



SARA'S MODESTY

Actor Sara Ali Khan says she doesn't believe in stardom as it keeps changing every Friday

LEISURE P2



VACCINE ROLLOUT

Medical workers, nursing home residents and politicians were vaccinated against the coronavirus across the European Union

INTERNATIONAL P10



RAHANE SCORES TON

Ajinkya Rahane scored a vital century as India took a lead of 82 runs in the second Test against Australia

SPORTS P12

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AIADMK TELLS BJP WHO'S BOSS IN TN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Dec 27: In its first poll rally here, the ruling AIADMK Sunday bluntly told ally BJP that it cannot be accommodated in the government if it won the Assembly elections, due next year, and asserted that Saffron party cannot make a mark in the Dravidian heartland of Tamil Nadu. The BJP has to endorse Chief Minister K Palaniswami's candidature for the CM's post for the polls, the AIADMK indicated and wanted its partner to agree to its other terms like non-participation in government and if not rethink of its 2021 electoral options.

Pointing to the deaths of AIADMK's top leader J Jayalalithaa and DMK's M Karunanidhi who opposed her, senior leader and AIADMK deputy coordinator KP Munusamy said that in the absence of such leaders, 'many' parties were now trying to make a political entry into Tamil Nadu and succeed but did not name any party. Some national parties, "opportunists, betrayers and a crowd," were blaming the Dravidian outfits, alleging they ruined Tamil Nadu by their 50 plus year rule of the state, he said. Munusamy wondered how accusa-

DRAVIDIAN POWER

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All such forces eyeing political gains should realise that Tamil Nadu would not endorse them as Dravidian ideology is the bedrock of the state's social and cultural milieu: AIADMK

Though AIADMK did not mention BJP by name directly, it was clear that the message was intended for the national party that led the Central government



K Palaniswami

tions of inefficiency could be hurled against the AIADMK government when the Centre had given so many awards to Tamil Nadu for its stellar performance in many sectors. Also, the state overall had superior infrastructure and facilities, be it education or health care amenities, he said. All such forces eyeing political gains should realise that Tamil Nadu would not endorse them as Dravidian ideology is the bedrock of the state's social and cultural milieu, he said. Tamil Nadu's socio-political landscape was nurtured by the Dravidian

movement, which was built on the ethos of Tamil culture, language and valour and hence the state was entirely different from the rest of the country, Munusamy said. Munusamy made the remarks in the presence of Chief Minister K Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam and other senior leaders. Assembly elections are due during April-May 2021 in Tamil Nadu. In his fiery speech, Munusamy, a senior leader seen as close to Panneerselvam, who is also the party coordinator, was clear in his political

message that BJP cannot succeed independently in Tamil Nadu and was very much dependent on AIADMK. He hinted that BJP should accept that AIADMK was the senior partner, endorse the candidature of Palaniswami or the saffron party may reconsider its electoral options for the 2021 polls. Though Munusamy did not mention BJP by name directly, it was clear that the message was intended for the national party that led the Central government. "Be it a national party or state party...the government will be led by

the AIADMK. There is no necessity for a coalition government. If any political party comes forward for an alliance arrangement with an idea of a coalition government, let them please think about it," he said. The provocation for the Dravidian major to be blunt seemed to be the continuing hesitancy, seen by political observers as a strategy of the state BJP leadership in endorsing Palaniswami as the chief ministerial candidate of the overall AIADMK-BJP alliance for the 2021 polls. The saffron party's TN unit had all along maintained that the CM nominee of the NDA in Tamil Nadu would be decided and announced by the BJP's national leadership. To make matters worse, senior BJP leader and Union Minister Prakash Javadekar, who was here Friday, toed the state unit's stand and declined to categorically say if his party continued its ties with the AIADMK or if it endorsed the candidature of Palaniswami. Some social media posts claimed that either BJP wanted to break away from the AIADMK alliance and form a separate front with Rajinikanth's proposed party or was merely 'posturing' to bargain for a Cabinet berth if AIADMK retained power.

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Centre extends validity of DLs, RCs till March 31

The Centre had earlier extended the validity of these documents till December 31, 2020

PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Centre has once again extended the validity of all vehicle-related documents in order to avoid crowding and the possible spread of Covid-19. All driving licences, registration certificates, and permits which were set to expire may now be used till March 31, 2021, according to a directory issued by the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to various State and Union Territory administrations. "Taking into consideration the need to prevent the spread of Covid-19, it is further advised that the validity of all of the above referred documents may be treated to be valid till March 31, 2021. This covers all documents whose validity has expired since February 1, 2020 or would expire by March 31, 2021," the directory says. "This will help out citizens in availing transport related services, while maintaining social distancing," it says. The ministry had earlier issued advisories dated March 30, June 9, and August 24 of this year, in which it extended the validity of documents related to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, and the Central Motor

All driving licences, registration certificates and permits which were set to expire may now be used till March 31, 2021

Vehicle Rules, 1989. They all said fitness, permit (all types), licence, registration or any other concerned document may be treated to be valid till December 31, 2020. The State Transport Authority (STA) in Odisha has also extended the date of validity for DL, registration and fitness certificates, permits of all types till March 31. The above directions relates to such vehicle documents which had expired since February or going to expire December 31, 2020. The STA posted the order issued by Transport commissioner in this regard through its official Twitter handle Sunday. As per the order, "The driving license test was cancelled from March 18 and subsequently slot quota was opened with less strength at Regional Transport Offices due Covid-19."

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Finally, the protesters are ready to talk. Please bring my earplugs.

SHORT TAKES

Lingaraj Temple reopens for devotees

Bhubaneswar: Shree Lingaraj Temple here reopened for devotees Sunday after remaining closed for almost nine months due to Covid-19 pandemic, officials said. Servitors and their family members were allowed entry into the oldest shrine of the state capital on the first day. They will be allowed to pray inside the temple till December 31, while the general public from outside the state capital will be allowed from January 6. The residents of Bhubaneswar can have the darshan of the Lord from January 3. The 11th century Shree Lingaraj temple is a unique place in India where both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu are worshipped together; making it a "Hari-Har" peeth. P3

3 killed, 6 hurt as bus overturns

Sundergarh: At least three persons were killed while six other passengers injured after the mini bus they were travelling in overturned near Balu Ghat in Rourkela Sunday. The bus was en-route to Rourkela from Lathikata. The mishap occurred after the vehicle hit the road divider, sources said. Following the incident, one person died on the spot while other passengers were immediately shifted to Rourkela government hospital where two others reportedly succumbed to their injuries.

WEATHER		BHUB	CTK
TEMP	MAX	27.6°C	27.8°C
	MIN	12.2°C	11.5°C
Humidity	57%	65%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	
Forecast		Dry weather likely	

Chinese delegation in Nepal to assess political situation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, Dec 27: A high-level Chinese delegation led by a vice minister of the Chinese Communist Party arrived in Kathmandu Sunday to "take stock" of Nepal's political situation after the dissolution of Parliament and subsequent split in the ruling Nepal Communist Party. Although no specific details about the agenda of the visit are available, the four-member delegation, led by Vice Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Guo Yezhou, will hold high-level talks during its four-day stay in the country, according to highly placed sources. Guo is expected to meet President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, Former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Madhav Kumar Prachanda, who has replaced Oli as chairman of the Prachanda-led faction of the party, sources said. The Chinese embassy here and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are tight-lipped about Guo's visit. His visit is aimed at "taking stock of Nepal's evolving political situation after the dissolution of the House of Representatives and subsequent split in the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) amid already-deepened intra-party rift", My Republica newspaper reported. China is not happy with the split in the largest communist party of Nepal, according to sources.



Farmers beat utensils as a protest against PM Modi's Mann ki Baat programme during their ongoing agitation over new farm laws at Singhu border in New Delhi, Sunday (Story on P8 & P3)

'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' goes haywire in state

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The Centre-sponsored 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Yojana' aimed at preventing female foeticide and educating the girl child has gone haywire in the state with no end to the sufferings of the girl child, a report said. The state government has also launched a scheme titled 'Biju Kanya Ratna Yojana' for the welfare of the girl child, but their plight has not decreased even slightly, as female foeticide continues unabated. Even today many girls do not have access to primary education. The scene is acute in the rural areas where the longing for a male child among



couples is more. This is primarily due to lack of awareness among people and shoddy implementation of the government schemes. The Union government implemented the scheme in 2017-18 fiscal with an aim to encourage the girl child to excel in every sphere of life - education, health, sports and employment. The state government has im-

plemented the scheme in 15 districts where the birth rate of the girl child is less compared to the male child. However, the state government has failed to utilise the Central funds available under the scheme. Nayagarh district received the highest share of funds under the scheme on the basis of male-female ratio but the state government has been able to spend only 62 per cent of the funds. Similarly, only 0.4 per cent of the funds have been spent in Balasore district, while Dhenkanal district has spend the lowest 0.12 percentage of funds. According to the State Women and Child Welfare department (WCD), Nayagarh district has re-

ceived ₹42.62 lakh under the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme, but spent only ₹26.52 lakh. The remaining 14 districts received ₹25 lakh each but failed to utilise the available funds. On its part, the state government has implemented 'Biju Kanya Ratna Yojana' in 2016-17 so as to prevent gender determination, ensure girl child protection and increase their enrolment in schools. This programme is especially being given importance in Angul, Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Nayagarh where people are being sensitised on gender issues. Under Biju Kanya Ratna Yojana, ₹4 crore has been provided, but only ₹3.81 crore has been spent.

Govt nurses wear black badges for better wages



Protesting nurses at Capital Hospital

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: A section of nurses in government hospitals Sunday worked wearing black badges in support of their demand for wage revision. Nurses in the Capital Hospital, Bhubaneswar, and SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, and in other hospitals in the state were seen protesting silently without hampering the services in government hospitals. "Our basic pay should be hiked. We demand that promotions should be given considering the services rendered during the contractual period. Permanent recruitment of nurses should be done following the guidelines of the National Health Mission (NHM)," Laxmipriya Jena, a nurse from SCB Medical College, said. The protests by the government nurses were organised across the state. The aggrieved health workers claimed that they would intensify their protests if their demands were not conceded. "We will continue with our strike till January 1. From January 2 to 5 we will undertake token strike but not hamper the emergency services," said Pravatī Mohanaty, general secretary, Odisha Nursing Employees' Association.

Saradha scam ghost haunts TMC as polls near

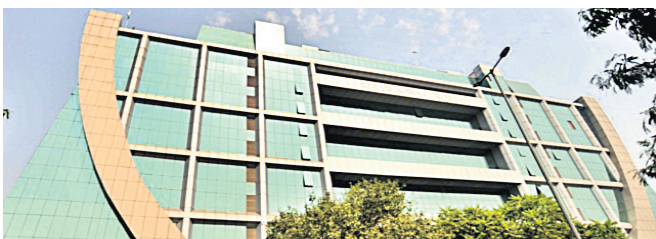
SALARIES OF TARA TV EMPLOYEES PAID FROM CM RELIEF FUND FOR 23 MONTHS, SAYS CBI

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 27: In a development which may further increase the political heat in West Bengal where Assembly polls are slated early next year, the CBI in a contempt plea in the Saradha chit fund scam has informed the Supreme Court that the Chief Minister's Relief Fund of West Bengal regularly paid for a period of 23 months, purportedly towards the salaries of employees of Tara TV which was under investigation for being part of Saradha Group of companies. In an application, the CBI said that the CM Relief fund has regularly paid the amounts - at the rate of ₹27 lakh per month - for a period of 23 months from May 2013 to April 2015. "It is submitted that the said amounts were purportedly given



towards salary payments of the employees of the said media company that was under investigation being part of group companies of Saradha Group of Companies," said the application. A total of ₹6.21 crore was paid to the Tara TV Employees Welfare Association from the Chief Minister Relief Fund of West Bengal. The CBI said in order to further look into the gravely suspicious payments to a private media entity, a letter dated October 16, 2018 was written to the



chief secretary, West Bengal to provide information about the constitution and functioning of the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. Despite repeated efforts, the state government has parted with incomplete and evasive replies, said the CBI. The CBI cited the High Court order which directed that the "salary of the employees should be paid from the available funds" and it nowhere states that employees of a private TV channel can be paid out

of state funds collected in the name of Chief Minister's relief work. "The Court order expressly states that the employees are to be paid out of the funds of the company. The payments from CM Relief Fund, ex-facie point towards a larger conspiracy and nexus," said the application. Pointing the needle of suspicion at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the scam, the CBI said: "Communication between the CBI and state authorities will show that

there has been a concerted effort to evade, avoid and to escape the process of law and a conscious effort on part of the authorities to scuttle the investigation." The CBI pointed at the examination of former Rajya Sabha MP Kunal Kumar Ghosh, one of the accused in the case, by Enforcement Directorate during October 2013 revealed that the Chief Minister and promoter of Saradha Group - Sudipta Sen, had very good relationship. "It is submitted that the same establishes that the Chief Minister used to talk to Sudipta Sen using phone of Kunal Kumar Ghosh," said the application. The investigating agency said the call detail record of two numbers of Sen spanning for one year reveals that he and Ghosh had contacted 298 times on one number and 9 times on another number.

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Today, you will crave total freedom in whatever you are doing, says Ganesha. And sheer entertainment is on the cards for teenyboppers, like mall-hopping or going for a film. The kids will demand a Jumbo Berry ice cone. All in all, it will be a family day for you.

TAURUS

You will wake up feeling determined and decisive today, says Ganesha. Be careful as your rigid views may make you seem stubborn. You may not be willing to come half way during a conflict and will make a habit of articulating your viewpoint.

GEMINI

The day promises sensitivity and compassion for you, predicts Ganesha. You may plan a trip with your family members. You may also invest your money in various financial companies, as securing the future of your family will be foremost on your mind. Moreover, you will also save some hefty amount to meet future needs.

CANCER

It is high time that you dedicated yourself to your work. If you are looking to try new things, today may not be a very good day to do so. Stick to doing things the way you have been doing them so far, advises Ganesha. All you need is a little attitude adjustment.

LEO

You might be the man of the house, but to make that house a home, you need a family. So keep that in mind, says Ganesha, and remember that your family is the foundation of your success. Make every possible effort to make your family's roots stronger. The fruits of such efforts shall only be sweeter.

VIRGO

Today might just bring those emotions to the fore that have been lying in the closet of your heart since long. You will even develop a bonding – a sentimental attachment – with your belongings. But, if and when you don't find the surroundings to your liking, you shall be like a fish out of the water.

LIBRA

Unleash the artist in you today! Don't be surprised if you happen to discover a love for the fine arts. The stars bestow on you refined aesthetic sense. As a result, your penchant for interior decoration is sure to get a boost. There is also the possibility of you capitalising on the commercial aspect of your newly acquired hobby, says Ganesha.

SCORPIO

Family matters have been screaming for long for your attention now. Your estranged spouse may deal the final blow to sever all ties, foretells Ganesha. But keep calm, and hold that tongue, advises Ganesha. Your priority should be to secure your family's peace.

SAGITTARIUS

Expect a call to late-night revelry and a chance to binge. But you don't seem to be in the mood to let your hair loose and party, says Ganesha. However tempting it may be, your serious side will take over and you shall deny the offer.

CAPRICORN

God helps those who help themselves, likewise, your sincere efforts will be paid off well, today. If you're dealing with shares and stocks, it may be your day, today. Your life partner will prove to be lucky for your success, so give him/her the credit he/she deserves, suggests Ganesha.

AQUARIUS

A productive day, as you will receive unrestrained support from your bosses and colleagues. Your creativity will reach its zenith and the resulting work will augment your reputation. The day will seem complete when you spend quality time with your family in the evening, says Ganesha.

PISCES

Happiness shared is double the joy; sorrows shared are half the burden. Your family is the foundation of your success, and it is to them you will turn in times of failure as well. With their support, getting back to the top of the game will take no time, says Ganesha.



MARTINE MCCUTCHEON WAS IN LOVE WITH HUGH GRANT

Actress Martine McCutcheon says she was little bit in love with her *Love Actually* co-star Hugh Grant. McCutcheon played an assistant to Grant's character in the film, and added that she didn't have to act too hard in romantic scenes, reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

THEATRES WILL SURVIVE COVID-19: TOM HANKS

Hollywood star Tom Hanks feels the shift to streaming world is a due change, and says that movie theatres will survive the Covid-19 pandemic. In an interview with *Collider*, Hanks told about the impact of the pandemic on the business, and the shift of many films to release on streaming services, reports *variety.com*.



Jacqueline's quirky b'day wish for Salman

Mumbai: As top star Salman Khan turned 55 Sunday, actress Jacqueline Fernandez shared a quirky birthday for him.

Jacqueline shared an edited photo on her verified Instagram account which shows herself and Salman as children. Both their face and bodies have been edited to appear like teenagers.

"Happy Birthday @beingsalmankhan," Jacqueline captioned the photograph.

Meanwhile, other celebrities also wished the actor on social media.

"Happiest birthday @beingsalmankhan to a great human being," wrote Katrina Kaif on her Instagram story.

"Happy birthday @beingsalmankhan sir. Love you and a big THANK YOU :))))#heartofgold #angel," posted choreographer-filmmaker Remo D'souza.

"Happy Birthday @BeingSalmanKhan Hope you have a Wonderful, Happy and Healthy Day," shared Madhuri Dixit.

"Happy Birthday dearest @BeingSalmanKhan bhai. God bless you with loads of happiness and good health. Have a fab year ahead," posted Neil Nitin Mukesh.

"Happy birthday to the king of swag and to the man who made going shirtless look good on #Bollywood heroes! a@BeingSalmanKhanaj, sir, have a happy, healthy, safe year!" wrote Swara Bhasker.

IAN S



Akshay kumar optimistic about 2021

Mumbai: *Khiladi* actor Akshay Kumar used a funny video of himself from the sets of his movie, *Good Newwz*, to give expression to the topsy-turvy 2020.

As the film completed one year of its release, Akshay shared a behind-the-scenes video which shows him performing a difficult 'naagin' dance, while sitting on a horse. The actor shared that the video sums up 2020 for him.

"If I were to describe the year gone by, that's exactly how it would be...topsy-turvy with some ups and downs but eventually we managed to hold on. Hope the coming year brings with it lots of #GoodNewwza #1YearOfGoodNewwz," he wrote along with the video. Also starring Kareena Kapoor Khan, Kiara Advani and Diljit Dosanjh, *Good Newwz* is about two couples who are trying to have a baby through IVF. It is directed by Raj Mehta.

IAN S

AK Bir's Hindi film *Antardhwani* bags int'l awards in Dhaka fest

PRODUCER SWAPNA PATI WAS ADJUDGED THE BEST ACTRESS WHILE BIR RECEIVED THE AWARD IN BEST ASIAN DIRECTOR'S CATEGORY

BHUBANESWAR:

Internationally acclaimed and multiple National Award-winning Odia filmmaker Apurba Kishore Bir's Hindi film *Antardhwani-The Inner Voice* has bagged two awards at Cinemaking International Film Festival 2020, held from December 24-26, at Dhaka in Bangladesh.

Director Bir was adjudged the Best Asian Director while film's female lead Swapna Pati was selected as Best Actress.

A psychological thriller, *Antardhwani's* theme is a flowing undercurrent of moral conflicts. It is about the relationship between two friends — Shantanu and Shalini, two friends studying in a university — and has



A scene from the film

been shot in natural light and ambience with jungles as the back-

drop. Most parts of the film were canned in the dense forest of

Uttarakhand. The film explores one's psyche and tries to find answers to various situations.

Presented by 24 FPS Entertainment and produced by Rajesh Kumar Mohanty, *Antardhwani* was the inaugural film of the festival in which as many as 400 films from around 70 countries were screened. Of them, 54 from Bangladesh and 150 from 54 other countries were selected for the competition round.

The Cinemaking International Film Festival 2020, was organised by the Dhaka Festival and the Cinemaking Organisation.



Sara doesn't believe in stardom

Mumbai: In a span of two years, Sara Ali Khan has seen the highs of glamour and has also garnered a substantial fan base. The daughter of popular stars Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh may have been born in the lap of fame, but she insists she does not believe in stardom.

"I don't look at stardom. Till now, I don't use the word fans. I don't use the word star. I don't believe in these things. I think Friday to Friday - I mean it used to be Friday and it can now be released any day. With every release of a film your stature, stardom - whatever you call it - keeps changing," Sara said.

"I think the only thing that matters is your 'neeyar' (intention). What matters are your intention, hard work, passion and craze. Everything else keeps changing and will continue to change," she added.

IAN S

FUN post

PEANUTS



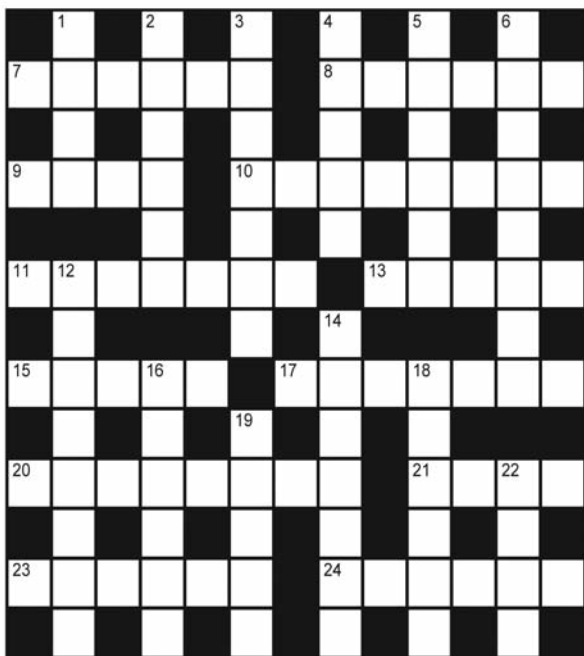
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



CROSSWORD



Across

- 7 Tiny village
- 8 2004 Olympics site
- 9 Tableland
- 10 Items of yore
- 11 Copy
- 13 Piquant
- 15 Hoity-toity sorts
- 17 Ceremonial staff

- 20 Queensland's capital
- 21 Caddie's offering
- 23 Map line
- 24 Acquire

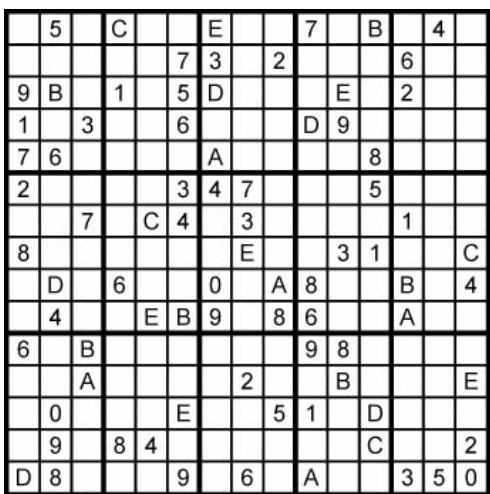
Down

- 1 Wise guy
- 2 Flexible
- 3 Type of bomber

- 4 Coffee order
- 5 Bank draft
- 6 Aardvark
- 12 Castle towers
- 14 Level
- 16 Kind of basket
- 18 Sports tallies
- 19 Pub game
- 22 Fail to mention

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

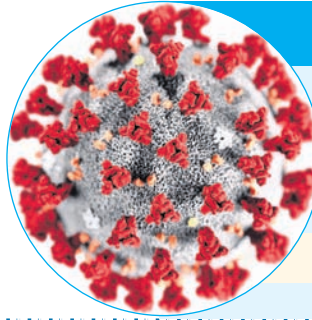


CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



HANDLOOM EXPO

Women check out garments at Cottonfab-2020 at the Exhibition Ground in Bhubaneswar, Sunday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	8,07,99,040	5,70,16,346	17,66,603
India	1,01,88,392	97,60,848	1,47,659
Odisha	3,28,201	3,24,068	1,857

CLARION CALL FOR MODI

WHILE THE PM POURED HIS HEART OUT THROUGH 'MANN KI BAAT', AGGRIEVED FARMERS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS USE A TRICK OUT OF THE PM'S BOOK TO DEMAND HIS ATTENTION TOWARDS THE 3 CONTENTIOUS FARM LAWS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: While Prime Minister Narendra Modi was addressing the nation, as part of his 'Mann Ki Baat' programme, agitating farmers and their supporters clapped, banged utensils and shouted slogans, as a mark of protest, Sunday.

Many state-based groups and outfits, and farmers' supporters joined the nationwide farmers' protest against the three contentious farm laws.

Members of 'Nava Nirmana Chaatra Sangathan' Sunday protested near Master Canteen here and banged utensils as a mark of protest against the three laws. MD Manwar Ali, state convenor, Chhatra Sangathan said that many farmers have died during this month-long protest but the Central government is adamant and shows no concerns.

The 'Naba Nirman Krushak Sangathan' also opposed the controversial farm laws during the 'Mann Ki Baat' speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday.

The farmers' outfit members



Members of 'Azaad Hind Bahini' express solidarity with farmers in Bhubaneswar, Sunday



Activists of various outfits register their protest at Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

66

Many farmers have died during this month-long protest but the Central government is adamant and shows no concerns

MD MANWAR ALI | STATE CONVENOR, NAVA NIRMANA CHHATRA SANGATHAN

We are beating utensils and ringing bells to mark our protests against the controversial laws of the Union government

SESADEV NANDA | STATE CONVENOR, SANYUKTA KISAN MORCHA

laws in Bhubaneswar, Sunday.

Notably, the protest was announced last Sunday by Swaraj India chief Yogendra Yadav. It may be noted here that in his last 'Mann Ki Baat' address November 29, the PM had spoken about the farm laws and iterated their advantages. He has used several platforms to reiterate the advantages of the agri laws.

Protesting farmers, on the other hand, have demanded the repeal of the three laws.

Saffron targets govt on women's issues

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) targeted the state government on the latter's commitment to fight for women rights and reservation.

BJP Mahila Morcha president Smruti Patnaik Sunday held a press

conference and blamed the Chief Minister Naveen

Patnaik and the state government for ignoring the demands and protests by

women workers engaged as ASHA,

Anganwadi workers and ANMs.

"Throughout the year, the women of the state are seen standing on the roads and asking for their rights. Be it ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers or ANMs," she said. "Can't the CM see their protests? During Covid times, these women helped the government to fight against the pandemic. Is the government



BJP Mahila Morcha president Smruti Patnaik addresses the media

not sensitive to hear to their woes?" she asked.

She alleged that many contractual women employees or those working in outsourced firms are deprived of the basic necessity of maternity leave.

"In all government offices in the state, can the government regularise the women workers who are working as contract workers or give them wages at par with others? In government setup, when women get pregnant they get maternity leave. However in Odisha, contractual women workers or those who are outsourced by the government are deprived of maternity leave. Why isn't the government working on this?" she asked.

She added, "The recent Pari murder case also exposes the deteriorating law and order situation in the state."

3rd UK returnee is Covid-19 +ve

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Another traveller, who recently returned from the United Kingdom (UK), has tested positive for Covid-19, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation, Sunday said.

The newly detected Covid-19 positive is the father of a 4-year-old who had earlier tested positive for the coronavirus, informed BMC Commissioner Prem Chandra Chaudhary.

As per the BMC Commissioner, around 20 persons have returned to the Capital city from the UK. "We have got the list of the returnees and are in constant touch with them." However, it's still uncertain whether the UK returnees are infected by the newly detected mutant strain of the virus or not.

Another 4 lives lost to Covid

303 MORE PEOPLE TEST POSITIVE FOR THE INFECTION IN THE LAST 24 HOURS

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Odisha's Covid-19 tally Sunday mounted to 3,28,504 after 303 more people tested positive for the infection, while four more fatalities pushed the toll to 1,861, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department official said.

Of the 303 cases, 172 were reported from various quarantine centres, and 131 detected during contact tracing.

Khurda and Kendrapara reported the maximum number of new cases at 31 each, followed by Sundargarh at 30. Five districts—Boudh, Gajapati, Koraput, Puri and Subarnapur—recorded just one case each.

Since Saturday, Kalahandi,



Kandhamal, Malkangiri and Rayagada have not registered any new patient.

Taking to Twitter, the H&FW department said, "Regret to inform about the demise of four Covid positive patients while under treatment in hospitals."

One fatality each was registered in Khurda, Kalahandi, Nuapada and Sundargarh, the official said. As many as 53 Covid-19 patients

IN NUMBERS

One fatality each was registered in Khurda, Kalahandi, Nuapada and Sundargarh

Khurda and Kendrapara reported the maximum number of new cases at 31 each, followed by Sundargarh at 30

Over 68 lakh samples have been examined for Covid-19 in the coastal state so far

died due to co-morbidities.

Over 68 lakh samples have been examined for Covid-19 in the coastal state so far, the official added.

Meanwhile, another 319 Covid patients recovered in Odisha, taking the total recoveries in the coastal state to 3,24,068, the H&FW department tweeted.



Fire drill at Cuttack rly station

PREMISE: A fire breaks out at the RRI building of the station around 11 am

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar/Cuttack, Dec 27: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Khurda Road Division Sunday conducted a mock drill at Cuttack railway station to check the alertness and preparedness of the authorities concerned to deal with emergency situation like fire incidents.

As part of the mock drill, there was a report that a fire broke out at the route relay interlocking (RRI) building of Cuttack railway station around 11 am.

On being informed, RPF officials led by inspector Pravin Kumar rushed to the spot with buckets and fire extinguishers to douse the flames.

The incident was also informed



The drill in progress

to the fire brigade office, ambulance services, GRP and the station manager.

tion manager.

As per the mock drill, around 10 railway employees, working inside the RRI building, were trapped inside their offices due to the fire.

Fire brigade officials led by assistant fire officer Abani Kumar Swain reached the spot and doused the flames by using two fire engines.

The fire brigade officials also rescued the trapped railway employees and sent to hospital through ambulances. The rescue operation took half an hour.

Later, the fire brigade personnel also demonstrated techniques to extinguish fire caused due to leak in cooking gas cylinder. Railway employees, passengers and common people witnessed the mock drill.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Director General of Police Abhay Sunday said that the law and order situation in the state is under control while inaugurating the 62nd Senior Police Officers' Conference-2020 virtually.

The conference is scheduled to continue for four days. The DGP also claimed that Odisha Police handled the Covid-19 situation with compassion and empathy.

The DGP revealed that 47 police personnel succumbed to Covid-19 in the line of duty while more than 900 personnel have donated plasma after recovering from the virus infection. Speaking on the Left-wing extremism, the DGP said, "Sustainable progress has been noticed LWV situation. The incidents of LWV violence have declined. We have written to government of India



The DGP addresses the senior police officials

OP PHOTO

to take five districts—Angul, Boudh, Deogarh, Nayagarh and Sambalpur—out of the SRE. In 2020, 17 hardcore Maoists have been neutralized, 32 Maoists have been arrested and 21 have surrendered. Two brave hearts from Odisha

Abhay stressed on 5T feedback to assess the level of satisfaction regarding police behaviour

Police laid down their lives."

He praised the police officials for conducting successful drives against drugs trade and extortion.

DGP also revealed

that around 1,200 quintals of ganja have been seized by the state police.

Similarly, 34 kgs of brown sugar has been seized by the state police this year.

The DGP also thanked the state government for creating more than 900 posts of civil police and setting up of around 200 new police stations and outposts in Odisha.

He urged senior police officials to treat the victims of crimes with empathy and take prompt action against the accused.

The DGP also stressed on 5T feedback to assess the level of satisfaction regarding the police behavior. He asked police officials to listen to the grievances of women and children with priority.

Senior police officials were also advised to expedite investigation process for better conviction. The conference also stressed upon capacity building to deal with rising cases of cybercrime in Odisha.

LINGARAJ TEMPLE REOPENS AFTER 9 MONTHS

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Shree Lingaraj Temple reopened for devotees Sunday after remaining closed for almost nine months due to Covid-19 pandemic, officials said.

Servitors and their family members were allowed entry into the oldest shrine of the state Capital on the first day. They will be allowed to pray inside the temple till December 31, while the general public from outside the state Capital will be allowed from January 6.

The residents of Bhubaneswar can have darshan of the Lord from January 3.

The 11th century shrine is a unique place in India where both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu are worshipped together making it a 'Hari-Har' peeth.

The officials said the temple was sanitised a day before allowing the devotees to offer prayer in the shrine. The temple will remain closed for devotees January 1 and 2 due to possible big congregation due to the New Year.



Visitors walk out of the temple after paying obeisance



Healthcare personnel conduct thermal screening of the devotees before entering the temple, Sunday

OP PHOTOS

sible big congregation due to the New Year.

The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), which has made arrangement for adherence to the

Covid-19 guidelines, has, meanwhile, clarified that the devotees having Covid-19 negative report will only be allowed to enter the temple.

The BMC has put up temporary

test camps near the temple to enable the devotees to get their Covid-19 tests before getting entry into the shrine. The authorities have also put up barricades outside the tem-

ple to ensure smooth darshan and proper implementation of the Covid-19 norms.

Meanwhile, the district administration in Puri allowed the people working in the Holy City to visit Srimandir with strict adherence to the Covid-19 guidelines. Similarly, people staying in rented accommodations in Puri city were also allowed to visit the 12th century shrine.

"People who are working in Puri and those staying in rented accommodations in the Holy city can visit Srimandir by producing their identity proofs and other valid documents," said Puri Collector Balwant Singh. The Puri district administration had earlier allowed the locals of the Holy City to visit the 12th century shrine from December 26 to December 31.

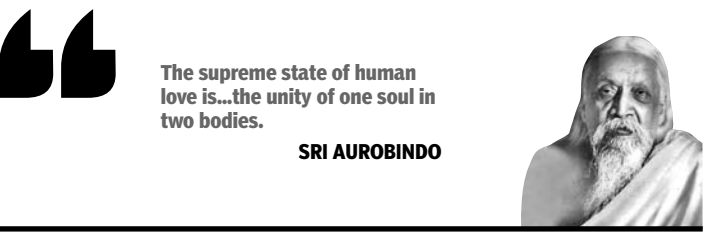
As per the schedule, the residents of ward no. 4, 13, 16, 18 and 20 in Puri visited Srimandir Sunday, said an official of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJAT).

OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL OF INDIA

9, DEEN DAYAL UPADHYAYA MARG, NEW DELHI - 110 002
Empanelment of Chartered Accountant firms/LLPs for the year 2021-2022

Online applications are invited from Chartered Accountant Firms/LLPs who desire to be empanelled with the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India for the year 2021-22 for the purpose of appointment of auditors of Companies as per Sections 139 (5) and 139 (7) of the Companies Act 2013 and of Statutory Corporations/Autonomous Bodies as per the provisions of their respective Acts. The online application along with detailed instructions in this regard will be available on the website www.cag.gov.in from 1 January 2021 to 15 February 2021. The applicant firms/LLPs will have to fill/update the data showing the status of their firms as on 1 January 2021. After filling/ updating the data, the firms/LLPs will be required to generate online acknowledgement letter for the year. If the firms/LLPs fail to generate online acknowledgement letter, their application would not be considered for empanelment. The firms/LLPs will be required to submit a print out of the acknowledgement letter generated online and also hard copies of the documents in support of their online application in this office by 26 February 2021.

Sd/-
Sr. Administrative Officer/CA-V
davp 51101/11/0001/2021



Disenchanted farmers

Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to kill two targets – the ongoing farmers' agitation and Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee - with one swipe in his much awaited interaction with farmers at a virtual event on 25 December. The exercise, however, showed a deplorable lack of urgency on the part of the Union government to end the stalemate in the farmers' agitation. He appeared to have turned the virtual meeting into an election campaign for the BJP in Bengal which is going to polls a few months from now. PM Modi was more focused on hitting out at Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee rather than finding ways out of the farmers' impasse. BJP leadership has been accusing the Opposition of 'misleading' the farmers. PM Modi too followed the same route.

PM Modi announced the release of the next installment of PMKSN (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi) amounting to Rs 18,000 crore to 9 crore small and marginal farmers. This big amount boils down to a pittance as the scheme's allotted money of Rs 6,000 per annum for each farmer is a measly Rs 500 per month. The announcement had all the usual theatrics associated with the PM's style of functioning. But, on the all-important issue of the farm laws, he merely repeated the government's readiness to talk things over with the farmers. There was not a word on the farmers' demand for repeal of the laws. Nor did he explain the government's position on the Supreme Court's suggestion of putting the laws on hold till a solution to the imbroglio is found. Though the farmers have agreed to resume talks with the government, they have made it clear they want the modalities for repealing the laws to be worked out.

The government finds itself in the grip of the worst crisis so far in its anxiety to help its friends in the corporate world itching to open the agriculture market which, they have realised now, holds a huge financial potential in India. Exploiting farmers is only collateral damage for the corporates. This government has weathered previous crises by either shifting the focus from the contentious issues to the Congress-led Opposition or whipping up communal and anti-Pakistan hysteria. But this strategy is not working with the farmers who can't be swayed by communal rhetoric nor will people in general accept the label that the agitating farmers are all Khalistanis. To wriggle out of the mess, the Union government has been resorting to denigrating the farmers and trying to break their unity. But both attempts have till date failed to yield any result.

The reason for which the agitating farmers have not been divided is very simple. Their demand has only one single point. That point is unconditional and total withdrawal of the three controversial farm bills. This has left no elbow space for the government to carry out any divisive tricks such as accepting chosen demands of different groups. This singular demand has definitely been cleverly thought out by the farmer leadership out of sheer experience of watching the Modi government play out various theatrics during past agitations. This is probably the only people's movement that has managed to trickle down to the grass roots against the present government. It is, therefore, imperative for the Centre to not make these farm laws an issue of prestige.

The image of PM Modi as a strong and resolute leader will not get watered down if the farmers' demand is met. Rather, Modi's image will be further bolstered as a true democrat who governs with compassion. Apart from the opportunity of gaining further support from the farmers which will far exceed the 38 per cent voter base that the BJP enjoys today, it will also create a favourable image internationally for Modi. To think that the PMKSN money will win over other farmers nationwide is far from truth. It must also be kept in mind and this has been proven by history that disenchantment among farmers affects social well being which in turn creates economic crises. India being an agricultural economy, this may spell doom.

WISDOM CORNER

- You cannot find peace by avoiding life. VIRGINIA WOOLF
- The shortest answer is doing the thing. ERNEST HEMINGWAY
- Freedom lies in being bold. ROBERT FROST

WORDSWORTH

■ Whelmed

The verb whelm does exist, though you might search for some time before you find examples in modern prose. That's excluding fantasy and historical fiction, of course – when SM Stirling wrote in *On the Oceans of Eternity*, “Whelm not our ships with Your anger, but give us swift voyaging and good winds, full nets and victory,” his choice of whelm was deliberately archaic, to help convey to his readers the sense of being in another time and place. On the other hand, to come across “It was a late-arriving crowd that saw the Hurricanes whelm the Philadelphia Flyers Saturday night,” which appeared in *The News & Record* of North Carolina back in 1998, is to be brought up short, wondering if the word's a misprint. But it was once common. It started as a medieval English sea term meaning to capsize – it's related to the even older whelve, to overturn. Around 1513, Robert Fabyan used it in *The Newe Cronycles of Englande* and of Fraunce: “By the mysgydnye of the sterysman, he was set vpon the pyllys of the brydge, and the barge whelmyd” (in modern spelling “By the misguidance of the steersman, he was set upon the piles of the bridge, and the barge whelmed”). It could also mean to turn a hollow vessel upside down to cover something; in 1842 the *Florist's Journal* wrote that “Pansies that were planted out in the autumn, should be protected by whelming a small pot over each plant.” It also came to mean, as an extension of the capsizing sense, being covered by water or drowning. Sir Charles Lyall used it that way in his *Principles of Geology* (1830): “Marsh land ... has at last been overflowed, and thousands of the inhabitants whelmed in the waves.” One might once have talked about the whelm of the tide, which covers the shore as it rises. But a writer can't use any of these senses any more, unless he's deliberately using an archaism for effect, or is showing off his knowledge of language, or is perhaps archly trying to invent a new word, not knowing that whelm exists.

LOL

PICKING A PUNISHMENT

This guy dies and is sent to Hell. Satan meets him and shows him the doors to three rooms and says he must choose one of the rooms to spend eternity in. So Satan opens the first door. In the room there are people standing in cow manure up to their necks. The guy says: “No, please show me the next room.” Satan shows him the next room and this has people with cow manure up to their noses. And so he says no



again. Finally, Satan shows him the third and final room. This time there are people in there with cow manure up to their knees drinking cups of tea and eating cakes. So the guy says, “I'll choose this room.” Satan says O.K. The guy is standing in there eating his cake and drinking his tea thinking, “Well, it could be worse,” when the door opens. Satan pops his head around, and says “O.K. tea-break is over. Back on your heads!”

FOCUS HIGHWAYS & FARMERS

CORPORATE LAND-GRAB!

Former PM Atal Behari Vajpayee's Golden Quadrilateral project was for a specific purpose— bolstering the country's infrastructure. But sadly it has degraded into a land-grabbing movement

farmers across the country have a lot more on their plate than just the ongoing agitation. They are losing more to roads and highways or expressways than the mere MSP guarantee they are demanding or repeal of the farm laws. The 10 new expressways proposed around the country and industrial corridors would be creating land sharks by acquisition of at least 25 per cent of more farmlands than required for each project and it can lead to enormous disaster and financial mess.

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Golden Quadrilateral project was for a specific purpose— bolstering the country's infrastructure. But sadly it has degraded into a land-grabbing movement. The rouge of infrastructure building is virtually a sham if the Agra-Noida JP Infratech Yamuna Expressway (YE) is taken as a test case. It has 3500 acre of the 6177 acre acquired unutilised – 56.6 per cent. The 165 km road itself as per calculations needed no more than 4500 acre. In fact, the project conceptualised by the UP government in 2001 emerged as the model for grabbing people's land for private profits. All subsequent road projects virtually have emulated it to create a new zamindari, a fear expressed at a national discussion at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi on freeing urban and rural ceilings in 1994.

Now on December 21, 2020, YE industrial development authority (Yeida) CEO Arun Vir Singh says it has notified 256,862 hectares (6.3 lakh acre) for development and has acquired 12,481 hectares (30841 acre) for various developmental projects – all of that is agriculture or wetland – in Gautam Buddha Nagar, Aligarh, Mathura and Agra.

The project also busts the myth that the public sector is inefficient. As huge tract of land is acquired by JP Infratech and it gets

into Rs 6,500 crore debt and to settle the tangle the National Buildings Construction Corporation Ltd (NBCC) is roped in. How much the public sector has lost for rescuing the prime acquirers and some others like Amrapali needs to be assessed. It is also a case of where thousands of home seekers have lost their life's savings amounting to thousands of crore.

The NBCC in turn has told PSU banks to raise about Rs 2,000 crore against the expressway and provide half of the amount (Rs 1,000 crore) to the state-owned company, which would utilise the fund for upfront payment and kick-start construction. The NBCC will not repay the loans in cash but would give 100 per cent equity to lenders (banks). So it is people's deposits that are being put to speculative risks with uncertain chances of return.

There is a myth in western UP that the compensation, peanuts as per market valuation, has improved quality of life of farmer families as the project displaced

them with “rich” benefits. It does not assess the fact that the loss it has caused to farm production, greenery and increased pollution in the NCR fall in quality of life of farm families.

It's also a wonder why after a few years of the start of the project NBCC has to step in. The project is virtually financially, ecologically and socially an example of how a company can botch up a simple issue for its greed. JP Infratech has 3500 acre of the 6177 acre acquired unutilised. This is now being sold to NBCC to acquire and manage. Is the public sector a hospital to rescue a private company that has caused untold human, financial and ecological hazard at a stone's throw from the national capital?

The toll roads are not masterpieces of Indian civilization. The national highways to Chandigarh, Jaipur, Aligarh and hosts of others across the country are instances of how bad potholed roads have been levied toll to fleece people.

ple. Each toll road has become synonymous with unending loot. The DND – or the Noida toll bridge lost the toll status at the intervention of the court as it had recovered more than it had invested on construction and maintenance in three years. Wonder that has not become the standard for awarding future such roads. Now the licence for toll collection is being given for 30 to 36 years – more than a generation. One such emerging monopoly belongs to an influential politician and many others also have similar connections in every region.

Minister for Road Transport & Highways Nitin Gadkari says India has now the second largest road network of expressways and highways. It is expanding at 30 km of road building a day. But he ignores the World Bank (WB) report of February 2020 on Roads in India that says the country has one of the worst roads and has the highest road crashes killing 1.5 lakh people a year and injuring or maiming more than five times. The WB says it costs the economy between three to five per cent of GDP.

So for corporate greed the country is building unsafe roads and people are being saddled with huge costs and increasing insurance premium. What started as loss to farmers has engulfed the entire society and the profits of the perpetrators are increasing. Greed is not only driving out the farmer but also poor workers around him who had been subsisting on farm activities. The country needs to study the phenomenon and act to prevent the situation from further aggravating.

The loss of arable land for a scramble of “bad development” can be socially and politically disastrous. The mad game for acquisition of fertile land must stop and the government has to look back to have a holistic agriculture and growth (not development) policy.

SPECTRUM SYSTEM

Corruption is the problem, not merely GST

I had expressed concerns five years ago that black economy will increase in size after GST implementation. The earlier system required a black marketer to negotiate with three inspectors of excise, sales tax and octroi. The GST system requires him to make setting with only one inspector thus making it easier to undertake black transactions.

Businesses are engaging in such transactions because GST officials are corrupt. A parallel black economy has come into being. The businessperson buys raw material, electricity and labour; the transporter shifts the goods; and the shopkeeper sells those goods—all do this in black, outside the books. The government made the e-way bill system to be able to check whether tax has been paid on goods during transit. This has been circumvented. The e-way bill between Delhi and Ghaziabad provides a window of 24 hours. Businesspersons transport 3 or 4 consignments on the same e-way bill within that time. Secondly, they are under-valuing the goods. A Hawaii Chappal is billed at Rs 50 and GST is paid on Rs 50 while the actual price is Rs 200. The seller takes Rs 150 in cash from the buyer and saves tax.

Black transactions cannot be controlled by reliance on technological solutions such as e-way bills. The purchase and sale of goods in cash can only be checked by inspectors.

The use of same e-way bill to transport three consignments can only be checked by questioning the driver. The under-pricing of goods can only be controlled by an officer comparing the price with similar goods available in market.

The government will have to control corruption of the tax bureaucracy. It has implemented a number of good measures in this direction. The most effective has been to retire corrupt officials. However, IAS officers are not willing to identify the corrupt among them.

We will have to think differently. Professor John Joseph Wallis of the University of Maryland says that less bureaucratic corruption in the US owes itself to the concern of the founding fathers with “representation, access, equity and fairness.” The framers of the US Constitution wanted to empower the people against the tyranny of the government. An article in “World Development” reviewed the anti-corruption experiences with a focus on civil servants. It found that anti-corruption organisations are not effective while “corruption audit” is effective. The underlying premise is that corruption takes place by cooperation between the civil servant and the businessperson. Anti-corruption organisations can know of corruption only when there arises a dispute between the giver and taker of bribe. Audit, on the other hand, involves an official to

proactively audit an office. We know that a common strategy adopted by civil servants is to sit on a file until their palms are greased. An auditor can uncover this by examining the time taken for disposal of files on a particular desk. Such an audit, however, would be fruitful only if it is undertaken by an external agency and not by the officials of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India that have been merrily overlooking corrupt practices.

Professor Errol D'Souza of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad says the role of the press and civil society is crucial in controlling corruption. I would add the judiciary. These organisations can flag corruption. The People's Union for Civil Liberties, for example, exposes high-handed actions taken by the police.

The Fifth Pay Commission had said that its recommendations for increase in salaries of government employees should be implemented only with instituting an external evaluation of Class 'A' officers. The common thread in all these suggestions is the empowerment of independent persons—improving access of people; corruption audit; empowering the press, civil society and judiciary; or external evaluation of officers. These are fundamentally different than the top-down measures such as retiring corrupt officials.

The difficulty in empowering independent oversight is that the empowerment also leads people to raise questions about the policies and actions of the government itself—not just corrupt officials. It is for this reason that the governments, unlike that envisaged by the founding fathers of the US Constitution, are reluctant to improve representation of people; institute corruption audits; empower the press, civil society and judiciary; or require external evaluation of officers. On the contrary governments want to suppress the voice of these independent players.

The government cannot repair the system on its own from top-down actions such as retiring corrupt officials. No wonder, one senior Minister in the UP government confided to me, “What to do? We have dismissed and suspended many police officers. But they just do not behave.” He should have sought the help of People's Union of Civil Liberties. Systemic reform can succeed only if the government acts from the top and the public acts from the bottom. The choice before the government, therefore, is either to live with corruption and lose its power altogether; or to allow people to question its policies and maybe survive.

The writer is a former Professor of Economics at IIM, Bangalore.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

Just justice

Sir, The 1992 Sister Abhaya case of Kottayam, Kerala would not have culminated in conviction but for the courts. Courts at various levels in Kerala, that were loathe to go by “reputed” investigative agencies' cursory closure reports, ensured a proper investigation took place in a case riddled with passion, deceit, dishonesty and influence. Courts took over, for some time, the responsibility of monitoring the investigations. The death of young Sister Abhaya, who was studying in Class 12 of a convent, was passed off as a 'suicide' though a homicidal angle was pointed out by some experts. Pulls and pressures made sure that the local police 'confirm' the suicide theory till the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was asked to come in by a court. Although eventually the CBI found out a foul play, the identities of the perpetrators of the dastardly murder were shrouded in mystery, and the courts' quest for justice resulted in the arrest and prosecution of a priest and a nun who were recently sentenced to life imprisonment by a special CBI court at Thiruvananthapuram. The beleaguered CBI, for once, did not flounder at the end. The CBI court judge succinctly noted that there was no way the young girl, going by the statements of those who knew her, could have ended her own life. Caught in the sexual act, the priest and the nun, the court said, murdered Abhaya and made it look like a suicide. Never ending investigation and lengthy prosecution did not deprive justice to the deceased Abhaya, and her family members who were waiting for the outcome for all these 28 long years.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA (MAHARASHTRA)

Ensure women's health

Sir, The state-owned Oil India Limited has introduced a community-based scheme 'OIL Shakti' to promote menstrual health and hygiene management among women of vulnerable communities so as to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. The scheme will increase the livelihood opportunities as well as the health and hygiene management of women. A comic book based on scientific facts about the stigma associated with menstruation has also been released which would be distributed at schools, colleges, and at the community level. This is a worthwhile initiative to provide health and hygiene-related information, and facilities to women. Rural women of India need such efforts to ensure their good health.

Amit Singh Kushwaha, SATNA (MP)

80 per cent of pvt schools lack NOCs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Dec 27: Students studying in over 80 per cent of the private schools in this district have been deprived of appearing in annual scholarship examinations as these schools have been operating without no-objection certificates (NOCs), a report said.

Over 30 madrasas have been allegedly committing fraud by siphoning off government funds without investing the money in education of students or infrastructure development. This has pushed the future of the students to the brink.

This is indicative of the commercialisation of education where the authorities of these private schools put up attractive advertisements in the form of hoardings and billboards to lure the parents and guardians for admission of their wards in these schools.



District education officer Sanjiv Kumar Singh said a probe has been ordered into the lack of NOCs by various private schools

This speaks about the sorry state of affairs in the education system due to lack of scrutiny and check-up by the education department.

Guardians Amarbar Biswal, Pradip Kumar Sahu, Sk Ehasan said that a total of 154 private schools are operating in the district and 80 per cent of them are run-

ning without NOCs. As a result, the students studying in these schools have been debarred from appearing in the annual scholarship examinations.

The state government rule has provision of admission of 25 poor students in these private schools. However, the rule seems to be not

binding on the private schools here as they never give admission to poor students in their schools.

The state education department is merging the schools having less than 20 students on their rolls with the nearest schools. However, this rule seems to be not binding on madrasas in this district.

It is alleged the authorities in most of the schools inflate student attendance records to avoid merger of their schools. This way the authorities try to gobble up the funds available to them. Moreover, most of the schools are being run by a single teacher. Residents have demanded the government to intervene and direct a probe by the mass education department. District education officer Sanjiv Kumar Singh said a probe has been ordered into the lack of NOCs by various private schools while a similar probe will be undertaken against the madrasas after the reopening of the schools.

Undertrial Maoist dies in Malkangiri

POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri, Dec 27: An under-trial Maoist at Malkangiri sub-jail in the district died under mysterious circumstances, Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as Danu Galori. According to a source, the police had arrested Galori two months ago during a combing operation. After that he was lodged in the Malkangiri sub-jail as an undertrial prisoner. However, he was found in an injured state Saturday evening and was admitted to the District Headquarters Hospital.

Due to serious injuries in various parts of his bodies, he breathed his last Sunday while undergoing treatment at the hospital.

The doctors said that there were deep cut marks behind the neck of the deceased. The reason behind the death was yet to be ascertained.

The police have sent the body for post-mortem. A further investigation into the case has been launched by the district police.

Farmer trampled to death, minor critical in elephant attack

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhanjanagar, Dec 27: A farmer was trampled to death while a minor boy was rendered critical in an elephant attack near a cashew orchard at Nuapalli under Galeri forest range in Ganjam district, Sunday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Sukriya Naik, 55, of Badangi Nuapalli village. The injured minor is Ganesh Goud of Galeri, 14. The incident has triggered panic in the area. Forest officials tried to recover the body but failed as the elephant herd has surrounded the body. Forest officials tried to drive away the elephants but in vain. The injured minor was rescued and shifted to Bhanjanagar hospital after primary treatment. DFO Abhaya Kumar Dalei, ACF Sudarshan Badi, forest ranger Umakant Das reached spot and started an investigation.

Reports said a herd of 17 elephants had stay put in a cashew orchard and was guarding a newborn elephant since Saturday night. The forest officials had alerted the villagers from Saturday not to venture into the area due to the presence of the elephants. However, as ill fate would have it Naik and Goud were passing by that way this afternoon when the elephant attacked them.

Passing under stationary train turns fatal for woman

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jharsuguda, Dec 27: Passing under a stationary train at a rail station proved fatal for a woman here. The goods train ran over the woman, killing her on the spot and injuring her partner critically at Bagdehi railway station in Jharsuguda district Sunday.

The deceased was identified as Sophia Mahanand (20) and the injured man as Roshan Mahanand (22). Roshan is undergoing treatment at the Jharsuguda district headquarters hospital.



Source said Sophia and Roshan had been staying in a live-in relationship in Brajarajnagar.

The couple had been at a relative's house at Budhapada in Bagdehi area under Laikera tehsil. Sunday morning, they reached Bagdehi railway station to board a train to go to Brajarajnagar.

There was a stationary goods train at platform no-4. To go to the platform from where their train leaves, they, in order to save time, chose to crawl under the stationary goods train to reach the other side.

Hardly did they know then that the goods train was just about to leave the station.

Roshan was partly outside the track and partly under the train but Sophia was fully under the train when the train started to roll, trapping both under it.

Sophia was crushed under the wheels while Roshan was severely injured.

He was immediately rescued and rushed to the hospital. One being informed, the Government Railway Police reached the spot, recovered the body and launched a probe.

Man held for killing 2-yr-old daughter after tiff with wife

POST NEWS NETWORK

Ambabdhona, Dec 27: A man was arrested Sunday for allegedly killing his two-year-old daughter after a quarrel with his wife in Kapasira village under Ambabdhona police limits in Bargarh district.

The accused Ramesh Satnami suspected his wife Jashoda of having an extramarital affair and this led to frequent fights between the couple, the police said.

On the other hand, Jashoda had frequently tried to solve the dispute between the couple. But no solution came out after the intervention of Jashoda's mother, following which Jashoda and her mother decided to leave Ramesh.

Sunday morning Jashoda took her two-year-old daughter in her arms and tried to leave the house. But Ramesh snatched the baby from his wife's hand and in anger, threw the baby to the ground, causing her death on the spot.

2 dead, 18 hurt as minibus hits road divider

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 27: In a tragic mishap, at least two people were killed on the spot and over 18 others sustained severe injuries in the wee hours of Sunday after a minibus rammed into a road divider near Balughat area on NH-143 under Raghunathpali police limits in Sundargarh district.

The deceased were identified as Kartik Mahakud and Suni Kuspatha. The condition of a six-year-old girl



Riya Martha was critical. She was sent to Burla hospital.

Reports said the ill-fated vehicle was heading towards Rourkela from Lathikata area with about 20 occupants. Driver of the minibus

POST NEWS NETWORK

Boinda, Dec 27: Four years have passed since the work on a bridge over Rainali rivulet near Ranibandh village under Athmallik block in Angul district started, but the project is yet to be completed.

While the bridge's construction has been limited to supporting pillars, the prospects of development of seven villages under Thakurgarh and Maimura panchayats have been affected.

Hundreds of villagers are forced to commute on concrete electric poles laid out across the rivulet, putting their lives at risk.

The government has been giving priority to improve communication facility in tribal-dominated remote areas by constructing bridges. The government had green-signalled the construction of a bridge over Rainali rivulet December 21, 2016.

For this, Rs 10,00,000 was allocated to the Western Odisha Development Council and the construction work on the bridge started with the then MLA Sanjeeb Sahu laying the foundation stone for the project.

Then, the inhabitants of



Children playing amid paddy stocks at a paddy procurement centre in Bargarh

OP PHOTO

4 years on, bridge remains half-built



Hatashimili and Ranibandh villages of Thakurgarh panchayat, Gopapur, Kansab, Rampur and Jhatikibahal villages of Maimura panchayat thought their days of hardship was short-lived. They had started dreaming of all sorts of developmental activities in their villages. But, their dreams have remained unfulfilled.

In order to be able to travel to other places, the villagers have laid out electric poles across the rivulet and are commuting on them. In

the rainy season, it is always a risky affair to cross the swelling rivulet. Parents often do not allow their children to attend classes in schools on the other side of the rivulet.

The villagers have already taken up the matter with the government officials and political leaders, but to no avail. They have also informed the collector, the block development officer and Sambalpur MP of their suffering due to the absence of a bridge. Similarly, they

have brought the attention of Athmallik MLA to the issue as well. The villagers alleged that they have so far only received assurances.

"The government has sanctioned money for the bridge. We are yet to understand as to what has shelved the construction work. The administrative inertia is only to be blamed for this," alleged Bibhu Prasad Senapati and some other villagers.

Echoing the same, Maimura sarpanch Satyananda Rout said the development of seven villages largely depends on the bridge. Presently, the villagers are facing a lot of difficulties in getting construction material to their villages.

The villagers have alleged that the bridgework has been left midway through as the money meant for the project has been siphoned off. They said they would resort to mass agitation if the construction work is not started at the earliest.

Block development officer, Sanjay Acharya, said the construction work had to be left midway as the sanctioned money fell short. Later, iron rods were found to have been stolen away from the bridge.

Man dies due to 'cold wave'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kesinga/Bhawanipatna, Dec 27: A 51-year-old man died due to suspected cold wave at new bus stand area in Bhawanipatna town, the police said Sunday.

The incident triggered panic in the area as all business establishments remained shut, Sunday. The deceased was identified as Ghasiram Putel of Talpalipada in Bolangir town. He was begging for alms in the town for the last two months.

Preliminary inquiries suggested that Ghasiram might have died of cold wave as he did not have clothes for himself

Police sent the body for post-mortem to a hospital. Preliminary inquiries suggested that Ghasiram might have died of cold wave gripping the area as he did not have winter clothes to cover himself. His son Bhagaban Putel arrived in Bhawanipatna and received the body from the police after a photograph of Ghasiram went viral on social media.

Bhanjanagar to get ₹25cr for healthcare overhaul



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhanjanagar, Dec 27: The healthcare sector will see a major overhaul in Bhanjanagar. The government has decided to invest Rs 17.90 crore for setting up of a special hi-tech women and infant ward on the premises of the Bhanjanagar sub-divisional hospital. Besides, Rs 7 more crore will be spent for the upgradation of infrastructure and facilities of the sub-divisional hospital.

This was revealed by state Forest and Environment Minister Bikram Keshari Arukh at a meeting of the Bhanjanagar Sub-divisional Rogi Kalyan Samiti Saturday.

The minister also said that a new building for the medical staff and a new bicycle stand will be set

up. Ambulance will be provided with funds to be made available from MPLAD fund while Rs 5 lakh will be made available from MLALAD fund for a drinking water facility, sanitation and setting up of high mast lights on the hospital premises.

As the number of patients turning up for the hospital has been increasing over the years, dialysis and physiotherapy facilities will be put in place, it was learnt.

Medical Superintendent Dr Sitansu Shekhar Satpathy pointed out various problems of the hospital.

On the occasion, the minister inaugurated a solid waste management plant near the fish spawn production centre. The plant was set up at a cost of Rs 1.03 crore.

NO FEAR FOR COVID



Throwing Covid safety norms to the winds, tourists throng Gopalpur sea beach on the eve of New Year day

OP PHOTO

Akhandalamani reopens today, Biraja tomorrow

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak/Jajpur, Dec 27: After remaining closed for nine months, the famous Akhandalamani shrine at Aradi in Bhadrak district will reopen from Monday amid strict Covid-19 protocols, while the Biraja temple in Jajpur will reopen from December 29.

The servitors and their family members will get the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the Lord in first two days at Aradi following which the shrine will be thrown open for local residents.

According to Bhadrak Sub-collector Pitambar Samal, December 28 and 29, the temple will reopen for servitors and their family members and residents of around four panchayats in the vicinity of the Aradi Temple will be allowed dar-



■ Bhadrak Sub-collector Pitambar Samal say, the temple will reopen for servitors and their family members Dec 28 and 29. People of four panchayats around the Aradi Temple will be allowed darshan Dec 30 and 31

■ The temple of Goddess Biraja is all set to welcome devotees from December 29. The ancient shrine, which has remained shut since March due to the coronavirus pandemic, will reopen following sharp decline in the Covid-19 cases in the district, Jajpur Collector Chakravarti Singh Rathore said

shan December 30 and 31. Finally, the temple will be thrown open for the public from January 3 after two days of closure on January 1

and 2 in view of the New Year rush.

All devotees will be allowed to have darshan of the Lord from

January 3 between 7 am and 5 pm, he added.

The sub-collector has urged the devotees to adhere to the Covid-19 guidelines strictly. Covid protocols like use of face mask, hand sanitising and social distancing have been made mandatory for the devotees before making entry into the shrine.

Similarly, the servitors have been instructed to show their identity cards before entering the temple premises, Samal added.

The temple of Goddess Biraja is all set to welcome devotees from December 29. The ancient shrine, which has remained shut since March due to the coronavirus pandemic, will reopen following sharp decline in the Covid-19 cases in the district, Jajpur Collector Chakravarti Singh Rathore said.

DOWN B-TOWN MEMORY LANE

From controversial deaths to actors' involvement in drugs and from super success of newbies to shocking demises of stalwarts, the entertainment world witnessed several incidents that grabbed eyeballs in 2020. *Orissa POST* takes a look at all that made good and bad noises over the last 12 months in showbiz



Split Wide Open

Till a few months ago people vouched for their compatibility and they were the best ever star couple. But come August, it came to light that all was not well, in fact things were worst between actor and MP Anubhav Mohanty and his wife actress Varsha Priyadarshini. In a shocking turnaround, Varsha filed a case in the court of SDJM, Cuttack, August 7 against her husband under Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act. Earlier, Anubhav had filed a divorce suit July 6 at the Patiala House Court, Delhi. Varsha, in her petition, had demanded a compensation of Rs 13 crore, Rs 50,000 per month for maintenance, Rs20,000 per month for house rent and Rs 2 crore for loss of earning and medical expenses from Anubhav. Varsha also moved Odisha State Commission for Women (OSCW) over the matter. Taking the issue seriously, the panel has issued notice to the BJD's Kendrapara MP and his parents to appear before the commission December 29. Besides, Varsha has filled multiple police complaints against Anubhav within a very short period.

Odisha too has a Sonu Sood

A film star intervening to offer assistance to migrant workers, arranging transport, hospitalisation, ration and finance for people, and leading a people's movement during the Covid-19 lockdown? This may sound like a reference to Sonu Sood, but Odia star Sabyasachi Mishra has led a similar campaign in Odisha. In the last three months, the engineer-turned-actor has arranged the arrival of hundreds of Odias in around 35 buses, and many more by special trains, from states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Kerala. But the actor's assistance to people hasn't been limited to transport. He has also delivered medical relief to people through hospitalisations, which is how the campaign began, and monetary assistance to migrants and others who were stuck in various parts of the country in the early phases of the lockdown. Mishra did all of this through his little-known trust, Smile Please, which was formed just a year ago to provide a platform to differently-abled youths for a career in acting.



NEW INNINGS

2020 has been a year of celebrity weddings. Here is list of celebs who surprised us by tying the knot this year

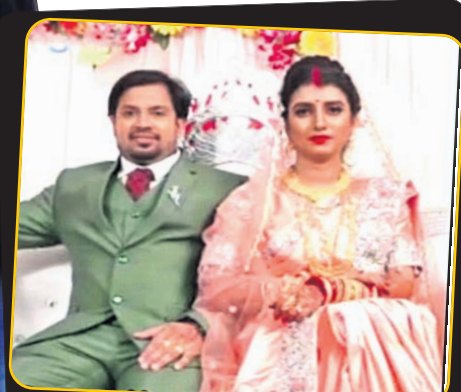
Kajal Aggarwal

The *Singham* actress got married to beau Gautam Kitchlu October 30 at Taj Hotel, Mumbai. The couple hosted low key pre-wedding festivities at home due to the pandemic.



Diptirekha Padhi

The popular Odia playback singer started her new innings of life as she tied the knot December 13. She married Soumya Ranjan Satapathy of Khurda district in presence of family members at a hotel in Bhubaneswar.



Amlan Das

The son of veteran actor Mihir Das married his childhood friend Bhumiika in Cuttack February 7. The wedding ceremony took place as per the Arya Samaj rituals in the presence of their family members and close friends.



MAANVI GAGROO

She was loved for her portrayal of the affable Goggle in *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, but it was her performance as Siddhi in season two of *Four More Shots Please!* that helped her gain a massive fandom and spotlighted her acting skills.



SHARAD KELKAR

It's interesting how he stole some of Akshay Kumar's thunder in the film *Laxmi*. It was his character as the original transgender that was more talked about. Sharad also delivered his best as Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj in the film *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*.



AHANNA KUMRA

She started the year with *Marzi*, which navigates the fading line between power, deception, and trust. She then turned into a zombie for *Betaal*. She will be ending the year on a hilarious note, in Rohan Sippy's thoroughly enjoyable sitcom *Sandwiched Forever*.



Jhilik Bhattacharjee

The top actress tied the knot with BJD leader and Sukinda MLA Pritiranjan Gharai. The actress made the revelation by sharing a marriage photo on her Instagram profile March 12. Hailing from West Bengal, Jhilik made her debut in Odia film industry with the movie *Tarjet* in 2013.



The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

For the film industry 2020 started on a normal note. Films released as scheduled. But unexpected spike in Covid cases proved to be a catastrophe. Covid-19 may have struck in 2019 but the impact started to be felt around March 20. After that, things have gone steadily downhill.

The year had just a few films with staying power at the box office, out of about 45 films that released in 2020. A few films that did well were *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*, *Baaghi 3* and *Street Dancer 3D*.

The year will also go into record for some major tragedies. The most controversial being the unnatural deaths of youth heartthrob, Sushant Singh Rajput and his associate, Disha Salian. Controversy dominated the news media, created some political storms and remains a subject of debate even now. Other than that, fans also mourned the deaths of Rishi Kapoor and Irrfan.

The other controversy was of the demolition of the high-end Mumbai property of Kangana Ranaut in, what was said to be the result of crossing swords with the powers that be. Ranaut was very vocal on the way the Sushant Singh Rajput

death probe was being handled. More and more film folk expressed their unsolicited opinions on the Rajput and Ranaut but public sympathy was with these two.

The TV channels made a marathon reality show of the Rajput and Kangana issues, with their usual for and against panelists who had little to do with the present-day affairs of the film industry.

However, what has rocked the film industry is the accusations of usage of drugs and the drug parties. A lot of stars and some filmmakers are still being investigated. For the film industry, otherwise always taken for granted, which was in the process of cultivating a goodwill with governments at the Centre as well as some states, these drug reports were a setback.



Screen Villain, Real-Life Hero

Actor Sonu Sood showed the world that what Akshay Kumar did in *Airlift* was very much possible off-screen too. Hindi film industry is charity-friendly, but even by its standards, Sonu Sood's deeds are heroic. Dubbed a migrant messiah, he stole our hearts for generously sending help and hope during the migrant workers' crisis in the wake of the nationwide lockdown. Screen baddie but real-life hero, his efforts saw him arrange special flights and busses to ensure those stranded due to

economic shutdown reached their villages and hometowns safely. International passengers, including students desperate to get home, were also put on chartered planes to facilitate their return to India. Suddenly, Sonu was the biggest saviour and good Samaritan in town. Today, he's a meme magnet. There's an SS joke for anyone (damsels included) waiting to be rescued. One man even reached out to Sood to be reunited with his sweetheart. During the Indo-China border conflict, a well-known columnist suggested, "Send Sonu Sood to

Ladakh to send Chinese back home safely." When Sanjay Gupta showed interest in buying rights to Sonu's life for a biopic, Twitterati's joked, "Akshay Kumar will play Sonu Sood." Expect *Airlift* II to drop on an OTT platform soon.

» ODISHA'S OWN GULLY BOY

Duleswar Tandi from Odisha's Kalahandi district, also known as Dule Rocker, rose to fame after his rap video, *Telling The Truth*, went viral, making even Hindi film industry sit up and take notice. Tandi was among those migrant workers who returned to his hometown walking. But soon he realised there would be little help coming his way from the government. That's when he decided to voice his opinion about the miseries of the migrants and their struggles following the nationwide lockdown in the form of rap. The 27-year-old rap sensation who used to wipe tables in hotels and



restaurants in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, has now nearly four lakhs views of his video on YouTube and has been covered by several news portals. Several celebrities including Vishal Dadlani and Swara Bhasker continue to shower praise on him on social media. The tribal youth is also being likened to the character portrayed by top actor Ranveer Singh in the 2019 Hindi film *Gully Boy*.



» Tribal Singing Sensation

The journey of young tribal girl Namita Melka from Chintaguda village in Koraput district to the New Recording Studio in Silver City Cuttack to achieve her dream was not easy. This was possible only for actress Varsha Priyadarshini. Highly impressed by Namita's resonant voice, the actress wrote on her Twitter handle, "Talent should not be hidden to be a small part in her journey to help her & inspire her to achieve her dreams & be successful & set an example for all the youth talent who wish to fulfil their own dreams." Living up to her commitment, the actress facilitated the recording of a devotional song sung by Namita in Cuttack. Soon after, the state government announced that the singing sensation will be getting the opportunity to pursue her future studies with music at Bhubaneswar.

In news for all the wrong reasons

As we leave the dreaded 2020 behind and start a new chapter in a few days from now, here's a look at a few celebrities who made news this year for all the wrong reasons

Rhea Chakraborty

The actress grabbed headlines this year after the demise of actor Sushant Singh Rajput whom she was dating. The actress was accused of abetment to suicide by the late actor's family. The case gained a massive momentum on social media leading to the CBI taking over the case from the Mumbai Police. The case was later taken up by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) as well. The NCB arrested Rhea, and her brother in September for alleged role in a drug case related to Rajput's death. Rhea was released on bail after spending a month in prison. Ever since the actress has not been spotted in the public eye.

Kangana Ranaut

The *Gangster* actress, in the past year, had slammed many of her peers and film industry members for different reasons. First, she accused Karan Johar and Aditya Chopra of running a "movie mafia" in the industry and sparked the nepotism debate again in the aftermath of Sushant's unfortunate death. She also asked Ranveer Singh, Ranbir Kapoor, Vicky Kaushal and more celebs to take drug tests. Kangana went on to compared Mumbai to "Pakistan occupied Kashmir" and within no time, a controversy erupted on social media and off it.



Kanika Kapoor

When the COVID-19 crisis first hit Hindi film industry, popular singer Kanika Kapoor was amongst the first to be tested positive for the virus. It was alleged Kanika broke quarantine rules and attended large gatherings in Lucknow despite symptoms. The singer received a lot of flak on social media and had limited the comments on her Instagram account.



Deepika, Rakul, Shraddha and Sara

Amid a suspected drug angle in Sushant's death case, the NCB also suspected a drug link in the film industry. The NCB then started to probe both the cases together. As part of its investigation, the NCB summoned Deepika Padukone, Rakul Preet Singh, Sara Ali Khan and Shraddha Kapoor among others. While Deepika and Rakul were summoned on the basis of alleged chats that surfaced online, Sara and Shraddha were Sushant's co-stars in *Kedarnath* and *Chhichhore*. It was also reported that Sara and Sushant briefly dated.



TOP 5 GROSSING HINDI FILMS

RANK	MOVIE NAME	GLOBAL COLLECTIONS (RS IN CR.)
1	Tanhaji - The Unsung Warrior	367.65
2	Baaghi 3	137.05
3	Street Dancer 3D	97
4	Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan	86.3
5	Malang	84.5

TOP 5 INDIAN WEB SERIES

The outgoing 2020 turned out to be a game-changing year for digital OTT platforms. Due to lockdown, the viewership of premium OTT platforms saw a massive surge. Here is a look at the list of the top five Indian web series of 2020 based on their IMDb ratings

Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story

National Award-winning director Hansal Mehta made his OTT debut with this web series. The thriller web drama is based on Debashis Basu and Sucheta Dalal's book *The Scam: Who Won, Who Lost, Who Got Away*. It reports the story of one of the biggest financial scams in the Indian stock market.



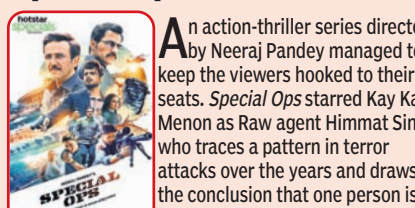
Panchayat

Starring Jitendra Kumar, Raghuveer Yadav, and Neena Gupta, *Panchayat* is a comic-drama series that showcases the journey of an engineering graduate. The simplicity and relatable storyline make this light-hearted series a must-watch with family.



Special Ops

An action-thriller series directed by Neeraj Pandey managed to keep the viewers hooked to their seats. *Special Ops* starred Kay Kay Menon as RAW agent Himmat Singh who traces a pattern in terror attacks over the years and draws the conclusion that one person is behind all the attacks.



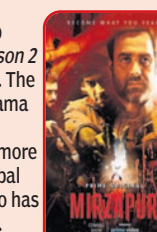
Bandish Bandits

This web series, based on Indian classical music, took the audience by a surprise. This romantic drama with mesmerising musical experience requires a special mention in a list dominated by crime thrillers.



Mirzapur Season 2

The most awaited Indian web series of 2020 *Mirzapur* season 2 was finally released in October. The action-packed crime thriller drama has all the raw and intense elements to entertain and attract more viewers. With the immense global popularity, Amazon Prime Video has renewed *Mirzapur* for season 3.



PRATIK GANDHI

He has to be one of the best additions to the Hindi entertainment space after his performance in Hansal Mehta's biographical drama, *Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story*. The show has made his career graph soar. Pratik was making his mark on the Gujarati screen and stage when the Harshad Mehta bio-series happened.



JITENDRA KUMAR

He always had a niche fan base thanks to his Viral Fever sketches, but 2020 proved to be the game changer. He courted fame with his portrayal of Ayushman Khurana's on-screen gay lover in *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*. But the show that made him a household name was *Panchayat*, a satirical web series where he played a big city boy who ends up as secretary in the gram panchayat of a remote village.



Maiden Int'l Emmy for Indian series



DELHI CRIME

Based on the horrific 2012 Delhi gang-rape and murder Netflix's *Delhi Crime* became the first Indian web-series to win an International Emmy Award. The series was directed by Richie Mehta and has magnificent Shefali Shah playing the role of Deputy Commissioner of Police who has been tasked with finding the culprits of the heinous crime as well as has an extremely talented Adil Hussain in a supporting role.

Sunanda Patnaik

Known for his performance in films such as *Hakim Babu*, the National School of Drama alumnus passed away September 13 following Covid complications. A dedicated theatre personality, Das (71) also acted in more than 60 Odia films.

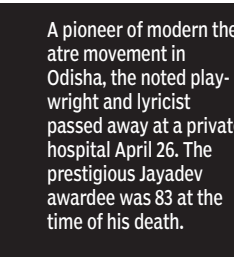


AJIT DAS

An eminent Indian classical singer, who had carved a special identity in Odia music world, passed away January 19 following a prolonged illness. She was 85. The Odisha government has decided to institute Sunanda Samman for eminent musicians and also set up Guruma Sunanda Patnaik Chair at Utkal University of Culture for higher studies and research in classical music.



BIJAY MISHRA



A pioneer of modern theatre movement in Odisha, the noted playwright and lyricist passed away at a private hospital April 26. The prestigious Jayadev award was 83 at the time of his death.



The veteran Odia film director and cinematographer also known as Raju Mishra passed away November 2 at his residence in Jatani area of Khurda district. He was 72. Mishra received several awards including Jayadev Samman in 2014 for his immense contributions to Odia cinema.



RAJ GOPAL MISHRA



The legendary filmmaker, known for his new wave cinema in 1970s and early '80s, passed away at a private hospital in Bhubaneswar January 13. He was 69. The FTII alumnus from Odisha had the rare distinction of winning eight national awards for his films.



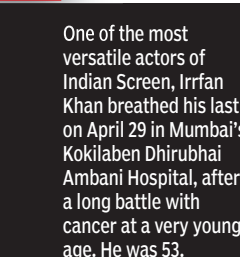
Popular for her performance in several music videos, the 'album queen' died July 27 following a battle with cancer. She was suffering from third stage of uterus cancer for six years.



DEEPA SAHU

IN MEMORIAM

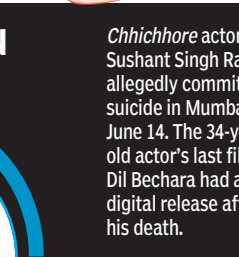
FROM AJIT DAS, BIJAY MOHANTY IN ODISHA TO SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT, IRRFAN KHAN, SP BALASUBRAHMANYAM, RISHI KAPOOR, THE INDIAN ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY LOST SOME OF ITS GREATS IN 2020. A LOOK AT THE NOTABLE EXITS



IRRFAN KHAN



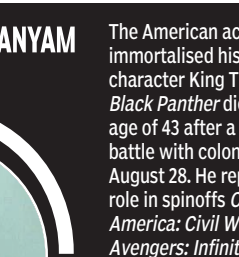
SAROJ KHAN



SUSHANT SINGH RAJPUT



SP BALASUBRAHMANYAM



CHADWICK BOSEMAN



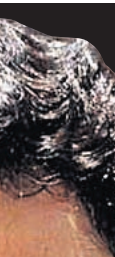
SEAN CONNERY



RISHI KAPOOR



CHADWICK BOSEMAN



CHADWICK BOSEMAN

of the day quote

The BJP government under Modi has given a new identity to the region which is now experiencing a new thrust in development



AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

PM-HM's shameful DISINFORMATION campaign on Bengal CAUGHT red-handed by their own Central Statistical Orgn! Chart EXPOSES how India growth rates hit bottom under duo, while growth under MamataB soared in Bengal: GDP, Industry, Services, Agri. So, apologise to people of Bengal



AMIT MITRA | BENGAL FINANCE MINISTER

Dear Nadda ji, before misleading the farmers, you should have known that there is no MSP on potatoes. And we also want reforms in the agriculture sector, but the question here is the way the life of farmers has been attacked with the three black laws



RANDEEP SURJEWALA | CONGRESS CHIEF SPOKESPERSON

SHORT TAKES

ED summons Sanjay Raut's wife

New Delhi: The ED has summoned Varsha Raut, wife of Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut, for questioning in the PMC Bank money laundering case December 29, officials said Sunday. Varsha Raut has been asked to appear before the federal agency in Mumbai. This is the third summons issued to her after she skipped the earlier two on health grounds, they said.

Sunil Kothari passes away

New Delhi: Padma Shri dance historian and critic Sunil Kothari passed away Sunday morning at a Delhi hospital after he suffered a cardiac arrest a month after testing positive for coronavirus. He was 87. "He had tested positive for COVID-19 almost a month back and was not in a good condition," Vidha Lal, a family friend and herself a dancer, told PTI. Born December 20, 1933 in Mumbai, Kothari qualified as a Chartered Accountant before turning to the study of Indian dance forms.

7 killed in Assam road mishap

Dhubri (Assam): Seven people were killed and 20 others injured after a passenger bus collided head-on with a truck on National Highway-17 in Assam's Kokrajhar district Sunday, police said. The accident happened at Chataguri near Panbari area under the jurisdiction of Bogribari police station.

Rajini discharged from hospital

Hyderabad: Superstar Rajinikanth was Sunday discharged from a hospital here, where he was treated for blood pressure fluctuation, after his condition improved, authorities said. "His blood pressure has been stabilised and he is feeling much better."

Jawan shoots self

Jammu: A Border Security Force (BSF) jawan allegedly shot himself dead with his service rifle at a camp in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district Sunday, officials said. Constable PK Dass, posted in 168th battalion, was on sentry duty when he shot himself with his rifle at Uchad camp in Mendhar area, they said.



Farmers are protesting for their survival. These laws will snatch away their land. I appeal with folded hands to the Centre to please repeal the three agri laws

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

FARMERS BEAT 'THALIS' DURING 'MANN KI BAAT'

AGENCIES

Chandigarh, Dec 27: Farmers Sunday beat 'thalis' at a few places in Punjab and Haryana during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme as part of their protest against the Centre's new agri laws.

While addressing a press conference December 20 at Delhi's Singhu border, farmer leaders had asked people protesting against the laws to beat utensils during the programme, the same way the prime minister had asked them in March to beat 'thalis' (steel plates).

Modi had asked people to express gratitude towards those at the forefront of combating the coronavirus and extending essential services by giving a five-minute standing ovation by clapping, beating plates or ringing bells. Farmers beat 'thalis' during protests at Amritsar, Ferozepur, Sangrur, Talwandi Sabo, Bathinda, Tarn Taran and Gurdaspur districts in Punjab and Rohtak and Jind districts in Haryana, among other places in the two states.

"The common people too are with farmers in their agitation against the farm laws," said a protester in Amritsar as he beat a 'thali' with a spoon and raised 'Jai Kisan' slogan. At many places, farmers, who were joined by people from other sections of society, raised slogans against the BJP-led government at the Centre.

Haryana Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) chief Gurnam Singh Chaduni went to the Makrauli toll plaza in Rohtak district along with a group of farmers to protest against the legislations. They beat 'thalis' with shoes during the prime minister's monthly radio broadcast. "We are here to oppose Modi's 'Mann Ki



Baat'. We are registering this protest because the prime minister only says what he has to without listening to the voice of the people," Chaduni said during the protest. He said feedback has been received from protesting farmers that toll collection on highways in Haryana should be halted till the Centre accepts the demands of the agitating farmers.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, are protesting against the laws since the last week of November at various border points of Delhi and demanding that the legislations be repealed. "We went to many toll barriers and farmers who are protesting there said no toll should be charged from people till the government accepts our demands," the BKU leader said.

Intensifying their agitation against the Centre's new agri laws, farmers December 20 had also announced that they will halt toll collection on highways in Haryana from December 25 to 27. "From December 25 to 27 all toll booths in Haryana will not be allowed by us to collect toll, we will halt them from doing so.

On December 27, our prime minister will say his 'Mann ki baat' and we want to appeal to the people to beat 'thalis' during his address, the same way the PM had asked

the country to bang utensils for coronavirus," the BKU leader Jagjeet Singh Dalewala had said at the press conference.

When the Prime Minister will speak, "we appeal to the people of the entire country to bang utensils in your houses throughout the duration of his programme to drown out his Mann Ki Baat", he had said. Farmers are protesting against the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, the Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

The three farm laws, enacted in September, have been projected by the government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove middlemen and allow farmers to sell anywhere in the country. However, the protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of Minimum Support Price and do away with the mandis, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates. The Centre has repeatedly asserted that these mechanisms will remain. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Sunday said attempts to "mislead" farmers on recent agriculture laws will not succeed.

IMD forecasts cold wave in north India next week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Several places in north India, including Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, recorded their minimum temperature below the five-degree Celsius mark Sunday, with the India Meteorological Department forecasting severe cold wave in parts of the region later this week and warning of dense fog.

Though the mercury rose slightly in Delhi due to a Western Disturbance, the department said the relief will be short-lived as cold and dry northerly and northwesterly winds from the western Himalayas are likely to bring the minimum temperature in north India down by three to five degrees Celsius. "Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and north Rajasthan from December 28-29. Ground frost and dense fog is likely in isolated pockets in the region," the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Four eclipses in 2021, two to be visible in India

This year, there were two solar and four lunar eclipses

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indore, Dec 27: There will four eclipses in 2021, including one total solar eclipse and one total lunar eclipse, but only two will be visible from India, Ujjain-based Jiwaji Observatory's Superintendent Dr Rajendra Prakash Gupta said Sunday.

He told PTI that the first of these events will be May 26, and will be seen in parts of West Bengal, coastal Odisha and in the north-eastern states, except Sikkim, as the moon is visible earlier in these places than other parts of the country. "The earth will cover the moon

by 101.6 per cent during this astronomical event," he said.

A total lunar eclipse occurs when the earth comes between the sun and the moon. Gupta said the annular solar eclipse June 10 will not be visible in India, and in this event, the moon will come between the sun and earth, leading to the sun getting covered 94.3 per cent and being seen as a 'ring of fire'. He said the partial lunar

eclipse, November 19, can be seen from Arunachal Pradesh and some parts of Assam for a very short period.

"At the peak of this event, 97.9 per cent of the moon will be seen covered by the earth's shadow. The total solar eclipse December 4, the last of 2021, will, however, not be visible from India," he added.



Hooda stuns the conclave

Former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda is a soft spoken person and rarely talks tough. But he was perhaps the only one among the dissidents to stun the conclave of 19 leaders that was held at the residence of Congress president Sonia Gandhi. Ghulam Nabi Azad, Anand Sharma, Prithviraj Chavan and many other letter writers who spoke at the meeting, were not as aggressive as Hooda was. Rather, some of them were speaking in a rather conciliatory and milder tone. When Hooda's turn came, he didn't mince his words. He began with an emotional note saying that he came to Delhi when he was only six months old and saw only Congress in his entire political career. But this was only the beginning.

Soon he sent the chill in the otherwise warm weather in the sprawling lawns at 10 Janpath. Hooda said he is fighting a lonely battle in Haryana against the BJP which had pumped in Rs 100 crores to win the Baroda Assembly seat in a bitter-fought byelection. There were people who were conspiring to defeat the Congress. Yet he was able to defeat the BJP against all odds and the might of state and Central governments. Hooda did not stop there and went on to say that had he been made the leader of the party in Haryana three months prior to State Assembly polls last year, the Congress would have won the state.

Fast-track vaccine clearances

There is a strong possibility that the UK is expected to authorise the Oxford vaccine early next week under the Emergency Authorization Use (EAU) probably by December 28-29 paving the way for India to use the same vaccine. Serum Institute is manufacturing AstraZeneca-Oxford under the head of Covid shield and has provided all the data to the Indian authorities. All the state governments have already been put on

high alert to identify the places to store the vaccine and those who will be handling the entire operations to vaccinate priority category people. However, the government is maintaining strict secrecy in this regard. But according to all indications, India is working on twin strategies; import some quantity from Pfizer vaccine also and allow Seerum's AstroZeneca for massive use too. Both have applied to the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) for an emergency use clearance earlier this month. The DCGI sought some additional data from Pfizer, Seerum Institute, Pune & Bharat Biotech, Hyderabad. Pfizer vaccine is being given in USA, UK and other countries on a large scale. Pfizer has also made it clear that it will provide the vaccine only to the government and not to any private company. With regard to the Bharat Biotech's Covaxin is concerned, the DCGI wants it to complete the Phase-II & Phase-III trials quickly and submit the data.

Modi proposes, officer disposes

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious experiment of hiring domain experts directly at the Joint Secretary level suffered

PM TO FLAG OFF FIRST DRIVERLESS TRAIN TODAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the country's first ever fully-automated driverless train service on the Magenta Line of the Delhi Metro Monday that will herald a new era of enhanced mobility driven by cutting-edge technology



Terror plot to attack temple in Poonch foiled

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Dec 27: The Jammu and Kashmir Police Sunday said it has arrested three Pakistan-linked militant associates and recovered six grenades from them, foiling a terror plot to attack a temple in the border district of Poonch and disturb communal harmony.

Poonch Senior Superintendent of Police Ramesh Kumar Angral said the arrested persons were planning to carry out a grenade attack on a temple at the behest of their Pakistani handler to disturb peace and communal amity in the district.

The officer told reporters in Poonch that the ploy was revealed after Special Operations Group (SOG) of the local police along with troops of the 49 Rashtriya Rifles detained two brothers -- Mustafa Iqbal Khan and Murtaza Iqbal of Galhuta village -- from their vehicle near Basooni in Mendhar sector at around 8 pm Saturday.

He said their interrogation was conducted at the 49 Rashtriya Rifles Battalion headquarters, Basooni, and it was found that Mustafa had received a call from a Pakistani number and was directed to execute the grenade attack.

"On being questioned further, he admitted to have been tasked with throwing a grenade at a temple in Ari village. A video on how to use a grenade was also found in his phone," the SSP said.

The SSP said it came to light that Mustafa was involved in militant activities, and on his confession two of his associates -- Mohammad Yaseen and Rayees Ahmad of Dabbi village of Balakote near the Line of Control (LoC) -- were also apprehended.

‘Not a good sign’: JD(U) on BJP’s Arunachal jolt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, Dec 27: The JD(U) Sunday expressed anguish over en masse exodus of its MLAs to the BJP in Arunachal Pradesh, saying it is "not a good sign of alliance politics", while pitching for coalition dharma followed during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's time.

The party's annoyance over the episode was expressed by its secretary general K C Tyagi after its national executive meeting here. He, however, made it clear that the developments of Arunachal Pradesh will have no bearing on Biha's politics as there is "no dispute" in its alliance government here.

Kumar is heading NDA government in Bihar having JD(U), BJP, Hindustani Awam Morcha and Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) as its constituents. After departure of six MLAs, the JD(U) is now left with one legislator in the north-eastern state.

"The party has expressed its deep anguish, displeasure, protest on Arunachal Pradesh development. It is not a good sign for alliance politics," Tyagi told reporters.

"The coalition partners should follow Atal Dharma" while running alliance government, Tyagi said. He pointed to the former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee successfully ran a coalition government of 23 partners where there were no contradictions among them (allies). He was sharing information about the decisions taken at party's national council meeting held at Karpoori Thakur Sabhagar at party's state



headquarters here. Meanwhile, Rajya Sabha member Ramchandra Prasad Singh better known by the initial RCP Singh, a close confidant of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, was on Sunday chosen as the new president of JD (U).

Kumar had proposed the name of Singh for the top post, which was then approved by other members during the party's national executive and national council meeting. Stating that party leader had told home minister Amit Shah and BJP chief J P Nadda that they would not find an opposition who could created any sort of trouble for the government and hence they may be included in the Arunachal cabinet, Tyagi said that "instead of accommodating them (JD(U) MLAs) into the cabinet, they (BJP) included them in their party".

Referring to Nitish Kumar's speech delivered at the party's meeting, Tyagi said that Kumar did not want to become the CM after the assembly results were declared, the decision which he (Kumar) had conveyed to both his party and ally BJP.

Hyd set to emerge as global hub for nCoV vaccine in 2021

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Dec 27: As the world is set to brace for a new year amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the city is poised to emerge as a 'saviour' from the killer virus, with as many as five vaccine manufacturing firms based here racing to bring out an antidote.

The vaccine development process by Bharat Biotech, Biological E Ltd and Aurobindo Pharma are currently in various stages, while Dr Reddy's and Hetero have tie ups for manufacturing the vaccine. Some of these companies have also drawn up plans to scale up their vaccine manufacturing capacities.

Besides vaccine makers, the International Airport here has also stepped up the cold-chain infrastructure for vaccine transportation.

GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo (GHAC) is in talks with various stakeholders towards meeting specific requirements of export and import of COVID-19 vaccines. A recent visit of over 60 envoys to vaccine man-



ufacturing facilities of Bharat Biotech and BE establishes the fact that the city will be in the forefront in making and supplying vaccines for COVID-19 which is rocking the world with over 77 million cases and nearly two million deaths as of now.

Udaya Bhaskar, director general of Pharmexcil, a pharma exports promotion body under the department of commerce, said as there is no policy in place with regard to COVID-19 vaccine exports to other countries, it can be assumed that the centre may ensure that domestic requirement is fulfilled before al-

lowing vaccine makers to export.

"All these vaccine makers, except Bharat Biotech, are having development or manufacturing tie ups with foreign companies. We do not know the agreement details as to what quantity will be exported from India. However, the Indian Government has the final say in this regard," Bhaskar said.

Telangana Director of Public Health G Srinivas Rao said though the companies are located here, the state will not get preference in vaccine allocation as it will be decided by the Centre. The state has no role in vaccine allocation. It will be decided by the centre only. They will devise a method to allot the number of doses and states will get accordingly," the official told PTI. The city's prominence accentuated after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited a facility of Bharat Biotech Genome valley here November 28 and reviewed the progress of Covaxin, a vaccine candidate for COVID-19.

BJP's big win in Arunachal

The BJP has not stopped after its Bihar win. It went on to make a big mark in Hyderabad multiplying its stellar performance in the Municipal polls there. As if this was not enough, it shocked the Congress by capturing Panchayat and municipal polls in Arunachal Pradesh without a vote being cast. The party defeated the Congress in 2016 in Arunachal Pradesh and never looked back. The BJP has won 96 of the 242 zilla parishad posts and 5,410 of the 8,196 gram panchayat posts uncontested. This apart, it also won five of the 58 corporator seats under the Itanagar Municipal Corporation. The results for the uncontested seats also reveal the free fall of the Congress, in the frontier state which had once been its bastion. After the results, the BJP radiated positivity, with the Chief Minister, Pema Khandu, hailing the victory as 'historic' and crediting it to the intelligence of the voters and the unprecedented development work going on in the state under the BJP-led government. In contrast, senior Congress leaders refuse to 'looking within' till now.

Govt pushed back investments: Sena

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 27: Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday said the Modi government may have pushed back Chinese investments, but it hasn't been able to push back Chinese soldiers who intruded into Indian territory.

The BJP rubbished the Rajya Sabha member's claim, published in his weekly column Rokhthok in the Sena mouthpiece Saamana. "It is their single-point agenda to target the Modi government,"

Maharashtra BJP chief spokesperson Keshav Upadhye said. "We were unable to push back Chinese soldiers, but we pushed back Chinese investments," Raut's article said.

"Instead of shutting investments, we should have pushed back Chinese soldiers from Ladakh," the Sena MP said.



We were unable to push back Chinese soldiers, but we pushed back Chinese investments. Instead of shutting investments, we should have pushed back Chinese soldiers from Ladakh

SANJAY RAUT I
SHIV SENA MP

Upadhye said he was yet to come across an article by Raut where he does not cast aspersions on the Modi government. "Anyway the public doesn't take such claims seriously," he added.

Raut also wrote that the relationship between states and the Centre is getting sour. "If those in power at the Centre don't realise that they are doing disservice to the

people by indulging in politicking, there would be a break-up of states the way USSR disintegrated," he said.

"The fact that states where the BJP is not in power are also part of the country is being forgotten," Raut said.

Claiming that the US government's coronavirus relief package provides \$85,000 per month for each citizen, Raut bemoaned that such a relief package was missing in India.

"The Centre doesn't have money,

but has funds to win elections, top-le governments and form new ones. The country's debt burden amount is more than the national revenue. If our prime minister can sleep peacefully in such a situation, he should be praised," the Rajya Sabha member said.

"People lost their lives due to the pandemic, but the Parliament lost its soul. Farmers are protesting against three agriculture laws, but the government ignored their sentiments and instead raised emotional issues like the Ram temple in Ayodhya," he said.

The future of India's parliamentary democracy came under threat this year, he said. Prominent personalities have informed Modi that instead of building a new Parliament complex at a cost of ₹1,000 crore, that money should be spent on improving the healthcare facilities, he added.

"Funds are being collected from people for the Ram temple in Ayodhya. If a similar crowd-funding activity is carried out for the new Parliament complex, even ₹one lakh would not be collected as such buildings have become useless for people," he said.

AKHILESH ACCUSES GOVT OF HURTING DEMOCRACY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Dec 27: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav Sunday accused the BJP-led state government of hurting the "foundation of democracy" by dissolving village panchayats without conducting elections for them.

Yadav's allegation prompted a rebuttal from UP BJP vice-president and party's in-charge of panchayat elections Vijay Bahadur Pathak who said Yadav had been the state's chief minister and should know that the panchayat elections could not have been held amid the Covid-19.

Pathak also expressed the UP government's commitment to holding the panchayat elections within six months.

"The BJP government in Uttar Pradesh has dissolved the village panchayats without conducting the fresh elections for them. Major elections are being conducted, but the government has been finding itself unable to hold elections of the smallest units of public represen-



tation. How will this government run Uttar Pradesh?" Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi on Sunday.

"The BJP must not hurt the foundation of democracy," the former UP chief minister added in his tweet. Rebutting Yadav's claims, Pathak told PTI, "Akhilesh Yadav had been the chief minister of UP. He should know that elections should have been conducted at the stipulated time."

"He should also know that the elections have been delayed because of the anti-Covid protocol. The

UP government is committed to holding elections within six months for which preparations are already going on," said Pathak.

He also said that those who are accusing the government of not holding the elections for these "smallest units of public representation" had actually crushed them for their own vested interests. "The BJP has faith in democratic values," Pathak said. The Uttar Pradesh has a total of 58,758 gram panchayats and as many panchayat heads.

Boycott farm laws supporters, says SP



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ballia, Dec 27: Senior Samajwadi Party leader Ram Govind Chaudhary on Sunday called on farmers in his constituency Bansdih here not to allow political leaders who are supporting the Centre's agricultural reforms to enter their villages.

The leader of opposition in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly was speaking at a programme organised in Bisauli village.

Thousands of farmers from different states, including Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at Delhi's borders for a month now to demand the repeal of the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.

The Samajwadi Party has come out in support of agitating farmers.

It held demonstrations in various parts of Uttar Pradesh earlier this month to back the farmers' demand.

Chaudhary said political leaders who are supporting the new farm laws should not be greeted with 'Ram-Ram', 'pranaam' and 'dua-salaam'.

"Giving them water and hookah should also be stopped. They should be stopped from entering the villages," he told the gathering.

Enacted in September, the three farm laws have been projected by the central government as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

However, protesting farmers have expressed apprehension that these laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of minimum support price (MSP) and do away with mandis that ensure income, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

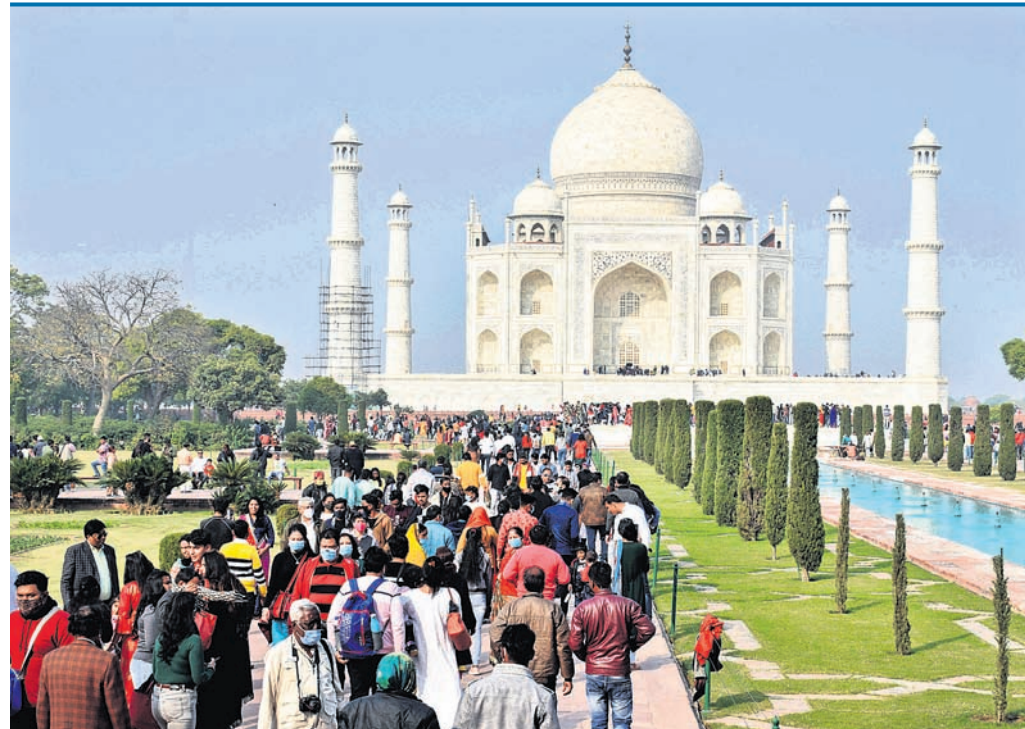
Earlier, the Centre again reached out to the farmers protesting against the agricultural laws, asking them to set the date for the next rounds of talks.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi met President Ram Nath Kovind and told him that the new agricultural laws were "anti-farmer".

He also hit out at the Narendra Modi-led government, saying India was now an "imaginary democracy".

The Delhi Police, meanwhile, detained a delegation of Congress party leaders, including Priyanka Gandhi, while they were trying to march to the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

TAJ TOURISTS



Tourists visit Taj Mahal amid coronavirus pandemic, in Agra, Sunday

PTI

I am placed under house arrest: Lallu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Dec 27: Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu Sunday alleged the state government has deployed armed police outside his residence here to stop him from going to Jhansi, a day after he was arrested briefly by the state police for taking out a march allegedly without permission.

He accused the BJP-led government of "muzzling" the voice of truth and trying to halt democratic protests.

The police said the force has been deployed outside Lallu's residence as they got a "message from the District Magistrate of Jhansi that Ajay Kumar Lallu should not be allowed to come to Jhansi".

Lallu and over 50 party workers were arrested in Lalitpur on Saturday after they tried to take out the 'Gai Bachao, Kisan Bachao (save cow, save farmers)' march without permission, but were released



after a few hours, police had said. The Congress had also alleged Saturday that Lallu was untraceable for some time after his arrest.

Lallu told PTI Sunday, "Yesterday, I was arrested in Lalitpur; and then released. However, the police took me to Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh, and when my not reaching Lucknow started trending on Twitter, I was brought to Lucknow in a hurried manner. I reached my residence in Lucknow at 2.00 am."

He also said, "Today (Sunday), I was scheduled to go to Jhansi, but there is police deployed outside my house."

"This undemocratic (BJP) government is hell-bent on unleashing atrocities. It wants to muzzle our voices. I have brought the ashes of cows from Lalitpur and will immerse them in Mandakini river in Chitrakoot."

He said PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary) personnel brought in three trucks have been deployed outside his residence in Lucknow. "Why is the government afraid if we just want to save the cows and the farmers, and take out a peaceful march," he asked.

"We cannot see cows and farmers die. The government should tell us a particular day when we can raise our voice against them and hold demonstrations," he said.

Meanwhile, UP Congress spokesperson Ashok Singh said, "Why it took the police so much time to bring Ajay Kumar Lallu from Jhansi to Lucknow. The police were unable to tell us the location of our leader."

G N Saibaba 'denied' woollen cap, other items in jail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nagpur, Dec 27: The lawyer of former Delhi University professor G N Saibaba, who is serving life term in Nagpur Central Prison for Maoist links, Sunday alleged that the jail authorities refused to accept a woollen cap and several other items that his family sent for him.

A senior official of the jail, however, said that although they have accepted all the necessary things that Saibaba requires, they cannot allow everything inside.

Saibaba is wheelchair-bound with 90 per cent physical disabilities. In 2017, a court in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli had convicted him and four others for Maoist links and indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country.

Since his conviction, Saibaba has been lodged in the Nagpur jail. Talking to PTI, Saibaba's lawyer Aakash Sarode said that of the 34 different things that Saibaba wanted,



the prison authorities accepted only 13 items when he went there three days back to hand them over.

"A month back, Prof Saibaba had consulted with the jail authorities about the essential things that he requires and which can be

brought from outside. Subsequently, he made a list of the things and submitted an application to the jail authorities so that his family could send these articles," Sarode said.

"Accordingly, his family sent these things to me. On December 24,

SOME OF THE THINGS THAT THE AUTHORITIES REFUSED TO HAND OVER TO HIM WERE THREE BOOKS, A PACK OF 200 PAGES OF BLANK WHITE PAPERS

OTHER ITEMS INCLUDED A NOTE PAD, COPY OF 'INDIA TODAY' MAGAZINE, A WRIST WEIGHT CUFF OF 1 KG THAT HE NEEDS AS PART OF HIS PHYSIOTHERAPY

I went to the jail with all the material along with the list of items. I tried to hand over these things to the authorities. However, the jail staff refused to accept several things, which neither pose any security threat nor pose any danger of COVID-19 spread," he said.

Some of the things that the authorities refused to hand over to him were three books, a pack of 200 pages of blank white papers, a note pad, copy of 'India Today' magazine, a wrist weight cuff of 1 kg that

he needs as part of his physiotherapy, the lawyer said.

"Similarly, a shampoo bottle, a woollen cap (monkey cap), a napkin, a handkerchief, a towel and a white T-shirt were refused by the jail authorities. In all, there were 34 items, but only 13 were accepted," Sarode added.

He said he has e-mailed a letter to the Superintendent of the jail about refusal to accept these things.

"I am yet to receive a reply from him," Sarode said.

When contacted, Superintendent of Nagpur prison Anup Kumre said that all the necessary things required by Saibaba or any other jail inmates were allowed and given to them as per the jail manual.

"We accept all the necessary things as well as things required as he (Saibaba) has health issues," he said.

"We always accept the things which are necessary and are essential for him. However, we cannot allow everything inside," Kumre added.

ALLIANCE WITH SENA ONLY IN MAHA: CONG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 27: Senior Congress leader Ashok Chavan Sunday said that the Shiv Sena was not part of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the tie-up between the two parties is limited to Maharashtra, a day after Sena MP Sanjay Raut called for expansion of the Congress-led bloc.

Speaking to reporters here, the state PWD Minister also said that it was not proper on part of the Sena to comment on the leadership of the UPA.

The Shiv Sena heads the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra, of which the NCP and the Congress are constituents.

"Shiv Sena is yet to become a part of the UPA. Our alliance with the Sena in Maharashtra is based on a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) and limited to

Maharashtra," he said.

A day after Sanjay Raut said that NCP chief Sharad Pawar also enjoys support across parties like UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Chavan said it was not proper for the Uddhav Thackeray-led party to comment on the UPA leadership.

"Sharad Pawar himself has denied the speculation that he will be the next chairperson of the UPA. UPA allies trust the leadership of Sonia Gandhi. So there is no need to discuss the issue," Chavan said.

On Saturday, Raut told reporters that the UPA needs to expand to take on the "dictatorial" Union government.

"All opposition parties should come together against the dictatorial attitude of the Central government. A weak opposition is bad for democracy," the Rajya Sabha MP had said.



of the day quote

The most challenging areas for vaccination are conflict settings, where outbreaks of violence hinder vaccinations, and areas where misinformation is circulating



BENJAMIN SCHREIBER | DEPUTY CHIEF OF GLOBAL IMMUNISATION, UNICEF

Any myth cannot justify throwing out the results of the election, nor can it justify imposing additional burdens on voters that will disenfranchise many Americans



WENDY WEISER | HEAD OF THE DEMOCRACY PROGRAM, NYU SCHOOL OF LAW

Vaccine regimens able to drive high levels of the COVID-specific antibodies with glycosylation patterns favoured by the placenta for selective transfer to the fetus may lead to better neonatal and infant protection



ANDREEA EDLOW | MATERNAL-FETAL MEDICINE SPECIALIST, MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL

SHORT TAKES

Protests keep up against Israel PM

Jerusalem: Hundreds of Israelis protested against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling on the long-serving leader to resign just days after the country was plunged into a new national election. The protesters have been gathering outside on Saturday Netanyahu's Jerusalem residence for months, slamming him for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic and saying he cannot lead the country while under indictment for fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in three separate corruption cases.

GOP leaders seek vote restrictions

Atlanta: Changes to the way millions of Americans voted this year contributed to record turnout, but that's no guarantee the measures making it easier to cast ballots will stick around for future elections. Republicans in key states that voted for President-elect Joe Biden already are pushing for new restrictions, especially to absentee voting. It's an option many states expanded amid the coronavirus outbreak that proved hugely popular.

Military chopper crashes killing 4

Multan: A Pakistani army helicopter on a rescue mission crashed overnight, killing all four aboard, the military said Sunday. The military said the helicopter was transporting the body of a soldier who died after getting trapped in an avalanche when it crashed Saturday evening in the northern Minimarg area of Astore district due to technical reasons. The dead included the pilot, co-pilot and two soldiers.

Stimulus benefits for many in limbo

West Palm Beach: Unemployment benefits for millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet were set to lapse at midnight Saturday night unless President Donald Trump signed an end-of-year COVID relief and spending bill that had been considered a done deal before his sudden objections. Trump's refusal to sign the bipartisan package as he demands larger COVID relief checks and complains about "pork" spending could also force a federal government shutdown when money runs out at 12:01 Tuesday in the middle of a pandemic.



Due to the mutual affinity for cricket shared by both India and Australia, we realised the tremendous opportunity that rested within the sporting event

SCOTT MORRISON | PM, AUSTRALIA

CHINA ORDERS ANT GROUP TO RECTIFY BUSINESSES

Chinese regulators have ordered Ant Group, the world's largest financial technology company, to rectify its businesses and comply with regulatory requirements amid increased scrutiny of anti-monopoly practices in the country's internet sector



EU KICKS OFF VACCINE ROLLOUT

The rollout marks a moment of hope for a region that includes some of the world's earliest and worst-hit virus hot spots

AGENCIES

Warsaw, Dec 27: Medical workers, nursing home residents and politicians were vaccinated against the coronavirus across the European Union on Sunday, part of an effort by the bloc's 27 nations to roll out shots in a coordinated and equitable fashion.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen released a video celebrating the vaccine rollout, calling it "a touching moment of unity" in the battle to protect the bloc's nearly 450 million people from the worst public health crisis in a century.

As it turned out, some EU immunisations began a day early in Germany, Hungary and Slovakia. The operator of a German nursing home



where dozens of people were vaccinated on Saturday including a 101-year-old woman, said "every day that we wait is one day too many."

The rollout marks a moment of hope for a region that includes some of the world's earliest and worst-hit virus hot spots — Italy and Spain

— and others like the Czech Republic, which were spared earlier in the year only to see their health care systems near collapse in the fall.

It also should ease frustrations that were building up, especially in Germany, as Britain, Canada and the United States kicked off their inoculation programs with the same vaccine weeks earlier.

Altogether, the EU's 27 nations have recorded at least 16 million coronavirus infections and more than 336,000 deaths — huge numbers that experts still agree understate the true toll of the pandemic due to missed cases and limited testing.

The first shipments of the vaccine developed by Germany's BioNTech and American drugmaker Pfizer were limited to just under 10,000 doses in most EU countries, with its

mass vaccination programs expected to begin only in January.

Each country is deciding on its own who will get the first shots. Spain, France and Germany, among others, are vowing to put the elderly and residents in nursing homes first.

In Italy, which has Europe's worst virus toll at over 71,000 dead, a nurse in Rome's Spallanzani Hospital, the main infectious diseases facility in the capital, will be the first in the country to receive the vaccine, followed by other health personnel.

Poland is also prioritising doctors, nurses and others on the front lines of fighting the virus. The central European nation was largely spared the surge that badly hit Western Europe in the spring, but has been hit by high daily infections and deaths this fall.

Militants attack Pak checkpoint killing 7 soldiers



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Dec 27: At least seven Pakistani soldiers were killed in a terrorist attack in the country's restive Balochistan province, the Army said Sunday.

The militants fire-raided a Frontier Corps (FC) outpost in Harnai region of the province late last night, it said. During the intense exchange of fire, seven soldiers were killed, it said.

The area was cordoned off and escape routes blocked to apprehend the fleeing militants, while a large-scale search and clearance operation was underway.

Such cowardly acts by inimical elements backed by anti-state forces will not be allowed to sabotage hard earned peace and prosperity in Balochistan, the Army said.

Commenting on the attack, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that he was saddened over the loss of lives.

My heartfelt condolences & prayers go to their families, he said. The attack followed the killing of 10 terrorists by the security forces five days ago in the province.

The terrorists affiliated with the Baloch nationalist outfits regularly attack the security forces in the province.

At least seven killed in knife attack in China



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 27: At least seven people were killed in a knife attack in China's northeast Liaoning province, officials said on Sunday.

The suspect has been arrested by the police, state-run CGTN reported. The incident in Kaiyuan city also left seven people injured, including a police officer who was involved in the arrest of the suspect.

The officials confirmed the death of seven people in the attack.

The injured have been taken to hospital, but their condition was not immediately known.

Violent crimes are rare in China as compared to many other countries, but there has been a series of knife and axe attacks in recent years.

Knife attacks by disgruntled people have been reported from different parts of the country in the past few years. The attackers generally target kindergarten or primary schools or general public to vent their anger.

Japan halts all foreign arrivals

JAPAN IS ALSO SUSPENDING THE EXEMPTION OF A 14-DAY QUARANTINE FOR JAPANESE NATIONALS AND RESIDENT FOREIGNERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Tokyo, Dec 27: Japan is barring entry of all nonresident foreign nationals as a precaution against a new and potentially more contagious coronavirus variant that has spread across Britain.

The Foreign Ministry says the entry ban will start Monday and last through Jan. 31. Last week, Japan banned non-resident foreigners coming from Britain and South Africa after confirming the new variant in seven people over the last two days — five from Britain who tested positive at airports and two others in Tokyo.

Japan is also suspending the exemption of a 14-day quarantine for Japanese nationals and resident foreigners in a short-track program that began in November: The entrants now must carry proof of a negative test 72 hours prior to departure for Japan and self-isolate for two weeks after arrival.

Japan is struggling with surging cases since November. It has confirmed a total of 217,312 cases



including 3,213 deaths, up 3,700 from the previous 24-hour period. Tokyo alone reported 949 cases, setting a new record, despite calls by experts and government officials for people to spend a quiet" holiday season.

Elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region — South Korea will decide Sunday whether to enforce its toughest distancing rules as cases maintain an upward trend with 970 in the

last 24 hours. The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency says the additional cases took the country's total to 56,872, with 808 deaths.

There were fewer tests over the weekend. Authorities are struggling to bring the latest bout under control. Most cases have been found in the Seoul area in many places including medical facilities, churches, restaurants, gyms, army bases and a prison.

Pearl's murder accused to stay in jail for now

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Dec 27: Pakistan's Sindh province government has decided not to release British-born al-Qaeda leader Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and his three aides, accused of kidnapping and murdering US journalist Daniel Pearl, in view of a Supreme Court order, according to a media report.

In a surprise move, a two-judge bench of the Sindh High Court on Thursday directed security agencies not to keep Sheikh and other accused under any sort of detention and declared all notifications of the Sindh government related to their detention null and void. The court observed that the four men's detention was illegal.

The court, however, had clarified that the accused should not be released if there is a Supreme Court restraining order regarding

their detention.

Citing its sources, the Express Tribune newspaper said that the provincial government will not release these men in view of the Supreme Court's September 28 order.

The Pakistan People's Party-led Sindh government believes that the apex court's September 28 order in the case is still in the field, the sources told the daily.

A three-judge apex court bench headed by Justice Mushir Alam, which is hearing the appeal by the Sindh government and the family of the slain journalist against the acquittal of Sheikh by the Sindh High Court in April, on September 28 noted that till the next date of hearing, the accused shall not be released.

A senior government official said the apex court order has not been specifically recalled.

MIGRANT'S WOES



A migrant looks for belongings in the snow covered burnt out Lipa camp in northwestern Bosnia, near the border with Croatia

PTI

Regression, hope and change: The Middle East in 2020

WHILE SOME DEVELOPMENTS HAVE SHINED HOPE ON OSTENSIBLY UNSOLVABLE CONFLICTS, OTHER DYNAMICS HAVE EXACERBATED ISSUES ACROSS THE REGION

AGENCIES

Tel Aviv, Dec 27: The year 2020 has left its mark on much of the Middle East. While some developments sparked a glimmer of hope in ostensibly unsolvable conflicts, other dynamics have exacerbated existing issues across the region.

Reflections on the year for Iraq and Iran have been published by Al Jazeera in other pieces.

In the 10th year of the war, which has not only resulted in more than 500,000 casualties but displaced an estimated 13 million people — more than half of all Syrians — lasting progress on a resolution is still not in sight.

Turkey and Russia agreed on a new ceasefire at the beginning of

March for the rebels' last remaining stronghold, Idlib.

However, President Bashar al-Assad continues to affirm his intention to regain control of every inch of Syrian soil, including the northeast areas controlled by a Kurdish-led administration, and Idlib.

The ceasefire between Moscow and Ankara notwithstanding, Israel has continued to conduct military attacks against Iran-related targets in Syria.

Adding to the situation's volatility is the resurgence of ISIL (ISIS).

Aided by the pandemic and the vacuum created by the United States withdrawing its forces from some areas, the group launched several attacks and continues to regain strength only a year after the col-



lapse of its physical caliphate in eastern Syria.

The overall situation is aggravated by unremitting US sanctions against the Syrian government that have impaired the country's econ-

omy, as well as by the 2021 Syrian presidential elections, as former Syrian Ambassador to Turkey Nidal Kabalan told Al Jazeera.

"Although Syrians cannot wait to wrap up one of the worst years in

a decade of a catastrophic conflict, their main concern will likely focus economically on overcoming the impact of stifling sanctions and politically on the upcoming presidential elections and relevant ramifications," Kabalan said.

The war between government forces under President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) continued in the south, while the rebel Houthis continue to fight the Saudi Arabia-led coalition and government forces in the north.

The Saudi Arabia-led military alliance has been fighting alongside the government since 2015 against the Iran-backed Houthis.

The Houthis control the capital Sanaa and large areas in the north

and west of the country. The conflict is increasingly becoming a burden on international shipping, with the Houthis increasingly attacking Saudi oil tankers.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people have been killed over the past 10 years. According to the United Nations, Yemen faces the worst humanitarian crisis in decades.

Malnourished girl Rahmah Watheeq receives treatment at Al-Sabeen hospital in Sanaa, Yemen [File: Hani Mohammed/AP Photo] Yet, international aid has considerably receded compared with previous years. In June, an international donor conference fell \$1bn short of the UN's \$2.4bn target, adding to the devastating situation.

of the day quote

Now that we've left the European Union, we can do things a bit differently (in financial services)



RISHI SUNAK | FINANCE MINISTER, UK

We are significantly increasing the number of electric vehicles. Between 2021 and 2023, we will build a quarter of a million more electric cars than originally planned



OLIVER ZIPSE | CEO, BMW

We want to produce more than 1 billion doses with Pfizer next year. We need to distribute them to over 80 countries



UGUR SAHIN | CEO, BIONTECH

SHORT TAKES

FM Logistic to double capacity

Mumbai: Third-party logistics company, FM Logistic, plans to double its warehousing space to 1.2 crore sq ft in three to four years from 60 lakh sq ft at present as it expects demand for such facilities to increase in the aftermath of the pandemic, its MD and CEO Alexandre Amine Soufiani said. Soufiani expects sales to return to pre-COVID levels by March 2021 as 90% of the business has already recovered by December.

Asus to add 1K retail points

New Delhi: Taiwanese tech major Asus is bullish on expanding its presence in offline retail, adding about 1,000 retail points over the next year as it witnesses continuous strong demand in the consumer and gaming segments, a top company official said. The company, which had 7.5% share in the Indian PC segment in the September quarter (as per IDC), currently has its products available at over 6,000 retail points along with online channels.

Over 4.15 crore ITRs filed

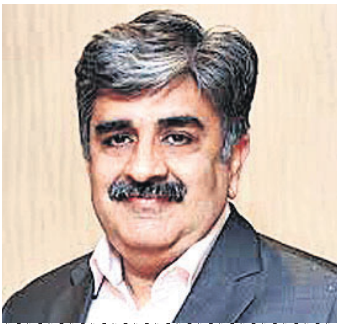
New Delhi: Over 4.15 crore taxpayers have already filed their income tax returns (ITR) for assessment year 2020-21 (FY2019-20) till December 26, the Income Tax Department said Sunday. As the deadline to file ITR by individuals nears, the tax department also urged people to file their ITR for assessment year (AY) 2020-21 early to avoid last minute rush. "More than 4.15 crore ITRs for AY 2020-21 have already been filed till December 26," the department tweeted.

MSMEs remain unaffected

New Delhi: Small businesses and dealers will not be impacted by the new government rule of paying at least 1% of GST liability in cash as only entities with annual turnover of ₹6 crore and above are required to follow the new rule, Finance Ministry sources said.

UltraTech mulls raising ₹1K cr

Mumbai: UltraTech Cement is considering to raise ₹1,000 crore by issuing non-convertible debentures (NCDs) on private placement basis on or after December 30. The Board of Directors of the company in May this year had approved the raising of funds, by way of issuance of NCDs, foreign currency loan or rupee term loan, or in any other manner, in one or more tranches.



The PLI applicants are working very furiously and with everything possible at their command to fulfill the targets. Many of them will be able to complete it but not before early financial year (FY) 2021-22

PANKAJ MOHINDROO | CHAIRMAN, ICEA

BANKS BRACE FOR COVID-HIT CORPORATES' BAD LOAN WOES

As far as the banking sector is concerned, the outbreak of the pandemic early in 2020 largely shaped activities and operations during most part of the year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Tackling non-performing assets will be a major challenge for the banking sector in the New Year as many companies, especially in the MSME sector, may not be able to withstand the heat of the coronavirus pandemic which led to a historic contraction of the economy in the first half of the current fiscal.

Besides, muted private investment impacting the corporate loan growth will be another challenge that banks will have to face in the coming months. Despite ample liquidity in the system, demand from the corporate sector is very low and bankers hope that faster than anticipated recovery could bring in the animal spirit as far as India Inc in concerned.

Although the Indian economy witnessed a sharp recovery from 23.9% contraction in first quarter to 7.5% contraction in the second quarter, it is yet to lift the sentiment of India Inc. For the past few years, private investment has been low while public spending has been doing the heavy lifting for the economy.

As far as the banking sector is concerned, the outbreak of the pandemic early in 2020 largely shaped activities and operations during most part of the year.

The legacy of rising NPAs (non-



performing assets) continued to mar the banking sector and the first major shock came in March with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) imposing moratorium on the then crisis-hit Yes Bank.

By the time Yes Bank's issue was resolved, the country was in the grip of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to nationwide lockdown and even the Budget session of Parliament had to be curtailed.

However, the government did not postpone the process of merger of six public sector banks into four anchor lenders with a view to create global-size institutions for achieving the objective of USD 5 trillion economy by March 2025.

Effective April 1, United Bank of India and Oriental Bank of Commerce were merged with

Punjab National Bank, making it second largest Public Sector Bank (PSB).

Similarly, Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank were merged with Mumbai-based Union Bank of India. Syndicate Bank was merged with Canara Bank while Allahabad Bank was amalgamated with Chennai-based Indian Bank.

"The merger has nearly stabilised... It happened very seamlessly despite the lockdown and the early positive signs of the amalgamation are now also visible," Financial Services Secretary Debasish Panda told PTI.

"They now have a larger capital base and their capacity to lend has increased, and then you have complementary products of the different banks that merged into the lead banks," he said.

L&T plans to hire 1,100 engineers across biz verticals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Engineering and construction conglomerate Larsen & Toubro (L&T) is looking to recruit close to 1,100 graduate and post graduate engineer trainees in 2021 and deploy them across various business verticals, a top company official has said.

The company, through its ongoing virtual hiring process, has already made around 250 offers in the recent hiring season at premium education institutes like IIT Madras, IIT Guwahati, IIT BHU, IIT Bombay, IIT Delhi, IIT Roorkee, IIT Kharagpur, IIT (ISM) Dhanbad, IIT Hyderabad and other IITs.

"L&T not only offers Graduate and Post Graduate Engineer Trainees (GETs & PGETs) continuous learning opportunities



and a growth path but also gives them immense satisfaction to work on projects that are high on the top of national or global pecking order," company's chief executive and managing director S N Subrahmanyan told PTI.

In 2021, it is planning to hire 1,100 engineers and has already made offers to 250 IITians, he said.

Every year, the company recruits around 1,100 plus engineers, 90 per cent of which belongs to premier institutes like IITs, NITs, and top government engineering colleges, the company said.

Crude steel output grows 3.5% in Nov



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: India registered a growth of 3.5% in crude steel production at 9.245 million tonne (MT) in November, according to World Steel Association. The country had produced 8.933 MT crude steel during the same month last year; the global industry body said in its latest report.

"Crude steel production for the 64 countries reporting to the World Steel Association (worldsteel) was 158.261 MT in November 2020, a 6.6% increase compared to 148.417 MT in November 2019.

"Due to the ongoing difficulties presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, many of this month's figures are estimates that may be revised with next month's production update," worldsteel said.

According to the worldsteel data, China registered 8% year-on-year growth in steel output at 87.660 MT

during November 2020, compared to 81.191 MT in the same period last year.

The US production stood at 6.120 MT, down 13.7% from 7.088 MT. Japan's output slipped 5.9% to 7.264 MT from 7.716 MT a year ago. South Korea's steel production fell 2.4% to 5.760 MT in the month under review, as compared to 5.904 MT in the year-ago period.

Germany's crude steel output rose 14.8% to 3.376 MT as against 2.941 MT. Italy's crude steel production was 2.049 MT in November 2020, up 3.2% from 1.986 MT a year ago. France produced 1.149 MT of crude steel last month, 3.7% lower from the year-ago period, while Spain's steel production stood at 1.113 MT, a rise of 11.2% year-on-year. With members in every major steel-producing country, worldsteel represents steel producers, national and regional steel industry associations.

CCI to release study on telecom sector shortly



AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Competition Commission will shortly release its study on the telecom sector and one of the key trends that has emerged is the vertical integration between telcos and digital solution providers, including OTTs and e-commerce platforms.

As the Competition Commission of India (CCI) continues to step up its vigil to curb possible unfair business practices, the regulator's Chairperson Ashok Kumar Gupta opined that for the digital space, enforcement has to be complemented with non-enforcement tools such as market studies.

Currently, the watchdog is studying mergers and acquisitions in the digital market, including those deals that might have escaped its scrutiny due to lower thresholds,

and pharmaceutical sector.

Gupta said the market study on the country's telecom sector, which was initiated in January this year to have a clear understanding of competition in that space, is complete and will be released shortly.

"The key trends and observations that have emerged from the study inter-alia relate to vertical integration in the industry between telecom operators and digital solutions providers, including OTTs (Over The Top), e-commerce platforms, digital payment platforms and other cloud-based technology solutions," he said.

In recent years, the domestic telecom sector has witnessed the exit of some prominent players amid stiff competition and legal cases.

According to Gupta, there is an ongoing study on mergers and acquisitions in the digital market to understand the emerging trends.

Mahindra Logistics to deploy EVs for last-mile delivery

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 27: Mahindra Logistics, which is on an ambitious growth path with a target of achieving ₹10,000-crore revenue by FY26 through inorganic and organic routes, is planning to deploy electric vehicles (EVs) for last-mile delivery shortly, a top company official has said.

The plan comes on the heels of online retailer Amazon India's move to deploy EVs for last-mile delivery. The company is reportedly in touch with Mahindra Electric and Kinetic Green for vehicle supplies.

Swedish furniture retailer Ikea (through Gati Logistics), and online grocery store Bigbasket also use EVs for last mile delivery, according to media reports.

Mahindra Logistics is one of the largest third-party logistics (3PL) service providers, specializing in supply chain management and enterprise mobility (people transport solutions, for which it already uses EVs in some parts of the country).

According to Rampraveen Swaminathan, the company's managing director and chief executive, a key part of the near three-fold growth drive in five years includes adding 2 million sq ft of warehousing annually over the next few years with each of the yards spanning 4-5 lakh sq ft.

The company has 16 million sq ft space now.

CII seeks clarity in taxation laws, simplification, lesser litigation

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 27: CII has suggested the government to bring about clarity in the taxation laws, simplification of procedures and reduction of litigation in the upcoming Union Budget.

It noted that the taxation laws should facilitate business transitions and make doing business easier for the industry.

In a statement, the industry body noted that Section 80JAA provides for deduction of 30 per cent on emoluments paid to new employees, which can be claimed for three years. This is available up to an emolument of ₹25,000 per month.

Stressing on the need to give a boost to employment at higher levels, CII has suggested raising the cap to ₹50,000 per month to encourage employment in higher skilled jobs



as well.

It further said over the last few years, in order to enhance the financial strength of banks, and for the stability of the financial sector, RBI has mandated that banks should augment their NPA provisioning. CII has suggested that the limit prescribed under section 36(1)(vii)(a) for provision for bad and doubtful debts for the Indian banks should be increased from the existing limit of 8.5% to 15%.

It told the Finance Ministry

that banks operating in India facilitate foreign investment by Foreign Portfolio Investments (FPI) by acting as custodians (cash and securities) for the FPIs investing in India. "Specific clarification should be provided so that banking and broking service providers are not held as representative assessee of their clients," it said.

Over the years, RBI has lowered the limit for recognizing an account as NPA from six months to 90 days.

China orders Ant Group to rectify businesses

AGENCIES

Hong Kong, Dec 27: Chinese regulators have ordered Ant Group, the world's largest financial technology company, to rectify its businesses and comply with regulatory requirements amid increased scrutiny of anti-monopoly practices in the country's internet sector.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, summoned

Ant executives on Saturday and ordered them to formulate a rectification plan and an implementation timetable of its business, including its credit, insurance and wealth management services, the regulators said in a statement Sunday.

The statement said that Ant Group lacked a sound governance mechanism, defied regulatory compliance requirements and engaged

in regulatory arbitrage. It also said that the company used its market position to exclude rivals and hurt the rights and interests of consumers. The meeting came after Chinese regulators last month halted Ant's \$37 billion stock debut in Shanghai and Hong Kong over regulatory changes, and comes just days after China announced an anti-monopoly investigation of e-commerce giant Alibaba Group.

'Indians may put off travel plans amid spread of new virus strain'

THE SURVEY TRIED TO UNDERSTAND PEOPLE'S PLAN TO UNDERTAKE DOMESTIC TRAVEL IN NEXT 3 MONTHS AS WITH REDUCING CASE-LOADS AND COVID FATIGUE SETTING IN, MANY MORE HAVE STARTED TO TRAVEL SINCE OCTOBER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 27: Many people may put off their international travel plans due to concerns over the spread of new variant of coronavirus in some countries and possibility of flight bans by nations like Dubai, France and Singapore, a survey has revealed.

The survey, which is based on over 15,000 responses from over 10,000 people from across 204 cities and conducted by online platform LocalCircles, also revealed that as many as 42 per cent of the respondents did not have any travel plan for domestic travel at all.

Post lockdown, the government

hasn't yet allowed regular operation of international flights, instead it operates transport bubbles with 23 countries, including the UK via the Vande Bharat Mission.

However, India imposed a temporary on flights from and to the UK from December 23 till December 31 following the detection of the new variant of the virus in the UK.

LocalCircles has conducted a survey to understand the impact of this new strain of coronavirus on international travel plans of Indians in the next three months.

The platform has observed an increase in citizens' posts suggesting that many may hold back on their travel plans to any in-



ternational countries as fear and anxiety of getting infected by this new strain as well as the possibility of flight bans from other airline hubs like Dubai, Singapore, Paris, etc. Has increased,

LocalCircles said in a release.

The survey also tried to understand people's plan to undertake domestic travel in the next three months as with reducing case-loads and COVID fatigue setting in, many

more have started to travel since October, it said.

Consumers were asked about their situation in regard to undertaking international travel in the next three months, according to the online platform.

"Local circle received 7,820 response, of which as many as 71% consumers said that they have no plans to undertake international travel in the next 3 months. While 2 per cent said they have bookings and will likely travel, and another 2 per cent saying that have bookings but may cancel based on COVID situation," it said.

Also, as many as 16% said they had plans but may not travel due to

COVID, while 7% said they might travel based on coronavirus situation. "The aggregate feedback of consumers suggests that the new virus strain that was recently detected in the UK and related flight bans, the majority planning international travel in the next 3 months are likely to hold back," the survey revealed.

When only the consumers considering international travel were surveyed: while keeping the 71% who had no plans to undertake travel in next 3 months, it appears that of the 100% who were considering international travel, 59% of them who had "plans but no bookings" will likely not travel, as per the survey.

