



DEEPIKA BAFFLES NETIZENS

Actor Deepika Padukone, who had deleted all her posts on social media, makes a comeback on the platforms with an audio diary

LEISURE

P2



VISA BAN EXTENDED

President Trump has extended the freeze on the most sought-after H-1B visas by Indian IT professionals until March 31

INTERNATIONAL

P10



AKHTAR LAUDS BUMRAH

Jasprit Bumrah is the 'smartest fast bowler' in contemporary cricket, as per former Pak great Shoaib Akhtar

SPORTS

P12

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IRREGULAR by MANJUL



New Year resolution? It depends on govt. If it hikes fuel price I will quit driving, if it hikes liquor price I will quit drinking!

CM urges Modi to set up Puri airport

BHUBANESWAR: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday wrote to PM Narendra Modi, urging him to set up an international airport in Puri for promotion of tourism in the state. Proposing the name of the airport as Sri Jagannath International Airport, he said the state government has identified land for the proposed airport.

P3

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1 step closer to vax

Expert panel nod to Covishield; India may begin vaccination in 7-10 days

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 1: India is one step away from its first coronavirus vaccine, with the nod of the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) awaited on the Subject Expert Committee's recommendation for emergency use of Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine.

According to official sources, the panel's recommendation, which came at its meeting here Friday, has been sent to DCGI V.G. Somani for approval. The approval will pave the way for the vaccine's rollout in India, which also has the highest number of infections in the world, after the US.

The rollout will begin from January 6, according to ministry sources. The UK and Argentina have already approved Covishield. More than five crore doses of the vaccine have already been stockpiled by its manufacturer, the Pune-based Serum Institute of India.

The expert panel had convened a meeting Friday afternoon to take a call on the emergency use authorisation sought by the Serum Institute and Bharat Biotech for their coronavirus vaccine candidates.

SILVER BULLET IN SIGHT

THE PANEL'S RECOMMENDATION HAS BEEN SENT TO DCGI VG SOMANI FOR APPROVAL

THE APPROVAL WILL PAVE THE WAY FOR THE VACCINE'S ROLLOUT IN INDIA



MORE THAN 5 CRORE DOSES OF THE VACCINE HAVE BEEN STOCKPILED BY SII

THE CENTRE PLANS TO VACCINATE NEARLY 30 CRORE PEOPLE IN THE FIRST PHASE

DRY RUN IN STATE TODAY

BHUBANESWAR: The state government is all set to conduct a dry run for COVID-19 vaccination at 31 places Saturday. The massive drive will be held at all 30 District Headquarters Hospitals (DHH) and the Capital Hospital here. "Under the dry run, we will see how the vaccines are delivered to the people in a hassle free mode. This is akin to a mock drill. Around 3.70 lakh people have registered with us for the dry run. Several other states also conducted dry runs," Director for Medical Education and Training (DMET) CBK Mohanty said.

Recommendations on latter's application is still awaited.

The Serum Institute had partnered with Oxford-AstraZeneca for conducting clinical trials and manufacturing 'Covishield' while Bharat Biotech has collaborated with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) to make 'Covaxin'.

Pfizer has, however, sought more time to present the data. As India awaits a silver bullet against coronavirus with bated breath, the DCGI, Thursday, hinted at the approval of vaccine and said that the country will have a "Happy New Year with something in hand".

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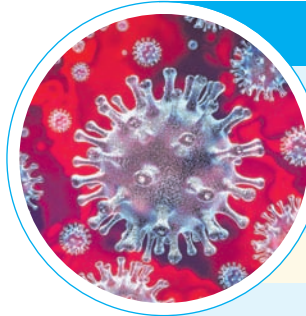
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NEW HOPE

Children enjoy the New Year's Day at Forest Park in Bhubaneswar



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	8,40,70,273	5,94,90,397	18,30,141
India	1,02,86,709	98,83,461	1,48,994
Odisha	3,29,866	3,25,733	1,876

PROMOTING TOURISM

CM urges Modi to set up airport in Puri

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to set up an international airport in Puri for promotion of tourism in the state.

Proposing the name of the airport as Sri Jagannath International Airport, Naveen said the state government has identified land for the proposed airport in the coastal town.

The state government will proactively support all the activities required for establishing the airport



The Holy city of Puri is among the Char Dhams of Hindu Dharma. The proposed airport will help bring Jagannath devotees from across the world

NAVEEN PATNAIK I CM

The Chief Minister mentioned that the Sun Temple of Konark, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is just 35-km away from Puri

The proposed airport will help bring Jagannath devotees from across the world, he said in the letter.

The Chief Minister also mentioned that the Sun Temple of Konark, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is just 35-km away from Puri and the Ramachandi-Chandrabhaga beach provides a unique experience to travellers.

Most of the historic Buddhist heritage sites like Dhauli and Ratnagiri, with a travel time of about three hours from Puri, attract national and international tourists.

Puri is also linked to two Ramsar sites - Chilka Lake on one side and Bhitarkanika National Park on the other. Both these locations have huge potential for international eco-tourism, he said.

in a record time, Naveen assured.

Patnaik said the Rath Yatra of Puri is a famous annual event, attracting lakhs of pilgrims from across the world and an airport in the holy town will

help bring devotees to the Sri Jagannath Temple.

"The Holy city of Puri, the abode of Lord Jagannath, is among the Char Dhams of Hindu Dharma. Hindus from all over the world visit Sri Jagannath Temple in Puri. The holy Rath Yatra is celebrated across 192 countries.

ILS, 2 other institutes decode how rabies virus affects brain

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: In a development that promises to help in better handling of dreaded disease rabies, a team of scientists from three institutes - Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), Bhubaneswar, Mumbai Veterinary College, Mumbai and Haffkine Institute, Mumbai, have found how the virus affects the brain at molecular level.

EXPERIMENTS ON

The currently used diagnostic procedures are all based on invasive techniques and are not very sensitive

The findings of the study conducted at ILS sheds light on addressing these problems

Rabies is almost untreatable even with the availability of the vaccines

The research team led by Amol Ratnakar Suryawanshi and Suchismita Behera, have used the proteomics (study of proteins and their expression) approach to identify proteins in the dog brain that are responsible for rabies virus infection considering that more than 95 per cent of human rabies cases occur due to transmission through dog bite.

Rabies is almost untreatable even with the availability of the vaccines. After entering the body, the virus remains dormant for periods ranging from 20 to 90 days without showing any clinical symptoms and when the symptoms emerge there is not much time available to offer any effective treatment.

Death occurs within two to seven days. Fatality is thus almost 100 per cent.

The currently used diagnostic procedures are all based on invasive techniques and are not very sensitive. The findings of the study conducted at ILS sheds light on addressing these problems.

The team is undertaking further experiments to investigate the role of various identified proteins in the molecular mechanism of the rabies virus infection. The study has been published recently in the International Journal of Proteins and Proteomics.

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VARIAION
SENSEX	47868.98 ↑ 117.65
NIFTY	14018.50 ↑ 36.70
DOLLAR	73.49 ↑ ₹0.03
EURO	89.75 ↑ ₹0.47
GOLD	₹50,235 ↑ ₹84
SILVER	₹68,120 ↑ ₹15

WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
TEMP MAX	28.3°C	28.8°C
TEMP MIN	14.8°C	12.5°C
Humidity	89%	78%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Fog/mist in the morning	

STRESS LESS, ENJOY THE BEST



Girls take a selfie at Udaygiri hills in Bhubaneswar as hundreds turn up at the tourist site on the New Year's Day OP PHOTO

Naveen flags off 84 new ambulances

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Friday flagged off 84 additional ambulances under 108 fleet to extend the coverage of emergency ambulance service.

Naveen flagged off the new ambulances through videoconferencing.

"The new fleet of ambulances will help improve our preparedness to take more calls. These ambulances have been envisioned to serve the needy and tribal people in different interior pockets of the state," Health Minister Naba Kishore Das said.

"These ambulances are funded by the state. Soon, we'll add more ambulances to 108 ambulance service that would exclusively made available to the medical colleges. These ambulances are aimed at reducing the response time to reach out to the people in distress," Additional Chief Secretary to Health



CM Naveen Patnaik flags off the ambulances through videoconference

department Pradipta Kumar Mohapatra said.

Launched March 5, 2013 and managed by Ziqitza Healthcare Limited, the 108 Emergency Medical Ambulance Service presently operates with a fleet of 518 vehicles covering all 30 districts of the state. The fleet has 456 Basic Life Support (BLS), 56 Advanced Life Support (ALS) and six boat ambulances.

According to sources, the state government has made a budgetary provision of ₹104 crore towards

the operational and capital expenditure of the newly-launched ambulances over a period of five years. The new fleet of ambulances will be stationed in 27 districts.

Apart from 108 Emergency Ambulance Service, the state has in position a fleet of 500 ambulances under Janani Express for transportation of pregnant women and sick infants. Official sources said, over 60 lakh people have so far been benefited from the 108 and Janani Express ambulance services in the state.

Barunei reels under infra woes, cries for attention

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khurda, Jan 1: The Barunei hill, one of the prominent tourism spots in Khurda district, is crippled with infrastructure woes even as mafia is smuggling timber by cutting trees from the site.

Lack of drinking water facility and basic sanitation at Barunei hill has been causing inconveniences for the tourists, sources said.

Located in sylvan settings, the shrine of twin goddesses Barunei and Karunei usually attract hundreds of tourists from several parts of the state. The tourism site, which comes under Ward No. 3 of Khurda municipality, sees many picnickers during the winter every year. A few years ago, the Tourism department and the district administration had set up a few drinking water kiosks at Barunei hill to cater to the visitors' needs.

However, these kiosks are now lying defunct due to lack of maintenance, locals rued. "The stairs to the shrine of twin goddesses Barunei and Karunei have suffered extensive damage over the years. The damaged

VICTIM OF APATHY



Lack of drinking water facility and basic sanitation at Barunei hill has been causing inconveniences for the tourists

The stairs to the shrine of twin goddesses Barunei and Karunei have suffered extensive damage over the years

The damaged and moss-covered stairs are posing threat to the tourists

and moss-covered stairs are posing threat to the tourists," they added.

The municipal authorities of Khurda town have engaged a private player to ensure cleanliness at Barunei hill. But, the agency has



Ill-maintained infrastructure at Barunei

failed to keep the tourist spot free from garbage, sources said.

"Lack of drinking water is a major concern at Barunei hill. Illegal parking of heavy vehicles on the road to the hill is also an issue. The administration has failed to provide basic facilities to the tourists," said Gagan Das, a tourist.

It is learnt that regular felling of trees from the nearby forests is affecting the natural environment of Barunei hill. "A few timber mafia have been active in the area for last several days.

There were restrictions on the congregation of tourists at Barunei hill due to Covid-19 pandemic. Now, we will take steps to ensure proper infrastructure at the tourist spot

SHWETAPADMA SATPATHY I KHURDA MUNICIPAL EXECUTIVE OFFICER



A damaged water kiosk at the tourist site

They have smuggled timber worth around ₹1 crore from the forests during the coronavirus induced lockdown. Soon, Barunei will lose its sheen. Some anti-social elements are

also congregating at the place," said a social activist.

Khurda municipal executive officer Shwetapadma Satpathy said, "There were restrictions on the congregation of tourists at Barunei hill due to Covid-19 pandemic. Now, we will take steps to ensure proper infrastructure at the tourist spot."

Vineel Krishna appointed Special Secretary to CM

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: In a minor reshuffle among bureaucrats, the state government Friday appointed R Vineel Krishna as Special Secretary to the Chief Minister. He will also hold additional charge of Special Secretary to Sports and Youth Services department.

Krishna, a 2005-batch IAS officer, is currently serving as the managing director of Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC). He was handling additional charge of Sports Director, MD of Odisha Mineral Exploration Corporation Ltd. (OMECL) and OSD (Covid Management) in the office of the Chief Minister.

Similarly, 2007-batch IAS officer and Puri Collector Balwant Singh has been posted as the new managing director of Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC). Singh will be in additional charge of MD of OMECL, Bhubaneswar: Samarth Verma, a 2011-batch IAS officer, will replace Singh as the Collector of Puri.

Likewise, 2010-batch IAS officer and Executive Director (ED) of

IAS RESHUFFLE

Puri Collector Balwant Singh has been posted as the new managing director of Odisha Mining Corporation

Samarth Verma, a 2011-batch IAS officer, will replace Balwant Singh as the Collector of Puri

2015-batch IAS officer Amrit Ruturaj is the new Collector of Kendrapara while Parul Patawari was posted as deputy secretary to Works dept

Jagatsinghpur Collector Saroj Kumar Mishra has been appointed as new district Collector of Rayagada



R Vineel Krishna

Centre for Modernizing Government Initiative (CMGI), Md Sadique Alam has been given additional charge of director, Industries.

The government has appointed Amrit Ruturaj (2015-batch IAS officer) as the new Collector of Kendrapara while another same batch IAS, Parul Patawari posted as deputy secretary in Works department. Vishal Singh, a 2016-batch IAS officer, has

been appointed as project director of District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Jajpur.

Besides, OAS officer and Rayagada collector Pramod Kumar Behera has been transferred as Additional Secretary to Revenue & Disaster Management department. Jagatsinghpur Collector Saroj Kumar Mishra has been appointed as new district Collector of Rayagada.

Mohapatra assumes charge as Chief Secy



Suresh Mohapatra (left) and Pradeep Kumar Jena assume their offices



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Senior bureaucrat Suresh Chandra Mohapatra Friday assumed charge as the new Chief Secretary and chief development commissioner of Odisha.

Mohapatra replaced Asit Kumar Tripathy who retired from service Thursday.

Tripathy, who was appointed as the chairman of the Western Odisha Development Council (WODC), will also be the principal advisor to the Chief Minister on regional development, tourism, agribusiness and industry.

Additional Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena also took charge as the state's development commissioner, a post held by Mohapatra.

"Revival of the economy is a big challenge for us," Mohapatra told reporters.

Prior to his appointment as the new Chief Secretary, the 1986-batch IAS officer was also holding the additional charge as the working chairperson of the Shree Jagannath

Known in the bureaucratic circles as a 'quiet performer', Mohapatra will remain as the Chief Secretary till February 28, 2022

Temple Administration (SJTA).

Mohapatra will remain as the Chief Secretary till February 28, 2022. Known in the bureaucratic circles as a 'quiet performer', Mohapatra started his career in civil service as the sub-collector of Nuapada district in 1988.

He also served as the district Collector of Bhadrak, Kandhamal and Puri districts.

He was once again posted as the Bhadrak Collector during the 1999 Super Cyclone to handle the critical situation.

During his stint as the secretary of the Forest and Environment department, Mohapatra developed the concept of eco-tourism, which boosted the state's tourism sector.

Sophisticated weapons with ultras a concern

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Even though the Maoist bastion in Odisha is gradually tumbling down due to intensive operations against the ultras by Odisha Police along with other security forces for the last few years, use of sophisticated weapons by the ultras is a major concern, said sources.

The Left-Wing Extremists (LWEs) are failing to regain their foothold in many parts of the state owing to several factors including able leadership in the state, better coordination among the security forces and stiff resistance from the gullible tribals.

However, some other worrying factors encountered during the anti-LWE operations have put the security forces on alert. The ultras are trying to enter new areas in the state where they had no influence earlier.

Similarly, the recovery of some advanced weapons from the Maoist hideouts has also emerged a major cause of concern for the security forces.

According to data revealed by Odisha Police, in 2020, the police managed to seize 61 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and 60 guns. As many as 26 sophisticated guns including LMG – 1, AK-47 – 1, INSAS – 8, SLR – 7, Sten – 3, Carbin – 1, 303 – 3, 9mm – 2 and CM -34 have been recovered from the Maoists in 2020 which is highest till now.

According to experts, the ultras secure maximum number of weapons from the security forces during the incidents of ambush



A huge cache of arms, including LMG and INSAS rifles, were recovered during an anti-Maoist operation in the 'Swabhimana Anchal' of Malkangiri by Odisha Police, BSF, CoBRA and Andhra Pradesh Police in February 2020

WORRYING FACTORS

The ultras are trying to enter new areas in the state where they had no influence earlier

Recovery of advanced weapons from the Maoist hideouts has emerged a major cause of concern for the security forces

Neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China are supplying sophisticated weapons to the Maoists

and through looting the security forces.

Neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China have reportedly

been supplying sophisticated weapons to the Maoists in Odisha through Nepal border via Bihar and Jharkhand in order to escalate violence in the country.

The Maoists are buying the weapons through extortion money collected from local contractors, businessmen and money earned through illegal ganja trade. The Maoists in Odisha have also been using hawala money to run their operations.

Similarly, the resolution of Odisha police to end the Red menace could also be gauged from the fact that maximum number of Exchange of Fire (EoF) incidents initiated due to police action happened in 2020. As many as 27 EoF had taken place between the LWEs and Odisha Police during 2020.

Respite from cold-wave as mercury rises

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: In a slight relief from cold-wave situation, mercury started rising in the state, official sources said Friday.

Except for Phulbani, no other place in the state recorded a minimum temperature below 10 degrees Celsius, Friday. Phulbani was the coldest place in the state recording 7.8 degrees Celsius, while Daringbadi recorded 10 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature was 10.2 degrees Celsius at Baripada, 11 degrees Celsius each at Koraput and Sundargarh, 12 degrees Celsius at Keonjhar, 12.2 degrees Celsius each at Bhawanipatna and Talcher, 12.5 degrees Celsius at Cuttack, 13 degrees Celsius each at Bolangir and Boudh districts. The local meteorological Centre said there will be no large change in the minimum temperature during the next three days, while it will rise gradually by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius thereafter.

Except for Phulbani, no other place in Odisha recorded a minimum temperature below 10 degrees Celsius, Friday

Shallow to moderate fog is very likely to occur at one or two places over the districts of Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Angul, Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Boudh, Khurda, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Rayagada and Koraput between Saturday and early Sunday, it said.

3 fresh fatalities push nCoV toll to 1,876

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: State's Covid-19 tally rose to 3,29,866 Friday as 245 more people tested positive for the infection, while three fresh fatalities pushed Odisha's coronavirus death toll to 1,876, a senior Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) de-

Odisha's Covid-19 tally rose to 3,29,866 as 245 more people tested positive for the infection, Friday

partment official said. As many as 139 new cases were reported in quarantine centres, while 106 infections were detected during contact tracing, said the official.

Sambalpur registered the highest number of new cases at 35, followed by Sundargarh (34) and Angul (32), the official said. The fresh fatalities were reported

from Khurda, Cuttack and Nabarangpur districts, the official said adding that as many as 53 other coronavirus patients have died due to comorbidities.

Odisha has so far tested over 69.76 lakh samples for Covid-19, including 29,143 Thursday, the official added.

Commodore Singh signs off

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Deputy Director General (DDG) of NCC Directorate Odisha, Commodore Shailendra Singh, NM, relinquished his office on superannuation Thursday after rendering 35 years of exemplary service to the Indian Navy.

In his three-and-half years of tenure as DDG, Singh played a pivotal role in processing the case for expeditious sanction of raising an NCC Group headquarters at Koraput and another Air Squadron at Jharsuguda, thus covering the existing gaps and reaching out to youths from rural and tribal areas of the state, said a release.

Commodore Singh handed over the baton of NCC Directorate Odisha to Commodore Somen Banerjee, an anti-submarine warfare expert, added the release.

Boat registration goes online

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: As part of 5T initiative, Commerce and Transport Minister Padmanabha Behera Friday launched online system for registration and renewal of boats operating in the state. It has been named as Boat Information and Management System.

The state government has formulated Odisha Boat Rules, 2004 to ensure safe journey of passengers in Inland water transport sector within the state. As per the Rules, till now, the registration and renewal of registration are being done on offline mode, Behera said, adding, now, all the services will be provided online.

AGAINST NEW FARM LAWS



People under the aegis of AIKSCC-Odisha demonstrate near Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar, Friday, demanding rollback of the new farm laws

CLEANER CITY BMC'S RESOLUTION FOR 2021

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: With a view to improving its performance in annual Swachh Survekshan, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) is all set to intensify its cleanliness drives to ensure a cleaner city in the New Year.

About 43 micro composting centres (MCCs) will come up in different parts of the City. As of now, 11 MCCs have become operational

While the civic body has begun construction and functioning of micro composting centres (MCCs),



it is likely to complete the projects in July. As per the plan, about 43 MCCs are set to come up in differ-

ent parts of the city. As of now 11 MCCs have become operational. "The MCCs are working towards

managing large quantities of waste generated in the city on a daily basis. These facilities will convert

File photos of a micro composting centre at Ward-36 in Bhubaneswar

wet or bio-degradable waste into compost. We have also begun awareness programmes on waste segregation and campaigns are being conducted to educate people on separating wet and dry wastes at source," BMC Commissioner Prem

LORD'S DARSHAN ON NYD



Devotees in large numbers congregate near the Lion's Gate of Srimandir to have a darshan of the 'Patitapabari' on the New Year's Day, Friday

Machines to 'empower' Jharpada jail inmates

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Following the enactment of new Jail manual in the state, jail authorities across the state have been taking various initiatives for the welfare of prison inmates including recreation facilities for the prisoners.

The authorities have also installed different equipment and machinery on jail premises to make the prisoners self-reliant.

The authorities at Jharpada special jail have installed four automatic washing machines, two advanced water purifiers, bush cutters, sanitary napkin incinerator, fogging machine to keep the jail inmates and the environment clean and hygienic.

As per an order of NHRC, the special jail at Jharpada has been provided with a projector with screen (6'x8') for playing movies, music and gaming instruments for recreation activities of the jail inmates. The initiative is aimed at reducing stress of the inmates and reining in suicidal tendencies.

Similarly, the system would soon get rid of the existing interview system where the prisoners were interacting with relatives in an iron wire mess. The authorities here are planning to introduce transparent glass window with intercom facilities.

Meanwhile, the Jharpada jail authorities have sought tender from eligible suppliers through the GeM portal to provide 50 scrubber driers, 88 vacuum cleaners, 200 sprayer machine, 108 hand-held search lights and 16 organic waste composters. It has also been planning to establish a turmeric powder processing unit, mustard oil extraction machine, body-worn cameras, e-rickshaws, deep search metal detector, power tillers and corn flakes processing units inside the Jharpada jail during the 2021-22 financial year.

Dry pulverizer machines have been installed in the female enclosures of the jail to make pure Kandhamal haldi powder and atta. An outlet is being opened outside the jail premises for the sale of the products produced by jail inmates.

LPG refill booking a missed call away

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Booking a cooking gas cylinder is just a missed call away for Indane Gas consumers.

Indian Oil LPG customers anywhere in the country can use a single missed call number – 8454955555 – for refill booking, an official statement said Friday.

national capital, was rolled out in seven more cities -- Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Kochi, Indore and Bhubaneswar Friday.

The missed call service for getting a new LPG connection was also launched in Bhubaneswar and will soon be extended to all over the country.



Indian Oil LPG customers anywhere in the country can use a single missed call number-- 8454955555 -- for refill booking

No call charges are levied to customers as compared to IVRS calls where normal call rates are applicable

The missed call service for getting a new LPG connection was launched in Bhubaneswar and will soon be extended to all over the country

The second phase of world-class premium grade petrol (Octane 100), branded as XP100 by Indian Oil, for high-end cars was also rolled out

Booking refills via missed calls is a faster way to book with customers not having to hold calls for a long time.

Also, no call charges are levied to customers as compared to IVRS calls where normal call rates are applicable.

This facility will be of immense help to people who are not adept with IVRS or old age customers as well as those in rural areas, the statement said.

Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan launched the missed call facility for LPG consumers at an event in Bhubaneswar.

He also rolled out the second phase of world-class premium grade petrol (Octane 100), branded as XP100 by Indian Oil, for high-end cars.

In this second phase, Indian Oil Corporation's branded XP100, which was last month launched in the

Speaking on the occasion, Pradhan exhorted the gas agencies and distributors to ensure that LPG delivery period is shortened from one day to a few hours.

He further said the country has travelled a long way in LPG.

The LPG connections given out in six decades prior to 2014 were about 13 crore and in the last six years, the same has been expanded to 30 crore.

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THE MOTHER

EC’s transfer policy

The Election Commission has already started gearing up for the Tamil Nadu assembly elections due in May 2021, starting with the babus who will be on election duty. In a recent letter to the state Chief Electoral Officer Sathyabrata Sahoo and Chief Secretary K Shanmugam, the Election Commission has stressed the need for effective transfer of officers who have completed three years and to ensure that no officer is posted in their native district.

Officers who are retiring within six months and those who are facing disciplinary actions recommended by the EC for earlier poll duty lapses should not be designated for poll duty. Further, officials who will complete three years in an election-related post before May 31 should be transferred.

Sources say that the Tamil Nadu government has transferred more than 50 IAS and IPS officers, including collectors and superintendents of police of more than 20 districts in the last two months

A service out in the cold?

Is the civil service no longer a dream career for aspiring youngsters in India? The recent survey of national school board toppers over 20 years suggests that it may be so.

Of the 86 men and women who topped in their school board exams between 1995 and 2015, more than half live abroad, most are working or pursuing advanced degrees in science and technology. Of those working most are in the tech sector, followed by medicine and finance. More than half grew up outside India’s metros in Tier-II and Tier-III cities. No surprises there!

What is surprising is that only one of these toppers joined the civil service. Subhankar Mohapatra, who topped the Class 10 CBSE exam in 2006, chose to become a civil servant (after studying at medical college). He cleared the IRS exam in 2016, the IPS in 2017 and finally the UPSC in 2018. The Odisha cadre officer is presently posted as Sub-Collector and SDM in Kandhamal, Odisha. Two others from the Toppers Club are preparing for the civil service exam. That’s it.

Could it be that there are many more attractive alternative career paths available now that are more rewarding financially and career-wise than what the civil service can offer to our brightest? For decades, the civil services have enjoyed an unparalleled social standing. While there have always been officers who have quit the civil service for better opportunities outside the government in the private sector and even politics, largely the IAS and allied services have been a top draw, as seen in the lakhs of hopefuls who appear for the UPSC. But that seems to be changing now.

A thorny issue

The Punjab government has appointed 1995-cadre IPS officer G Nageswara Rao as Secretary in the Department of Home Affairs and Justice, a post that has traditionally been held by the IAS cadre. The appointment is part of a larger reshuffle of officers effected by the Congress government of Capt Amarinder Singh.

The move is unlikely to help in the long ongoing tussle between IAS and IPS officers. The IAS officers are likely to see this as another encroachment on their turf, a trend that has become more pronounced at the Centre after the Modi sarkar came to power. The rivalry between the two elite services – be it at the Central or state level – is also over issues like pay parity, promotions, central empanelment and avenues for deputation and training courses.

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WISDOM CORNER

- Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year.
RALPH WALDO EMERSON
- Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right.
OPRAH WINFREY
- If you asked me for my New Year Resolution, it would be to find out who I am.
CYRIL CUSACK

WORDSWORTH

White lie

It’s based on the ancient Western idea of polar opposites, represented in popular culture through white meaning good and black its evil antithesis. We have white magic, for example, beneficent magic that’s opposed to the malign black variety. The term white patenoster meant a prayer or charm recited to protect against evil at night (of which one version that survives is the old children’s rhyme “Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Bless the bed that I lie on”). The opposite was a black patenoster, a spell recited to conjure up evil spirits or devils. Along the same lines, a white lie is one that lacks evil intent, as opposed to a black lie, which is most certainly malevolent, though normally we don’t bother to specify that lies are evil. A white lie is harmless or trivial, frequently one said in order to avoid hurting someone’s feelings. The term is first found in the eighteenth century, when it suggested something slightly different: A certain Lady of the highest Quality ... makes a judicious Distinction between a white Lie and a black Lie. A white Lie is That which is not intended to injure any Body in his Fortune, Interest, or Reputation but only to gratify a garrulous Disposition and the Itch of amusing People by telling Them wonderful Stories. The Gentleman’s Magazine, 1741.

Widdiful

Somebody who was widdiful deserved to be hanged. The story behind it starts with the northern English and Scottish word widdy or widdle, local forms of the standard English withy, a flexible branch from a tree such as willow used to make baskets or to tie or fasten things together. One sense was of a band or rope made of intertwined withies. Later it came to mean a halter and in particular a hangman’s rope. To cheat the widdy meant to escape hanging. By an obvious transfer the sense of gallows-bird grew up, one destined to fill a widdy. This is a modern example: “Will you shut the bloody noise off, you bloody widdiful!” Philips said in a shout that was nearly a scream (The Reaches, by David Drake, 2003). The word weakened in its later history in Scotland, turning into a joking term for somebody who was merely a scamp or scoundrel. It has been recorded in Yorkshire dialect in a very different sense, one derived from the idea of a witty being tough and durable: WIDDIFUL, Industrious, laborious, plodding. It is applicable to a hard-working man, who never complains of fatigue, and is derived from widdy; of such a character it is often said, “he’s as tough as a widdy” (The Dialect of Craven, 1828).

LOL

Tried and trusted

A wealthy investor walked into a bank and said to the bank manager, “I would like to speak with Mr Reginald Jones, who I understand



is a tried and trusted employee of yours.”
The banker said, “Yes he certainly was trusted. And he will be tried as soon as we catch him.”

FOCUS WORLD

‘DO’ MORE DEMOCRACY

When COVID-19 emerged exactly one year ago, liberal democracy was in crisis. For the first time since 2001, there were more autocracies than democracies in the world. Right-wing populists were gaining traction.

Moreover, the norm of universal and inalienable human rights was under pressure from the governments of China, Russia, and even the United States under President Donald Trump. The repression of civil society and threats to the rule of law, the free press, and human rights continued unabated in many countries. And some democratically elected leaders (such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán or Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) had set out to dismantle liberal democracy from within, a trend some have called the third wave of autocratisation.

But the anti-democratic wave faced a counter-trend. In 2019, more people in more countries than ever expressed their dissent by protesting. Governments in Algeria, Bolivia, Iraq, Lebanon, and Sudan were forced to step down. In Chile and France, governments were pressured into reversing controversial legislation.

Then the pandemic erupted, engulfing the world in a public health crisis and unprecedented economic contraction. For a brief period, the protest movements that marked 2019 came to a halt.

But as historic and unique as its impact on the world has been, for many people, the pandemic is just one more crisis among many; with grievances unaddressed, dissent soon resumed. Initially, there was a surge in creative ways of protesting without having to gather in person. From online hashtag-activism to placing shoes in public places to represent the homebound masses, people found ways to express dissent without risking the spread of the virus.

And then old and new protest

movements began to take to the streets again. The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May triggered weeks of massive demonstrations against police violence and systemic racism not only throughout the US, but also in more than 60 countries worldwide. In Hong Kong, people continue to fight for democracy. Chile held a referendum to adopt a new constitution after months of public protest. Around the world, from Belarus to Thailand to India, peaceful protests continued to erupt in 2020.

With equal resolve, governments in many places have sought to crack down on dissent, using the pandemic as a pretext to roll back democratic achievements, crack down on critics and opponents, erode human rights norms, and suppress civil society. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems has counted postponed elections in 69 countries, and the COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker records 130 countries with restrictions on the right to assembly, while 50 countries have measures affecting freedom of expression.

Of course, human rights organisations and official bodies recognise that some restrictions on rights and freedoms can be a legitimate government response to a public health crisis. But contact tracing technology or emergency power legislation should have sunset clauses, automatically limiting the time and scope of their validity. And social distancing measures that limit the right to assembly whether to protest or to worship, must be necessary, temporary and proportional, as well as non-discriminatory. Governments must acknowledge the intersection of these rights, and make a transparent, good-faith effort to strike a well-reasoned balance between them.

In many instances, however, efforts to stop the spread of disinformation – Hungary is a primary example – have also stopped people’s ability to voice legitimate criticism of government responses to the health crisis (because they are jailed on the basis of pandemic-related emergency legislation). In 28 countries, websites were blocked or users and platforms forced to delete content deemed critical or unfavorable. In at least 13 countries, the Internet and/or phone services have been shut down since January 2020, leaving people largely unable to access potentially life-saving services and information during the pandemic.

Where governments seek to use social distancing laws, curfews, and track-and-trace technology to harass, detain, or sanction activists and critics, we need peaceful protest more than ever. That is why the wave of global protest movements is continuing to rise, and why these movements – which skew young, female, and intersectional – are learning from, encouraging, and mobilising in solidarity with one another.

Democracy is more than elections and institutions. It is a continuous process of renegotiating power and its distribution...the global protests attest to a fundamental understanding that participants share: The best response to democracy’s shortcomings is to ‘do’ more democracy

Democracy is more than elections and institutions. It is a continuous process of renegotiating power and its distribution...the global protests attest to a fundamental understanding that participants share: The best response to democracy’s shortcomings is to ‘do’ more democracy

SPECTRUM URBANISATION

India’s ‘smart cities’ challenge

The New Year, it is hoped, shall see operational ‘smart cities’ at least by December-end as envisaged by the NDA government. The growth of cities has been a unique phenomenon in the country. According to the United Nations, India is expected to add 404 million people between 2004 and 2050. In such a scenario, the Prime Minister had aptly outlined his vision in 2016 for creating 100 ‘Smart Cities’, realising the need for developing infrastructure in tune with international standards, most of which will become operational by end 2021 or 2022.

Keeping in view the fact that India’s urbanisation will reach 50 per cent by 2039 and an estimated \$1.2 trillion will have to be spent in urban areas over the next two decades, the country needs a national urbanisation plan. While there are many dimensions to such a developed city, what is essentially meant is that these centres should provide a better quality of life. Whether a new city is built or an existing one is extended and developed – the second option being most judicious – it needs a model that is faster, better and cheaper. Smart cities herald a new age where information technology in addition to roads, electricity and transport facilities are unique.

A report by McKinsey Global Institute pointed out that with proper planning Indian cities could

produce 70 per cent of the GDP and drive a near-fourfold increase in per capita income across the nation by 2030. The surge in growth is expected to bring about employment opportunities to the educated class in cities.

One may mention here that most cities and towns have grown haphazardly post independence. Behind the sheen and glitter of the so-called manhattans lies bad planning. Moreover, most metros are full of slums, squatter settlements, and railway colonies not to speak of a large population of pavement dwellers.

City development would require huge funds, which obviously have to be garnered through public-private partnership (PPP) to build and operate both physical and digital infrastructure. Apart from this, there is the problem of distorted and shrinking land markets, which have stymied orderly urbanisation. India has always been land scarce compared to most countries and by 2050, its land to population ratio would decline fourfold, making it the one of the most land scarce nations in the world. Changes and modification in old laws are absolutely necessary without which little will happen. It is imperative to free up land for urban development and housing that have been locked due to outdated laws. Land is needed in every metro or big city for housing needs of economically weaker sections and the middle class – both upper and lower.

Apart from additional housing requirement, there is also the problem of shelter upgradation. In Mumbai, 55 per cent of the people live in slums on 35 km of land while around 25 per cent reside in old and dilapidated buildings. As such, around 80 per cent of the population needs to be re-housed, which may take a decade to accomplish the task. The problems in Delhi and Chennai are equally critical.

As is generally agreed, housing would have a multiplier effect as such construction activity generates employment for both skilled and unskilled persons. Moreover, housing has backward and forward linkages with many other industries. Apart from housing, demand of land for commercial and industrial hubs would increase significantly.

However, questions arise that if essential services are developed by PPP model, how will the parties recover the amount. Keeping in view the need for cities to generate more revenue, the State and municipal representatives suggested, at a recent meeting, adoption of certain measures. These include land monetisation, increased floor area ratio, norms with transparency in policies, progress in e-governance and online service delivery apart from GIS-based master plans for sanitation, land use and digital

connectivity. It was also suggested to have fixed tenures for mayors, municipal commissioners, and minimum educational qualification for municipal councillors to ensure development process is geared in right direction.

In the coming years, there is need for further improvement, especially in greater use of IT in official functioning, relocation of hawkers from strategic points and business areas, upgrading shelter requirements in slums and unauthorised colonies and improving their environmental conditions.

Though one need not be too optimistic, one can expect that the thrust on city development given by the Modi government would augur well in coming years. There are expectations that most of the required investment under the smart city scheme would come from the private sector under the PPP mode. Experts, however, believe that more investment by the Centre would have attracted funds from the private sector and international agencies.

While figures of how many of the 100 ‘smart cities’ have become operational is worth a watch, the question will linger whether Modi’s vision will be achieved before or at least by the time envisaged. Now, focus seems to have shifted to the controversial Central Vista project. Surely, priorities need to be put right.

SCB modernisation

Sir, This refers to the news item “Rs 3,500 cr for SCB modernisation” published in **Orissa POST** on 1 January, 2021. The government will invest ₹3500 crore for the modernisation of the state’s premier healthcare institution, the SCB Medical College and Hospital (SCBMCH). In fact, all medical colleges of Odisha need investment to improve the quality of medical education. This is evident from the vacant seats of all-India quota which are added in State quota. As Odisha already has an AIIMS, developing SCBMCH into another AIIMS-type facility is not the proper utilisation of state funds. This money can be better invested in other medical colleges.

Gopal Prasad Mittal,
BHUBANESWAR

Truce in Congress

Sir, Have the Congress ‘letter writers’ backtracked? Has the so-called dissent been snuffed out? Have the senior leaders resigned to their fate? Did Rahul Gandhi have the last laugh? In hindsight, the very fact that Sonia Gandhi, with Rahul in tow, agreed to meet the 23 letter writers in a series of ‘strategy meetings’ to understand and redress their grievance was thought of as a sort of victory for the senior leaders who not once, but twice, voiced their concern over the growing hegemony of a select few in the party. After the ‘successful’ meet between dissenters and the mother-son duo, the subsequent statements emanating from the Congress have raised a strong suspicion about ‘amicable agreement’ between the dissenters and the high command. A Congress spokesperson’s remark that 99.5 per cent of party members were in ‘favour’ of Rahul ascending the throne of party president has unambiguously pointed out to a tacit understanding between those who penned the high voltage letters and the high command. Known to be close to many of the ‘letter writers’, Sonia may or may not have buttered them up with sweet talk. But Rahul’s ascension is almost certain. In that event, doesn’t it mean that all efforts taken by the letter writers, five of them being former CMs, have come to a naught? At this rate, it is certain that the Congress would continue to bag double digit seats in general elections. It is disappointing to note that Sonia cannot see a Congress without the Gandhi tag. Clearly, win or lose, Sonia is very cautious that the age-old grip of the Gandhis over the grand old party does not slip.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

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

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TMC, BJP tussle to win over women voters

THIS RENEWED FOCUS ON WOMEN VOTERS COMES IN THE BACKDROP OF STATISTICS SHOWING THAT WOMEN HAD SWUNG THE BIHAR ASSEMBLY ELECTION IN NDA'S FAVOUR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 1: The TMC and the BJP are tussling to win over women voters, who comprise 49 per cent of poll-bound West Bengal's draft electorate, by highlighting issues concerning them.

Both parties are accusing each other of failing to ensure women's safety and are showcasing the developmental schemes launched for them by the two parties' respective governments at the Centre and the state. Elections to the 294-member West Bengal assembly are due in April-May this year. Of the 7.18 crore voters in the state, 3.15 crore are women, a number neither party can ignore. This renewed focus on women voters comes in the backdrop of statistics showing that women had swung the Bihar assembly election in the NDA's favour.

While the women voters were firmly behind Mamata Banerjee-led TMC, many of their loyalties shifted towards the BJP in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, prompting the ruling party in the state to launch initiatives to woo them back.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has appointed 'Bongo Janani', the

party's apolitical front formed after the TMC's drubbing in the 2019 elections, to reach out to women by highlighting the developmental schemes of her government and 'rise in crimes against women' in BJP-ruled states.

"The TMC government, in the last 10 years of its rule in West Bengal, has implemented several globally-acclaimed schemes like Kanyashree which have benefited women and girls. We don't need a certificate from the BJP on what we have done to ensure women's safety," Women and Child Development Minister and Bongo Janani general secretary Sashi Panja said.

Apart from criticising the BJP for its 'lackadaisical efforts' in tackling women issues, the Bongo Janani's outreach campaign highlights the TMC government's women-centric initiatives like the Swasthya Sathi health scheme and Rupashree direct cash transfer scheme to prevent child marriage.

Bongo Janani was formed to create an atmosphere for a social movement against heinous crimes against women like the Hathras rape-murder incident in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh and reach out to women



The BJP should be the last outfit to speak about women's safety in the country. The condition of women in states ruled by the saffron party speaks loud

SAUGATA ROY | TMC MP

who do not want to directly associate with any political outfit, TMC sources said.

"The BJP should be the last outfit to speak about women's safety in the country. The condition of women in states ruled by the saffron party

speaks loud," senior TMC leader and MP Saugata Roy said.

Women of the state remained solidly behind the Left till 2006-07, when the anti-land acquisition movements in Singur and Nandigram tilted their support towards Mamata Banerjee. Since the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, most women voted for Banerjee. While some crimes against women dented her support base among urban women voters, her rural base remained intact till the BJP entered the state's political scene.

The BJP emerged as the prime challenger to the Trinamool

Congress in the 2019 elections, bagging 18 seats, four less than the TMC's tally out of 42 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state.

The saffron party pocketed a large chunk of the women's vote share, sources said.

It is now targeting the TMC over 'increasing incidents of rape' and 'rising number of women trafficking from north Bengal and tribal areas'.

"The rise in rape and other crimes against women shows that no woman is safe in West Bengal. Compensation to rape survivors is horrific. Is the TMC government trying to buy a woman's honour? It has failed to ensure women's safety," State BJP Mahila Morcha chief Agnimitra Paul told PTI.

The National Commission for Women has also slammed the state police for alleged inaction over complaints of atrocities against women.

The BJP is also highlighting the Centre's initiatives like Ujjwala scheme, aimed at providing LPG connection to women of BPL families, the construction of toilets under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and health cover to families under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

Hooda strengthens his position after civic polls

The farmers' agitation in Haryana is having an impact on the BJP's electoral fortunes

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

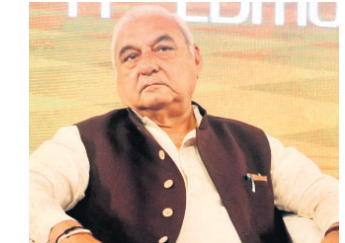
New Delhi, Jan 1: Former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda has strengthened his position in the Congress after the civic body elections and the recent Baroda Assembly bypoll win.

Both the wins are from the Sonepat region of the state, which is Hooda's stronghold.

The wins have reinforced his claim of being the super challenger to the BJP and Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar in particular in the state. It also establishes his power within the Congress as the sole leader who has been able to not only retain his backyard but is also trying to give a hard time to the BJP in other areas.

Sources say the BJP's win in only one civic body indicated that support for the party in urban areas is ebbing. But, the Congress as a party is also not in a position to unsettle the government till the JJP remains with the BJP.

Haryana's ruling BJP-JJP combine lost the mayoral polls in two municipal corporations but won



in one civic body on Wednesday. The opposition Congress won the post of Mayor in the Sonepat Municipal Corporation, while the BJP won the post in Panchkula Municipal Corporation.

In Ambala Municipal Corporation, victory belonged to the Haryana Jan Chetna Party of Vinod Sharma, who had left the Congress party in 2013 and formed his own party. Shakti Rani Sharma of the Haryana Jan Chetna Party defeated the BJP's Vandana Sharma in the election by a margin of over 7,000 votes.

The farmers' agitation in Haryana is having an impact on the BJP's electoral fortunes. The Congress, even though gaining, has much to owe to the Hooda influence in his stronghold.

Mamata hit by divide in cultural clan ahead of polls

Some intellectuals feel that there seems to be no control on unruly elements in the party and criminals are calling the shots



Bibhas Chakraborty

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Jan 1: Prominent intellectuals who once battled for the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress in West Bengal during the Nandigram-Singur anti-land acquisition movement are now maintaining a 'socio-political distance' from the ruling formation ahead of the crucial 2021 Assembly polls.

Veteran theatre personalities such as Bibhas Chakraborty, singer-composer Nachiketa Chakraborty, actor Kaushik Sen and many others, who used to be seen on the forefront of Trinamool rallies, have openly developed distance from the incumbent party and have now become its staunch critics. Those who were with Mamata, even after her party stormed to power in 2011, are veering towards the fence, following the snowballing political clashes taking place in various districts.

Trinamool Congress is facing a stiff challenge of an intellectual exodus from its stable. Today there is a sharp division among the intellectuals who were with her during the agitations in Singur and Nandigram and who had provided moral support to Mamata to oust the CPI-M-led world's longest-serving Left regime.

"After a decade I feel deeply ashamed as we were part of the people's movement that took place in Bengal under the banner of Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress. The lumpenisation of politics has taken a different turn over here. The ruling party workers are now into all sorts of illegitimate activities across Bengal and the worst part is once we all had voiced protests against these things only So, the change that we wanted has turned out to be an ultimate farce," Bibhas Chakraborty told IANS. Known as a noted ideologue, Chakraborty said that he has decided to maintain a "socio-political distance" from the Trinamool Congress and its activities now. He also slammed the ruling party for displaying 'totalitarian and dictatorial traits' and called for electoral reforms.

"It is better not to talk about it. Only thing that I want to say is we never wanted this to happen in Bengal. So, I just want to stay away from it. But Bengal will have a



Nachiketa Chakraborty

disabled democracy if this goes on too long," the octogenarian thespian said.

The rift between a section of Bengali intellectuals and the Trinamool Congress developed in 2018 when the state's ruling party was desperate to ensure a walkover. Sharp reactions had come following widespread violence across Bengal over filing of nominations for the three-tier rural polls scheduled in May, 2018.

The ruling party's attempt to win elections without facing a contest had made the whole clan deeply worried. Disgruntled intellectuals like academician Sunando Sanyal and painter Samir Aich also resigned from government positions in the past that Mamata had offered them after coming to power.

Singer-composer Nachiketa Chakraborty was one such name who had shadowed Mamata during her struggling time, singing songs to mobilise the village folks across Bengal. Asked if he feels that was a mistake on his part, he told IANS: "That was 10 years ago. I was comparatively young at that time and had limited understanding of politics. I never wanted to become a minister. I did what I felt right at that juncture. It will not be repeated again."

Nachiketa said that time also he was a singer and sang songs to motivate people protesting against the misrule of the Left Front government. "I don't want to talk about anything political. Now also, my identity is I am a singer and will continue to remain a singer in the years to come. This is my world and I don't want to switch to anything now," he pointed out. Some intellectuals feel that there seems to be no control on unruly elements in the party and criminals are calling the shots.

Mamata has always invoked the soft sentiments of Bengali icons like Rabindranath Tagore, Nazrul Islam, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and many others playing songs and poems in the background of her political rallies. To counter the saffron surge, recently she was seen walking with a Tagore's portrait in Birbhum's Santiniketan. She took part in the road-show fondly hugging the poet's portrait and launched a fierce attack at her arch adversary BJP during the rally.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The Delhi Jal Board will consider moving court against the 'apathetic' Haryana government as it is yet to stop the discharge of pollutants into the Yamuna which affect drinking water supply in the national capital, the utility's Vice Chairman Raghav Chadha said.

At a meeting with senior DJB officials, Chadha also discussed the feasibility of ozonation plants for treating high levels of ammonia in the river's water.

"We can neither depend on the apathetic and undependable Haryana government nor resign to fate. Proactive and preventive steps are a must to ensure that Delhi residents get clean, safe and uninterrupted water," he said.

"We also discussed the feasibility of ozonation plants for treating such high levels of ammonia," he said.

The Delhi Jal Board (DJB) will augment its treatment capacities so

that it can minimise such issues in the coming years. Work will begin in this regard soon at the Chandrawal and Wazirabad plants, Chadha said.

"The DJB will also consider taking legal recourse towards an unresponsive Haryana government, if this continues... We will consider approaching the judiciary to seek justice on behalf of the people of Delhi because of the Haryana government's apathetic and undependable approach and deeds," he said.

High levels of ammonia in the Yamuna have prompted the DJB to reduce or stop water production at its plants at least five times this year.

Earlier this week, Chadha had urged the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) to look into the issue.

According to officials, the DJB's water treatment plants can treat up to 0.9 parts per million (ppm) ammonia concentra-



tion in the river water.

If the ammonia content is higher than this, the raw water is diluted with fresh water from the Upper

are temporarily shut. The DJB said two canals in Haryana - DD-1 and DD-2 - carry contaminated water to the Yamuna. DD-2 is also known as "dye drain" because this canal contains a large amount of dye from industrial units.

The two canals meet near Shimla Guiran village in Haryana's Panipat district and merge into the Yamuna near Khojkipur village where ammonia levels often reach up to 40 ppm. Apart from Carrier Lined Channel (CLC), Delhi Sub-Branch (DSB) and Yamuna, water is also supplied to the city from DD-8 canal.

A few kilometres along the DD-8 canal also flows another canal, DD-6, (at Pyau Manhari in Haryana) in which Haryana releases huge amounts of industrial and domestic waste.

These two canals are separated via sand sacks which are mostly in bad shape at many places. As a result, the contaminated water of DD-6 mixes with DD-8 and thus, the ammonia reaches Delhi, the DJB said.

‘DIDI TRUE UPHOLDER OF BENGALI CULTURE’

THE COMMENTS BY TMC COME IN THE BACKDROP OF THE RAGING ‘OUTSIDER-INSIDER’ DEBATE IN THE STATE; TMC HAS REPEATEDLY BRANDED BJP AS A PARTY OF OUTSIDERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 1: The ruling Trinamool Congress celebrated its 23rd foundation day Friday and asserted that the party chief Mamata Banerjee is the "true upholder" of Bengal's culture and values.

The opposition BJP mocked at TMC's foundation day celebrations saying this will be the last time that Mamata Banerjee's party does so while being in power.

Senior TMC leaders led by state party president Subrata Bakshi hoisted the party flag at its state headquarters and congratulated workers for their tireless efforts in serving people.

"In the past 23 years our TMC family fought many battles whereby more and more people bestowed their faith in @MamataOfficial as the true upholder of Bengal's culture, pride & values! As we step into another year, we promise to always protect & serve the people of Bengal," the TMC tweeted.

The comments by TMC come in the backdrop of the raging 'outsider-insider' debate in the state.



TMC has repeatedly branded BJP as a party of outsiders which poses a threat to the culture and values of the state.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in a series of tweets asserted that she will continue to fight and work for the people of the state in the days to come. "As Trinamool turns 23 today, I look back at the journey we began on January 1st, 1998. Our years have been of immense struggle, but throughout this time we have continued to achieve our objective of being committed to the cause of only the people," Banerjee said on Twitter.

Vowing to carry on her fight to uplift the state, she said "On #TMCFoundationDay, I extend my sincere gratitude to our Maa-Mati-Manush and all our workers who

continue to fight with us in making Bengal better and stronger each day. The Trinamool family will carry on with this resolve for times to come!"

Senior TMC leader Firhad Hakim termed the saffron party as an "outfit of poachers".

"The BJP can't win the polls in a direct contest. So they have unleashed the CBI, the ED and are poaching our leaders to pin us down. But that won't yield any result as the party of poachers will be defeated and the traitors will not be able to save them," he said.

Mocking TMC, Dilip Ghosh, the BJP state president said "The days of the TMC government are numbered in Bengal. This is the last time that it is observing its foundation day while being in power:

42-mt high mountain of waste in Gurugram

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Gurugram, Jan 1: Due to lack of a waste-to-energy plant, a mountain of waste reaching upto nearly 42 metres has accumulated at the Bandhwari garbage plant in Gurugram.

The waste-to-energy plant is yet to be set up by Ecogreen Energy Private Limited at the site. The company has a contract to collect house waste from Gurugram and Faridabad districts.

According to MCG officials, nearly 10 acres of land is required for the waste-to-energy plant while the Bandhwadi plant is spread over 30 acres of municipal land.

In 2017, Ecogreen Energy had started work on setting up a waste plant at the same site. For this, 10 acres of land was provided by the MCG at the Bandhwari plant but due to the non-construction of the plant, three million tonnes of garbage has accumulated at the proposed plant site.

The corporation officials informed that the civic body has paid more than Rs 126 crore to Ecogreen in 31 months but the

company did not begin the work even after a year of getting environmental clearance.

The officials said nine trommel machines are working to reduce the mountain of garbage. The height of one part of the garbage mountain had reached 42 metres. Nearly 1,700 tonnes of garbage from Gurugram and Faridabad is reaching the Bandhwari landfill daily.

According to information through a Right to Information (RTI) query, fines have been imposed several times on Ecogreen.

As per a National Green Tribunal (NGT) order, the State Pollution Control Board imposed a fine of Rs 25 lakh November 11, 2019, on the company for spreading pollution and harming the environment. The Faridabad Municipal Corporation did not take action to cancel the company's contract till June 2020, despite imposing a fine of more than Rs 1.57 crore.

"Nine trommel machines are working to reduce the garbage mountain. The company's representatives have been instructed to set up the waste-to-energy plant soon," said Dheeraj Kumar, Joint Commissioner, Swachh Bharat Mission, MCG.



of the day quote

Disability compensation has been extended to all serving central government employees who get disabled in the line of duty and are retained in service in spite of such disablement

JITENDRA SINGH | UNION MINISTER

I thank everyone for their wishes, prayers and moral support during my illness. My family members and I have now fully recovered from the Covid-19

JAGAT PRAKASH NADDA | BJP PRESIDENT

I salute the Corona warriors – doctors, nurses, medical staff, police personnel, sanitation workers, and social and religious organisations. You all got down to serve the people despite a very tough situation

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | DELHI CHIEF MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

3rd expansion of MP cabinet Jan 3

Bhopal: The Shivraj Singh Chouhan-led Madhya Pradesh cabinet will be expanded January 3, an official said Friday. This is the third expansion of the state cabinet after Chouhan took over as the chief minister for the fourth term in March 2020. The cabinet expansion is expected to take place around 12.30 pm Sunday, the official said.

Theatres in Ker to reopen

Thiruvananthapuram: After remaining shut for over 10 months, theatres in Kerala will reopen from January 5 with only 50 per cent occupancy and adhering to strict COVID-19 guidelines. Only 50 per cent of the seats should be occupied or only half the tickets sold.

Tigress, 2 cubs found dead

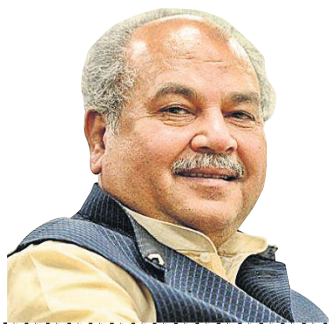
Nagpur: A tigress and her two cubs were found dead Friday evening in Umred Paoani Karhandala Sanctuary in Maharashtra's Nagpur district, an official said. It was suspected that poisoning was the cause of death but it was yet to be confirmed, he said. Pench Tiger Reserve field director Ravikiran Govekar, in a statement, said the carcasses were found near an agricultural field, and the half-eaten body of a cow was lying nearby.

Man gets one year RI

Alibaug (Maha): A special court at Alibaug in Raigad district of Maharashtra sentenced a 49-year-old man to one year of rigorous imprisonment for molesting school girls. In the order passed recently, special court judge S S Shaikh also slapped a fine of Rs 5,000 on the convict Ashwin Arvind Puranik, a local resident. As per the complaint, Puranik molested the girls a few times while they were going to school.

LeT associate held

Srinagar: Security forces arrested an associate of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and recovered incriminating material, including explosive substance, from his possession in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said Friday in a statement.

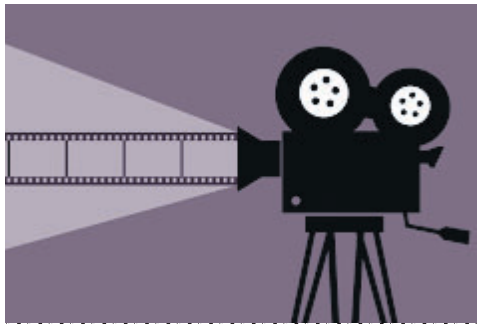


I am hopeful that whatever decision would be arrived in the farmers' unions meeting will be in the interest of the country and of the farmers

NARENDRA SINGH TOMAR | AGRICULTURE MINISTER

KERALA TO HOLD ICONIC FILM FEST IN FEBRUARY

The International Film festival of Kerala (IFFK) will be held from February 10 onwards in four places. This is the silver jubilee of the film festival



Schools reopen in Kerala, K'taka, Assam amid strict Covid curbs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore/ Guwahati, Jan 1: The chatter was back on campuses as schools in Kerala, Karnataka and Assam reopened after several months with strict COVID-19 regulations such as wearing masks, thermal screening, washing hands and mandatory social distancing. Though many students attended school, with letters of consent from their parents, some chose to continue education online with their guardians anxious about the pandemic situation and the emergence of a new strain of the novel coronavirus.

India on Friday reported a single-day rise of 20,035 new COVID-19 cases which pushed the country's virus caseload to 1,02,86,709. The death toll increased to 1,48,994 with 256 fresh fatalities, according to Union Health Ministry data.

In Karnataka and in Kerala, classroom studies for classes 10 and 12 resumed on the first day of the new year, while in Assam children studying in classes one to five attended schools. Staggered classroom schedules were followed by schools in these states, with the Centre recommending only 50 per cent of students be allowed at a time in educational institutes. Attendance of students is also not mandatory and they can choose to continue classes online, the cen-



tral government had recommended.

Universities and schools across the country were closed in mid-March, when the Centre announced a countrywide classroom shutdown as part of measures to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus. Subsequently, a nationwide lockdown was imposed on March 25. The government started easing restrictions gradually from June 8 under 'Unlock'. While regular classes began in Karnataka for class 10 and second-year pre-university (PU) Class 12 students, who will be taking board exams, students from grades six to nine came to campuses for the Vidyagama programme, which enables continued schooling. Wearing masks, students with consent letters from their parents were seen entering classrooms after thermal checks and sanitising their hands at schools and PU colleges. While there was opposition from certain sections about opening schools and PU col-

leges amidst prevailing pandemic situation, others including Karnataka Education Minister Suresh Kumar were of the opinion that opening of schools and colleges along with preventive measures were necessary for students, especially in rural areas, with on-line education mostly not available and cases of them being forced into labour. Expecting attendance of 40 to 50 per cent on Friday, the minister also said that "we are not expecting good attendance on the first day itself, as attending classes are not compulsory, also (Friday) being a New Year many may want to come to classes from Monday".

Schools in Assam reopened for primary students after 10 months in a staggered way following strict COVID-19 protocols. For students, faculty and school staff in Kerala, strict instructions right from wearing masks, washing hands at frequent intervals to mandatory social distancing were in place.

India seeks assistance for sailors stuck in China

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: India Friday called for urgent, practical and time-bound assistance to 39 Indian sailors stranded on two cargo ships in Chinese waters in view of the "grave" humanitarian situation developing on board the vessels.

Citing coronavirus-related restrictions, Chinese authorities have not allowed the ships, MV Jag Anand and MV Anastasia, to either dock or go for a crew change for months. "There is a growing stress on the crew members on account of the long delay. Given this and our concern for the increasingly difficult conditions for our crew members, these two cases are being pursued vigorously," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava said.

He said while the shipping companies concerned are examining the logistics of moving the ships away from their current points of anchorage, the Indian embassy in Beijing is in touch with relevant Chinese authorities for berthing approvals to facilitate the crew change. Srivastava said Indian bulk cargo vessel MV Jag Anand,

with 23 Indian sailors, has been on anchorage near Jingtang port in Hebei province of China since June 13 while MV Anastasia, with 16 Indians as crew members, is on anchorage near Caofeidian port since September 20.

"We have noted the statements of the Chinese side, expressing their willingness to extend their assistance in this matter. We expect that this assistance will be provided in an urgent, practical and time-bound manner given the grave humanitarian situation that is developing on board the ships," he said responding to a media query on the matter.

Srivastava said the Indian embassy in Beijing continued to remain in close and continuous touch with the Chinese authorities in Beijing, Hebei and Tianjin, adding the MEA is also following up on the matter through the Chinese Embassy here for "an early resolution".

He said the Indian embassy has repeatedly taken up the issue both with the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs and also with the local provincial authorities, requesting that the ships be allowed to dock and/or the crew be allowed to be changed.

Representative image



A vendor selling toys rides a bicycle on the first day of New Year in Kolkata

PTI PHOTO

Delhi Metro rides into 2021 with driverless trains

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Delhi Metro's journey may have been halted for over five months due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the year gone by, but the urban transporter is zooming into 2021 riding on next-generation driverless trains, while accomplishing a major technological feat for the country.

The first case of novel coronavirus in Delhi was reported March 1 and soon the daily cases began to multiply and number of containment zones grew rapidly. Flight services were soon suspended to check the spread of the virus.

Metro services in Delhi-NCR



were stopped March 22 to contain the spread of the pandemic and the ensuing nationwide lockdown from March 25 meant the services remained suspended in that period.

The raging virus that has claimed over 10,000 lives in the national capital in 2020 alone, wreaked havoc in June when the city witnessed the first major wave of the pandemic, followed by two

more lethal waves in mid-September and November.

Following guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Delhi Metro resumed operations in a graded manner September 7, after a hiatus of 169 days, even as both the DMRC and commuters trod with caution amid the new normal in the rapid transport system.

Delhi Metro resumed services after taking a slew of measures to ensure least physical contact for riders, like automated thermal screening-cum-sanitiser dispenser and lift calling system driven by a foot pedal at several stations, to begin with.

DAILY GRIND

DELHI FREEZES ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: A severe cold wave swept Delhi on New Year's Day as the mercury plummeted to 1.1 degrees Celsius, the lowest in 15 years, and "very dense" fog lowered visibility to "zero" metres, smudging landmarks from view and affecting traffic movement.

On January 8, 2006, the city had recorded a minimum of 0.2 degrees Celsius.

The all-time record is minus 0.6 degrees Celsius registered in January 1935.

The lowest minimum temperature recorded in January last year was 2.4 degrees Celsius, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

Kuldeep Srivastava, the head of the IMD's regional forecasting centre, said "very dense" fog lowered visibility to "zero" metres at Safdarjung and Palam at 6 am.

According to the IMD, "very dense" fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres. In case of "dense" fog, visibility is between 51 and 200 metres, "moderate" 201 and 500 metres, and "shallow" 501 and 1,000 metres.

The Safdarjung Observatory, which provides representative data for the city, recorded a minimum of 1.1 degrees Celsius, six notches below normal, and the lowest in January in 15 years.

The weather stations at Ayaznagar and Lodhi Road recorded a minimum of 1.2 degrees Celsius and 1.4 degrees Celsius, the IMD said.

Delhi recorded a minimum of 3.3 degrees Celsius Thursday.

At 15.2 degrees Celsius, the city recorded the season's lowest maximum temperature December 18.

Kashmir again abuzz with tourists in New Year

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN KASHMIR HAS SUFFERED IN THE PAST FEW YEARS FOR VARIOUS REASONS, PARTICULARLY AFTER THE GOVERNMENT IMPOSED RESTRICTIONS FOLLOWING THE ABROGATION OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR'S SPECIAL STATUS IN AUGUST 2019 AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Jan 1: After a lull of nearly one-and-a-half years, Kashmir was again abuzz with tourists as thousands of people from different parts of the country descended on the picturesque Gulmarg, Pahalgam and other areas of the valley for the New Year.

As tourist arrivals spiked, the region witnessed huge traffic jams. The situation was such in the popular skiing destination Gulmarg that some tourists had to ring in the New Year from their vehicles stuck in traffic.

"One needs to understand that global destinations are ruled out due to the pandemic and Kashmir became an obvious choice for domestic travellers," says Nighat Shah, the reservation manager with a prominent hotel chain in



Srinagar and Gulmarg.

Hotels and resorts organised various events on the New Year's Eve. Firecrackers illuminated the sky and musical shows enthralled the tourists. The tourism department too organised an event in Gulmarg that drew a large number of visitors. Kashmir Divisional Commissioner P K Pole was the chief guest at the event.

"After all, people have undergone a lot of stress during 2020. Our effort was to help them de-stress," says Masroor Hussain, the general manager of a hotel in Srinagar. Managing Director of Ahad Group of Hotels Asif Burza said that after many years the tourism industry in the valley has seen such a busy December. "Not only in Gulmarg, occupancy of ho-

tels in Pahalgam and Srinagar too increased. There is a feel good factor in the tourism industry and we are looking forward to a great season ahead," he said.

He thanked the Kashmir administration for controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. "Of course the COVID crisis was well managed.... It encouraged tourists to visit," he said. With the pandemic upsetting plans of travel to Europe, Kashmir emerged as the most preferred destination for tourists, he said. Hussain feels that efforts made by hoteliers to woo domestic tourists by launching a programme, 'Unlock Kashmir', helped. "It is a tough fight ahead. But, the aim of this programme was to garner support as Kashmir's tourism can go to higher places if supported together by private and government players," he said.

of the day quote

It is important to ensure that investment and industry keeps coming into the state for the generation of employment for our children so that they do not go out of Punjab for jobs

AMARINDER SINGH | PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER

The successful and peaceful celebration of the fete displayed that in a democracy the power of the people is stronger than any force

V NARAYANASAMY | PONDICHERRY CM

60 per cent BJP-backed candidates have won in the local body elections in the state (Karnataka)

BS YEDIDURAPPA | KARNATAKA CM

SHORT TAKES

12 killed in UP road mishaps

Lucknow: At least 12 people were killed and several others injured in separate road accidents due to dense fog on the New Year in Uttar Pradesh Friday. According to police, four people were killed and three others were injured when a private bus collided with a container in Auras police circle in Unnao district on the Lucknow-Agra expressway. The bus was going towards Delhi from Bihar.

New security challenge in J&K

Srinagar: The murder of 70-year-old Punjab born jeweller, Satpal Nischal by motorcycle-borne terrorists in J&K's Srinagar city has thrown up a new challenge for the security forces. The incident took place Thursday. Having lived and worked in Kashmir for 40 years, Satpal Nischal had obtained a domicile certificate last year and purchased a house in the high security Indira Nagar area of Srinagar city in addition to a shop in the Sarai Bala area, where the terrorists shot him dead.

NCB arrests 3 peddlers

Mumbai: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has arrested three peddlers on charge of possessing synthetic drug mephedrone, officials said Friday. NCB Zonal Director Sameer Wankhede told IANS: "We intercepted three peddlers with the synthetic stimulant during raids at Andheri and Kurla areas on Thursday night and arrested them."

3 killed in road mishap

Shahdol (MP): Three persons, including a man being rushed to a hospital, were killed when an ambulance was hit by an unidentified vehicle on a national highway in Madhya Pradesh's Shahdol district, police said Friday. The accident took place at Lalpur village on National Highway 43 late Thursday night.

Criminal shot dead

Ballia (UP): A suspected criminal was allegedly killed by his associate in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia district, police said Friday. Sonu Singh (25) had a heated debate with his Abhishek Singh over some issue at Chand Diar village Thursday night, following which the latter opened fire on him and fled, Bairiya police station incharge Sanjay Tripathi said.



During the pandemic, police worked hard, due to which thousands of these personnel contracted the infection, with some of them getting martyred in the line of duty

UDDHAV THACKERAY | MAHARASHTRA CM

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN MUSEUM TO REOPEN

The Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum will reopen to the public from January 5, 2021 after a gap of nearly 10 months



Will take firm steps if Jan 4 talks fail: Farmers

Addressing a press conference at the Singhu border protest site, farmer leaders warned of multiple actions if their main demands are not met

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Resolute in their demands for the repeal of three new farm laws and a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops, protesting farmer unions Friday said they will have to take firm steps if the government does not take a decision in their favour in the next meeting scheduled for January 4.

Addressing a press conference at the Singhu border protest site, farmer leaders warned of multiple actions if their main demands are not met. They said that only five per cent of the issues raised by them have so far been discussed in meetings with the government.

"If the January 4 meeting with the government fails to end the deadlock, we will announce dates for shutting all malls, petrol pumps in Haryana," farmer leader Vikas told reporters. Farmers protesting at Shahjahanpur on the Haryana-Rajasthan border will also move towards the national capital, Swaraj India leader Yogendra Yadav said. Another leader Yudhveer Singh said that a tractor march will be held on January 6 if no concrete decision is taken in the next round of talks.

After the sixth round of formal negotiations Wednesday, the gov-



ernment and farm unions reached some common ground to resolve protesting farmers' concerns over rise in power tariff and penalties for stubble burning, but the two sides remained deadlocked over the main contentious issues of the repeal of three farm laws and a legal guarantee for MSP.

After the talks between three union ministers and a 41-member representative group of thousands of farmers protesting on Delhi borders, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said at least 50 per cent resolution has been reached with mutual agreement on two out

of four items on the agenda and discussions would continue on the remaining two January 4 at 2 PM.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, are protesting at various borders of the national capital for more than a month against these three new laws. The government has presented these laws as major agriculture reforms aimed at helping farmers and increasing their income, but the protesting unions fear that the new legislations have left them at the mercy of big corporates by weakening the MSP and mandi systems.

Soldier killed in Pak firing on LoC

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Jammu, Jan 1: An army soldier was killed in Pakistani ceasefire violation in J&K's Rajouri district on Friday.

Defence ministry spokesman, Colonel Devender Anand said at about 3.30 p.m. on Friday Pakistan initiated an unprovoked ceasefire violation by firing with small arms and shelling with mortars along the Line of Control (LoC) in Nowshera sector of Rajouri district.

Defence sources said Naib Subedar Ravinder Kumar was injured and later succumbed to the critical injuries sustained in the Pakistani firing. Sources said the Indian Army retaliated befittingly. Friday's is the first ceasefire violation by Pakistan on the LoC in 2021. In 2020, Pakistan violated the ceasefire over 3500 times. Thirty civilians were killed and over 130 injured.

Kolkata sees rise in pollution levels after New Year celebrations



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 1: Air quality turned 'poor to very poor' in parts of Kolkata Friday, hours after people rang in the New Year by bursting firecrackers, and private vehicles crowded city roads, significantly raising particulate matter levels in the atmosphere.

At Rabindra Bharati University

in north Kolkata, the air quality index (PM 2.5) around 2 pm touched the 'very poor' category at 329, an official of West Bengal Pollution Control Board said. He, however, explained that particulate matter usually hangs heavy in the air around this time of the year, especially during early morning and evening hours. "Bursting of firecrackers alone wouldn't

have deteriorated the air quality to this extent. Factors such as vehicular pollution and burning of fossil fuel played a significant role," the official said. At Ballygunge, the air quality index remained in the 'poor' category at 292. Similarly, at Jadavpur it was 270, and Victoria 260. Environmentalist SM Ghosh said rampant bursting of firecrackers was witnessed in different parts of city since December 31 night.

"It was clear that the crackers kept aside during Diwali and Kalipuja were used during New Year celebrations. Neither the police nor the pollution control board could prevent that. The situation was compounded by emissions from diesel-run cars," the activist said.

India, Pak exchange list of nuclear installations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Continuing a 30-year practice, India and Pakistan Friday exchanged a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral arrangement that prohibits the two countries from attacking each other's atomic facilities.

The two countries exchanged the list of nuclear installations and facilities covered under the Agreement on the Prohibition of



Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities between India and Pakistan, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

This was done simultaneously

through diplomatic channels in New Delhi and Islamabad.

"India and Pakistan today exchanged, through diplomatic channels simultaneously at New Delhi and Islamabad, the list of nuclear installations and facilities, covered under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities," the MEA said in a statement.

The exchange of the list came amid frosty ties between the two

countries over the Kashmir issue as well as cross-border terrorism.

The agreement was signed on December 31, 1988 and it came into force January 27, 1991.

The pact mandates the two countries to inform each other of the nuclear installations and facilities to be covered under the agreement on the first of January of every calendar year. This is the 30th consecutive exchange of the list with the first one taking place January 1, 1992.

DEMOLITION OF HINDU TEMPLE

India lodges protest with Pakistan



AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 1: India has lodged a strong protest with Pakistan over the vandalism of a Hindu temple in Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the neighbouring country and sought strict action against those responsible for the incident, sources said Friday. India expects Pakistan to carry out an investigation into the incident and has asked for sharing of the probe report with it, they said. On Wednesday, the temple in Terri village of Karak district was vandalised by a mob, protesting against its expansion work.

The sources said the Ministry of External Affairs conveyed its serious concerns to the Pakistan High Commission here over the repeated instances of similar incidents and atrocities against the members of the minority community. "It was also impressed upon the government of Pakistan that this was not the first time the temple was destroyed. This has been going on since 1997. We also asked for the investigation report to be shared with the ministry," a source said.

The sources said it was conveyed

that the government of Pakistan, in discharging its responsibilities, is expected to look after the safety, security and well-being of its minority communities, including protecting their religious rights and cultural heritage.

Over 30 people, mostly members of a radical Islamist party, were arrested over the attack, Pakistani officials said Thursday.

The attack on the temple drew strong condemnation from human rights activists and Hindu community leaders. On Thursday, the provincial government ordered authorities to reconstruct the damaged temple as it vowed to bring the culprits to justice.

According to the local police, they arrested more than 30 people, including Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Rehmat Salam Khattak, in overnight raids. Over 350 people have been named in the FIR, Provincial Police Chief KPK Sanaullah Abbasi has said. He said all the sections of law relating to terrorism have been included in the FIR against the accused.

Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Mahmood Khan said Friday that his government will rebuild a Hindu temple.

POND OF NECTAR



A devotee takes a holy dip in the sacred pond at the Golden Temple amid fog, on New Year's Day, in Amritsar, Friday

PTI PHOTO

How scientists studied coughs to model nCoV spread

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: When the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world, IIT-Bombay Professor Rajneesh Bhardwaj was studying how droplets evaporated for applications in spray cooling and inkjet printing, and his collaborator Amit Agrawal was working on point-of-care medical devices and electronic cooling.

But once it became clear that the pandemic was mainly spreading through cough and sneeze aerosols from infected individuals, the duo began applying their knowledge to understand the evaporation of respiratory droplets from surfaces and the spread of cough clouds.

"Our plans were to continue in the domain of thermal and fluid engineering. However, the pan-



Representative image

demio came as an opportunity to diversify and explore other research areas. We thought of extending and applying our knowledge to several unanswered questions in the context of COVID-19," Agrawal, Institute Chair Professor from the Department of Mechanical Engineering, IIT-Bombay, told PTI.

Bhardwaj and Agrawal, both experts in the field of fluid mechanics, said their understanding of the motion of fluids helped them model how the novel coronavirus spread.

"Air and water are the most common fluids, and also the carrier of most viruses and bacteria, it is not that surprising that the subject is playing an important role in understanding and managing the current pandemic," Bhardwaj told PTI.

Numerous studies, over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, applied principles of fluid mechanics to provide scores of important insights about the distance over which different size respiratory droplets travel, the safe distance between people, and the efficacy of various types of masks in reducing the transfer of contaminated droplets.

Scientists also probed into the process by which larger droplets underwent evaporation and subsequently precipitation to turn into microdroplets called aerosols.

"During this process, big droplets settle on the ground after a short distance in flight while the smaller ones remain airborne for a longer period forming aerosols," explained Saptarshi Basu, from the Indian

Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore.

Two studies by Basu and his team, both published in the journal Physics of Fluids, applied fluid dynamics experiments to show how the respiratory droplets dried and formed aerosols, and how virus particles are distributed within them.

According to the IISc scientist, factors such as people's mask wearing behaviour, social distancing, population density, and movement of individuals contribute significantly to the infection rate and severity in a region.

As economies slowly opened across the world post lockdowns, and travel restrictions eased, scientists and engineers also applied fluid mechanics to shed light on the indoor spread of the coronavirus.

international

of the day quote

If we can learn from any one country in the world, it is China. Their development model suits Pakistan the best. The speed with which they have developed in the last 3 decades is something we can learn from



IMRAN KHAN | PM, PAKISTAN

We understand that Pakistani authorities are taking steps to ensure that Omar Sheikh remains in custody while the Supreme Court appeal seeking to reinstate his conviction continues



JEFFREY A ROSEN | ACTING US ATTORNEY GENERAL

As the largest democracy... we will be promoting very fundamental values like democracy, human rights and development (at the UN). India's message will also be to ensure how we let diversity flourish in a united framework



TS TIRUMURTI | INDIA'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO THE UN

SHORT TAKES

Bangkok shuts down venues

Bangkok: The Thai capital is shutting down venues including schools and entertainment parks as coronavirus cases continue to spread. Thailand reported 279 new cases Friday including two deaths. Seven provinces including Bangkok have been designated red zones where places including entertainment venues, boxing rings, gyms and flea markets are ordered closed. Restaurants are allowed to serve only takeouts. The restrictions are in place until mid-January.

Pak hands over list of prisoners

Islamabad: Pakistan Friday handed over a list of 319 Indian prisoners including 49 civil and 270 fishermen lodged in the country's jails to the High Commission of India as part of a bilateral agreement. The Foreign Office (FO) said that the step is in consistent with the provisions of the Consular Access Agreement between the two countries signed May 21, 2008. "The Government of Pakistan, today, shared with the Indian High Commission in Islamabad a list of 319 Indian prisoners in Pakistan," it said.

Fireworks kill young men

Paris: A man in eastern France was killed when a New Year's Eve firework exploded after he went back to inspect it, while another man was killed by a home-made firework in neighbouring Germany. The 25-year-old died instantly in the incident in Boofenheim, close to France's eastern border with Germany, the regional government said Friday. Another man was treated for facial injuries after the firework exploded as they were inspecting it.

UK abolishes 'sexist' tax

London: Britain abolished the so-called "tampon tax" Friday, eliminating sales taxes on women's sanitary products. The move was widely praised by women's rights campaigners as well as proponents of the country's departure from the European Union. Treasury chief Rishi Sunak had committed to ending the widely unpopular tax on tampons and pads in his budget statement in March but the change could only come into effect Friday.



Politicians need to help reduce public uncertainty and fear over the coronavirus and gain people's support by speaking sincerely about the pandemic

HARUKI MURAKAMI | JAPANESE NOVELIST

OZ CHANGES NATIONAL ANTHEM

Australians will sing a different version of their national anthem from this year after PM Scott Morrison announced a change to the words. The anthem will no longer refer to Australia as "young and free" in an attempt to reflect the country's long indigenous history



H-1B VISA

Trump extends ban until March, Indian IT professionals to be hit

Hours before the freeze was set to expire December 31, Trump issued another proclamation Thursday to extend it until March 31



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Jan 1: US President Donald Trump has extended the freeze on the most sought-after H-1B visas by Indian IT professionals, along with other types of foreign work visas and green cards through March 31 to protect American workers, saying that the reasons for which he had imposed such restrictions amidst the pandemic have not changed.

The freeze on various categories of work visas was ordered by Trump through two proclamations April 22 and June 22 last year. Hours before the freeze was set to expire December 31, Trump issued another proclamation Thursday to extend it until March 31.

He said that the reasons for which he had issued such a restriction have not changed.

The continuation of the restrictions, which comes with just 20 days left in the Republican President's term, is the latest effort to bar the entry of immigrants to the US.

Restricting immigration has been a focus of the Trump administration since its first days when it issued the travel ban on seven Muslim-majority countries, and it has continued into Trump's final year in office as the White House uses the coronavirus pan-

demic as cover. US President-elect Joe Biden has promised to lift the suspension on H-1B visas, saying Trump's immigration policies are cruel.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. The technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

They would now have to wait at least till the end of March before approaching the US diplomatic missions to get stamping. It would also impact a large number of Indian IT professionals who are seeking renewal of their H-1B visas.

President Trump said that the effects of COVID-19 on the US labour market and the health of American communities are a matter of ongoing national concern, and the considerations present in the two previous proclamations have not been eliminated.

"The 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to significantly disrupt Americans' livelihoods. While the November overall unemployment rate in the United States of 6.7% reflects a marked decline from its April high, there were still 9,834,000 fewer seasonally adjusted nonfarm jobs in November than in February of 2020," Trump said in his proclamation.

The current number of new daily cases worldwide reported by the WHO, for example, is higher than the comparable number present during June, he said.

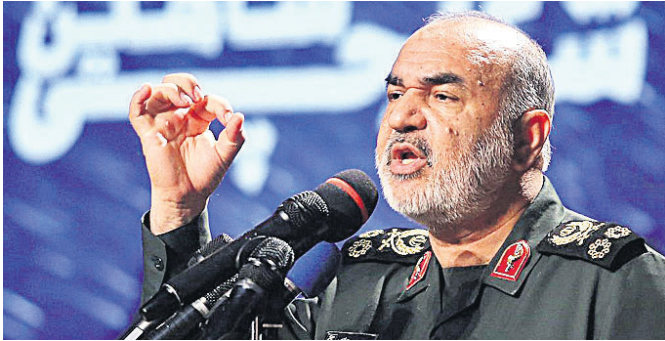
SOLEIMANI ASSASSINATION

Iran warns US against escalation

AGENCIES

Tehran, Jan 1: The top commander of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said Friday that his country was fully prepared to respond to any US military pressure, amid heightened tensions between Tehran and Washington in the waning days of President Donald Trump's administration.

General Hossein Salami spoke at a ceremony at Tehran University commemorating this week's one-year anniversary of the US drone strike in Baghdad that killed Revolutionary Guard General Qasem Soleimani, who headed the expeditionary Quds force, January 3, 2020. "Today, we have no problem, concern or apprehension toward encountering any powers. We will give our final words to our enemies on the battlefield," Salami said, without mentioning the US directly. Several top Iranian officials, along with members of Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements and Soleimani's family, were in attendance.



Soleimani's replacement, Brig. Gen. Esmail Ghaani, said at the ceremony that Iran was not afraid of confronting "powers," again without naming the US.

The head of Iran's judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi, said all those who had a role in Soleimani's killing would not be able to "escape law and justice," even if they were a US president.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said Friday that Washington would bear responsibility for the consequences of any possible "adventure" in the

region. His comments came during a call with his Kuwaiti counterpart and were reported by Iran's Foreign Ministry website.

Already, America has conducted B-52 bomber flyovers and sent a nuclear submarine into the Persian Gulf over what Trump administration officials describe as the possibility of an Iranian attack on the anniversary of Soleimani's killing last year. At the time, Iran retaliated by launching a ballistic missile strike on a military base in Iraq that caused brain concussion injuries to about 100 US troops.



A Palestinian vendor sells toys at the beach in Gaza City

REUTERS

US blocks \$63mn funds of global terrorist groups

AGENCIES

Washington, Jan 1: The US blocked \$63 million in funds of designated terrorist groups, including Pakistan-based LeT and JeM, in 2019 as part of its crackdown on foreign terror organisations, according to the treasury department.

The US blocked \$342,000 in funds of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), \$1,725 of the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and \$45,798 of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen-al-Islami, the US Department of Treasury said in an annual report released Thursday.

All the three groups are Pakistan-based terror outfits. Harkat-ul-Mujahideen-al-Islami is a jihad group operating primarily in Kashmir. Another Pakistan-based Kashmir centric terrorist outfit Hizbul Mujahideen has \$4,321 blocked by the US in 2019 as against \$2,287 the previous year, the report said.

For the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the US blocked \$5,067 in 2019 as against a paltry \$318 in 2018.

The Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control



The US has blocked \$342,000 in funds of the LeT, \$1,725 of the JeM and \$45,798 of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen-al-Islami

(OFAC) is the leading US government agency responsible for implementing sanctions against the assets of international terrorist organisations and terrorism-supporting countries.

The federal body implements these sanctions as part of its general mission to administer and enforce economic and trade sanctions based on US foreign policy and na-

JOHNSON CELEBRATES UK'S FORMAL EXIT FROM EU

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

London, Jan 1: Prime Minister Boris Johnson Friday hailed the "amazing moment" of the UK's formal exit from the European Union (EU) and in his New Year message voiced his government's ability to do things "differently" and "better" after leaving the 27-member economic bloc following arduous negotiations.

Despite technically leaving the EU January 31, 2020, the UK remained tied to the economic bloc's rules as a member of the single market and Customs Union, which ended at 11 pm on Thursday night as the UK and EU began a brand-new trading partnership under the terms of a new free trade agreement (FTA).

The end of the Brexit transition period concludes Britain's membership of the economic bloc on the basis of the last-minute FTA, raced through Parliament to become law after the Queen's Royal Assent earlier this week.

"This is an amazing moment for this country. We have our freedom



in our hands and it is up to us to make the most of it," said Johnson.

"And I think it will be the overwhelming instinct of the people of this country to come together as one United Kingdom - England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland working together to express our values around the world," he said.

In reference to Oxford University's "beacon of hope" in the form of an approved vaccine against COVID-19, he noted: "As the sun rises on 2021, we have the certainty of those vaccines."

"Pioneered in a UK that is also free to do things differently, and if necessary better; than our friends in the EU. Free to do trade deals around the world. And free to turbocharge our ambition to be a science superpower."

ILLEGAL FISHING

Lanka calls for joint patrols to resolve issues with India



AGENCIES

Colombo, Jan 1: Sri Lanka has called for joint patrols to address the issue of illegal fishing in the northern waters of the country while India insisted on the early release of its fishermen arrested for allegedly poaching in the island nation's territorial waters, as the two countries held a meeting of the joint working group on fisheries.

During a virtual meeting of the Sri Lanka-India Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries held last month for the fourth time, the two sides discussed the issues related to fishermen. During the meeting, the Lankan delegation underlined the need to address the matter of illegal fishing in its waters by Indian fishermen, which resulted in loss of livelihood and damage to fishing equipment of local fishermen.

'Ethiopian forces killed scores in June-July unrest'

AGENCIES

Nairobi, Jan 1: A new report says Ethiopian security forces killed more than 75 people and injured nearly 200 during deadly unrest in June and July after the killing of a popular singer. More than 30 others were beheaded, tortured or dragged in the streets by attackers amid ethnic slurs.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in its report released Friday says 123 people in all were killed and at least 500 injured in one of the country's worst outbreaks of ethnic violence in years, a "widespread and systematic attack" against civilians that points to crimes against humanity.

Ethnic violence is a major challenge to Nobel Peace Prize-winning PM Abiy Ahmed, who has urged national unity among more than 80 ethnic groups in Africa's second most populous country.

Israel's virus surveillance tool tests its democratic norms

AGENCIES

Tel Aviv, Jan 1: In the early days of the pandemic, a panicked Israel began using a mass surveillance tool on its civilians, tracking people's cellphones in hopes of stopping the spread of the coronavirus.

The government touted the technology, normally used to catch wanted Palestinian militants, as a breakthrough against the virus. But months later, the tool's effectiveness is being called into question and critics say its use has come at an immeasurable cost to the country's democratic principles.

"The idea of a government watching its own citizens this closely should ring the alarm," said Maya Fried, a spokeswoman for the

Association for Civil Rights in Israel, which has repeatedly challenged the use of the tool in court.

"This is against the foundations of democracy. You can't just give up on democracy during a crisis." Little is known about the technology. According to the Yediot Ahronot daily, the Shin Bet internal security service has used the tool for two decades, sweeping up metadata from anyone who uses telecom services in Israel.

Information collected includes the cellular device's location, web browsing history and calls and texts received and made, but not their content. That has reportedly helped the agency track militants and halt attacks, although it's unclear what happens to all of the data.

The idea of a government watching its own citizens this closely should ring the alarm. This is against the foundations of democracy. You can't just give up on democracy during a crisis

MAYA FRIED | SPOKESWOMAN, ASSOCIATION FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, ISRAEL



Israel first brought the Shin Bet into its virus outbreak battle in March. By tracking the movements

of people infected with the coronavirus, it could determine who had come into contact with them and was

at risk of infection, and order them into quarantine.

With the contact tracing capabilities of Israel's Health Ministry limited, the Shin Bet was seen as the best option to pick up the slack, even though its own leaders were reluctant to deploy the tool. The Shin Bet declined to comment.

Officials say the technology has been a critical tool in keeping track of the outbreak and insist they have struck a balance between protecting individual rights and public health. "We believe that the cost is certainly reasonable," Deputy Health Minister Yoav Kisch told a parliamentary committee last month. "We haven't seen this tool be used exploitatively. This tool saves lives."

Initially, Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu used emergency regulations to approve the use of the tool. After the hasty deployment was challenged in court, the government was forced to legislate limits on its use in July, submitting it to some parliamentary oversight.

The law says the Shin Bet must keep the information separate from other data it gathers for other purposes and that after a certain period of time, it must be deleted. The law also limits those who are able to access the information and stipulates that Israel must present and popularize a civilian alternative to the surveillance, such as a phone app. Israel has developed such an app but it is not widely used. Critics say there is no proper oversight on how the Shin Bet data is gathered, stored, used or deleted.

of the day quote

There is a new Africa emerging with a sense of urgency and purpose and an aspiration to become self-reliant



NANA AKUFO-ADDO | PRESIDENT, GHANA

Yesterday (Dec 31), we clocked 60% more GMV than last New Year's Eve. That's GMV of Rs 75 crores in one single day, with peak orders per minute (OPM) rate of 4,254



DEEPIINDER GOYAL | CEO, ZOMATO

Growing environmental consciousness is expected to pave way for greater demand of eco-friendly transport fuels. The circumstances create a fertile ground for growth of an eco-friendly and easily deployable fuel like auto LPG



SUYASH GUPTA | DIRECTOR GENERAL, INDIAN AUTO LPG COALITION

SHORT TAKES

Hero MotoCorp sales up 5% in Dec

New Delhi: The country's largest two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp Friday reported 5.02 per cent increase in total sales at 4,47,335 units in December. The company had sold 4,24,845 units in the same month of the previous year, Hero MotoCorp said in a statement. Total motorcycle sales stood at 4,15,099 units last month as against 4,03,625 units in December 2019, up 2.84 per cent. Total scooter sales increased 51.91 per cent to 32,236 units as compared with 21,220 units in the year-ago month, it added.

Govt procures paddy worth ₹92,121cr

New Delhi: Paddy procurement has increased 25 per cent so far in the ongoing Kharif marketing season to 487.92 lakh tonnes, valued at Rs 92,121 crore, an official statement said. The Kharif marketing season (KMS) starts from October. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) and state agencies have purchased 487.92 lakh tonnes of paddy till December 31 as against 390.56 lakh tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous year.

NMDC's iron ore output grows 23%

New Delhi: State-owned NMDC Friday posted over 23 per cent rise in iron ore output at 3.86 million tonne (MT) during December 2020. In the year-ago period, the miner had produced 3.13 MT iron ore from its mines, NMDC said in a BSE filing. The company's total sales during the month under review were at 3.62 MT, up 19 per cent from 3.04 MT in December 2019. NMDC, under the administrative control of the Ministry of Steel, is the country's largest iron ore miner.

AGEL gets 600-MW wind-solar project

New Delhi: Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) Friday said its wholly-owned subsidiary Adani Renewable Energy Holding Eight Ltd (AREHeightL) has been awarded a 600-megawatt wind-solar hybrid power project by Solar Energy Corporation of India. "AREHeightL participated in a tender issued by SECI for setting up 1,200-MW ISTS-connected wind-solar hybrid power project. "It has won the letter of award (LOA) for 600-MW wind-solar hybrid project. On December 31, 2020, AREHeightL received the LOA," AGEL said in a statement.



We have newest and modern portfolio of gasoline engines and we are confident that we have an advantage as it came in last two-three years

PAWAN GOENKA | MD, M&M

Ford, M&M to scrap proposed automotive JV

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: US-based auto major Ford Motor Co and India's Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) on Friday said they have decided to scrap a previously announced automotive joint venture, citing changes in global economic and business conditions partly due to the coronavirus pandemic.

While Ford said it will continue its independent operations in India as it is, M&M said the decision will not have any impact on its product plan but will enable it to focus on the core business of SUVs and also develop electric vehicles.

The two companies determined they will not complete a previously announced automotive joint venture between their respective compa-

nies. The decision follows the passing of the December 31, 2020, "longstop", or expiration, date of a definitive agreement the organisations entered into in October 2019, Ford Motor Company said in a statement.

The outcome was driven by fundamental changes in global economic and business conditions — caused, in part, by the global pandemic — over the past 15 months. Those changes influenced separate decisions by Ford and Mahindra to re-assess their respective capital allocation priorities, it added.

Ford further said its independent operations in India will continue as it is.

"The company is actively evaluating its businesses around the world, including in India, making



choices and allocating capital in ways that advance Ford's plan to achieve an 8 per cent company adjusted EBIT margin and generate consistently strong adjusted free cash flow," Ford Motor Co said. EBIT stands for earnings before interest and tax.

Ford's plan calls for developing and delivering high-quality, high-value, connected vehicles — in-

creasingly electric vehicles — and services that are affordable to an even broader range of customers and profitable for Ford, it added.

The company said it is moving quickly to turn around its automotive business — competing like a challenger while simplifying and modernising all aspects of the company.

Also, it is planning to "grow by capitalising on existing strengths, disrupting the conventional auto-

motive business, and partnering with others to gain expertise and efficiency".

Addressing a video conference, M&M Managing Director and CEO Pawan Goenka said both the companies were clear that given the current situation, this is "the most prudent decision for them to make and move on" and focus on the core business.

"This particular JV clearly got impacted by the significant upheaval that has happened in the whole world because of the pandemic," he said.

Goenka added that all the assumptions and scenarios when we signed the definitive agreement (DA) and the current situation are different. "That's what led to this one."

Budget to set course for economic pick up: FM

The government's spending plans particularly on infrastructure and social sectors as well as relief to sections hit by the pandemic and lockdown will dictate the pace of recovery, analysts said

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 1: Indian economy is now expected to see a faster turnaround given the impending rollout of vaccine, increased mobility and less disruption to business operations as the economy opens up but a lot will also depend on the upcoming Budget for 2021-22 to steer its course.

India, which had in 2019 overtaken the UK to become the fifth-largest economy in the world, was knocked off course somewhat due to the carnage that the pandemic and the ensuing strict lockdown unleashed — businesses were shut, consumption slumped, investments took a hit and jobs were lost.

The combined effect being that the economy got relegated to the sixth spot in 2020.

The Budget for the next fiscal



starting April 2021 that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present a month from now will be the starting point for picking up the pieces after the economic destruction.

The government's spending plans particularly on infrastructure and social sectors as well as relief to sections hit by the pandemic and lockdown will dictate the pace of recovery, analysts said.

India's economy had been losing momentum even ahead of the shock delivered by the COVID-19 crisis. The rate of GDP growth sank to a more than ten-year low of 4.2 per cent in 2019, down from 6.1 per cent the previous year.

The pandemic bought a human and an economic catastrophe for India, with nearly 1.5 lakh deaths. Though the deaths per million are significantly lower than in Europe and the US, the economic impact had been much more severe.

NEVER CHARGED USERS SEPARATELY FOR IUC: AIRTEL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Telecom operator Bharti Airtel Friday said it has never charged its customers separately for IUC and that the unlimited calling benefits will continue for subscribers without any change.

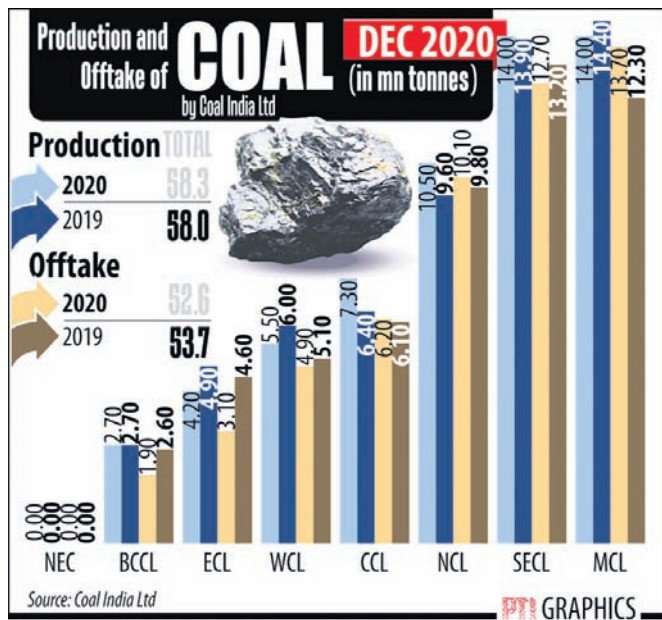
The comments came a day after Reliance Jio announced that calls by its users to other networks in India will become free from Friday, as the Interconnect Usage Charges (IUC) regime ends.

Ajai Puri, Chief Operating Officer of Bharti Airtel said, "At Airtel, we are obsessed with delivering



the best-in-class experience to our customers. Airtel mobile customers already enjoy unlimited free calls to all networks with our prepaid bundles and postpaid plans that also offer large dollops of high speed data."

The zero IUC regime was previously slated to come into effect



Agri exports likely to surge over \$25bn-mark

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 1: India's agri exports are set to rake in more than \$25 billion in 2021 on the back of healthy demand from Middle East and China. In a conversation with IANS, Trade Promotion Council of India's Chairman Mohit Singla said growth in India's agri-based and processed foods will sustain in 2021.

India has exported \$22.5 billion worth of agricultural products from April to November 2020. In terms of segments, exports of primary products were \$15.83 billion while processed foods worth \$6.71 billion were shipped out.

The overall exports of agricultural products during this period grew by 9.23 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis. Besides, at the same time, India imported \$12.8 billion worth of agricultural products.

Consequently, a trade surplus was achieved during this period worth \$9.71 billion, a 24.3 per cent Y-o-Y jump from the like period of



last year.

"India's agri exports are likely to attain \$60 billion by 2022. This means India's exports will likely continue this path of surplus and good performance in the upcoming year too if supported by a normal monsoon," he said.

"Indian exporters have extremely good order booking positions for food including processed food that is a clear indication that 2021 will be a good year for agri and food ex-

ports. We are getting good orders from Africa, Latin America, GCC countries and China."

According to Singla, the ban of basmati rice imports from India has been lifted by Iran which will contribute to India's improved performance in cereal exports in 2021. Besides, China imported non-basmati rice from India for the first time in December 2020 in about three decades owing to supply issues.

"China's traditional suppliers

India has exported \$22.5 billion worth of agricultural products from April to November 2020. The overall exports during this period grew by 9.23% on a Y-o-Y basis

were Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and Pakistan. These countries lacked supplies in 2020 whereas India had a surplus production. India also offered rice at a highly discounted price."

"This new development can open Chinese markets for India's non-basmati in the future. And this continuation of imports by China from India is very likely as India's rice quality is way better than it was three decades ago. And, the quality was the only concern that prevented China from importing Indian rice."



NYSE DELISTS 3 CHINESE TELCOS

The New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) has started proceedings to delist the securities of three Chinese companies, China Telecom Corporation Ltd., China Mobile Ltd. and China Unicom (Hong Kong) Ltd. The decision to delist these companies was taken in order to comply with an executive order signed by US Prez Donald Trump November 12, NYSE said

RBI comes up with Digital Payments Index

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Jan 1: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constructed a composite Digital Payments Index (DPI) to capture the extent of digitisation of payments across the country.



The RBI-DPI comprises of five broad parameters that enable measurement of deepening and penetration of digital payments in the country over different time periods.

These parameters are 'payment enablers', 'payment infrastructure -- demand side factors', 'payment infrastructure -- supply side factors', 'payment performance' and 'consumer centricity', said an RBI statement.

Each of these parameters have sub-parameters which, in turn, consist of various measurable indicators.

The index has been constructed with March 2018 as the base period, with a DPI score for of 100. The DPI for March 2019 and March 2020 work out to 153.47 and 207.84, respectively, indicating appreciable growth, said the statement.

Govt plans chat bot to deliver public services

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The government Friday invited bids to develop a chat bot or voice assistance application like Amazon's Alexa or Google Assistant to deliver e-governance services to the public.

The artificial intelligence-based conversational platform is expected to interact with the public in multiple languages, analyse sentiments and intent, collect and analyse data to give personalised experience to users.

The National E-Governance Division of Ministry of Electronics and IT has invited proposals to build the conversational platform that can be deployed on the UMANG platform, which hosts various apps that provide government services to citizens.

"The platform should be able to provide assistance with general tasks, including but not limited to availing services of government and available on the UMANG platform such as registration, login, reset password, department service relation information, event, (and) new launch...etc," the request for proposal document said. The chatbot should be able to turn speech into a textual input and turn text into speech.

"Platforms should also have other deep learning capabilities, which can be used by platforms for discovery and recommendation of eligible schemes and services to the users of bots/applications.

ROBUST DEMAND LIFTS PV SALES IN DECEMBER

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 1: Leading automakers Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors, and Toyota witnessed double-digit growth in wholesale despatches in December as pent up demand led to robust passenger vehicle offtakes.

Mahindra & Mahindra (M&M) and Honda Cars also reported increased sales in the domestic market last month.

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) reported 17.8 per cent increase in sales in December at 1,46,480 units as against 1,24,375 units in December 2019.

The sale of mini cars, comprising Alto and S-Presso, increased by 4.4 per cent to 24,927 units as compared to 23,883 in the same month last year.

Similarly, sales of compact segment vehicles, including models



Swift, Celerio, Ignis, Baleno and Dzire, rose by 18.2 per cent to 77,641 units as against 65,673 cars in December last year.

Utility vehicle sales, including Vitara Brezza, S-Cross, and Ertiga, also rose 8 per cent to 25,701 units compared to 23,808 units in the year-ago month, MSI said.

Similarly, Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL), the country's second-largest passenger vehicle maker, reported its best monthly sales in December.

AKHTAR LAUDS BUMRAH



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Jasprit Bumrah is the 'smartest fast bowler' in contemporary cricket who has learnt the art of deceiving rival batsmen in air; something that was the secret of success for Pakistani greats, said Shoaib Akhtar.

One of the fastest bowlers to have ever played the game, Akhtar is enamoured by Bumrah's skill-sets and his ability to outwit a batsman in a mere 'five seconds' from an ungainly run-up which isn't exactly a critic's delight.

"He (Bumrah) is probably India's first fast bowler, who checks the wind speed and wind direction rather than how much grass has been left on the track. This thing used to be the art of Pakistanis, we used to know how you could play with the wind," Akhtar said on YouTube channel 'Sports Today'.

He then cited example of how the two Ws and him used to read the wind speeds during their heydays. "We used to actually (do that), me, Wasim bhai and Waqar bhai, we used to note the wind speed and direction, look the wind is blowing from that corridor, okay I might get reverse from that end," he said.

"We knew mechanics and aero dy-



namics of fast bowling, how much swing and at what time of the day. This is my assumption that Bumrah knows these sort of things which I hardly think other fast bowlers know these sort of things," Akhtar added.

For Akhtar, post Mohammed Asif and Muhammed Aamir, Bumrah is the 'smartest operator' in terms of intelligence. With his seven-step run-up, Bumrah terrorises the batsman in a matter of five seconds.

"In Bumrah's world, in those five seconds, he only visualises the batsman and thinks about his art of taking wickets. He is a great character. He will be the most unusual but great fast bowler if fitness permits. If his back remains okay, he will play for a long time."

Akhtar loves the manner in which

Bumrah has proved people wrong. "He has proved people wrong time and again. The more people were critical of his ungainly action, he just told them, look boss this is what I can do with this action."

Bumrah's greatest asset is his ability to alter length in a small corridor and deceive the batsman first in air and then off the pitch. "He sets up subtle traps. The 2x2 length corridor where he bowls, if you ask him to pitch 60 balls at same place, he can do that day in and day out."

The use of crease is also one of his more effective weapons. "When he comes over the wicket, he uses the crease well. He also comes close to the stumps, if need be goes wider; he plays with variations, so the length will increase or decrease as per need but it won't be outside the corridor," he said.

"He can bowl those away swinger to left-handers which will swing back in the air as the batsman will commit to an incoming delivery. Then after pitching, it will become and away going delivery," explained Akhtar.

"He is that accurate fast bowler that if you get him out of sleep, he will pitch the bowler there only He knows art of taking wickets."

We have fallen into India's trap a few times: Labuschagne



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Jan 1: The Indian bowlers, led by the crafty Ravichandran Ashwin, have successfully trapped Australian batsmen in the first two Tests, conceded Marnus Labuschagne but vehemently defended Steve Smith, who is currently going through a poor run of form.

Australia have been all out for 191, 195 and 200 in three out of four innings with Ashwin getting 10 wickets so far dismissing Smith twice and Labuschagne once.

"I've never faced Ashwin before until this series. You don't have the stats that Ravi has without being a great bowler and also a great thinker," the 26-year-old said during a virtual press conference.

"He's (Ashwin) obviously come in really prepared and they're being really crafty with their field and what they're trying to do. We have fallen into their trap a few times," he admitted Australia's inability to counter both pace and spin.

The Indian bowling attack, on the other hand, has executed its plans to perfection, leaving a heavy leg side field to cut down their run rate and not allowed them to cross 200-mark in both the Tests. "They are very disciplined in their bowling and have come up with a plan in both spin and pace...They've held it that straight line and made us face a lot of balls," Labuschagne said.

He defended Smith for his underwhelming show. "Call it what you want to call it, but not long ago he got two hundreds of 60-odd balls in ODIs (against India at Sydney)."

Asked what could be the reason for Smith's sudden bad patch, Labuschagne said: "He's not short of runs maybe, I mean, he has played a lot of white ball cricket and he probably hasn't had as much time against the red ball as he would have liked. That's the reality of cricket and of this COVID situation."

Labuschagne reminded everyone about Smith's staggering Test

'WARNER A BIG INCLUSION' FOR OZ

MELBOURNE: Australian batsman Marnus Labuschagne is looking forward to the return of David Warner for the third Test against India in Sydney as he feels the hosts will benefit not just from his batting but also the 'terrific energy' he will bring to the field. Warner, who missed out a major chunk of the India assignment due to a groin injury, was brought back into the squad for the last two Tests with the series locked at 1-1. The third Test begins January 7. "He's a big inclusion for us if he does come back in," Labuschagne told reporters in an online interaction. "He's someone with over 7000 Test runs and averaging near-on 50, he's a superb player. He's in that top calibre of player and his energy around the group and in the field will be terrific. It will be great to have him," he added.

average and this current series could just be an aberration. "He averages 60-plus after 80-odd games (75). He's shown he's consistent even from the start of his career to now. He just keeps putting the runs on the board."

In fact, Indians have created a leg-side field and blocked their run-scoring opportunities. "They've certainly come in with a plan, making sure that they're really not leaving stamps and having a really heavy leg side field.

"It obviously slows the scoring rate down because you know those shots that you do get on your legs, go for one or four," he explained. "And then they're always keeping those catches in the game. We also need to come up with ways to put them under pressure."

The Aussie No.3 had scored three centuries and a double at the SCG in the home series against Pakistan and New Zealand but he's not been able to cross a half-century from four innings so far in this series. "We've just got to keep finding ways, keep hitting balls in the training and keep finding ways to get out there."

Natarajan, Shardul in for Umesh, Shami

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Jan 1: Tamil Nadu's yorker sensation Thangarasu Natarajan Friday replaced injured pacer Umesh Yadav in the Indian Test team for the remaining two games against Australia, continuing his remarkable rise in international cricket.

Earlier, Shardul Thakur had replaced an injured Mohammed Shami in the squad before the second Test. "Umesh Yadav sustained a strain in his left calf muscle on Day 3 of the second Border-Gavaskar Test in Melbourne...The fast bowler will not recover completely ahead of the remaining two Test matches and has been ruled out of the series," BCCI Secretary Jay Shah stated in a media release.

"The All-India Senior Selection Committee has named T Natarajan as Yadav's replacement. Ahead of the Boxing Day Test, Shardul Thakur was added to the Test squad

as Mohd. Shami's replacement after the senior fast bowler suffered a hairline fracture in his right forearm," the release added.

Both Shami and Umesh Yadav will head to the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore for further rehabilitation of their injuries.

The 29-year-old Natarajan had started off as a net bowler during the series and then subsequently made it to the T20 and ODI squads. He snared eight wickets (two ODI and six T20) during his four limited-overs appearances in national colours. He has played 20 first-class games for Tamil Nadu and will now be in contention for a slot in traditional format.

Earlier, fit-again top batsman Rohit Sharma completed his quarantine and joined the team in Melbourne. The series is locked 1-1 right now with the third Test starting in Sydney from January 7.

Team India Test squad: Ajinkya Rahane (C), Rohit Sharma, Mayank



Agarwal, Prithvi Shaw, KL Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Hanuma Vihari, Shubman Gill, Wriddhiman Saha (Wk), Rishabh Pant (Wk), Jasprit Bumrah, Navdeep Saini, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, R. Ashwin, Md. Siraj, Shardul Thakur & T Natarajan.

ROHIT REPLACES PUJARA AS RAHANE'S DEPUTY

NEW DELHI: Senior opener Rohit Sharma was Friday appointed the vice-captain of the Indian Test team for the first time in his career, replacing Cheteshwar Pujara, who was entrusted with the responsibility for the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne. After regular captain Virat Kohli went on paternity leave after the first Test in Adelaide, Pujara was named Ajinkya Rahane's deputy for the second match. However, it is learnt that the team management was always clear that once Rohit is fit and able to join the squad, he will be Rahane's deputy. "There was never an iota of doubt about who will be India's vice-captain once Virat takes a break and Ajinkya is elevated. It was always going to be Rohit and Pujara was just a stop-gap arrangement till the former joined the squad," a senior official privy to the development told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "Rohit has been India's long-time white ball vice-captain, so it was only imperative that in Virat's absence, he will be a part of the team's leadership group," the official added.

Sunny recalls walkout tale against Aus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Melbourne, Jan 1: Sunil Gavaskar has cleared the air on his infamous walkout during the Melbourne Test of 1981, saying it was the Australian players' 'get lost' call, and not his leg-before dismissal, that prompted him to storm off the ground with his opening partner.

In the 1981 series, that was dogged by some inconsistent umpiring, a Dennis Lillee in-cutter caught Gavaskar plumb in front and umpire Rex Whitehead, standing in just his third Test, raised his finger. But Gavaskar, who thought that the ball had got his bat on the way to the pad, protested by standing his ground long enough.

"The misconception is that I was upset at the lbw decision," Gavaskar told 7Cricet.

"Yes, it was upsetting. But the walk-off happened only because, as I had gone past Chetan (Chauhan) on the way to the change-rooms, the Australians had given me a spray. They told me to get lost, which is where I've come back and asked Chetan to walk off with me."

As he reluctantly started to leave, Lillee reportedly made one comment too many and the Indian snapped, returned to the crease and instructed fellow opener Chauhan to walk off the pitch with him.

"I got an inside-edge as you can see from the forward short leg fielder. He hasn't done anything, he hasn't moved. Lillee is telling me, 'It hit you there', and I'm trying to say 'No I hit it'. And now you see, I've asked Chetan to walk off with me," said Gavaskar.

Good show vs Argentina confidence booster: Rani

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Indian women's hockey team captain Rani Rampal feels that a good show in the series against Argentina will boost her side's confidence heading into this year's Tokyo Olympics.

Indian women's team will hit the restart button and begin their Olympic preparations with the tour of Argentina, starting next week, almost a year after their calendar was disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic.

"If we play to our potential against Argentina, then we will attain (gain) a lot of confidence for the all-important Olympics, where we are aiming nothing short of a medal," Rani was quoted as saying in a Hockey India (HI) media release.

"Hopefully, we can make history in Tokyo and make our country proud. We are going to give our absolute best in every match we play this year," she added.



India will compete in eight matches against hosts Argentina, starting from January 17 to 31. "We are very excited to make our return to the international circuit. The year 2020 was really tough for us, however, we continued to practice our skills at the national coaching camp."

The skipper is looking forward to seeing how her teammates responds in match situations after a long break. "All the players in the team are feeling very confident about their games and it will be interesting to see how each one of them performs in a match situation after staying away from the international circuit for almost one year."

HI has been in talks with different nations to also organise a tour for the men's team, which played its last international match against Australia February 22 last year at the FIH Hockey Pro League.

Men's skipper Manpreet Singh said his side is keen to get some much-needed match practice ahead of the Tokyo Games. "We are very excited about getting back into the international circuit. We are really looking forward to playing against an international team before the Olympics," Manpreet said.

"A few matches against a good team will help us prepare for the Olympics. This year is very important for us. We have practiced very hard in the last few months and have raised our game to a level that is close to which we usually operate in international games."

"If we play to our potential at the Olympics in July, then we will surely bring glory to our country. We have to go into the Olympics with a mindset of clinching a medal," he added.

As transfer window opens, a look at struggling EPL summer signings

With the January transfer window opening, Premier League clubs have the chance to strengthen their squads for the second half of the season. But the high expectations from new recruits aren't always reflected in their performances on the field — as the struggles of these high-profile summer signings show:

GARETH BALE (Tottenham Hotspur)



The homecoming to Tottenham was meant to be Bale's chance to revitalize a career that stalled at Real Madrid even as the forward won every major title. Still only 31 but prone to injury layoffs, Bale has been unable to find a consistent run in a team he starred for before securing the move to Madrid in 2013. Now the attacking threat comes most consistently from Harry Kane and Son Heung-min. The announcement from Tottenham this week that Bale faces a 'few weeks' out due to a calf problem is not the blow to the club it might once have seemed. He has made only one Premier League start since returning to Tottenham on a season-long loan in September, with Jose Mourinho usually deploying him in the Europa League when key players can be rested from the starting lineup. The scoring instinct is still there, but his

only goals so far from open play have been a pair of headers. He will need to prove his fitness and form in the second half of the season to secure a longer stay at the north London club.

KAI HAVERTZ (Chelsea)



Havertz arrived as the new sensation of German football but the 21-year-old forward is struggling to justify his USD 92 million price tag. While the intensity of the English game could be a step-up from what he experienced in the Bundesliga with Bayer Leverkusen, Havertz might also be the player suffering most from Chelsea's vast offseason overhaul that has left manager Frank Lampard searching for his best combinations and tactical approach. Indeed, Mason Mount — a fellow 21-year-old whose first-team chances looked to have diminished following the arrival of Havertz and other attacking players

— appears to be Lampard's preferred option in central attacking midfield, ahead of Havertz. Lampard is calling for patience with Havertz, though, especially with the player having been hit hard by the effects of the coronavirus after contracting it in November.

DONNY VAN DE BEEK (Manchester United)

Van de Beek was United's major off-season purchase at USD 46 million and the central mid-fielder appeared an odd signing at the time — not because of the price tag or doubts about his ability, but because of the team's options already in his position. With Bruno Fernandes the first-choice No.10, Paul Pogba able to play in different



midfield positions and the likes of Scott McTominay and Fred fulfilling the criteria of a box-to-box midfielder, it was always going to be difficult for Van de Beek to establish himself in the team.

He has started just twice in the Premier League — and in one of those games, at West Ham, he lasted just 45 minutes — and has mostly come on as a late substitute, like on his debut when he scored a consolation goal against Crystal Palace. That remains his only goal for United. He has had more goals (2) and starts (4) for the Netherlands in that period.

WILLIAN (Arsenal)



After averaging seven goals a season during his six-year stint at Chelsea, Willian is yet to reproduce that form across London at Arsenal. The Brazilian hasn't scored a single goal. While the 32-year-old winger has three assists, two came in Arsenal's opening-day win at Fulham in September. But he is still being started — when fit — by Mikel Arteta. Willian's struggles are reflective of the entire team he has joined. The north London club, which last won the league in 2004, is 13th in the 20-team standings.



JONATHAN SURPRISES FANS WITH SECRET MARRIAGE NEWS

Grooming expert and podcast host Jonathan Van Ness has revealed that he secretly got married to his best friend in 2020. He made the announcement while reflecting on 2020 in an Instagram post.

PLANT-BASED DIET WASN'T FOR ME: HAILEY BALDWIN

Model Hailey Baldwin, who is married to pop star Justin Bieber, gave up dairy and meat during lockdown. However, she now says the plant-based diet she was following is not for her.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

Carry the peace sign if you have to, because today, people will literally pull you into arguments. You could even be facing some kind of litigation or trouble with peace-keeping forces, warns Ganesh.

TAURUS

Armed with ingenuity and lateral thinking, you are all set to take on today with practised ease, feels Ganesh. The toughest of problems will crumble like a house of cards before your intellect. A promotion or salary hike is also likely today.

GEMINI

Today, you may decide to get a little more conscious about your health. Filled with positive drive, you may even plan to join a gymnasium or start taking a hard look at your calorie intake. Don't go overboard, though! You don't want to do it only today, and forget it tomorrow - plan and execute in a step-wise manner, so it doesn't get a bit too much.

CANCER

Control your anger, counsels Ganesh. Or else, it will sadden your near ones. Writers may display creative output of high order. The day augurs well for artists, too.

LEO

The pressure at work will be high. Some person may try to tempt you with lucrative offers to go against your principles. However, you will be able to resist the lure of easy money. Your health may suffer today, so be on guard, says Ganesh.

VIRGO

You will stay calm and steady today, and there is hardly anything that can disturb your peace of mind. Your family and friends will back you fully and motivate you to overcome hurdles. You will work with devotion, says Ganesh. You may ask for work that others may find very difficult to do.

LIBRA

Ganesh says people will try to take advantage of your amiable nature and disposition. Small issues will crop up today making your nature a little tensed and enhance your anger too. You will be inspired to take chances in monetary matters. Ganesh says you need to keep your mind steady and regain your lost charm soon.

SCORPIO

Your imagination runs wild today. Though you do not travel geographically, your mind travels beyond boundaries. Think and act according to your will, advises Ganesh. However, practice caution before taking any major step.

SAGITTARIUS

Your will be loaded with responsibilities at work today, fore sees Ganesh. But, you are pro challenges and will take it up sportingly. On personal front, the list of your friends is likely to get longer. All in all, Ganesh sees you in an active avatar today.

CAPRICORN

Don't let your emotions play a spoilsport while deciding about the future. Think practically, otherwise, your expectations and reality will not be on the same boat, guides Ganesh. Friendly and supportive, today you will spread happiness and win the love of one and all.

AQUARIUS

You speed up your pace and try to do everything in order to complete your targets, but you won't be able to complete the tasks on time. Don't lose hope as tomorrow will be a different day, says Ganesh.

PISCES

Some conflicts could crop up in the morning on the domestic front. However, they will cease to be a cause of annoyance as the day progresses. Come evening and you will be in as fine a mood as you ever were, ready to spend time basking in the affection of your near and dear ones, says Ganesh.

RANBIR ANNOUNCES NEW FILM ANIMAL

Mumbai: Actor Ranbir Kapoor started the new year with a new film announcement. Ranbir will soon be seen in the crime drama titled *Animal*, which also stars Parineeti Chopra, Anil Kapoor and Bobby Deol.

The film will be directed by *Kabir Singh* maker Sandeep Reddy Vanga.

"During the pandemic we all got some time to introspect and choose films that are close to our hearts. So when Sandeep narrated the story, I grew close to the character and was immediately keen on doing the role," Ranbir said.

"I'm a huge admirer of both of his movies and really looking forward to our creative collaboration. Bhushan Kumar sir is one of the producers who is backing strong content entertaining cinema and his immense knowledge of music will be seen in *Animal*. I am so grateful to work with such a great ensemble cast, I can't wait to start shoot for *Animal*,"

he added.

The title of the film was announced with a glimpse to background music by Harshavardhan Rameshwar, while Ranbir's voiceover gives a glimpse of what to expect from the film.

Vanga shared: "I'm very excited to call action and cut on Ranbir Kapoor. The exemplary Anil Sir, Bobby Ji and the sprightly Parineeti will be adding so much to the film."

"While working and seeing his pas-

sion for filmmaking, I knew I had to work with Sandeep again. When he narrated the script of *Animal* I knew we had a winner. Ranbir fits the role to the T. With his process of working on every character he plays will just uplift his role and add so much to the film," said Bhushan Kumar.

IAN S

Big B has no resolution for 2021

Mumbai: Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan has expressed that he has no resolve or resolution for the new year 2021.

"Seems odd to be writing this after an entire year of 2020.. it was an odd year .. 2020 .. and the next could be odd too .. but in the better sense than the previous .. and just the feel of 1.1.21 .. has a certain ring about it .. a ring that provokes attention and perhaps tidings of the refreshed year," the actor blogged.

"No resolve or resolution .. what needs to be done is to be done .. and done with conviction

forces .. compassionate one hopes .. and in the throes of happiness and great care," he added.

The 78-year-old Bollywood star also wished "Peace love and harmony 2021" for his fans and followers on his verified Instagram account.

Big B has his kitty full this year with upcoming films like *Chehre*, Nagraj Manjule's *Jhund*, Ayan Mukerji's *Brahmastra* and Ajay Devgn's *Mayday*.

IAN S

'Wild Dog was a good revision course in Telugu language'

Mumbai: Actress Dia Mirza is naturally excited about her first Telugu film, *Wild Dog*. She grew up in Hyderabad, and she says she got a chance to brush up on her spoken Telugu skills while working in the action thriller starring superstar Nagarjuna.

"I was brought up in Hyderabad, so I learnt Telugu in school. I used to read and write Telugu till sixth grade, so doing this film was a good revision course of Telugu. I think the special

thing about languages is that once you learn it you don't forget it completely. You might not speak it on a daily basis but once you start speaking it you remember everything you have learnt as a child," Dia said.

Talking about the film, Dia said: "It is an action film and I have been a part of action films in the past, but I am playing a very dramatic and emotional character in this film."

IAN S



Mumbai: Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone, who had deleted all her posts on social media, has made a comeback on the platforms with an audio diary. Deepika posted her Audio Diary on Twitter and Instagram.

In the audio clip, she said: "Hi everyone. Welcome to 'My Audio Diary', a record of my thoughts and feelings. I'm sure you will agree with me that 2020 was a year of uncertainty for everybody. But for me, it was also about gratitude and being present. As for 2021, all I can wish for myself and everyone around me is good health and peace of mind. Happy New Year."

Deepika captioned the audio clip: "It's 1.1.2021! Happy New Year Everyone! What are you grateful for...?"

The actress earlier shocked fans and followers by deleting all posts from her social media platforms December 31.

Currently, Deepika has 27.7 million followers on Twitter and on Instagram she has a fan following of 52.5 million.

The actress is currently vacationing with husband, actor Ranveer Singh, in Rajasthan.

Deepika will next be seen in Kabir Khan's *83* where Ranveer plays former World Cup-winning captain of the Indian cricket team, Kapil Dev. Deepika plays Kapil's wife Romi Dev. She will also be seen in Shikun Batra's yet-untitled next, which also stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Ananya Panday.

IAN S

FUN post

PEANUTS



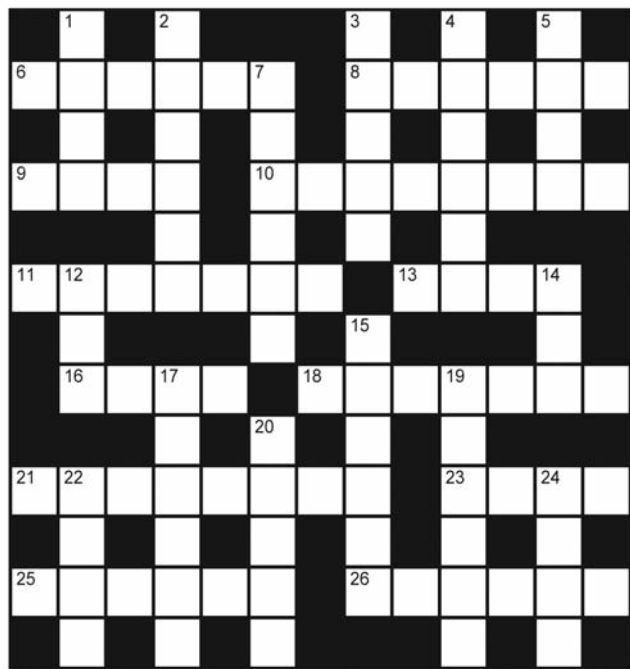
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



CROSSWORD



Across

- 6 French brandy
- 8 Entrance
- 9 Dabbling duck
- 10 Perform in a theatre
- 11 Kind of vehicle (3-4)
- 13 Italian wine center
- 16 Sheepish look
- 18 Give it a go

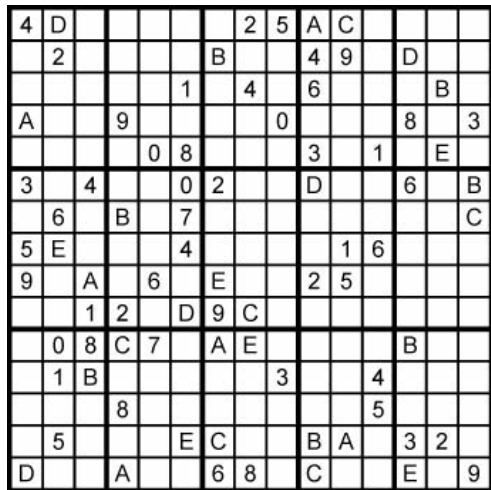
- 21 Links rental (4,4)
- 23 Hands on a ship
- 25 Big gun
- 26 Modus operandi

Down

- 1 Region
- 2 Fisherman
- 3 Milky gems
- 4 French pancakes
- 5 Volcano output
- 7 Cattle pen
- 12 Driving hazard
- 14 Mischievous one
- 15 Declares
- 17 Babe
- 19 Alibi
- 20 Mountain lakes
- 22 Viva-voce
- 24 Decorative pitcher

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW