at MSP will continue, leaving the farmers remain unconvinced. Earlier this week the Joint Secretary in the Agriculture Ministry wrote to the protesting farmers and invited them for a sixth round of talks. He also said it would not be "logical" to include any new demands related to MSP; such demands, the letter said, were out of the purview of the farm laws. "I again request you... the government has been discussing all issues with an open heart and good intention to end the protest and will continue to do so. Kindly suggest a date and time (for the next round of talks)," the letter to the farmers read.



**HOLIDAY LIGHTING**  
A church in the Unit IV area of Bhubaneswar decorated with lights on the eve of Christmas **PHOTO: MAUSAM NANDA**

## India's largest hockey stadium to come up in Rourkela: CM

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Gearing up to host the prestigious FIH Odisha Men's Hockey World Cup India 2023, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Thursday announced construction of India's biggest hockey stadium in Rourkela city in Sundargarh district. In a video message, Naveen said, "As we have announced earlier, Odisha will once again be the proud host of the prestigious Men's Hockey World Cup in 2023. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region," he said. The stadium will have all the modern amenities and will offer a unique experience. He hoped that the new stadium will emerge as the best venue for field hockey

at the international level. The India teams led by players like Dilip Tirkey and Sunita Lakra have brought laurels for the country." Naveen further said popularity of hockey can be seen across the district. The support given by people of the district to hockey players is unparalleled anywhere in the world. "As a tribute to the contribution of Sundargarh to Indian hockey, I would like to announce that we will build a new world class hockey stadium in Rourkela with a seating capacity of 20,000. This is going to redefine the sports landscape in the region," he said. The stadium will have all the modern amenities and will offer a unique experience. He hoped that the new stadium will emerge as the best venue for field hockey

in the world. The stadium along with the allied facilities will be developed as a benchmark for other Hockey stadiums around the world. Spread over 15 acres, the stadium will be constructed in the Biju Patnaik University of Technology campus, Rourkela. Recently, a high-level team, including senior officials from the state government, International Federation of Hockey (FIH), Department of Sports and Youth Services and Hockey India had visited Rourkela. The team reviewed the infrastructure and allied facilities in the city to host the prestigious hockey event. The work to lay synthetic hockey turfs in each of the 17 blocks of Sundargarh district has already commenced.

## India challenges arbitration ruling in S'pore

**VODAFONE RETRO TAX**  
**New Delhi, Dec 24:** India has challenged in Singapore an international arbitration court's verdict against it over a \$2 billion tax claim involving Vodafone Group Plc, a senior government official told Reuters Thursday on condition of anonymity. Vodafone in September had won the case against India, ending one of the most high-profile disputes in the country that had caused concern among investors over retrospective tax claims on companies. An international arbitration tribunal in The Hague had ruled that India's imposition of a tax liability on Vodafone was in a breach of an investment treaty agreement between India and the Netherlands. India had 90 days to appeal the ruling. India's finance ministry did not immediately reply to an email and message seeking comment on the story. India lost another international arbitration case this week, against Cairn Energy, over a tax dispute. It has been ordered to pay the UK-listed company over \$1.2 billion in damages and costs. India is expected to challenge this ruling too given the size of the award, said the senior government official, who did not want to be named as the decision was not public yet. India has faced a string of arbitrations by investors including Deutsche Telekom, Nissan Motor Co, Vodafone and Cairn Energy over issues ranging from retrospective taxation to payment disputes.

## China reining in Alibaba with anti-monopoly probe

**CHINESE LEADERS MIGHT HAVE FOCUSED ON ANT BECAUSE MA COMPLAINED THAT REGULATORS WERE BLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES**

**Beijing, Dec 24:** Chinese regulators Thursday announced an anti-monopoly investigation of e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, stepping up the ruling Communist Party's efforts to control fast-growing tech industries. President Xi Jinping's government worries about the dominance of competitors such as Alibaba, the world's biggest e-commerce company by sales volume, and Tencent Holding, operator of the popular WeChat messaging service and Asia's most valuable tech company. Regulators appear to be especially concerned about controlling private sector companies that are expanding into online banking at a time when Beijing is trying to re-

duce financial risks. The ruling party says anti-monopoly enforcement, especially in tech industries, will be a priority next year. Since early November, regulators have tightened the reins by suspending the stock market debut of an online finance platform affiliated with Alibaba and summoned industry executives to warn them against trying to suppress competition. "The era of free growth and ultra-high growth is really over," said Francis Lun, CEO of Geo Securities Ltd in Hong Kong. "The government will decide what you can do." Thursday's announcement said the State Administration of Market Regulation is looking into Alibaba's policy of "choose one of two," which requires business partners to avoid dealing with its competitors. The

one-sentence statement gave no details of possible penalties or a timeline to announce a result. Proposed rules issued in November would ban exclusive contracts, subsidies and other tactics regulators say hurt competition. "Reports of platform monopoly problems are increasing by the day," the ruling party newspaper People's Daily said in a commentary about the Alibaba probe. "Anti-monopoly has become an urgent issue."

Internet companies in the United States face similar scrutiny. Legislators and regulators are looking at whether Facebook, Google and other companies improperly hamper competition in advertising and other areas. Alibaba, set up in 1999, operates retail, business-to-business and consumer-to-consumer platforms. It has expanded at a breakneck pace into financial services, film production and other fields. Alibabas founder, Jack Ma, is China's richest entrepreneur and one of its most prominent businesspeople worldwide with a net worth of \$59 billion. He is widely admired and a ruling party member but has run into regulatory hurdles. In November, regulators jolted the Chinese business world by suspending the stock market debut of Ant Group, a former Alibaba subsidiary that is the world's biggest online finance platform. It would have been the top global initial public offering this year. Economists said regulators worried about financial risks, but businesspeople suggested Chinese leaders might have focused on Ant because Ma complained at a business conference in October that regulators failed to keep up with industry development and were blocking opportunities.



**MARKET WATCH**

INDEX	VAIATION
SENSEX	46973.54 ↑ 529.36
NIFTY	13749.30 ↑ 148.20
DOLLAR	73.58 ↓ ₹0.10
EURO	99.77 ↑ ₹0.80
GOLD	₹49,994 ↓ ₹155
SILVER	₹67,355 ↓ ₹221

**WEATHER**

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	28.4°C	27.8°C
MIN	13.8°C	12.0°C
Humidity	93%	79%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Fog/mist in the morning



## TARAJI HAD 'THOUGHTS ABOUT ENDING' LIFE AMID PANDEMIC

Actress Taraji P. Henson has revealed that she had suicidal thoughts amid the Covid pandemic. She even thought of how her death would affect her son, Marcell Johnson. Henson made the revelation on her Facebook Watch series, Peace Of Mind With Taraji, reports *people.com*.

## TONY-NOMINATED BROADWAY STAR REBECCA LUKER DIES AT 59

Soprano Rebecca Luker, a three-time Tony nominated actor who starred in some of the biggest Broadway hits of the past three decades, died Wednesday. She was 59. "Our family is devastated. I have no words at this moment because I'm numb," said her husband, veteran Broadway actor Danny Burstein.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
Positive thinking can change the world, and you could do with some today. No matter how tough the going gets, take it in your stride, says Ganesh. If you think you can do it, you will. You have the magic touch today to initiate a new business strategy.

**TAURUS**  
Today is a perfect day to relax and enjoy your health, feels Ganesh. However, precaution should be the buzzword while dealing in money matters. You may develop a new interest in jewellers, artists, bankers and orators.

**GEMINI**  
Today, your house gets a facelift — a new rug, matching cushion covers, or a brand new kitchen. This will take up most of your time. First, you will be busy furnishing and setting up your home, and then you will spend your time flaunting it to your friends, relatives, neighbours, bosses, colleagues, acquaintances.

**CANCER**  
You are known for your ability to set the ball rolling. Once you set your mind to do something, it is generally considered done by your peers. Today, you are eyeing a few accomplishments on the monetary front.

**LEO**  
Some people have the world at their feet. And today, you are one of them, says Ganesh. With your gorgeous appearance and gregarious attitude, it is easy for you to open all doors with just a touch. So, you have the luxury to choose — either you entertain yourself through multiple avenues such as movies, theatre and music, or you be the entertainer with your superior performing skills.

**VIRGO**  
A shadow grows large in your mind today. An unknown fear will haunt your day, warns Ganesh. But be ready to take a hike. You are most likely to end up spending on your foreign associates. Be careful of those expenses, says Ganesh.

**LIBRA**  
It's a day of reaching new heights when it comes to finances. The cosmos favours money-lenders and stock marketeers. Call it the special touch that you give to all transactions monetary, but today you have the uncanny knack of raking in the moolah from all sources.

**SCORPIO**  
It's the same old rut today, says Ganesh. Nothing new, nothing exciting. People from the opposite sex, however, may bring you out of the routine and try to enliven your spirits, predicts Ganesh.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Those around you will be impressed by the leader in you. You are the general and others will rally at your call to arms. And all the while, you swing your sword and make your way to the top, defying all odds. Do not forget to let people have their own time and space.

**CAPRICORN**  
The journey from defeat to success is driven by optimism. You will be very optimistic today — about your work, future and everything that can lead you to success, says Ganesh. You will also be very careful while dealing with day-to-day work, and will capitalise on every opportunity that can get you a step closer to your goals.

**AQUARIUS**  
Things barely move today. But just like the proverbial tortoise, you seem to be winning the race, for many opportunities will come your way. There won't be any cash crunch, so you needn't lose sleep over that, says Ganesh.

**PISCES**  
The focus will be on children today, says Ganesh. While they will be the cause of an unfair share of your headache, you will be surprised at their ability to step up to the occasion, with just a little amount of coaching.

# So glad you enjoyed Wonder Woman: Gadot to Hrithik

**Mumbai:** Hollywood star Gal Gadot has replied to top star Hrithik Roshan, who had earlier praised the actress for essaying Wonder Woman perfectly in the new release, Wonder Woman 1984. Gadot said she is glad that Hrithik had enjoyed the film. "Just watched WONDER WOMAN. Exhilarating experience. My childhood crush (WW) and my first love (movies) together with the BIG cinema IMAX experience! Doesn't get any better than this. Thank you @GalGadot for being the perfect WONDER WOMAN. And congratulations to the entire team!" Hrithik had tweeted. To this, Gadot has replied: "So glad you enjoyed the movie @iHrithik! Wishing you and yours a happy holiday." The film is a sequel to the 2017 hit Wonder Woman, with Gal Gadot reprising the titular superhero and her alter ego Diana Prince.

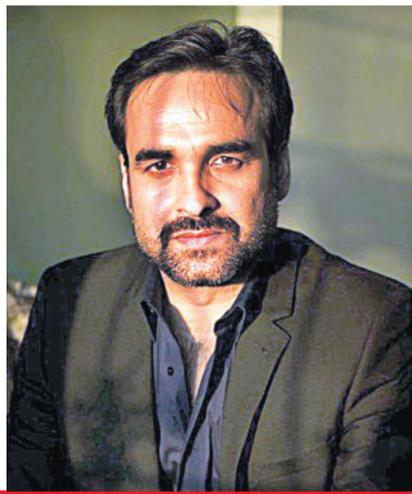


# Superstars' era started fading after 90s: Pankaj

**Mumbai:** Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who is all set to play a yesteryears' superstar in the upcoming film *Shakeela*, says the era of superstars started to fade after the nineties. "The nineties heroes truly were superstars. The era of superstars started fading away after that. These heroes have been heroes not just on screen but off screen, too. Every element of their personality — even their wardrobe — became statements," Pankaj said. Pankaj plays a quintessen-



tial South Indian cinema superstar. As a key part to achieve this character, considerable thought went into matching the wardrobe and style of heroes of that decade. Flashy gold accessories, bright colours and prints are what embodies his look, which will remind many of iconic heroes. "The fashion of that time was so peculiar, much like any other decade. That's what we want to embody on screen. I thoroughly enjoyed the process to get into this look," he said about his role in *Shakeela*, which stars Richa Chaddha in the title role, and is scheduled to release December 25 in theatres.



## Neha gives Rs one lakh to Warrior Aaji

**Mumbai:** Singer Neha Kakkar has given one lakh rupees to Shantabai Pawar, who became an Internet sensation after a video of her performing Lathi Kathi on a street in Pune went viral. Popular as Warrior Aaji, Pawar said: "I'm performing since I was eight years old. People mostly remain indoors due to Covid, so I clang utensils to make them

aware of my performance. I now take care of 10 orphan girls and provide for them. There are times when I go hungry in order to feed these girls." Now in her eighties, she also mentioned that she faces trouble doing the Lathi Kathi act due to physical limitations. She shared her story during an appearance on the show Indian Idol, which has Neha as one of the judges. Inspired by her, Neha offered Rs 1 lakh to Pawar, to support her for good work.



# OTT goes big with Xmas films, shows

The festival season is here and it is time to embrace Yuletide spirits. With cinemas yet to draw audience confidence fully, OTT platforms are going all-out to add a Christmas sparkle with shows and films that celebrate the season of Santa Clause.

Here is a list of new attractions that toast a happy ending to the year and a good cheer.

**Operation Christmas Drop**  
The film is about a political aide falling for a big-hearted air force pilot while looking to shut down his tropical base and its airborne Christmas tradition. The Netflix film stars Kat Graham, Alexander Ludwig, and Virginia Madsen.



**A California Christmas**  
The Netflix film follows a wealthy real estate heir who poses as a ranch hand to get a hardworking farmer to sell her family's land. It stars Lauren Swickard, Josh Swickard and Ali Afshar.



**2020 Global Citizen Prize**  
Hosted by John Legend, it will feature performances by John Legend, Carrie Underwood, Gwen Stefani, Tori Kelly & JoJo. The program will also feature appearances by Elton John, Shawn Mendes, Priyanka Chopra Jonas. It will stream on Voot Select on December 26.



**Home for Christmas**  
The Norwegian television series dropped its first season in 2019, and has been a teen favourite ever since. The series is about Johanne who



tries to find a boyfriend to bring home for Christmas Eve. Starring Ida Elise Broch, the show is available on Netflix.



**The Christmas Chronicles: Part 2**  
Kurt Russell returns as Santa Claus in the sequel of 2018 film The Christmas Chronicles. The film is directed by Chris Columbus. It shows Russell reprising his role as Santa Claus to save Christmas. The



highlight is an on-screen reunion between Russell and Goldie Hawn, who plays Mrs. Claus. It is streaming on Netflix.



**Dolly Parton's Christmas On The Square**  
Starring Dolly Parton, Christine Baranski and Treat Williams, the holiday movie musical is about a woman who plans to sell a small town without regard for the people, and what happens when she gets a visit from an angel. It is available on Netflix.

### PEANUTS



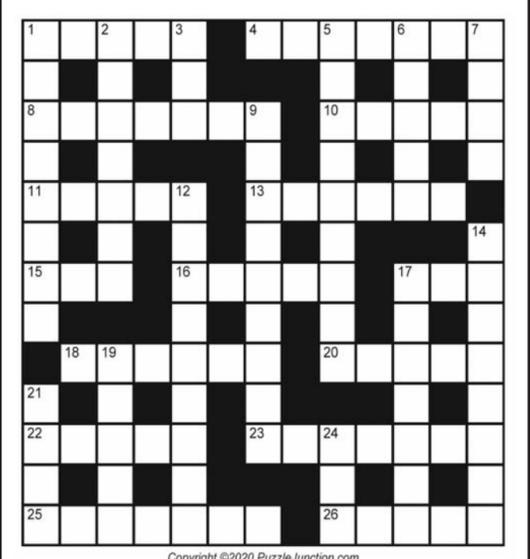
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



### FUN post CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Young pigeon
  - 4 Billiards item (3,4)
  - 8 Egged on
  - 10 Take up space
  - 11 Despot's duration
  - 13 Euphrates tributary
  - 15 Food container
  - 16 Magic spell
  - 17 Shade of green
  - 18 Nose wiper
  - 20 Saltpetre
  - 22 La Scala offering
  - 23 Digit part
  - 25 Analysed
  - 26 Gazetteer
  - 5 Cone-bearing tree
  - 6 Excuse
  - 7 Running behind
  - 9 Wash day need
  - 12 Required
  - 14 Small graceful antelopes
  - 17 Booby trap
  - 19 Notions
  - 21 Divan
  - 24 Notable period
- Down**
- 1 Partition off
  - 2 Perfect
  - 3 Auction action

### SUDOKU

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

2	4	3	0	6	C	1		5
	7	5	9				D	C
			2	1	B	4		0
1	5	7	B		8			
A			5	E		D		
0	1	2		3	4	7		B
E		B				3	9	
	9		6	5		4	C	
9		C		A	E	2		
	8	A			7	6		3
7	6	D	5	4	C	0	A	
8		C	3				D	9
E	2		1		8			3
4	A		8	D	B			E
	9	B				2	6	1

### SOLUTIONS

**CROSSWORD**

S	D	C	M	M	H
R	E	M	E	D	Y
E	M	U	S		
O		E	S	O	O
E	N	R	O	U	T
B	S	S	A		
A	S	C	O	T	
E	E	S	B	O	
P	R	O	P	A	S
E	L	M	I	O	I
I	N	D	I	G	O
E	D	A	E	O	E

**SUDOKU**

C	B	0	5	6	8	A	9	1	7	E	4	3	2	D
3	4	1	D	A	9	2	C	B	6	8	5	E	7	0
E	6	2	3	7	C	8	D	5	B	1	0	9	4	A
D	7	A	1	4	B	E	3	0	C	2	9	8	5	6
5	8	9	E	2	0	7	6	4	3	D	A	B	C	1
4	9	8	C	5	A	B	2	6	D	7	3	0	1	E
A	E	C	7	8	2	1	4	3	0	9	6	D	B	5
6	5	B	4	1	3	0	8	D	E	C	2	A	9	7
0	1	3	B	D	E	9	A	7	5	4	8	2	6	C
7	2	0	9	6	5	E	C	1	A	B	4	8	3	7
2	C	7	8	3	1	4	9	E	A	5	6	0	9	8
8	A	5	9	0	D	3	7	2	4	6	1	C	E	8
1	0	E	6	A	C	0	9	8	3	7	5	A	2	4
9	0	6	B	7	8	2	1	4	3	0	9	6	D	B
8	3	4	2	E	5	6	1	A	9	0	C	7	D	B

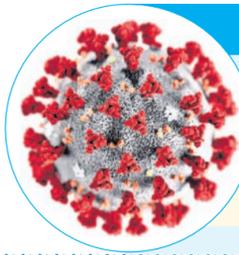
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown



## DISTANCING MUST

Workers draw round marks on the Grand Road near Srimandir in Puri, Thursday, to ensure social distancing among the devotees



## COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	7,93,00,795	5,58,62,270	17,42,246
India	19,06,371	96,92,643	1,46,791
Odisha	3,27,542	3,22,648	1,850

# RT-PCR test must for all UK returnees

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** As a prophylactic measure to combat the spread of the mutated strain of the novel coronavirus, the state government Thursday ordered mandatory testing of all the returnees from the United Kingdom (UK).

The Health department Additional Chief Secretary, PK Mohapatra, Thursday wrote to all the Collectors, National Health Mission, Municipal Commissioners and all Chief District Medical Officers (CDMO) to act urgently on the matter and comply with the new orders.

As per the new orders issued by the Health department, all the persons who returned to Odisha in the last 14 days would undergo RT-PCR test for Covid-19. All the persons who come in contact with the

## NEW COVID STRAIN

Collectors were asked to ensure intense surveillance, contact tracing, RT-PCR test for all incoming passengers from the UK as well as all persons coming in contact with the incoming passengers to prevent the spread of the mutated Covid strain



ALL THE PERSONS WHO RETURNED TO ODISHA IN THE LAST 14 DAYS WOULD UNDERGO RT-PCR TEST FOR COVID-19

returnees would also be tested.

"It is therefore requested to undertake intense surveillance, contact tracing, RT-PCR test for all incoming passengers from the UK as well as all persons coming in con-

tact with the incoming passengers to prevent the spread of the mutated Covid strain in the state," the letter from the Health department to all the Collectors read.

This comes after the Delhi

Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) wrote to all states about the entry of several passengers from UK to India and going back to their home states. The DDMA has asked all states to take adequate steps to stop the spread of the mutant strain of virus. It also provided the Odisha government details of close to 50 passengers from Odisha who returned to India from UK via Indra Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi.

The Collectors the urban local bodies (ULBs) have now been entrusted with the task of tracing all the returnees who landed on or after December 7 from the UK. All of them have earlier been asked to remain in quarantine. Many of them have however been exempted from the RT-PCR test they have already got their tests done after their arrival in the country.

## 263 new cases take Covid caseload to 3,27,542 in state

PNN/ AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** The state's Covid-19 caseload rose to 3,27,542 after 263 more people tested positive for the infection, while four fresh fatalities took the coronavirus death toll to 1,850, a Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said Thursday.

The 263 new cases were detected in 22 of the 30 districts of the state, with 151 reported from different quarantine centres, while 112 are local contact cases.

Angul district recorded the highest of 45 new cases followed by Sundargarh (41) and Cuttack (29). Eight districts - Boudh, Dhenkanal, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Koraput, Malkangiri, Subarnapur and Nayagarh, did not register any new Covid-19 cases during the last 24 hours, he said.

Taking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare department said, "Regret to inform the demise of four numbers of Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

Of the four fresh fatalities, two patients succumbed to the infection in Khurda district while one person each died in Sundargarh and Kalahandi districts.

This apart, 53 other Covid-19 positive patients have so far died due to comorbidities, he said.

Khurda district, of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, alone accounted for 317 deaths followed by Ganjam (246), Sundargarh (163), Cuttack (138) and Puri (114).

Currently, Odisha has 2,991 active Covid-19 cases, while as many as 3,22,648 patients have recovered from the highly infectious disease.

The state has so far tested 67.37 lakh samples for the virus including 36,736 Wednesday. Odisha's positivity rate stands at 4.86 per cent, the data released by the H&FW department said.

## 15 OMBADC projects worth ₹3,210Cr get nod

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Fifteen projects worth Rs 3,210 crore have been approved under Odisha Mineral Bearing Areas Development Corporation (OMBADC) scheme.

The Oversight Authority headed by justice AK Patnaik has approved the projects during a meeting held through videoconferencing, Thursday.

The panel has approved mega piped drinking water supply scheme for Sundargarh district at an estimated cost of Rs 585.16 crore; mega piped water supply for 13 blocks in Myurbhanj (Rs 1531.39 crore), sustainable livelihood programme for sericulture farmers in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Jajpur and Dhenkanal districts (Rs 82.29 crore) and livelihood generation programmes through handicrafts in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Jajpur and Dhenkanal districts (Rs 35.14 crore).

Other approved projects include healthcare projects for Mayurbhanj (Rs 47.25 crore), strengthening of infrastructure facilities, library, research centre in the Government Engineering College of Keonjhar (Rs 33.39 crore); opening of centres of excellence in government

## Oversight Authority expresses satisfaction over progress made on OMBADC projects

ITI and Polytechnics (Rs 123.45 crore), skill development of tribal youth (Rs 0.16 crore) and skill & entrepreneurship development among farmers and youths (Rs 146.92 crore).

Patnaik expressed satisfaction over the quality and progress of the projects being implemented with OMBADC funds.

Patnaik appreciated the remarkable efforts of Chief Secretary Asit Tripathy and the State Team in encountering the pandemic of Covid-19 and restarting the economic activities at a fast rate.

Tripathy directed the Collectors to expedite ground level implementation of the projects by maximum utilization of the technical and engineering capacity already created at district level through OMBADC.

OMBADC chief executive officer Uma Nadnduri said around 38 projects of Rs 14,330 crore in seven priority sectors have been approved under OMBADC and Rs 2844 crore have been released to the executing agencies for implementation of the projects so far.

## Eight universities told to return unspent amount

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** The state government Thursday directed eight universities to return their unutilised amounts sanctioned for opening civil service coaching centres.

The eight universities are: Utkal University, Berhampur University, Sambalpur University, Ramadevi Women's University, Ravenshaw University, GM University, Fakir Mohan University and North Odisha University.

In the letter to the universities, Rajashree Mohanty, Additional Secretary to Higher Education department, stated, "The department had asked the universities June 11, 2020 to refund the unspent balance available with them under the 'Civil Service Coaching Centre' scheme". But none of the universities have refunded their unspent amounts to the department even after six months.

A decision in this regard was taken after the universities failed to provide comprehensive and quality coaching, sources said.

Earlier in 2019, the Higher Education department started giving coaching to the civil service aspirants. Coaching and guidance were imparted to 100 students who were preparing to appear for the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examination.

The department had roped in Dhyeya Educational Service Limited for the coaching services. Under the scheme, students whose parents' income was less than Rs 2 lakh, the entire fee was paid by the state.

## Folk artistes spread nCoV message

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Odia Language, Literature and Culture department in association with Information and Public Relations department and Unicef, Odisha kick-started a Covid appropriate behaviour campaign rath from Sanskruti Bhawan here, Thursday.

The rath will be running in seven districts including Balasore, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Ganjam and Khurda and in Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation areas from December 24 to 30. Ten folk groups from each district will participate in the campaign and help in awareness.

Water Resources, Information and Public Relations Minister Raghunandan Das flagged of the rath Thursday.

He said that the virus cases had decreased substantially in the state as compared to other states due to strict rules by the Odisha government. Even the WHO had taken note of this, he added.

He also said that the involvement of folk artistes in the campaign will help in creating impactful awareness for the virus and its precautions.

Bishnupada Sethi, Principal Secretary, Odia Language, Literature and Culture said that at present only seven districts have been selected for the campaign but in coming days more districts will be covered.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



# Pattas distributed under Town Planning Scheme

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Thursday launched the distribution of Record of Rights (RoRs) to people under state's first ever Town Planning Scheme (TPS).

The scheme is being implemented through land pooling method- a viable alternative to land acquisition - to bring well planned and sustainable urban development in the Bhubaneswar development plan area.

On this occasion, Naveen said, "I am happy that Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA), in partnership with the land owners, has initiated Odisha's first ever town planning scheme. This is a fair, transparent and practical way of expanding the cities in a planned manner."

Stating the scheme will herald a new era of planned development in the state, he hoped that officials concerned will ensure implementation of the scheme in a time-bound manner and create a model for the remaining cities to emulate.

The Chief Minister said community partnership and citizen involvement are central to city development and his government gives high priority to such partnership models with active involvement of citizens. Odisha would become a role model in urban development, he added.

Housing and Urban Development Minister Pratap Jena handed over



H&UD Minister Pratap Jena hands over the Record of Rights to a beneficiary

## Housing and Urban Development Minister Pratap Jena handed over RoRs to 11 land owners or beneficiaries of Sahajpur

RoRs to 11 land owners or beneficiaries of Sahajpur village. In the first phase, 358 RoRs will be distributed to the land owners of Sahajpur. The scheme covers three more villages—Naragoda, Sijupur and Paikrapur on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar.

"Despite Bhubaneswar being a planned city, it has been losing its planning characteristics and significance due to unplanned and haphazard development in and around the city. Hence, by implementing the scheme, the city will get more planned development," said BDA vice-chairman Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

States such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala have used land pooling instrument as a viable alternative to land acquisition. The concept involves amassing small rural land parcels into a large parcel, provide it with infrastructure and return approximately 60 per cent of the redeveloped land to the owners after the development is complete and appropriating the costs of infrastructure and public spaces.

Of the remaining 40 per cent, a substantial portion is reserved for setting up infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, schools, parks, provide electricity, water, sewerage and such like.

As per the Comprehensive Development Plan -2030, there is a provision of a ring road of 64.90 km within BDA plan area. It has been proposed to take up 45 town planning schemes in 58-revenue villages along 200 metre on both sides of the ring road.

# Khurda temples to reopen Jan 3

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** The Khurda district administration Thursday issued an order allowing reopening of temples in the district from January 3.

The District Collector, Sanat Kumar Mohanty, Thursday issued the order and said that all religious institutions in Khurda except Lingaraj temple and temples coming under the territorial jurisdiction of Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) will be allowed to reopen January 3.

The order, however, said that the approvals are subject to compliance of some of the norms which the temples need to ensure. The norms claimed that before the opening of the institutions, a meeting would be held under the chairmanship of the local tehsildar with the local IIC of the police station, local gram panchayat member and other members of the area including the members managing the temples.

The panel will chalk out modalities on how to allow the public darshan and ensure compliance of Covid-19 safety measures. The local Revenue Inspector has been entrusted with the task of smooth darshan and worship in the temples



The temple authorities need to ensure that the thermal screening of the visitors are done, they wear face masks and maintain social distancing during their visit to the shrines

Senior citizens, people with co-morbidities, pregnant women and kids below the age of 10 years have been advised not to visit crowded places

and compliance of COVID safety measures.

The temple authorities need to ensure that the thermal

screening of the visitors are done, they wear face masks and maintain social distancing during their visit to the shrines. It has been mentioned that spitting in religious institutions would be punishable.

The tehsildars and the local IIC have been given the power to decide if the local temples would remain open on special holidays and major festivals after assessing the local conditions. Senior citizens, people with co-morbidities, pregnant women and kids below the age of 10 years have been advised not to visit the crowded areas.

## SPCB penalises Jajpur illegal sand miner

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** The State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) has ordered imposition of Rs 20,000 penalty on an illegal sand miner in Jajpur district for allegedly operating without adequate approvals.

The action came after a petition was filed before the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The NGT has asked the SPCB to take appropriate action against the errant illegal sand miner operating in Jajpur district without adequate clearances.



The SPCB was also asked by the NGT to see if the miner in question has been involved in mining even after a ban imposed by the green body on the operations. The SPCB in their intimation to the NGT has said that the mining operations have halted but environment clearance was not complied with.

"Environment compensation of Rs 20,000 has been imposed in pursuant to the order of the NGT dated September 2, 2020. In present scenario since there is no illegal mining of sand at the site, no assessment report of compensation is prepared," the SPCB said in their written statement to the NGT.

## Atharanala beautification soon

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Puri, Dec 24:** The district administration Thursday stopped vehicular movement on Atharanala bridge over Musa river here following a recommendation by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for the preservation of the heritage structure.

The administration had banned plying of four-wheelers and heavy vehicles on Atharanala in 2015. Recently, the administration had put restrictions on the movement of two-wheelers on the old bridge.

"Steps would be taken to preserve and beautify Atharanala bridge. The heritage structure would be decorated with colourful lights. There would be a selfie point near the bridge to attract visitors," said

## The heritage structure would be decorated with colourful lights

an official of the district administration.

Notably, Atharanala bridge was constructed several hundred years ago to facilitate road communication to the Holy City.

The unique structure was built with laterite stone and lime mortar. "Atharanala is part and parcel of the rich heritage and culture of Puri. The bridge has been in dilapidation for last several years. We welcome the decision to preserve and beautify the structure," said a local.

FOCUS INDIA & BANGLADESH

# STITCHING A PARTNERSHIP



**Bangladesh is a fit case for engaging in track-II diplomacy beyond inter-governmentalism. That will back up governmental collaboration and ensure animosity against India is not engineered**

2021 as a part of the liberation celebrations.

The seven agreements inked during the summit included projects on hydrocarbon, high-impact community development, trans-border elephant conservation, solid waste management, mainly supply of equipment from India for garbage disposal in Barishal city, sanitation, textile, agriculture and creation of a CEOs forum for policy inputs. A notable development is reopening of a cross-border rail link which was defunct since 1965. There were six rail networks between India and Bangladesh from 1947-1965. The latest rail link between Haldibari in Cooch Behar to Chilahati, Northern Bangladesh was started during the summit.

Understandably Hasina is sentimental about India as she recognises its critical role in the liberation of her country. She shared her ordeal during the Bangladesh crisis. "Bangladesh got liberated on December 16, 1971 but my family and myself were freed next day on 17 December." One 29-year-old Indian major along with three soldiers rescued Hasina's family including two sisters, two brothers and mother, facing scores of Pakistani soldiers. The major was awarded Paramvir Chakra for this heroic act. After the summit, Hasina made

a powerful statement, "I believe both our countries can move up the global and regional value chains by further integrating our economies taking advantage of available synergies." She also stated that a good number of Indians are employed in business - manufacturing and service sector - sending sizeable remittances back to India. At the same time, India receives a number of tourists and patients from Bangladesh. There are a number of students from Bangladesh pursuing higher education in India.

As expected, Hasina raised the issues of Rohingya and sharing of Teesta water. These two issues have been bothering Dhaka and on which it has sought greater cooperation from New Delhi. Modi on his part, acknowledged Dhaka's generosity in accommodating 1.1 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. Both leaders agreed to work in collaboration for safe and swift return of these refugees to Myanmar.

Amongst other agreements, it was decided to soon hold a joint boundary conference to sort out pending issues. It was agreed to complete border fencing in remaining sectors starting from Tripura. Both countries reckoned terrorism to be the principal threat to global peace and security and reiterated their commitment to elim-

inating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. On energy sector, 130 kms India-Bangladesh Friendship pipeline was to be set up. Both leaders welcomed the signing of second addendum to the Protocol on Inland Water. The important development perhaps is the move towards signing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which is supposed to be an advanced form of a free trade agreement that will ensure preferential and even tariff free access to goods, services and investment in both countries. In July 2020, maritime connectivity was enhanced as a trial of trans-shipment of goods to India's North-East through Chittagong.

In South Asia, apparently, Bangladesh under Hasina is the closest neighbour of India. Nepal used to have that space in India's neighbourhood. Ironically, after monarchy was abolished and Nepal came under the influence of Communist parties, Kathmandu inched closer towards Beijing. However, they are in trouble now as the Community party has split, Parliament is suspended and Kathmandu has not been successful in cutting off traditional links with India. Dhaka is warm and friendly with India under Hasina, but Islamic radical elements resurface whenever Hasina is not at the helm. Despite closeness and commonalities existing between India and Bangladesh, the latter could be volatile under different regimes. New Delhi, therefore, has to connect with people, businesses, universities, civil society organisations to maintain a healthy and warm relationship. Bangladesh is a fit case for engaging in track-II diplomacy beyond inter-governmentalism. That will back up governmental collaboration and ensure that animosity against India is not engineered.

*The writer is Professor, International Relations, JIMMC, INFA*



If you can always smile at life, life will always smile at you.  
**THE MOTHER**

## Shun obduracy

The farmers' protests are showing no signs of abating. Four weeks into the agitation, the Centre and the agitating farmers have failed to find a meeting ground. Both the sides are adamant in their respective stand. In this backdrop, the suggestion of the Supreme Court that the Centre put in abeyance the implementation of the three contentious farm laws makes eminent sense. Earlier, the court has suggested formation of a committee comprising representatives of all the stakeholders including farmer unions, their supporters, the government and other political parties to suggest measures to find an amicable solution to the festering crisis. Unfortunately, this proposal did not find resonance with the protesters; in good measure the Centre also continued to show intransigence. That both sides are hardening their stance is not a good sign. The apex court has acknowledged the farmers' right to hold non-violent protests. In no less strong terms, the top court also rooted for the fundamental rights of common people to move freely. The Supreme Court has been broadly sympathetic to the farmers' cause. The Centre, on its part, has demonstrated its intent to sympathetically handle the issue. However, most of its posturing is rhetoric only. It has been consistently refusing to revisit the three divisive laws—a one point demand of farmers. They have declared that nothing short of a complete withdrawal of the three farm laws will satisfy them. The government seems to be in no mood to review the divisive laws. Farmers are out sitting in the cold. There have been suicides over this issue. A priest in Punjab committed suicide purporting his support for the farmers. The situation continues to be highly volatile and delicate. The apex court's intervention offers a window of opportunity to end this impasse.

The government should show magnanimity and accept the Supreme Court's proposal that it will not push ahead with the laws. Heavens will not fall if implementation of the laws is kept in abeyance for some time. In the meantime, the Centre should strive to bring various stakeholders round to its stand. There are sections of farmers in the country, especially from south and eastern India who may be open for discussions. Pending a resolution of the crisis, senior leaders in the government should restrain themselves from making aggressive pitch against the farmers. In the past three weeks, such irresponsible statements by senior party leaders have further alienated the farmers. Both the parties should eschew obduracy. Both should adopt an accommodative stance over the issue. Ego and one-upmanship should not be allowed to scupper the pitch of discussions. The government should take the first step. It must tone down the rhetoric and invest itself in talks. No reforms can be shoved down the throats of people for whom they have been designed. The government should either win their confidence on the proposed reforms or put it on hold till the end-users come on board. The government must jettison its policy of my way or highway. The farmers on their part also should not play themselves into the hands of political parties who see nothing but political opportunism in the problem. This way the agitation will lose its sanctity, making the job easy for the government. Both the government and the farmer unions should adopt a policy of give and take. Things should not be seen in a defeat or victory binary.

DK Giri

**IN SOUTH ASIA, APPARENTLY, BANGLADESH UNDER SHEIKH HASINA IS THE CLOSEST NEIGHBOUR OF INDIA**

### WISDOM CORNER

- You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough. **WILLIAM BLAKE**
- If we can really understand the problem, the answer will come out of it, because the answer is not separate from the problem. **JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI**
- What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals. **ZIG ZIGLAR**

### WORDSWORTH

**Well heeled**  
Well-heeled never had anything to do with people being well shod (so it has no link with down at heel). The original expression came from cock-fighting, and meant to provide one's bird with good, sharp spurs (considered, it would seem, as a kind of artificial heel) that would inflict the most damage. It was taken over into American usage in frontier days to mean that one was likewise carrying a weapon, but in the more modern sense of a gun (the first recorded use is from a story of Mark Twain's dated 1866). Only later did it transfer its meaning to being armed with a more powerful weapon still: money.

**West Brit**  
It's a term that's so deeply entrenched in the centuries of Irish attitudes to Britain that it almost requires a book to sort out its subtleties for somebody who doesn't know the historical background. In the Republic of Ireland today, it's definitely derogatory. In its least insulting sense it refers to an Irish person who has sympathies for the UK or who takes his cultural and social cues from Britain. If you were being polite, you might instead call such a person an Anglophile. The term is applied in particular to Protestant Dubliners who have liberal attitudes to moral issues. It's an abbreviation of West Briton. In that spelling, it has been around since the early nineteenth century. To start with, it was borrowed from the equivalent term applied by the English to a Scot, a North Briton (the country being North Britain), terms that are thankfully obsolete, since Scots so often heard a patronising tone in them. (At one time, West Briton could also be used for a Welsh person, though this is long since defunct; to judge from the title of a newspaper in Truro, the West Briton, it was once a term for the Cornish, too.) The term West Briton evolved in meaning in the period of the partition struggles of the early twentieth century that led to the creation of the Irish Republic. A West Briton then was a person who favoured the retention of a close association with Great Britain and was against the establishment of the Republic. You can get a flavour from James Joyce's Dubliners, published in 1914: "Perhaps he ought not to have answered her like that. But she had no right to call him a West Briton before people, even in joke". West Briton remains a favourite insult of members of the Republican movement, who sometimes use it for somebody who is seen as retaining a subservient attitude to the UK.

### SPECTRUM WORLD

# The public-private climate urgency



Michael Froman

**IF THIS YEAR HAS SHOWED US ANYTHING, IT IS THAT PEOPLE AND THE PLANET'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ARE INEXTRICABLY LINKED**

Less than 12 months ago, private-sector leaders came together at the World Economic Forum with a sense of optimism and a series of new commitments to re-energize the fight against climate change. Ambitious goals were set, and bold plans were announced. And then COVID-19 struck.

Owing to its ferocity and widespread impact, the pandemic has disrupted lives and businesses in ways unseen in our lifetimes as the world was forced to take drastic action - economic lockdowns, travel restrictions, school closures, and much else - in pursuit of self-preservation. Amid so much human suffering, there is a perverse irony in the fact that global greenhouse-gas emissions this year declined by a record-breaking amount. At least now we have all witnessed the potential impact of collective action.

But we should not treat temporary developments as a new normal. As COVID-19 vaccines are rolled out and the world gains its first glimpse of an exit from the crisis, we must chart a new course toward an inclusive recovery, ensuring that the race to reset the economy does not reverse the progress made on other fronts - not least climate and the environment. If this year has showed us anything, it is that people and the planet's health and well-being are inextricably linked. Confronting the global threats that we are facing will require urgent and coordinated action. Rather than serv-

ing as an excuse to delay environmental commitments, COVID-19 underscores just how important it is for every organization - public and private - to re-evaluate its environmental impact and reaffirm its commitments.

We have long known that the climate crisis demands collective action. At the UN climate conferences in Copenhagen in 2009 and in Paris in 2015, governments set aside the view that climate change was the responsibility of only rich industrialized countries. While these countries have of course contributed far more cumulative emissions than the developing world, all signatories to the Paris agreement have assumed collective responsibility for tackling the problem.

According to an October 2020 Pew Research Center report, 70% of people across 14 countries say climate change is a major threat. And yet, owing to rising political polarization in many countries, progress since 2015 has stalled or, at best, been inconsistent. While multilateral approaches like the Paris framework remain critical, it has become clear that government action alone is not enough to prevent global warming from exceeding 2° Celsius (relative to pre-industrial levels). We need alternative ways forward.

Young people are pushing for bolder action from political leaders on climate change, and consumers are demanding more transparency

from businesses about their role in causing social and environmental problems and their efforts to address them. Corporations and business groups have articulated promising aspirations, such as those underpinning the WEF's Trillion Tree Campaign, a cross-sector response in support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration initiative.

Sustainability is achievable only when it is embedded as a core feature of a business's growth strategy, rather than treated as a philanthropic afterthought. To be sure, shareholders have placed mounting pressure on CEOs to document progress against environmental, social, and governance goals, and companies' eagerness to show that they are "doing their part" has fueled some healthy competition on as businesses race to meet common environmental standards. But it's not enough. Companies need to look beyond their own walls and take responsibility for bringing others along - across sectors, borders, and backgrounds.

Such engagement cannot come soon enough. While economic activity has been curtailed in 2020, weather- and climate-related disasters have continued to increase in frequency and severity. According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, in 2020, there have been at least 16 weather events with losses exceeding \$1 billion each - and that is just in the United States. There were 6.6 such

events per year between 1980 and 2019, on average; but that figure rose to 13.8 in the 2015-19 period.

Real, scalable climate action can happen only if the public and private sectors come together behind jointly executed plans. Efforts like Microsoft's \$1 billion climate commitment demonstrate how companies can join forces to support existing programs that desperately need capital in order to scale across markets. Another example is Mastercard's Priceless Planet Coalition. This initiative brings together governments, nonprofits, and businesses to plant 100 million trees as part of broader reforestation efforts, and takes the idea of collaboration a step further by helping consumers understand their own impact on emissions and providing an avenue for them to get involved directly.

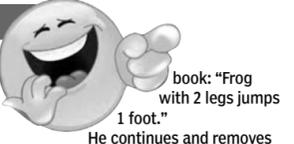
By pulling together, we can de-risk individual efforts, embed environmental standards in core commercial activities, create sustainable new business models, and achieve the scale needed to secure the planet's future. In addition, we must pursue collective action to restore the balance between humanity and nature before it is too late. If we act in isolation, we will be united in failure.

*The writer is Vice Chairman and President of Strategic Growth at Mastercard. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE*

### LOL

#### Biologist experiment

There was this biologist who was doing some experiments with frogs. He was measuring just how far frogs could jump. So he puts a frog on a line and says "Jump frog, jump!" The frog jumps 2 feet. He writes in his lab book: "Frog with 4 legs - jumps 2 feet." Next he chops off one of the legs and repeats the experiment. "Jump frog jump!" he says. The frog manages to jump 1.5 feet. So he writes in his lab book: "Frog with 3 legs - jumps 1.5 feet." He chops off another and the frog only jumps 1 foot. He writes in his



book: "Frog with 2 legs jumps 1 foot." He continues and removes yet another leg. "Jump frog jump!" and the frog somehow jumps a half of a foot. So he writes in his lab book again: "Frog with one leg - jumps 0.5 feet." Finally he chops off the last leg. He puts the frog on the line and tells it to jump. "Jump frog, jump!" The frog doesn't move. "Jump frog, jump!!!" Again the frog stays on the line. "Come on frog, jump!" But to no avail. The biologist finally writes in his book: "Frog with no legs - goes deaf."

### 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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

#### Safety lapses

Sir, This refers to the news "IFFCO gas leakage kills 2, six injured" published in Orissa POST, on December 24. Urea fertiliser plants are critical in nature as these use high pressure and high temperature technology and ammonia is a hazardous chemical. Exposure to ammonia more than 50 ppm for longer period can be fatal. These plants have stringent safety system and disaster management plans. Mock drills every six months are mandatory and lapses are analysed to stop recurrence in future. Non-destructive testing is done in annual shutdown of corrosive pipelines and equipment. As per newspaper reports, five cases of ammonia leakages had occurred in the last two years in India. This is not taken seriously and safety report recommendations are not implemented to stop frequent leakages.  
**Gopal Mittal, BHUBANESWAR**

#### Change of wind in J&K

Sir, This refers to the news "PAGD takes lead over BJP" published in Orissa POST, December 23. The celebrations that broke out in J&K, particularly in Kashmir, over results of District Development Councils (DDC) polls were a far cry from past elections which were marked by allegations of rigging or criticism that they reflected the minority opinion due to abysmal turnout. There was a time when India's defeat in a cricket match against Pakistan would see celebrations in the streets of Kashmir. But the fact that DDC polls not only witnessed good participation of the people in the valley but also that results were welcomed by the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) constituents, independents and other parties alike shows that they all want grassroots democracy that will bring them the benefits of development. The good show by independents reflects the emergence of new and young leadership at the grassroots. The participation of the PAGD was itself a gain in the post-Article 370 scene. What is most significant about the DDC polls is that elected local representatives from J&K will, for the first time, be swearing allegiance to the Constitution of India and not the J&K constitution and establishing the finality of the Centre's move to nullify Article 370. The successful conduct and good voter participation were bound to pave the way for Assembly elections as early as possible.  
**N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE**

# Sethy's kin knew about crime

It is being ascertained by the investigators as to when his family came to know about his act

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nayagarh, Dec 24:** Arun Bothra, Head, SIT probing the Pari murder case, Thursday revealed that prime accused Saroj Sethy's family was aware of the crime.

However, it is being ascertained by the investigators as to when his family came to know about his act, said Bothra. The IPS officer was today present in the village where the crime scene was reconstructed in the presence of the accused.

Clearing the air over the alleged missing of bones of the girl's recovered body, Bothra said some bones were given to the doctors for the DNA test to ascertain the identity of the decomposed body. The bones have been preserved, he said.

Meanwhile, the SIT has decided to seek no further remand of the prime accused, informed SIT chief Arun Bothra Thursday afternoon.

The 'gamchha' (towel) recovered from the house of the accused will



be sent to Bhubaneswar for forensic examination, said Bothra addressing media persons here during his visit to Jadupur village on the last day of remand of the prime accused Saroj Sethy.

The prime accused had confessed during previous interrogation that when the minor girl started bleeding from her nose during the strangulation, he used the towel to wipe the blood. The towel was recovered

from his house and traces of blood were found on it during preliminary examination, stated Bothra.

Saroj is the prime accused and it is yet to be confirmed if anyone else helped him during disposal of the minor girl's body. While it has been clear that the family was aware of the crime, it is yet to be ascertained as to when they came to know about the incident, Bothra added.

## Curious revelation

SIT chief Bothra said that before the probe, Saroj collected information about him through Google search

The accused was also observing the activities of the investigators in the village from the roof of his house and keeping himself updated

In another interesting revelation, the SIT chief said that before the commencement of the probe by the team, Saroj had collected information about him like his IPS career and background through Google search.

The accused was also observing the activities of the investigators in the village from the roof of his house and keeping himself updated about the progress in the case by watching news on TV, said Bothra.



Police conducting patrolling in Daringbadi area of Kandhamal district on the eve of Christmas

OP PHOTO

# Two govt officers under Vig scanner

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sonepur/Rayagada, Dec 24:** The Odisha Vigilance department Thursday conducted raids on the properties of two government officials, a panchayat executive officer (PEO) in Sonepur and a deputy executive engineer of Rayagada Works Division, on charges of accumulating assets disproportionate to their known sources of income.

Anti-corruption wing officials of Bolangir, Sambalpur and Sonepur divisions simultaneously raided the house of the PEO of Cherupali gram panchayat early morning Thursday. The PEO has been identified as Durjyodhan Meher.

The searches are being conducted simultaneously at Meher's residential house at Manikswari in Sonepur town and office at Cherupali. The total value of his moveable and immovable assets was yet to be ascertained as the raids were underway at the time of filing of this report.

The raids are being conducted



under the supervision of Vigilance SP Sarah Sharma, it was learnt.

On the other hand, five teams of vigilance sleuths conducted raids on the properties of Uddhab Padhi, deputy executive engineer in Rayagada (R&B) Division-II at Gunupur.

On the strength of a search warrant issued by Special Judge, Vigilance, Berhampur, five teams of the anti-graft officials conducted raids simultaneously at Padhi's three storied building in Berhampur, one flat in Puri, his business unit at Dharakote and his quarters and office at Gunupur in Rayagada district.

Since the raids were underway, the total value of Padhi's moveable and immovable properties was yet to be ascertained.

# Maoists call for 'Odisha bandh'

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Malkangiri, Dec 24:** Maoists have called for a day-long bandh across Odisha, December 28, protesting the recent encounter at Alampakka area under 'Swabhiman Anchal' in Malkangiri district in which two ultra cadres were killed during an exchange of fire with security forces.

According to a source, a red poster was put up a few days ago by Maoist chief and Andhra-Odisha

## Ultras kill villager

**MALKANGIRI:** To make their presence felt in Malkangiri, Maoists killed an innocent villager in a village on Andhra-Odisha border near Swabhiman Anchal of Malkangiri district Thursday as he was suspected to be a police informer. The deceased has been identified as Satish Babu of Chintaguru village under Binilkota panchayat in Padabailu block belonging to adjoining Andhra Pradesh. The heinous crime has been committed allegedly by the red rebels of Kurukonda Dalam.



zonal committee secretary Kailash in this regard. The poster claimed that a gunfight between the Maoists and the security forces at Alampakka area was false.

The call for Odisha bandh has been given in protest against the encounter of two unarmed Maoists, the poster had stated.

Releasing an audio clip in this regard, CPI-Maoist Odisha committee spokesperson Sonali said the rebels will give a befitting reply to the deaths of the cadres. Terming the deaths as 'killings by SOG and DVF jawans', she warned of destroying the police informers' network. The Maoist chief Sonali has

# Solar-powered tubewell scheme comes a cropper

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Jajpur, Dec 24:** A state government plan to provide drinking water to the rural population through installation of solar powered tubewells in the state has hit roadblocks with hundreds of the projects lying defunct due to alleged irregularities and sub-standard works, a report said.

Among them, 49 of the projects were from Jajpur district.

As a result, people have failed to get drinking water and have to depend on alternative to fulfill their needs. A report by the customer relationship centre (CRC) said that around 739 projects are lying defunct in the state. The matter acquired prominence after the accountant general wrote to the chief engineer of rural water supply and sanitation department (RWSS) and sought report on the matter.

Accordingly, the chief engineer of RWSS wrote to the concerned engineers December 22, and asked them to file detailed reports on their respective projects along with the utilization certificate (UC) submitted by the Odisha Renewable Energy Development Agency (OREDA). The engineers have been asked to file detailed reports on the utilisation certificate of ₹1,78,16,400 submitted in two phases.

It is alleged that the projects developed snags and became defunct a month after their installation due to sub-standard works. This



has happened due to alleged bonhomie between some unscrupulous officials of RWSS department and the consultancy agency OREDA. It is alleged that officials have gobbled up the lion's share of the sanctioned funds by manipulating the UC.

# Drones to guard Ghumsar forests

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhanjanagar, Dec 24:** Unmanned aerial vehicles or drones will soon fly over forests under Ghumsar forest division in Ganjam to monitor poaching, track wildlife and anti-environmental activities in the area.

A training programme for forest officials was conducted in Buduli reserve forest under Muzagarh



range Thursday. A drone has also been pressed into service. It can fly at an altitude of

25 metre and cover five km at a time. More drones will be purchased as per requirement, it was learnt.

The primary objectives of these drones would be to track the movements of wildlife, forest protection, sapling plantation and monitor poaching.

"The technology will be cost-effective and can reach remote areas," officials said.

# Farmer trampled to death by tusker

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Dhenkanal:** A man was trampled to death by an elephant at Kandarsinha village under Dihadol forest section of Mahabirod range in Dhenkanal district Thursday.

The farmer's son, however, escaped unhurt. The deceased has been identified as Niranjan Swain, a farmer of Majhika village in Kandarsinha panchayat under

Parjang police limits.

According to a source, Niranjan and his son had gone to Kandarsinha village to harvest paddy. On their way home, they came face to face with an elephant.

The elephant took Niranjan by its trunk and pinned him on the ground. But his son managed to escape. Niranjan was rushed to Parjang CHC where doctors pronounced him received dead.

# New black gram variety offers hope to farmers



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhawanipatna/Kesinga, Dec 24:** At a time when climate change induced irregular rainfall and drought have taken a toll on agriculture, cultivation of a high-yielding variety of black gram has stirred hopes among farmers in Bhawanipatna, a report said.

The cultivation of a new variety of black gram has resulted in a bumper harvest for the farmers in this district. Farmers had initially raised doubts on the yield of this new variety as the saplings witnessed a huge growth and the duration of cultivation was very long. However, proving the skeptics wrong, the farmers reaped a good harvest from the cultivation.

Farmers in Phatkamal, Boria Burlupada, Nagpula and Kinerkela villages reaped a good harvest from the cultivation. Agriculture offi-

## BUMPER HARVEST

A harvest of 3.72 quintal per acre was reaped in Phatkamal while it was four quintal in Boria

The market price of black gram ranges between ₹8000 to ₹10,000 per quintal this year

cial also participated in harvesting the new variety at some places on an experimental basis which threw off astounding results. Reports said that a harvest of 3.72 quintal per acre was reaped in Phatkamal while it was four quintal in Boria.

Reports said that the cultivation of this new variety of black gram has been taken up under National Food Security Mission (Pulses) by Kesinga agriculture department which has planned for its cultiva-

tion over 100 hectare of land. The new variety known as RU-03-14 has been developed by Indira Gandhi Agriculture University in Chhatisgarh. The Odisha Seeds Corporation received the seeds from National Seeds Corporation and distributed them among 200 local farmers. The farmers, after receiving the seeds, sowed it on their farmland in between August 10 to September 20. Agriculture officials also distributed necessary kits, micro fertilizers and pesticides free of cost to the farmers.

Block agriculture officer Janaki Ballav Mohapatra, field agriculture officials and Krushak Sathis were present during the harvest. When contacted, Mohapatra said that this new variety has become a success and farmers in the area will also cultivate this variety in next year. The duration of this cultivation is slightly longer but those farmers who applied manure, micro-fertilizers, pesticides properly and de-weeded their farmland have been able to earn ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 from the cultivation of this new variety of black gram, he added.

Notably, the market price of black gram stands at ₹8000 to ₹10,000 per quintal this year.

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
No. A-407  
**DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
**MINOR IRRIGATION DIVISION, SAMBALPUR**  
Phone No. (0663) 2412791 (Off.), E-mail: eemispb@yahoo.co.in  
No. 5154 Date: 17.12.2020

**e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE**  
BID Ref. No. EE, MID, SBP/02/2020-21

Name of Work : Civil Construction Works  
No. of Works : 01 (One) No.  
Estimated Cost : 01 No. of work is Rs. 17.50 lakh  
Tender Paper Cost : Referred to DTCN  
Period of Completion : Referred to DTCN  
Availability of bid through online : From Dt.28.12.2020, 10.00 A.M. to Dt.07.01.2021 upto 05.30 P.M. in website (www.tendersorissa.gov.in)

Period of receipt of bid through online : From Dt.28.12.2020, 10.00 A.M. to Dt.07.01.2021 upto 05.30 P.M. through online.

Date of opening of bid document : On Dt.08.01.2021 at 11.00 A.M. onwards  
Digital Signature Certificate of Bidder : The bidder must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) of Class - II or Class-III.

The detail tender call notice can also be seen in the DOWR website: http://dowrissa.gov.in  
Name & Address of the OIT : Executive Engineer, M.I. Division, Sambalpur, At: Motijharan, P.O. - B.S.S. Nagar, Dist. - Sambalpur PIN - 768001, Ph. 0663-2412791 E-mail ID: eemispb@yahoo.co.in  
Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement market place. : http://tendersorissa.gov.in  
Sd./- 17.12.2020  
Executive Engineer, M.I. Division, Sambalpur  
OIPR-32036/11/0001/2021

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. O-769  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, NUAPADA**  
e-mail: rd\_nuapada@rediffmail.com  
**e-Procurement Notice**  
BID IDENTIFICATION No. RWNPD-07/2020-21 (Online)

- Name of the Work : Road Works
- Total No. of Work : 01 No.
- Estimated Cost : Please refer the DTCN
- EMD : 1% of Estimated Cost
- Cost of Tender Document : Please refer the DTCN
- Class of Contractor : Please refer the DTCN
- Period of Completion : 03 (Three) Calendar months as per Annexure
- Other Details : As per DTCN

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding		Last date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Bid	
		From	To		Technical	Financial
Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division, Nuapada	RWNPD-07/2020-21 (Online)	28.12.2020 at 10.00 A.M.	07.01.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.	06.01.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.	08.01.2021 at 11.00 A.M.	To be intimated later

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in.  
OIPR-25050/ 11/0009/2021 Sd./- Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division, Nuapada

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No. B-561  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**  
**SUNDARGARH (R&B) DIVISION, SUNDARGARH**  
E-mail ID: pwd\_sng@yahoo.co.in, Tel./Fax: (06622) 272230  
**"e" Procurement Notice**  
Bid Identification No. EE-R&B-SNG-59 of 2020-21  
Letter No. 6358/W/E Date: 09.12.20

- The Executive Engineer, Sundargarh (R&B) Division on behalf of Governor of Odisha inviting percentage rate bid in Double Cover System on ONLINE mode from eligible contractors with valid licences for "Road Work" as detailed in DTCN.
- Nature of Work : Road Work
- No. of Work : 01 (One) No.
- Tender Cost : Rs.10,000/-
- Class of Contractor : "B" & "A" Class Contractor
- Availability of bid document in the website : From 10.00 A.M. of date 29.12.2020 to 05.00 P.M. of date 07.01.2021
- Date of Opening of Bid : 11.00 A.M. on Dt.08.01.2021
- The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website (https://tendersorissa.gov.in). Any addendum/corrigendum/cancellation of tender can also be seen in the website said only.

Sd./- Executive Engineer  
Sundargarh (R&B) Division  
OIPR-34043/11/0028/2021

**ZILLA SWASTHYA SAMITI, NUAPADA**  
**OFFICE OF THE CDM & PHO CUM DMD, NUAPADA**  
DPMU, NHM  
E-mail: nhmnuapada@gmail.com Phone: (06678)-223908  
Advertisement No.: 4699/DPMU/NHM/2020 Date: 23.12.2020

**CONTRACTUAL ENGAGEMENT**  
No. E-476:- Applications are invited for filling up the following posts under Zilla Swasthya Samiti, Nuapada on contractual basis for a period of 11 months and subject to renewal as per Society norms basing on the performance and subject to continuance of the programme.

Sl. No.	Name of the Post	Vacancy
1	Consultant - Medicine, NPHCE	01
2	Doctor - Dist. NCD Clinic - NPCDCS	02
3	Pediatrician at DEIC	01
4	MO - MBBS at DEIC	01
5	Medical Officer DTC - RNTCP	01
6	Medical Officer (SNCU)	03
7	AYUSH MO - MHU	Ayurvedic-ST-1, Homeopathic- UR-1 Male (UR-1, SC-1), Female (UR-1, SEBC-1, ST-1)
9	Optometrist, DEIC	01
10	Dental Technician (DEIC)	01
11	Rehabilitation Worker-NCD	01
12	District Programme Coordinator (RNTCP)	01
13	Office Assistant (DPMU)	01

Interested eligible candidates can log on to www.nuapada.nic.in for details of vacancy, eligibility criteria, age, remuneration, application format & selection procedure etc. Candidates fulfilling the eligibility criteria may submit their application on or before 11/01/2021 till 5 P.M. through Regd. Post/Speed Post/Courier only. The Application must be superscribed with "APPLICATION FOR THE POST OF...". The undersigned reserves the right to cancel any or all the applications/positions at any stage of recruitment process without assigning any reason thereof.  
OIPR-10055/11/0024/2021 Sd./- CDM & PHO, Nuapada

# ... AND THEN CAME CORONA

## India locks down

Centre's sudden enforcement of lockdown seemed hastily prepared and disadvantaged the already vulnerable populations

The Centre March 24, 2020, ordered a nationwide lockdown for 21 days, confining its 1.3 billion people indoors. It was ordered after a 14-hour voluntary public curfew March 22, followed by enforcement of a series of regulations in the country's COVID-19 affected regions. Who will forget the mass lighting of lamps and beating of bells from rooftops and balconies. The lockdown came when the number of positive cases in India was approximately 500. India was quick to close its international borders and enforce an immediate lockdown which WHO praised as "tough and timely".

The government's sudden enforcement of the lockdown seemed hastily prepared and disadvantaged already vulnerable populations. Implementing public health measures was difficult in places with overcrowded living conditions and inadequate hygiene and sanitation. Non-COVID-19 health services were disrupted. Reports suggested that the government's efforts to provide financial support and a measure

of food security to ease these pressures would be insufficient to meet demand. But better planning and communication could have helped avert this crisis. Rates of testing were low (0-28 per 1000 people as of April 20). Capacity issues, absence of political will, and operational feasibility were to be blamed.

One threat to the COVID-19 response in India was the spread of misinformation driven by fear, stigma, and blame. There were rising levels of violence against healthcare workers and stigmatisation of people suspected of having COVID-19, which could have impeded reporting of illness. The pandemic was also used to fan anti-Muslim sentiments, after a gathering connected to the group Tablighi Jamaat was identified as being responsible for many cases. A welcome initiative to combat fake news was led by a group of more than 400 multidisciplinary Indian scientists, who have voluntarily formed Indian Scientists' Response to COVID-19 to fight myths and misinformation about the disease.

"A political government tries to find a scapegoat when there is pandemic or calamity and the circumstances show that there is probability that these foreigners were chosen to make them scapegoats," the Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court had observed while quashing FIRs registered in Maharashtra against several foreign nationals who had attended the Markaz Nizamuddin event in New Delhi in March.

Even as the year winds down, the corona story continues to get grimmer. None yet really knows how much longer the hunt will persist. Mankind, for many centuries to come, will scarcely believe such a catastrophe ever visited the earth. Covid-19 has affected nearly eight crore people worldwide and stubbed out 17.40 lakh lives and counting. Its speed, pervasiveness and intractability have made it arguably one of the most lethal disasters that have ever befallen humanity. Its impact has upended the socio-cultural and economic fabric of mankind and changed the way we look at life. Coronavirus will certainly count as a huge milestone in history and we, the survivors so far, may well be straddling the cusp of a pre and a post-corona world



## The walk back home

The overnight nationwide lockdown announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi March 24 forced over 10 million migrant labourers to return to their home states.

The northern state of Uttar Pradesh and the eastern state of Bihar witnessed the highest number of migrant returns, according to a written reply by Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Minister of State of Labour and Employment in Parliament September 14.

A majority of these migrants, probably, reached their homes on foot. During the two-month-long lockdown in India, one of the strictest in the world, most industrial and commercial activity was halted. As a result, thousands of daily wagers struggled to live in the rented shanties of big cities. Since all modes of

public transport were stopped due to the lockdown, millions of poor Indians walked hundreds of kilometres to reach their native places. The last time India witnessed such massive migration was at the time of partition in 1947 when 15 million people were displaced.

News and social media were awash with images and videos of migrants struggling with their families and belongings, as all AaForms of public transport in the country had been shut down. Finally, 800 special Shramik Express trains were organised to transport at least 1 million people. The Central and state governments announced financial aid ranging from Rs 500 to Rs 2,000 for women and the poor but millions could not avail these benefits because of loopholes and oversight in the schemes and those who got the money found that it was not enough.

While this reverse migration triggered fears that the virus might travel from urban to rural India, the stark reality that faced the workers was that their hometowns lacked well equipped healthcare systems.

The Modi government finally clarified May 28 that it is not paying for migrant labourers' Shramik Express tickets, telling the Supreme Court that the bill is being footed by states.

The statement in court comes amid much confusion over who exactly is paying for the migrant labourers' journey, with certain statements from the Central government suggesting that it is bearing 85 per cent of the fare and states paying the remaining 15 per cent. BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra had also claimed that the Central government is paying 85 per cent of the fare.

The Central government's clarification came as the Supreme Court, at a virtual hearing, took up a PIL on the problems being faced by migrant labourers stranded in different parts of the country amid the COVID-19 lockdown.

In a statement to the court, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who was representing the Central government, said the fare for the special

State	Number of migrant labourers
Andhra Pradesh	32,571
Arunachal Pradesh	2,871
Assam	4,26,441
Bihar	1,500,612
Dadar & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	43,747
Haryana	1,289
Jammu & Kashmir	48,780
Jharkhand	5,30,047
Kerala	3,11,124
Ladakh	50
Lakshadweep	456
Madhya Pradesh	7,53,581
Maharashtra	1,82,990
Manipur	12,338
Meghalaya	4,266
Nagaland	11,750
Pondicherry	1,694
Punjab	5,15,642
Rajasthan	1,308,130
Tamil Nadu	72,145
Telangana	37,050
Tripura	34,247
Uttar Pradesh	3,249,638
West Bengal	1,384,693
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,466,152</b>

Data: Government data (As of Sept 14)

## Wuhan wet market

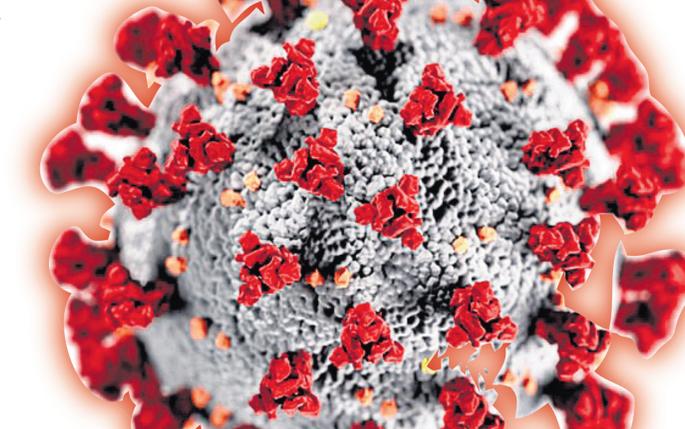
The new strain of coronavirus likely originated in bats or pangolins. The first transmission to humans was in Wuhan, China. Since then, the virus has mostly spread through person-to-person contacts. Reports of the first COVID-19 cases started in December 2019. Although China has not been very overt about this. Molecular clock dating analyses of coronaviruses suggest that the most recent common ancestor of these viruses existed around 10,000 years ago. This relatively young age is in sharp contrast to the ancient evolutionary history of their putative natural hosts, which began diversifying tens of millions of years ago. In 2003, a WHO team was able to identify the animal source of SARS coronavirus within weeks despite its arrival in China nearly three months after the initial outbreak. In the case of MERS coronavirus, the intermediate host was identified more than a year after the first human case was reported. However, in the case of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), its source is still unknown even 11 months after WHO reported the first case.

Until early this year, most people had never heard of the term "wet market," but the coronavirus has thrust it into the limelight. A wet market in



Wuhan called the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market is believed to be the source of COVID-19. Somewhat akin to farmers' markets and found around the world, wet markets are typically large collections of open-air stalls selling fresh seafood, meat, fruits, and vegetables. Some wet markets sell and slaughter live animals on site, including chickens, fish, and shellfish. In China, they're a staple of daily life for many. More rarely, wet mar-

kets also sell wild animals and their meat. Why "wet" markets? One explanation has to do with the liquid in these places: live fish splashing in tubs of water, melting ice keeping meat cold, the blood and innards of slaughtered animals. Another is simply that they deal in perishable goods (thus wet) instead of dry, durable goods. Soon after the virus spread around the world, there was heightened demand to identify its origin in China's Wuhan



Shramik trains organised by the Railways was paid either by the originating state or the receiving one. The migrant workers are not required to pay the fares, Mehta told a bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, SK Kaul and MR Shah.

When asked by the bench how it is ensured that the migrant workers are not harassed to pay for the tickets, Mehta said the states should file their respective reports in court.

## Hunt for vax

How could scientists race out COVID-19 vaccines so fast without cutting corners? They weren't making tea or maggi. Many were left baffled when Modi announced the launch of vaccines on Independence Day. Just to make the moment elephantine, hope was fed to the citizens. Who can forget BJP's vaccine-bribe during the Bihar polls campaigning?

November 18, final results from Pfizer Inc's COVID-19 vaccine trial showed its shot had a 95 per cent success rate and two months of safety data. The final analysis comes just a week after initial results from the trial showed the vaccine was more than 90 per cent effective. Moderna Inc, a few days ago, had released preliminary data for its vaccine, showing 94.5 per cent effectiveness.

India manufactures more than 60 pc of all vaccines sold across the globe, and while its \$40 billion pharmaceutical sector is not yet involved in the production of the expensive Pfizer and Moderna shots, the nation will undoubtedly play a pivotal role in immunising much of the world, a Reuters report said. Indian companies are set to produce eight, more affordable vaccines designed to fight

COVID-19, including AstraZeneca's Covishield, called the "vaccine for the world here" by its developers.

"There are many vaccines being produced in countries around the world but there's only one nation that has the manufacturing capacity to produce sufficient quantities to satisfy the demands of citizens in every country, and that's India," said Australia's ambassador to India, Barry O'Farrell, after touring vaccine manufacturing sites in India with many other diplomats.

Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's biggest vaccine maker, has already stockpiled more than 50 million doses of the AstraZeneca shot, even as it awaits emergency-use approvals from both British and Indian authorities. SII plans to make a total of 400 million doses of Covishield by July and is setting up new production lines to roll out roughly one billion shots a year.

The UK became the first country in the world to approve the coronavirus vaccine developed by Pfizer/BioNTech in December start. According to CNN, UK regulators began their formal review process November 25 — three days after Pfizer submitted data to the US FDA. But because British regulators used "rolling reviews," they were able to quickly push it past the finish line first.

From May 4, 2020, the lockdown was eased with several relaxations in all zones that came progressively in phases. As part of Unlock 2.0 in July, most activities were permitted outside of containment zones, with the exception of educational institutions, international air travel, places of recreation. Interestingly, wine shops were allowed to re-open.

**UNLOCK 1.0 (JUNE 1-30)**  
The focus was to revive the dented economy. Lockdown restrictions were to be imposed in containment zones, while review process allowed the UK to permissiveness data from Pfizer's late-stage trials as each set was released, starting in October. Thus, when the formal review process began, the data had already been examined in detail.

Although the EU's regulatory agency — the European Medicines Agency (EMA) — released a statement criticising the UK's approach and calling it "hasty," UK regulators have defended their process, saying that it is equivalent to other international regulatory standards.

mitted in other zones in a phased manner. Shopping malls, religious places, hotels and restaurants were allowed to reopen from June 8. Large gatherings were still banned but there were no restrictions on inter-state travel.

Odisha began staggered lifting of the lockdown June 8, as part of the Unlock 1.0. A night curfew from 7 pm to 7 am was enforced in the state. Restrictions continued in containment zones till June 30. Malls, restaurants and places of religious worship remained closed.

**UNLOCK 2.0 (JULY 1-31)**  
Lockdown measures were only imposed in containment zones. In all other areas, most activities were permitted. Night curfews were in effect from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. State governments were allowed to put suitable restrictions on all activities, but state borders remained open to all. Intra and interstate travel was permitted. Limited international travel was permitted as part of the Vande Bharat Mission. In Odisha, the weekend shutdown continued.

**UNLOCK 3.0 (AUGUST 1-31)**  
Unlock 3.0 for August 2020 removed night curfews and permitted gymnasiums and yoga centres to reopen from August 5. Independence Day celebrations were permitted with social distancing. Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu imposed a lockdown for the whole month while West Bengal imposed lockdowns twice a week.

## UNLOCKING INDIA



**UNLOCK 4.0 (SEPTEMBER 1-30)**  
August 29, 2020, the MHA issued guidelines for activities permitted in Unlock 4.0. It said "Lockdown shall remain in force in the containment zones till 30 September 2020." Marriage functions with gatherings of up to 50 people and funeral/last rites ceremonies with of up to 20 people were permitted. Religious, entertainment, political, sports, academic functions and gatherings of up to 100 people were allowed. Face coverings/masks were made compulsory in public places, workplaces and during transport.

**UNLOCK 5.0 (OCTOBER 1-31)**  
For schools it had a preference for online learning if possible, but states and Union Territories were able to make those decisions from October 15 in a graded manner. Cinemas that had closed all this while could finally be opened from October 15, 2020 with a 50 pc of their seating capacity. November 3, Kerala opened its tourism sector by reopening hill stations, beaches, national park and inter-state public transport movement.

**UNLOCK 6.0 (NOVEMBER 1-30)**  
The MHA did not make any new changes to the Unlock 5.0 guidelines in its latest instructions for another set of unlocking and said they would continue to be implemented in the month of November too. Handful of states were allowed opening up of more activities outside containment zones and announced partial reopening of schools.

**UNLOCK 7.0**  
The state government still prohibited large gatherings and congregations till December 31 under its Unlock 7 guidelines. However, it authorised the school and mass education department to take a call on the date of reopening of schools for students of Class IX to XII in a graded manner after consultation with stakeholders. While medical colleges reopened from December 1, all academic, technical and skill development institutions remained closed till December 31 or till a date is decided by the departments concerned.

**UNLOCK 8.0**  
The state government still prohibited large gatherings and congregations till December 31 under its Unlock 7 guidelines. However, it authorised the school and mass education department to take a call on the date of reopening of schools for students of Class IX to XII in a graded manner after consultation with stakeholders. While medical colleges reopened from December 1, all academic, technical and skill development institutions remained closed till December 31 or till a date is decided by the departments concerned.

**UNLOCK 9.0**  
The state government still prohibited large gatherings and congregations till December 31 under its Unlock 7 guidelines. However, it authorised the school and mass education department to take a call on the date of reopening of schools for students of Class IX to XII in a graded manner after consultation with stakeholders. While medical colleges reopened from December 1, all academic, technical and skill development institutions remained closed till December 31 or till a date is decided by the departments concerned.

**UNLOCK 10.0**  
The state government still prohibited large gatherings and congregations till December 31 under its Unlock 7 guidelines. However, it authorised the school and mass education department to take a call on the date of reopening of schools for students of Class IX to XII in a graded manner after consultation with stakeholders. While medical colleges reopened from December 1, all academic, technical and skill development institutions remained closed till December 31 or till a date is decided by the departments concerned.

## Economy battered

While containment measures had been used by many countries, the scale of India's restrictions was unique, bringing the country of more than 1.3 billion people to a sudden halt. Unsurprisingly the economic fallout was staggering. No other major economy was as badly affected by Covid-19 as India's. In the April-June period, India's GDP shrank by 23.9% — the worst contraction ever in the country's history. The economy also shrank in the following quarter as India entered its first economic recession since the British left in 1947.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman claimed Indian economy will rebound very rapidly and it will be a "V-shaped recovery". Does this mean the Covid-19 contraction was only a blip and things will get back to pre-pandemic path soon? That is unlikely. Take a look at IMF's per capita GDP predictions. It sees GDP shrinking by 11%, making Indians on an average poorer than Bangladeshis. How long will this figure take to recover? The IMF predicts that the recovery itself will take three years and the per capita GDP will be back to pre-Covid-19 levels not before 2022.

The overall unemployment rate for young workers aged 16-24 jumped from 8.4% to 24.4% from spring of 2019 to spring 2020, while unemployment for their counterparts aged 25 and older rose from 2.8% to 11.3%. Younger workers have had disproportionate job loss, in part, because of their concentration in the industries and occupations that were hardest hit. About a quarter of young workers are employed in leisure and hospitality, where employment declined by 41% between February and May 2020. In September 2020, India saw an unemployment rate of over six per cent. Unemployment rose to 24 per cent in May 2020 — a result of a decrease in demand as well as disruption of workforce faced by companies.

Furthermore, this caused a GVA loss of more than nine percent for the Indian economy that month.

Between February and April 2020, the share of households that experienced a fall in income shot up to 46 per cent. Inflation rates on goods and services including food products and fuel were expected to rise later this year. Social distancing resulted



in job losses, specifically those Indian society's lower economic strata. Several households terminated domestic help services — essentially unorganised monthly-paying jobs. Most Indians spent a large amount of time engaging in household chores themselves, making it the most widely practiced lockdown activity. The most devastating impact of the virus and the lockdown had been on the economically backward classes, with limited access to proper healthcare and other resources.



# Congress seals alliance with Left for Bengal polls

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The Congress high command has given its nod for an alliance with Left parties for the West Bengal Assembly election next year.

Bengal Congress President Adhir Ranjan Chowdhry said, "Today the Congress High command has formally approved the electoral alliance with the Left parties for the impending election in West Bengal."

In the last polls in 2016, the Congress fought in alliance with the Left parties and secured 44 seats to emerge as the second largest party. However, half of its MLAs have since joined the Trinamool.

It is not clear how many seats the Congress will contest but party sources say Congress wants a fair share in the seat sharing agreement.

Bengal Congress in-charge Jitin Prasad said talks on seat sharing will begin but the party will fight with full force to restore the pride of Bengal which is being "destroyed by the BJP and TMC."

In Bengal, the Congress faces a formidable challenge from the ruling Trinamool Congress and the BJP, which is fast emerging as a



force to reckon with in the poll-bound state.

The 294-member Bengal Assembly will go to the polls next year. While the Trinamool Congress has the challenge to retain power, the Congress also has to retain its ground in the state.

The Congress is also up against an upbeat BJP which has made inroads in the state after winning 18 Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 general election. The Congress was in a dilemma over whether to go with the Left or the Trinamool.

But its state leaders have been talking to the Left informally and holding programmes in the state simultaneously.

# Rise & rise of Abhishek and how it's biting TMC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kolkata, Dec 24:** For West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, it has been like a journey from the rags to riches. The Diamond Harbour MP made his first political appearance exactly a decade ago, when the Trinamool Congress stormed to power in 2011, toppling the world's longest-serving Communist government in Bengal.

He was practically para-dropped to the political scenes of this eastern state, having no prior connection with the mainstream movements of Nandigram and Singur land acquisition which had rocked the nation with widespread protests.

Abhishek, the second most powerful name in the Trinamool Congress' rank and file now, had publicly come to the centre stage of politics July 21, 2011 when the party had observed its first Martyrs' Day celebrations in Kolkata, barely two months after the formation of the state government. He was just 24 at the time.

In a country that thrives on dynasty politics, junior Banerjee, son of Mamata's elder brother Amit Banerjee, had joined the bandwagon

amid much fanfare of cheering Trinamool supporters that day. It was all fine, till then. But Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee slowly decided to catapult her nephew as the next generation leader of the Trinamool Congress. To remember, Abhishek's name was announced by Banerjee as the president of the All India Trinamool Yuva - a platform apparently launched to give the nephew some room in the state's political arena. The newly-floated party body was a brainchild of Banerjee to bridge the gap between the Trinamool Chhatra Parishad and the Trinamool Youth Congress. And she had chosen Abhishek to take over the party's newly formed youth arm. Under Abhishek's leadership, Trinamool Congress Yuva had started accepting membership from those in the 21-35 age group.

Abhishek's emergence gave birth to a new chapter of dynasty politics in Bengal.

Clad in starched white kurta and branded footwear - a style similar to the new-breed of national leaders - Abhishek's rimless glasses and gelled hair was a far cry from Banerjee's ordinary cotton saris and white flip-flops.

Considered as extremely arro-



gant by many within the party, Banerjee's nephew took full advantage of being a family man and utilised it to the hilt. The first hurdle came when he tried to gain ground within the party from then second-in-command in Trinamool, Mukul Roy, who later joined the BJP. Roy is currently a national vice-president of the BJP.

According to sources, after winning the election from the Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, Abhishek took over the control of the party's organisational parts (mainly financial control) from Roy which never went down well with

Banerjee's once most trusted lieutenant. It led to the first major defeat in the Trinamool Congress as Roy quit in September, 2017, after the controversial Narada sting operation. Roy stood as a stiff challenge before Abhishek for the No. 2 position in the party that he was eyeing then.

Asked about the current crisis within the party, especially among the young leaders following the emergence of Abhishek, veteran Trinamool Congress Lok Sabha MP Sougata Roy said that it could have been one of the reasons for many key leaders within Trinamool

Congress defecting from the party. "Perhaps it could be a reason for many key party leaders for not being happy or to quit. But I don't know much as I am not a young politician," the party's key trouble-shooter Roy told IANS.

Abhishek's authoritarian approach did antagonise former Trinamool Lok Sabha MP and West Bengal minister Suvendu Adhikari, Soumitra Khan, Anupam Hazra (all are now with the BJP in Bengal) and many others, especially the young Turks. There were dissenting notes coming out from within the party. It had sent a wrong signal to the people at the grassroots level where Trinamool Congress was viewed as a proletarian political force, after the outgoing Left Front.

Meanwhile, dissenting notes have also come out recently from many top Trinamool leaders, including state Forest Minister Rajib Banerjee who had openly criticised the party's style of functioning. Two rounds of talks were held already by Trinamool's Secretary General and state Education Minister Partha Chatterjee to resolve the issues with Rajib Banerjee.

# PFI received ₹100cr in its bank accounts: ED to court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kochi, Dec 24:** The Enforcement Directorate, probing the money laundering probe against the Popular Front of India (PFI), told a court here Thursday that its investigation so far revealed that the Kerala-based outfit has received more than Rs 100 crore in its bank accounts over the years.

The agency, while seeking extension of custody of PFI's student wing leader KA Rauf Sharif, arrested in connection with the money laundering probe, made the submission in the Special court for Prevention of Money Laundering Cases here.

Considering ED's application, the court extended the custody of Sharif for three more days. In its affidavit submitted, ED stated that the source and disbursement of these funds is under investigation.

"The investigation conducted by the Directorate against PFI has so far revealed that more than Rs 100 crore have been deposited in the

accounts of PFI over the years, and that a large part of the same has been deposited in cash," the ED said. It also alleged that since 2013, PFI has been indulging in various scheduled offences and the money transfers and cash deposits have also significantly increased after 2014.

Investigation has also revealed that PFI has been involved in anti-CAA protests and funds during the period of December 2019 to February 2020

may have been used for this purpose, the affidavit said. ED also mentioned the role and involvement of PFI members in the Delhi riots in February this year have come to its notice in the ongoing investigation into the money laundering in the riots.

"There are also indications that PFI has linkages with the recent violence in Bangalore city. PFI has also been involved in various cases in the past in which public order was disturbed and various offences of grave nature were committed by the members of the organisations," it said in the affidavit.

# Seeds of discontent in Bengal BJP as turncoats join saffron fold

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kolkata, Dec 24:** The fight between the old and new members of Bengal BJP has intensified as the high-voltage Assembly elections scheduled in 2021 draws closer.

In a measured tactical move, the party has apparently sent out a clear signal to a section of BJP state leadership about their outrageous comments on the social media. Recently, it has sent show-cause notices to two prominent BJP West Bengal unit leaders - Sayantan Basu and Agnimitra Paul - for allegedly making gross anti-party statements.

While Basu is the sitting general secretary of BJP in Bengal, Paul heads the women's arm of the party, Mahila Morcha, in the state. The show-cause notice came a few days after Trinamool Congress heavyweight and former state Transport and Irrigation Minister Suvendu Adhikari joined the saffron brigade in presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah at a grand rally in West Midnapore last week. With more and more political turncoats joining the state BJP from other parties, including Trinamool Congress, Congress and the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), the situation has turned into a veritable mishmash with seeds of discontent arising within the party.

The BJP has also clipped the wings of both Basu and Paul for their random media bytes to TV channels which constituted derogatory and anti-party statements reflecting severe anti-organisation sentiments. Some of their remarks went directly against certain decisions taken by the party, BJP sources said.

Both Basu and Paul, however, refused to comment on the issue dubbing it an internal matter of the BJP. Sources said that Basu reportedly apologised for his comments and sent a written reply to the party leadership in Delhi. BJP state unit President Dilip Ghosh said: "Their statements to the media are against the discipline of the party and they have been cautioned for that."

On Monday, BJP MP from Bankura's Bishnupur Lok Sabha constituency Soumitra Khan's wife Sujata Mondal Khan had joined Trinamool Congress and she blasted at the BJP leadership for wooing TMC leaders with plum posts.

"I shed sweat and blood for the party in its tough time but never got rewarded for that. Now the opportunists and fence-sitters from dif-



ferent parties are being welcomed in the BJP with prime positions," Sujata had told media persons at a press conference.

The discontent among the BJP workers became visible as mild clashes took place between the old party workers and newcomers in West Midnapore and Durgapur town this week with posters and banners opposing the decision of welcoming rebel Trinamool leaders were seen in many places.

BJP sources said a ruckus also took place in Durgapur on Tuesday while Trinamool supporters were scheduled to join the BJP in presence of the party state president Dilip Ghosh. The warring groups attacked each other with plastic chairs and engaged in a scuffle. A similar incident had also taken place at Narayangarh in West Midnapore district.

Recently, Asansol BJP MP and Union Minister Babul Supriyo had taken a public stance against Asansol Trinamool leader and Pandabeswar MLA Jitendra Tewari making it public on social media.

# Kerala Assembly to adopt resolution against farm laws

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 24:** The Kerala Cabinet Thursday decided to convene a special Assembly session December 31 to adopt a resolution against the three new central farm laws. It will make a recommendation to Governor Arif Mohammad Khan to convene the session.

With the latest decision of the Cabinet, all eyes are now again on Khan for his response to the state government's move.

The Governor had shot down an earlier state government recommendation to convene the special session December 23

on the ground that there was no urgency since a special session was slated to be convened January 8, 2021.

Following this, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had written to the Governor, pointing out that in a democracy, the Governor has to give consent to the decision of a democratically elected government.

In response, the Governor had replied that the highly confidential letter's content were available with the media.

Assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan too had reacted strongly and said that it was for the Cabinet to decide on the urgency of convening the Assembly session. He said that the Governor must take the state government into confidence and take a decision accordingly.

Leader of Opposition Ramesh Chennithala had written to President Ram Nath Kovind to recall the Governor for disallowing the Assembly's special session.

Former Chief Minister Oomen Chandy told the media that the state government seemed to fear something or someone in coming out against the Governor in all earnest. He advised the Vijayan

government to issue an ordinance against the farm laws and not be content with passage of a resolution in the House.



# Tagore's vision essence of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat': PM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Santiniketan, Dec 24:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday extolled the pivotal role played by Visva-Bharati in India's freedom movement and furthering the cause of universal brotherhood.

Addressing the centenary celebrations of the university founded by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, Modi said the literary legend's vision was also the essence of the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative launched by his government for the making of a self-reliant India.

"Visva-Bharati is a venerable source of constant energy to the country," he said.

He said Tagore and the institution he founded not only strengthened the spirit of nationalism but also promoted inclusiveness that strengthened 'visva bandhutva' (universal brotherhood).

Praising the institution for its remarkable achievements in varied fields like art and literature, and science and innovation, the prime minister urged its students to reach out to the artisans in the region to explore ways to find national and international markets for their produce.

"That will make them self-reliant. Atmanirbhar Bharat is the initiative for India's prosperity which will aid in global prosperity," he said.

Recalling India's freedom struggle, Modi said, "Bhakti Movement



**Bhakti Movement united us, the Movement for Learning gave us intellectual strength and the Movement of Karma exemplified by the likes of Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi gave us the courage to fight for our rights.**

**NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER**

Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi gave us the courage to fight for our rights."

Visva-Bharati, he said, is the embodiment of philosophy, vision and hard work of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore.

united us, the Movement for Learning gave us intellectual

strength and the Movement of Karma exemplified by the likes of

# Not invited to Visva-Bharati centenary celebrations: Didi

**Kolkata:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday said she was not invited to the centenary celebrations of Visva-Bharati by its authorities. Addressing a press meet here, she also said that those who are currently at the helm of the central university "play no integral part" in carrying forward Tagore's legacy. "No, I can't recall having received any invitation to the function. I, however, posted on Twitter that Visva-Bharati evokes a sense of pride, having completed 100 years of establishment," she said. The chief minister, when asked to comment on a controversy doing the rounds over Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's age-old property in Santiniketan, said "he was being subjected to vicious attacks" because of his anti-BJP stance. "I have immense respect for Amartya da. Do you believe Amartya Sen can occupy land? I offer my apology to Amartya da on behalf of Bengal," Banerjee said. Iterating that BJP leaders have verbally abused her on many occasions, the TMC boss said, "They (BJP) think they could insult the luminaries of Bengal, like Sen, just as they had been insulting me. They are wrong. People of the state won't accept this." Banerjee said she would protest against the insult meted out to Sen during her rally in Bolpur on December 29, and urged all intellectuals in the state to also do the same. "I want to know why the heritage Poush Mela was not organised this year with COVID-19 protocols in place. Who is behind this?" she said, adding that those responsible would never be able to "unsettle" the 100-year-old institute's glorious tradition.

# Fauci, Kerala minister Shailaja named for Mother Teresa Awards

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, Dec 24:** US epidemiologist Dr Anthony Fauci, Kerala Health Minister K.K. Shailaja, DGP Sanjay Pandey and other prominent global personalities have been named as recipients of the Mother Teresa Memorial Awards for 2020.

The awards, instituted since 2005 and the only one recognised by the Missionaries of Charity, Kolkata, have been given to a select few globally renowned personalities for their incredible contributions during the Covid-19 pandemic this year; with the theme 'Celebrating Compassion in Times of Covid', said Harmony Foundation Chairman Abraham Mathai.

Dr Fauci, 80, Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and his task force were the first to recognise the seriousness of the coronavirus pandemic and introduced measures like facemasks, quarantine and social distancing, besides helping the research for the vaccine.

In view of the Covid restrictions, the awards shall be presented at a virtual ceremony scheduled for 6 pm, December 27.

Sanjay Pandey, IPS, Maharashtra DGP-Home Guards, went beyond the call of duty as a police officer to open the first relief camp in Mumbai for migrant workers whose livelihood was disrupted by the lock-



down to contain the pandemic. Shailaja, 64, Health Minister of Kerala, whose efforts and pro-activeness in dealing with the pandemic by following experts and scientific advice helped countless Keralites survive the terrors of this pandemic, and became an example for governments of other states and countries.

**The Health Minister's efforts and pro-activeness in dealing with the pandemic helped countless Keralites survive the terrors of this pandemic, and became an example for governments of other states and countries**

Dalai Lama and Kailash Satyarthi, President of Ghana Nana Akufo-Addo, ex-Prime Minister of Malaysia Mahathir Mohamad, former Deputy Speaker of the UK's House of Lords Baroness Caroline Cox, and many other celebrities worldwide. The awards celebrate and commemorate the memory and legacy of Mother Teresa, canonised as a Saint by Pope Francis in the Vatican.

# national

## of the day quote

There is a new mutation (of coronavirus) in UK, South Africa. What if a new mutation appears in Maharashtra. Night curfew was imposed to make people aware that danger still persists

The Delhi government is on alert in the wake of a mutated coronavirus strain detected in the UK

Eleven passengers among those who arrived in Goa from the UK after December 9 have tested positive for COVID-19 so far

## SHORT TAKES

### Cop commits suicide at PS

**Palghar:** A 41-year-old policeman allegedly committed suicide by shooting himself with his service revolver inside a police station in Maharashtra's Palghar district Thursday, an official said. According to the MBVV police, head constable S D Bhoje attached to Tulj police station in Nalasopara shot himself inside a cabin on the station premises between 8 am to 9 am. The policeman, who was on night duty, was going to leave for home, when his colleagues heard a gunshot from the cabin and found him lying in a pool of blood, the official said.

### Actress Ragini shifted to hospital

**Bangalore:** Kannada film actress, Ragini Dwivedi, who is lodged in the Bangalore Central prison after her arrest in what came to be known as "Sandalwood Drug case", was shifted to a hospital after she complained of severe stomach pain. She was arrested September 4, after her house was raided by police in her alleged connection to a gang that organised high-profile parties in which drugs were allegedly consumed.

### 13 more Rohingyas held in Assam

**Silchar:** With the arrest of 13 more Myanmar Rohingya Muslims in Assam a total of 35 Myanmar, including women and children, have been detained in the past one month for illegally entering northeast India, officials said Thursday. An Assam Police official in Karimganj said that acting on information, 13 Rohingyas, suspected to be refugees fleeing from their camps in southeast Bangladesh, were held Wednesday from Churaibari in southern Assam.

### K'taka withdraws night curfew order

**Bangalore:** In a U-turn, the Karnataka government Thursday withdrew its night curfew order, hours before it was to come into effect. The decision to impose night curfew for nine days from 11 pm to 5 am starting from Thursday was taken Wednesday in line with the Centre's advice, amid concerns over a new COVID-19 variant spreading in the UK. In a statement, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa said: "In view of the public opinion that there was no need for night curfew, the decision was reviewed and after consulting with cabinet colleagues and senior officials it has been decided to withdraw the night curfew."

# BJP dares Rahul for debate



Rahul Gandhi met the President and handed over a memorandum signed by two crore farmers demanding a repeal of the laws, saying they will not benefit farmers or labourers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The BJP Thursday challenged Rahul Gandhi for an open debate on what the Congress did for farmers' welfare when in power and what the Modi government has done for them, as it rejected his allegations against the Centre as "baseless and illogical". Union minister Prakash Javadekar accused the Congress of ignoring farmers' interests and keeping them poor to ensure cheap grain prices, and asserted that the Modi government empowered them by implementing the Swaminathan commission report to give them remunerative price through MSP. The BJP leader noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will transfer ₹18,000 crore to nine crore farmers Friday, taking to a total of ₹1.20 lakh crore the amount of money it has directly credited to their bank accounts so far.

"This is merely the beginning. It will continue for 10 years and the total scheme is of ₹7 lakh crore," he said, noting that the all the Congress did when it was in power was to waive their loans amounting to ₹53,000 crore.

This money was not given to farmers but to banks against their loans, he noted. "I challenge the Congress and Rahul Gandhi for an open debate. I will prove how the Congress always ignored farmers' interests and how Modi empowered them. Farmers always demanded remunerative price for their produce but the Congress never did so," he added.

The opposition party has been "unmasked" as it has become clear and it and its allies have been using farmers' shoulders to fire at the government and have been "instigating" them, he alleged.

Rahul had alleged earlier in the day that there is "no democracy in India" and it exists "only in imagination". A Congress delegation met President Ram Nath Kovind and demanded a joint session of Parliament to repeal the Centre's three agri laws.

"The farmers (camping at Delhi borders) would not return till these laws are repealed. The government should convene a joint session of Parliament and repeal these laws," he told reporters after meeting the president. Javadekar made light of Rahul's demand for a session, say-

ing when Parliament is in session, Congress members obstruct and do not take part in a debate. He said the government's doors are always open for dialogue with agitating farmers, and it is confident that a solution will emerge.

Taking a swipe at the Congress leader, Union Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said that leave aside the entire country, even the Congress does not take seriously whatever Rahul says. If Rahul was so concerned about farmers, his party when in power could have done something for them, Tomar said. The Congress has always been against farmers, he alleged.

In its 2019 election manifesto, Rahul had said if the Congress came to power, the government would end agricultural produce market committee (APMC), ensure trade without mandi tax, and promote contract farming, he said.

"Now I want to ask Rahul Gandhi, if he lied in 2019 or is lying now. On this, the Congress has to come clear," Tomar said. At a briefing at the BJP headquarters, party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi took a swipe at Rahul by calling him "perpetually young, disenchanted, frustrated and agitated" and said his "baseless and illogical" broadside against the government was in line with his nature.

In a counterattack on the Congress leader over his charge that the government invariably dubs its critics as "anti-national", Trivedi said the opposition party had levelled a case of "treason" against former prime minister Charan Singh, a noted leader of farmers, and jailed him as well. BJP stalwart and former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had also been levelled with a similar charge by the party, he said.

He asked why Rahul is not agitating for farmers in Kerala as the state from where he is an MP does not have the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee Act.

# Zydu Cadila vax found safe in clinical trials

AGENCIES

**Ahmedabad, Dec 24:** Zydu Cadila announced Thursday that its plasmid DNA vaccine to prevent COVID-19 - ZyCoV-D - was found to be safe, well tolerated and immunogenic in the phase I and II clinical trials.

The company is now planning to initiate phase III clinical trial in around 30,000 volunteers upon receiving necessary approvals.

The phase II study of the vaccine ZyCoV-D had been conducted in over 1,000 healthy adult volunteers as part of the adaptive phase I/II dose escalation, multi-centric, randomised, double-blind placebo controlled study. The vaccine was found to be safe and immunogenic.

The trial has been reviewed by an independent Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) and reports have been submitted to Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) regularly for the update on safety outcome.

Pankaj R. Patel, Chairman of the Zydu Group said, "After es-

ablishing safety in phase I clinical trial, ZyCoV-D has now completed Phase II clinical trials and the vaccine has been found to be safe and immunogenic. We are optimistic of phase III clinical trial outcomes as well and that we would be able to start production of the novel vaccine on its successful completion."

With ZyCoV-D, the company has successfully established the DNA vaccine platform in the country, a statement said. The platform is also known to show much improved vaccine stability thus requiring lower cold chain requirements. This makes the vaccine ideal for access in remotest regions of the country. Administered through the intradermal route, it also allows for ease of administration. Further, the platform also provides ease of manufacturing the vaccine with minimal biosafety requirements (BSL-1). Furthermore, the platform can be rapidly used to modify the vaccine in a couple of weeks in case the virus mutates to ensure that the vaccine still elicits protection.

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# Massive cyberattacks that shook the world in 2020

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** In a virus-hit year that kept more people hooked to their Internet-connected devices for far too longer, cybercriminals saw more opportunity to push their agenda and garner profit, resulting in a huge number of ransomware attacks, data breaches, and even very sophisticated nation-state sponsored attacks.

The biggest of them perhaps came to light towards the end of the year when cybersecurity company FireEye earlier this month revealing that it became a target of hackers who accessed tools that the company uses to test its cus-

tomers' security. While the scale and size of the attack is still being determined, it has now emerged that this is no ordinary cyberattack affecting just one organisation.

According to a report in *The Wall Street Journal*, suspected Russian hackers installed the malware in the Orion software sold by the IT management company SolarWinds, and accessed sensitive data belonging to several US government agencies, at least one hospital and a university.

At least 24 big companies including tech giants like Intel, Cisco, VMware and Nvidia installed the software laced with malicious code, said the report.

# Terrorists release 3 hostages

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Agartala, Dec 24:** Three persons kidnapped from Tripura by members of the outlawed National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) have been released after 17 days of captivity in adjoining Bangladesh territory, police said Thursday.

However, small-time trader Litan Nath, 35, still remains untraced 28 days after his abduction at gunpoint by tribal guerrillas from Malda Kumar Para, a remote village in northern Tripura along the Tripura-Mizoram border, November 27.

A senior police official said that faced with mounting pressure from

Border Security Force and other paramilitary and state forces, the NLFT militants released the three kidnapped persons on Wednesday night in a mountainous forested area along the India-Bangladesh border.

Supervisor Subhash Bhowmik, 48, JCB driver Subal Debnath, 37, and worker Gana Mohan Tripura, 37, were kidnapped at gunpoint by the NLFT ultras from Malda Kumar Para in eastern Tripura's Dhalai district December 7 while they were engaged in border-fencing work along the international border. "Bangladesh security forces had conducted a massive search operation in their territory to locate

the three Indian hostages and to nab the Tripura ultras, following request from Indian security forces," the police official said on the condition of anonymity. Tripura Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order) Rajiv Singh earlier told IANS that there was information that the NLFT militants had whisked away their hostages to Bangladesh since the crime spot was just along the international border.

Government-owned National Building Construction Corporation was assigned the task to put up barbed wire fence along the India-Bangladesh border to check crimes and infiltration bids.

# nCoV shadow on Christmas celebrations

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the country is all set to celebrate Christmas, albeit with restricted entry to churches, live streaming of services, and no midnight Mass.

In Delhi, celebrations at Sacred Heart Cathedral will be low key due to the pandemic. "The participation of people in the mass service has been restricted by 95 per cent this year," Father



Stanley Kozhichira, spokesperson of Archdiocese of Delhi, told IANS. Father Kozhichira further said that each mass will only admit 100 people this year. Last year, as many as two lakh people had visited the church. "This year, we are restricting the

participation and not letting anyone enter the campus."

On Christmas Eve, the Mass will be held at 6 pm and 8 pm, while on Christmas Day, four masses will be organised in the morning. The Masses will be streamed live on YouTube and Facebook, he added.

Maharashtra, which accounts for the highest number of coronavirus cases and has also clamped a night curfew, will also have a toned-down Christmas celebration this year.



"This attack is different from the tens of thousands of incidents we have responded to throughout the years," FireEye CEO Kevin Mandia

said in a statement. Microsoft President Brad Smith said that this latest cyber-assault is effectively an attack on the US and

its government and other critical institutions, including security firms.

Earlier this year, Marriott International sent shock waves when the hotel chain announced that personal information of close to 5.2 million guests may have been accessed using the login credentials of two employees at a franchise property. The Twitter cryptocurrency hack in the middle of the year was another major incident that revealed how vulnerable the cyberspace was. The social media platform revealed that it was a "coordinated social engineering attack" by people who successfully targeted some of the company's employees with access to internal



## RAGHAV CHADHA ACCUSES BJP OF VANDALISING HIS OFFICE

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Jal Board (DJB) Vice Chairman Raghav Chadha Thursday accused BJP workers of vandalising the DJB office in the national capital

## SANTA ON DUTY



A man dressed as Santa Claus entertains patients during Christmas celebration, at Bai Jerbai Wadia Hospital For Children in Mumbai

## Modi to flag off India's first driverless train Dec 28: DMRC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** In an advance New Year's gift to people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to flag off the country's first ever fully-automated driverless train service on the Magenta Line of Delhi Metro December 28, the DMRC said Thursday.

The commercial operation of these new-generation trains, set to be a major technological feat, will begin after the event, a senior Delhi Metro official said. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be flagging off the country's first ever fully-automated driverless train service on the 37 km-Magenta Line (Janakpuri West to Botanical Garden) and will also be launching the fully operational National

Common Mobility Card (NCMC) for travel on the 23-km Airport Express Line (New Delhi to Dwarka Sector 21) on December 28, 2020," the DMRC said in a statement. Both the events, the flagging-off of the driverless train as well as the launch of NCMC on the Airport Express Line, will be hosted via video-conferencing, a senior DMRC official said.

"After the launch, it will be the first time when commuters will be able to use NCMC on any corridor of the Delhi Metro," he said. Prime Minister Modi in March 2019 had launched the indigenously-developed NCMC to enable people to pay multiple kinds of transport charges, including using Metro and bus services across the country.

## Agri Gold Ponzi case: ED attaches ₹4,109cr assets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The ED has attached properties worth ₹4,109 crore spread across various states in a money-laundering case linked to an alleged Ponzi scheme, the agency said Thursday.

The case pertains to the Agri Gold Group of Companies. Three promoters of the group were arrested by the central agency Tuesday.

"The attached assets include 2,809 landed properties, Haaland Amusement Park in the name of Arka Leisure and Entertainment Private Limited in Andhra Pradesh (spread over 48 acres) and shares of various companies, plants and machinery," the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said in a statement Thursday.

The assets attached provisionally under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) are located in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.

The accused can appeal against the ED order before the Adjudicating Authority of the PMLA within six months.

The ED initiated a probe into the matter after going through various police FIRs filed against the accused in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka for allegedly duping over 32 lakh investors after funds worth ₹6,380 crore were collected from them.

The "main accused" are Avva Venkata Rama Rao, Avva Venkata S Narayana Rao and Avva Hema Sundara Vara Prasad -- the promoters of the Agri Gold Group of Companies who have been arrested by the ED.

The agency initiated the probe against the accused after going through various police FIRs filed against them in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka. Investors from Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Chhattisgarh were also duped through the Ponzi scheme, it had said.

"The scam was perpetrated by Avva Venkata Rama Rao through the Agri Gold Group of Companies. He had earlier worked in the Golden Forest CIS (collective investment scheme) fraud and having learnt the tricks of the trade in that scheme, had hatched a well-planned conspiracy.

# international



**We faced an epochal health crisis, the biggest economic calamity and job losses since the Great Depression, and dangerous new threats to human rights. COVID-19 has laid bare the world's fragilities**  
ANTONIO GUTERRES | SECRETARY GENERAL, UN

## DOZENS DETAINED IN ARMENIA

Police in the Armenian capital detained dozens of people Thursday during protests against the country's PM, who is being pressured to resign over his handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan



## of the day quote

There is no possibility of a backdoor or diplomatic dialogue with India in the prevailing situation. The circumstances are not suitable for any dialogue at the moment  
**SHAH MAHMOOD QURESHI** | FOREIGN MINISTER, PAKISTAN

Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Hou Yanqi met Chairman of the Nepal Communist Party Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' this morning. They discussed the issues of bilateral concerns  
**BISHNU RIJAL** | LEADER, PRACHANDA-FACTION

Over recent weeks, we've had a huge increase in number of samples to (Nigeria CDC) reference lab  
**CHIKWE IHEKWEAZU** | DIRECTOR-GENERAL, CDC

## SHORT TAKES

### 'Pak reports 111 nCoV deaths'

**Islamabad:** Pakistan has reported 111 new deaths due to coronavirus in the last 24 hours, the highest during the second wave of the pandemic which hit the nation in November, the health ministry said Thursday. The Ministry of National Health Services said the last time deaths crossed hundred-figure within a day during the second wave of pandemic was December 15 when a total of 105 people died.

### Journalist killed in Honduras

**Tegucigalpa:** A radio journalist has been killed in Honduras, the fourth to be slain this year, the InterAmerican Press Association said Wednesday. The group identified the victim as Pedro Arcángel Canelas, owner of Radio Bambi and host of the news program "Correo Informativo." It said Canelas was shot to death by a man on a motorcycle in the rural province of Olancho over the weekend. The group called on Honduran authorities to thoroughly investigate the crime.

### Trump pardons former aides

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump has pardoned 29 individuals, including former aides convicted during the Robert Mueller investigations on allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 elections and his son-in-law's father. Prominent among those pardoned Wednesday include Roger Stone and Paul Manafort, who were convicted during the Robert Mueller investigations. "Today, President Trump has issued a full and complete pardon to Paul Manafort, stemming from convictions prosecuted in the course of Special Counsel Mueller's investigation," the White House said.

### Saeed sentenced to 15 years in jail

**Lahore:** Mumbai terror attack mastermind and Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed was Thursday sentenced to 15 years in jail by an anti-terrorism court in Pakistan in one more terror financing case. The court also imposed 200,000 Pakistani rupees fine on him. Saeed, 70, has already been convicted for 21 years imprisonment in four terror financing cases of late. Now, Saeed will have to undergo collective imprisonment of over 36 years in five terror financing cases.

# UK, EU clinch post-Brexit FTA, hail biggest bilateral deal

Earlier, it had emerged that crunch talks overnight meant UK PM Boris Johnson summoned his Cabinet for a late Wednesday night conference call to indicate that a post-Brexit FTA is ready to be signed off soon



**London, Dec 24:** The deal is done. Downing Street in London and European Union (EU) officials in Brussels confirmed Thursday as both sides managed to thrash out a post-Brexit free trade agreement (FTA) just days before the December 31 deadline. Thousands of pages of legal text accompanies the deal, with details of the agreement set to emerge in the course of the next few days, including the final ratification of the FTA by Parliaments on both sides. "We have got Brexit done and we can now take full advantage of the fantastic opportunities available to us as an independent trading nation, striking trade deals with other partners around the world," Downing Street said in a statement. "We have signed the first free trade agreement based on zero tariffs and zero quotas that has ever been achieved with the EU. The deal is the biggest bilateral trade deal signed by either side, covering trade worth GBP 668 billion in 2019," it said, adding that the UK has taken back control of its "money, borders, laws, trade and

**We have finally got a deal, a fair and responsible deal. The EU rules and standards will be respected...the UK is a long-standing partner...parting was such sweet sorrow**  
**URSULA VON DER LEYEN** | PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

our fishing waters". "The deal also guarantees that we are no longer in the lunar pull of the EU, we are not bound by EU rules, there is no role for the European Court of Justice and all of our key red lines about returning sovereignty have been achieved. It means that we will have full political and economic independence on 1st January 2021," Downing Street declared. On the other side, the EU said it has a good deal to show for the "long and winding road". "We have finally got a deal, a fair and responsible deal," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said at a press conference from Brussels. "The EU rules and standards will be respected... The United Kingdom is a long-standing partner," she said, adding that while "parting was such sweet sorrow" it was time to look to the future as the UK is now classified as a "third country" in relation to the economic bloc. Earlier, it had emerged that crunch talks overnight meant UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson summoned his Cabinet for a late Wednesday night conference call to indicate that a post-Brexit trade agreement is ready to be signed off soon. Johnson and Von Der Leyen have been in close contact over the past few days as the December 31 transition period cut-off loomed over the negotiations, which have missed repeated deadlines as they failed to agree on key areas of fishing rights in each other's waters and competition rules that would apply to the UK as a non-member of the 27-member economic bloc.

# Covid-19 dampens Christmas joy in Bethlehem, elsewhere



AGENCIES

**Bethlehem, Dec 24:** A stream of marching bands joyously paraded through Bethlehem Thursday, but few people were there to greet them as the coronavirus pandemic and a strict lockdown dampened Christmas Eve celebrations in the traditional birthplace of Jesus. Similar subdued scenes were repeated across the world as the festive family gatherings and packed prayers that typically mark the holiday were scaled back or cancelled altogether. In Australia, worshippers had to book tickets online to attend socially distanced church services. Pope Francis was set to celebrate Mass in a near-empty Vatican service early in the evening, hours before a curfew went into effect in Italy.

Celebrations elsewhere in Europe were cancelled or greatly scaled back as virus infections surge across the continent and a new variant that may be more contagious has been detected. Thousands of truck drivers and travellers were trapped in mass gridlock at Britain's Dover port on Christmas Eve, held up from crossing to France by the slow delivery of coronavirus tests demanded by French authorities. In Bethlehem, officials tried to make the most out of a bad situation. "Christmas is a holiday that renews hope in the souls," said Mayor Anton Salman. "Despite all the obstacles and challenges due to corona and due to the lack of tourism, the city of Bethlehem is still looking forward to the future with optimism and will celebrate Christmas in all its human and religious meanings." Raw, rainy weather added to the gloomy atmosphere, as dozens of people gathered in the central Manger Square to greet the Latin Patriarch, the top Catholic clergyman in the Holy Land. Youth marching bands playing Christmas carols on bagpipes, accompanied by pounding drummers, led a procession ahead of the patriarch's arrival early in the afternoon.

## SANTA EVERYWHERE!



Members of the Slovenian Cave Rescue Association dressed as Santa Clauses rappel down the glass facade of a paediatric hospital in Ljubljana, Slovenia  
REUTERS

# Macron leaves isolation after a week

AGENCIES

**Paris, Dec 24:** French President Emmanuel Macron no longer has virus symptoms and was leaving isolation Thursday after a week with COVID-19, but is urging the French public to limit their contacts and remain vigilant to keep infections under control during the Christmas holidays. Macron's office said that he is finishing a week of isolation at a presidential retreat in Versailles based on French health protocols,

which recommend seven days of confinement following the appearance of symptoms or a positive virus test. In an apparently self-shot video from the presidential retreat last week, a tired-looking Macron said he was suffering from a dry cough, headaches and fatigue, and said negligence and bad luck led to him getting infected. French authorities lifted virus restrictions for the holidays but infections remain high, and some doctors are urging new lockdown

measures. As families prepare to gather for traditional Christmas Eve dinners on Thursday, Karine Lacombe, head of the infectious disease department at Paris' Saint-Antoine Hospital, warned: "It's a risky evening, the meal is one of the most risky situations for transmitting the virus." But after an emotionally trying year, "it's important to take into account the need to have some conviviality, it's a balance between the benefit and the risk," she said on France-Info radio.

# Trump's legacy: He changed the presidency, but will it last?

The American President smashed conceptions about how presidents behave and communicate, offering unvarnished thoughts and policy declarations alike, pulling back the curtain for the American people while enthralling supporters and unnerving foes — and sometimes allies — both at home and abroad

AGENCIES

**Washington, Dec 24:** The most improbable of presidents, Donald Trump reshaped the office and shattered its centuries-old norms and traditions while dominating the national discourse like no one before. Trump, governing by whim and tweet, deepened the nation's racial and cultural divides and undermined faith in its institutions. His legacy: a tumultuous four years that were marked by his impeach-

ment, failures during the worst pandemic in a century and his refusal to accept defeat. He smashed conceptions about how presidents behave and communicate, offering unvarnished thoughts and policy declarations alike, pulling back the curtain for the American people while enthralling supporters and unnerving foes — and sometimes allies — both at home and abroad. While the nation would be hard pressed to elect another figure as dis-



rruptive as Trump, it remains to be seen how much of his imprint on the office itself, occupied by only 44

other men, will be indelible. Already it shadows the work of his successor, President-elect Joe Biden, who framed his candidacy as a repudiation of Trump, offering himself as an antidote to the chaos and dissent of the past four years while vowing to restore dignity to the Oval Office. "For all four years, this is someone who at every opportunity tried to stretch presidential power beyond the limits of the law. He altered the presidency in many ways, but

many of them can be changed back almost overnight by a president who wants to make the point that there is a change," said presidential historian Michael Beschloss. Trump's most enduring legacy may be his use of the trappings of the presidency to erode Americans' views of the institutions of their own government. From his first moments in office, Trump waged an assault on the federal bureaucracy, casting a sus-

picious eye on career officials he deemed the "Deep State" and shaking Americans' confidence in civil servants and the levers of government. Believing that the investigation into Russian election interference was a crusade to undermine him, Trump went after the intelligence agencies and Justice Department and later unleashed broadsides against the man running the probe, special counsel Robert Mueller.

## DANIEL PEARL MURDER

# Pak court orders release of Omar Sheikh, aides



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Karachi, Dec 24:** In a surprise move, a Pakistani court Thursday ordered the release of British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, who were convicted and sentenced in the abduction and murder case of US journalist Daniel Pearl. A two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court, presided over by Justice K K Agha, directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under "any sort of detention" and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their detention "null and void". The court observed that the four men's detention was "illegal". In April, a two-judge Sindh High Court bench commuted the death sentence of 46-year-old Sheikh to seven years imprisonment. The court also acquitted his three aides who were serving life terms in the case — almost two decades after they were found guilty and jailed. However, the Sindh government refused to release them and kept

them in detention under the Maintenance of Public Order. Their continuous detention was challenged in the Sindh High Court, which ordered their release. However, it asked to place their names on the no-fly list so that they could not leave the country. It also directed them to appear before the court whenever summoned. Pearl, the 38-year-old South Asia bureau chief for The Wall Street Journal, was abducted and beheaded while he was in Pakistan investigating a story in 2002 on the links between the country's powerful spy agency ISI and al-Qaeda. A three-judge apex court bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam is hearing the appeal by the Sindh government and the family of the slain journalist against the acquittal of Sheikh. The US has been mounting pressure on Pakistan, demanding justice for Pearl. Pearl's murder took place three years after Sheikh, along with Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, was released by India in 1999.

## Korea launches probe into fatal Tesla Model X accident

AGENCIES

**Seoul/New Delhi, Dec 24:** South Korea's transport safety agency has launched a preliminary investigation into causes of a deadly accident involving a Tesla electric vehicle, officials said Thursday. A Tesla Model X caught fire after ramming into a parking lot wall at a Seoul apartment December 9, killing the car owner who was in the passenger seat, and injuring the designated driver and an employee of an apartment. The designated driver told police that the car went out of control due to "unintended acceleration," reports Yonhap news agency. Last week, the Korea Automobile Testing & Research Institute requested Tesla to submit documents related to the accident to figure out the cause of the accident, said an official of the Ministry of Land, Transport and Infrastructure. The institute, which is overseen by the ministry, will look into whether the accident was caused by sudden unintended acceleration or battery problems, and will examine its door lock system, the official said.



REUTERS

## of the day quote

Shipping freight rates have surged since July and companies are now finding it almost impossible to sustain normal trade operations

**RAJESH MENON** | DIRECTOR GENERAL, SIAM

Covid-19 has accelerated the enterprise movement towards cloud which has become the origin of transformation in the networking ecosystem

**SUDHARSAN RAGHUNATHAN** | SENIOR MARKET ANALYST, IDC INDIA

FASTags will be made mandatory for vehicles from January 1, 2021

**NITIN GADKARI** | UNION MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### BMS demands EPF deduction

**New Delhi:** RSS-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) Thursday pitched for the mandatory EPF deduction to be based on 100% of the gross pay, including allowances, which will enhance social security cover for formal sector workers. Other trade unions also agree on the suggestion to define wages under the Code on Wages in such a way that the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) is deducted on the entire gross pay of a worker covered under the social security schemes run by the EPFO.

### Sebi imposes ₹27cr fine

**New Delhi:** Markets regulator Sebi Thursday imposed a total penalty of ₹27 crore on NDTV promoters, Pranroy Roy and Radhika Roy, as well as on RRRP Holding for violating various securities norms by concealing information from shareholders regarding certain loan agreements. RRRP Holding is a promoter entity of New Delhi Television Ltd (NDTV). According to Sebi, certain loan agreements had clauses that have adversarial effect on the NDTV shareholders.

### Embassy REIT finishes takeover

**New Delhi:** Embassy Office Parks REIT said it has completed the acquisition of IT park Embassy TechVillage in Bangalore for ₹9,782 crore as part of its growth strategy. Embassy REIT is India's first publicly-listed REIT (Real Estate Investment Trust) sponsored by Blackstone and Embassy group. It got listed on stock exchanges last year. In a statement, Embassy REIT said it has completed acquisition of Embassy TechVillage assets from Embassy Sponsor.

### Zydus Cadila seeks govt nod

**New Delhi:** Drug firm Zydus Cadila on Thursday said its vaccine against COVID-19, 'ZyCoV-D', has been found to be safe and immunogenic in the Phase I/II clinical trials, and the company is seeking regulatory approval to commence Phase-III trials. The company's 'plasmid DNA vaccine to prevent COVID-19, ZyCoV-D, was found to be safe,' Zydus Cadila said in a statement. The Phase-II study of the vaccine, ZyCoV-D, had been conducted in over 1,000 healthy adult volunteers as part of the adaptive Phase-I and II dose escalation, multi-centric, randomised and double-blind placebo controlled study.



The economy is consumer-driven and 130 crore consumers in the country have the power to decide how fast the economy of the country can grow

**PIYUSH GOVAL** | UNION COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

### GOVT MAY IMPOSE ANTI-DUMPING DUTY

The government may impose anti-dumping duty for five years on certain type of steel products from few countries, including Japan and Korea, to guard domestic players from cheap imports



# FY21 GDP now expected to contract by 7.8%: Report

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** India Ratings and Research Thursday narrowed the contraction in India's FY21 gross domestic product (GDP) growth to negative 7.8 per cent from a negative 11.8%.

It pointed out the easing of the Covid-19 headwinds and better-than-expected 2QFY21 GDP numbers as the reasons behind such a move.

"However, the question remains, how sustainable is the recovery witnessed in 2QFY21, as a significant part of the impetus came from the festival and pent-up demand," the ratings agency said in a report.

"Although the headwinds emanating from Covid-19 related challenges are unlikely to go away till mass vaccination becomes a reality, perhaps the economic agents and economic activities not only have learnt to live with it but also are adjusting swiftly to the post Covid-19 world," the report said.

According to Ind-Ra, GDP growth during 3QFY21 is expected to come in at negative 0.8% and 4QFY21 GDP growth to turn positive at 0.3% as against its earlier expectation of it turning positive in 4QFY22.

Besides, the agency expects FY22 growth to be 9.6 per cent, mainly due to the favourable or weak base of FY21.

"The non-contact intensive sector such as manufacturing or electricity and other utilities in 2QFY21 recorded positive growth, and the mining and construction sectors



saw significant reduction in negative growth," the report said.

"However, the same is not true for the contact-intensive services sectors such as trade, hotel, real estate, and tourism and they are likely to remain subdued for some more time due to social distancing norms and risk aversion."

Furthermore, the report pointed out that agriculture has been a bright spot even through the Covid-19 related lockdown and continues to be so, riding on the back of the favourable 2020 monsoon.

"Ind-Ra therefore expects agriculture, industry and services to grow at 3.5%, negative 10.3% and negative 9.8% Y-o-Y, respectively, in FY21."

In terms of private consumption, the report said mainstay of aggregate demand, came under significant pressure in FY20 which got aggravated in FY21 due to Covid-

19 headwinds.

"Although rural demand, on the back of four consecutive good harvests, is lending support to the consumption demand, it is inadequate to compensate for the loss of urban demand."

"Urban demand, despite gaining some momentum lately, may remain subdued due to the depressed consumer sentiment and lower economic activity or employment generation."

On the other hand, monetary and fiscal measures, although have eased the liquidity requirements and are supportive of consumption, may still not be sufficient to spur investments as capacity utilisation has not yet fully recovered even to the pre-Covid level, the report said.

Ind-Ra expects private final consumption expenditure and gross fixed capital formation to fall 13.4% and 16.8% Y-o-Y, respectively.

### Amazon Seller Services loss widens to ₹5,849.2 cr in FY20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** Amazon Seller Services, the India unit of US e-tail giant Amazon, saw its losses widening to ₹5,849.2 crore for 2019-20 fiscal from the previous year, according to regulatory documents.

Amazon Seller Services had recorded a net loss of ₹5,685.4 crore in 2018-19, according to Registrar of Companies filing shared by market intelligence firm ToIffer.

Its revenue from operations grew from ₹7,593.5 crore in financial year 2019 to ₹10,847.6 crore in financial year 2020, it added.

"The company revenue grew by 43 per cent compared to the last financial year. The company continues to invest in opening new fulfillment centres, and technology advancement," the filing said.

Emails sent to the company did not elicit a response.

Amazon Seller Services said it also continues to invest in launching new products and services for its customers and sellers.

"The company is confident on its future growth," it said.

The filing pointed out that Amazon Seller Services has received over ₹8,400 crore in fund infusion during financial year 2020 in three tranches.

Amazon Corporate Holdings Private Limited and Amazon.Com.Incs Limited were issued shares of Amazon Seller Services worth ₹2,800 crore in May and ₹3,400 crore in October last year, and ₹2,208.01 crore in January this year, as per the document.

# AI pilots warn of 'industrial action'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 24:** Disinvestment-bound Air India's pilot unions have rejected the paltry five per cent rollback in their salary cuts and warned of "industrial action" if there is no "substantial" reversal in their paycuts.

In a joint letter to Air India Chairman and Managing Director Rajiv Bansal on Thursday, the Indian Pilots' Guild (IPG) and the Indian Commercial Pilots Association (ICPA) said, "(The) pitance in the form of a five per cent decrease in the current wage cut is an outright insult, its sting magnified in light of our unwavering support and trust in this company."

They said this "generosity" amounts to a reduction of about 3% in the current gross pay cut for pilots. In April, Air India had reduced its pilots' salary by up to 70% to partially offset the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on its finances.

"We have given the management every benefit of doubt as well as ample time to redress the issue of disproportionate payout for pilots of Air India and its subsidiaries so there is no point left in mincing words. If we do not see a timely substantial reduction in this disproportionate payout, we will be forced to seek justice through harsher means including 'Industrial Action'," the two unions said.

In the letter, the unions said, "We do not accept this paltry five per cent rollback in illegal payout



and you may advise the concerned to donate this five per cent towards funds for building the Parliament or PM-CARES (Fund)."

Right now, the "disproportionate unilateral" payout imposed on pilots in the name of COVID-19 amounts to a gross reduction of the pilots' rightful wages from April, the letter said.

It added, "This cut has been carefully worded to slash our wages by more than half while insulating top management from any meaningful austerity contribution such as a fair percentage cut on gross emoluments which spreads the burden fairly." Stating that the pilots have been patient and shown a lot of restraint to ensure smooth flight operations and have gone above and beyond during this pandemic, the letter said, "In spite of 171 pilots testing COVID-19-positive, operations continue to run smoothly even in the face of a resurgence of an even deadlier strain of COVID-19."

It said that while the parliamentarians have taken a cut of 30% on gross emoluments and refused to take a higher cut, it is egregious for pilots "to continue tolerating this arbitrary massive pay cut of 55% on our gross emoluments".

# Adani Power's deal to buy stake in OPGC cancelled



AGENCIES

**Mumbai, Dec 24:** Adani Power's agreement with AES OPGC Holding and AES India for acquisition of 49 per cent stake in the Odisha Power Generation Corporation (OPGC) has been cancelled as the Odisha government, which holds 52% stake in OPGC has exercised the right of first refusal.

In June, Adani Power Ltd had entered into a share sale and purchase agreement (SSPA) to acquire, from AES OPGC Holding and AES India Private Ltd, a total of over 89 lakh equity shares held in OPGC representing 49% of the total issued paid-up and subscribed equity share capital of OPGC. The cash consideration of the proposed sale was \$135 million.

"We hereby inform you of further development in this matter that the sellers have intimated to the company vide their communication dated December 24, 2020 that the Government of Odisha, who are

### OPGC is engaged in the business of establishing, operating and maintaining thermal power generating stations in Odisha

holding the balance 92,94,735 shares representing 51 per cent of the share capital of OPGC, have exercised their Right of First Refusal (RoFR) to purchase AED shareholding in OPGC," Adani Power said in a regulatory filing.

Accordingly, the sellers have transferred the AES shareholding in OPGC to the agency authorised by the Odisha government. With this development, the SSPA signed in June has ceased to be effective.

OPGC is engaged in the business of establishing, operating and maintaining thermal power generating stations in Odisha.

### CIL's coal allocation to power sector rises 5.9% in Apr-Nov

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** State-owned CIL's coal allocation to the power sector under the special e-auction saw a 5.9 per cent rise to 17.96 million tonnes (mt) in the first eight months of the current financial year.

Coal India Ltd (CIL) had allocated 16.95 mt of coal during the April-November period of the previous financial year, according to the coal ministry's monthly summary for the Cabinet.

However, coal allocation by the state-owned company under the scheme dropped significantly to 1.38 mt last month, over 4.05 MT in the corresponding month a year ago, it said.

Coal distribution through the forward e-auction is aimed at providing access to coal for such consumers who wish to have an assured supply over a long period, say one year, so as to plan their operations.

The purpose of the scheme is to provide equal opportunities to all intending coal consumers to purchase coal for own consumption through single-window services, at a price determined by themselves through the process of on-line bidding. Forward e-auction is aimed at facilitating all the consumers of coal across the country with wide ranging choice for booking coal online, enabling them to buy dry-fuel through a simple, transparent and consumer-friendly system of marketing of fossil fuel.

# Esplanade One says GoodBye 2020 in style!



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Esplanade One is all decked up to celebrate Christmas in style. Following the pandemic, the mall offers exciting shopping experience to buyers with over 150 brands and the best of restaurants and dining options available to deliver a complete shopping experience. Living up to their reputation, the mall has announced a 'GoodBye 2020 Sale', where they will have exclusive deals and discounts on popular brands for the last 15 days of 2020.

Earlier during Diwali, Esplanade One Mall recovered over 75% its business and more than 55 percent of footfalls as compared to last year. Leading in to Christmas and New Year, Esplanade One is ready to roll out a never-seen-before décor, which is sure to startle its patrons and make it a must visit place during this month. The Shop & Win Gratification: Shop for ₹5,000/- & get Gift Vouchers worth ₹500, also get a gold coin on shopping of 1 lac and a silver coin on shopping of

₹40000 and get a silver coin attracts many to the place.

Speaking on the occasion, Parth Pratim Nayak, Centre Director at Esplanade One said, "The year 2020 has been one that all would want to put behind. At Esplanade, we would like to give people one reason to say GoodBye 2020 by claiming exclusive offers with us by shopping at their favorite brands."

To ensure that people end the year with sentiments filled with love and happiness, Esplanade provides an opportunity to herald good times by upgrading their wardrobes, decorating homes, dining-out and buying gifts for family and friends. Our GoodBye 2020 Sale is here to spread the flavour of the season - love and good cheer.

A special taskforce will enforce and ensure that all safety norms are followed within the mall premises. On behalf of the entire Esplanade One family, we wish everyone Happy festivities." Esplanade One will mark start their Christmas festivities with unique décor which has never been executed in the region before.

### Kalamandir launches 'End of Decade Sale'

POST NEW NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** State-based fashion shop, Kalamandir has rolled out the unique 'End of decade sale'. The company is offering 10% discount for 10 days on the occasion of Christmas and New Year and celebrating the dawn of a new decade.

During the post-pandemic period, Kalamandir continued to attract reasonably good footfall, following all the necessary guidelines.

Incepted in 1949 as "Burma General Stores" today's Kalamandir is a mega shopping experience for people across Odisha. It is managed by Bhubaneswar's well-known "The Singh Family", presently headed by Rajinder Singh. Latest trends in fashion, high quality customer service and its perfect location in the heart of city centre attract celebrities, tourists and the common people to taste the ever festive mood of Kalamandir Shopping. Time and again, Kalamandir has been the preferred choice by the customers in the state.

Kalamandir's strength lies in its vast variety and reasonable prices. It houses huge variety of garments and exciting collection of sarees apart from clothes for all ages. Keeping in mind a customer's choice and preference, one can shop for every member of the family. Modern day 'Kalamandir' has become Odisha's premier fashion destination stocking the widest range in men's wear, ladies wear, kids wear, furnishings and wide collection of fancy sarees, bridal sarees and lehengas, all under one roof.

### IGNORING THE PANDEMIC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** Christmas and New Year celebrations have come about as a silver lining for the hospitality industry which has been among the worst-impacted sectors due to the lockdowns and the pandemic.

More and more people are moving outstation on staycations of three to four days, along with their friends and families. The national capital, despite the rising number of novel coronavirus cases, has been among the favoured destinations for tourists, with average occupancy rate in hotels remaining above 60% level.

Some of the hotels hosting popular parties and year end events have also seen packed bookings even on skyrocketing prices.

# Hotels see high occupancy during year-end celebrations

This rise in demand for hotel rooms comes on the back of discounts, offers and packages along with fatigue among the common people triggered due to the lockdowns and the pandemic.

Hotel Association of India's (HAI) Vice President KB Kachru told IANS that the occupancy rate is moving in the right direction. He said that while in some places, the rise in demand has been steep, others are improving moderately.

Kachru noted that most hotels are offering packages. Across the country, the average occupancy rate of hotels is 80 per cent currently ahead of Christmas and New Year celebrations.

Rohit Kapoor, Chief Executive Officer, OYO India & South Asia told IANS that the besides customer demand, post the gradual unlocks,



between October 2020 and December 2020, OYO has also observed a five-fold jump in demand for leisure destinations driven by local travel agents or the offline channel. This demand has been broadly led by Goa, Jaipur, Udaipur and hill stations located in north

India, he added.

"Currently, our occupancy has recovered to 45% of pre-Covid levels with room nights sold increasing over 40% month-on-month. The demand we are witnessing is fairly distributed and holiday patterns have changed tremendously. The

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ROHIT KAPOOR | CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, OYO INDIA & SOUTH ASIA

holiday season has come as a huge breather for the tourism and hospitality ecosystem," he said.

"With the gradual unlocks, combined with consumers' aspirations to travel again after staying indoors for months together, we're seeing a steady demand for leisure travel since the festive season kicked in around October 2020," Kapoor added.

He said that OYO's top 12 leisure destinations accounted for 55% of demand across India. This December, with Christmas and New Year's on the horizon, this sentiment continues to rise and the hotel chain is seeing an uptick in bookings for the holiday season across leisure destinations like Goa and Himachal Pradesh for December 30, 2020 and January 1, 2021.

Kush Kapoor, CEO of Roseate Hotels and Resorts observed that there is a growing trend of staycations and people are driving down to closer destinations as there is a pent-up demand.

"People are booking year-end holidays and while we have queries for 1-2 night of stay, we are also seeing longer holidays as people don't need to rush back to work and can work remotely," he said.

# LANGER ENJOYING INDIA'S MISERY

Australia chief coach wants to put visitors under 'relentless' pressure



Australian cricketers go through their slip catching drills at the MCG Thursday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Dec 24: Australia chief coach Justin Langer said Thursday that they would go with the same playing XI in the Boxing Day Test against India, beginning Saturday. He said it would be 'pretty courageous' to change a side that dominated in the first game at Adelaide.

"I'd be a pretty courageous man to change the XI for this Test match after the last one," Langer said during a virtual media conference. "At this stage, unless something happens over the next few days - and things can happen in the world we live in - we'll go in with the same XI, I'd say," added Langer.

The Australian coach said that he is glad, that the visitors are 'stressed' during the Christmas weekend ahead of the second Test starting

**Tim Paine's leadership on and off the field has been incredible. As I said many times, he is our most important player in the last one year**

JUSTIN LANGER



December 26. He asserted that in the absence of Virat Kohli, the Australians would apply relentless pressure on new skipper Ajinkya Rahane. Langer made the observations when asked what would he have done had he

been in Ravi Shastri's shoes. "It's none of my business. I have had enough with stresses, I know what it feels like. If India are feeling any stress, I am glad they are and not us over the Christmas weekend," Langer stated. He also pointed out that the absence of Kohli and Mohammed Shami would certainly be an advantage for his team. However more than looking at the opposition, the focus will be to execute plans made by his side.

"Of course, whatever sport you play, if you take out two of your stars, it surely gives the opposition some advantage," asserted Langer. "But we need to play to our strengths, we need to start strongly on the first day and build pressure on Rahane. Our own processes won't change much during the game," Langer pointed out.

# India sweat it out at the nets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Dec 24: The Indian cricket team Thursday tried a hitherto unseen training drill that vaguely resembled a wrestling bout, with a pair of two players each seemingly striving to outdo each other. Sources said that this drill was implemented to increase aggressive intent among the players.

All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja was the first to arrive at the nets. He was put through a fitness test as he ran between the wickets with a bat in his hand. Jadeja, who has bagged 213 wickets and scored 1869 runs in 49 Tests, had missed the final two T20Is and the first Test against the hosts due to a concussion and a hamstring injury suffered during the first T20I.

One of the tour's finds, pacer T Natarajan bowled well at the nets

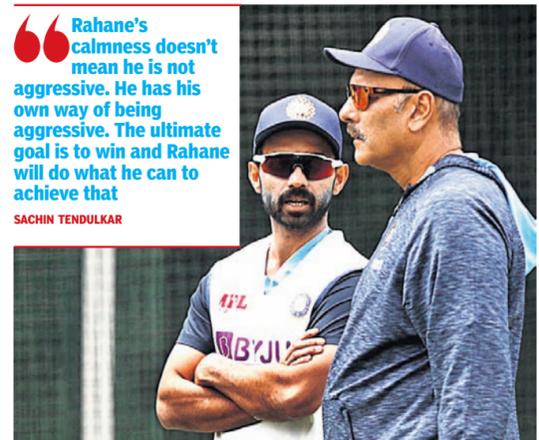
and often managed to beat the outside edges of both stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara. Set to play in the second Test against an in-form Australian team, KL Rahul had a long hit at the nets, and so did Rishabh Pant.

As the players got busy at the nets after warming up, the Indian think tank - chief coach Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Bharat Arun and batting coach Vikram Rathour - were seen exchanging notes from the practice session. They also had a long chat with Rahane, who will lead the team in the remaining three Tests. Shastri was also seen discussing something with Rahul after the batsman's net session.

Prithvi Shaw, who is going through a lean patch, was also seen batting in the nets against the likes of chinaman bowler Kuldeep Yadav.

**Rahane's calmness doesn't mean he is not aggressive. He has his own way of being aggressive. The ultimate goal is to win and Rahane will do what he can to achieve that**

SACHIN TENDULKAR



TWO TO TANGO: Stand-in skipper Ajinkya Rahane had lot to discuss with Ravi Shastri during the training session, Thursday

## WARNE'S VIEW

MELBOURNE: Spin legend Shane Warne said Thursday that Australia will 'blow away' India in the Boxing Day Test as the visitors are still a 'bit shocked' by the Adelaide humiliation. India were bowled out at Adelaide for 36 - their lowest ever Test score. "I think Australia are probably going to blow them (India) away," Warne told 'Fox Cricket'. "We know what Cheteshwar Pujara can do, then there are some classy players like KL (Rahul) and (Ajinkya) Rahane. But I still believe India will be blown away," Warne added. The former leg-spinner also said that India are going to miss Mohammed Shami badly at the MCG Test. "Shami would have been the ideal bowler for India in MCG conditions," Warner pointed out.

## CA's contingency arrangements done

MELBOURNE: Cricket Australia (CA) said Thursday that the MCG has been placed on standby to host the third Test between India and Australia. This has been done keeping in mind the fresh COVID-19 outbreak in Sydney. However, efforts are being made to continue with the original schedule. The SCG is scheduled to host the third Test between India and Australia from January 7. "CA has reaffirmed its commitment to giving it the best chance to play the third Test at the SCG and the fourth at the Gabba as per the original schedule," CA said in a statement. "However, the public health situation in NSW may render playing in Sydney untenable. CA's preferred contingency plan is to work with the Victorian Government to play the third Test at the MCG followed by the fourth at the Gabba," it added. A final decision on the third Test venue would be made during the Boxing Day Test beginning Saturday. CA interim CEO Nick Hockley said the board is working closely with the Queensland government to get exemptions regarding travel arrangements.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Ban overturned

LAUSANNE: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) said Thursday that a Swiss court has overturned an eight-year doping ban against Chinese swimmer Sun Yang. It has ordered the case back to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) for a second time but with a different chairman of the judges. Three-time Olympic champion Sun was found guilty of refusing to cooperate with sample collectors for regular testing. So he was banned for eight years.

### New sponsorship deals

TOKYO: Tokyo Olympic officials said Thursday they have reached a 'basic agreement' with all 68 domestic sponsors to extend their contracts into next year to support the postponed Games. Yoshiro Mori, the president of the organising committee, said at an on-line briefing that the new contributions "will exceed" 22 billion yen, or about \$210 million, to patch up holes in the growing budget. Japanese domestic sponsors had already contributed a record of \$3.3 billion to the local operating budget, and the new money pushes the total past \$3.5 billion.

### No foulplay found

BUENOS AIRES: A second autopsy has shown that Argentine football legend Diego Maradona did not consume alcohol or narcotics in the days before his death, a local prosecutor's office has said. The 1986 World Cup-winner died of a heart attack aged 60, November 25, less than a month after undergoing surgery in the Argentina capital to remove a blood clot on his brain. Results of the autopsy published revealed Maradona was suffering from problems related to his kidneys, heart and lungs, reported 'Xinhua' news agency.

### Bhuvni out for 6 months

NEW DELHI: India pace bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who has off cricket after after injuring his thigh muscle during an IPL game October 2, will remain out of action till the 2021 IPL edition likely to begin in early April. The 30-year-old bowler, who is recuperating at Bangalore's National Cricket Academy (NCA), will complete his rehab next month. Overall, he would remain out of action for six months since the date of injury.

## Asensio fashions Madrid triumph

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Madrid, Dec 24: A moment of inspired attacking by substitute Marco Asensio ensured Real Madrid stayed level on points with Spanish league leaders Atlético Madrid in a title race that is shaping up as a cross-town contest. Asensio came off the bench Wednesday to help Madrid to a 2-0 win over Granada.

Moments after hitting the post with a shot, Asensio set up Casemiro to finally break through Granada's defense in the 57th minute. Karim Benzema scored Madrid's second goal in the game's final seconds with Granada caught off guard while searching for an equaliser.

Madrid's fifth league victory in a row kept them in second place behind Atlético on goal difference. They are both six points ahead of Real Sociedad and Villarreal. Fifth-place Barcelona are eight points back.

"We have to be pleased with how we are playing," said Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane. "We are going to have to keep working hard and fighting on the field like we have been doing. Now we need to rest a little bit, spend some days with our families, and then get back to work," the Frenchman added.

Granada's well-disciplined defence anchored by Domingos Duarte frustrated

### LA LIGA POINTS TABLE (TOP THREE)

TEAMS	M	W	D	L	POINTS
Atletico Madrid	13	10	2	1	32
Real Madrid	15	10	2	3	32
Real Sociedad	16	7	5	4	26

Madrid's attack throughout most of the engrossing game.

Sputtering in attack, Madrid lost forward Rodrigo Goes in the 38th when the 19-year-old Brazilian grabbed his right thigh and asked to be substituted. He had to be carried off on a stretcher. On came Asensio, and the match swung in Madrid's favor.

The creative midfielder, who has struggled to regain his form since undergoing knee surgery last year, showed why he was once considered a future star for Madrid and Spain's national team.

Asensio went inches from scoring in the 55th minute when he used an audacious flick of his heel to bat a pass by Dani Carvajal on to the post. The goal came on Madrid's next attack when Asensio dribbled to the endline and crossed the ball into the heart of the area for Casemiro to leap over his marker and head home.

## Man U, Spurs in semifinals

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Manchester, Dec 24: Edinson Cavani grabbed an opponent's throat, then grabbed a crucial late goal Wednesday to send Manchester United into the English League Cup semifinals and a rematch with fierce rivals Manchester City.

Had VAR been in operation for the competition, the Uruguayan striker might not have been on the field to score Man United's 88th-minute opener in the 2-0 win over Everton Wednesday.

That's because earlier in the half, Cavani was seen putting his right hand around the throat of Everton defender Yerry Mina and throwing the Colombian to the ground following a tussle between the South Americans. The incident apparently wasn't spotted by match officials, who were unable to review it because no VAR is in place.

Anthony Martial then added a second goal in the sixth minute of added time with virtually the last



CELEBRATION TIME: Edinson Cavani (left) celebrates with teammates after getting the first goal for Manchester United against Everton Wednesday

kick of the game at Goodison Park to seal United's place in the one-legged semifinals at Old Trafford.

Meanwhile in another quarter-final Tottenham Hotspur beat Stoke 3-1 to set up a home game against another second-tier opponent, Brentford, in the last four. Gareth Bale, Ben Davies and Harry Kane

scored for Spurs in a routine win at Stoke as manager Jose Mourinho kept up his impressive record in the League Cup.

The semifinals will take place in the week beginning January 4, with the final at Wembley Stadium having been pushed back to April.

## DEBASHIS MOHANTY NAMED IN NEW SENIOR SELECTION PANEL

# IPL to be 10-team affair from 2022

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ahmedabad, Dec 24: The BCCI announced Thursday its senior selection committee. Odisha's Debashis Mohanty has found a place in the three-member panel. Chetan Sharma is the chairman while Abbey Kuruvilla is the third member in the committee.

Meanwhile the BCCI's governing body Thursday ratified the entry of two new franchises in the IPL to make it a 10-team affair from 2022. The BCCI also decided to back ICC's push for cricket's inclusion in the 2028 Olympics, during its AGM here. "Two new teams will be introduced in the 2022 IPL," a BCCI source said.

In another major development, the BCCI, in principle, decided to back the ICC's bid for inclusion of cricket, in the T20 format, in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. This

### OTHER MAJOR DECISIONS TAKEN

Along with IPL-14, BCCI will organise women's tournaments (senior and junior) veteran Congress leader Rajiv Shukla officially anointed BCCI's vice-president in place of Mahim Verma from Uttarakhand.

The general body decided that president Sourav Ganguly and secretary Jay Shah will represent BCCI in all ICC meets

KVP Rao, former Bihar cricketer had been appointed as general manager (Game Development). He was sacked for his failure to provide a proper action plan amid the COVID-19 pandemic

Retirement age of umpires and scorers increased to 60 years

decision was taken 'after getting some clarifications from the International Olympic Committee (IOC)'

The BCCI also has decided that if it does not get full tax exemption from the government of India to host the World T20 next year, as sought by the ICC, then it would agree to deduction from its annual revenue of USD 390 million from the global body.

"We have told the ICC that we will approach our government for tax rebate. However, if we don't get that exemption, the amount, which is around USD 123 million, can be deducted from our annual revenue. So we will get around USD 267 million," the source stated.

Also, it was decided that all first-class players, both men and women, will be suitably compensated for the curtailed domestic season due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "The money will be sent to state associations and it will be up to them for distribution," said the source.

## Top stars confirm



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Melbourne, Dec 24: Tennis legends Serena Williams and Roger Federer have confirmed their participation among at the upcoming Australian Open (AO). Apart from the star duo, World No.1 Ash Barty and eight-time champion Novak Djokovic will lead the fields at the tournament slated to be held February 8-21.

There was a question mark over Federer, who warned this month he

was in a 'race against time' to be fit after two rounds of knee surgery. But the Swiss legend has begun training in Dubai and was among those entered to play at Melbourne Park.

On the other hand, Serena will set herself up to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles by winning an eighth Australian Open crown.

"Although the Australian Open will look a bit different to previous years, the safety of everyone is our top priority. We have the opportunity to stage a very safe, and happy Slam, and give the players the experience of competing in front of crowds again, something they've missed for most of this year," Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said in a statement on Thursday.