



KIARA'S FUNDA

Actor Kiara Advani says the repeat viewing of a film is the biggest gift an artiste can ever receive

LEISURE P2



AFGHAN WOMEN'S PLIGHT

Taliban government enforces higher education ban for women with forces blocking their access to universities

INTERNATIONAL P9



INDIA EYE SERIES SWEEP

India look to seal series when they face Bangladesh in the 2nd Test, having already won the first comfortably

SPORTS P12

SHORT TAKES

Mild tremors felt in Gajapati district

Bhubaneswar: A mild earthquake of magnitude 3.4 shook Gajapati district Wednesday, the regional office of the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) here informed. However, there was no report of any casualty or damages to properties. The tremors occurred at 9.46am, at a depth of 5km, the IMD said. The epicentre of the quake was about 277 kilometres from the Odisha capital. The tremor triggered by the earthquake was felt in Parlakhemundi town and other parts of Gajapati district. It was also felt at Taptapani, a tourist town in neighbouring Ganjam district, an IMD official informed. Despite the tremors being mild, residents at a number of places rushed out of their homes onto the streets in fear.

8 Manipur students killed in bus mishap

Imphal: Eight students were killed and over 25 others suffered grievous injuries after a school bus overturned in Manipur's Noney district Wednesday, police informed. The incident took place on Old Cachar Road near Longsai area of the hill district, around 55km from the state capital. The injured students are being treated at a few hospitals here after being rescued from the accident site, a police officer said. The students were from Thambalnu Higher Secondary School and were on an annual study tour to Khoumum, the official stated. Manipur CM N Biren Singh announced an ex-gratia of ₹5 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased and ₹1 lakh each for those with serious injuries.



CHRISTMAS CALLING: Giraffes Pali, Peto and Fipo receive fruits as gifts from Santa Claus as part of Christmas celebrations at the Aurora Zoo in Guatemala City

Pick-up van mows down homeguard in Kendrapara dist

Kendrapara, Dec 21: A home-guard was run over by a speeding pick-up van in Kendrapara district Wednesday when he tried to stop it as part of a vehicle checking drive, police said. The incident happened at Balabhadrapur chowk on National Highway-53. The speeding van mowed down Pabitra Kumar Mohapatra when he tried to stop it, police added. The driver of the speeding vehicle was apparently escaping an enforcement squad of the Regional Transport Office (RTO). Checks were going on for overloading of vehicles when the accident occurred. Pabitra came in the way of the speeding van thinking the driver will stop the vehicle. However, the van mowed him down," police said. "We have seized the vehicle at Laxminarayapur Chowk. However, the driver is absconding. A special squad has been constituted to nab the driver," a police officer said. Police also informed that the papers of the seized vehicle were not in order and it did not have a pollution certificate. Following the tragedy, irate locals blocked the highway, demanding compensation for the deceased's family. The protest paralysed traffic on the busy highway that connects Paradip port to the mineral-rich hinterlands in Jajpur and Keonjhar districts.

India ramps up Covid vigil

Masks back in vogue as government urges all, especially senior citizens, to go for booster doses as virus cases spiral alarmingly in China

New Delhi, Dec 21: With the number of Covid-19 cases on the surge in China, the Indian government reviewed the situation Wednesday. After the meeting, Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya asked people to start following Covid-19 appropriate behaviour and to wear masks at crowded places. As of now there are no mandatory Covid-19 protocols in the country. The surge in cases has been attributed to the BF.7 sub-variant of Omicron. Three such cases have been reported in the country also. Two were reported from Gujarat and one from Odisha. However, the ministry said Wednesday that there is no need to panic, but to implement precautionary measures in a stringent manner. The new variants have not only been found in India, but also in the US, UK, Brazil, Italy, Japan, South Korea and some more countries. Official sources informed that random sample testing will be done at airports for international passengers arriving from China and other countries. "Covid-19 is not



over yet. I have directed all concerned to be alert and strengthen surveillance. We are prepared to manage any situation," Mandaviya said. During the meeting, attended by experts and senior officials, the minister was briefed on the global Covid-19 situation and the domestic scenario, including the preparedness of all stakeholders. Noting that only 27-28 per cent of India's eligible population have taken the precaution dose of Covid-19, NITI Aayog member (Health) Dr VK Paul, after the meeting, said people should take the jab as quickly

ODISHA READIES TO TACKLE BF.7 VARIANT

BHUBANESWAR: The Odisha government is taking all precautionary measures keeping in mind the threat of the BF.7 variant of Covid-19. Health Secretary of the Odisha government, Shalini Pandit said in a letter Wednesday that surveillance has to be increased to tackle the new variant. She said in the letter that timely detection of the variant will help in its containment. Sources in the government meanwhile said that a number of testing centres will be reopened both in the Odisha capital and Rourkela, the two cities where matches of the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup will be played. Government officials, when asked about the BF.7 case found in Odisha said that it happened in October and the patient has left the state since then.

samples to track the variants through the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) network to ensure the timely detection of newer variants, if any circulating in the country.

BOOTLEGGER DIES IN EXCISE CUSTODY

ENVELOPE ADDS NEW TWIST TO SAHU CASE

Cuttack, Dec 21: Custodial deaths seem to be the order of the day in Odisha as another alleged accused breathed his last Wednesday. Coming on the heels of Gobinda Sahu's alleged death by suicide, the demise of an alleged bootlegger in Excise custody has put the government in an embarrassing position.

The deceased, identified as Sarat Pradhan from Mahishalanda village in Cuttack district was detained by the Chowdwar Excise department officials Tuesday. However, while in custody, he breathed his last Wednesday. Sources said Excise officials raided the village Tuesday evening and caught Pradhan red-handed while selling liquor in the area illegally. Eighty litres of liquor was also seized from his possession. The sources said that while in Excise, custody, Pradhan complained of uneasiness. He was taken to the SCB Medical College

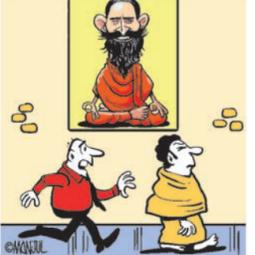
and Hospital here immediately, but doctors declared him dead on arrival. **Continued on P4**

DATE	NAME	REASON
Nov 5, 2022	Niranjan Pani	Family alleges torture in custody
April 30, 2022	Manoranjan Gedi	Drug peddler dies, injuries found on body
April 19, 2022	Pradip Sahu	Vegetable vendor dies, wife cries foul
Sept 24, 2021	Gobinda Kumbhar	Family blames police for demise

State's Republic Day tableau rejected again

Bhubaneswar: The Union Defence Ministry rejected Wednesday Odisha's tableau for Republic Day celebrations. This is the third year in succession that Odisha's tableau has been rejected. It should be stated here that the state's tableau in 2020 was highly acknowledged and won prizes showcasing the sculptural magnificence of Lingaraj temple and the cultural richness of Rukuna Rath. This year's tableau titled 'Pragayapna Medha' was themed on Odisha's art, culture, heritage and architect representing the architecture of Mukteswar temple and Warrior Horse along with depictions of the Maghahi and Ghumura dance forms.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Why did we lodge an FIR against a cartoonist? Can't we cure hurt feelings?

High drama in capital

Youth threatens to end life after failing to meet CM over projects allotted to Rourkela

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: High drama unfolded at Sishu Bhavan Square here in the Odisha capital as a social activist climbed atop an advertisement hoarding and threatened to die by suicide over projects for Rourkela city allegedly sent to the cold storage, officials informed. However, he was brought down hours later and would be taken to Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's residence for a meeting with him, they added. Muktikanta Biswal walked over 490 km from the steel city to the state capital to meet Patnaik. However, when he failed to meet the CM, he climbed atop the hoarding and threatened to die by suicide, a fire official said. **Continued on P4**



Fire Services personnel bring down Muktikanta Biswal with the help of a hydraulic platform. Police and personnel from the Fire Services department reached the spot and tried to convince him to climb down. They placed cushions on the ground and kept hydraulic lifts ready to rescue him but he threatened to jump if anyone came near him. Seeing the commotion, a large number of people also gathered on the ground.

As Messi, Mbappe sweat, liquor sales soar

The soccer crazy southern state celebrated Argentina's World Cup joy with glee and pomp with festivities continuing for 2-3 days



Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 21: They both wore No. 10 jerseys for their respective countries. They both shone like beacons in the FIFA World Cup final with Kylian Mbappe of France scoring four goals and Lionel Messi of Argentina hitting the target thrice, respectively. However, as they sweated out on the pitch, giving it their all, it was the Kerala government that bene-

fitted. Engrossed with the final, the soccer-loving Keralites bought liquor Sunday night worth ₹56 crore. The figures from the Kerala State Beverages Corporation (KSBC) - the sole wholesalers of liquor, wine, and beer, revealed that while on normal Sundays, the sales of liquor in the state stand at around ₹35 crore, on the Sunday of the final, this shot up to ₹49.40 crore. Apart from the sales made through retail outlets, the numerous bars in Kerala had stocked up liquor worth more than ₹6 crore, and it brought the total amount of sales to a whopping ₹56 crore. Incidentally, liquor sales cross the ₹50 crore mark on a single day during the peak of the festival season in Kerala. It is during Onam and Christmas. The highest recorded sale was registered during Onam in 2021 when liquor worth ₹51.22 crore was sold on a single day. So as Messi and Mbappe held the TV viewers enthralled with their skills on the pitch, the soccer crazy Keralites hit the bottle with glee. Their joy knew no bounds when Argentina emerged victorious giving Messi the trophy he desperately sought - the World Cup. Figures also revealed that football and sales of liquor have a relation when it was found out that the maximum sales of ₹45 lakh was recorded from a KSBC retail outlet in football-crazy Tirur municipal-ity of Malappuram district.

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	61067.24	↓ 635.05
NIFTY	18199.10	↓ 186.20
DOLLAR	82.64	↓ ₹0.03
EURO	88.05	↑ ₹0.33
GOLD	₹55,139	↑ ₹241
SILVER	₹69,880	↑ ₹238

WEATHER	BHUB	CTK
MAX	28.7°C	28.0°C
MIN	15.9°C	15.2°C
Humidity	90%	94%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Shallow to moderate Fog likely	

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshSpeaks.com
accuracy • reliability • trust
FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
You are a touchy one. People will rub you the wrong way today. But remember that getting needlessly annoyed will bring nothing but more complications. Contemplate in seclusion about the root cause of the problem. Ganesh's hint? It is closer than you imagine.

TAURUS
Today, says Ganesh, you will be likely to encounter someone who is bent upon provoking and getting on your nerves. You are urged not to retaliate and do things unbecoming of your good nature. Keep calm and unruffled. Respond and behave in a manner befitting your better nature.

GEMINI
You will be in an extremely emotional and romantic mood today. You may be worried about your personal relations, health, diet, career etc. You need to guard against giving into excessive stress and worry and look after your health, says Ganesh.

CANCER
You may be in one of your more frivolous moods today, foresees Ganesh. Gossip, fun, laughter and some harmless flirting shall make your day interesting, yet these are not the pastimes you usually enjoy. Hence, as the day rolls on, you shall find yourself to your reserved, reticent self concentrating hard on getting the work done to make way for the early evening gym/ driving class.

LEO
To many, you will seem to have got your senses back after a long time. Reason? You will finally have a definite career plan in mind. Although, it's not really a big deal for you when your mind races and yearns to achieve in two warring directions, it may seem quite jarring and unreal to the mere mortals.

VIRGO
Leadership is your forte and you shall receive kudos for the manner in which you handle your team. Much awaited promotions will materialise and so will some extra cash in your wallet. Wisely enough, you didn't get all this by not effectively balancing home and work, says Ganesh.

LIBRA
Ever heard of the phrase, "To stick one's foot in one's mouth"? Well, today you might be doing exactly the same, albeit unwittingly. You are likely to invite trouble, especially if some of those heated discussions get out of hand. A legal dispute does not seem unlikely.

SCORPIO
Your rung in the social ladder just went higher today. But be wary of green-eyed monsters and ill words. Fight tooth and nail - if necessary - to protect our reputation, says Ganesh. But also learn to find your enemies' Achilles' heel and target it ferociously.

SAGITTARIUS
No wonder, if you feel like you are stuck in a rut. Your energy level and enthusiasm has gone for a toss due to mundane routine. Unfortunately, your stars too seem to be lazy today, and there's nothing on the cards that can cheer you up. Ganesh advises to let the day pass calmly and wait for a better tomorrow.

CAPRICORN
You are armed with good communication skills, it helps you convince the most adamant of those around you. But, you'll need to hone this talent once again, says Ganesh. You'll look into heart of the matter and find the answers you have been searching for.

AQUARIUS
The cupid may strike you today! The singles may feel the energy and excitement of budding romance. Equally blissful day for the married couples, too, as they will spend quality time with each other. Go down the memory lane, go through some photo albums and cherish those long lost moments, says Ganesh.

PISCES
Unexpected expenses are likely to crop up today. There are strong indications that you will set out upon a journey or a picnic to some nearby place, without too much prior planning. However, the journey will be comfortable and your travel plans will go off without a hitch.

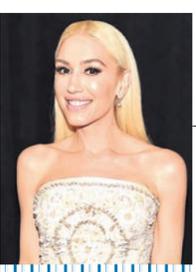
STEP UP DIRECTOR SAYS SHOW HAS SOCIALLY RELEVANT TALES

Dawn Wilkinson, who has partly directed the third season of drama series *Step Up*, has shared that the show features stories which are socially relevant but at the same time, they are very entertaining and they engage the audience on an emotional plane.



STEFANI USES TABLOID NEWSPAPER TO DECORATE HER BATHROOM

Singer Gwen Stefani's bathroom is decorated with tabloid newspapers. Splitting her time between LA and a newly-built ranch in Oklahoma since tying the knot with country singer Blake Shelton, 46, in 2021, the 53-year-old pop star revealed that they decided to cover one of the bathrooms wall to wall with front pages.



ZIBAH IN OSCARS RACE

It's truly the best thing: Helly Shah

Mumbai: Actress Helly Shah recently announced that her film *Zibah* is one of the top three films from India to get a theatrical screening in LA and is eligible for Oscar qualification. The actor tweeted the announcement and currently feels amazing.

The talented actress plays a Kashmiri girl in the movie. The tale of a mother and daughter who share a strong emotional connection found in *Zibah*. The film demonstrates how to work together to end the pervasive and harmful community practice known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM refers to any harm to the female genital organs, including partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons.

Playing a powerful character as such, Helly Shah yet again

proved her caliber for being an actor who possesses nothing but utmost brilliance. Talking about this milestone, she shares, "I was thrilled and honoured to be a part of this spectacular film. We shot the movie in January and by end of December 2021 nobody anticipated that it would be eligible for an Oscar."

Helly's 2022 has been a wonderful one. Her feature film *Kaya Palat* was screened at the Cannes Film festival amongst dignitaries around the world. Whereas, her 'Midas Touch' continues as *Zibah* too achieves a milestone for its Oscar qualification.



Miss Finland Erika Helin kicked out of restaurant over 'inappropriate outfit'

THE FORMER 'BEAUTY QUEEN' CLAIMS SHE DOESN'T THINK THERE WAS ANYTHING WRONG WITH HER OUTFIT

Model and social media influencer Erika Helin, who was crowned Miss Finland in 2018, recently claimed that she was kicked out of a restaurant for her 'inappropriate outfit'.

She revealed on Instagram that she was talking with friends when a security guard asked her to leave the Helsinki restaurant.

Erika's pink bralette top, which she paired with a black mini skirt, heels and a matching bag (inset), was 'inappropriate', she says the security guard told her. She explained on Instagram:

"Unexpectedly, the jerk came to get me, told me that I had to leave, dragged me

out of the bar. "Although I didn't object in any way, when I got there, loudly criticised my choice of outfit." The model says she could've bought a different

outfit from a nearby shop if it had been pointed out to her before she entered the restaurant. "In my opinion, it is contradictory to even take a customer in if the outfit is not suitable," she added.

But Erika still didn't think there was anything wrong with her outfit in the first place. "Maybe I'm too used to the dressing culture of my other home country - much more relaxed there," she mused.

After the incident Erika shared a series of pictures of the 'inappropriate' outfit and slammed the security guard for being a 'misogynist'.



SRK among '50 Greatest Actors of All Time'



Mumbai: Shah Rukh Khan has become the only Indian to be named in the list of '50 Greatest Actors of All Time', released by *Empire* magazine.

Others who are named in the list include Hollywood stalwarts Tom Hanks, Robert De Niro, Denzel Washington, Natalie Portman and Bette Davis among many others.

Pooja Dadlani, Shah Rukh's manager, took to Instagram to share the news. She shared a clip of the article and wrote: "@iamsrk on the Empire list of 50 greatest actors of all time... the only Indian doing us proud always!"

Shah Rukh in a career spanning over three decades has worked in iconic films such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, *Swades*, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, *Mohabbatein*, *Veer-Zaara*, *Devdas* and *Om Shanti Om*, among many others.

His next film *Pathaan* has been surrounded in controversy ever since filmmakers released its first song *Besharam Rang* a few days ago. Objecting to the lead actors' costumes, many political outfits have threatened to stall the film's release.

The film is slated to release in January. He will also be seen in *Jawan*, directed by Atlee.

Kiara: Repeat value of a film biggest gift for me



Mumbai: The repeat viewing of a film is the "biggest gift" an artist can receive, says actor Kiara Advani, who believes the sole intent behind a movie is entertainment. The 31-year-old actor, who had three releases in this year *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2*, *Jugjugg Jeeyo* and *Govinda Naam Mera*, said she aims to do films that connect with people.

"We don't make the film for ourselves but for the audience. We want them to love it and want each one of them to come out smiling, happy and entertained.

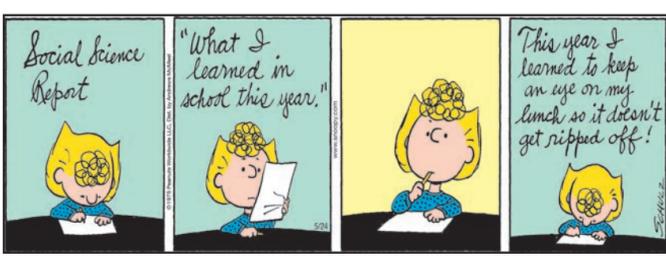
"We just want you to watch it again and again. If a film has a repeat value, then, for me that's the biggest gift ever," said the *Shershaah* actress.

Her latest *Govinda Naam Mera* is currently streaming on Disney+ Hotstar and the actor said she is nervous before the release of every film irrespective of the medium.

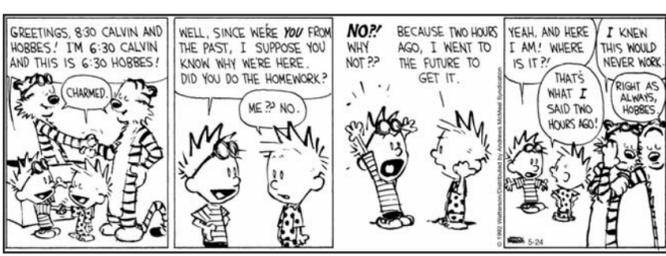
Calling herself a director's actor, Advani said she surrendered to filmmaker Shashank Khaitan's vision for *Govinda Naam Mera*, also starring Vicky Kaushal and Bhumi Pednekar.

FUN post

PEANUTS



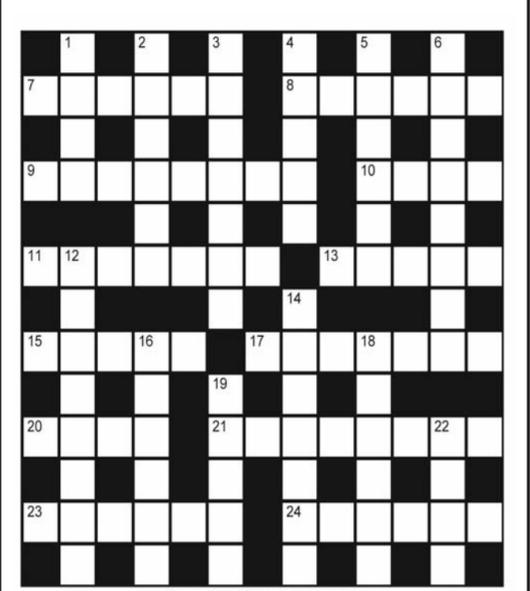
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



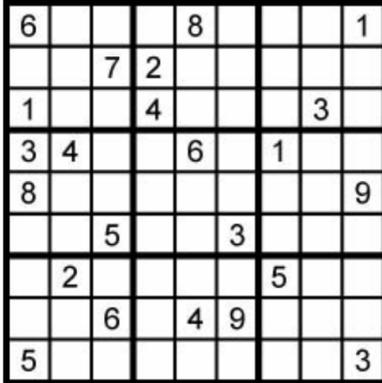
CROSSWORD



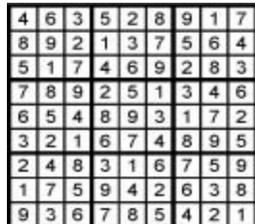
- Across**
- 7 Land on Lake Victoria
 - 8 Wit
 - 9 Tax bureaucrat
 - 10 "My bad!"
 - 11 Threatening
 - 13 German wine valley
 - 15 Cuban dance
 - 17 Deep-dish dessert
 - 20 Bunsen burner
 - 21 Shaky
 - 23 Gloomy
 - 24 After bottle or can
- Down**
- 1 Historic periods
 - 2 Apprentice
 - 3 Swoon (4,3)
 - 4 Amulet
 - 5 Osculation
 - 6 Film genre
 - 12 Ski venue
 - 14 Slammer
 - 16 Type of bull on the Weser River
 - 18 German city
 - 19 Construct
 - 22 Affaire d'honneur

SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.



SOLUTIONS



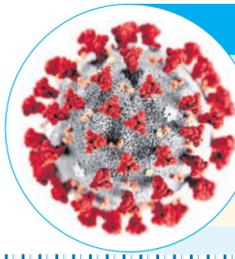
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown



IN SYNC

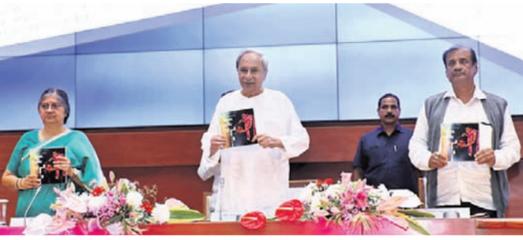
Artistes perform at the 16th Devadasi Dance Festival at Bhanjakala Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday



COVID-19 TRACKER

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	65,91,71,387	63,24,50,515	66,76,317
India	4,46,76,330	4,41,42,242	5,30,680
Odisha	13,36,304	13,26,915	9,204

'Drink from Tap' in 19 more places



CM Naveen Patnaik, H&UD Minister Usha Devi and Science & Technology Minister Ashok Panda at the launching event in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Noting that safe drinking water provision at every Odisha home has long been his dream, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Wednesday launched the 'Drink from Tap' project in 19 cities and towns of the state.

Earlier, the facility was unveiled in Puri and Gopalpur:

Under the project, drinking water will be supplied round-the-clock through taps installed in households. Patnaik said at least 5.55 lakh people in the 19 cities and the towns would benefit from the project.

Describing water as precious to all, he appealed to people to not waste even a single drop.

On Wednesday, the project was launched in Cuttack, Nimapara, Berhampur, Gopalpur, Rourkela,

Sundargarh, Biramitrapur, Rajgangpur, Keonjhar, Joda, Barbil, Champua, Anandapur, Baripada, Rairangpur, Udala, Karanjia, Vyasnanagar and some parts of Bhubaneswar.

Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) department Minister Usha Devi said, "People of Odisha are getting quality services, thanks to the vision and leadership of the CM."

Oversight Authority of OMBADC Justice AK Patnaik appreciated the 'remarkable' work by the state government towards ensuring safe drinking water.

While H&UD department Principal Secretary G Mathivathanan delivered the welcome address, WATCO CEO PK Swain gave the vote of thanks.

Among others, Science and Technology Minister Ashok Panda, Bhubaneswar Mayor Sulochana Das, Chief Secretary Suresh Chandra Mahapatra, ST Secretary VK Pandian attended the programme.

Withdraw GST on kendu leaf: BJD MPs to FinMin



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: A delegation of BJD MPs Wednesday met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and demanded withdrawal of 18 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) on trade of kendu leaves, considered as green gold of Odisha.

In their memorandum submitted to the FM, the BJD MPs mentioned that kendu leaf, used for wrapping 'bidis', is an important non-wood forest produce of the state.

Around 8 lakh pluckers, binders and seasonal workers, mostly belonging to the tribal community and poor families, are dependent on the trade of the forest produce, they said.

The tribal people collect kendu leaves as part of their rights defined under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

They have the rights to procure and

The delegation of BJD MPs said that withdrawal of GST will help improve the lives and livelihood of eight lakh people associated with the kendu leaf trade

sell this product, the memorandum said.

"Imposition of 18 per cent GST is adversely affecting the kendu leaf trade," it said.

The delegation of BJD MPs from Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha also claimed that if the GST is withdrawn, it will help improve the lives and livelihood of eight lakh people associated with the trade of kendu leaf.

Notably, the GST being levied on the forest produce was a major issue in the recently concluded Padampur bypoll, and the ruling party attacked the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre on this matter.

Earlier, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik had written to Sitharaman, requesting her intervention for the withdrawal of GST on kendu leaf.

Odisha Finance Minister Niranjan Pujari had also raised the issue in the 48th GST Council meeting held December 17 and demanded for exemption of the indirect tax on the forest produce.



INFRA BOOST: School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash, in presence of Puri MLA Jayanta Sarangi and other dignitaries, inaugurated a new DEO office in the Holy City, Wednesday
OP PHOTO

Patra reiterates demand for spl status to state

New Delhi, Dec 21: The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Wednesday reiterated its longstanding demand for special category status to Odisha on account of the massive economic loss that the state faces due to natural calamities.

BJD MP Sasmit Patra, in a special mention in the Rajya Sabha, said that every year Odisha faces natural calamities like cyclones, floods and drought for which more than 80 per cent of geographical area and nearly 90 per cent of population of Odisha are vulnerable.

"The Union government should take into account that the guidelines of special category status fails to factor in aspects like proneness to natural calamities like floods, cyclones, drought etc. and low rate of mobilisation of resources. The

changing of sharing pattern of various centrally-sponsored schemes from 90:10 ratio to 60:40 ratio has already burdened states like Odisha," Patra said.

The BJD MP said that instead of providing a helping hand, the Centre has been refusing the special category status to Odisha on the basis of the laid down guidelines.

"However, such guidelines by the Union are not cast in stone and can be amended just as many legislations, rules, guidelines, anti procedures are amended regularly," Patra said. "I urge the Government of India and reiterate the demand made by my leader and Chief Minister of Odisha Naveen Patnaik to accord special category status to Odisha on account of natural disasters it faces and the subsequent damage caused to the 4.5 crore people of Odisha," Patra said.

103 super speciality hospitals outside Odisha under BSKY

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: As many as 103 super speciality hospitals outside Odisha have been brought under the purview of Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY), an official said Wednesday.

This was revealed during a recently convened meeting of Odisha State Health Assurance Society (SHAS) recently.

These super specialty and tertiary care hospitals were empanelled under the state's health assurance scheme by the end of November, 2022, it was learnt.

Chairing the meeting, SHAS Chief Executive Officer Brundha D directed the officials to ensure timely settlement of claims raised by the private hospitals.

The nodal officers were asked to look into the claims on a daily basis for their earliest payment within the scheduled timeline.

According to officials, Christian Medical College in Tamil Nadu, Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation in Bangalore, Tata Medical Centre in Kolkata, Homi Bhabha (HB) Cancer Hospital in Vizag and Sangur in Punjab, Dr Bhubaneswar Borooh Cancer Institute (BCCI) in Guwahati are among the empanelled hospitals.

Other empanelled hospitals include HB Cancer Hospital in Varanasi, Mahanana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya Cancer Centre in Varanasi, Advanced Centre for Treatment, Research and Education in Cancer in Mumbai and Tata Memorial in Mumbai.

Many premier hospitals in Chennai,

Delhi, Dehradun, Vashi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Kolkata, Amritsar, Faridabad, Gurgaon, Jaipur, Noida, Ludhiana, Punjab, Raipur and Jamshedpur were also empanelled under BSKY.

Around 4500 from Odisha have received cashless critical care in these hospitals during November 2022 for which the state government has paid ₹11.26 crore to the hospitals.

From January to November of 2022, around 28,000 patients received cashless treatment outside Odisha towards which the state paid around ₹39 crore.

The feedback from the patients revealed that around 98 per cent of them were directly aided by Swasthya Mitras engaged by the state government and satisfaction level of the people was more than 97 per cent.

AI-based digital marker to measure characteristics of heart disease: Study

Scientists have constructed an in-silico, or computer-derived, marker for coronary artery disease (CAD) to better measure clinically important characteristics of the disease, a new study has found.

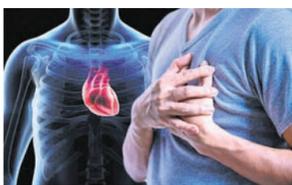
Using machine learning and clinical data from electronic health records, the researchers at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York are the first ones to map characteristics of CAD on a spectrum. Previous studies have focused only on whether or not a patient has CAD, the study said.

CAD and other common conditions exist on a spectrum of disease; each individual's mix of risk factors and disease processes determines where they fall on the spectrum. However, most such studies break this disease spectrum into rigid classes of case (patient has disease) or control (patient does not have disease). This may result in missed diagnoses, inappropriate management, and poorer clinical outcomes, said the investigators.

The findings, published in the journal *The Lancet*, are expected to lead to more targeted diagnosis and better disease management of CAD, the most common type of heart disease and a leading cause of death worldwide, the study said.

"The information gained from this non-invasive staging of disease could empower clinicians by more accurately assessing patient status and, therefore, inform the development of more targeted treatment plans," said Ron Do, senior study author, Icahn School of Medicine.

"Our model delineates coronary artery disease patient populations on a disease spectrum; this could provide



The machine learning model incorporated hundreds of different clinical features from the electronic health record, including vital signs, laboratory test results, medications, symptoms, and compared it to both an existing clinical score for CAD

more insights into disease progression and how those affected will respond to treatment.

"Having the ability to reveal distinct gradations of disease risk, atherosclerosis, and survival, for example, which may otherwise be missed with a conventional binary framework, is critical," said Do.

In the retrospective study, the researchers trained the machine learning model, named in silico score for coronary artery disease or ISCAD, to accurately measure CAD on a spectrum using more than 80,000 electronic health records from two large health system-based biobanks, the BioMe Biobank at the

Mount Sinai Health System and the UK Biobank. According to the study, the model, which the researchers termed a "digital marker", incorporated hundreds of different clinical features from the electronic health record, including vital signs, laboratory test results, medications, symptoms, and diagnoses, and compared it to both an existing clinical score for CAD, which uses only a small number of predetermined features, and a genetic score for CAD.

The 95,935 participants included participants of African, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and European ethnicities, as well as a large share of women. Most clinical and machine learning studies on CAD have focused on white European ethnicity, the study said.

The investigators found that the probabilities from the model accurately tracked the degree of narrowing of coronary arteries (coronary stenosis), mortality, and complications such as heart attack, the study said.

"Machine learning models like this could also benefit the health care industry at large by designing clinical trials based on appropriate patient stratification. It may also lead to more efficient data-driven individualized therapeutic strategies," said lead author Iain S. Forrest, Icahn Mount Sinai.

"Despite this progress, it is important to remember that physician and procedure-based diagnosis and management of coronary artery disease are not replaced by artificial intelligence, but rather potentially supported by ISCAD as another powerful tool in the clinician's toolbox," said Forrest.

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Vig recovers ₹1.6cr from IDCOL dy manager

Bhubaneswar: In one of the biggest seizure of disproportionate assets, Vigilance officials have recovered ₹1,60,44,500 suspected ill-gotten money from the possession of Gaya Santara, Deputy Manager, IDCOL, Ampa Valli Limestone Mines, Simagoda, Koraput Wednesday. The Vigilance sleuths also traced 1kg 83 gm gold and 6kg 750 gm silver at his Bhubaneswar residence and ₹4.19 crore as bank deposits. The sleuths found two multi-storied buildings in Bhubaneswar and 13 plots in prime areas of Bhubaneswar, Jajpur and Nayagarh.

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Executive Director (CS)
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CBC17163/12/0023/2223

Huge job opportunities in dairy sector: Naveen



Balangir district aims to be considered as the first district in the country in the field of milk production within the next 5 years

district aims to be considered as the first district in the country in the field of milk production within the next 5 years.

The summit will promote about 6500 cooperative societies and 3 lakh dairy farmers in the state to produce milk, informed Rana. The programme was held in two phases and included guest speeches, networking forums and discussions on various case studies. On this occasion, about 2,000 people from various parts of the state and the country related to cow husbandry were present and exhibited their products. Young entrepreneurs who have contributed to development in the field of government and achieved success were felicitated.

neers to set up startups. I am glad that Balangir is organizing a dairy summit and bringing in experts, veterinarians, research institutes, dairy farmers and startups to a single platform."

Chanchal Rana, Collector and District Magistrate, Balangir said that the conference will be an inspiration for the farmers. Milk production can provide a sustainable income to the farmers and help in doubling their income, thereby enabling the administration to prevent migration in the district. Along with this, Balangir



THE SANTA CLAUS CARRIAGE VISITS DPS KALINGA: Ringing in the festive season of Christmas, Santa Claus reached the school premises on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar and distributed toffees and muffins among the excited students. The event was organised by City-based Empires Hotel, Wednesday

Raahgiri Day to return from Dec 25

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The much-awaited Raahgiri event is back in the Capital city! It will start from December 25 from Ram Mandir square to Master Canteen, and will continue every Sunday morning. The weekly fest, which used to promote healthy activities among the denizens, will be resumed after two years of Covid outbreak.

The activities which will be held in the fest will include street plays, free health checkup, painting, dance, song, road painting, rangoli, zumba dance, yoga among others. As a host to the Men's FIH Hockey



World Cup, every citizen of the Capital is feeling proud and they are planning to celebrate the event

in their own way. December 25, the World Cup trophy will arrive in Bhubaneswar and Raahgiri is going

to celebrate the occasion, said a BMC official.

Meanwhile, as a preparatory measure and to bring in inclusiveness and ownership of the residents of the city, a mass cleanliness drive with public participation in every ward of BMC is planned to be organized December 24.

The drive will be organized under the direct supervision and monitoring of concerned Zonal Deputy Commissioner (ZDC).

BMC official said as the City is about to witness a huge football for the upcoming World Cup, the administration is giving special attention towards cleanliness.

Utkal to hold its 52nd convocation ceremony

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Utkal University, the 17th oldest university of undivided India and the first university of Odisha, is set to conduct its annual convocation ceremony here December 23.

After completing eighty years since its foundation November 27, 1943, the premier higher education institution is decked with festive colours for its 52nd convocation day. "Having put in their best effort, the scholars are to get awarded with gold medals and certificates, which will boost the morale of the young brains of the state," said Sabita Acharya, the university vice chancellor.

Many illustrious statesmen and intellectuals of Odisha, like maharaja Krushnachandra Gajapati, Biswath Das, Nilakantha Das, Godavarisha Mishra, are credited as the ar-

chitects behind establishment of this premier institution which was accredited A+ by NAAC in 2016 with category-I university status and was awarded greater autonomy in 2018. It also secured the 96th, 87th and 88th position in NIRF ranking in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively.

"The centres of excellence under RUSA-II have been promoting cutting edge research. Steps have been taken to organise distinguished lectures regularly by visiting professors from India and abroad. Seba Bhumi, a tribute to Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das is under construction along with the boundary wall of the campus. In the best interest of the employees, a daycare unit is also being built," informed an official.

The university caters to the need of all sections of the state providing very low-cost education with state-of-the-art infrastructure and laboratories.

'State not safe for women, children'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Opposition BJP has alleged that Odisha is 'unsafe' for women and children and dubbed the state government's claim of empowering women as 'hollow'.

Atrocities against women and children, particularly minor girls, have increased alarmingly in recent years, Odisha BJP Mahila Morcha President Smruti Pattnaik claimed.

The ruling BJD dismissed the charges and said its efforts to empower women through the SHG movement have been appreciated by the BJP-led government at the Centre itself, besides Niti Aayog and the United Nations.

Dubbing the BJD government's claim about women empowerment in Odisha as 'hollow', Pattnaik told a press conference Tuesday. "While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has introduced several welfare schemes for women; the Naveen Pattnaik government in Odisha has been utilising members of self help groups for political purposes."

Special train for pilgrims

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), a public sector undertaking under the Railways ministry, is going to run the Bharat Gaurav Tourist Train for a special tour 'Shri Jagannath Yatra', under the Indian government's initiative of "Dekho Apna Desh" meant to promote domestic tourism.

The train, which will cover some of the prominent pilgrimage and heritage destinations of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha, is all set to embark on its 8 days tour wherein tourists will visit Puri Jagannath temple, one



of the Char Dhams of India. Besides, the visit to Varanasi, Bajinath Dham and Gaya will be added attractions in the tour. Coupled with a modern state of the art AC rake, the tourist train will start from Delhi Saffarjung railway station January 25 and return Feb 1, 2023.

"Tourists will also have options to board/ de-board the train at Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Tundla, Etawah, Kanpur and Lucknow stations in the tour. The 7 nights/8

days train tour has its first stop at Varanasi, where tourists will visit Kashi Vishwanath jyotirlinga temple and corridor along with the Ganga ghat and arti. After Varanasi, the train will move to Jashidih Railway station in Jharkhand and tourists will proceed to visit Baidyanath dham Jyotirling temple. Further train will depart from Jashidih to Puri where stay for two nights will be arranged for tourists in the hotels," said an IRCTC official.

Bootlegger dies...

Excise officials informed that when he was detained, Pradhan had said that he was ill and had not taken any medicine. So when he complained of uneasiness Wednesday, he was immediately rushed to the hospital. However, en route to the hospital, he suffered a cardiac arrest and breathed his last. They asserted that the post-mortem report will nullify all doubts as to the exact cause of Pradhan's death. Meanwhile, the deceased's brother alleged that Pradhan died to torture by Excise officials. "My brother was beaten up mercilessly by the officials due to which he died. He was healthy and had no health issues," Pradhan's brother said.

High drama...

"I will climb down only if the CM comes here and gives a written assurance to the people of Rourkela to complete the projects. Else, I will kill myself," Muktikanta said from atop the 25-feet-high hoarding. Ashwini Barik, a Fire Services personnel, said that one of his colleagues kept conversing with Muktikanta to divert his attention while another fireman caught hold of him and he was forcibly shifted from the hoarding to the hydraulic platform and subsequently brought down. Water was poured over Muktikanta before bringing him down to wash away the diesel he had doused himself with, Barik informed.

During the rescue attempt Muktikanta's parents appealed to him through a TV channel to come down from the structure. Later, after he had been rescued they talked to him over the phone.



Open access solution to problem at the heart of scientific research

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed many flaws in the way our societies function. Among the less obvious is the gaping problem at the heart of scientific research. In March 2020, scientists were scrambling to understand what the new virus was, how it affected patients, and how it could be treated.

National science agencies from nations including the UK, Australia, Italy, the United States and Brazil called for publishers to make coronavirus research immediately and freely accessible, which in the most part they did.

But the very need for these groups to call for research to be made available in the middle of a global emergency demonstrates the failure of the current publishing system. Making research immediately free to read, which, when combined with the use of an open publishing licence, is known as 'open access' — is a hot topic in science.

Global health bodies know how important open research is, espe-

cially in times of emergency which is why they have repeatedly called for research to be made open.

The latest plaintive request came in August 2022 from the US White House Office of Science and Technology Policy for mpx research to be made open. Previous global calls were in 2016 for Zika and in 2018 for Ebola.

The consequences of lack of access to research can be dire.

In 2015 a group of African researchers claimed that an earlier Ebola outbreak could have been prevented if research on it had been published openly.

The past 12 months have seen a flurry of changes in open access globally and from January 2023, the high profile journal Science will allow published research to be immediately placed in publicly-accessible repositories at no cost to scientists.

In August 2022, the Office of Science and Technology Policy issued a memorandum to all US research funding agencies that by 1 January 2026 they must make all



Making research immediately free to read, which, when combined with the use of an open publishing licence, is known as 'open access'

the research they fund immediately publicly available, along with the data behind that research.

Though the language of the memorandum has been criticised for not specifying how the research is to be made open, it clearly articulates the why and when.

And make no mistake: this memorandum has teeth, coming as it

Global health bodies know how important open research is, especially in times of emergency, which is why they have repeatedly called for research to be made open

does from the White House. How each federal agency interprets the memorandum will be watched not just in the US but elsewhere, especially as it will provide examples of a diversity of approaches to open access.

The benefits of open research extend beyond simply increasing the readership and use of research

among academics.

Open access is just one part of a global movement of open science that in 2021 led to UNESCO, the United Nations education, science and cultural organisation, to issue the 'Open Science Recommendation'.

This is a world-leading initiative that sets international standards for open science built on values such as equity, diversity, collective benefit, quality and integrity.

The recommendation lays out why open science is important, including increasing return on investment, improving the effectiveness and productivity of scientific systems, pushing back against misinformation and disinformation, and addressing existing systemic inequalities to produce and access research.

Crucially, the recommendation is not just a piece of text to be written and forgotten, but rather it has been accompanied by a programme of implementation actions and will include a monitor-

ing process to hold signatories to account.

The UNESCO recommendation, like the Office of Science and Technology Policy memorandum, does not prescribe any particular pathway to open access and we will therefore see a diversity of routes to open access.

Allowing a diversity of approaches also recognises the reality that open access and open science are not static concepts and that they will evolve over time as culture and technology change.

A diversity of approaches also guards against a small number of commercial publishing houses dominating.

Many publishers are now negotiating nation-wide deals that bundle reading and open access publishing together. The Confederation of Open Access Repositories has made the case for more diversity in publishing, including through university repositories. As 2023 unfolds, it seems that the benefits of open access have been proved beyond doubt.

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BUDDING SCIENTISTS : Students display their projects at a science exhibition organised by City Kids' School in Keonjhar, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

FUNDS FOR ROAD PROJECT EMBEZZLED 21 TIMES

Vigilance starts probe into scam

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhapur, Dec 21: Vigilance officials have started an investigation into massive irregularities committed under a road project in Badasahara panchayat under this block of Nayagarh district. Upset over the scam, locals had long been pressing for an investigation and action against those involved in it.

Last year, funds worth lakhs of rupees were sanctioned 21 times for the road project in Badasahara panchayat. And the funds have been misappropriated through forged bills, it was alleged.

A team of Vigilance officials from Nayagarh visited the panchayat Tuesday and did the measurement of the road. The officials interacted with local people and officials of the Bhapur block administration.



A team of sleuths from Nayagarh visited Badasahara panchayat and took measurements of the road

They inquired the people and the officials about how much fund was provided to the road project under MGNREGS, details of the funds and utilisation and deadlines.

When our correspondent asked the officials about the probe, they said that the department had received allegations in 2021 that funds sanctioned for the projects 21 times have been embezzled.

Reconstruction work of the road project has been measured. Officials wanted to know the departments which have spent funds

for the project. Official documents related to fund allocations are being examined by Vigilance officials. "The irregularities will be reinvestigated if need arises," said a senior Vigilance officer.

Locals had filed complaints at the district administration earlier. The Collector had ordered an investigation into the irregularities. However, no step had been taken for the investigation. Locals were upset. However, after a long hiatus, the Vigilance has launched a probe into the irregularities.

RAYAGADA DISTRICT

BSF jawans shifting as Red menace ebbs

As a result of regular combing and search operations by security forces, the Maoist citadel in the district began to crumble

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rayagada, Dec 21: With the Maoist menace gradually declining in Rayagada district, BSF jawans posted here are being relocated to other sensitive areas of the country.

This was stated to media here by Border Security Force (BSF) Second Commandant Ravikant. Reports said that the district has not witnessed any violence by Maoists in the last few years. Following the return of BSF jawans, IRB jawans are being posted at their location.

Previously, the rebels were active in majority of the district's territory, stretching from Chandrapur to Kashipur and from Kenduguda to Kerada. They were not only targeting the common people but also the police and soldiers of the security forces through offensives.

The Telugu Maoist cadres used to call the shots in the areas bordering Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Maoist outfits had spread their network into every nook and cranny of the district. Maoist leader Sabayasachi Panda and other rebel leaders like Azad, Aruna, Akash, and Geeta had also built up their or-



ganisations in Rayagada district.

Even dreaded Maoist leaders like Ganapati and Ramkrishna used to run their networks from Rayagada district. However, as a result of regular combing and search operations by security forces, the Maoist citadel in the district began to crumble. A large number of Maoists fled the district as the security forces started tracking their movements through intelligence reports.

Currently, only a handful of Maoists have been left behind in the district. They are keeping themselves busy by sticking posters and hanging banners in the name of the Vamsadhara-Ghumusar-Nagabali division of Maoists.

As a result, the BSF jawans who were rushed into the district in 2013 are vacating their camps, Ravikant said. Jawans from the BSF-88 bat-

talions were stationed in the district at Kashipur and Kumbhikota.

They operated from their headquarters at the district headquarters in Rayagada, under the direction of the district police. The BSF camp at Bandhugaon in Koraput district was also being operated from here.

The district police had also set up their own camp at various places. BSF jawans posted at Kashipur were engaged in combing operations at Basangmali, Leligumma, and Nishikhil jungles. The jawans had launched a combing operation at Basangmali after a top Maoist official, Rabi, and eight others died in an encounter. The jawans were posted at Kumbhikota after Maoist activities witnessed a surge on the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh borders, he added.

Civil Supplies Corp yet to pay Bhadrak RMC's ₹18.18cr fee



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, Dec 21: The State Civil Supplies Corporation has not paid market fee worth ₹18.18 crore to the Regulated Market Committee (RMC) in Bhadrak for the last three years.

Reports said, the RMC has served demand notice to the Civil Supplies Corporation seeking clearance of the dues.

As per norms, the RMC is entitled to get 2 per cent of the total price of the paddy procured every year from the Civil Supplies department towards the market fee.

In 2019-20 marketing season, the Civil Supplies Corporation had procured paddy worth ₹332 crore from the district. However, it still has not paid ₹6.64 crore towards market fee.

The Civil Supplies Corporation had purchased paddy worth ₹436.62 crore in 2020-21, while market fee amounting to ₹8.73 crore is pending with the former.

Paddy worth ₹437 crore was procured from the district in 2021-22, but market fee to the tune of ₹8.74 crore was not paid.

The Civil Supplies Corporation was supposed to pay ₹24.11 crore in total in the last three years. Till May this year, the Civil Supplies Corporation has cleared ₹5.92 crore. Contacted, district Civil Supplies Officer Lingaraj Behera said that the RMC has often delayed in submitting utilisation certificates (UCs) and has submitted faulty reports to the Civil Supplies Corporation. This has caused delay in clearing market dues in time, he explained.

Vig raid on forest ranger

Bhawanipatna: Vigilance sleuths raided the office, residence and official quarters of Kegaon forest ranger Keshab Majhi on charge of amassing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income, Wednesday. The sleuths raided Majhi's residence at Om Nagar, his office, official quarters and parental house at Brahmani. The sleuths from Kalahandi and Koraput Vigilance departments detected Majhi's assets over ₹2.45 crore during the raid. A 12-member team comprising DSP Susant Biswal, Bhawanipatna DSP Sadanand Pani, Nabarangpur DSP Kalabati Bag conducted the raid.

NCC training complex soon in Berhampur

Chhatrapur: The Higher Education department has decided to set up an NCC training complex at the Silk city in Ganjam district. The NCC training complex will come up on an area of 5 acre where NCC cadets will be imparted training and camps will be organised. The Higher Education department has written a letter to the District Collector to earmark a patch of land for the project. Now, NCC cadets are being imparted training and camps are being organised at different colleges. A decision to this effect was taken at the state-level NCC Advisory Committee.

CB starts probe into Gobinda's suicide

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir, Dec 21: A ten-member Crime Branch team along with forensic experts has Wednesday started investigation into alleged suicide of Gobinda Sahu, the prime accused in Mamita Meher murder case, in Kantabanji sub-jail. His body was handed over to his family members after post mortem and which was later consigned to flames at his native Mahaling village.

Reports said, the CB team led by DSP Bijay Kumar Mallick accompanied by a scientific team reached Kantabanji sub-jail at 10am Wednesday. On the other hand, the body of Sahu had been brought to BBMCH, Bolangir Tuesday night and was kept in morgue. A team of doctors conducted post mortem in the forenoon today in the presence of a magistrate as per the NHRC guidelines. Security arrangements had been made on the BBMCH premises. Gobinda Sahu's in-laws Mahendra Sahu and Tuna Sahu were present at the hospital.

His relatives alleged that Gobinda's suicide inside the jail is not believable. "He was a strong minded person. As Mamita Meher case is a sensitive one, Gobinda might have been murdered. Two

sheets of papers were recovered from the pockets of Sahu, but police did not reveal what was written on them," Mahendra Sahu rued.

EAST COAST RAILWAY
e-Tender Notice No. ETCECONIIBBS/2022/17, Dated: 16.12.2022
Name of Work: REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR APPOINTMENT OF PROJECT SUPERVISION SERVICES AGENCY (PSSA) FOR PROVIDING PROJECT SUPERVISION SERVICES (PSS) AT VARIOUS CONSTRUCTION SITES/SECTIONS IN THE JURISDICTION OF 3RD & 4TH LINE PROJECT BETWEEN BUDHAPANKSAGGAON VIA RAJNAGARH-2&S Km. IN KHURDA ROAD DIVISION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY
Approx Cost of the work: ₹388.63 Lakhs, EMD: ₹3.44,300/-
Completion Period of the work: 24 (Twenty Four) Months.
Tender Closing Date & Time: at 12:00hrs. of 17.01.2023
No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letterhead and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website http://www.reps.gov.in
Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to visit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigenda issued for this tender.
The tenderers' bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS portal. Only registered tenderer/bidder can participate on e-tendering.
The tenderers should read all instructions to the tenderers carefully and ensure compliance of all instructions.
Chief Administrative Officer (Con)/ PR-148/CF/22-23 Bhubaneswar

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER RURAL WORKS DIVISION, BARGARH
Email: rd_bgh@yahoo.co.in, mail: rwd.bgh@gmail.com
1st corrigendum to Tender Call Notice No. Online-Bgh-15 of 2022-23
No.O-1495:- The following changes has been made to Tender Call Notice No. Online-15 of 2022-23 -
1) The availability of tender online for bidding starts from 26.12.2022 at 11.00 A.M. to 05.01.2023 upto 5.00 P.M. instead of 22.12.22 at 11.00 A.M. to 03.01.2023 upto 5.00 P.M.
2) The last date of seeking tender clarification is 05.01.2023 upto 4.00 P.M. instead of 03.01.2023 upto 4.00 P.M.
All other terms & conditions as laid down in the above tender call notice will remain unchanged.
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Government of Odisha No.B-1007: "E" Procurement Tender Notice OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RAYAGADA (R&B) DIVISION NO-II
E-mail ID: eepwd765017@gmail.com, Phone: (06856) 233066
Bid Identification No: RC (RANDB) RGD No-II 21/ 2022-23 (Online tender) No.5480 Date: 16.12.2022
1. Total No. of the works : 03 Nos. Building works
2. Approximate estimated cost : Rs 14.30 Lakh to 37.58 lakhs.
3. Period of completion : 03 (three) calendar months for building works
4. Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal : 11.00 Hrs. of Dtd 26.12.2022 to 17.00 Hrs. of Dtd. 09.01.2023 for online bidding.
5. Last date/Time for receipt of bids in the portal : Upto 17.00 Hrs. of Dt. 09.01.2023
6. Name and address of the Officer inviting BID : Executive Engineer, Rayagada (R&B) Division No-II
7. Date of opening of Bid at 11.00 Hours on Dt. 10.01.2023.
8. Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal: www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
9. Further Addendum/Corrigendum if any will be hosted in the above website only.
Sd./- Executive Engineer Rayagada (R&B) Division No.II OIPR-34139/11/0010/2223

Tribals see red over stockyard project

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, Dec 21: A controversy has broken out over construction of a stockyard near Talakainsari village under Banspal block in Keonjhar district. Local tribal residents have strongly opposed the project.

The locals have long been appealing to the administration to stop the project claiming that the land on which the stockyard is being built by Gandhamardan iron ore mine was under their occupation for many years in the past.

"We were raising paddy and other crops. As elephant menace continued, we had given up farming on the land. We oppose the construction of the stockyard on our land," locals Bhimsen Munda, Laxmidhar Munda, Rato Munda, Raya Munda and Dhaneswar Nayak said.

They also alleged that the mining company is trying to snatch their land by building a stockyard. Some villagers have moved the sub-divisional magistrate's court to stop the work seeking proclamation of Section-144 on the land.

Admitting the petition, the court has ordered the local IIC to look into the matter.

Notably Gandhamardan iron ore mine is building a stockyard on 12.50 acre of land. Many trees on the land have been cleared while construction work is underway. "After an investigation, truth will come out and action will be taken accordingly," said sub-divisional magistrate Ramachandra Kisku.

Role of rangers in Similipal Tiger Reserve under scanner

Nine out of 16 posts of rangers are lying vacant in the tiger reserve

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, Dec 21: Protecting forests and wildlife is the duty of the range officers posted in the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) of Mayurbhanj district. However, staff crunch and range officers going on long leaves have severely affected the day-to-day functioning of the range offices inside the STR.

There are also instances of range officers handing over charges to their juniors and going on leave. As a result, poachers and timber mafia gangs are having a field day inside the forest.

Locals have lost faith in forest officials. The recent poaching of a tusker and the involvement of forest officials in disposing of evidence by burning the carcass have only compounded the problems. Apart from that, the Special Task Force's seizure of a Royal Bengal Tiger skin has put forest officials on the defensive.

Sources informed that majority of the range offices are being manned by junior officials. Nine out of 16 posts of rangers are lying vacant under the STR-North and



STR-South divisions of the sanctuary. The STR-North division has seven range offices, out of which four posts are vacant, while the remaining vacancies are in the south division.

Foresters have been found discharging the responsibilities of range officers in places like Jenabila and Barahakamuda. Locals allege that in most cases, range officers, instead of venturing into the forests, prefer to stay in the comfort of their respective offices. They leave everything to the junior officers, which leads to goof-ups.

The Forest department's silence on the death of guard Turam Purty has also sparked a row. He consumed poison as three suspended forest officials had abused him for spilling out details re-

garding the death of the tusker and the burning of the carcass.

Former honorary wildlife warden Bhanumitra Acharya alleged that the Forest department is trying to sweep the entire matter under the rug to cover up its own wrongdoing.

Wildlife lovers have demanded action against Forest department officials responsible for the death of a Kumki elephant, which died due to alleged medical negligence.

They have also demanded the transfer of inexperienced officials posted in the Similipal National Park and STR and a probe into disproportionate assets earned during their period of service in the sanctuary. The demand for action against officials working in collusion with the poachers is also growing.

When contacted, STR field director T. Ashok Kumar said that the ranger who was on leave had been asked to join work after the poaching of the jumbo. He added that requests have been sent to the Odisha government to fill up the vacant ranger posts.

Man awarded life term for killing father-in-law

POST NEWS NETWORK

Boudh, Dec 21: A court Wednesday awarded life imprisonment to a person after convicting him of killing his father-in-law in Boudh district. District and sessions judge Bikram Kumar Pradhan pronounced the verdict on accused Pankaj Sethi (45) of Sarsara village under Boudh police limits.

According to the case diary, Pankaj and his family members used to stay at the house of his father-in-law Ghurundu Barik (65). Pankaj was not doing any work to sustain his family, leading to wordy duels with his father-in-law.

On December 16, 2018, both Pankaj and Ghurundu had gone to farmland to bind paddy bundles. Hours later, Ghurundu was found dead in a pool of blood on the farmland. Later, it was known that Pankaj had hacked Ghurundu to death with an axe.

UCO Bank Zonal Office, UCO Bank Building, 2nd Floor, C-2, Ashok Nagar, Bhubaneswar-751009, Tel: 0674-2620423 **POSSESSION NOTICE For Immovable Property**
(Under Section 13(4) of the Securitization & Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 for Immovable Property)
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the UCO Bank under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (No. 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 issued a Demand Notice under section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the Borrowers/Guarantors to repay the amount mentioned in the notice with interest at the contractual rate together with incidental expenses and costs within 60 days from the date of the said Notice. The Borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrowers/Guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken POSSESSION of the property described here-in below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules. The Borrowers/Guarantors in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the UCO Bank for an amount plus interest & expenses thereon.

SAHID NAGAR BRANCH / Name and Address of Borrowers/Guarantors	Amount Outstanding as on Specified Date	Date of Demand Notice / Date of Possession	Description of the Immovable property
Borrowers: 1) Mr. Siddhartha Sankar Dash, S/o.: Mr. Balaram Dash, 2) Mr. Balaram Dash, S/o.: Late Baishnab Charan Dash / Guarantors: 1) Mrs. Jyotirmayee Dash, W/o.: Mr. Balaram Dash, 2) Mrs. Madhumita Acharya, W/o.: Mr. Siddhartha Sankar Dash, All are at Plot No.: 27(P), Behind Maharshi College, Sahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar, Khurda-751007	₹50,05,894.44 as on 28.09.2022 + interest & expenses thereon	13.10.2022 / 16.12.2022	All that part and parcel of Land and Building Standing in the name of Mr. Balaram Dash, S/o.: Late Baishnab Charan Dash, RSD No.: 7210, 7226, Dated: 04.11.1977 executed in the Sub-registrar office: Bhubaneswar situated in Hal Mouza: Bhubaneswar Sahar Unit-IX Satyanagar, Dist.: Khurda, Khata No.: 163, Plot No.: 117/1103 for an area of Ac.0.050 Dec., Bounded by North: Road, South: Plot No.: 1060, East: Plot No.: 1104, West: Plot No.: 1050

Place: Bhubaneswar Date: 21.12.2022 **Authorised Officer UCO Bank**

There is no greater pride and glory than to be a perfect instrument of the Master.

SRI AUROBINDO



Time to Deglobalise

After four decades of fostering integration through trade and finance, the global economy has begun a painful process of fragmentation. Initially driven by wealthy countries – namely, the United States under former President Donald Trump and the United Kingdom following the Brexit referendum – several geopolitical forces have combined to accelerate the shift toward deglobalisation.

The fracturing of global trade could herald the fragmentation of international capital markets. COVID-19-related lockdowns and closures have disrupted global supply chains and shut down major production centers, most notably in China. Similarly, the war in Ukraine has altered trade routes and forced Western countries to find alternative suppliers of major commodities like oil, gas, wheat, and fertilizers. Western-led sanctions on Russia have further impeded trade and sharply increased food and energy prices.

But while global trade could become even more fragmented if major economies adopt protectionist policies such as border carbon taxes, financial markets remain strongly integrated. Cross-border capital flows are still largely unregulated and more volatile than ever. It's a combination that is currently proving to be lethal for many low- and middle-income countries.

The liberalisation of capital accounts in these countries in the 1990s has led to large inflows of "hot money": private financial capital driven not so much by developing countries' economic outlook as by developed countries' macroeconomic policies. In the years following the 2008 global financial crisis, capital flows to emerging and "frontier" markets surged as prolonged monetary expansion by developed countries' central banks fueled asset bubbles. Financial agents borrowed cheap in dollars and either lent in foreign currency to developing countries or invested in local currency markets. Capital inflows triggered higher interest-rate spreads and currency appreciation, making carry trades particularly lucrative – at least for a while.

Over the years, the inflows of hot money, often held as reserves and invested in low-return dollar assets, have made emerging and developing economies vulnerable to capital flight. This has had a dampening effect on these countries' fiscal policies, as rising seigniorage costs have stoked fears of credit-rating downgrades.

The rapid interest-rate hikes in the US and the European Union have compounded low- and middle-income countries' external debt burdens, forcing them to raise interest rates even more aggressively than advanced economies and hindering their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, these dramatic rate hikes have not prevented fickle foreign investors from fleeing, causing emerging-market currencies to depreciate and severely damaging labour markets and growth prospects.

But the developed countries' combination of higher interest rates and fiscal consolidation is counterproductive, as it risks causing recessions without addressing the real forces behind surging inflation. As a result of following the US Federal Reserve's lead, many low- and middle-income countries already face severe stagflation – and integration with global finance is worsening their economic woes.

Instead of mimicking developed countries' ineffective approach, developing and emerging countries must introduce policies tailored to their specific needs and political economies. Such policies include controlling the prices of key commodities, increasing domestic production to alleviate critical shortages, and ensuring social protections for the newly unemployed and those who are worst affected by high inflation.

Above all, developing countries must introduce more effective capital controls. Imposing constraints on volatile portfolio flows, particularly those that contribute to currency depreciation, is crucial to mitigating the risks associated with financial globalisation. Moreover, just as several developing countries have explicitly or implicitly defied the US-led trade sanctions on Russia, policymakers must break free from the US-dominated international financial system, especially dollar swaps and repo markets.

Given that most developing countries cannot afford to act on their own, regional cooperation is also critical. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's annual report mentions several innovative forms of finance and exchange payments that Global South countries could implement to counter advanced economies' financial dominance, including "South-South clearing unions."

If trade among Global South economies grows quickly, the report notes, the flows will be settled in their own currencies or through regional currency mechanisms. Such mechanisms could also help negotiate debt-restructuring deals, provide financial insurance at the regional level, and even establish stabilisation funds to improve countries' foreign-asset positions.

Financial globalisation was supposed to usher in an era of robust growth and fiscal stability in the developing world. It ended up doing the opposite. Now, to restore their economic viability, low- and middle-income countries must make the most of deglobalisation and embrace the fragmentation of international capital markets.

The writer, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism. **NORMAN VINCENT PEALE**

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time. **THOMAS A. EDISON**

In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't. **BLAISE PASCAL**

WORDSWORTH

Dydlar

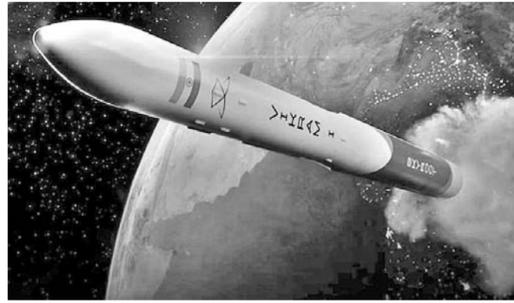
In 2007, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) bought a remote fen in the Norfolk Broads, so isolated that few people had ever been there. This is from one report of the sale: *A few wild-fowlers would have visited it by boat when it was owned by Lord Percy; a handful of marsh men and sedge cutters still go there occasionally to harvest reeds; ditch "dydlars" are sometimes sent in to keep the water channels open from vegetation, and a few naturalists and artists know about this lost world of swamp and sky (The Guardian, 8 Jan. 2007).* As this indicates, a dydlar is a clearer of water channels in the Broads. He gets his name from his principal tool, the dydle. Though cutting drainage ditches has always been part of the job, the dydlar used to be as often occupied with dredging navigable channels through the fens. The Oxford English Dictionary points out that early examples of dydle, from the sixteenth century, could also refer to a sharp triangular spade for edging ditches that was used in conjunction with a crome, a hooked stick to remove weeds.

HERALDING A NEW ERA

FOCUS SPACE EXPLORATION

With the launch of the country's first privately developed rocket named Vikram-S by ISRO on 18 November 2022 from its facilities at Sriharikota, India has entered into a new era of space programme which is now actively thrown open for private partnership. Earlier, the exploration of the space sector was purely the domain of ISRO, India's state-owned body, which was established under the able leadership of Dr Vikram Sarabhai in 1969.

In its illustrative career of 53 years, ISRO has not only sent missions for exploring the Moon and the Mars in its own vehicles, but also successfully launched satellites of other nations on a commercial basis. The organisation has made India self-reliant in the field of space technology and its application to the cause of national development in areas like agriculture, forest cover mapping, disaster management, weather forecasting, and communication. It has also demonstrated how crucial space missions could be accomplished with a low investment economy affordable by a developing nation like India. However, ISRO's earnings over the years were only 2% of the global space market. Although this is a minuscule amount, India's space sector aims to make it 8% in coming days by including active participation of private players in the field. The new space policy announced by the Government of India will remove most of the constraints faced by the private players, who can now look forward to building satellites, leasing out transponders, building launch vehicles and exploring the whole world of space-based applications. While the transition for NASA to the realm of private sector business took nearly a decade, India can aspire to reach the same status in the next 10 to 15 years with the opening up of its space sector. ISRO is also expanding its launch facilities by developing a third launch pad at Sriharikota and another spaceport in Tuticorin dis-



The launch of India's first privately developed rocket was a technology demonstration to showcase the tremendous potentials of Indian private players in the field

trict of Tamil Nadu to facilitate increasing use of its infrastructure by private stakeholders.

The Vikram-S rocket was developed by a Hyderabad-based startup named Skyroot Aerospace Private Limited over a period of two years of research and hard work. The six-meter tall single-stage solid fuelled, sub-orbital rocket soared to an altitude of 89.5 km after its launch and met all the flight parameters and mission objectives before having a smooth splash down in the Bay of Bengal covering a total time span of nearly five minutes. One of the notable features of the mission was that few advanced technologies were incorporated in some of its designs such as the use of carbon composite structures in building its motor casing and 3D printer components in building its thrusters. The Vikram-S Rocket is equipped with a gross lift-off mass of 545kg with a payload mass of 80kg. In its maiden flight, it carried three customer payloads which will map the measurement and validation of certain flight parameters and payload integration processes. The rocket will help validate the technologies that will be used in the subsequent Vikram-1 orbital vehicle of Skyroot that is planned for launch next year, subject to technical clearance from the reg-

ulatory authority IN-SPACe. The rocket was named after Dr Vikram Sarabhai, the Father of India's Space programme.

The launch of India's first privately developed rocket was a technology demonstration to showcase the tremendous potentials of Indian private players in the field. The Indian National Space Promotion and Authorization Centre (IN-SPACe) has been designated as a nodal agency under the Department of Space (DoS) to look after the private sector's access into the field. It has given five authorizations to various space NGEs for undertaking space activities in India and signed sixteen MoUs. Till date, IN-SPACe has received more than 150 applications from different space NGEs for authorization, facilitation, and promotion. Union Minister of State for Science and Technology & Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh, has described the achievement as a new dawn in building India's space ecosystem. The unlocking of the immense potential of the Indian space sector began with a landmark policy decision taken by the government in June, 2020. Previously, the role of the private sector was limited only to the supply of satellite hardware to ISRO. But now, the private sector can play a more proac-

The writer is Education Officer, Regional Science Centre, Bhopal.

THE NEW SPACE POLICY ANNOUNCED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA WILL REMOVE MOST OF THE CONSTRAINTS FACED BY THE PRIVATE PLAYERS



Nikunja Bihari Sahu



Jayati Ghosh

Instead of mimicking developed countries' ineffective approach, developing and emerging countries must introduce policies tailored to their specific needs and political economies

SPECTRUM SOCIETY

PENCiL portal and child protection



Samir Kumar Nanda

THE LAUNCH OF THIS PORTAL IS AN INNOVATIVE SCHEME, BUT TO MAKE IT 100 PER CENT USEFUL, MOBILE AND INTERNET SERVICES MUST FIRST BE ARRANGED IN ALL PARTS OF THE COUNTRY

In order to create a child labour free society across the country by engaging Union & state governments, district administration, civil society and public in a single platform and manage all data and complaints related to child labour practice through a single database, the government launched PENCiL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour) portal on 26 September 2017. Successful implementation of the Act, complaint cell, convergence of all departments, management of National Child Labour Project (NCLP) and tracking of children remain the main components of this portal. Through the complaint cell on this portal, anyone who sees child or adolescent labour being employed anywhere in the country can file a complaint immediately without going to the office. By clicking on the new complaint link, a complaint can be filed by providing the details of the child/adolescent employed, the address of the workplace and the details of the complainant. On receiving the complaint, the District Nodal Officer investigates the genuineness of the allegations and takes action as well as rescues the concerned child/adolescent labourer. Rescued children

mitted in the SSA, children between 9 to 14 years are admitted to NCLP Special Training Centres (STC) and adolescents of 15-18 age group are admitted to the relevant skill development centres.

Since the opening of the PENCiL portal, the management of all NCLP STCs has been accepted through the portal only. STCs were also forced to upload the daily attendance of the child labour students through the portal only. But the infrastructure was not developed for the purpose. For example, in STCs, the salary of a working teacher and accountant is ₹7000 and ₹5000 per month respectively. How can the employee buy an Android phone and how to recharge data pack every month to manage the portal with such a salary? Again, according to the data provided by the Union Ministry of Communications in the Parliament this year, out of 5,97,618 villages of our country, 25,067, including 6099 villages of Odisha, have not received mobile and internet services at all. Then how will the public and NCLP STCs of the said villages use the PENCiL portal without mobile and internet facility? The government didn't release funds to the NCLPs who fail to upload information daily through the PENCiL portal as a result of which

many STCs in the country were closed, which affected millions of child labourers and thousands of workers employed by the government for their rehabilitation.

Examining the data displayed on the PENCiL portal shows how useful the portal's management is. According to the data displayed on this portal on 17 November, 2022, only 1,97,365 (0.05%) children were identified in the whole country since launching of the portal. So, during this period an average of only 105 children were identified daily in such a large country? Similarly, while there are 763 revenue districts in our country, according to the data of the PENCiL portal, District Nodal Officers have been appointed in only 620 districts in the last 62 months. What about the future of the children of the remaining 143 districts? The user ID and password required to use this portal has not been provided by the ministry for years. Most of the staff have not been given the necessary practical training to use this portal. Since the stipend amount of the child labour students is also forced to be paid through this portal, till now many child labourers could not get their stipend amount. The launch of this portal is an innovative scheme, but to make it 100 per

cent useful, mobile and internet services must first be arranged in all parts of the country. Secondly, to use it, the concerned staff and officials should be given full practical training. During the last Budget speech, the Finance Minister announced in Parliament that the NCLP, which has been functioning smoothly since 1988 for the welfare of child labour across the country under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, will be subsumed in the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. Here the question arises that if a ministry of the government has been working efficiently for child labour in the country since 1988, in whose interest and why was the responsibility removed from that ministry? After the Finance Minister's announcement, the Ministry of Labour did not take over the NCLP and the Ministry of Education did not take any action. As a result, millions of child labourers and employees of the country are forced to beg on the streets today for livelihoods.

The writer is Programme Manager, Labour & Employment, Govt. of India. Views are personal.

State of education

Sir, Recently the Central government has come up with a strange data. In response to a question raised in the Rajya Sabha, the government admitted that during the last four years, more than 61,000 government schools were closed across the country. However, in that stipulated period the number of students studying in government schools increased manifold – nearly by one crore 23 lakh. At a time when it has been reported that most of the schools are already overcrowded and also having huge imbalance in the teacher-pupil ratio; then how can the quality of teaching and learning in schools be maintained. During the outbreak of the pandemic when the economic condition of a large number of people in the country was badly affected, many families removed their children from private schools and enrolled them in government schools because they could not afford the expenses. In such a complicated situation how can quality based education be imparted in the midst of increasing number of students. Since the foundation of the development of any country rests on the condition of quality education, the government should take concrete steps to improve the system continuously.

Abhijit Roy, JAMSHEDPUR

Great opportunity

Sir, India's G-20 presidency which is consultative, collaborative and decisive, takes place at a very critical moment in international affairs. The events are no more exclusive domain of metro cities. Over 200 meetings are planned across 55 locations in the country. The event will enable the world to get to know India better. It is a great moment to showcase the country's progress in many sectors. It is best time to open up our tourism and hospitality sector to the world. Yoga is one of the greatest gifts of India to the world. So yoga, along with our traditional medicines, indigenous products like herbal tea based on ayurveda can be promoted. Traditional medicine experts and chefs can share personalised diet and well-being tips to foreign delegates. In all the meetings, yoga session, even for a very short duration, can be held. But the big question: are we well prepared for such a big event? Our people and police are infamous for their ill-treatment to tourists. Road connectivity and transport facility are yet to be at the desired level. Non-availability of adequate number of star hotels near tourist places is another issue. Let us make this grand event a huge success.

Pratap Nayak, BHUBANESWAR

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST

B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

of the day quote

This year, the number of pilgrims at Ganga Sagar Mela is expected to be more than what it was in the past few years

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

Despite GOIs tall claims of heavy investment flow into J&K post abrogation of Article 370, the figures presented by them in the Parliament prove otherwise. 840 crores in 2017-18 vis-a-vis 376 crores in 2021-22. A lie has no legs

MANOJ SINHA | J&K LT GOVERNOR

Eviction is a continuous process and it won't stop. There is no point in talking about it. We will clear forest and government land (across the state) as well as in Bataidra

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

SHORT TAKES

Jammu-Srinagar Highway re-opened

Srinagar: The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, which was closed due to stonewall near Dewal bridge Wednesday, has now been re-opened for vehicular traffic, officials said.

Smugglers held with rare turtles

Sambhal (UP): Two wildlife smugglers were Wednesday arrested from the Bahjoi area with 44 turtles, which they were going to sell in other states, police said.

Fire in restaurant, no casualty

New Delhi: A fire broke out Wednesday at a restaurant in South Extension Part-2 of the city, officials said here. Fire services officials said they were informed about the fire around 12.45 pm and they rushed eight fire tenders to the spot.

CBI takes over missing girl's case

New Delhi: The CBI has taken over the probe into a case where a six-year girl went missing from a Saraswati Puja pandal in Bihar's Muzaffarpur February 16 last year, officials said Wednesday.



The saving grace is Kerala at present is not reporting many fresh cases, but we must ensure that all precautions should be taken when Covid-like symptoms like cold and cough surface

PINARAYI VIJAYAN | KERALA CM

MASS CULLING OF WILD BOARS

As many as 31 wild boars, which strayed into human settlement and caused havoc, have been gunned down in a hamlet in this district.



All about BF.7 that has triggered Covid fears



Covid was back at the centre of India's health and political map Wednesday with the government advising people to get vaccinated and mask up, and saying random sample testing will be conducted at airports for passengers arriving from China and other countries

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 21: As India gears up to fight a potential resurgence of the Covid virus in the country, the BF.7 Omicron sub-variant once again hogged the headlines as it is currently on the move in countries like China.

This new Omicron variant was first detected in China and India has seen its first case of this variant in Gujarat.

Initially in the pandemic, the virus mutated several times and the WHO declared the Delta variant as the most severe one.

The symptoms of the new BF.7 sub-variant are similar to common flu and include cold, cough, fever, body pain, etc. As it is highly transmittable, it spreads to a larger group of people within a short duration.

It is important to be careful in the public places since we do see that people have become a little careless as many of the norms and the rules that are put forth during Covid-19 have been lifted, say experts.

So, it is now important that we at least follow the basic measures, they add.

Random sampling at airports

New Delhi: Random sample testing for coronavirus will be conducted at airports for international passengers arriving from China and other countries in view of the recent surge in cases in some parts of the world, official sources said Wednesday.



'Even low-cost air sensors can improve pollution forecasting'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: What can be done to improve the predictive power of identifying hazardous air quality in pollution hotspots?

A recent study from Delhi has found an answer. The study uses a high-precision spatiotemporal prediction model drawn from two years of data from a low-cost monitoring network of 28 custom-designed low-cost portable air quality sensors to derive fine-grained pollution maps.

It proposes that a network of inexpensive, portable air quality monitors in densely populated cities can significantly enhance pollution forecasting and play an important role in developing precise policy recommendations and public health alerts.

The paper emphasizes how high costs often prevent city governments from widely deploying reference-grade air quality monitors, which are the standard for providing data to the public air-quality index.

The study shows how high costs often prevent city governments from widely deploying reference-grade air quality monitors, which are the standard for providing data to the public air-quality index



Inclusion Economics at Yale University, Warwick, EPIC, Swiss Data Center, Kai Air Monitoring Pvt Ltd, and New York University proposes a new methodology to model and predict urban air quality at a fine-grained level using dense and noisy, low-cost sensors.

Anant Sudarshan, Senior Fellow, EPIC, and Assistant Professor, University of Warwick, explains: "Our paper develops a model that can offer more precise forecasts and assessments of air quality. So we used machine-learning methods to combine high and low-



Youth Congress supporters stage a protest by burning tyres against the State Government in Kolkata

PTI PHOTO

Parl passes anti-piracy Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Parliament Wednesday passed a Bill which provides for prevention of maritime piracy and stringent punishment to those convicted of such crimes.

The Rajya Sabha passed the Maritime Anti-Piracy Bill 2022 by voice vote Wednesday. The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha Monday.

Moving the Bill for consideration and passage in the Rajya Sabha, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said it has provisions for the prevention of maritime piracy, will strengthen India's maritime security and give it an effective legal instrument to combat the menace.

"Ensuring maritime security is key to safeguard India's security and economic wellbeing," he said. The Bill was initially introduced in the Lok Sabha December 9, 2019 and referred to the Standing Committee on External Affairs for examination. Jaishankar said the ministry had held several rounds of extensive inter-ministerial consultations with the departments concerned to incorporate the recommendations of the Standing Committee.

Out of 18 recommendations of the Standing Committee, 14 have been incorporated suitably in the Bill, he said, adding that three recommendations were only observations which too have been duly noted. "The bill addresses the issue of death penalty as an exceptional case and the quantum of punishment envisaged are in



IN THE BILL, THE GOVERNMENT HAS ADDED PROVISIONS FOR DEATH PENALTY AND LIFE IMPRISONMENT FOR THOSE CONVICTED OF MARITIME PIRACY

THE BILL WILL ENABLE THE COUNTRY FULFILL ITS INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND IMPROVE INDIA'S STANDING AT GLOBAL FORUMS

line with the gravity of offences," the minister said.

In the absence of a specific law or a legal provision in the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure on piracy, he said, this Bill would provide an effective legal instrument to combat maritime piracy.

Also, he said, it would enable India to discharge its obligations under the United Nations'

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The external affairs minister asserted that the security of "our sea lanes of communication is critical" with more than 90 per cent of India's trade taking place by sea route and more than 80 per cent of its hydro-carbon requirements being sea-borne. India, he said, is also one of the largest providers of seafarers in the world. He also highlighted that India has taken a lead on issues of maritime security at multilateral forums.

Members cutting across party lines supported the Bill although some of them had pointed out that a few provisions could be improved.

Supporting the Bill, Congress member Vivek Tankha said India will be delighted to have this law but asked the government to look at some of the harsh provisions, including bail provisions for those arrested.

IndiGo passenger calls cabin crew 'servant', DGCA launches probe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: An IndiGo passenger and an air-hostess were involved in a heated exchange over choice of meals onboard a flight from Istanbul to Delhi, and aviation regulator DGCA is looking into the incident.

A video clip of the heated exchange onboard the flight December 16 was shared on social media Wednesday.

In a statement, the airline said it is looking into the incident. "My crew is crying because of you," the IndiGo air-hostess is heard telling the passenger.

The passenger is also heard telling her, "You are a servant of a passenger", to which she responded, "I am an employee and not your servant... I am not your servant." At one point, the passenger said "why are you yelling? Shut up" to the air-hostess, who also asks the former to "shut up", according to the nearly one-minute-long clip that was apparently shot by a passenger in the flight.

A senior official at the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the regulator is looking into the incident and shall take appropriate action.

Hoax social media bomb threat at IGI leads to security drills

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: A social media chat about "bombing and eliminating" Delhi's IGI Airport led to a brief panic and triggered a counter-terrorist security drill at the country's largest civil aviation facility Wednesday, official sources said.

The threat was categorised as "non specific" or hoax around 6:30 am after over an hour of conducting anti-sabotage checks at the facility even as normal passenger traffic continued, they said. Airport security officials, sources told PTI, were informed about a social media post, in reply to another message, that the Indira Gandhi International Airport should be bombed. The chat posts, whose creators are being traced by the police, also talked about "eliminating" the airport, the sources said.

A bomb threat assessment committee (BTAC), comprising security, intelligence and airport operators, was triggered into action soon after the chats were flashed at the IGI control room around 5:15 am.

Delhi cops destroy 2,800 kg of drugs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: The Delhi Police Wednesday destroyed over 2,800 kgs of drugs worth Rs 1,513.05 crore seized under a campaign in the last eight years, officials said.

Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora and members of the disposal committees were present when the drugs were destroyed in an incinerator in Delhi's Nilothi, they said.

The police said effective action is being taken against traffickers under the Centre's Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan' to eradicate the drug menace from Delhi-NCR. The Drug Disposal Committees (DDC) of Delhi Police's Crime Branch and Special Cell shortlisted the seized drugs which were no longer required for any legal proceedings and approval of the competent court was obtained for their destruction, the state-



ment said. The DDCs physically examined, verified the weight and other details of the each of seized items, report of chemical analysis and any other documents and recorded its finding in each case and other mandatory procedures, it said.

The drugs which were destroyed include four kg of Ketamine, five kg Pseudoephedrine, 26.161 kg charas, 3.4 grams LSD, 204 grams of cocaine, 2,372.830 kg of ganja, 213.697 kg heroin/ smack, 22.378 kg crude heroin, 39 bottles Pakvil, 32 tablets Addiso KN, and 238.652 kg psychotropic substances, officials said.

Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora and members of the disposal committees were present when the drugs were destroyed in an incinerator in Delhi's Nilothi

national

of the day quote

The whole world is looking at India's youth with hope because you are the growth engine of the country and India is the growth engine of the world

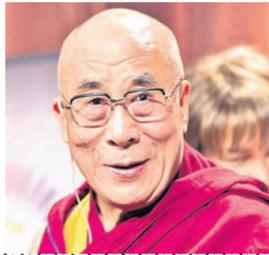
ANURAG THAKUR | UNION MINISTER

Powers have been given to security forces, but some states have said that their powers have been taken away. If we do not give powers to our agencies, how will they be able to work? We must have faith in our security forces, those politicising the issue are supporting drug trafficking

AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Bihar has lesser numbers of liquor deaths as compared to other states but the NHRC came to Chhapra for the investigation. Why it would not go to other states? I can't understand what they would find in Chhapra. We are already investigating the incident

NITISH KUMAR | BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER



In recent decades, (there has been) too much ups and downs. India (is a) democracy, (it has) religious freedom. India respects all religions. That is India's tradition, that is very good

DALAI LAMA | TIBETAN SPIRITUAL LEADER

TOUGH ACTION

Action has been taken against 2,724 corrupt officials, including 248 cases of prosecution sanction in the year 2021, the Parliament was told Wednesday



BJY enters Haryana



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nuh (Haryana), Dec 21: Targeting the BJP, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Wednesday suggested that while his party gave voice to farmers and labourers another ideology benefited only a select few. As the Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY) led by him crossed over into Haryana from Rajasthan, Gandhi also slammed the ruling party over inflation and unemployment. On BJP leaders questioning the need for him to undertake the Kanyakumari to Kashmir march, the former Congress president said he is "opening a shop of love in the market of hate" through the yatra. "When these people go out to spread

hatred in this country, people of our ideology go out to spread love and affection," he said, addressing a large gathering that had turned up braving the morning chill. "This is not a new fight. Don't think that this fight is today's, of the 21st century. This fight is thousands of years old and the two ideologies have been fighting."

The yatra resumed from Patan Udaipuri in Haryana's Nuh district, entering it from neighbouring Rajasthan. Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, his former deputy Sachin Pilot and state party chief Govind Singh Dotasara accompanied the yatra into the state, run by a BJP-led coalition. It was welcomed by Haryana's Leader of the Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Randeep Singh Surjewala, Kumari Selja and Deepender Singh Hooda. Haryana Congress chief Uday Bhan and the newly appointed state in-charge at the AICC, Shaktisinh Gohil, too were in this group.



Pigeons fly over the Dargah Hazratbal Shrine in Srinagar

PTI PHOTO

Biting cold, dense fog grip north India

At least 11 people were injured in the pile-up involving several vehicles on the Lucknow-Gorakhpur National Highway, even as a moderate fog cloaked Delhi where 18 trains were running late by 1:30 to 5 hours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Intense cold and dense fog gripped large swathes of north India Wednesday, significantly reducing visibility, disrupting rail services and causing a vehicle pile-up in Uttar Pradesh while the harshest winter period 'Chilla-i-Kalan' set in Kashmir freezing fringes of many water bodies.

However, three flights were returned or diverted to the Delhi airport due to bad weather in Chandigarh, Varanasi and Lucknow Tuesday night.

Amid low temperatures, high moisture and still winds, a layer of dense to very dense fog persisted over Punjab, Haryana, north-west Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and parts of Uttarakhand, according to India Meteorological Department. At 5:30 am, visibility levels stood at zero in Bhatinda; 25 m in Ganganagar, Amritsar and Bareilly, and 50 m in Varanasi, Bahraich and Ambala.

In a statement issued at 1:30 pm, the IMD said dense to very dense

fog in many/most pockets is very likely over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh during night and morning hours in the next 24 hours due to moisture and light winds at lower tropospheric levels over the Indo-Gangetic plains. According to IMD, very dense fog is when visibility is between 0 and 50 metres, 51 and 200 is dense, 201 and 500 moderate, and 501 and 1,000 shallow.

The Sadarjung Observatory, the primary weather station in Delhi, recorded a minimum temperature of 7.1 degrees Celsius, a notch below normal. The maximum temperature settled at 21.2 degrees Celsius, the lowest so far this season.

The minimum and maximum temperatures are likely to drop to 5 degrees Celsius and 20 degrees Celsius in the next few days. On the Lucknow-Gorakhpur National Highway, a bus overturned after colliding with a truck which led to the pile-up of more than 12 other vehicles. 11 people in vehicles behind the bus were injured.

A day earlier, two persons were killed and 15 injured in separate ac-



A vendor sits near a bonfire to keep himself warm on a cold and foggy winter evening in Jammu

PTI PHOTO

cidents amid low visibility due to dense fog in different districts of Uttar Pradesh. A dense fog also enveloped several places in Uttar Pradesh Wednesday morning with people across districts braving a severe cold with dropping night temperature.

According to the report of the Meteorological Centre, Lucknow, most areas in the eastern and western parts of the state witnessed fog in the morning and a drop in temperature. During the last 24 hours, a significant drop in day temperature was recorded in Moradabad and Meerut divisions of the state, it said. Prayagraj, Bareilly, Moradabad, Ayodhya, Kanpur, and Bareilly too saw a drop in day temperatures. Fursatganj was the cold-

est place in the state in the last 24 hours with temperature there dropping to 4.9 degree Celsius. In the next 24 hours, a dense fog is expected in the morning and evening in Maharajganj, Siddharthnagar, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Deoria, Sant Kabir Nagar, Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Amroha, and Bijnor.

Kashmir's harshest winter period 'Chilla-i-Kalan' began on Wednesday with the mercury dropping several notches below the freezing point at many places including Pahalgam, which recorded the lowest night temperature at minus 6.2 degrees Celsius. 'Chilla-i-Kalan' is a 40-day period when a cold wave grips Kashmir and temperatures drop considerably.

MAHA-K'TAKA BORDER ROW

Will enter K'taka as China entered India: Sanjay Raut

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 21: Shiv Sena-UBT MP Sanjay Raut Wednesday threatened to enter Karnataka just as China has entered Indian territory and nobody's permission is needed for that, as a fresh war of words erupted out on the contentious border dispute with Maharashtra.

"Just like China has entered (India), we will also enter (Karnataka). We do not need anyone's permission for this. We are keen to resolve it (the dispute) through negotiations, but the Karnataka Chief Minister is igniting the fire," Raut said grimly.

Charging that there is a "weak government" in Maharashtra which is not taking a stand, he pointed out that the border row is 70 years old and "we have nothing against the people of Karnataka, but it is also a question of humanity".

Raut sought to know when Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis went to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi last week, "whether they were told to keep quiet" in the matter.

The latest salvo came even as the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) urged the Shinde-Fadnis government to adopt a tough stance vis-a-vis the latest aggressive posturing by Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai.

Leader of Opposition in Assembly Ajit Pawar said: "This is despite the intervention by Shah and the matter pending in the Supreme Court. We urge you to take a strong stand on the issue



The way China has invaded (Indian territory), we will do the same in Karnataka. We do not need anyone's permission to do so

SANJAY RAUT | SHIV SENA (UBT) LEADER

in the wake of Bommai's latest moves and utterances."

He demanded that both houses of the Maharashtra Legislature must pass unanimous resolutions supporting the Marathi-speaking people in the Karnataka border villages and our territorial claims on them.

"We had sought this in the Business Advisory Committee meeting and the government had assured it would be done. The government should bring the resolution and we shall support it," said Pawar.

Congress President Nana Patole sought to know why the Shinde-Fadnis government is keeping silent against what he termed as "dadagiri" (bullying) tactics of Karnataka.

Excise Minister Shambhuraj Desai asserted that Karnataka is speaking about "not giving even one inch of land... we will also not concede half-an-inch of our territory".

SHORT TAKES

3 ED officers promoted

New Delhi: Three Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers have been promoted as Special Directors, according to an official order issued Wednesday. Satyabrata Kumar, a 2004-batch Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer of the Customs and Indirect Taxes cadre, has been appointed as the Special Director for the western region of the agency, while 2002-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Sonia Narang has been appointed in the same rank and she will look after the central region and the special task force (STF) of the ED. Monika Sharma, a 2003-batch IRS officer of the Income Tax cadre, has been appointed as the Special Director and she will head the headquarters investigation unit-1, adjudication, systems and training wings.

Boy killed buried in field by uncle, cousin

Baghatp (UP): The body of a 7-year-old boy, who was missing for the last five days, was recovered from a sugarcane field here. The deceased minor, identified as Shaurya a.k.a Suryansh, had gone missing December 15 while on his way back from tuition class. The police said Wednesday that the boy was allegedly killed by his uncle and cousin. Three people, including the uncle and cousin, have been detained by the police. According to the police, the boy's uncle, cousin, and another man had abducted the boy to extort money because the victim's grandfather had recently retired from government service and received a lot of cash with which he had bought some land too.

TTE molests German woman

Jaipur: A 25-year-old German woman was allegedly molested by a travelling ticket examiner of the Indian Railways, an official said. The accused travelling ticket examiner (TTE), identified as Vishal Singh Shekhawat, has already been suspended, he added.

Couple jumps into well with daughter

Jaipur: A married couple died by suicide by jumping into a well along with their four-year-old daughter in Rajasthan's Pali district Wednesday, police said. The incident happened in Sanjhi village. The couple had a three-year-old son, who was unwell.

WhatsApp bans 37L accounts in Nov

The banned WhatsApp accounts in India include 99 lakh accounts which were barred proactively before being flagged by users

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Instant messaging platform WhatsApp Wednesday said it banned 37.16 lakh accounts in India in November, about 60 per cent more than the accounts it barred in the preceding month.

The banned WhatsApp accounts in India include 9.9 lakh accounts which were barred proactively be-



fore being flagged by users. In October, WhatsApp had banned 23.24 lakh accounts in the country, including 8.11 lakh accounts which were barred proactively.

"Between 1 Nov, 2022 and 30 Nov, 2022, 3,716,000 WhatsApp accounts were banned. 990,000 of these accounts were proactively banned, before any reports from users. An Indian account is identified via a +91 phone number," WhatsApp

CONSENSUAL RELATIONSHIPS

In a written reply to a question whether the government is considering changing the age of consent for consensual relationships to 16 years from the present 18 years, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said the question "does not arise"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Government has no plans to reduce the age of consent for consensual relationships, the Rajya Sabha was informed Wednesday.

In a written reply to a question whether the government is considering changing the age of consent for consensual relationships to 16 years from the present 18 years, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said the question "does not arise". The minister said the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences

(POCSO) Act, 2012 enacted to safeguard children from sexual abuse and sexual offences clearly defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years.

The Act was further amended in 2019 to introduce more stringent punishment, including death penalty for committing sexual crimes on children, with a view to deter the perpetrators and prevent such crimes against children.

"In case of commission of offence by child and termination of age by Special Court," the minister said.



ing its reasons for such determination," Irani said. The minister added that The Majority Act, 1875, which was amended in 1999, provides 18 years as the age for attainment of majority.

In reply to another written question on child marriages, the minister informed the Rajya Sabha that number of cases of child

marriages reported has increased over the last few years as per the data of National Crime Records Bureau, but added that it does not necessarily reflect increase in the number of cases of child marriages, but may be because of increased awareness.

In 2019, 523 cases of child marriage were reported, in 2020 it was 785, and in 2021, it was 1050. "Higher reporting of cases does not necessarily reflect increase in the number of cases of child marriages, but it may be because of increased awareness among citizens to report such incidents due to initiatives such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Women Helpline (181) and Childline (1098) implemented by the Ministry and better enforcement of law by states/Union Territories," Irani said.

of the day quote

After the explosions on Nord Stream - which, it appears nobody in the European Union is going to objectively investigate - Russia stopped gas transportation through the northern routes

SERGEI LAVROV | FOREIGN MINISTER, RUSSIA

We will launch the campaign to put everyone before their legal and historical responsibilities to provide international protection for the defenceless Palestinian people in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza

MAHMOUD ABBAS | PRESIDENT, PALESTINE

Resurgence in terrorism poses a renewed threat to our national security. Our valiant security forces are fully capable of dealing with this threat

SHEHBAZ SHARIF | PRIME MINISTER, PAKISTAN

SHORT TAKES

Landslide death count reaches 26

Kuala Lumpur: The death count from a landslide at an unauthorised campsite in Malaysia rose to 26 after search and rescue teams Wednesday found the body of a man in a tight embrace with his dog, officials said. Seven people are still missing after a pre-dawn landslide Friday hit the site located at an organic farm near the town of Batang Kali in Selangor state, just north of the capital Kuala Lumpur. About 680 personnel from various agencies led by the fire and rescue department and the police are involved in the rescue operations.

More than 100 Rohingya stuck

Mumbai: At least 100 ethnic Rohingya are stranded in a boat off Andaman Islands and as many as 16-20 may have died of thirst, hunger or drowned, said two Myanmar Rohingya activist groups. Each year many Rohingya, members of a Muslim minority, risk their lives boarding rickety vessels to escape violence in Myanmar and squalor in Bangladesh refugee camps. Many attempt to reach Malaysia. The stranded boat was approached by five Indian ships late on Tuesday, a source told news agency Reuters.

Nepal PM elected Parl party leader

Kathmandu: Nepali Congress President and Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has been elected the parliamentary leader of the party. Deuba is widely seen as next Prime Minister of the Himalayan nation from the ruling coalition. But he is also challenged by Chairman of the CPN (Maoist Center) Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda. In an election held on Wednesday to elect the parliamentary party leader, Deuba secured 64 votes to claim the victory.

Murder charges on 8 teen girls

Toronto: Eight teenage girls who apparently met on social media have been charged with second-degree murder in the stabbing death of a 59-year-old man in Toronto, police said Tuesday. Investigators allege that the girls assaulted and stabbed the man in the city's downtown core early Sunday morning. According to police, the eight girls were arrested near where the attack happened. Three of the girls are 13 years old, three are 14 and two are 16.



Let us think of the many children in Ukraine who suffer, suffer so much, because of this war
POPE FRANCIS | CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADER

RECORD VISAS BY CANADA

Canada has processed an all-time high of 4.8 million visa applications in 2022, nearly twice the 2.5 million processed during the same period last year, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)



CHINA'S COVID CATASTROPHE

HEARSES QUEUE AT BEIJING CREMATORIUM

Several prominent scientists and World Health Organization advisers said a potentially devastating wave to come in China means it may be too early to declare the end of the global pandemic emergency

REUTERS

Beijing, Dec 21: Dozens of hearses queued outside a Beijing crematorium Wednesday, even as China reported no new Covid-19 deaths in its growing outbreak, sparking criticism of its virus accounting as the capital braces for a surge of cases.

Following widespread protests, the country of 1.4 billion people this month began dismantling its unpopular "zero-Covid" regime of lockdowns and testing that had largely kept the virus under control for three years though at great economic and psychological cost.

The abrupt change of policy has caught a fragile health system unprepared and hospitals are scrambling for beds and blood, pharmacies for drugs, and authorities are racing to build special clinics.

At a crematorium in Beijing's Tongzhou district, a Reuters witness saw a queue of about 40 hearses waiting to enter while the parking lot was full.

Inside, family and friends, many wearing traditional white clothing and headbands of mourning, gathered around about 20 coffins awaiting cremation. Staff wore

hazmat suits and smoke rose from five of the 15 furnaces. There was a heavy police presence outside the crematorium. Reuters could not verify whether the deaths were caused by Covid. Some Beijing residents have to wait for days to cremate relatives or pay steep fees to secure faster service, funeral home workers said.

'2020 MINDSET'

China uses a narrow definition of Covid deaths and reported no new fatalities for Tuesday, even crossing one off its overall tally since the pandemic began, now at 5,241 - a fraction of the tolls of many much less populous countries.

The National Health Commission said Tuesday only deaths caused by pneumonia and respiratory failure in patients who had the virus are classified as Covid deaths.

Benjamin Mazer, an assistant professor of pathology at Johns Hopkins University, said that classification would miss "a lot of cases", especially as people who are vaccinated, including with Chinese shots, are less likely to die of pneumonia.

Blood clots, heart problems and



It doesn't make sense to apply this sort of March 2020 mindset where it's only Covid pneumonia that can kill you. There's all sorts of medical complications
China reports no new deaths; some criticise its accounting
Beijing faces surge in severe Covid in next two weeks - expert
Experts predict China could face over a million deaths next year

BENJAMIN MAZER | ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PATHOLOGY, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

sepsis - an extreme body response to infection - have caused countless deaths among Covid patients around the world.

'ACT QUICKLY'

The death toll might rise sharply in the near future, with the state-run Global Times newspaper citing a Chinese respiratory expert predicting a spike in severe cases in Beijing over the coming weeks.

"We must act quickly and prepare fever clinics, emergency and se-

vere treatment resources," Wang Guangfa, a respiratory specialist from Peking University First Hospital, told the newspaper.

Wang expected the Covid wave to peak in late January, with life likely to return to normal by late February or early March.

The NHC also played down international concern about the possibility of virus mutations, saying the likelihood of new strains that are more pathogenic was low. Paul Tambyah, President of the

Afghan women weep as Taliban enforce univ ban

Despite initially promising a more moderate rule respecting rights for women and minorities, the Taliban have widely implemented their strict interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, since they seized power in August 2021



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kabul, Dec 21: Taliban security forces in the Afghan capital Wednesday enforced a higher education ban for women by blocking their access to universities, with video obtained by The Associated Press showing women weeping and consoling each other outside one campus in Kabul.

The country's Taliban rulers a day earlier ordered women nationwide to stop attending private and public universities effective immediately and until further notice. The Taliban-led administration has not given a reason for the ban or reacted to the fierce and swift global condemnation of it.

Journalists saw Taliban forces outside four Kabul universities Wednesday. The forces stopped some women from entering, while allowing others to go in and finish their work. They also tried to pre-

vent any photography, filming and protests from taking place.

Rahimullah Nadeem, a spokesman for Kabul University, confirmed that classes for female students had stopped. He said some women were allowed to enter the campus for paperwork and administrative reasons, and that four graduation ceremonies were held Wednesday.

Members of an activist group called the Unity and Solidarity of Afghanistan Women gathered outside the private Edrak University in Kabul Wednesday morning, chanting slogans in Dari.

"Do not make education political!" they said. "Once again unisex is banned for women, we do not want to be eliminated!"

Taliban have banned girls from middle school and high school, barred women from most fields of employment and ordered them to wear head-to-toe clothing in public. Women are also banned from parks and gyms.

A letter shared by the spokesman for the Ministry of Higher Education, Ziaullah Hashmi, Tuesday told private and public universities to implement the ban as soon as possible and to inform the ministry once the ban is in place.

US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said late Tuesday that no other country in the world bars women and girls from receiving an education.



MIGRANTS' PLIGHT: A migrant child, traveling with his family as they seek for asylum, sits near to members of the Texas National Guard and Texas State Troopers on the banks of the Rio Bravo river, the border between the United States and Mexico, seen from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

Zelensky in US to seek more arms

REUTERS

Kyiv, Dec 21: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has often astonished the world with his trips to the battlefield but his visit to Washington to press for military aid has delivered the biggest surprise of the 10 months since Russia invaded his country.

"On my way to the United States to strengthen resilience and defence capabilities of Ukraine," Zelensky said on his Twitter account early Wednesday.

Zelensky said the visit was meant to strengthen Ukraine's "resilience and defence capabilities" amid repeated Russian

missile and drone attacks on the country's energy and water supplies in the dead of winter.

He is due to meet President Joe Biden and visit Congress and to plead for more weaponry to resist Russia's relentless attacks on energy targets that have left millions of Ukrainians without heat and light in the midst of the Ukrainian winter.

"The fight is here," Zelensky said in response to a US offer to evacuate him from Kyiv when the war broke out, the Ukrainian embassy in Britain said at the time.

His political adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said the visit showed the high degree of trust between



the two countries and offered him the opportunity to explain what weapons Kyiv needs.

"This finally puts an end to the attempts by the Russian side ... to prove an allegedly growing

cooling in our bilateral relations," Podolyak told Reuters. "This, of course, is not even close. The United States unequivocally supports Ukraine."

Biden will announce nearly \$2 billion in further military assistance for Ukraine that will include a Patriot missile battery to help it defend itself against barrages of Russian missiles, a senior US official said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was defiant on Wednesday at an end-of-year meeting of top defence chiefs, saying Russian forces were fighting like heroes in Ukraine, would be equipped with modern weapons and would achieve all Moscow's goals.

Signs of Salome, nurse to baby Jesus, unearthed

REUTERS

Lachish Forest, Dec 21: Excavations of a cave reputed to be the burial place of Salome, said in non-canonical scripture to have been nurse to the newborn Jesus, have found more signs it was both an important Jewish tomb and a Christian pilgrimage site, archaeologists say.

The Book of James, among early Christian writings called the Apocrypha which are not included in the Bible, describes Salome as doubting the account of the virgin birth. Stricken in one arm, she cradles the baby, proclaims him "a great king ... born unto Israel," and is cured.

Work to prepare the 2,000-year-old cave for public access unearthed a 350 square-metre (3,767-square-



foot) forecourt whose stone slabs and mosaic floors are consistent with a family tomb for prominent Jews, the Israel Antiquities

Authority (IAA) said.

Also found were inscriptions - some in Arabic - and decorated oil lamps consistent with the site having served Christian pilgrims, including through to the ninth century after the Muslim conquest of the region, the IAA said.

The site, about 35 km (22 miles) southwest of Bethlehem, has been known for generations as the Cave of Salome.

Earlier excavations located Jewish relics "but the surprise was the adaptation of the cave into a Christian chapel," the IAA said. "Judging by the crosses and the dozens of inscriptions engraved on the cave walls in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods, the chapel was dedicated to the sacred Salome."

NK to hold kids' union congress after 5 years

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Seoul, Dec 21: North Korea will convene a congress of a major youth group in Pyongyang for the first time in five years, according to its state media Wednesday.

Members of the Korean Children's Union (KCU) across the country arrived in the capital Tuesday to attend the 9th Congress of the KCU, the North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said, without specifying when the event will open.

"The Ninth Congress of the Korean Children's Union ... will mark a significant occasion in fully demonstrating the courageous spirit of the KCU members who are growing up to be reserves to shoul-



der the future of socialist Korea," Yonhap News Agency quoted the KCNA as saying in a report

The KCU's 8th Congress took place in June 2017, while the 7th was held in 2013. The North's leader Kim Jong-un took part in both events. The KCU, formed in 1946, is a youth organisation composed of children aged 7 to 13. Its members are known for wearing red neckerchiefs.

THE YEAR OF WAR



This was the year war returned to Europe. Russia's invasion of Ukraine plunged Europe into its biggest land battle since World War II, igniting a conflict that has killed thousands, displaced millions, pulverised Ukrainian cities and damaged the global economy. The skirmish revived Cold War-era enmity between Russia and the West, pushing Sweden and Finland to seek NATO membership and prompting NATO nations to flood troops and weapons into Eastern Europe. Orissa POST takes a deep look at the ongoing humanitarian crisis

NUCLEAR FEAR

Russian TV broadcasts, since the invasion of Ukraine, have repeatedly discussed nuclear strikes on Western cities like Paris or New York

NATO's chief has expressed a worry that fighting in Ukraine could spiral out of control and become an all-out conflict between Russia and NATO

CRIMEA BRIDGE ATTACK

Chaos, crisis, catastrophe

Since the invasion began in February Russia made most of its gains in the first month of the war when it seized Kherson, surrounded Mariupol, and was on the doorsteps of Kyiv and Kharkiv. But Russia soon gave up on Kyiv and withdrew all its forces from the north.

In the first week of the counter offensive, Ukraine liberated more territory than Russia had captured in the previous five months. The success of the counter offensive showed that Ukraine's military was superior to Russia's in every category with the exception of size. The Ukrainians were able to conquer much of the territory without using many troops on the ground. Instead, Ukraine used long-range rockets supplied by the US and NATO allies to bombard Russian bases and supply lines that were previously unreachable. After nine months of fighting, the Russian military has shown itself incapable of seizing and holding a large part of Ukraine.

With the help of western air defence systems, Ukraine was shooting down 50 per cent of Russian missiles in October and is now intercepting over 80 per cent of them. For the energy industry, 2022 will be remembered as the year Russia's invasion of Ukraine accelerated a global crisis.

The invasion, and subsequent Western sanctions, heaped new pressures on oil and gas supplies already strained from the rapid economic rebound from the pandemic. The world's top energy companies beat a hasty retreat from Russia and wrote off tens of billions of dollars in assets. As for NATO, 10 alliance members have expressed support for a membership path for Ukraine, nine in central Europe plus Canada.

Other allies have generally remained silent or noncommittal, reflecting the fact that many, while prepared to provide Ukraine financial and military assistance, are not prepared to go to war with Russia to defend Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Putin made a rare trip this week to Moscow's ally Belarus. Putin's visit came hours after Russia's latest drone attack on Ukraine. Moscow has been targeting Ukraine's power



The war between Russia and Ukraine has not yet come to an end. It continues to cause severe damage to human lives and properties. Russia has not shown any signs of stopping the war, despite numerous sanctions from various parts of the world

14MN UKRAINIANS DISPLACED

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has driven some 14 million Ukrainians from their homes in "the fastest, largest displacement witnessed in decades," sparking an increase in the number of refugees and displaced people worldwide to more than 103 million, the UN refugee chief said. Filippo Grandi, who heads the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, told the UN Security Council that Ukrainians are about to face "one of the world's harshest winters in extremely difficult circumstances," including the continuing destruction of civilian infrastructure that is "quickly making the humanitarian response look like a drop in the ocean of needs" making a landmark shift from encampment of refugees to inclusion — a transition that I hope all will robustly support.



HIGHLIGHTS

- FEBRUARY:** Russian forces march into Ukraine from the north, in an attempt to gain control of Kyiv and with the intention of overthrowing the Ukrainian government.
- MARCH:** Kherson became the first and only regional capital to be captured by Russian forces.
- APRIL:** Russia begins an offensive to take control of Donetsk and Luhansk, two territories which have witnessed conflict since 2014. Russia launches a missile strike on Ukrainian infrastructure, which leads to 50 civilians dying, as a result of a strike on a train station in Kramatorsk.
- MAY:** Russian forces start an operation to take control of Mariupol.
- JUNE:** Ukrainian forces regain control of Snake Island, which is a tiny island in the Black Sea, near the Ukrainian port city of Odesa.
- JULY:** Lysychansk, which was the last city in Luhansk under the control of Ukrainians, finally falls to Russia.
- AUGUST:** Ukraine finally launches its much-awaited counter-offensive.
- SEPTEMBER:** The surprise Ukrainian counter-offensive directed towards Kharkiv succeeds. Ukrainian forces recapture major chunks of the Kharkiv oblast, including the strategically important city of Izium, which is a key logistics hub.
- OCTOBER:** After the attack on the Crimean bridge, which connects the Crimean peninsula with the Russian mainland, Russian forces start bombing cities across Ukraine. Russian forces rely on Iranian Shahed drones, to carry out the strikes, as per the analysis of western intelligence agencies.
- NOVEMBER:** Russian forces start retreating from Kherson. General Sergey Shoygu, the Russian defence minister, states in a televised address that protecting the lives of Russian soldiers is important, adding that Kherson is not defensible.
- DECEMBER:** Putin made a rare trip this week to Moscow's ally Belarus as his forces pursued their campaign to torment Ukraine from the air amid a broad battlefield stalemate almost 10 months into the war. Russian forces fired dozens of missiles across Ukraine. Ukrainian officials said Russia fired more than 70 missiles in one of its heaviest barrages since the invasion.

Banished from public consciousness for decades, the nightmare of Nuclear warfare has surged back to prominence with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, highlighting the erosion of the Cold War global security architecture.

With Moscow on the back foot in its offensive, the military stalemate has raised fears Russia could resort to its nuclear arsenal to achieve a military breakthrough. Russia, along with Britain, China, France and the United States, are the five recognised Nuclear weapons powers and permanent UN Security Council members. For now, the moral and strategic nuclear "taboo" that emerged after the US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II in 1945 still holds. But rhetoric has escalated massively. India, North Korea and Pakistan, along with the five recognised powers, also have nuclear

weapons, while Israel is widely assumed to do so while having never officially acknowledged it.

North Korea sharply stepped up missile testing this year, continuing its pursuit of an independent nuclear deterrent that began when it quit the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003.

Washington, Seoul and Tokyo all believe a seventh nuclear weapons test by Pyongyang is imminent. The isolated dictatorship announced in September a new nuclear doctrine, making clear that it would never give up the weapons and that they could be used preemptively.

Non-nuclear countries in the region fear that the protection provided by the US nuclear umbrella is fraying. The invasion of a state that willingly gave up nuclear weapons, Ukraine, by its nuclear-armed neighbor has increased fears of proliferation.

COST OF THE INVASION

DEATH
As of December second week, more than 6,700 civilian deaths in Ukraine were reported due to the Russian invasion. OHCHR specified that the real figures could be higher. The United States' top general estimated November 9 that Russia and Ukraine had each seen more than 1,00,000 of their soldiers dead or wounded.

MISERY
One third of Ukrainians have been forced from their homes, the largest current human displacement crisis in the world. There are currently more than 7.8 million refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe, with the biggest numbers in Poland, Russia and Germany.

UKRAINE
Besides the human losses, Ukraine has lost control of around 22% of its land to



Russians since the 2014 annexation of Crimea. It has lost a swathe of coastline, its economy has been crippled and some cities have been turned into wastelands by Russian shelling.

RUSSIA
The war has been expensive for Russia too - though it does not disclose the costs which are state secrets. Besides the military costs, the West has tried to punish Moscow by imposing severe sanctions - the biggest shock to Russia's economy since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

ECHOES OF WAR CRIMES

There is a body in the basement of the abandoned yellow home at the end of the street near the railroad tracks. The man is young, pale, a dried trickle of blood by his mouth, shot to death and left in the dark, and no one knows why the Russians brought him there, to a home that wasn't his.

There is a pile of toys near the stairs to the basement. Plastic

clothespins sway on an empty line under a cold, gray sky. They are all that's left of normal on this blackened end of the street in Bucha, where tank treads lay stripped from charred vehicles, civilian cars are crushed, and ammunition boxes are stacked beside empty Russian military rations and liquor bottles.

Ukraine has seen the horrors of Mariupol, Kharkiv, Chernihiv



and nearby Irpin. But the images from this town an hour's drive from Kyiv -- of bodies burned, bodies with hands bound, bodies strewn near bicycles and flattened cars --

have seared themselves into global consciousness like no others.

In one backyard in Bucha are three graves, dug by neighbors too scared to put them elsewhere. Grenades were tossed into basements, bodies thrown into wells. An elderly man at a nursing home was found dead in his bed, apparently of neglect, while a younger person, perhaps a caregiver, lay outside, shot to death. Women in their 70s were told not to stick their heads out of their houses or they'd be killed. Many Bucha residents describe similar, frightening encounters. A building was used as a base by the Russians; residents were forced to stay in the garbage-strewn basement. It was cold and crowded, with about 100 people. They used buckets for toilets.

Experts assist sexual violence investigation



An international team of legal advisers has been working with local prosecutors in Ukraine's recaptured city of Kherson in recent days as they began gathering evidence of alleged sexual crimes by Russian forces as part of a full-scale investigation. The visit by a team from Global Rights Compliance, an international legal practice headquartered in The Hague, has not previously been reported. Their efforts are part of a broader international effort to support overwhelmed Ukrainian authorities as they seek to hold Russians accountable for crimes they allegedly committed during the conflict, now nearly 10 months old.

RUSSIA USING 40-YR-OLD ROUNDS

Russia is turning to decades-old ammunition with high failure rates as it burns through its stockpiles to carry out its nearly 10-month-old invasion of Ukraine, a senior US military official said. The United States accuses Russia of turning to Iran and North Korea for more firepower as it exhausts its regular supplies of ammunition. The official assessed that Russia would burn through its fully-serviceable stocks of ammunition by early 2023 if it did not resort to foreign suppliers and older stocks.

PUTIN CRITIC JAILED

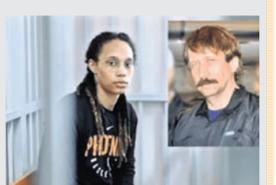
A prominent Russian opposition figure was recently sentenced to 8.1/2 years in prison after being convicted on charges stemming from his criticism of the Kremlin's action in Ukraine. The sentence handed to Ilya Yashin, one of the few Kremlin critics to have stayed in Russia, offered the latest indication of an intensified crackdown on dissent by Russian authorities. International human rights groups have denounced it as a mockery of justice and called for Yashin's immediate release.

EU REACHES DEAL ON AID

The European Union reached a deal in principle to send an 18 billion euro (\$18.93 billion) financial aid package to Ukraine and approve a minimum tax on major corporations in a big move that narrowed a rift between the bloc and recalcitrant member Hungary. The 27 envoys of the EU nations reached a tentative agreement in a deal that also sees Budapest getting a bigger part of promised funds that had long been in jeopardy over complaints by the other member states that Prime Minister Viktor Orban had veered away from the democratic rule of law.

PRISONER SWAP

In a reminder that Moscow maintains lines of communication with the West despite the war, the United States said Russia had freed US basketball player Brittney Griner in return for the release of Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout. However, the Kremlin said the prisoner swap should not be seen as a step towards improving bilateral ties between Moscow and Washington, saying they remained "in a sorry state". Russian state media have cast the release of Bout as a political "win" for Putin. The White House said the prisoner swap would not change its commitment to the people of Ukraine.



SURGERY IN FLASHLIGHT

Russian strikes have cut off power across Ukraine, including many hospitals. The power outages added more pressure on the country's already weakened healthcare system. Oleh Duda was in the middle of a complex surgery at a hospital in Lviv, Ukraine, when he heard explosions. Moments later, the lights went out. Duda had to keep working with only a headlamp for light. The operation took place November 15. That day, the city in western Ukraine suffered outages as Russia launched missiles at Ukraine's energy supply.

business

of the day quote

The government is taking steps to increase production of their produce, improve packaging, branding, marketing. We are using platforms like Amazon and Flipkart also for tribal products

Since April 2020, 98 FDI proposals from countries sharing land border with India were approved by various administrative ministries/departments

This country should keep UPI free till the period more than a majority of shopkeepers and customers are making payments by digital mobile payments system

SHORT TAKES

India inks 13 FTAs

New Delhi: India has signed 13 free trade agreements (FTAs) and six preferential pacts so far with its trading partners for ensuring greater market access for domestic goods and promoting exports, Union minister Anupriya Patel said Wednesday.

Byju's in soup

New Delhi: The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has claimed that the edtech company Byju's is allegedly purchasing the phone numbers of kids and their parents and threatening them that their future will be ruined if they do not buy courses from it.

Elin Electronics IPO subscribed 95%

New Delhi: The Initial Public Offer (IPO) of electronics manufacturing services company Elin Electronics was subscribed 95 per cent on the second day of subscription Wednesday.

Viacom18 secures Olympic's rights

New Delhi: Viacom18 Media has secured exclusive media rights to broadcast the next Olympic Games, which will be held in Paris in 2024, in India and the subcontinent region.

TWITTER TWISTER

Since buying Twitter for \$44 billion and taking over as the CEO in late October, Musk, who also runs Tesla and SpaceX, has journeyed from one controversy to the next

New York, Dec 21: Twitter's new owner billionaire Elon Musk said he will resign as the social media company's chief executive as soon as he finds "someone foolish enough to take the job," two days after users voted for him to quit in a poll he ran online.

RBI could hike repo rate to 6.75% in '23

Mumbai, Dec 21: The Reserve Bank of India could take the key policy rate to 6.75% next year, as core inflation stays elevated and the US Federal Reserve continues to hike rates, treasury head of IDBI Bank said today.

"The focus will now be on core inflation that continues to be above 6%. Some other components in inflation have also shown an uptick. So, it is too early to say that inflation has come within the RBI's tolerance band," Arun Bansal, executive director, and head of treasury at IDBI Bank, said in an interview.

"The RBI will also have to be mindful of the rupee's depreciation and the narrowing interest rate differential with the US. There is still a 60% probability that the terminal repo rate is hiked to 6.75%."

The RBI has raised repo rate by 25 basis points since May to 6.25% as it continues its fight against inflation. In contrast, the US Federal Reserve raised interest rates by 425 bps to 4.25%-4.50%.

The Fed is set to raise rates to above 5% in 2023, which may force India's central bank to also follow suit, the treasury official said.

He expects the Indian rupee to remain vulnerable, with a possibility of hitting a fresh record low, as the dollar index braces to rise again. "We may see another 1.00-1.50 rupee move on the exchange rate against the dollar on the downside. We are not expecting much appreciation on the rupee at least until there is a sustained increase in foreign flows to India," Arun Bansal said.

The currency was at 82.81 against the dollar, and down 11.4% so far in 2022.

Bansal expects the benchmark 7.26% 2032 bond yield to stay in the 7.00%-7.35% band in the near term, and rules out chances of any major increase, even if the repo rate reaches 6.75%.

"Most of the negatives are also priced in," he said, adding that any increase in yields after a rate hike will be temporary. "We will see renewed buying at those levels."

Further, Arun Bansal expects a positive development towards inclusion of Indian bonds in global indexes which will aid yields, while value purchase of bonds above 7.30% levels will also help.

He also prefers to bulk up his portfolio with seven-year and 14-year bonds, saying they are far more attractive than the 10-year benchmark note. "Whenever the rate cut cycle starts, these two papers may result in a good investment."

The RBI governor added that the developments over the last one year, which include the latest crash of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, which is termed as one of the biggest financial frauds in the history of the US, illustrate the threat posed by such instruments

Mumbai, Dec 21: Pressing for the prohibition of instruments like Bitcoin, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das Wednesday warned that the next financial crisis can be triggered by private cryptocurrencies, if such speculative instruments are allowed to grow.

Elon Musk to step down as CEO



ised earlier to abide by the result of a Twitter poll which saw 57.5 per cent of users vote "yes" to him quitting the role.

Musk added the tweet to his earlier post Sunday in which he had asked in an online poll if he should step down as head of Twitter: "I will abide by the results of this poll," he had said.

I will resign as CEO as soon as I find someone foolish enough to take the job. After that, I will just run the software and servers teams

Over 17 million votes were cast in the poll that began Sunday evening and ended early Monday morning with most respondents voting in the affirmative, CNN reported. Musk had not immediately reacted to the outcome of the vote and declared two days after the poll that he will resign as soon as he finds someone foolish enough to take the job.

He had tweeted on Sunday: "Should I step down as head of Twitter? I will abide by the results of this poll".

"As the saying goes, be careful what you wish, as you might get it," Musk added in a later tweet. A total of 57.5 per cent voted "yes" after Musk asked his 122 million followers whether he should stand down.

In the past, Musk has obeyed Twitter polls. He's fond of quoting the phrase "vox populi, vox dei", a Latin phrase that roughly means "the voice of the people is the voice of God".

The poll comes as Twitter says it will shut down accounts solely designed to promote other social media platforms.

The measure would also affect accounts that link off to or contain usernames from platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Mastodon,

Truth Social, Tribel, Nostr and Post, the company said in a tweet. But cross-content posting from other sites will still be allowed. Twitter had already blocked users from sharing some links to Mastodon, the platform many Twitter users moved to after Musk's takeover.

Musk's announcement was the latest in a series of decisions by Twitter to generate blowback, after the suspension last week of more than half a dozen journalists who report on Musk.

On Friday, he reinstated a number of journalists he had suspended for allegedly sharing location data about him after the EU and UN called it an attack on press freedom.

Musk has started, stopped, and restarted a revised verification system that costs \$8 for a blue check mark.

COVID WOES

Markets slump as investors spooked

HEALTHCARE STOCKS IN LIMELIGHT AMID RENEWED COVID WORRIES

Mumbai, Dec 21: The Sensex slumped 635 points while the Nifty finished below the 18,200-mark Wednesday as surging Covid cases in China and concerns over renewed outbreaks in other countries sapped risk appetite.

Three cases of Omicron sub-variant BF.7, apparently the strain driving China's current surge of Covid cases, have been detected in India so far, official sources said. Different sets of data modelling indicate that China could be facing a massive death toll after it lifted its stringent zero-Covid policy.

Declining for the second straight day, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 635.05 points or 1.03 per cent to settle at 61,067.24. The broader NSE Nifty declined 186.20 points or 1.01 per cent to end at 18,199.10.

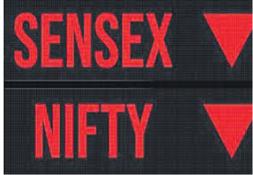
IndusInd Bank was the biggest laggard in the Sensex pack, shedding 2.28 per cent, followed by Maruti Suzuki, UltraTech Cement, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors and Axis Bank.

Sun Pharma topped the index gainers' chart with a jump of 1.67 per cent. HCL Technologies, Tech Mahindra, TCS, Nestle India, Wipro and Infosys were the other winners, climbing as much as 1.01 per cent.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge tumbled 2.18 per cent and midcap index declined 1.40 per cent. Among sectoral indices, utilities declined 2.50 per cent, followed by power (2.40 per cent), services (2.34 per cent), telecommunication (2.32 per cent), industrials (2.13 per cent) and commodities (1.91 per cent). Healthcare and IT ended in the green.

International oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.08 per cent to end at \$80.85 per barrel.

The rupee declined 14 paise to settle at 82.84 against the US dollar Wednesday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought shares worth a net ₹455.94 crore Tuesday.



India to push carbon trading mkt

INDIA HAS COMMITTED TO CUTTING ITS RATIO OF GREENHOUSE EMISSIONS TO GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT BY 2030 TO 45% OF ITS 2005 LEVEL AND TO NET ZERO BY 2070

New Delhi, Dec 21: India is planning a stabilisation fund to keep prices of credits in its planned carbon market above a certain threshold, ensuring that they remain attractive for investors and that the market succeeds in cutting emissions, two government sources said.

Money in the fund would be used by a market regulator to buy carbon credits if prices fell too low, one of the officials said.

Consistent investor interest in credits and a floor under the price would be needed because sharp falls in the market could discourage industries from reducing carbon dioxide emissions, that official added.

Planning envisages the market becoming fully operational in 2026, covering 37% of the country's emissions, according to slides, seen by Reuters, that the Power Ministry has shown to stakeholders. The sources said the government intended to publish the market's rules soon.

In creating a carbon market, a country sets a limit on emissions and then allocates a corresponding quantity of tradable permits, or credits, to emitters. The quantity reduces over time. If a company wants to emit more, it can buy more credits at the market price, but it will also consider whether constraining or even cutting its emis-

Stabilisation fund to make carbon credits attractive-sources

Fund to be used to buy carbon credits if prices fall-sources

Market to become fully operational in 2026-sources

sions might more profitable. Details would be announced next year, said a third person, Samrat Sengupta, vice president for new businesses and market strategy at carbon off-setter EKI Energy Ltd, which has been briefed by the government.

The source said the federal government would set up the stabilisation fund. Exactly how it would work and where the money would come from was still under discussion.

The second source said the World Bank had shown interest in financing the carbon market if a stabilisation mechanism were created. The bank extended an \$8 million grant to India in 2016/17.

"The World Bank continues to remain committed to support India in developing a carbon trading market and other instruments to help scale up financing for key cli-

mate transitions," it said in an email to Reuters.

Beginning in 2008, prices of carbon credits in other countries slumped heavily, because of that year's economic crisis and because governments had issued too many of them.

In the European Union, a credit worth 1 tonne of carbon dioxide traded at just 5 euros in 2012, down from around 30 euros in 2008, so cutting emissions was not very rewarding. But creation of a market stability reserve in 2019, among other measures, has seen the price rise to between 75 and 95 euros per tonne.

MARKET LANDSCAPE The Indian market would cover emissions of carbon dioxide and also five other greenhouse gases valued in terms of their carbon dioxide equivalence, the sources said.

Power Minister RK Singh said last week the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission would probably be the market regulator. In a part of the planned market, participation would be obligatory for entities in a dozen sectors, such as oil refining, steel, aluminium and cement, the sources said. Another part, the voluntary market, would be open to other entities.

India already has a market for trading certificates in above-target energy savings. Entities in 13 sectors must participate.

Green energy companies formed a group in October to mediate between the government and industry. They included Adani Green, owned by billionaire Gautam Adani, Hero Future Energies, Ayana Renewable Power and global private equity major KKR's Virescent Infra.

The targets for reducing each sector's emissions will be set by committees of the environment, power and renewable energy ministries, the two officials said.

India's carbon market is being set up in two phases, according to the government's presentation slides. In the first phase, between 2023 and 2025, the existing energy-savings certificates will be converted to carbon credits.

The government was still considering whether the new market would subsume one in which certificates for renewable energy generation are traded, the two officials said.

JSP launches second edition of 'Yashasvi'

Bhubaneswar: Expanding its ambit to provide financial assistance to more women and girls from weaker sections of society, JSP Foundation, the CSR wing of Jindal Steel & Power (JSP) today launched the second edition of the Yashasvi programme. Chairperson of JSP Foundation Shalini Jindal inaugurated the programme and presented scholarship award letters to 5122 women and girls from Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.



Launching the programme, Jindal said, "Quality education and skill development is still a challenge for many women and girls who belong to disadvantaged sections of society. Yashasvi is a step towards empowering women and girls to break the glass ceiling through education and skill development. We are happy that many girls who received support in the first phase of the programme have got jobs after their training. I am sure the second edition of the Yashasvi programme will enable more women and girls to achieve their goals and realise their aspiration".

Indian Bank holds road show

Sambalpur: Indian Bank, Sambalpur Zone, conducted extensive road show in Sambalpur city under the leadership of Sanchit Kumar Zonal Manager and Md Badruzzama, Deputy Zonal Manager along with all staff members of local branches of Sambalpur to create awareness within customer on various deposit products. Bank also gave wide publicity to the newly launched Term Deposit Product IND SHAKTI giving best interest rate in market and new salary account IND SALARY SURAKSHA which comes with with free Annual Health Insurance up to one lakh and Personal Accident Insurance up to 30 lakh along with many other benefits.



Central Bank celebrates 112th Foundation Day

Bhubaneswar: Central Bank of India celebrated its 112th Foundation Day at regional office, Bhubaneswar. On this occasion, Regional Head, Central Bank of India, Bhubaneswar garlanded the photograph of the Founder Sorabjee Pochkhanawala in the presence of all staff members. The retired executives, officers and employees of the Bank were also invited to grace the occasion. A motivational programme for staff members was also conducted on this occasion followed by customer seminar.



Cryptocurrencies at crossroads after annus horribilis

The RBI governor added that the developments over the last one year, which include the latest crash of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, which is termed as one of the biggest financial frauds in the history of the US, illustrate the threat posed by such instruments

Mumbai, Dec 21: Pressing for the prohibition of instruments like Bitcoin, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das Wednesday warned that the next financial crisis can be triggered by private cryptocurrencies, if such speculative instruments are allowed to grow.

to such instruments and the RBI has gone till the Supreme Court with its contention.

"Cryptocurrencies... have huge inherent risks from macroeconomic and financial stability (perspective) and we have been pointing it out," he said, speaking at an event organised by the Business Standard here.



the developments over the last one year, which include the latest crash of cryptocurrency exchange FTX,

which is termed as one of the biggest financial frauds in the history of the US, illustrate the threat

It's a 100 per cent speculative activity, and I would still hold the view that it should be prohibited... if you try to regulate it and allow it to grow, please mark my words, the next financial crisis will come from private cryptocurrencies

SHAKTIKANTA DAS | GOVERNOR, RESERVE BANK

posed by such instruments. "After all these, I don't think we need to say anything more about our stand," Das said, adding that private cryptocurrencies' valuation has shrunk from \$190 billion to \$140 billion and there is no un-

derlying value for the market-determined price.

He acknowledged that different jurisdictions are taking different stances on it, but the RBI would like to stick to its stance of prohibiting them completely.

Das said the origin of private cryptocurrencies lie in their intent to "break" the system, in not believing in fiat currencies introduced by the central banks and not believing in a regulated financial system. "They want to bypass and beat the system," Das said, adding that he is yet to come across any credible argument which can demonstrate the public good served by such private cryptocurrencies.

INDIA EYE WHITEWASH

Donald lauds bowlers for keeping Virat, Rahul quiet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mirpur, Dec 21: Stand-in skipper KL Rahul would be eager to overcome his lean patch as India are expected to go for the kill in the second Test against Bangladesh, beginning here Thursday, to strengthen their position in the World Test Championship.

The race for the top-two spots in the WTC standings has become more interesting with India (55.77 PCT) moving up to the second position following South Africa's (54.55 PCT) heavy loss to Australia (76.92 PCT) in two-day Gabba Test.

The upcoming home series against Australia will be decisive in India's bid for a second straight WTC final but they also can't afford any slip-ups against Bangladesh, who showed plenty of fight in the

not out in the series-opener.

It was refreshing to see Pujara going for his shots as India needed to accelerate in the second innings. The stage will also be set for Virat Kohli to score his first Test hundred since November 2019.

India batted at more than four runs per over in the second innings and it remains to be seen if that positive approach was only the need of the hour or a sign of things to come.

Considering the conditions, the bowlers will once again be looking to target the stumps, be it the pacers or slower

RAHUL & CO AIM TO SEAL SERIES AS THEY FACE BANGLADESH IN SECOND TEST, STARTING TODAY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mirpur, Dec 21: Bangladesh bowlers have been 'really good' in keeping India star Virat Kohli quiet in the ongoing series and bowling coach Allan Donald expects that to continue in the second Test beginning here Thursday.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam dismissed Kohli with a beauty in the first innings in Chattogram while the former India captain remained unbeaten on 19 in the second essay. Stand-in skipper KL Rahul too found it tough in the first Test.

"They are the prized wickets aren't they, it is like bowling to (Sachin) Tendulkar. You know when that man walks into the crease the value of getting it right is absolutely paramount," Donald told reporters on the eve of the game.



Allan Donald (R) speaks to Mustafizur Rahman during a Bangladesh practice session

"So when the great Virat Kohli steps out and you miss a chance against him, you are going to suffer because they don't give many chances after that. I thought we have been very good against him and KL and hopefully that will continue. Virat is hungry, he wants to leave the series with a hundred under his belt."

"Shakib available to bowl" Donald also informed that Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who did not bowl in the second innings in Chattogram due to a rib injury, is fit to roll his arm over in the final Test.

"Shakib is okay, he will bowl. He was bruised and battered in the one-day game here, but he has gone through that. He is available for selection, and available to bowl," said the South African pace legend.

Donald added that pacer Taskin Ahmed will feature in the second Test. "Taskin is good to go. He wanted to play the last Test but he was very much short of a gallop in terms of rhythm. The build-up in the last Test was crucial for him. He is looking forward to the contest."

Bangladesh are expected to play

with the same bowling combination as the surface is expected to aid the spinners more. "Any selectors here? (laughs) If I am talking out of the room a little bit, it will be the same three spinners and welcoming back Taskin and Khaled as well."

"Sorry to the selectors but I am talking out of the room a little bit. That's what I can see happening. Good news is that Shakib is good to go. Looking at the pitch, I think he will very much come into play," added Donald.

After being bowled out for 150 in the first innings, Bangladesh put up a much improved effort in the second essay to end at 324. However, India won comfortably by 188 runs. "We want to win. It doesn't matter where you play India, you put that in your highest order of achievements. We know 150 didn't cut it for us."

"We have spoken about the values of our partnership. We need to be much more resilient, which we showed in the second innings. We are desperate to win. A lot of people including me want to go home for a delayed Christmas with a win under our belt," said Donald.

first Test after a poor first innings with the bat.

With regular skipper Rohit Sharma yet to recover from his thumb injury, no changes are expected in the Indian playing eleven. The first Test presented a golden opportunity for the likes of Shubman Gill and Kuldeep Yadav and they made it count.

Had Rohit been fit for the game, it would have been extremely difficult to drop Gill following his maiden Test hundred in Chattogram. However, that situation did not arise and Gill will be keen to cash in on another opportunity.

Rahul too would look to lead from the front after the disappointment of his two innings in the first Test. Like Chattogram, the pitch is expected to be slow and decent for batting, providing Rahul an ideal platform to get runs under his belt before the Australia series.

It would be fair to say that Cheteshwar Pujara, who made a comeback with the one-off Test in England, has consolidated his number three position with a 90 and an unusually attacking 102

bowlers. Kuldeep, playing his first Test since February last year, flaunted his artistry with a match haul of eight wickets. Compared to lead spinner R Ashwin and Axar Patel, he was slightly under-bowled in the second innings but the left-arm wrist spinner still managed to take three wickets.

Ashwin could manage only one wicket in spin friendly conditions and he will be looking to make up for that here. Axar displayed his utility to the team with four strikes in the second innings with the batters struggling against his fast left-arm spin.

Bangladesh too will be confident of their chances given how they batted on day four. Rookie opener Zakir Hasan has shown he belongs at this level. Senior batters including Litton Das and Mushfiqur Rahim will be aiming to learn from their mistakes and make big hundreds.

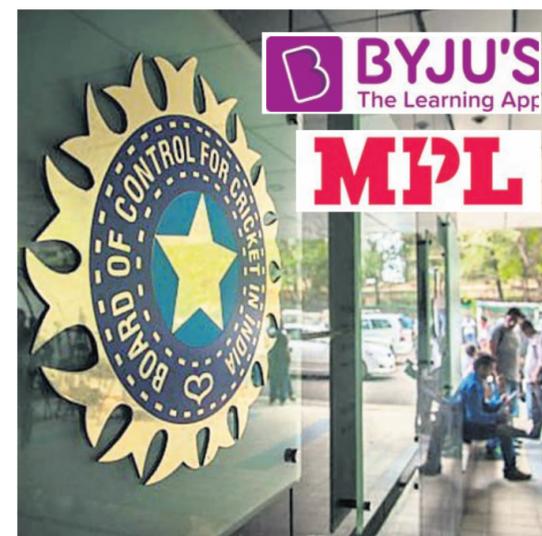
Skipper Shakib Al Hasan did not bowl in the second innings due to an injury and that is why Bangladesh have

added left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed to the squad. Nasum is likely to make his Test debut on Thursday.

Former captain Mominul Haque too could get a game. "He'd be the first to admit that in last year he hasn't got the runs. But he is too good a player to not have around. You cannot lose a player of Mominul's quality. He will definitely be considered for the second Test," said head coach Russell Domingo.



BYJU'S, MPL WANT TO BREAK UP WITH BCCI



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Two of Indian cricket team's main sponsors, edtech major Byju's and MPL sports, want to exit from their sponsorship agreements with the BCCI.

In June, Byju's had extended its jersey sponsorship agreement with the Board until November 2023 for an estimated USD 35 million. Byju's now wants to terminate its agreement with the BCCI which has asked the company to continue at least until March 2023.

"BCCI received an email from Byju's on 4.11.2022 requesting terminating the association post the recently concluded T20 World Cup. As per our discussions with Byju's, we have asked them to continue the current arrangement and continue the partnership at least until 31.3.2023," read a BCCI note on the matter.

The matter was discussed at the BCCI Apex Council meeting Wednesday. The brand had replaced Oppo back in 2019. Byju's was also one of the sponsors of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

The edtech company had recently announced plans to lay off not more than five per cent of its total strength of 50,000.

Team kit and merchandise sponsor had conveyed the BCCI for the complete assignment of its rights

to Kewal Kiran Clothing Limit (KKCL). The existing contract is valid until December 31, 2023. MPL had replaced Nike back in November 2020.

"BCCI received an email communication from MPL sports 2.12.2022 seeking a complete assignment (team + merchandising) at full value to Kewal Kiran Clothing Limited, a fashion wear brand, for the period from 1.12.2023 to 31.12.2023."

"With the upcoming back to back home series and the women's away calendar, it was suggested that the current arrangement should not be hampered as it involves performance gear for the national teams."

"We have asked MPL sports to continue the association at least until 31.3.2023 or look for a partial assignment that would involve only the right chest logo but not the kit manufacturing agreement," the note read.

Earlier this year, Paytm had transferred its title sponsorship rights for Indian cricket's home season to Mastercard.

The Apex Council was expected to decide on the players' central contracts but it would only be done after the formation of the new selection committee. The BCCI had sacked the Chetan Sharma-led panel after the T20 World Cup in Australia.

Warm reception for history-making Morocco team

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Rabat, Dec 21: Tens of thousands of jubilant Moroccans welcomed their national soccer team home after the players exceeded the North African nation's wildest expectations and finished fourth at the World Cup in Qatar.

Fans packed squares and lined up along avenues and streets in and around Rabat, lighting flares, waving flags, dancing to the beat of drums and cheering as an open-top bus carrying the suit and tie-clad players rolled into the capital with a heavy police escort.

Smiling players and coach Walid Regragui waved, blew kisses to their ecstatic fans and snapped selfies against the backdrop of undulating crowds and swinging palm springs.

At some points along the parade route, the crowds spilled from sidewalks onto a four-lane highway carrying the bus. Slowing down the vehicle as it traveled to the royal palace where King Mohammed VI was waiting to receive the players to "celebrate their great and historic accomplishment."

As the first African or Arab team to reach the World Cup semifinals, the Moroccan team, known as the Atlas Lions, made history and was one of the big success stories of the tournament, the first hosted by an Arab nation.

After the team beat former European colonial powers Belgium, Spain and Portugal, it lost to France in the semifinals. Its record-setting performance led to the players receiving a hero's welcome.

"Morocco's run in the 2022 FIFA World Cup will be remembered in the history books as one of the most exciting campaigns since the tournament's inception," café owner Reda Ghazi, 27, told The Associated Press. "It was the dream of every Moroccan to win something, especially because Morocco is a country where the passion for football is overwhelming."

Morocco finished fourth in the competition after losing to Croatia 1-2 in the third-place play-off on Saturday, exceeding the expectations of most Moroccans.

"I still can't wrap my head around what happened in this World Cup," added student Anour El Berkaoui, 23. "The team has now set the bar



Jubilant Morocco fans were present to cheer and applaud their team on their return from FIFA World Cup

so high that we won't be happy with anything less than winning the upcoming African Cup of Nations."

The Moroccan team charmed many Arab soccer fans who saw in the team a reflection of themselves. Players waved the Palestinian flag

after their wins and celebrated on the field with their mothers and children. The team also galvanized support across Africa.

"As an African team, we broke a lot of records and made the whole continent proud," Rabat resident

Omar Zorgane said. "Morocco as a whole will gain a lot from this year's World Cup, from tourism to getting the attention of other countries to possibly hosting one of the biggest tournaments in the world in the future," he said.

ODISHA FC WOMEN REIGN SUPREME



Odisha FC were crowned champions in the Odisha Women's League (OWL) football tournament after beating East Coast Railway (ECOR), who finished as runners-up, 2-1 in their final match of the competition at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday. The win helped them get into the Indian Women's League (IWL). Odisha FC are the second team from the state in IWL after Sports Odisha, who had qualified as the first team following their top-four finish in the last edition of IWL. In the other matches on the day, Sports Odisha defeated OGP Club 2-0 at the Capital Ground, while Odisha Police crushed Rising Student Club 6-0 at the 7th Battalion Ground.

Jiwanjot century props Uttarakhand vs Odisha

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Odisha bowlers had a disappointing day Wednesday as they managed to dismiss only three Uttarakhand batters in 90 overs as skipper Jiwanjot Singh's unbeaten century (174 batting, 306b, 28x4) put the hosts in a commanding position in their Ranji Trophy Elite Group A match in Dehradun.

Resuming the day's play at four for no loss, Uttarakhand reached 308/3 at stumps on Day 2. Swapnil Singh (60 batting, 91b, 3x4, 3x6) was giving Jiwanjot company at the middle when the umpires called off the play for the day. The hosts are already 95 runs ahead of Odisha's first innings total of 213 with seven wickets in hand.

Suryakant Pradhan (1/43) helped Odisha get the first breakthrough of the day inside opening 10 overs of play as he dismissed Priyanshu

Khanduri (6). Jiwanjot was joined by Kunal Chandela (28) at the middle as they played watchfully to add 93 runs for the second wicket.

Odisha got their second wicket when a mix-up between Jiwanjot and Kunal led to the run-out of the latter. Dikshanshu Negi (28) then joined his skipper at the middle as the duo stitched together 56 runs for the third wicket. Subham Nayak (1/70) broke the stand dismissing Dikshanshu.

And that was the last laugh Odisha had on the day. Swapnil and Jiwanjot then joined hands to resurrect Uttarakhand innings as they scored at more than four runs per over to add an unbroken 138 runs for the fourth wicket to put the hosts in the driver's seat.

Brief scores: Odisha 213; Uttarakhand 308/3 (Jiwanjot Singh 174 batting, Swapnil Singh 60 batting; Suryakant Pradhan 1/43, Subham Nayak 1/70). Match to continue.