



LOST IN ADMIRATION

Actor Ananya Panday says top star Deepika Padukone is one of the nicest people she has ever met

LEISURE P2



BIRD FLU

Around 1,800 migratory birds, most of them bar-headed geese, found dead in a lake in Himachal

TWO STATES P7



UK ROLLS OUT ASTRAZENECA

The UK begins rolling out Oxford University vaccine developed by AstraZeneca as protection against Covid-19

INTERNATIONAL P10

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Now that vaccine is here, I will soon be able to borrow your sugar, milk, newspaper, vegetables...

SHORT TAKES

Muralidhar takes oath as CJ of HC

Bhubaneswar: Justice S Muralidhar Monday took oath as Chief Justice of the Orissa High Court. Governor Ganeshi Lal administered the oath to Muralidhar at Abhishek Hall of Raj Bhavan here. After obtaining permission of Governor, the Chief Secretary read out the warrant of appointment of the judge as the Chief Justice of the High Court issued under the seal and signature of the President of India. Thereafter, the Governor administered the oath to the justice. Among others, law minister Pratap Jena, leader of opposition PK Naik, judges of High Court, registrar general of High Court, senior officers and dignitaries were present at the occasion. P3

Sensex soars past 48,000-mark

Mumbai: The Indian equity indices hit fresh highs Monday with the BSE Sensex touching the 48,000-mark for the first time. It has touched an all-time high of 48,168.22 points. Similarly, the Nifty50 on the National Stock Exchange touched a high of 14,114.15 points. Hopes on the vaccine front, along with improved auto sales and GST collection data supported the market sentiments Monday. Around 10:10 am, Sensex was trading at 48,096.55, higher by 227.57 points or 0.48% from its previous close of 47,868.98.

Fresh Covid cases in state below 200

Bhubaneswar: Odisha's COVID-19 tally Monday mounted to 3,30,492 after 183 more people tested positive for the infection, while two more fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,885, a health department official said. Of the new cases, 106 were reported from different quarantine centres, while the remaining 77 are local contact cases. Sundargarh district recorded the highest of 32 new cases followed by Angul (24) and Khurda (14) districts. P4

Round 7 ends in draw

Talks between farmer unions and the Centre remain inconclusive as govt refuses to repeal new farm laws

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 4: The seventh round of talks between protesting unions and three central ministers ended inconclusively Monday as farmer groups stuck to their demand for the repeal of three farm laws, while the government listed out various benefits of the new Acts for the growth of the country's agriculture sector.

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said he remains hopeful of a solution in the next meeting January 8, but asserted that efforts need to be made from both sides for a solution to be reached (taali dono haathon se bajti hai).

He also said no outcome could be reached in Monday's meeting as farmer leaders remained adamant on one issue of repeal of the laws, but the government wanted a clause-wise discussion on the legislations to take forward the talks. Farmer leaders, however, alleged that it was the government's "ego problem" that was coming in the way of resolving the issues and they insisted they would not relent on their key demands for the repeal of the three laws and a legal guarantee for the MSP (minimum support price) system for procurement of their crops. From the very beginning of the meeting, union leaders kept on insisting on the repeal of the three contentious farm laws and the two sides took a long break after just about one hour of discussions. During the break, representatives of protesting farmers had their own food, arranged from langar (community kitchen), as they have been doing for the last few times.

However, unlike the last round of talks on December 30, the ministers did not join the union leaders for the langar food and were seen having their own discussion separately during the break, which lasted for almost two hours.



Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson Rakesh Tikait along with farmer leaders leaves Vigyan Bhawan after the seventh round of talks between the farmer leaders and the Centre in New Delhi ended in a deadlock, Monday

Farmer leaders insist on a complete rollback of the three farm laws

The government wants a clause-wise discussion on the legislations

Next meeting between farmers and the Centre will happen January 8

The two sides got together again to resume their discussions at around 5.15 pm, but no headway could be made as the talks remained focussed on the farmers' demand for the repeal of the Acts. Farmer leaders said the government said it needs to consult internally and thereafter it would come back to the unions. The union leaders will also have their own meeting on Tuesday to decide their next course of action.

In Monday's talks, another key demand of farmers for a legal guarantee to the Minimum Support Price (MSP) procurement system barely came up for discussion. Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at

various Delhi borders for over a month against the three laws. They have stayed put despite heavy rains and waterlogging at protest sites over last couple of days, besides severe cold weather conditions in and around Delhi. Kavitha Kurungati of Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch, said, "The standoff continued as the government is talking about benefits of the laws and we are asking for the repeal of those laws." "The government said they will consult further and get back to us," she said.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (Rajewal) President Balbir Singh Rajewal said farmers will not agree to anything less than the repeal of three farm laws. "We will discuss only the MSP issue and the repeal of laws. It is the ego problem of the government that is coming in way of resolving issues," he said.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Tomar said the farmer leaders should flag specific issues in the three laws on which they have problems. He maintained that the talks took place in a cordial atmosphere.

SIT seeks to do narco-analysis of Pari accused

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, Jan 4: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the state Crime Branch Monday has sought permission from the POCSO court here to conduct a narco-analysis test of Pari murder accused.

The matter came to the fore after the SIT probing into the sensational case of sexual assault and murder of 5-year-old girl Pari of Jadupur village in Nayagarh district filed a petition in this regard in the POCSO court here, Monday. The hearing of the petition will be held Tuesday. The SIT has arrested a college youth, Saroj Sethi, of the same village in the case on charge of sexually assaulting the girl and strangling her to death.

Sethi is also accused of trying to have sexual intercourse with the corpse. Later, Sethi allegedly packed the body in a gunny sack and dumped it in a bush near a pond located at the backyard of the deceased's home July 14 last year, police had said.



Meanwhile, the lawyer representing the accused has prayed before the court to treat the latter as juvenile by submitting the birth certificate and claiming that he was a minor on the day of the incident. Chandrabijayee Mishra, the lawyer for Sethi said, he has not received any copy on the narco-analysis test. He has appealed to the court to allow conduct of the hearing in a juvenile court.

Vaccine in state by January 30

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: With the approval of Covishield and Covaxin, the much-awaited Covid-19 vaccines are likely to reach state by January 30, Health and Family Welfare Minister Naba Das said Monday.

"Discussion is going on between the Centre and the state government. As soon as guidelines for this purpose are issued, we will start the process for vaccination," Das said. Asked when the vaccines will reach Odisha, the minister replied, "I strongly believe it is likely to reach by January 30."

As per protocols, Covid warriors including frontline health workers including doctors will get the first dose of the vaccine. In the second phase, elderly persons will be administered the vaccine, he said.

Meanwhile, Director of Medical Education and Training (DMET) CBK Mohanty said the state government is fully prepared to start the vaccination programme even at a short notice. The Centre has approved

two Covid-19 vaccines—Covishield and Covaxin, cent effective, Mohanty said. So far as Covaxin is concerned, its third level clinical trial is underway. The preliminary report by experts claims that its quality is 90-95 per cent effective, he said, adding, the Centre has taken a decision to use Covishield in the first phase of vaccination.

"The Serum Institute has stocked nearly 5 million doses of such vaccine. But, our state can't avail it directly. It will reach here through the Centre. It all depends on the share our state would get in future. We have already completed the dry run for which we can begin the vaccination programme here even at a short notice," he claimed.

In July last year, CM Naveen Patnaik had talked to Serum Institute's CEO who had assured him that vaccine would be provided to Odisha on priority basis. Senior officials said the state government has targeted to vaccinate 3.20 lakh beneficiaries, mostly healthcare workers in the first phase.

Vax to cost \$3-4 to govt; \$6-8 in pvt mkt: Serum

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 4: Coronavirus vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and the University of Oxford will cost USD 3-4 per shot (Rs 219-292) to the government and will be priced at double that rate in private market once such sales open up, said the CEO of its Indian manufacturer Monday.

Serum Institute of India, the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, has a licence to produce the shot and has already manufactured close to 50 million doses. Its CEO Adar Poonawalla said that the company will start selling Covishield to the Indian government and GAVI countries in the first stage, followed by the private market.

Indian drug regulator Sunday approved Covishield and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin for restricted emergency use in the country. "We want the vaccine to be affordable

'No export licence yet'

NEW DELHI: The Serum Institute of India Monday clarified that the company was yet to receive the permission from the authorities here to export its Covid-19 vaccine to other nations, a company official said. The clarification has come after it was reported that India has barred the company from exporting its vaccine for several months. However, sources said the permission has not yet been granted for exporting the vaccine.

and accessible to all. The government of India will receive it at a far more affordable price of USD 3-4, since they will be buying in a larger volume," he said.

Serum will have 100 million doses in a month, and will possibly double it by April. The government has indicated that it may need 300 million doses before July 2021, with frontline health workers and the elderly given priority.

NEW DAWN



Students attend morning prayers on the first day of school in Agartala, Monday. Schools in Tripura reopened for students from Class 5 to Class 8 Monday after remaining closed for months amid the Covid-19 pandemic. PFI PHOTO

UK judge refuses to extradite Assange to US

AGENCIES

London, Jan 4: A British judge has rejected the United States' request to extradite WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to face espionage charges, saying it would be "oppressive" because of his mental health.

District Judge Vanessa Baraitser said Monday Assange was likely to commit suicide if sent to the US. The US government said it would appeal the decision.

US prosecutors have indicted Assange on 17 espionage charges and one charge of computer misuse over WikiLeaks publication of leaked military and diplomatic documents a decade ago. The charges carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison.

Lawyers for the 49-year-old Australian argue that he was acting as a journalist and is entitled to

Jack Ma 'disappears' after conflict with Chinese govt

AGENCIES

Beijing/New Delhi, Jan 4: Tech billionaire and Alibaba founder Jack Ma has "disappeared" from public life and has not been spotted for at least two months amid the conflict with the Chinese regulators.

The Financial Times reported that Ma was recently replaced as a judge in the final of TV show 'Africa's Business Heroes'.

"His photograph was removed from the judging webpage, and he was conspicuously left out of a promotional video," the report claimed.

The final took place in November, shortly after Ma "made a candid speech criticising China's regulators and its state-owned banks".

"Ma was dressed down by officials in Beijing and the \$37 billion initial public offering of his company Ant



Group was suspended. He has not been seen in public since," the report further said.

A spokesperson for Alibaba was quoted as saying that "due to a schedule conflict Mr Ma could no longer be part of the finale judge panel of Africa's Business Heroes

earlier this year (2020)". Last month, as China's top market watchdog began investigation into alleged anti-competition practices by the e-commerce giant Alibaba, the country also laid out "rectification plan" for Ma's fintech venture Ant Group.

According to a report in TechCrunch, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, "summoned Ant Group for regulatory talks December 26th, announcing a sweeping plan for the fintech firm to 'rectify' its regulatory violations".

The banking authority laid out a five-point compliance agenda for Ant Group. The agenda is that Ant Group should return to its roots in payments and bring more transparency to transactions.

Ant Group said it has established an internal "rectification workforce" to work on all the regulatory requirements. Xinhua news agency had first reported that The People's Bank of China, China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, China Securities Regulatory

Commission, and State Administration of Foreign Exchange will "interview Ant Group in the near future".

The State Administration for Market Regulation started investigation into alleged anti-competition practices by e-commerce giant Alibaba, as Beijing tightened control of an expanding Internet.

In a brief note, the State Administration for Market Regulation said that it is investigating Alibaba over its "choosing one from two" policy.

As part of this policy, merchants are forced to sell exclusively on Alibaba e-commerce platforms and skip rivals like JD.com. Alibaba Group said in a statement that they have received notification from the State Administration for Market Regulation. MORE P11



First Amendment protections of freedom of speech for publishing leaked documents that exposed US military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. The judge rejected claims by the defence that Assange was protected by free-speech guarantees, saying his "conduct, if proved, would therefore amount to offenses in this jurisdiction that would not be protected by his right to freedom of speech." But she said Assange suffered from clinical depression that would be exacerbated by the isolation he would likely face in US prison. The judge said Assange had the "intellect and determination" to circumvent any suicide prevention measures the authorities could take.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	48176.80	↑ 307.82
NIFTY	14132.90	↑ 114.40
DOLLAR	73.40	↓ ₹0.10
EURO	89.96	↑ ₹0.23
GOLD	₹51,126	↑ ₹882
SILVER	₹70,173	↑ ₹2050

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	30.8°C	30.2°C
MIN	12.9°C	11.8°C
Humidity	77%	84%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

Forecast: Fog/mist in the morning



BOND GIRL TANYA ROBERTS PASSES AWAY AT 65

Actress Tanya Roberts, best known for playing the Bond girl in *A View To A Kill*, is no more. She was 65. The actress collapsed while walking her dogs December 24, and was admitted to a hospital where she died Sunday, her friend and representative Mike Pingel said.

RUSSELL BRAND'S WIFE FINDS HIS ENERGY LEVELS EXHAUSTING

Laura Brand, wife of comedian Russell Brand, says she sometimes feels she has three children instead of two thanks to the energy levels of her husband. Russell, who has previously battled addictions to drugs, alcohol and sex, has two children with Laura -- Mabel and Peggy.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Some decisions are hard to take, but a firm resolve will help you stay committed. Sentimentality may shake your purpose, but once decided, you must stick to it. Also, learn to take heartbreak in your stride, says Ganesh.

TAURUS
Definitely not a day when you plan to get your feet dirty (maybe a pedicure, though). You might delay the start of a new project. Perhaps, a romantic escape with your sweetheart or a day in the spa grooming yourself with a lavish makeover will validate your lethargy today.

GEMINI
Today, it's time to meet those who are close to you, and maybe even those who were close to you at some point of time. Also, it's time to revive old friendships, old memories and sink into nostalgia. You may want to buy a valuable historic artefact, says Ganesh.

CANCER
It is about time that you cultivated healthy eating habits. Today, you will be prone to doing everything in excess. You may overeat or get swept away by emotions. You must keep a check on your emotions, or it may lead to unwanted complications.

LEO
The desire and passion for learning is a life-long quest, says Ganesh. It may be that you love to learn, but dissipating the knowledge you have acquired is equally important.

VIRGO
Money matters will hit a major snag today, says Ganesh. Let your mind overrule your heart. Take extreme care of personal belongings, legal responsibilities and new ventures with long-term effects in mind.

LIBRA
Nothing comes for free — keep this in mind as you may have to pay your dues for the success you desire today, especially if it is a new project that you have undertaken. Be prepared to invest a considerable amount of time and effort in your endeavours.

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

SAGITTARIUS
The rewards of hard labour will be sweet, so start off by unwinding with some fun today. Ganesh sees quality time being spent with friends and family. All in all, a fun day.

CAPRICORN
Patience is tested when one is in trouble; your patience could be tried today. The trick is in keeping your composure, says Ganesh. Avoid getting into an argument or scuffle with those around you, as luck may not be on your side.

AQUARIUS
Things have become stagnant but it fails to frustrate your spirit. Slow and steady wins the race and it seems you have imbibed it very well. You will be able to seize opportunities coming your way and march ahead on your path. Financially, you will be on a stable ground, says Ganesh.

PISCES
The focus today will be on self-improvement. You may find yourself attending seminars or workshops. Self-employed people are likely to find lucrative deals landing in their laps in the afternoon. Quality time with your family in the evening will give you a sense of balance and of belonging, says Ganesh.

Rajit elated to share screen with Neena for third time

Mumbai: Actor Rajit Kapur is elated to share screen space with Neena Gupta again. The two senior artistes come together for the third time in *Goldfish*, a film by Pushan Kriplani. The two actors, who are known for their distinctive style of acting and powerful performances, worked together for the first time in Rajit's first feature film, Shyam Benegal's *Suraj Ka Saatvan Ghoda*, in 1992. They came together after 23 years in 2015 film *The Threshold*. "The trust between Neena and I still remains. After so long, the need to create something together again was strong. The journey of *The Threshold* brought us closer even though we may not speak to each other for months together. We always pick up from where we had left, hoping to ignite each other on-screen again in *Goldfish*," said Rajit.



'Deepika is the biggest sweetheart'

New Delhi: Budding actress Ananya Panday finds working with top star Deepika Padukone anything but intimidating. She calls Deepika the biggest sweetheart.

Ananya is currently working with Deepika in Shakti Singh's untitled next film that also features Siddhant Chaturvedi.

Asked if it's intimidating to work with a star, Ananya said: "Not at all. She (Deepika) is the biggest sweetheart. As beautiful as she is on the outside, she is as beautiful on the inside. She is one of the nicest and warmest people ever. She is literally like my sister. We have a really good relationship."

"She has done a really good job in making all of us feel comfortable on set. There are no intimidating vibes. We did workshops together, too. She is a very caring person," she added.



Ananya Panday

Sunny's awkward moments with Salman

Mumbai: Actress Sunny Leone recently met Salman Khan on the set of a reality show, and says it was an awkward yet fun experience. Sunny took to Instagram to share the moment when she tried to sing, when she joined him on the *Bigg Boss 14* stage. "Who needs singing lessons when you have @beingsalmankhan... Can't sing at all but I do believe in living life to the fullest and enjoy every min of it. An awkward moment that turned into so much fun. But Bigg Boss home is all about fun! Thanks Salman and Bigg Boss," she wrote with the clip she shared Monday.

Sunny entered the *Bigg Boss* house in the avatar of a doctor, and gave a dose of reality to the contestants. On the work front, she has started shooting for Vikram Bhatt's *Anamika*, billed as a 'Gun-Fu' action series with 10 episodes. Sunny will be seen in an action avatar in the show.

3rd convocation of Birla Global University

Bhubaneswar: Birla Global University (BGU), Bhubaneswar organised its third Annual Convocation for the MBA, BBA, MAJMC, BAJMC, M.Com, B.Com and MA Economics students December 30, 2020. Held on virtual mode due to the COVID 19 restrictions, the event was presided over by Prof. Harivansh Chaturvedi, Member, Board of Governors, BGU and Director, BIMTECH, Greater Noida.

He spoke about a new world which has brought in plenty of challenges before the people. Prof Charuvedi also advised the students to be optimistic about their future as the next two decades will be witnessing a robust growth in all the sectors. He complemented the efforts of faculties, staff and the students for successfully organising the convocation on a virtual mode. BGU's another member of Board of



Governors, Vikash Kandoi asked the students to turn the torch bearers of the country's long legacy of values with excellence and transform the world to a better place using their skills. BGU's Vice-Chancellor Prof. PP Mathur welcomed the dignitaries, students and parents and presented the annual report of the varsity. Prof. P. Nayak, Dean, Birla School of

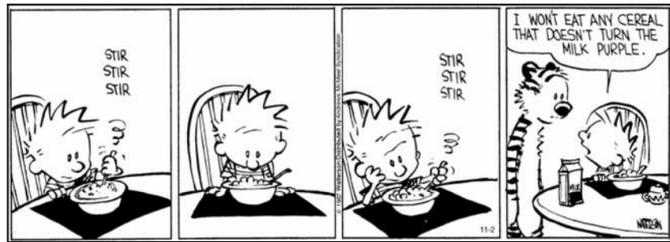
Management, Prof. Samson Moharana, Dean, Birla School of Commerce presented the list of graduating students and toppers of different schools for award of degrees. The convocation ceremony was conducted by BK Das, Registrar, Birla Global University.

The Controller of Examinations Bimal Chandra Mishra and Archana Choudhary, Coordinator, MBA programme conducted the proceedings. Batch toppers Srusti Patra (MBA), Sudesna Das Patanaik (MAJMC), SahistaTasnim, (M.Com), Sunil Swarup (Economics), Mohammed Javaid (BBA), Anwesha Nandi (BAJMC), Sanchita Das (B.COM) were presented gold medals while Mohammed Javaid of BBA programme was selected as the best graduate of the year.

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

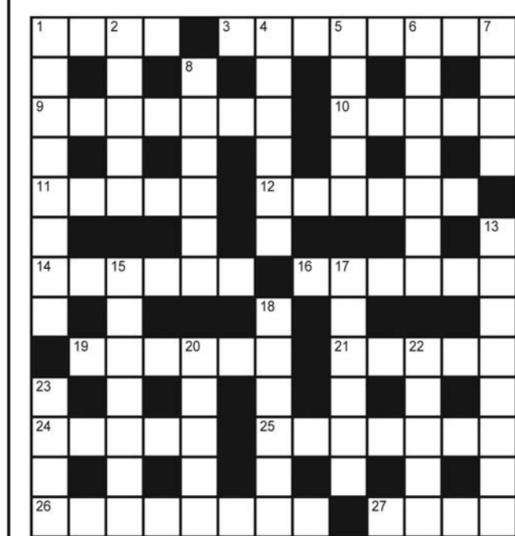


BREVITY



FUN post

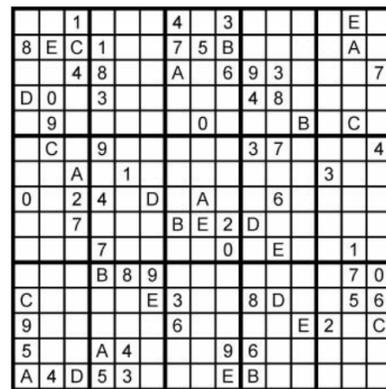
CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Wise one
 - 3 Bedtime drink
 - 9 Helsinki locale
 - 10 Odour
 - 11 Beach souvenir
 - 12 Floating nest builders
 - 14 Place of business
 - 16 Three sheets to the wind
 - 19 Uncivilised
 - 21 Tropical fruit
 - 24 Safari sight
 - 25 Kettledrum
 - 26 Goes before
 - 27 Trifling
 - 5 Undue speed
 - 6 Balmy
 - 7 Trapper's prize
 - 8 Aromatic bulb
 - 13 Sing
 - 15 Breakable
 - 17 Protein source
 - 18 Small sofa
 - 20 Dwelling
 - 22 Taper off
 - 23 Snare
- Down**
- 1 Place to buy a trinket (4,4)
 - 2 Washer cycle
 - 4 Deep blue

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

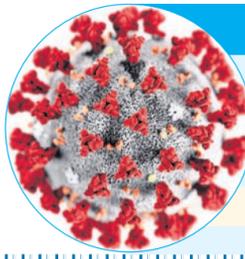


CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



IN MEMORIAM

Dignitaries inaugurate a booklet at the Rajkishore Nayak Memorial Lecture organised at Odissi Research Centre in Bhubaneswar, Monday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	8,56,14,877	6,05,71,308	18,53,282
India	1,03,41,291	99,46,131	1,49,686
Odisha	3,30,492	3,26,507	1,885

BJP demands minister's arrest over Salipur double murder

BJD SAYS IT HAS NEVER TOLERATED ANY KIND OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: The Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Monday took out a rally here demanding immediate arrest and dismissal of Law Minister Pratap Jena, one of the accused in the twin murders of BJP leader Kulamani Baral and his associate Dibyasingha Baral.

Jena and 12 others have been booked under various sections of the IPC, including 302 (murder), based on a complaint lodged by the deceased BJP leader's son Ramakanta.

The Law minister, however, alleged that the saffron party was "politicising the case and dragging his name into the matter for no reason".

Saffron party activists burned effigies of the minister here, and vowed to intensify their agitation if no action was taken against the minister anytime soon.

Kulamani Baral, the BJP's Salipur district in-charge and Mahanga block ex-chairman, and Dibyasingha Baral were hacked to death on Saturday allegedly by Jena's supporters.

Four days prior to the incident, Ramakanta had alleged his father told him that Jena, who is also the local MLA, threatened to kill the duo.

"The minister is completely responsible for the murder of my father. The miscreants killed my father on the local MLA's direction as he had raised his voice against Jena's corrupt methods," he said.

Taking to Twitter, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra drew parallels between the political situation in Odisha and neighbouring Bengal. "Senior BJP leader Kulamani Baral of Mahanga was brutally hacked to death just because he spoke against the corruption of Minister Pratap Jena in Odisha Govt. The minister's



The state has witnessed at least 17 political murders involving BJP leaders since the previous panchayat elections in 2012. Odisha is going on the Bengal way so far political violence is concerned

APARAJITA SARANGI | BJP LEADER

Investigation will reveal the truth. It will be my personal endeavour to ensure that the culprits are arrested and punished

PRATAP JENA | LAW MINISTER



name finds a mention in the FIR as well. Is Odisha going the Bengal way?" Patra tweeted.

Echoing him, Bhubaneswar MP and BJP leader Aparajita Sarangi said, "The state has witnessed at least 17 political murders involving BJP leaders since the previous panchayat elections in 2012. Odisha is going on the Bengal way so far political violence is concerned."

BJP's state general secretary Prithviraj Harichandan said that the party would hold protest rallies across the state if Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, who is also in-charge of the Home department, does not take measures to get the culprits arrested.

"We will not allow any minister including the Chief Minister to attend any function across the state until the culprits are arrested," Harichandan asserted.

Congress MLA Suresh Routray sought to know how the law minister, despite being named an accused in the double murder case, was allowed to attend the oath-taking ceremony of Orissa High Court Chief Justice earlier in the day.

Jena, in his defence, claimed that the opposition has the habit of

pointing fingers at ruling party leaders for every crime recorded in the state.

"The investigation will reveal the truth. It will be my personal endeavour to ensure that the culprits are arrested and punished," he added. Reacting to Patra's comment, BJD spokesperson Chinmay Sahoo said, the state government has adopted zero tolerance approach to political violence.

Parties which are in power in other states with more political violence shouldn't criticise Odisha government, he stated.

"As per NCRB's 'Crime in India 2019' report, Odisha didn't report a single political murder in 2019. West Bengal reported 12 political murders followed by 6 in Bihar and Jharkhand. Karnataka and Punjab reported 4 political murders in 2019," Sahoo claimed.

In Mahanga double murder case, the SP has already said no one would be spared and all the accused would soon be apprehended.

"Let the probe be over. BJD has never tolerated any kind of political violence & in Mahanga case also, the guilty will not be spared," he added.

BSCCL starts survey for GIS-based master plan

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Aiming to expedite the proposed GIS-based master plan for the Capital city, the Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited (BSCCL) has initiated the survey for about 26 locations here to obtain field-level data.

The Geographic Information System (GIS)-based Master/Development Plan, which is a sub-scheme under the Union government's Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), is aimed at town planning using satellite data. Thus, the BSCCL under the aegis of Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) has invited tenders for conducting a total station survey for the proposed locations.

"We have proposed a request for proposal (RFP) for selection of reputed agencies to undertake total sta-



Eight locations have been fixed for prospect development of parks while 16 have been zeroed in on for playgrounds

SMART CITY INITIATIVE

The proposed area for survey of 26 locations is divided into four categories - waterfront promenade, restoring blue ways (water trail), parks and open areas & playgrounds

While BDA City Centre at NICCO Park has been proposed for the waterfront promenade, land near Naveen Niwas has been planned for developing water trail

tion survey of the selected sites, data collection and demarcation of roads and final plots pertaining to land records along with authentication of the same. The total area covered under this is about 107.4 acres. The information collected from the survey will be reflected in GIS platform," said a BSCCL official.

The proposed area for survey of 26 locations is divided into four cat-

egories - waterfront promenade, restoring blue ways (water trail), parks and open areas & playgrounds. While BDA City Centre at NICCO Park has been proposed for the waterfront promenade, land near Naveen Niwas has been planned for developing water trail. Meanwhile, eight locations have been fixed for prospect development of parks while 16 places have

been zeroed in on for playgrounds. The proposed survey is being conducted under City Investments to Innovate, Integrate and Sustain (CITIIS) programme which is aimed at improving sustainable mobility, increase the amount of public open spaces among others.

As the base maps of the city will be prepared with a very high resolution satellite (VHRS) images and the GIS technology, the RFP stated that mapping is to be done in scale 1:500 and 1:1000.

Moreover, the projects under AMRUT scheme for about 500 cities are being funded by the Centre involving an outlay of Rs 515 crore. Out of 500 cities, nine development authorities of Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Puri, Berhampur, Sambalpur, Rourkela, Paradip, Talcher and Kalinga Nagar are selected from the state which would be developed under State Urban Development Agency.

CREATIVE STROKES



Girls look at a mural at Tribal Museum near CRP Square in Bhubaneswar, Monday

OP PHOTO

S Muralidhar takes oath as High Court Chief Justice



Governor Ganeshi Lal administers the oath to Justice S Muralidhar at Abhishek Hall of Raj Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Monday

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Justice S Muralidhar Monday took oath as the new Chief Justice of Orissa High Court. Governor Ganeshi Lal administered the oath to Muralidhar at Abhishek Hall of Raj Bhawan here.

After obtaining permission from the Governor, the Chief Secretary read out the Warrant of Appointment of the Judge as the Chief Justice of the High Court of Orissa issued under seal and signature of the President of India. Thereafter, the Governor administered the oath to Muralidhar.

Among others, Law Minister Pratap Jena, Leader of Opposition Pradipta Kumar Naik, judges of High Court, Registrar General of the HC, senior officers and other dignitaries were present on the occasion. Taking to Twitter, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, "Congratulate Justice Dr S Muralidhar on being appointed as Chief Justice of Orissa High Court. Welcome him to #Odisha and wish him a successful tenure."

Justice Muralidhar succeeded Justice Mohammad Rafiq as the

MURALIDHAR BEGAN HIS CAREER AS AN ADVOCATE SEPTEMBER 12, 1984 AND PRACTICED IN CIVIL COURTS IN CHENNAI, DELHI HIGH COURT AND SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

HE WAS APPOINTED AS AN ADDITIONAL JUDGE OF DELHI HIGH COURT MAY 29, 2006 AND AS PERMANENT JUDGE AUGUST 29, 2007

JUSTICE MURALIDHAR SUCCEEDS JUSTICE MOHAMMAD RAFIQ AS THE NEW CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE ORISSA HIGH COURT

new Chief Justice of the Orissa High Court. Muralidhar was born August 8, 1961. He began his career as an advocate September 12, 1984 and practiced in civil courts in Chennai, Delhi High Court and Supreme Court of India.

He was appointed as an Additional Judge of Delhi High Court May 29, 2006 and as Permanent Judge August 29, 2007.

Later, he was transferred to Punjab and Haryana High Court March 6, 2020.

Govt yet to comply with SC order: Cong

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: The state unit of Congress Monday alleged that state government has not yet implemented a Supreme Court directive on separating the investigation and law & order wings in police department.

State Congress spokesperson Nishikant Mishra alleged that the government submitted affidavits in the apex court in 2007, 2008 and 2013 claiming that it has separated the investigation and law & order wings. "However, an RTI reply revealed that the two wings in the Commissionerate Police area have not been separated," he said.

The Congress leader urged the Home department to come out with a clarification as to why it has kept the 4.5 crore Odia people in dark. He also demanded the government to publish a White Paper in this regard.

In the famous Prakash Singh & others versus Union of India case, the SC had asked all the states to segregate the two wings, Mishra said.

Naveen inaugurates renovated Ramalingeswar pond in Silk City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, Monday, dedicated the renovated Ramalingeswar water body and park in Berhampur to the people of Odisha through a videoconference.

Stating Ramalingeswar water body renovation has become an extraordinary example of transformation, Naveen said it would have a special place in the tourism map of Ganjam and thanked the people of Berhampur for their support and cooperation for completion of the beautification project.

The Chief Minister said that state government is constantly working to develop Berhampur as an ideal town. He said that work of a stadium with modern facilities is in progress and a solid waste management centre worth Rs 42 crore is going to be completed. Besides, work on the ring road in the town in order to have traffic control has



A 35-ft high statue of Lord Shiva has also been installed in the middle of the big pond

also been started, Patnaik said. The work for the development of the project was started in 2017 for which the government had sanctioned Rs 12 crore.

A spacious parking station has been built for the visitors. A 35-

ft high statue of Lord Shiva has also been installed in the middle of the big pond. Six watch towers have been erected to facilitate visitors to enjoy the beauty of the Silk City.

Floating jetty and boat facilities have been made available for the visitors. The park also has food stalls and kiosks for selling handicraft and handloom products.

The large pond at the heart of Berhampur city is over a sprawling 8.157 acres of land. It dates back to the Pre-Independence era.

MeT predicts dense fog for 5 districts

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Forecasting dense fog, the India Meteorological Department has issued yellow warning for Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, Khurda, Boudh and Kandhamal districts.

The weatherman said that a few places in the five districts are likely to witness dense fog in during Tuesday and Wednesday morning.

Similarly, shallow to moderate fog is very likely to occur at a few places in the districts of Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Bhadrak, Khurda, Boudh, Kandhamal, Kendrapara, Jajpur, Puri, Nayagarh, Koraput, Malkangiri and Rayagada during the said days, the Met department revealed.

As per report of Bhubaneswar Met Centre, lowest temperature of 9.6 degrees Celsius was recorded at Koraput while 10 degrees was recorded at Daringbadi. All others recorded above 10 degrees Celsius.

HARVEST SEASON



Farmers thresh paddy at a farmland in Pipli area of Puri, Monday

OP PHOTO

Girl's mutilated body found

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bargarh, Jan 4: In a shocking incident, a 9-year-old girl's mutilated body was recovered from a forested area near Jogendrapur under Paikamal police limits in Bargarh district, Monday.

According to sources, the girl's parents were working at a brick kiln nearby. They had taken her along with them to the brick kiln Sunday. After a while, the girl had returned home. Reaching home, she had gone to a grocery shop in the village to buy some essentials. That was the last time she was seen, said the villagers.

Her parents began a frantic

search on reaching home when they did not find him at home, but failed to trace her.

Some local residents first spotted her mutilated body lying in the forest. They immediately informed the police who reached the spot and recovered the body before sending it for postmortem.

While some villagers alleged that the girl had been sexually abused before being murdered by some miscreants, the police refused to say anything about the case.

"It will be too early to jump to any conclusion. We are waiting for the postmortem report and hope that it will help us solve the case," a police officer said.

Outfit wants BPIA renamed

Bhubaneswar: Shree Jagannath Sanskruti Surakhya Parishad, Odisha wrote a letter to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday requesting him to rename the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) as Shree Jagannath International Airport. In the letter, the outfit said that recently Odisha Govt has given a proposal to the Centre for a new international airport at Puri. But from technical and commercial point of view this proposal doesn't look feasible.

Higher Education dept summons VCs for meeting

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: The Higher Education department has sent a letter to the Vice Chancellors of Fakir Mohan University and Utkal University Monday for attending a review meeting on the activities of the universities to be taken by Minister Higher Education Department Arun Kumar Sahoo.

Saswat Mishra, Principal Secretary, Higher Education department, in a letter, directed the Utkal University vice chancellor Sabita Acharya to come to the review meeting January 6 at the minister's office at Lokaseva Bhawna, while to Fakir Mohan University VC Dina Bandhu Sahoo the meeting date was set at January 8, 2021. As per sources, the minister will review the activities of the university after new VCs took charge.

Recently, the state government directed eight universities to return their unutilised amounts sanctioned for opening civil service coaching centres.

In the letter to the universities, Rajashree Mohanty, Additional Secretary, 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, Higher Education Minister Arun Kumar Sahoo held a meeting with the new vice chancellors of six universities of the state January 11.

OCTOGENARIAN'S DEATH

Kin receives ₹1L compensation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: The state government has finally paid compensation of Rs 1 lakh to the relatives of one Dukhi Jethi who had reportedly sustained serious injuries after falling into a 20-ft open manhole in the Old Town area of the city here August 24, 2017.

Though the state government was initially reluctant to pay the compensation, it later acquiesced due to the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission. The Commission issued the order while hearing a petition filed by human rights activist Dilip Kumar Das.

The commission also rejected the plea of the Odisha Water Supply and Sewerage Board (OWSSB) which argued that the incident had occurred due to the negligence by the contractor M/s East Coast Construction Industries Ltd. The workers of the company had left the manhole open in a dangerous situation without taking any precautions.

However, the Commission stated that it was the duty of the board authorities to supervise the work being carried out by the contractor. However, the authorities neither reviewed the work nor brought to fore the discrepancies in work.

Subsequently, the commission asked the Chief Secretary to pay the financial aid and take stringent action against the official responsible for the mishap. However, the authorities later came to know that Dukhi had passed away few months



Death due to negligence

Dukhi, an 82-year-old woman, fell into an uncovered manhole in the city while she was going to her son's house in Old Town area. Later, she passed away

Though the state government was initially reluctant to pay the compensation, it later acquiesced due to the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission

The Commission issued the order while hearing a petition filed by human rights activist Dilip Kumar Das

after the incident. Radheshyam Jethi, husband of Dukhi, recently received the cheque of Rs 1 lakh from the authorities.

Meanwhile, the commission again directed the Chief Secretary to identify the guilty official and take action against him within four weeks.

Notably, Dukhi, a 82-year-old woman, had fallen into an uncovered manhole in the city while she was going to his son's house in Old Town area. According to sources, the fire services personnel rescued Dukhi who reportedly spent the whole night in the pit.

HITTING THE STREETS



Members of 'Odisha Covid-19 Paramedical Staff Association' demonstrate at PMG Square in Bhubaneswar, Monday, demanding regular employment

'Basti Ku Chala' drive to control crime in Capital

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: The Deputy Commissioner of Police has launched a special month-long drive 'Basti Ku Chala' to collect vital intelligence from the slum areas across the city.

Speaking on the issue, DCP Umashanakar Dash said that three to four slums under each police station limits of the city will be targeted during the drive.

The officers of the local police stations will pay regular visits to these slum areas. They have been instructed to develop a good relationship with the dwellers and collect regular data. They have been asked to collect important information related to the youths held in different cases in the past. The cops hope the drive will help in controlling crime in the city.

The Commissionerate police will be assisted by BMC for slum categorisation and identification.

State logs 183 fresh virus cases, 2 deaths

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Odisha's Covid-19 tally Monday mounted to 3,30,492 after 183 more people tested positive for the infection, while two more fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,885, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said.

Of the new cases, 106 were reported from different quarantine centres, while the remaining 77 are local contact cases.

Sundargarh district recorded the highest of 32 new cases followed by Angul (24) and Khurda (14) districts. Taking to Twitter, the



The state's positivity rate stands at 4.7 per cent

ODISHA & COVID

Sundargarh district recorded the highest of 32 new cases followed by Angul (24) and Khurda (14)

The two fresh fatalities were reported from Balasore and Sundargarh

Odisha has so far conducted over 70.28 lakh sample tests for Covid-19

Of the 1,885 coronavirus fatalities reported so far, Khurda district of which the state capital Bhubaneswar is a part, alone accounted for 326 deaths followed by Ganjam (247), Sundargarh (168), Cuttack (140) and Puri (117).

Twenty-five other districts have reported Covid-19 fatalities below 100, the official pointed out.

Currently, Odisha has 2,345 active COVID-19 cases, while as many as 3,26,209 patients have so far recovered from the highly infectious disease. The state has so far conducted over 70.28 lakh sample tests for Covid-19. The state's positivity rate stands at 4.7 per cent.

H&FW department said, "Regret to inform the demise of two numbers of Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals." The two fresh fatalities were reported from Balasore and Sundargarh districts.

This apart, 53 Covid-19 positive patients have also died in the state due to comorbidities, said the official.

CYBER FRAUD

Man's self-immolation bid thwarted in Khurda

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khurda, Jan 4: Frustrated over the lack of action to trace fraudsters, a man who has been duped off Rs 17 lakh online, attempted self-immolation Monday in front of Collectorate office here.

The man has been identified as Brajabandhu Sahu of Bakoi village under Bolagada block. Sahu reached in front of the office at around 11.00am, and then tried to set himself on fire after dousing himself with kerosene. Luckily, some cops were present at the spot and saved him from suffering grievous injuries.

Sahu then narrated his plight to the mediapersons. "I was defrauded of 16.95 lakh while purchasing timber online. I have lodged a com-

plaint at the Cyber Crime police station in Cuttack. However, no action has been taken till date even though more than one-and-a-half years have passed," Sahu alleged.

Sahu said he had taken loans from various sources including banks to buy the timber. At present he was not being able to repay the loans and was in great stress. "I have a timber depot in Bolagada. I used to buy wood from outside Odisha, make furniture and sell those. Now with all my money gone, I don't know what to do. Though I have lodged complaints at Bolagada PS and the Cyber Crime police station in Cuttack, no step has been taken in this connection yet. As I am under tremendous mental pressure, I attempted self immolation."

'ENSURE ZERO CASUALTY WHEN SCHOOLS REOPEN'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Odisha Parent's federation Monday urged the state government to ensure zero casualty when schools reopen for physical classes from January 8.

In a letter to the chief minister, the outfit said that the government has announced that schools will reopen for students of Standard X and XII from January 8 and will follow the detailed standard operating procedure to be strictly implemented by the authorities. However, the hostels will reopen now and school buses will be available for the students with 50 percent capacity.

We demand that the Special Relief Commission (SRC) declare a mission for zero casualty in physical classes for Std X and XII. Health and Family welfare department should take all responsibility for sanitation and campus checkup in government and private schools, the outfit stated. Teachers shall be engaged only



for education for 100 days without additional works like sanitation, cleaning and campus monitoring and district administration, police and others shall be given the responsibility to prevent any casualty, the association stated.

We request your kind intervention and order to SRC, Department of Health and Family welfare department, Department of SC, ST and others to undertake this initiative in mission mode to create an example in India and provide all facilities for sanitation in both government and private schools.

'Allow' physical classes for other students too

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Welcoming the government's decision of reopening schools for physical classes of Std X and XII students, Confederation of Odisha Public Schools urged the government to reopen physical classes for students of Std IX and XI too.

Chairman of the outfit BN Patnaik in a press conference Monday said that classes of Std IX and XI should also be allowed to reopen along with Std X and XII. He also said that in other states, schools are being reopened in non-containment zones.

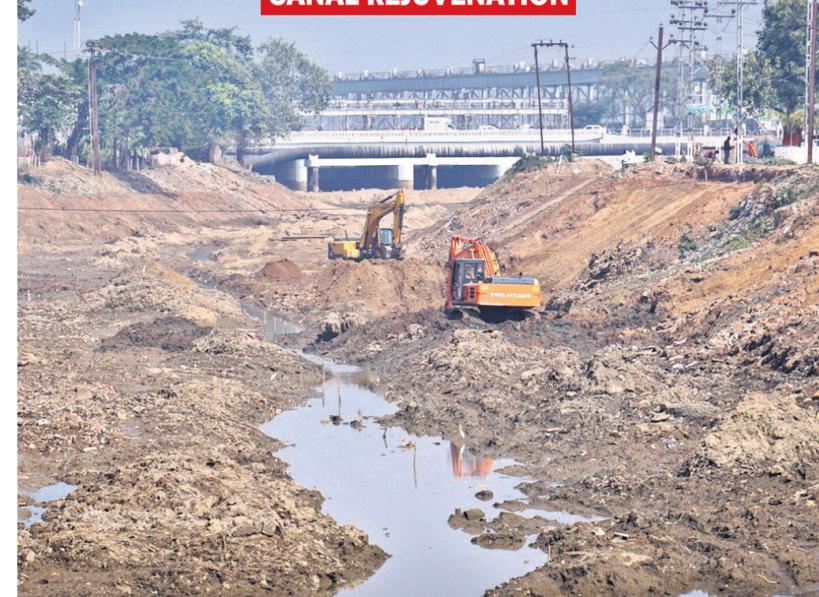
Several states such as Karnataka, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Puducherry, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra among others have chosen to partially reopen schools. In Assam, even younger students are now back in school. In comparison to other states, Odisha has done very



The outfit said that classes of IX and XI should also be allowed to reopen along with X and XII

well to control the pandemic. "Also, we request the parents to pay the fees as the pandemic has come under control. The schools are taking classes online and we will also promote all students from KG to class VIII," the outfit said.

CANAL REJUVENATION



Rejuvenation of Taladanda Canal in Cuttack in progress, Monday

Drapes, jewellery draw denizens to expo

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Offering a wide range of drapes, oxidised jewellery items and dresses for women, 'Cotton Fab 2020' drew an impressive footfall even during the pandemic.

Being the first expo after the pandemic began, Covid guidelines are being enforced at the fair. Sanitizers and thermal screening are a must at the entry gate and a gap of six metres is being maintained between every three stalls at the fair.

Interacting with Orissa POST, organiser Javed Khan said, "On its 17th day, we are witnessing an impressive footfall. From colourful drapes to dresses, one can enjoy a wide variety of clothes. We also have amazing spread of home furnishings, blankets to cater to the demand of winter requirements. Above all, it's a fair where everyone can buy something for themselves."

Not just drapes, a lavish showcase of oxidised jewellery pieces, semi-precious stones, Jhumakas,



Bangles and necklaces draws more and more enthusiastic women to the expo.

Sandhya Jagruti, a local buyer, said, "It's been 9 months since I bought any jewellery for myself and my sister-in-law due to Covid restrictions. Finally, all the sil-



ver work and stone stud jewellery made me buy at least 3 sets from the fair."

Seller Jayanti from Gujarat feels that Oxidised Jewellery are the latest fashion trends that keep growing with time. From youngsters to middle-age ladies,

all prefer it in the modern jewellery section.

Foodies can also enjoy Rajasthani delicacies: Dal bati Churma, Rajasthani thali, Ghevar and more. One may visit the fair till January 17. The timings are from 10.30 AM to 09.00 PM.

FOR CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS CONTACT OUR BOOKING STATIONS

Acharya Vihar-Dayal Agency-9437135727, A.P. Tours and Travel, Maitri Vihar, C.S. Pur- 9861301598, Aurobindo Market-Sai Audio & Electronics-9438304668, Airport Road-Sai Baba Variety Store-9090071530, Anish Infotech- Tankapani Road-9861341488, Bapuji Nagar- Dreamland Studio- 9777517314, Baramunda Rental Colony-Maa Ramchandi Communication-9658821469, Baramunda Housing Board Colony-Pappu Variety Store-9040500106, Cuttack Road-Alishan Snacks-8984236754, District Center (Chandrasekharpur)-Sai Google Mart-9776056507, Forest Park-DTDC Couriers & Services (HB Services)-7381024156, IRC Village-Bapi Xerox-9090090404, Gift Hut(Antriksh Gifts & Decors Pvt. Ltd.)-9954781084, Pruthvi Medicine-9853314816, Janpath-Krupajal Book Store-7978646669, Jaydev Vihar-AK Enterprises-7978116618, Subam Sai Books Store-8895550649, Swain Graphics- 9337121249, Jagannath Mobile Point- Janpath Road, Ram Mandir- 9938475415, Kanan Vihar-Auro Electronics-8260697560, Khandagiri- Swosti Mobile Centre- 7992914045, World Solution- 9938317559, KIIT Road-Jugad Jn-9338545031, Laxmi Sagar-Aditya Mobile-9438191836, Lewis Road-Spider Web-7809186415, Metro Satellite City-Arogya Mitra Medicine Store-9853621640, Madhusudan Nagar-Mohapatra Communication-9124446664, Maa Santoshi travels- Gajapati Nagar- 9777675867, Nayapalli- The Cake Room- 7873660137, Near Mayfair Lagoon-Cookiemana-9439491273, Nigamananda-Omm Sai Travels-9668284823, Nr Cosmopolis Main Gate- Shreeram Medical Store- 8763711714, Net Square- Niladri Vihar (C.S. Pur)- 7205634821, Priyadarshini Market-Astro Point-9938134346, R.N. General Store-Nilakantha Nagar-9438642501, Sahid Nagar- Maa Communication- 9437353424, Sahini General Store- Near Patia Railway Station, Mahavir Vihar- 9937586626, Satya Nagar-Baishnavi Mixture & Sweets-7894821764, Samantapur- Download Point-7504557743, Sailashree Vihar-Harsha Book Store-8093449515, Saheed Nagar-Jagannath Graphics-7978652670, Photo World-7978468191, Sainath Photo Studio-8984436129, Shanti & Co-9937071063, Siripur-Omm Maa Sarala Communication-9777682449, Sushree fashion- Jagmara-9938714347, Shree Vision- Sailashree Vihar-9861476678, Unit-3-LIC of India Premium Point-9337787080, Unit-7- LIC Premium Point- 9338227422, VSS Nagar-Friends Cake & Bake-8658200930, Jeet Infoworld-7205195782, XIMB Square-LD Books-9658061373.

NH-53 extension gets mired in irregularities

Bridge across Salunki remains a promise

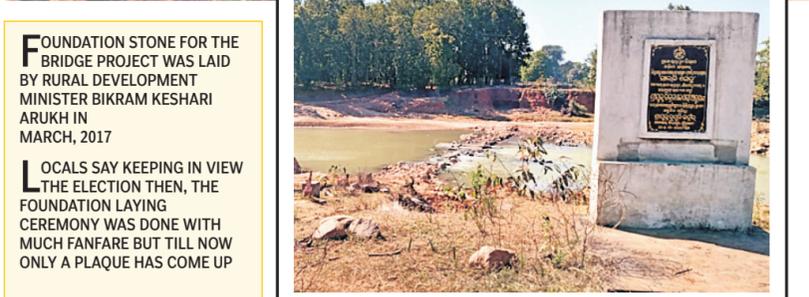
RESIDENTS OF 30 VILLAGES CONTINUE TO FACE COMMUTING PROBLEMS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Phulbani, Jan 4: Over years, thousands of people in 30 villages under Sadar block of Kandhamal district have been suffering from commuting woes in the absence of a bridge across river Salunki.

During monsoon, 30 villages under Alami and Duduki panchayats remain marooned for days together. As no step is being taken for the bridge, our hopes have vanished

A RESIDENT OF ALAMI



FOUNDATION STONE FOR THE BRIDGE PROJECT WAS LAID BY RURAL DEVELOPMENT MINISTER BIKRAM KESHARI ARUKH IN MARCH, 2017

LOCALS SAY KEEPING IN VIEW THE ELECTION THEN, THE FOUNDATION LAYING CEREMONY WAS DONE WITH MUCH FANFARE BUT TILL NOW ONLY A PLAQUE HAS COME UP

“Only a plaque, that’s what it is. No work has been done after the tender was floated,” said villagers. “Nobody knows when the bridge will be completed,” lamented Arjun Kahnr, a local. In emergency cases, ambulances, fire tenders and other vehicles fail to access the villages sans a bridge. Locals have been demanding a bridge across the river for a long

time. But the dream has remained a dream. Once completed, the bridge will facilitate communication in all the 30 villages in the region, they noted. Locals are upset over commuting problem and apathy of the Rural Development department. Some youths of Sattkar Yubak Sangh (Sainipadar village) got together and managed to build a temporary

bridge with logs across the river at Ranikhandi a few days ago. The bridge was laid for about a kilometre distance. Locals like Alekh Kahnr, Jalandhar Kahnr, Jasobant Kahnr, Guguna Dalchhatra, Indu Dalachhatra and Suresan Kahnr bemoaned that the place is just 10 km from the district headquarters, but development has taken a back seat.

Reports of irregularities and sub-standard works in the construction of Sambalpur-Tileibani stretch of NH-53 may further delay the project



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Jan 4: The construction of Sambalpur-Tileibani stretch of National Highway-53 in this district has run into trouble with allegations of severe irregularities and sub-standard works, a report said. The project is worth Rs390 crores. Reports added that a new consultancy firm is now carrying out the construction works of the highway after a firm Punj Lloyd backed out of the project citing various problems. The new consultancy agency has missed the deadline and is reportedly under pressure to finish the work soon. Notably, the highway construction started after the district administration acquired land for the four laning of the highway in 2016-17. Over 15,000 trees were chopped off to make way for construction of the highway. Taking advantage of the situation, the consultancy agency is trying to finish up the work anyway for which it is using sub-standard construction materials in the road construction, residents alleged. The firm is allegedly using fly-ash to fill up the craters on the highway

FLY-ASH WORRY

The concerned construction firm has been dumping fly-ash on the highway which has grown to the size of a hill. The fly-ash dust has been polluting the houses and shops on the roadsides. The firm is using the fly-ash to fill up all types of craters ranging from 10 metres to 1 metre. Later, the firm is using rollers to level the craters without sprinkling water on them

Minister for Road Transport and Highways. The locals had lodged complaints at the local office of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). Residents alleged that the firm has dumped the fly-ash on the highway which has grown to the size of a hill. The fly-ash dust flies in the air and pollutes the houses and shops on the roadsides. The firm is using the fly-ash to fill up all types of craters ranging from 10 metres to 1 metre. Later, the firm is using rollers to level the craters without sprinkling water on it. The firm while carrying out the works has filled up various water bodies and drains flowing alongside the highway. It has also neglected in putting up information plaques near diversions and intersection for which mishaps have become frequent occurrence on the highway. The NHAI has hired an agency to supervise the construction work but it has failed to do so. When contacted, B Venkateshwar, project director of NHAI said that a probe will be undertaken to ascertain the veracity of the complaints of irregularities filed by the residents.

‘Mysterious’ animal feeds on goats’ intestines in Deogarh

WHILE 12 GOATS WERE FOUND DEAD, VILLAGERS SAY MORE THAN 25 ARE STILL MISSING

POST NEWS NETWORK

Deogarh, Jan 4: After a gap of two years, the ‘mysterious animal’ surfaced again in Chakadihi village under Barkot block in Deogarh district, late Sunday night. A herd of 12 goats was found dead in the village Monday morning. Reports said that many goats were injured in the attack by the unidentified animal. The incident occurred late Saturday night, but it became public after locals spotted the carcasses of the animals Monday morning. The ‘unknown’ animal had fed on the intestine of the goats. According to a source, the goats had gone to graze in the nearby forest Saturday. However, they did not return, prompting the villagers to go into the forest to look for them. In the wee hours of Monday,

they found carcasses of 12 goats and three other animals with multiple injury marks on their bodies. The villagers said that more than 25 goats are still missing. According to the shepherds of the village, they had gone out for grazing their goats to a nearby jungle. They left their sheep and goats on one side of the jungle and went for collecting some jungle flowers. Around 5 pm Saturday, they heard an unusual sound coming from the place where they had left their herds. When they reached the spot the goats got panicked after seeing something and ran astray. On being informed, Barkot forest range officials reached Chakadihi village to take stock of the situation. As many as two CCTV cameras have been installed to keep a check on the movement of the wild animals.

JOB STIR



General nurse midwives posted in the Covid unit of MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur, stage a demonstration outside the main gate of the hospital demanding reinstatement following their abrupt dismissal from service, Monday. PHOTO

75 MIGRANT LABOURERS RESCUED IN NUAPADA

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khariar, Jan 4: Acting on a tip-off, Khariar police rescued 75 migrant labourers, including 10 children from a roadside dhaba near Khariar Ranipur in Nuapada district in the wee hours of Monday. The rescued labourers were identified as natives of Khinamal and Rokal villages under Boden block in Nuapada district. All workers are identified to be the residents of Khirmal and Rokal

villages under Boden block in the district. The labour agent had housed them in the dhaba to send them outside the state. However, the middleman managed to escape. Later, the cops sent the rescued workers to their respective houses in a special bus in the presence of Khariar SDPO Santak Jena. An inquiry in this connection is underway, said Khariar police station Inspector In-Charge Kailash Chandra Sethi.

WHY ARTISTES AREN'T HAPPY DESPITE COVID RELAXATIONS

THE STATE HAS GIVEN ITS NOD TO RESUME ORGANISING CULTURAL PROGRAMMES BUT THE BONE OF CONTENTION LIES IN THE RESTRICTED AUDIENCE COUNT OF 200

POST NEWS NETWORK

Angul, Jan 4: After a gap of nine months, the government gave its nod to resume organising cultural programmes. But this announcement has hardly brought any joy to the organisers and artistes. Their unhappiness lies in the guideline issued by the government. The guideline says that cultural programmes can be held with only 200 audience capacity. Auditoriums where these programmes would be held should function with only 50 per cent of their capacity. And in case of organising opera shows, permission from the district administration is a must. The associations of organisers and artistes have demanded that they should be allowed to hold their programmes with at least 500 attendees. The outbreak of COVID-19 has rendered as many as 32, 000 artistes in Angul district jobless. There are about 50 registered cultural organisations in the district. Of them, 15 or



so are such organisations which hold cultural festivals in different parts of the district. If a play is staged or a musical night is organised, the number of artistes alone will cross 50. In that case, how such cultural programmes can be held with only 150 onlookers, some artistes asked. “Organising a cultural event with such a small audience can never be feasible from a commercial point of view. We can’t even increase the ticket price. We are also not able to get financiers during these days as we used to get earlier,” observed Bhupesh Chandra Pradhan, chairman, District Artistes’ Association. Echoing the same,

eral election. The festival features cultural programmes and Pallishree Mela which receive a huge footfall. But people are not sure if the district administration will hold the festival this year or not. When asked, Angul district Collector Siddharth Shankar Swain, said, “It is hoped that new guidelines will come in the future and then we will decide about holding the Zilla Mahotsav accordingly.” Sudhansu Mohan Dwibedy, chairman, Natyam, said, “We have been organising theatre festivals for last 28 years. For a play, there should be at least 500 people in the auditorium. We are in doubt regarding getting teams and artistes from outside.” Expressing his dissatisfaction over the government’s decision, Akshay Kumar Nath, president, Sur Taal, said, “The government should reconsider this.” At the same time, it is also feared that the Angul district festival (Zilla Mahotsav) may also get affected due to prevailing COVID-19 fear. The festival is held April 1 every year. In 2019, the festival was pre-poned due to gen-

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)
‘e’ PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Bid Identification No. E.E. JSPP (R&B) - 20/2020-21

- Name of Work : Building (Civil) Works for the year 2020-21
- No. of Works : 01 (One) No.
- Estimated Cost : Above Rs.5.00 lakhs upto Rs.50.00 lakhs (Approx).
- Period of Completion : Work wise mentioned in NIT
- Class of Contractor : (CIVIL) “D” and “C”

Other details as follows :
6. Date & time of availability of bid documents in portal : 08.01.2021 at 11.30 A.M.
7. Last date/time for receipt of bids in portal : 21.01.2021 upto 05.00 P.M.
8. Opening of Bid documents : 22.01.2021 at 11.30 A.M.
9. Procurement Officer : Executive Engineer, Jagatsinghpur (R&B) Division, Jagatsinghpur with E-mail address : eerbjspr@gmail.com

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website tendersodisha.gov.in.
Sd./- Executive Engineer Jagatsinghpur (R&B) Division OIPR-34093/11/0021/2021

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, RAIRANGPUR (MAYURBHANJ)
E-mail ID: eerwairangpur@yahoo.com Date: 30.12.2020

“e” Procurement Notice for ROAD Works
Bid Identification No. RWDRRP-13 / 2020-21

- Name of the Work : As per Annexure
- Estimated Cost : From Rs.0.89 lakhs to 33.93 lakhs (Approximately)
- Class of Contractor : ‘D’, ‘C’ & ‘B’ Class (of Odisha P.W.D.) or relevant class of works licence.
- Period of Completion : Sl. No. 1, 3, 6 & 7 (One month), Sl. No. 2, 4 & 5 (Two months)
- Tender Paper Cost : As per Annexure

The details are as follows:

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for bidding	Last date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & time of Opening of Tender in O/o. E.E.R.W. Division, Rairangpur, Technical Bid & Financial Bid
1	2	3	4	5
E.E.R.W. Division, Rairangpur	RWDRRP-13/2020-21	07.01.2021 at 11.00 A.M. to 20.01.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.	19.01.2021 upto 1.00 P.M.	21.01.2021 at 11.30 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
Sd./- Er. D. Behera Executive Engineer, R.W. Division, Rairangpur OIPR-25107/11/0013/2021

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, BOLANGIR (R&B) DIVISION, BOLANGIR
Mail ID: eepwdbgr@rediffmail.com, eepwdbgr@gmail.com, Ph. No. 06652-232374 No. B-590

e-Procurement Notice
BID IDENTIFICATION No. BGR R&B/15/2020-21 No. 4808 Dtd.31.12.2020

- The Executive Engineer, Bolangir (R&B) Division, Bolangir on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in single cover system in ONLINE MODE for Electrical work detailed in the table below from eligible contractors.
- Nature of Work : Electrical Work
- No. of Tender : 1 No. Electrical Work
- Tender Cost : Rs.6,000/- (Tender Paper Cost)
- Class of Contractor : HT (Electrical)
- Date & time of Sale & receipt of Bids : From Dt.08.01.2021, 11.00 A.M. Dt.21.01.2021 upto 5.00 P.M.
- Date of Opening of Bid : Dt.25.01.2021 at 11.30 A.M.
- The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website <http://tendersodisha.gov.in>.
Sd./- Executive Engineer Bolangir (R&B) Division OIPR-34028/11/0014/2021

OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, NIMAPARA
E-mail: nimapadanac@gmail.com Phone No./Fax: (06758) 250229

No. 01 Date: 01.01.2021

e-Procurement Notice

Bid documents consisting of work, estimated cost, cost of tender paper, EMD, time of completion, class of contractors and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in Govt. website i.e. www.tendersorissa.gov.in.

- Tender Reference No. : NP-NAC-39/2020-21
- Tender ID No. : 2020_ORULB-64867_pack1
- Name of the Work : Civil construction works as mentioned in website
- No. of works : 01 No.
- Estimated Cost : Rs.17,47,702.00
- Period of Completion : 60 days
- Date & time of bidding : 04.01.2021 to 13.01.2021 upto 5 P.M.
- Last date & time for receipt of bids in the portal : 13.01.2021 upto 5 P.M.
- Last date for submission of Original documents : On or before 18.01.2021 upto 5 P.M. (Physically produce to the Officer inviting the Bid or through Registered Post/Speed Post or Office Tender Box).
- Bids received online shall be opened on : Dt. 19.01.2021 at 11.30 A.M.
- Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid : Executive Officer, NAC, Nimapara

Further details can be seen from the procurement portal i.e. www.tendersorissa.gov.in.
Sd./- Executive Officer, NAC, Nimapara

FOCUS ECONOMY

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM



The welcome to the new year was wishfully cheerful, riding more on hope than on evidence. Economic data that is coming out is still mixed, yet hopeful. But to have survived the year 2020 is itself a cause for celebration. Disease, death, economic destruction, and yet resilience, fortitude and determination is how most people experienced the last year. Most of the country, for much of 2020, was in lockdown mode, which was progressively diluted. The lockdown is still operative in many states. It has affected jobs, income, livelihoods especially in the informal sector. The plight of the urban migrant workers in the country is now well known and was even mentioned by the Prime Minister in his radio address. The rural economy turned out to be their saviour. The adverse economic impact on small and medium businesses has been severe. The exact detailed economic picture of India's vast informal sector becomes clear only with a lag.

The virus is still with us, although vaccinations have started. Just four countries account for half of all the Covid cases worldwide. These are United States, India, Brazil and Russia. India's population is 17 per cent of the world and the country now has 13 per cent of all global cases. Despite this sobering fact, it is also true that India managed to "flatten the curve" much better than the other three countries. All three till recently were registering ever increasing daily numbers of the infected and also fatalities. India's declining daily count for the last couple of months is remarkable, given the much lower state of health infrastructure relative to our GDP. Perhaps the management of the pandemic has improved considerably as also patient recovery rates. There may be an element of inbuilt immunity that we don't know. As of this writing the government has given an emergency approval to two vaccines which are yet to finish the final phase of their clinical trials. The pace at which leading scientists of the world managed to de-

velop a vaccine is nothing short of spectacular. It is also testimony to the benefit of global collaboration in science and of openness in the digital age.

The economic revival, which is now visible, is also remarkable, because it has been achieved with much less fiscal stimulus as compared to other countries. The comeback signs are evident in corporate profitability, sporadic cases of revival in the real estate sector; rising collections in GST, much higher sowing area for the rabi crop, and an increase in employment numbers. This year India will end up producing a record 301 million tonnes of food grains and next year the outlook for agricultural growth is for 3.5 per cent. The Union Budget due in less than four weeks promises a strong dose of fiscal stimulus through infrastructure, and of course a beefing up of health and education, which are part of the soft infrastructure. The stock market continues its gravity defying rise, as if it is completely oblivious to the underlying economy. We know that the stock market is forward looking and not myopic, but its vision seems to be far out into the future! The government must find a way to tap into the wealth of the

stock market to fund its stimulus requirement. The buoyant markets are also an opportune time to divest government holdings in the public sector enterprises already identified by Niti Aayog. Another way is to pledge the PSU shares, currently valued at more than ₹15 lakh crore, to the Reserve Bank of India in a sweetheart bilateral "loan against shares" deal, priced at a low interest rate of just above the repo rate. These shares can be pledged for a period of five years and then swapped back.

The optimism about the new year should not however distract us from some difficult challenges that will need urgent attention. Firstly, there is the crisis around the new farm laws. The agitation led by farmers is more than a month old, and their demand for repeal seems to be increasingly non-negotiable. Their apprehensions are very real, whether the concerns are about minimum support prices for wheat and rice or legal protection available when contracting with large corporates, or protection from downward price spikes. The government must find a face-saving way to end the agitation since it is now not just affecting the farm sector in the north, but also has dis-

rupted the flow of coal, fertiliser and other railway freight. This will surely affect industrial production and sentiment in the northern states. An early resolution is critical. Why not explore the possibility of keeping the laws in abeyance, refer them to a parliamentary standing committee, and in the meantime let individual States, aligned with the ruling party, go ahead and implement them, if politically feasible?

The second big challenge is in banking. The KV Kamath committee had identified 26 sectors where loans will have to be restructured, without the respective borrowers being pushed into bankruptcy. The total identified loans under stress were about ₹48 lakh crore. But as the period of moratorium ends, only a tiny fraction of these borrowers have come forward to take the offer of restructuring. Do we interpret that to mean that most of the stressed borrowers have become profitable? Or are there some deeper yet to be discovered problems? The last thing we need is another bank failure. In fact, in the Union Budget the finance minister will have to make large allocations to recapitalise public sector banks, especially after the devastating impact of the pandemic. For India to grow at 8 or 9 per cent, bank credit must grow at 18 to 20 per cent at the very least, and that calls for a substantial risk capital injection. Where is this going to come from?

Beyond the anti-farm law agitation and imminent banking challenges, there is also the need to give a big boost to exports. The new foreign trade policy will be unveiled shortly after the Union Budget. We have lost the export momentum of the past in the last five years with a current situation of nearly zero growth.

There is no doubt that 2021 will be a much better than last year, and we should use it as a bridge to get back to high, sustainable, inclusive and greener growth.

The writer is an economist and Senior Fellow, Takshashila Institution.

THE BILLION PRESS



Ajit Ranade

INDIA'S POPULATION IS 17 PER CENT OF THE WORLD AND THE COUNTRY NOW HAS 13 PER CENT OF ALL GLOBAL CASES. DESPITE THIS SOBERING FACT, IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT INDIA MANAGED TO "FLATTEN THE CURVE" MUCH BETTER THAN THE OTHER THREE COUNTRIES

The welcome to the new year was wishfully cheerful, riding more on hope than on evidence. Economic data that is coming out is still mixed, yet hopeful. But to have survived the year 2020 is itself a cause for celebration. Disease, death, economic destruction, and yet resilience, fortitude and determination is how most people experienced the last year. Most of the country, for much of 2020, was in lockdown mode, which was progressively diluted. The lockdown is still operative in many states. It has affected jobs, income, livelihoods especially in the informal sector. The plight of the urban migrant workers in the country is now well known and was even mentioned by the Prime Minister in his radio address. The rural economy turned out to be their saviour. The adverse economic impact on small and medium businesses has been severe. The exact detailed economic picture of India's vast informal sector becomes clear only with a lag.

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SPECTRUM UNITED NATIONS

Slow death or new direction



Mark Malloch-Brown

THE UN'S CHALLENGE NOW IS TO FASHION A PRACTICAL, ACHIEVABLE AGENDA WITHOUT BETRAYING ITS FOUNDING CHARTER AND ITS COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND OTHER FREEDOMS

For much of its life, the United Nations has hidden behind the comfortable maxim that, "If we didn't have it, we would have to invent it." Now at the venerable age of 75, the organisation still enjoys widespread approval in global opinion polls.

But beneath the surface, the UN faces difficulties that cannot be ignored. Judging by traditional and social media, the issues that the UN pushes tend to get little traction. Worse, when it comes to maintaining peace and security, the UN is often stymied by its dysfunctional Security Council, which itself reflects an increasingly divided world. Whether in Syria, Yemen or Libya, progress toward securing peace has been glacial, with much more being decided on the battlefield than at the Security Council. These same divisions have also hampered human-rights advocacy, as has the recent election that awarded seats on the UN Human Rights Council to Russia, Cuba, and China.

Of course, the UN has always mirrored the world it represents. There was broad member support for a strong UN only in its initial years and during the early years of Kofi Annan's tenure as Secretary-General in the late 1990s. Otherwise,

the UN has typically operated against strong headwinds; and now, a number of political and demographic changes are rapidly reshaping the UN's world.

Today's world is younger overall. US power appears to have peaked, and the global distribution of power is being redistributed to China and others. At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic has ensured that the world will be poorer, just as digitalisation has made it less equal.

With a charter that rests squarely on the liberal-democratic values of the winners of World War II, the UN has struggled to accommodate the changing global order. Under its current Secretary-General, António Guterres, the UN has admirably continued to pursue gender parity and more diversity in its staffing. Still, too many top jobs remain in the hands of the founding member states. And, more fundamentally, the organization seems out of touch with the world beyond its doors.

China, the second-largest contributor to the UN's assessed budget, has increasingly tried to assert global leadership on climate change and other issues, following America's abdication under outgoing President Donald Trump. At the UN General Assembly in

September, Chinese President Xi Jinping took an extraordinarily consequential step, pledging that China would become carbon neutral by 2060. Yet the same regime that has committed to environmental sustainability is also brutally persecuting China's Uighur minority.

This points to the UN's central dilemma. In terms of population, most of today's world is under authoritarian rule, ranging from despots without even a pretense of democratic legitimacy to elected autocrats who have eroded democratic institutions and checks on their power. With no choice but to contend with this increasingly undemocratic world, the UN's challenge now is to fashion a practical, achievable agenda without betraying its founding charter and its commitment to human rights and other freedoms. It will have to tap into its current strengths. As a representative of "collective rights," the UN is uniquely positioned to mobilize action on issues like climate change, which threatens poor farmers in developing countries as much as it does rich Manhattanites who are exposed to rising sea levels.

Likewise, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which seek to tackle inequality and exclusion everywhere, remain an example

of the UN at its best, as does Guterres's call for "A New Social Contract for a New Era." The UN provides an indispensable global good by producing league tables of human development and organizing broad coalitions to achieve steady progress on key indicators of well-being.

By contrast, the UN probably will have to bow to the logic of the 21st century cold war. The Security Council will remain ineffectual until it is reformed, which is a distant prospect. But there are ways around this paralysis. During the original Cold War, the UN, without reference to the Security Council, launched major initiatives to address humanitarian crises and to support new members emerging from colonial rule. It is here that the UN's future will be secured or lost. In a younger, angrier, increasingly impatient world, a distant club of men in dark suits is doomed to irrelevance. Where the UN matters is on the ground, deploying its remarkable mandate to fight for those who need it most.

Mark Malloch-Brown, a former deputy United Nations secretary-general, is Co-Chair of the UN Foundation.

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There is nothing mind can do that cannot be better done in the mind's immobility and thought-free stillness. When mind is still, then truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence.

SRI AUROBINDO



Cave In

China is steadfastly reorganising its military might to advance its agenda of becoming the number one economic power of the world, making its defence system a key tool in the strategy for global dominance. With that objective in mind its revised National Defence Law (NDL) has come into effect from 1 January 2021. The intention of the reform is to "defend national interests both at home and abroad." The new NDL expands the power of China's armed forces, headed by President Xi, to mobilise military and civilian resources.

This will enable Xi to tackle with an iron hand both growing dissidence within the country and meet challenges from the USA and the Quad grouping comprising India, Australia, Japan and the USA. It also weakens the role of the State Council, China's Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Li Keqiang. The Cabinet used to formulate military policy which has now been handed over to the Central Military Commission, the overall high command of the two million-strong People's Liberation Army headed by Xi.

There have been several recent instances of China's handling of its dissidents within the country, one of which is the disappearance of billionaire Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba. Ma has not been seen in public for a while, fuelling concerns about his safety amid his ongoing conflict with the Chinese government. He failed to appear for the final episode of his own talent show Africa's Business Heroes in November 2020 and has not made a public appearance since then.

Only a few months ago, the Chinese government had stopped an IPO of his Ant Group after the billionaire criticised China's financial regulators and state-owned banks in October last year. He had criticised the regulators for "stifling innovation" and said Chinese banks are like "pawn shops". The country's government has also launched an anti-monopoly investigation into Alibaba in December 2020 after regulators earlier told Ant Group to restructure its operations.

Economists across the world are predicting that China's GDP can become bigger than the US GDP by 2028 in nominal terms. Countries without ownership of technology will face difficulties to deal with a vastly powerful, both militarily and economically, China. The uprising in Hong Kong was a clear indication of unrest within. Yet, Beijing could blatantly suppress the protests and the whole world watched helpless, including the US. India, on the other hand, does not know where to place itself. For instance, Chinese military intrusions into Indian territory at Leh during the lockdown period made the Indian government hit back by banning a few Chinese apps. Interestingly, not only have some of the prominent apps returned to India, the Union government has awarded a huge contract to Shanghai Tunnel Engineering Company Limited for the construction of a 5.6 km underground stretch from New Ashok Nagar to Sahibabagh of the Delhi-Meerut RRTS project. Chinese banks have also been granted licenses by RBI for full scale operations in India.

Jack Ma is a great example. The future portends ill for all those that oppose China. Standing up to the might of that dragon would be very difficult. It is time to brace for battle or cave in and be servile.

WISDOM CORNER

- It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then. **LEWIS CARROLL**
- The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. **CHINESE PROVERB**
- We need to accept that we won't always make the right decisions, that we'll screw up royally sometimes - understanding that failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of success. **ARIANNA HUFFINGTON**

WORDSWORTH

Break one's duck

It's not as cruel as it sounds. It's not the duck that's being broken, but a duck's egg. These days the expression can be used in almost any game that involves a score of some sort but originally - back in Victorian times - it related solely to cricket. It seems to have been English public-school slang of the 1850s to call a score of naught against a player's name a duck's egg - presumably a duck rather than a chicken because a duck's egg is bigger and more prominent. A player who had scored, who had moved off that accusing zero on the scoreboard, was said to have broken his duck's egg. It began to appear in print in the early 1860s and soon people shortened it just to duck. The first known example of that form appeared in the Daily News in August 1868: "You see ... that his fear of a 'duck' - as by a pardonable contraction from duck-egg a naught is called in cricket-play - outweighs all other earthly considerations." A batsman who was dismissed without scoring was said to be out for a duck. It's only in comparatively recent times that the expression has broadened to other games and to the performance of whole teams rather than individual players. In the report you quote, it means that the soccer team concerned has won a match, that their count of wins has moved off zero, an extension that is as figurative as to suggest it might be a misunderstanding of the original meaning. Though the expression is known from all cricket-playing English-speaking countries, it's only in British usage, I think, that you can apply it generally to achieving some particular feat for the first time. Americans briefly knew of duck's eggs in the 1860s, but prefer now to speak of goose eggs in much the same sense, a slang term that is almost exactly contemporary with the cricket one. A related expression also originally from cricket is to lay an egg, so to score a zero; that might be the source of the theatrical version from the 1920s onwards that says an actor or a show is a failure or a flop, but it might instead be from airman's slang of the First World War, meaning to drop a bomb. It's often said that the equivalent term love in tennis and some other games for a zero score likewise derives from the shape of an egg, in this case the French l'oeuf. To forestall lots of e-mails, I should say it's a folk etymology. There is no known such link between the French word and the English one, and the term love is recorded in English in 1742, in Hoyle's famous book on the game of whist.

LOL

Christmas trip

A man in Scotland calls his son in London the day before Christmas Eve and says, "I hate to ruin your day but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; forty-five years of misery is enough." "Dad, what are you talking about?" the son screams. "We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the father says. "We're sick of each other and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Leeds and tell her." Frantically, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like hell



they're getting divorced!" she shouts, "I'll take care of this!" She calls Scotland immediately, and screams at her father "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?" and hangs up. The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife. "Sorted! They're coming for Christmas - and they're paying their own way."

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, opinions and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com

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

Poaching migratory birds

Sir, With the onset of winter lakhs of birds from far-flung places like Siberia, Caspian Sea, lake Baikal central and South east Asia, Ladakh, Himalayas, Northern Eurasia, Kazakh and remote areas of Russia are usually flock to the brackish water lake for its congenial environment. According to sources in the Forest Department, at least 8 lakh migratory birds of around hundred species have congregated at Nalabana Bird Sanctuary inside Chilika and nearby places like Badagotha, Satapada, Mangalajodi, Bhusandpur and Nairi. The bird species include northern pintail, gadwall, Shelduck and black tailed Godwit. But rampant poaching of migratory birds at villages near Chilika has emerged as a big challenge for Forest Department. Hundreds of migratory birds are killed by the poachers for meat purpose everyday under the nose of Forest Department officials. Poachers are killing migratory birds at Brahmagiri, Krushnapasad, Tangi, Mangalajodi and Bhusandpur areas near Chilika either by using poison or traps. Poachers are also supplying bird meat to hotels and restaurants for serving their meat to the visitors on demand. Hundreds of migratory birds fall prey to illegal poaching activity. The Forest Department must intensify rigorous patrolling in the vicinity of the lake and also make concrete plans to save the migratory birds from the hunters.

Kamal Lochan Dash, JAJPUR

Welcome move

Sir, The state government reviving the Commission for Other Backward Caste at this time would be a great boost to the inclusion of those that remain outside the special support of government, and also to identify those that have gone upfront after availing all the facilities for years. Besides it will be the main forum to highlight the issues affecting deprived people as many unscrupulous people have, in the name of a particular caste, swiped all the benefits simply by virtue of producing forged caste certificates for years. Now, hopefully these deprived people would be included in the various beneficial programmes of the government. They actually need the special assistance provided by the government, which has so far been unlawfully availed by the creamy layers of the society. It will now be seen if the commission is able to do justice to such people and also exclude the creamy layers from the list. It now remains to be seen what action this commission would take in coming days in including the millions of deprived backwards of this poor state.

Janaki Ballav Dash, MAYURBHANJ

1,800 migratory birds perish in Himachal

The administration sounded an alert by banning all human activities within 10-km radius of the Pong wetlands

AGENCIES

Shimla, Jan 4: Migratory birds found dead at Pong Dam Lake in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra district have tested positive for bird flu, according to officials, the fourth state to report cases of the dreaded avian influenza in recent days.

Around 1,800 migratory birds, most of them bar-headed geese, have been found dead in the lake sanctuary so far.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Archana Sharma said that the laboratory at the Indian Veterinary Research Institute in Bareilly detected avian influenza in the samples of dead birds, while citing the information conveyed by the Centre.

At the same time, she said that her department was awaiting confirmation by the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD), Bhopal, as it was the nodal body for testing this disease.

The local administration has already sounded an alert by banning all human activities within 10-km radius of the Pong wetlands in Kangra district.

Besides the bar-headed geese, the other species were the shoveler, the river tern, the black-headed gull and the common teal. Some birds - including the bar-headed geese - were seen acting strangely before their deaths, Chief Conservator, Wildlife, of Pong wetlands, Upasna Patyal said.

"When you're seeing that birds are not able to take the flight despite healthy wings, it's really disturbing. At some distance, you find their carcasses," Patyal said.



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When you're seeing that birds are not able to take the flight despite healthy wings, it's really disturbing. At some distance, you find their carcasses

UPASNA PATYAL | CHIEF CONSERVATOR, WILDLIFE

The Rajasthan government last week sounded an alert after confirmation of avian influenza in crows that died in Jhalawar district.

Indore in Madhya Pradesh has also reported death of crows. Mass mortality of poultry birds was reported at one of the largest poultry belts at Barwala near Panchkula in Haryana. According to the Bird Count India, a partnership comprising organisations and groups, over the past 7-10 days there have

been reports of wild birds dying in separate incidents at different locations in the country.

That wild birds die is not necessarily worrying. But it is possible that some of these recent deaths are out of the ordinary, with large numbers dying or reports of diagnoses of H5N1 (avian influenza).

At the moment, no-one knows whether these are causes of larger concern, but it is worth keeping an eye on the situation, it said.

"If you encounter a wild bird that is dead or dying, do not approach it, and under any circumstances do not touch it given the

Bird flu outbreak in Kerala

KOTTAYAM: An outbreak of bird flu has been reported from some parts of Kottayam and Alappuzha districts, prompting authorities to order culling of ducks, hens and other domestic birds in and around one km radius of the affected areas. Kottayam district authorities said bird flu has been reported from a duck farm in Neendoor.

Around 1,500 ducks have died in the farm. Similarly, bird flu outbreak has been reported from some farms in Kuttanad region of Alappuzha district, sources said. Tests conducted at the National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal have confirmed the bird flu outbreak, officials said. State Animal Husbandry Minister K Raju said

in Thiruvananthapuram that the government will compensate farmers whose domestic birds will be culled.

Officials said some 40,000 birds will have to be culled to check the spread of the H5N8 virus. Although the situation has been brought under control, authorities have sounded high alert in the districts, considering the potential of the virus to infect humans, sources said. Bird flu occurs naturally in wild waterfowl and can spread to domestic poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese. The disease is transmitted via contact with an infected bird's feces, or secretions from its nose, mouth or eye.

The last major case of bird flu was reported in the state in 2016.

possibility (however small) that it might be infected with avian influenza. H5N1 is a highly contagious virus that can cause severe illness in people," it warned.

Sensing the gravity of the situation, Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) scientist KS Gopi Sundar told IANS that it's an alarming situation. "We are getting reports of death of birds in nature across India. It's likely to be a disease because the deaths are occurring in multiple locations involving multiple species. It is a dangerous situation

and needs multi-stakeholder intervention on priority," he said.

At the Pong wetlands, preliminary findings of their post-mortem have ruled out poisoning as the cause of their death, wildlife officials said.

Every winter, the Pong wetlands are home to over 100,000 birds of nearly 114 species. Among them the bar-headed geese, the northern pintail, the Eurasian coot, the common teal, the common pochard, the northern shoveler, the great cormorant, the Eurasian wigeon and the ruddy shelduck are notable.

Oppn serves notice seeking removal of Kerala Speaker

The move comes in the wake of allegations against P Sreeramakrishnan in the controversial gold smuggling case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 4: The Congress-led UDF Opposition in Kerala Monday served a notice to the Assembly Secretary seeking the removal of Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan from the constitutional post in the wake of allegations against him in the controversial gold smuggling case.

M Ummer, a legislator of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), a key coalition partner in the UDF, submitted the notice under Article 179 (C) of the Constitution, which deals with the removal of the speaker and rule 65 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Kerala Assembly.

The Manjeri MLA had earlier served a similar notice last July, but the Speaker had refused to accept the resolution, citing technical reasons. The alleged personal relationship of the Speaker with the accused in the gold smuggling case and his presence in the inauguration of a workshop owned by one of them was "not in accordance of the decorum of the House," the notice said. "The Kerala community was shocked to hear that the Customs was going to interrogate the Speaker in the dollar smuggling case," it said.



Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan

Allegations of corruption and extravagance against him in connection with various construction activities in the Assembly and programmes like eniyamasabha, festival on democracy and so on were now a talking point among the public, the notice said.

"No such serious allegations have been levelled against any other Speaker in the past," it said, seeking the removal of Sreeramakrishnan as "he failed to keep the dignity of the post."

The Speaker had come under criticism from the Opposition for inaugurating the shop of one of the accused in the gold smuggling case, Sandeep Nair, months ago.

There were media reports last week that the Customs would soon serve him notice for interrogation in connection with the dollar smuggling case.

Colleges, varsities reopen in Kerala

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 4: After a gap of nearly nine months, colleges and universities in Kerala reopened for students Monday with strict Covid safety norms.

Classes will be conducted between 8.30 am and 5 pm on all days, except Sundays. Around 1,350 higher educational institutions including arts and science colleges, engineering colleges, law colleges as well as all the state universities and the lone central university in the state located in Kasaragod have commenced their classes. Only 50 per cent of students will be allowed in each class based on the strength, in compliance with strict Covid-19 norms.

Parvathi Babu, a third year BA political science student of a college in Thiruvananthapuram told IANS: "It's an excitement to be among the classmates and teachers in physical form after such a long gap. We were in virtual world for the past nine months."

However, some teachers have

expressed their discontent over the education department's decision to extend the timings of the classes. Thomas Sebastian, a teacher with a government arts college in the state capital, said, "Workload is very high and with classes between 8.30 am and 5 pm, teachers are overburdened. Besides, conducting classes on Saturdays is also not a good idea."

Higher Education Department Principal Secretary Usha Titus said that the new arrangement has been made to compensate for the gap and to ensure that the academic session continues normally. Titus said: "The working pattern will adhere to the University Grants Commission's guidelines which

mandate 40 working hours a week, of which 16 hours had to be dedicated to the classes of assistant professors and 14 hours for associate professors and professors." Transport Minister AK Saseendran told media that he has already directed the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation to immediately take action regarding the roll-out of travel concession to students.



Hilly terrain, inclement weather may hit vaccine drive

Health authorities plan to take the immunisation programme to new heights by trudging miles of rugged, cold and inhospitable terrains, sometimes traversing on horsebacks or even airlifting the vaccine to reach remote habitations like the previous polio programmes

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Shimla, Jan 4: With the authorities gearing up to undertake the coronavirus vaccination in the coming weeks, tough Himalayan terrain and inclement weather conditions in Himachal Pradesh are likely to put up roadblocks in the hill state's immunisation plans.

Officials say these villages are located across Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts and interiors of Chamba, Kullu, Sirmour and Shimla districts.

But the health authorities are determined not to let roadblocks take their toll. They plan to take the immunisation programme to new heights by trudging miles of rugged, cold and inhospitable terrains, sometimes traversing on



horsebacks or even airlifting the vaccine to reach remote habitations like the previous polio programmes.

Officials told IANS that vaccinating the elderly will be a challenge as a large population lived in rural areas, where maintaining cold chain facilities and ferrying the vaccine would be a big hurdle.

But they say they won't see a vaccine phase for the elderly people before April in India.

Chief Medical Officer Gurdarshan Gupta, who is posted in Dharamsala in Kangra district, told IANS Sunday that in the first and second phases of Covid-19 vaccine inoculation, only healthcare and frontline staff would be given the shots. The phase to vaccinate the elderly will come thereafter - some

where in April-May.

"A large number of elderly people living in remote villages across the district normally move to lower elevations during winter," he pointed out.

Health officials say their staff will have to traverse at least three days on foot from the nearest road heads to the remotest hamlet Bara Bhangal in Kangra district for the vaccination programme.

The journey for Bara Bhangal, part of the Dhauladhar Wildlife Sanctuary that remains cut off from the rest of the world for over six months due to heavy snow, is 65 km from the last village that is connected by road. And if that entire region remains under heavy snow cover at that time, it won't be possible to send a team there on foot,

THE ALTITUDE CHALLENGE

Last month, the world's highest post office at Hikam in Spiti Valley at a height of 15,000 feet above the sea level and currently covered in a thick blanket of snow was hit by the coronavirus. Hikam has a population of 200.

Also, nearby villages Komik and Langche too were hit by the virus. They support populations of 87 and 136 respectively.

Authorities blamed the locals, who are largely Buddhist farmers growing barley, potatoes, wheat and black peas, for the virus spread as they were reluctant to go to hospitals owing to belief that they will be automatically cured with the blessings of a local deity.

a health official added. In such a case, airlifting the vaccine is the only option.

Bara Bhangal has a population of around 400. During winters, most of them migrate to Bir village in Bajnath tehsil, near Palampur town, some 250 km from Shimla.

"These days, 147 people, mostly young persons, remain in the village. So if the situation demands at the

time of inoculation, we will take the help of local administration to airlift the vaccine to those far-off places," the Chief Medical Officer added.

On several occasions, the Election Commission has shifted the lone polling booth at Bara Bhangal to Bir, citing administrative reasons. Health officials told IANS that at least 30 villages in Lahaul-Spiti and an equal number in Kinnaur are located at altitudes ranging from 9,000 feet to 15,000 feet above mean sea level. The Pangri segment in Chamba district has over a dozen such villages.

Kunnu and Charang villages in Kinnaur's Pooch subdivision, known for growing peas, are among the remotest habitats where locals have to trudge some 15-20 km to reach nearby health centre. While Charang has 50 households, Kunnu has 30.

Locals rue that the condition of road is so bad that they can't even walk on it. Large pits pose threat of accidents. There are several hamlets across Lahaul-Spiti district and Pangri in Chamba district where locals have to trek more than 10 km to reach the health centre. Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti are part of the sprawling Mandi parliamentary constituency that covers almost two third of the hill state. The Buddhist-dominated districts in the Himalayan terrain, with elevations ranging from 15,000 to 20,000 feet above the mean sea level share a porous border with China.

Team of seven rescues 100 tourists stuck on icy roads

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Manali, Jan 4: It was 'Team Raptors', who voluntarily came to the rescue of nearly 100 tourists stuck on the icy roads overlooking the picturesque tourist resort of Manali in Himachal Pradesh at altitudes ranging above 3,000 metres this weekend, and won accolades for their exemplary act.

The heavy snowfall Saturday evening coupled with slippery roads in the 12-km avalanche prone stretch between the Solang ski slopes and the newly opened Atal Tunnel Rohtang turned joy into a nightmarish experience for the nearly 300 tourists.

The tourists were trapped in their vehicles. It was Team Raptors, comprising seven local youths, who are experts in off-road motoring, that came to the rescue of nearly 100 tourists. They assisted the local administration and the police in the night-long rescue operation that ended Sunday. The remaining tourists were rescued by the administration.

Ace off-road rallyist Suresh Rana, founder of Team Raptors, told IANS



Monday that the rescue operation was tricky owing to poor visibility and inclement weather.

"A large number of panicky tourists along with children left their vehicles behind and started trudging on snow-laden road towards Manali," Rana, who captured the Raid-de-Himalaya - one of the world's toughest off-road motor rallies - 11 times in the four-wheeler Xtreme category, told IANS.

He said seven members of Team Raptors first started rescuing those who were walking with no idea

about reaching their hotels. "Initially, our team members safely transported the tourists back to Manali in their respective hotels. Later, we told the administration to make their arrangement for transportation mid-way so that timely assistance could be extended to more stranded tourists," Rana said.

"I am extremely grateful to Team Raptors for rescuing me and my entire family," said Akhil Dubey, a tourist from Delhi.

"The much publicised tourist destination Manali has no disaster management strategy," remarked tourist Shalini Verma. "The roads often get clogged, and the snow makes it risky to drive on them, especially for non-Himachali motorists. Nobody is there to assist in case of a natural calamity. When the administration knows about the prediction of heavy snowfall, why they allowed hundreds of tourists to move towards the high hills" she asked.

The 9.02-km long Atal Tunnel - the world's longest motorable tunnel - has 45 avalanche-prone spots, officials said.

Kanthalloor: The 'Nalanda' of south India

THE KERALA CAPITAL CAN BOAST OF AN ANCIENT UNIVERSITY WHICH ACCORDING TO HISTORIANS, CULTURAL ACTIVISTS AND ACADEMICIANS, WAS ESTABLISHED 1,200 YEARS AGO

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 4: The capital city of Kerala can boast of an ancient university which according to historians, cultural activists and academicians, was established 1,200 years ago.

Ullas Sreedhar, historian and journalist, while speaking to IANS, said, "Kanthalloor was a university constituted by Aayi kingdom in 852 AD. This can be seen as the first university with multi-discipline subjects being taught in this part of the world."

To revoke the memories of Kanthalloor University 'Kanthalloor Sabha' - a gathering of historians, journalists and cultural activists recently conducted a programme on Vedas, Mantras and science of earlier days. Writings in copper plates preserved at the museum of Padmanabhapuram Palace have mentioned about Kanthalloor University and its rich history.

Historians said that the university was spread across 500 acres of land and the majestic Kanthalloor



Shiva temple at Valiyasala in Thiruvananthapuram is the only remnant of those days.

The argument is that the university existed on the premises of the temple or rather the students of 'Kanthalloor Sala' used to pray in this Mahadeva temple as it was under the 'Gurukula' system of education those days.

Senior journalist and historian of Thiruvananthapuram, Malayinkeezhu Gopalakrishnan said "Kanthalloor university was

in existence during those days and this was mentioned in the manuscripts of olden times."

Kanthalloor University had taught 64 disciplines including Mathematics, Chemistry, Martial Arts, Astrology, Astronomy and Ayurveda, according to research scholars and historians who are conducting studies of Thiruvananthapuram and its history. Kishore Kallara, teacher and historian who had produced and directed the documentary 'Enittum Kanthalloor' while speaking to IANS

said, "It is a 1,200-year-old university which had taught more than 64 disciplines including Martial arts and Mathematics."

Kishore said "I was astonished when children in General knowledge class were mentioning Kanthalloor Sala as the Nalanda University of south India and here my inquisitiveness commenced and I ended up making this documentary." The teacher has conducted several shows of his documentary in various schools, universities and academic institutions.

Malayinkeezhu Gopalakrishnan said that while there is a hot debate between historians and academicians on whether the university existed at Valiyasala, the possibilities of the university being situated at Valiyasala is more certain as the ninth century 'Anandapura Varnanam' has explicitly referred to it. After the documentary of Kishore Kallara, interest has cropped up among students and academicians on Kanthalloor Sala.



Ayurveda, Unani and homeopathy have a lot of potential in treatment of various diseases but it was not taken forward
YOGI ADITYANATH | UTTAR PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

STEPS TO SUCCESS

In a first of its kind initiative to promote education of the girl child, Assam Education Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has said every school-going girl student will get Rs 100 per day for attending classes



of the day quote

In such a situation, the government should come forward to help the affected families without delay. If the present government does not do this, then this work will be done whenever the next Congress government is formed



BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA | HARYANA LEADER OF OPPOSITION

Netaji's Planning Commission has been dissolved by the central government. They have named it (the new body which replaced the institution) Niti Aayog or Niti Niyog, I do not know. Earlier, I used to go for meetings of the Planning Commission which sought suggestions from each state. Now we cannot share our views



MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

We needed a vaccine against COVID. The Herculean efforts made by our scientists have finally paid off. Today, we have several vaccines that have been developed across the world, two of which have been developed at a record-breaking speed and granted authorisation in India



HARSH VARDHAN | UNION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Srinagar encounter: Families seek bodies

Srinagar: Families of three alleged militants, killed in an encounter with security forces at Parimpora on the outskirts of the city last week, on Monday demanded the return of their bodies and a fair investigation into the incident. According to security forces, Ajaz Maqbool Ganai, Zubair Ahmad Lone and Athar Mushtaq Wani were killed in an encounter on December 31. Police said while they were not listed as terrorists in their records, two of them had "radical" thoughts.

Sanjay Raut's wife reaches ED office

Mumbai: Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut's wife Varsha reached the Enforcement Directorate (ED) office here Monday afternoon for questioning in connection with an alleged transaction linked to the PMC Bank money laundering case, a police official said. According to the official, Varsha Raut reached the ED office at Ballard Pier in South Mumbai around 3 pm after she was summoned by the central agency.

Rains drench Delhi for 2nd day

New Delhi: Delhi received light rain for the second consecutive day Monday, even as the minimum temperature rose to 11.4 degrees Celsius due to a cloud cover over the city, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum temperature of 11.4 degrees Celsius, four notches above normal and the highest in the last 22 days.

Naxal held

Bijapur: A Naxal wanted for attacks on police and kidnapping of civilians as well as other serious offences was arrested from Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, an official said Monday. Punem Binda (48) had a reward of Rs 1 lakh on his head and was apprehended on Sunday from his native Marudbaka village under Usoor police station limits in an anti-Naxal operation of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and District Force (DF), he said.

China used 'unorthodox weapons' at LAC: MoD



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 4: China's People Liberation Army escalated the situation at Line of Actual Control in Eastern Ladakh by utilisation of "unorthodox weapons and amassing large number of troops", said the Ministry of Defence in its year-end review.

The ministry also pointed that Chinese made unilateral and provocative actions to change the status quo by force, in more than one area on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). India responded to it in a firm and non-escalatory way, ensuring the sanctity of our claims in Eastern Ladakh.

"Indian Army has maintained all protocols and Agreements between the two countries while the PLA escalated the situation by utilisation of unorthodox weapons and amassing large number of troops," the ministry said. The year end review stated that Indian Army with assistance from Indian Air Force, mobilised troops including accretionary forces in a very short duration including heavy equipment like guns, tanks as also ammunition, rations and clothing. "Our engineers constructed roads, accommodation shelters and bridges to assist troop deployment," said the ministry adding that in a major skirmish in Galwan, 20 brave Indian soldiers lost their lives while preventing PLA troops from ingressing into our territory. The Chinese also suffered significant casualties. Later August 28 and 29, 2020, Indian troops in a precautionary de-

SHOCKING REPORT

The ministry also pointed that Chinese made unilateral and provocative actions to change the status quo by force, in more than one area on the Line of Actual Control (LAC)

India responded to it in a firm and non-escalatory way, ensuring the sanctity of our claims in Eastern Ladakh

ployment, pre-empted Chinese expansionist designs and occupied heights along the southern bank of Pangong Tso.

Braving inclement weather, own troops continue to be deployed on these heights, the ministry pointed. Advance Winter Stocking (AWS) and winter preparations for the enhanced strength has been completed and troops are well entrenched to counter any misadventure by Chinese forces.

The ministry also said that India categorically conveyed China that any attempt to unilaterally alter the status quo at the border is unacceptable and that India is determined to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The ministry also stated that to make the Indian Army future-ready, budgetary constraints for capability development and meeting other requirements have been removed.

India and China are engaged in a nine-month-long standoff at the LAC in Eastern Ladakh.

'Over 1,565 deaths due to extreme weather in 2020'

BIHAR LOST THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF 379 LIVES DUE TO FLOOD, THUNDERSTORM, LIGHTNING AND COLD WAVE, FOLLOWED BY UTTAR PRADESH (356), IT SAID IN A REPORT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: Extreme weather conditions led to the death of more than 1,565 people last year with thunderstorm and lightning claiming the lives of 815 of them, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday.

Bihar lost the maximum number of 379 lives due to flood, thunderstorm, lightning and cold wave, followed by Uttar Pradesh (356), it said in a report. The weather department said the number of deaths due to extreme weather events were



Representative image

based on media reports.

Heavy rainfall and flood-related incidents reportedly claimed more than 600 lives in different parts of the country during pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon seasons, it said. Of these, Assam lost 129 lives, Kerala 72, Telangana 61, Bihar 54, Maharashtra 50, Uttar Pradesh 48 and Himachal Pradesh 38. Of the 815 deaths due to thunderstorm and lightning, 280 occurred in Bihar; 220 in Uttar Pradesh,

122 in Jharkhand, 72 in Madhya Pradesh, 23 in Maharashtra and 20 in Andhra Pradesh, according to the IMD report. Cold wave conditions, which mainly prevailed over central parts of the country, especially in the month of January, caused about 150 deaths, the IMD said.

Of these deaths, 88 were reported from Uttar Pradesh alone, 45 from Bihar and 16 from Jharkhand. The deaths in Bihar were on a single day on January 1. According to the

IMD, the year 2020 was the eighth warmest year since it started maintaining records in 1901. "However, this is substantially lower than the highest warming observed over India during 2016 (plus 0.71 degree Celsius)," the IMD said. "During the year, annual mean land surface air temperature averaged over the country was 0.29 degree Celsius above normal (based on the data of 1981-2010)," the IMD said in a statement on Climate of India during 2020. "The year 2020 was the eighth warmest year on record since nation-wide records commenced in 1901. However, this is substantially lower than the highest warming observed over India during 2016 (+0.71 degree Celsius)," it said.

The five warmest years on record in order were: 2016 (+ 0.71 degree C), 2009 (+0.55 degree C), 2017 (+0.541 degree C), 2010 (+0.539 degrees C), and 2015 (+0.42 degree C). Twelve out of the 15 warmest years since 1901 were during the last 15 years - between 2006 and 2020, according to the IMD data.

WINTER WONDERLAND



Pedestrians walk across a snow-covered road during heavy snowfall, in Srinagar

PTI PHOTO

Mumbai's jumbo hosps to work as vaccination centres

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Jan 4: The jumbo Covid Care Centres set up in Mumbai after the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak will now be transformed into mega-vaccination centres by the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation, officials said here Monday.

"We shall convert the Covid jumbo field hospitals now into vaccination centres for public benefit," said BMC Additional Municipal Commissioner Suresh Kakani who earlier inspected the sprawling facilities, designed on the lines of the Wuhan field hospitals.

In the initial stages, the BMC plans to conduct vaccination drives at its four big hospitals - King Edward Memorial at Parel, B.Y.L. Nair in Mumbai Central, R.N. Cooper at Vile Parle and Lokmanya Tilak at Sion, which are equipped to vaccinate 2,000 persons daily each.

Besides, 1,000 each shall be vac-



inated daily at the periphery hospitals like Bhabha in Bandra, V.N. Desai in Santacruz, Rajawadi in Ghatkopar and Dr B.R. Ambedkar in Kandivli.

This would take care of a total of 12,000 vaccinations daily covering the priority groups like health workers, police, security, and other frontline workers, etc, and the rest

are proposed to be vaccinated at the jumbo Covid centres.

The mega-facilities are at the NSCI in Worli, R&D Complex at Byculla, BKC, NESCO in Goregaon and one each in Dahisar and Mulund, which are currently lying virtually vacant owing to the steep decline in cases in Mumbai in the past couple of months.

ARCTIC EXPEDITION TO RESUME IN JUNE

"Last year, the expedition was cancelled because of COVID-19 outbreak. This year, we are resuming the expedition. It will be held from June to October,"

M Ravichandran, Director NCPOR said

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Panaji, Jan 4: After a gap of a year due to COVID-19 pandemic, India's annual expedition to the Arctic will resume this year in the month of June, a senior Union government official said Monday.

Talking to reporters in Vasco town, about 30 kms away from here, M Ravichandran, Director, National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR), said the annual expedition to the Arctic region will be held from June to October. "Last year, the expedition was cancelled because of COVID-19 outbreak. This year, we are resuming the expedition. It will be held from June to October," he said. He said about 150-200 crew from India would be participating

in the expedition in the batches of 10 at a time. India embarked upon the Arctic research by launching first scientific expedition to Arctic in the first week of August, 2007, using the international research facility in the Spitsbergen Island of Norway.

Subsequently, India has been sending scientific teams every summer and winter for carrying out studies in the Arctic, primarily in the fields of glaciology, hydrochemistry, microbiology, and atmospheric sciences. Ravichandran said the crew will embark on the mission by flight. "There's a science village in the Arctic where representatives of seven countries would stay together," Ravichandran said.

Scientists identify ways of preventing next pandemic

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: How to prevent the next pandemic? As 2021 begins with COVID-19 continuing its global spread, scientists have spotlighted three approaches to at least reduce the risk of pandemic potential diseases - screening animals, reducing land-use change and improving health infrastructure.

There can be no one answer to the question at the centre of an anxious debate across a world coping with COVID-19 and wondering what will happen if another one comes, but the global scientific community has been working on multiple tracks to ensure that humankind is better prepared.

Following several multidisciplinary studies in 2020, scientists now firmly believe a "perfect storm" for an outbreak with pandemic po-

tential is created by the combined forces of land-use change, high population density and the presence of interfaces between wildlife and domestic animals. "We are only as strong as our weakest 'link' given our globally connected society," Krutika Kuppalli, an expert in emerging infectious diseases affiliated with the Stanford University School of Medicine in the US, told PTI. Manuel Ruiz, wildlife veterinarian at Montana State University in the US, added that one of the best ways to prevent the next pandemic is to "sample animals across the world to characterise potential pathogens".

Instead of spending money to curb outbreaks once they occurred, "we could invest in reforestation and in trying to change the way we interact with wildlife, and alter our level of land-use change", Ruiz said.



Earlier in the pandemic, it became clear that efforts applying scientific approaches to prevent the next big outbreak could cost countries way less than the expenditures they have meted out to control COVID-19. A study published in July in the journal Science esti-

mated that COVID-19 may likely cost the global economy between USD 8.1 and 15.8 trillion. It added that preventing major outbreaks could be 500 times cheaper than the expenditures meted out to curb the ongoing pandemic. According to Ruiz, detecting or classifying every

single pathogen in the world's wildlife would be close to impossible, but new methods using machine learning algorithms can be used to generate a catalogue of pathogens from which the animal host and place where the next outbreak may happen could be predicted. One such international collaborative project that came into the spotlight in 2020 was USAID's PREDICT, which aimed to strengthen global capacity for the detection of new viruses with pandemic potential. Working with over 30 countries and screening more than 1,64,000 animals and people, the project has detected nearly 100 novel viruses globally, including the Bombali ebolavirus and the deadly Marburg virus. The PREDICT project by the US has created this big dataset of viruses circulating in bats and other wildlife.

Residual terrorist strength in Kashmir currently below 200

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 4: Residual terrorist strength in Jammu and Kashmir is currently below 200, said the Ministry of Defence in its annual review. The ministry also pointed out that local recruitment is decreasing giving a serious blow to the nefarious designs of Pakistan to "indigenise" the movement and fuel unrest in the valley.

"Well synergised, intelligence-based operations have resulted in significant successes and have considerably degraded terrorist leadership and their capabilities in Jammu and Kashmir," the ministry said.



Attempts to spread violence South of Pir Panjal Range have been comprehensively defeated by proactive operations. It is South of Pir Panjal Range from where terrorists from Pakistan make attempts to infiltrate in the valley.

The ministry also said that possible steps are being taken to provide a secure environment to the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Attempts of inimical elements to mislead people by running disinformation campaigns were defeated by proactively monitoring the situation and engaging with the local population.

India condemns terrorist attacks in S.Niger

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: India Monday strongly condemned the terrorist attacks in southwestern Niger that left over 70 civilians dead and many injured.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said India has always opposed and rejected terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and urged concerted global action against the menace, including cross-border terrorism. Over 70 people were killed and many injured in terror attacks on two villages in southwestern Niger on Saturday.

In a statement, the MEA said India stands in solidarity with the government and people of Niger in the fight against terrorism. "India strongly condemns the terrorist attacks in southwestern Niger on January 2, where more than 70 civilians have been killed and many injured. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and government of Niger," it said.

"India stands in solidarity with the Government and people of Niger in the fight against terrorism. India has always opposed and rejected terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and has urged concerted action by the international community against terrorism, including cross-border terrorism," it said.



I feel proud and content that in such unfavourable conditions (COVID-19), Maharashtra has not stopped and will never stop

SEVERAL PARTS OF NORTH INDIA WITNESS RAINS

Several parts of north India witnessed light to moderate rains due to a western disturbance and above-normal temperatures on Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said



of the day quote

Gujarat is fully equipped for vaccination against COVID-19. Soon, the Made in India vaccine will be available and the vaccination process will start



VIJAY RUPANI | GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER

All types of arrangements have been made. I have decided not to get vaccinated for now. First, we will ensure that the priority groups get vaccinated and later I will go for vaccination



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN | MADHYA PRADESH CHIEF MINISTER

If a minister of the Indian government coming to West Bengal is termed as an outsider, then I want to ask that people from which place are considered as insiders



ANURAG THAKUR | UNION MINISTER OF STATE FOR FINANCE

SHORT TAKES

Sovan Chatterjee skips BJP roadshow

Kolkata: BJP's Kolkata zone observer and former city mayor Sovan Chatterjee on Monday skipped a party roadshow that he was scheduled to lead in the metropolis. Chatterjee could not attend the rally due to the sudden illness of his friend Baisakhi Banerjee, BJP sources said.

Farmer commits suicide in Gujarat

Mahisagar: A 70-year-old farmer has allegedly committed suicide in Gujarat's Mahisagar district, apparently over delay in release of funds to construct a house sanctioned to him under a government scheme, police said Monday.

Six killed in road mishap

Gajraula (UP): A cattle-laden truck overturned after suffering a tyre burst on the Delhi-Moradabad highway Monday, leaving six people dead and 10 others seriously injured, officials said.

Bharat Biotech hits out at critics

COVAXIN, INDIA'S INDIGENOUS COVID-19 VACCINE BY BHARAT BIOTECH, IS DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ICMR - NIV

AGENCIES

Hyderabad, Jan 4: Amid questions raised by industry experts and opposition parties on the emergency approval to its coronavirus vaccine Covaxin without publication of efficacy data, Bharat Biotech's chairman Monday hit out at critics saying his firm had carried out "200 per cent honest clinical trials".

Speaking to reporters at a virtual press conference, Krishna Ella said his firm has a track record of producing safe and efficacious vaccines and was transparent with all data. "We are not just conducting clinical trials in India. We have done clinical trials in more than 12 countries including the UK," he said.

Covaxin addresses an unmet medical need and has generated excellent safety data with robust immune response to multiple viral proteins that persist, he said. Ella said his company had carried out "200 per cent honest clinical trials".

"Give me one week's time, I will give you confirmed data," he said. Bharat Biotech has manufactured



16 vaccines, he pointed out.

"We are not just an Indian company, we are truly a global company. People should not accuse us that we don't know clinical research..." he said.

Without naming Serum Institute CEO Adar Poonawalla, who had termed vaccines other than that of Pfizer, Moderna and Oxford-AstraZeneca as "just like water", Ella said, "We do 200 per cent honest clinical trials and yet we receive backlash. If I am wrong, tell me. Some companies have branded me like water."

He also said the Bharat Biotech vaccine is not inferior to that developed by Pfizer. "You look at Pfizer: They have five publications (of vaccine data). Bharat Biotech (has) five publications. We are no way inferior to Pfizer in terms of publication (of data)," Ella said.

Ella said it was wrong to say Bharat Biotech was not transparent with data and went on to cite the number of publications by the company in comparison with industry peers. "I think we are the only company I can categorically say (which)

has got extensive research experience and extensive publication (in) peer reviewed journals. Many people say that I am not transparent in my data. I think people should have the patience to read (on) internet and look at what our articles are," he said.

The approval by the Indian drug regulator to Covaxin without revealing its efficacy results has been questioned by industry experts and opposition Congress. On Sunday, Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala lauded scientists and researchers of Bharat Biotech for the indigenous vaccine but the party's senior leaders like Anand Sharma, Jairam Ramesh and Shashi Tharoor raised concerns over the grant of approval to its vaccine without the phase 3 trials, saying it is "premature" and can prove dangerous.

Reacting to the allegations, Ella said he does not have any political affiliations and he is a scientist. "Don't accuse us of inexperience... We are not just an Indian company, we are truly a global company," Ella said. He said Covaxin is currently undergoing phase 3 clinical trials involving 24,000 volunteers with less than 10 per cent side effects and the efficacy data is expected to be published in March. Defending the decision to award Covaxin emer-

New COVID-19 strain: Total 38 test positive

A total of 38 people have tested positive for the new UK variant of SARS-CoV-2 in India so far, the Union Health Ministry said Monday. These include the 29 cases which were announced till Friday. All these people have been kept in single room isolation in designated healthcare facilities by respective state governments and their close contacts have also been put under quarantine, the ministry said.

gency approval, he said the emergency use authorisation was based on 2019 rules of the Government of India and went on to state that even the US grants emergency authorisation to a company with good immunisation data.

He alleged that AstraZeneca, which has developed a vaccine for COVID-19, was administering Paracetamol to volunteers along with the antidote leading to suppression of "adverse reaction" if any. Bharat Biotech was the first to identify the Zika virus and the first to file global patents for the Zika and Chikungunya vaccines, he said.

TN govt allows 100% occupancy in cinema halls



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, Jan 4: Lending its ears to the demand of the owners, the Tamil Nadu government on Monday permitted 100 per cent occupancy in cinema halls in the state.

According to the government, the decision was taken as the number of Covid-19 infections was coming down in the state.

The government had earlier permitted theatres to screen movies with 50 per cent occupancy.

The decision comes ahead of the Pongal festival when new movies are slated for release and also new coronavirus clusters - star hotels, IIT-Madras - are cropping up. The government's decision comes in the wake of actor Vijay meeting Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami, who made a request to allow 100 per cent occupancy in the theatres. Vijay's movie "Master" is set for release during Pongal.

'UP's anti-conversion law applies to all'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: Defending the anti-conversion law enacted by the Yogi Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh, a group of former judges, civil servants and veterans Monday hit out at its critics, saying they seem to have "usurped" the constitutional power of judicial review to put every law of the land to the "test of their own whims".

In a statement signed by 224 persons, including those from academia, they claimed that the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Ordinance, referred as 'love jihad' law by Hindutva groups, applies to everyone and safeguards the dignity of women.

Slamming the law's critics for terming it illegal and anti-Muslim, the statement alleged that it is a "shocking obsession of this biased group to stoke communal fire by investigating the religious minorities". Former UP chief secretary Yogendra Narain, former Punjab chief secretary Sarvesh Kaushal, former Haryana chief secretary Dharam Vir, former Delhi High Court chief justice Rajendra Menon, former ambassador Lakshmi Puri and former Maharashtra DGP, Praveen Dixit are among the signatories to the statement. Their support to the law came days after 104 retired civil servants alleged that Uttar Pradesh has become the "epicentre of politics of hate, division and bigotry" and the in-

stitutions of governance are "steeped in communal poison".

They had sought repeal of the law, saying it is being used to particularly victimise Muslim men. Countering them, the Monday statement said 'Ganga-Jamuni' culture, a colloquial term for peaceful interfaith existence, does not stand for unlawful conversions with criminal intent, leading to murders, mutilation, torture and betrayal of women in particular.

"We strongly believe in a secular India with harmonious coexistence of people of all faiths, and consider unlawful conversions with wrongful intent and questionable means a threat to communal harmony. We urge all state governments to discharge their functions in the best public interest in maintaining law and order, social harmony and dignity of women without succumbing to any pressures," it said. The signatories said the former civil servants, who had issued a statement slamming the law, should have kept in mind that even prior to India's independence, princely states, including Kota, Patna, Surguja, Udaipur and Kalahandi, had passed laws regarding religious conversions. After independence, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand among others had legislated on matters relating to unlawful conversions, they noted, adding that new laws reflect the evolving needs of a dynamic society.

GOLDEN FIELD



A woman works in a mustard field during a cold winter morning at a village on the outskirts of Ajmer

PTI PHOTO

IIT DELHI, AIIA TO DEVELOP DEVICE FOR WOUND HEALING

Ayurveda is one of the world's oldest known medical systems, which originated in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) here and the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) have joined hands to work on seven collaborative projects including development of herbal wound dressing, a fumigation device for aiding wound healing and a herbal formulation to reduce the harmful effects of reusing cooking oil.

"The amalgamation of traditional knowledge with technology is expected to benefit the society at large by offering better health care options. Validation of the traditional knowledge sys-



tems is the key, in order to make these forms of medicine more widely acceptable worldwide," IIT Delhi Director V Ramgopal Rao said. The seven collaborative projects focusing on various Ayurvedic

formulations and practices include - effect of the six Ayurvedic rasas (tastes) on gastrointestinal secretions; developing herbal formulations that would reduce the harmful effects of reusing cooking oil; developing a biodegradable, herbal wound dressing; studying the effects of the 'Brahmari pranayama' on the nervous system; analysing the impacts of bhasmas (ashes) on proteins implicated in neurodegenerative diseases; developing a 'dhoopantra' - a fumigation device for aiding wound healing; and early cancer detection and assessment of breast cancer response to Ayurvedic drugs.

IT dept quizzes Vadra for 9 hrs in benami properties case

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 4: Income Tax department officials on Monday questioned Congress President Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra for over nine hours in connection with the probe into the 'benami' properties case.

However, Vadra described his questioning as "vendetta politics" and said that the government is trying to divert attention from the ongoing farmers' protest.

A team of IT department sleuths on Monday morning arrived at the Sukhdev Vihar residential premises of Vadra who is married to Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.



Earlier in the day, an I-T department source related to the probe told IANS, "An I-T team is at Vadra's residence to record his statement in the benami properties matter."

The team of sleuths left his residence at 6 p.m. The team arrived at his residence as he was unable to join the investigation due to Covid pandemic.

Speaking to the media outside his residence after the team left his house, Vadra said, "I replied to all the questions asked by the I-T department sleuths in nine hours. If they come once again, I will share my answers with them."

Can't confiscate animals before owner convicted: SC to Centre

PNN/AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 4: The Supreme Court Monday told the Centre that rules notified in 2017 for confiscating animals of traders and transporters would be stayed if not either withdrawn or amended.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and comprising Justices A.S. Bopanna and V. Ramasubramanian asked the Centre to either withdraw or amend rules notified in 2017 for confiscating animals of traders and transporters during the pendency of trial in cases under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The top court observed that the

rules are contrary to the law, and insisted that the court would stay them. The law provides that animals can be confiscated only if the owner is convicted under the Act. The court told the Centre's counsel that it cannot confiscate animals and keep them before the owner is convicted. "Your rules are contrary. You either withdraw it or we will stay it," noted the bench.

A plea by traders' associations have claimed the seizure of their livestock, which supports livelihood of their families, was being done under the 2017 rules. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Care and Maintenance of Case Property Animals) Rules, 2017

framed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, were notified on May 23, 2017.

The top court emphasised that the animals are a source of livelihood for the people concerned. "Animals are a source of livelihood. We are not talking about pet dogs and cats. People live on the basis of their animals," said the bench.

Additional Solicitor General Jayant K. Sud, representing Centre, at the beginning of the hearing submitted before the bench that the 2017 rules have been notified. The bench replied the government cannot confiscate the cattle and keep them before a person is convicted. Citing atrocities on animals, Sud sub-



mitted that the rules have been notified. The bench replied the rules are clear that only the person who is convicted can lose the animal.

"We cannot have a situation where the rule is running contrary to the express provision of the Act," said the bench.

The bench scheduled the matter for further hearing on January 11, after Sud sought time to allow him to take instructions in the matter.

The Buffalo Traders Welfare Association had moved the top court challenging the constitutional validity of these rules. The traders have claimed they were being forcibly deprived of their cattle which are sent to 'gaushalas'. In July 2019, the apex court had asked for the Centre's response on the traders' plea.

The Rules have emboldened "anti-social elements" to take matters into their own hands and loot cattle traders and it has become a cause for polarisation of society, the petitioner added.

international



There's no way I lost Georgia... I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have. Because we won the state

DONALD TRUMP | US PRESIDENT

NEW COIN TO MARK UK QUEEN'S 95TH B'DAY

The UK's Royal Mint has announced that it will commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's 95th birthday with a new £5 coin. On April 21, Queen Elizabeth II will become the first UK monarch to turn 95-years-old, the BBC reported



of the day quote

My government is mulling the declaration of another state of emergency in Tokyo and three surrounding prefectures due to an unabated Covid-19 resurgence in those areas



YOSHIIDE SUGA | JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER

We need a Constitution which is the foundation of the establishment of the future democratic federal union complying with principles and standards



U WIN MYINT | MYANMAR PRESIDENT

The (Covid-19) deaths are real deaths. The jam-packed hospitals and stressed-out healthcare workers are not fake. That's real



ANTHONY FAUCI | TOP US INFECTIOUS DISEASES EXPERT

SHORT TAKES

Pastor killed in church shooting

Washington: A pastor was killed and two others were injured during a shooting at a church in the US state of Texas, police said, adding the perpetrator was arrested and charged. The incident took place at around 9.20 a.m. Sunday at the Starrville Methodist Church in Winona, about 360 km north of Houston, Xinhua news agency quoted Larry Christian of the Smith County Sheriff's Office as saying to reporters. He said that no services were going on in the church when the 21-year-old old suspect opened fire.

Talks on Nile dam suspended

Khartoum: Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia have agreed to suspend the tripartite talks over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) built on the Nile River, for one week. The three countries announced the decision in a joint communique issued following a video meeting Sunday in presence of the African Union (AU) experts and the international observers. "The meeting adopted a proposal by Sudan to devote this week for bilateral meetings among the three countries and the team of experts and observers," the communique said.

Militants attack kill 9 in Syria

Damascus: Militants ambushed buses traveling down a highway in central Syria late Sunday, killing nine people, including a 13-year-old girl, state media reported. The ambush is the second this week to target buses traveling between government-controlled areas and to be blamed on suspected Islamic State militants. Another attack Wednesday killed nearly 30 people, most of them soldiers returning home for the holidays.

68K Lankans await repatriation

Colombo: Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry has said that an estimated 68,000 overseas nationals were awaiting repatriation due to the global coronavirus pandemic. The Ministry said that it has been carrying out the task of repatriation for almost a year and to date 60,470 Sri Lankans, including pilgrims, students, government or armed forces officials, migrant workers, short term visitors, seafarers and cases on compassionate grounds have been repatriated from abroad.

India's S-400 deal with Russia may trigger US sanctions: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Jan 4: India's multi-billion dollar deal to purchase the Russian-made S-400 air defence system may trigger US sanctions on New Delhi, a US Congressional report has warned.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) - an independent and bipartisan research wing of US Congress - in its latest report to Congress, said India is "eager for more technology-sharing and co-production initiatives, while the United States urges more reforms in India's defence offsets policy and higher Foreign Direct Investment caps in its defence sector."

Prepared for the members of the

Congress for them to take informed decisions, the report went on to warn that "India's multi-billion dollar deal to purchase the Russian-made S-400 air defence system may trigger US sanctions on India under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act."

The CRS' reports are neither an official report of the US Congress nor reflect the view of Congressmen. They are prepared by independent experts for the lawmakers to take informed decisions.

In October 2018, India had signed a USD 5 billion deal with Russia to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems, despite a warning from the Trump administration that going ahead with the con-



tract may invite US sanctions.

In 2019, India made the first tranche of payment of around \$800 million to Russia for the missile systems. The S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system.

Last month, Russia had said that implementation of its ongoing de-

fence deals with India including the supply of a batch of S-400 missile systems is advancing well notwithstanding the threat of US sanctions.

At a press conference in New Delhi last month, Russian ambassador to India Nikolay Kudashev appeared to criticise the US sanctions

on Turkey for procuring the S-400 missile systems under a \$2.5 billion deal, saying Moscow does not recognise such unilateral actions.

"We do not recognise or welcome unilateral sanctions as a language or tool or instrument of interstate or international relations, other than those applied by the UN Security Council, this is also the case of Turkey," he said.

"As far as India is concerned, we share the same platform. India's position is also crystal clear: No sanctions are acknowledged other than those imposed by the UN Security Council. Whatever the future is, we believe that our ties could withstand the coming challenges," he said.

Bill introduced in US House to end Pak's non-NATO ally status

The major NATO-ally status allows countries to enter into cooperative research and development projects with the Department of Defense on a shared-cost basis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Jan 4: On the first day of the 117th Congress, a lawmaker has introduced a Bill in the US House of Representatives to terminate the designation of Pakistan as a Major non-NATO ally.

Introduced by Republican Congressman Andy Biggs, the Bill removes Pakistan's designation as a major non-NATO ally, a status that allows for various benefits such as access to excess US defence supplies and participation in co-operative defence research and development projects.

The Bill also notes that the US President cannot issue a separate designation of Pakistan as a major NATO ally unless a presidential certification that Pakistan continues to conduct military operations



The Bill seeks a presidential certification that Pakistan has taken steps to demonstrate its commitment to preventing the Haqqani Network from using any Pakistani territory as a safe haven

The Bill also asks the President to certify that Pakistan has shown progress in arresting and prosecuting Haqqani network's senior leaders and mid-level operatives

that are contributing to significantly disrupting the safe haven and freedom of movement of the Haqqani network in Pakistan.

It also seeks a presidential certification that Pakistan has taken

steps to demonstrate its commitment to preventing the Haqqani Network from using any Pakistani territory as a safe haven and that the Pakistan government actively coordinates with Afghanistan to restrict the movement of militants, such as the Haqqani network, along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

The Bill also asks the President to certify that Pakistan has shown progress in arresting and prosecuting Haqqani network's senior leaders and mid-level operatives.

Trump suspended all financial, security aid to Pakistan in 2018. Pakistan was named a major non-NATO ally during the Bush administration in 2004. Currently, there are 17 major non-NATO allies.

'Iran begins 20 pc uranium enrichment'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tehran, Jan 4: Iran said Monday it has begun enriching uranium up to 20 per cent at an underground nuclear facility, a short, technical step to weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent amid escalating tensions with the US.

Iranian state television quoted spokesman Ali Rabiei as saying that President Hassan Rouhani has given the order for the move at the Fordo facility.

Iran's decision to begin enriching to 20 per cent a decade ago nearly brought an Israeli strike targeting its nuclear facilities, tensions that only abated with the 2015 atomic deal. A resumption of 20 per cent enrichment could see that breaksmanship return.

The move comes after President Donald Trump withdrew the US unilaterally from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018. In the time since, there have been a series of escalating incidents between the two countries.

Iran's decision comes after its parliament passed a bill, later approved by a constitutional watchdog aimed at hiking enrichment to pressure Europe into providing sanctions relief. It also serves as pressure ahead of the inauguration of President-elect Joe Biden, who has said he is willing to re-enter the



nuclear deal.

Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency last week that it planned to take the step.

Shielded by the mountains, Fordo is ringed by anti-aircraft guns and other fortifications. It is about the size of a football field, large enough to house 3,000 centrifuges, but small and hardened enough to lead US officials to suspect it had a military purpose when they exposed the site publicly in 2009.

The 2015 deal saw Iran agree to limit its enrichment in exchange for sanctions relief. The accord also called for Fordo to be turned into a research-and-development facility.

Under Iran's former hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran began enrichment at the 20 per cent level. Israel, which has its own undeclared nuclear weapons program, feared Tehran was building an atomic bomb.

Pelosi re-elected as Speaker of US House of Representatives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Jan 4: Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi has been narrowly re-elected as the speaker of the US House of Representatives for the 117th Congress.

Pelosi, 80, from the Democratic party, secured 216 votes in a tight contest against Republican Kevin McCarthy, who got support from 209 Congressmen.

According to the House Clerk, a total of 427 votes were cast. One vote went to Senator Tammy Duckworth and one to Congressman Hakeem Jeffries. Notably, six Democratic lawmakers did not vote for Pelosi, while all the 209 Republicans stood by McCarthy, who is now the House

Minority Leader. The Democratic Party has 222 seats in the House.

The US House of Representatives has a strength of 435 voting members and six non-voting members.

Pelosi received two more votes than the 2014 votes, which is the majority of members who participated in the election by voting for someone by name, soon thereafter announced that this is her last term as the House Speaker.

Pelosi has led the House Democrats since 2003. In 2007, she created history by becoming the first woman speaker of the House. She was re-elected in 2009. She served as the House Minority Leader from 2011 to 2019, when she was elected as the Speaker after Democratic Party gained control of the House.

SLAIN SCRIBE



Journalists and mourners carry the coffin of TV reporter Adeb al-Janani, who was killed in an attack on Aden airport, during his funeral in Taiz, Yemen

UK begins Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine rollout

BRIAN PINKER, WHO IS AMONG THE FIRST RECEIVE THE VACCINATION, HAILED IT AS A MAJOR MILESTONE IN THE PHASED VACCINATION PROGRAMME BEING UNDERTAKEN BY THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, Jan 4: The UK Monday began rolling out the Oxford University vaccine developed by AstraZeneca as protection against Covid-19, with an 82-year-old Oxford-born dialysis patient becoming the first to receive the new jab.

Brian Pinker is among the first to be vaccinated by the Oxford University Hospital's (OUH) chief nurse, hailed as a major milestone in the phased vaccination programme being undertaken by the National Health Service (NHS) as the Oxford jab became the second vaccine approved for rollout after the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

A retired maintenance manager who has been having dialysis for kid-



ney disease at the hospital for a number of years, Pinker said he was pleased to be getting protection against the virus, giving him peace of mind as he continues to receive treatment.

"I am so pleased to be getting the Covid-19 vaccine today and really proud that it is one that was invented in Oxford. The nurses, doctors and staff today have all been brilliant and I can now really look

forward to celebrating my 48th wedding anniversary with my wife Shirley later this year," he said.

Alongside Pinker, music teacher and father-of-three Trevor Cowllett, aged 88, and Professor Andrew Pollard, a paediatrician working at OUH who also pioneered the Oxford jab, are among the first to be vaccinated Monday.

"The Oxford vaccine is a triumph of British science and I want to thank everyone involved in its development and production," said UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

"We know there are challenges still ahead of us over the coming weeks and months, but I'm confident this is the year we will defeat coronavirus and start building back better," he said.

Professor Pollard, Director of the Oxford Vaccine Group and Chief Investigator of the Oxford Vaccine Trial, said: "It was an incredibly proud moment for me to have received the actual vaccine that the University of Oxford and the AstraZeneca teams have worked so hard to make available to the UK and the world."

"As a paediatrician specialising in infections, I know how important it is that healthcare workers along with other priority groups are protected as soon as possible - a crucial role in defeating this terrible disease."

The new Oxford vaccine is easier to transport and store than the Pfizer jab, which has to be kept at minus 70 degrees until shortly be-

fore it is used, making it easier to deliver in care homes.

"Through its vaccine delivery plan, our exceptional NHS has now delivered over a million vaccinations to patients across the UK. The vaccine is our way out and this huge achievement brings us a step closer to the normality we've all been working hard to reclaim," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

"This will be a historic day, and cause for celebration, but it's vital everyone continues to follow the rules and remember hands, face, space, to keep ourselves and others safe," he said, warning that the new variant of the deadly virus still remains a major risk to the NHS services.



With an improvement in passenger traffic in 2021-22, Icra expects the aviation industry to report a y-o-y growth of around 57% in revenues, with the industry's net loss reducing to ₹14,600cr from an estimated net loss of ₹21,000cr in 2020-21

KINJAL SHAH | VICE-PRESIDENT, ICRA

INFRA CREDIT GROWS MARGINALLY

Infrastructure credit by banks and NBFC-IFCs in India marginally grew to ₹22.6 lakh crore in the first half of the current fiscal compared to ₹22.5 lakh crore in 2019-20. "While the infrastructure credit grew 7% in FY2020, it increased marginally to ₹22.6 lakh crore as on September 30, 2020," Icra Ratings said



of the day quote

Our first phase (of vaccination) comprises priority groups with high risk of mortality and our healthcare and frontline workers. For them, we believe, we have enough (Covid-19 vaccine) stockpile

VK PAUL | MEMBER, NITI AAYOG



The latest PMI results for the Indian manufacturing sector continued to point to an economy on the mend, as a supportive demand environment and firms' efforts to rebuild safety stocks underpinned another sharp rise in production

POLLYANNA DE LIMA | ASSOCIATE DIR (ECONOMICS), IHS MARKIT



Bengalis need to decide, debate and take decisive action. Bengal's economic future depends on a conducive, investor-friendly and proactive policy environment that encourages businesses

ANURAG SINGH THAKUR | UNION MINISTER



Covid-19 carnage: Tax pie undergoes subtle change



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: India's tax pie seems to have got altered with a sharp drop in direct tax collections resulting from a disproportionate impact of the Covid-19 carnage on incomes.

The share of indirect taxes, which mainly comprise of levy on goods and services as well as import duty has risen while that of direct taxes - made up of corporate and personal income tax - has gone down in 2020.

In an interview with PTI, Finance Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey said in a pandemic like this where the economy has been impacted, any large scale changes impact direct taxes more severely, whereas indirect tax collection is mostly proportional to business turnover and compliance.

"In a situation like this where the economy has been impacted and we are on the recovery path, the direct taxes are impacted more severely because the profitability of a company is not directly propor-

While the government has officially not released direct and indirect tax collections, industry sources said the share of indirect taxes in overall tax collections rose to about 56%, highest in over a decade

tional to the turnover always. If your turnover reduces below a certain benchmark then the profit will not merely reduce, but it may get into a negative zone and therefore the company may not pay any income tax as it will be into a loss.

"Similarly, when we are in a recovery phase, the companies will take a longer time to come into the profitable zone to pay income tax. In the case of indirect tax, it is more or less proportional to the business volume and turnover and

In a pandemic like this where the economy has been impacted, any large scale changes impact direct taxes more severely, whereas indirect tax collection is mostly proportional to business turnover and compliance

AJAY BHUSHAN PANDEY | FINANCE SECRETARY

compliance," he said.

While the government has officially not released direct and indirect tax collections, industry sources said the share of indirect taxes in overall tax collections rose to about 56 per cent, the highest in over a decade for the period. This follows a sharp 26-27 per cent decline in direct tax collections.

Direct taxes are a direct outcome of income levels while indirect taxes are mostly driven by consumption as demand for some goods is inelastic either because of them being essential in nature or not substitutable like petrol and diesel.

Excise collections rose in 2020 after the government raised the tax on petrol and diesel by ₹13 and ₹10 per litre, respectively.

Customs collections, which reflect duty paid on goods imported, grew substantially in November and December.

While the revenue in December was up 94 per cent to ₹16,157 crore, in November it was up 43 per cent to ₹11,598 crore.

Pandey said this buoyancy in Customs collection would be due to many factors, including the introduction of faceless assessment.

Oil prices surge on hopes of supply cap by 'OPEC+'



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 4: Crude oil prices surged Monday on expectations that 'OPEC+', the cartel of Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allied oil producing nations would limit the oil output at the current levels.

Brent crude crossed the \$53 per barrel mark and touched a multi-month high of \$53.17 a barrel which is the highest level since March, 2020. Market anticipates that in February the production levels of crude would remain at the same level as last year and with elevated demand, prices could remain firm

Similarly, the February contract of WTI crude on NYMEX was trading at \$49.53 per barrel, higher by 2.08 per cent from its previous close.

Market anticipates that in February the production levels of crude would remain at the same level as last year and with elevated demand, prices could remain firm.

On Sunday, Mohammad Barkindo, Secretary General of OPEC, said that while crude demand is expected to rise by 5.9 million barrels per day (bpd) to 95.9 million bpd this year, the cartel sees plenty of downside demand risks

Brent crude crossed the \$53 per barrel mark and touched a multi-month high of \$53.17 a barrel which is the highest level since March, 2020. Market anticipates that in February the production levels of crude would remain at the same level as last year and with elevated demand, prices could remain firm

Crude oil prices have held a steady range near the resistance levels of \$50. Crude oil prices are supported by vaccine rollout optimism and expectations that OPEC plus nations may keep output quota unchanged when they meet today

TAPAN PATEL | SENIOR ANALYST (COMMODITIES), HDFC SECURITIES

in the first half of 2021.

Tapan Patel, Senior Analyst (Commodities), HDFC securities said: "Crude oil prices have held a steady range near the resistance levels of \$50. Crude oil prices are supported by vaccine rollout optimism and expectations that OPEC plus nations may keep output quota unchanged when they meet today."

SHORT TAKES

HMSI reports 3% rise in Dec

New Delhi: Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) Monday reported 3% increase in total sales in December 2020 at 2,63,027 units. The company had sold total 2,55,283 units in the same month in 2019, HMSI said in a statement. Domestic sales last month stood at 2,42,046 units as against 2,30,197 units in December 2019, a growth of 5%, it added. "Signalling to demand recovery continuing post the festival season, Honda's two-wheeler Y-o-Y sales uptick continued for the fifth consecutive month in December as well," the company said.

GJC elect new chairman

Mumbai: The All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC), the national apex body of the gems and jewellery industry, has announced the appointment of Ashish Pethe as chairman and Saiyam Mehra as vice chairman for a period of two years. The entire e-Voting election process was conducted by an authorised independent person, and the voting platform was created by a digital agency, according to a statement.

Reliance Jio to move HC

Mumbai: Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), through its subsidiary Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL), in a petition mentioned to be filed in the Punjab and Haryana High Court Monday, has sought the urgent intervention of government authorities to bring a complete stop to the illegal acts of vandalism by miscreants. These acts of violence have endangered the lives of thousands of its employees and caused damage and disruption to the vital communications infrastructure, RIL said.

Sugar production up 42% in Oct-Dec

New Delhi: India's sugar production increased 42% y-o-y during October-December period at 110.22 lakh tonne on higher cane output and an early start of mills in Maharashtra, according to trade data. Sugar marketing year runs from October to September. Indian Sugar Mills Association said in a statement that mills produced 110.22 lakh tonne of sugar during (Oct-Dec) 2020-21.

JSPL posts highest steel production in Dec 2020



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: JSPL Steel operations reported its highest-ever monthly production volumes during December, 2020, according to a report issued by the company.

The official report claimed that JSPL produced 7.27 lakh tonnes of steel in December, where its integrated steel plant at Angul reported the highest-ever monthly production. The Angul plant registered 4.16 lakh tonnes of production.

The company's Raigarh steel plant also reported the highest monthly production of 3.11 lakh tonnes. JSPL also reported the highest-ever monthly sales of 7.11 lakh tonnes in December (last month).

The company posted a record standalone steel production of 19.3

lakh tonnes in Q3, FY21 as compared to 16.1 lakh tonnes in Q3, FY20.

Similarly, JSPL's standalone steel sales also increased by 12% Y-o-Y. It reached 18.8 lakh tonnes of sales in Q3, FY21 as compared to 16.7 lakh tonnes in Q3, FY20. JSPL's Steel exports increased by 18% Y-o-Y to 3.87 lakh tonnes in Q3, FY21 contributing 21% to the total sales volumes in the country.

"We are proud of our dedicated workforce who achieved such an extraordinary increase in the production with existing capacity by way of optimising various operating parameters without any Capex. We will achieve even greater heights in times to come," said VR Sharma, Managing Director, JSPL.

Pradhan seeks power plant boost for Nalco's Brownfield project

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Union Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Monday wrote a letter to Union Minister of Coal, Mines Prahalad Joshi urging to increase the capacity of Nalco's Aluminium smelter plant at Angul.

In his letter, Pradhan requested, "Nalco is undertaking a Brownfield expansion project for their aluminium smelter plant at Angul. I would like to put forward a proposal for the commencement of said project for increasing the capacity of this plant from 0.46 MTPA to 1 MTPA, in view of the abundant availability of alumina (1.5 MTPA) at Angul, which include construction of a 1,400 MW feeder captive power plant (CPP)."

The cost of the project is estimated to be around ₹22,000 crore and it is presently under acquisition, the minister wrote.

Nalco's bauxite production capacity will increase from 7.3 MTPA to 10.5 MTPA after operationalisation of Pottangi mines.

Out of this, up to 3.1 MTPA consists of alumina which has potential to be produced into 1.5 MTPA of aluminium.

BIZ BUZZ

Realme rolls out smart watches

Bhubaneswar: Realme, one of India's most popular tech-lifestyle brands, Monday launched the newest additions to its AIoT portfolio. It launched the premium smart watch segment with the realme Watch S Series. Watch S Pro is the first realme watch made of stainless steel, featuring a big 3.5cm AMOLED touch screen with advanced Always-On Display, 15 sports modes, 5 ATM, GPS sensor and a large 420mAh battery for the first time. Watch S Pro is priced at ₹9,999 and available at realme's website and Flipkart. Watch S the most versatile smart watch in the segment comes with a 3.3cm large colour touch screen, heart rate and spo2 monitor, 16 sports modes, powered by a 390mAh battery; priced ₹4,999. The brand is constantly innovating and bringing best-in-class technology with stylish designs for the consumers.



Kirin Holdings to invest \$30mn in 'Bira' maker B9

New Delhi: Japan's Kirin Holdings is set to invest \$30 million in beer maker B9 Beverages for a sub-10 per cent stake in the New Delhi-based company. B9 Beverages was in talks with several international brewing majors, including Kirin, and other investors to sell a stake of up to 20% in the company, media reports said. The investment comes as a major boost for the beer maker amid the severe impact of the pandemic. The company has reported losses in the recent year. B9 expects this investment to help the company reach break-even in the upcoming financial year. As per the reports, both the companies will explore business synergies post the investment. It would also boost Bira's plans to launch products in Japan later this year. The deal is likely to complete in the next few days.



Bosch Power Tools launches BeConnected

Bhubaneswar: Bosch Power Tools launched the all new BeConnected, a QR code-based web application. By scanning the QR codes on each power tool, the user can check whether the product is genuine or not along with its complete technical specifications. Also, by scanning the QR code on the tool, they can register the tools for warranty by uploading the invoice and can also avail exciting offers available from time to time. Bosch is offering a '6-month extended warranty' for the power tools with BeConnected QR codes. Currently over 75% of the tools are available with BeConnected QR codes. By Q4, 2021, Bosch is planning to roll out 100% BeConnected enabled tools in the Indian market. BeConnected is a web application that provides vital information like: location of dealers and service centers, product information, tutorial videos, user reviews, information on new products, and timely reminders to service the tool.

Jack Ma's 'disappearance' may hit Indian firms in long run

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 4: Call it a double whammy. First, reports surfaced in August last year that China's Alibaba Group has put on hold plans to invest in Indian companies amid geopolitical tensions between the two nations. Now, the "disappearing" act by Alibaba founder and owner of fintech venture Ant Group, Jack Ma, may have left top-notch Indian digital firms flummoxed.

According to US-based PitchBook that delivers data on private capital markets, Alibaba and its affiliates Alibaba Capital Partners and Ant Group (earlier known as Ant Financial) invested more than \$2 billion in Indian companies since 2015.

Overall, in the last five years, Chinese investors (including Tencent) have poured in over \$5.7

billion into the Indian startup ecosystem, according to data from Venture Intelligence.

The companies where Alibaba Group via its fintech ventures has invested in include digital payments platform Paytm, online food delivery platform Zomato and BigBasket.

Zomato in January last year raised \$150 million from Ant Financial. Ant Financial has been an investor in Zomato since 2018.

Meanwhile, Paytm in December refuted a report that claimed that Ant Group is considering the sale of its 30 per cent stake in the home-

grown digital payments major. Ant Group also said that the report is based on "false information".

Jack Ma's fallout with the Chinese government started when the Shanghai Stock

Exchange (SSE) in November postponed Ant Group's listing at \$37 billion, which would have been the biggest IPO ever.

The Shanghai Stock Exchange cited regulatory changes as the reason behind this sudden suspension. Alibaba shares plunged by almost 10% in Hong Kong after the news, as Ma lost more than \$3 billion in his net worth. Since then, Ma has been nearly untraceable.

The People's Bank of China (the country's central bank), December 26, "summoned Ant Group for regulatory talks, announcing a sweeping plan for the fintech firm to 'rectify' its regulatory violations".

The banking authority has laid out a five-point compliance agenda for Ant Group. The agenda is that Ant Group should return

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TEAM INDIA TEST NEGATIVE



Team India, along with their support staff pose for a photograph after their win in the second Test at Melbourne

We are 100% going to Brisbane: Lyon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Jan 4: Australia off-spinner Nathan Lyon Monday said they are '100 per cent' sure of Brisbane hosting the fourth Test against India, playing down media reports that the tourists are reluctant to travel there in view of stricter quarantine rules.

The fourth Test is scheduled to be held in Brisbane from January 15, but Lyon added his team is currently focussed on the third match, which will be played in Sydney from January 7.

"100 per cent planning on going to Brisbane and sticking with plan A," said Lyon at a virtual press conference. "We have heard nothing as players, so we have got obviously travel up to Sydney today and get ripping there, and hopefully, get the result that we are after and then straight on playing in Brisbane."

Australia have got a good record at Brisbane while India are yet to win a Test at the Gabba. "We all know how much we love playing cricket at the Gabba and we know our result there as well with our records. So, all plans to go to Gabba, that is for sure."

According to Australian media reports, the Indians are not happy at the possibility of going for another quarantine in Brisbane, since

they have already served one upon entering Australia.

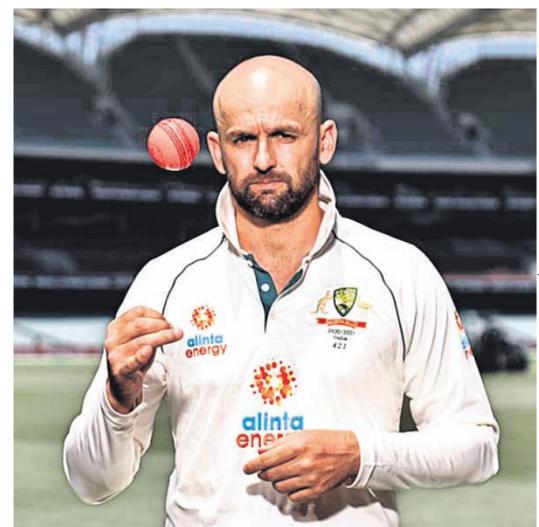
"To be honest mate, I am not thinking about plan B or not playing at the GABBA. I, for 100 per cent, think we are going there and we are preparing for the Gabba."

Lyon is aware that many players in both the groups have been staying in a bubble for close to six months, but he called it a 'small sacrifice' under the current circumstances.

"To be honest, regarding quarantine, I know there are few people from both squads, who have been in the bubble for close to six months now. But, in my eyes, it is a very small sacrifice, for us to get out there and play the game we love and put a lot of smiles on lot of people's faces around the world," added Lyon.

I am not really worried about what's being reported, it is for us to worry about what we can control and the information that we are receiving from the people at CA and the medical people. It is just about us making sure that we are very well prepared for the Sydney Test

NATHAN LYON



SCG limited to 25% crowd capacity



A look at the Sydney Cricket Ground

The SCG had hosted 2 ODIs and as many T20Is during limited-overs series against India. First 3 games saw 18,000 crowd, while the last one saw 30,000 attendance

The SCG had hosted two ODIs and as many T20s during the limited overs leg of India's tour. The first three games were played in front of a limited 18000 crowd before restrictions were lifted for the final T20 December 8 with more than 30000 attending the game.

The match will now have to be re-ticketed with the existing holders getting an exclusive window to re-buy the tickets from 5pm local time Monday through to 12pm Tuesday. All remaining public tickets will be released at 12pm Tuesday.

"In response to the public health situation in NSW, we are working closely with Venues NSW and NSW Health to put appropriate bio-security measures in place for our staff, players, match officials, broadcasters and fans to ensure we play the third Test at the SCG safely."

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sydney, Jan 4: The crowd limit for the third Test between India and Australia, beginning here from Thursday has been reduced to 25 per cent of the SCG's seating capacity on advice of the New South Wales government after fresh COVID-19 cases were recorded in the city.

Approximately 9500 people would be allowed to watch the game with the series currently locked at 1-1 following India's remarkable comeback in Melbourne. The SCG has a seating capacity of about 38,000.

"Reducing the capacity of the venue is crucial in achieving social distancing requirements, and we sincerely thank ticket-holders for their patience, as we process refunds today, reconfigure the SCG seating plan to deliver these social distancing measures and go back on sale," Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley said in a statement.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Jan 4: The Indian cricket team and their support staff have returned negative in the latest COVID-19 tests conducted here ahead of the third Test against Australia in Sydney, the BCCI said Monday. The game is due to start January 7 and The Indian team landed in Sydney Monday as scheduled.

"Playing members of the Indian Cricket Team and support staff underwent an RT-PCR Test for COVID-19 January 3, 2021. All tests have returned negative results," the BCCI said in a short statement.

The statement came a couple of days after five Indian players - vice-captain Rohit Sharma, opener Shubman Gill, wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant, pacer Navdeep Saini and batsman Prithvi Shaw - were placed in isolation when a video of them at an indoor restaurant was posted by a fan on Twitter.

Cricket Australia had announced that a joint investigation with the BCCI was on to determine whether it amounted to a breach of bio-security protocol for the series.

The five were, however, allowed to train and travel with the team for the match in Sydney. According to sources in the Indian contingent, they have been cleared to play in the third Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

All the players and support staff returning negative for COVID-19 is welcome news for the Indian team amid the controversy around the alleged breach of bio-security protocols.

Despite the announcement of a joint investigation by BCCI and Cricket Australia on the alleged breach, there has been no word on it from either of the two boards in the last two days.

According to the bio-security protocols set by CA, players are allowed to sit outside but not allowed to dine inside restaurants. The players, according to team sources, have maintained that they went in to escape a drizzle.

It is understood that the controversy has not gone down well with the travelling team and it is not amused with how CA has so far handled the issue.

The latest development is preceded by Australian media reports that the fourth Test in Brisbane has been jeopardised as the tourists are reluctant to travel there in view of stricter quarantine rules.

But the final Test, starting at the Gabba from January 15, is on as of now. The four-match series is currently locked 1-1 after India fought back with an eight-wicket triumph in the Melbourne Test following a humiliating loss in the opener in Adelaide.

Narzary fashions Hyderabad victory

POST NEWS NETWORK

Goa, Jan 4: Hyderabad FC returned to winning ways in the Indian Super League (ISL) as they registered a thumping 4-1 victory over Chennaiyin FC at the GMC Stadium in Bambolim, Monday.

Joel Chianese (50th minute), Halicharan Narzary (53rd & 79th) and Joao Victor (74th) were on the scoresheet for Hyderabad while Anirudh Thapa (67th) scored the only goal for Chennaiyin.

The first half proved to be an entertaining, end-to-end contest with both goalkeepers finding themselves busy. Hyderabad created better chances but were guilty of missing them.

Chennaiyin goalkeeper Vishal Kaith was called into action early in the opening minute. Aridane Santana received a long ball and flicked it towards Chianese, who made a run in the box and fired a shot, but saw his effort blocked by Kaith.

Chennaiyin also tested Hyderabad. They had the chance to draw first blood in the 31st minute but Laxmikant Kattimani made a



Halicharan Narzary wheels away in celebration after scoring one of his goals against Chennaiyin

fine save. Lallianzuala Chhangte made his way into the box from the left and cut inside, only to see his shot saved by Kattimani.

At the other end, Kaith produced an excellent save in the dying min-

utes of the first half to keep the scoreline goalless. After parrying away Ashish Rai's cross, Kaith denied Chianese at point-blank range. The ball fell to Rai again, whose shot rattled the woodwork.

Hyderabad registered a three-minute double early on in the second half. A mix-up from Chennaiyin's backline gave them the opener. Kaith and Eli Sabia made a mess of a chipped pass from Santana, allowing Chianese to score his maiden ISL goal.

Three minutes later, Hyderabad doubled their tally. They won a corner and did well to keep the ball in the box before Rahim Ali's clearance fell towards Narzary. The winger launched a cracking shot that struck the underside of the crossbar before heading into goal.

Chennaiyin reduced their deficit after a blunder from Kattimani who fluffed his lines while attempting to clear Ali's cross into the box, allowing Thapa an easy tap-in.

But Hyderabad soon restored their two-goal lead through Victor, who buried his shot into the top corner after receiving a pass from Rai.

Chennaiyin's defense was exposed again as they pushed for a late goal. Substitute Fran Sandaza released Narzary, who made his way from near the half-way line, into the box and produced a neat finish.

Manpreet urges players to be mentally prepared



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: Keeping the fast-evolving COVID-19 situation in mind, Indian men's hockey team captain Manpreet Singh says his side will need to be 'mentally prepared' for the several obstacles it might face on its way to the Tokyo Olympics.

Pushed back by a year due to the pandemic, the quadrennial sporting extravaganza is slated to be held in July-August.

"The biggest learning from last year was to not let external factors affect our goal. There could be many uncertainties but we need to only worry about what's within

our control and that is to work towards being our best. There could be several challenges leading up to the Olympic Games this year and we need to be mentally prepared for it," Manpreet said, putting things into perspective.

With only 200 days to go for the Olympics, Manpreet and Rani, the women's team skipper, believe the players in respective core groups will have to give their 100 per cent to be able to achieve their goals in Tokyo.

"The next 200 days is going to be the most important period of our lives. Each one of us have to give our 100 per cent in training and in competition if we want to see ourselves make the Indian Team for Tokyo," stated the midfielder.

Rani agreed that in the next few months the players will need to up their game in all aspects. "In the previous national camp which lasted over four months, we have really worked hard to reach the level we were previously at. In the next few months, our focus will be on improving further in all aspects of the game."

CA rejects reports of India seeking change of venue for 4th Test

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sydney, Jan 4: Cricket Australia (CA) chief executive Nick Hockley Monday dismissed reports that the Indian team is reluctant to play the fourth Test in Brisbane because of stricter quarantine rules there.

Hockley said the Indian cricket board was 'fully across (and) supportive' of quarantine requirements in Queensland. "We speak to our counterparts at the BCCI daily," he told reporters here.

"We've had nothing formal from the BCCI to suggest anything other than they're supportive. Both teams have wanted to play the schedule as we've set out," he asserted.

The third Test in the four-match series is scheduled to be played at the Sydney Cricket Ground from Thursday. The series is locked at 1-1 right now. The fourth game is due from January 15 at the Gabba.

The Australian media has claimed that the Brisbane Test is in jeopardy because of the tourists' reluctance to travel there in view of harder quarantine rules, having already served one upon entering Australia in November.

The reports, citing unnamed sources, claimed that the Indian team wanted the fourth Test to be also played in Sydney.

Queensland has closed its borders for people travelling from New South Wales, of which Sydney is the capital, due to the rising cases of COVID-19 in the city and surrounding areas.

Both the Indian and Australian teams travelled to Sydney Monday after all their players and support staff returned negative in latest round of COVID-19 tests.

Hockley's statement came two days after five Indian players - vice-captain Rohit Sharma, opener Shubman Gill, stumper Rishabh Pant, pacer Navdeep Saini and batsman Prithvi Shaw - were placed in isolation for an alleged breach of bio-security protocols.

Ronaldo helps Juve thump Udinese



Turin: Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice and created another goal as Juventus got back to winning ways in Serie A with a 4-1 victory over Udinese here Sunday, moving the champions up to fifth in the standings. Ronaldo opened the scoring with a trademark drive, after latching on to Aaron Ramsey's pass in the 31st minute, before threading a perfect through ball into the path of Federico Chiesa to score Juve's second goal four minutes into the second half. Ronaldo's second goal put the result beyond any doubt as he took his goal tally to 14 league goals for the season in the 70th minute, with Marvin Zeegelaar scoring an injury-time consolation for Udinese. There was still time for Paulo Dybala to score another goal for Juventus as Andrea Pirlo's side moved 10 points behind leaders AC Milan, with a game in hand.

Sky Blues outshine Blues

London: Manchester City shook off the impact of a COVID-19 outbreak in their ranks to outclass Chelsea 3-1 at Stamford Bridge and put themselves firmly in the Premier League title mix Sunday. Pep Guardiola's team responded in scintillating fashion with goals by Ilkay Gundogan, Phil Foden and Kevin De Bruyne dismantling Chelsea in 16 first-half minutes. Substitute Callum Hudson-Odoi did grab a stoppage-time consolation goal for the home team. The Sky Blues' vintage display lifted them to fifth in the table with 29 points, four behind joint leaders Liverpool and Manchester United having played one game less. A fourth defeat in six league games leaves the Blues in the eighth place with 26 points having played two games more than City.



Barca win Messi's landmark game



Barcelona: Lionel Messi set up Frenkie de Jong for a goal to help earn a 1-0 win at Huesca in the Argentine great's 750th overall appearance for Barcelona and his 500th in the Spanish league. The 33-year-old Messi trails only Xavi Hernandez as the Barcelona player with the most games played. Xavi played 767 games in all competitions, including 505 La Liga matches. Barcelona dominated last-place Huesca but could only manage De Jong's goal in the 27th minute. Messi lobbed a pass forward to meet De Jong's run behind the defense, with the Netherlands midfielder steering the ball inside the upright. The victory moved Barcelona ahead of Sevilla into fifth place. Ronald Koeman's team is 10 points behind leader Atletico Madrid, who got a late goal from Luis Suarez to win 2-1 at Alaves.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Barik lifts Jaguars

Cuttack: Nirbisankar Barik's (4/17) brilliant spell, along with a superb knock by Shamsul A Khan (62) helped Odisha Jaguars tame Odisha Cheetas in a match of the MGM Odisha T20 Cricket League at the Barabati Stadium here, Monday. Put into bat, Jaguars rode on knocks by Khan, Girija P Rout (37) and Abhijit S Barik (33 n o) to post 169/4. In response, Cheetas could muster only 121/9. Anurag Sarangi (31) was their top scorer. For Jaguars, Nirbisankar found an able ally in Manoj Kashyap (2/16).

Kapoor new AICF boss

New Delhi: Dr. Sanjay Kapoor has been elected as new president of All India Chess Federation (AICF), Monday. Kapoor defeated PR Venkat Ram Raja by two votes only. It is understood that Odisha played a very important role for the victory of Kapoor. He secured 33 votes while Raja got 31. Bharat Singh Chouhan has been elected as secretary.