

Omicron will not cause economic derailment: Ameya Prabhu

Kolkata (KCN): NAFA Capital managing director and financial wizard speaks with Kailashnath Adhikari, MD, Governance Now. Covid-19 came as a rude shock and hit the world with several disruptions, halting economies and destroying livelihoods. While research for the new variant, Omicron, thought to be less lethal than Delta is under way, its emergence has raised serious concerns. However, with the economy on the rebound, Ameya

Prabhu, financial wizard and managing director of NAFA Capital, feels that Omicron will not cause an adverse impact. In a freewheeling conversation with Kailashnath Adhi-

kari, MD, Governance Now, during the webcast of the 75th episode of the Visionary Talk series held by the public policy and governance analysis platform, the investment banker said, "Omi-

cron will not cause economic derailment." However, sounding a word of caution, Prabhu said that going forward disruptions like new Covid variants, climate change and animal diseases infecting humans due to loss of animal habitats will be increasing and Covid should be looked upon as preparing us as a global economy and humanity. "The Indian economy has picked up and growing. Markets are also doing well," he

said. However, the MSME sector is facing many challenges. "A big business is like a river that needs many small tributaries and streams which feed into it. SMEs are the tributaries that need to be strengthened," said Prabhu. He said new technologies like blockchains will have to be brought in to benefit the MSME sector, reduce the cost of finance, and reduce the risk for financial institutions and banks. "The beauty of blockchains

NEET-PG counselling delay: IMA seeks PM's intervention in resolving issue

NEW DELHI(KCN): Expressing concern over the strike of resident doctors against the delay in NEET-PG 2021 counselling, the Indian Medical Association on Thursday sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention in resolving the crisis and augmenting manpower to face a possible third wave of Covid infections. The doctors' body warned that if the issue is not resolved at the earliest, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) will be "forced to adopt direct democratic participation along with the resident doctors". The NEET-PG exam was held in September. Due to legal impediments, the counselling is withheld resulting in a shortage of 45,000 doctors in the frontline, the IMA said. "As the NEET-PG exam was not held in January 2021, the aggressive second wave was handled by limited manpower of doctors and resulted in the loss of more than 2,000 noble professional souls in the

Covid war. "At that time 1,60,000 doctors were appearing for the exams and waiting for the examination to be held relentlessly for the eight months, without involving in the Covid care," the IMA said in a statement. Now, in view of the impending third wave, if this PG counselling is not held, then with the limited manpower it will be too difficult to handle the third wave of Covid infections, it said. The IMA appealed to the prime minister to personally intervene in the matter. "The resident doctors are raising the genuine demands and till now it is not properly resolved. IMA demands the issues of reservation policy which is the prerogative of the government shall not be mixed with the schedule of the counselling and the larger decisions of that reservation shall be taken at an appropriate time on successive counselling.

OBC Priority in Panchayat Poll

Bhubaneswar (KCN): Even though there will be no OBC reservation in the upcoming Panchayat Polls, the governing Biju Janata Dal (BJD)



will give preference to OBCs during the selection of candidates for the election.

This was informed by senior BJD leader and Panchayati Raj Minister Pratap Jena here on Thursday. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Jena said, "In accordance with the Supreme Court order, the Orissa High Court had ordered that no particular reservation can be accorded to OBCs. The OBC seats will be termed as un-reserved seats. So, the State Government cannot make provisions for reservation for OBCs in the Panchayat election. However, we will give preference to OBCs while select

Rs 6,000 Special COVID Assistance Announced For Newspaper Hawkers In Odisha



Bhubaneswar(KCN): Acknowledging the hard work of newspaper hawkers during pandemic, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik today announced Rs 6,000 special COVID-19 assistance for them. The special financial assistance of Rs

6,000 will be sanctioned to each newspaper hawker in two phases from Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF). Earlier, Patnaik had announced a social security scheme for the newspaper hawkers, who are registered under

Odisha Unorganised Workers' Social Security Board. Under the scheme, the kin of hawkers will be provided with accidental death benefit of Rs 2 lakh and natural death benefit of Rs 1 lakh. Besides, the beneficiaries will

get Rs 1.5 lakh compensation in cases of complete disability due to accident. In case of partial disability, a hawker will be provided with Rs 80,000, he/she loses both limbs in any mishap and Rs 40,000 for loss of one limb.

ପର୍ଯ୍ୟବେକ THE KALINGA CHRONICLE
 (ଦୈନିକ ନିର୍ଦ୍ଦେଶନା ଦୈନିକ ଖବର କାଗଜ) Popular People's Daily of Odisha
WESTERN ODISHA BUREAU OFFICE
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 Contact : 9437083992, 8338839092
DEULBANDH, MODIPADA, SAMBALPUR

Bureau office of People's odia daily Paryabekhyak & English daily The Kalinga Chronicle will be inaugurated on **25 th December (Saturday) at 11.00 AM.** The Following Dignitaries have given their kind consent to grace the occasion

Inaugurator-cum-Chief Guest : Sri Suresh Pujari Hon'ble MP, Bargarh

Guests of Honour : Sri Jaynarayan Mishra Hon'ble, MLA, Sambalpur
 Sri Nauri Nayak Hon'ble MLA, Rengali
 Sri Bhabani Hota Former MP, Sambalpur
 Adv Sureswar Mishra Sr. Advocate, Sambalpur
 Dr Pramod Ratha President, Sambalpur Bar Association
 Dr. Pabitra Mohan Samantaray Editor in Chief, Paryabekhyak & The Kalinga Chronicle, Bhubaneswar

Sri Sudhanshu Sekhar Maharana Bureau Chief

ନିମନ୍ତ୍ରଣ ପତ୍ର

“ସମାଜ ଗଠନରେ ସାହିତ୍ୟର ଭୂମିକା”
 (ଏକ ତାତ୍ତ୍ୱିକ ଆଲୋଚନା) ଏବଂ
 ଶ୍ରୀମତୀ ବସନ୍ତ ମଞ୍ଜରୀ ମହାରଣାଙ୍କ କବିତା ସଂକଳନ
“ମନ ଦୋଳି ଉଡ଼ି ଯା” ର ଉଦ୍ଘୋଷନ

ସ୍ଥାନ: ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସାଂସ୍କୃତିକ ସମାଜ ହଲ, ସେନପାର୍କ, ସମ୍ବଲପୁର
 ତା: ୨୫.୧୨.୨୦୨୧ (ଶନିବାର), ସମୟ: ଅପରାହ୍ଣ ୪ ଟା

ଏହି କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ରମରେ ଯୋଗଦେବେ

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 କୁଳପତି, ଉତ୍କଳ ସାଂସ୍କୃତିକ ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ

ପ୍ରଫେସର ଡ. ଅର୍ଚ୍ଚ ଦାସ ମହାପାତ୍ର
 କୁଳପତି, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ମୁକ୍ତ ବିଶ୍ୱବିଦ୍ୟାଳୟ

ଡ. ପ୍ରଭାସ କୁମାର ସିଂ
 ପୂର୍ବତନ ଲୋକସଭା ସାଂସଦ

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 ବିଭାଗୀୟ ମୁଖ୍ୟ, ଲୋକସଂପର୍କ ବିଭାଗ, ଏମ.ସି.ଏଲ୍

ଉପରୋକ୍ତ ସାରାସ୍ପତ ସମାରୋହରେ ଯୋଗଦେବାକୁ ଅନୁରୋଧ ।

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ITC Charmis announces Kiara Advani as its new Brand Ambassador

Kolkata (KCN): ITC Charmis, a legacy brand announces Bollywood's leading

for a potent skincare format i.e Face Serum. Charmis Deep Radiance Face Serum

“Our R&D team at ITC's Life Sciences and Technology Centre leverages its deep research and world-class expertise in bio-sciences to introduce a range of Charmis Deep Radiance Serum. Charmis Deep Radiance Serum is an effective hydrating solution for skin radiance. Kiara brings with her the energy and vibrance that is synonymous with this new Charmis range, and we are glad to announce her as the new face of the brand.”

With blockbuster successes and noteworthy performances, Kiara Advani has emerged as one of the most favourite stars of the nation, with a huge fan base across sectors and age groups. Speaking on the new

partnership with Charmis, Kiara Advani adds, “Skin care has always been very important to me. I'm happy to be a part of the Charmis family and I can't wait to introduce all its modern face care offerings. When I think of Charmis, I think of vibrance and radiance and together we endeavour to bring exciting yet effective skincare for everyone”.

With its pricing of INR 249/- for 30 ml, Charmis Deep Radiance Face Serum is crafted with the goodness of Vitamin C, Hyaluronic Acid, and Salicylic Acid. Dermatologist-tested Charmis Deep Radiance Face Serum is also non-sticky and suitable for all skin types.



lady, Kiara Advani, as its brand ambassador. Charmis has enjoyed consumer's trust for decades with its cold cream and is now democratizing modern formats like Face Serums amongst the masses with its Deep Radiance Product Range with Kiara as their Brand Ambassador.

introduces a practice with #Swish-Dab-Dab that highlights its light texture & quick absorption to keep skin glowing and radiant. The film with its young energy and vibrant treatment communicates effectiveness and functional benefits of the Charmis face serum in a playful narrative. Sameer Satpathy, Divisional Chief Executive, Personal Care Products Business, ITC Limited, said,

Social Activist Felicitated in Begunia

Khordha (KCN): In the successful completion of 9th Session Odisha -Moparivar Jeevan Bindu

the Sarapanchas and Panchayat Samiti Members of 21 GP of Begunia Block. Till now 3452 unit Blood



Programme Social Activist Abyakta Hari Hara Khadga were felicitated by BDO Begunia Laxmidhara Sahoo and MLA Begunia Rajendra Kumar Sahoo for Successfully Coordinated the Jeevan Bindu Programme in all the 21 GP of Begunia Block and also gave farewell to

collected from Begunia Assembly Constituency. The Jeevan Bindu programme which was launched by BJD has now turned into a peoples movement in Odisha achieving the goal of ensuring that no needy person is deprived of the live saving blood in the state.

Mathematician Narayan Pati's 38th. Death Anniversary observed by DPBP



Cuttack Sadar (KCN): Cuttack Sadar 42 mouza social organization Dayanidhi Pratibha Bikash Pakistan (DPBP) observed eminent personality mathematician Narayan Pati's 38th. Death Anniversary of the villagers of

Taikana at Ananda Nrusingha smruti pujuryuja bhawan Patana. In this meeting Prasanna Behera the chief guest, Social worker Bulai Behera the guest of honour, Adviser Saroj Nalini Parija, Cultural Sec-

retary Rudra Narayan Das, Senior member Upendra Barik, Politician Binod Behera, Prakash Kumar Mohanty, Sagar Behera, Suwendu Charan Das Mohapatra, Srabantika Mohanty, Sriansha Mohanty, Kirtan

Das, Natabara Behera were present with done silence prayer and offer flower oil print photo of great soul late Narayan Pati. Lastly General Secretary Narayan Chandra Mohanty gave thanks to all members & the meeting was closed.

Mathematics is a subject with a hard shell but sweet stuff inside

Bhubaneswar(KCN): National Mathematics Day was observed with an interactive

students not to dread Mathematics as a difficult subject but to bring a change in ap-

learning Mathematics. The Chief Guest gave a heart-touching account of the life

Principal Sri Bipin Kumar Sahoo. The Principal advised the students to make



and enriching session by Dr.L.K Bhopa, Professor. NCERT, New Delhi (Retd.), Dept. of Mathematics Education. Joining the programme organized by the Mathematics Department of the school as the Chief Guest, Dr. Bhopa advised the

proach and attitude in order to beat their fear of the subject. In his answer to the questions asked by the students, the chief guest expressed his concern over the decrease in students' inquisitiveness which plays a vital role in orienting them for

of India's greatest Mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan and his lasting contribution to the world of Mathematics. The programme started with floral tribute to the unparalleled genius Ramanujan followed by welcome address by the Prin-

friendship with Mathematics by relating it with every aspect of day to day life. The entire programme was smoothly organized keeping in view the guide lines of COVID-19 SOPs with the whole-hearted cooperation of all the members of staff.

MLA Begunia Distribute Masks



Khordha (KCN): Following the appeals of Chief Minister Naveen Pattnaik MLA, Begunia have started masks distribution campaign in their Assembly Constituencies as part of its awareness campaign against the

novel corona virus. The masks distribution programme was organized by mission Shakti members in the GP of Rout Pada and Siko under Begunia Assembly Constituency. Begunia Panchayat Samiti Vice -Chair-

man Tanuja Patsahani, Members of Mission Shakti Reena Sethy, Shantilata Ransingh, Geetanjali Subudhi, Lila Swain, Rashmita Gumansingh and MBKCRP, Krushi mitra and members of SHGs Group were

present. The masks is purchased in MLA, LAD fund and distributed 4 masks in each house. The general public praised this type of activities of CM Naveen Pattnaik and MLA, Begunia Rajendra Kumar Sahoo

State to Appoint 11,403 Teachers

Bhubaneswar: On the instruction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the process has been started for the appointment of 11,403 teachers in government-run high schools. The recruitment process will be completed by April 2022.

As the School and Mass Education department was finding it difficult to get

official sources said. Besides, the State Government has

and the commencement of another phase of recruitment process with

Recently the state government has appointed 6,131 school teachers on a single day. This year, in the first phase, advertisements for 4619 Hindi, Sanskrit and sports teachers were published on August 13. In the second phase, another notification was released on August 28 for filling up 6,720 posts of TGT, Arts and Telugu teachers.



the required number of qualified candidates for the teaching posts, the recruitment examinations and rules have been amended to attract a larger number of candidates to participate in the recruitment process,

also sanctioned 3462 teacher posts keeping in view the high number of students. The government is committed to smooth completion of the entire teacher recruitment process within four months

the aim to transform the State's School Education Sector. Principal Secretary School And Mass Education Satyabrata Sahu is making overdrive for massive recruitment in the School Education Sector.

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Appealing to fans' inner writers, Anupam Kher offers autographed book

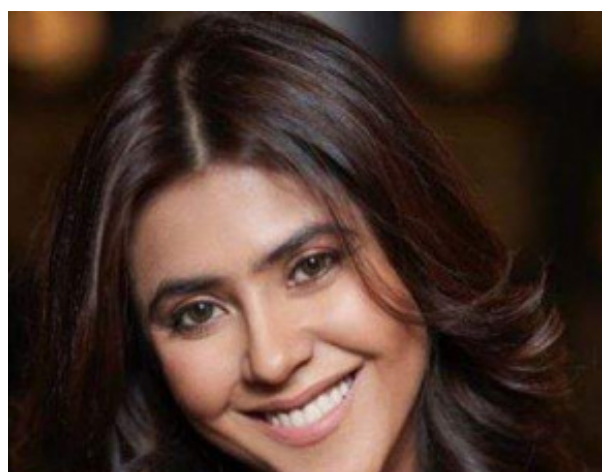


NEW DELHI: Asking his fans to rejuvenate their inner writers, veteran actor Anupam Kher, offered them to send his autographed book 'Your Best Day is Today' on Tuesday. Kher hopped on to Twitter and shared a candid picture of him. Calling on his fans to give a suitable caption for the picture, he wrote "Mujhe meri ye tasveer pasand hai. (I like this picture of mine) I will send an autographed copy of my latest book #YourBestDayIsToday to the person whose caption for this pic I like the most!" Adding to the cation, he noted "Hindi or English - apka caption kisi bhi bhasha me chalega! Chaliye! Apne andar ke lekhak ko jagaiye!! (your caption will go in any language! Let's go! Wake up your inner writer,) with Hibiscus smiling face and heart-shaped smile emoticon. Within a few hours of being posted, fans of the former Chairman of Film and Television Institute of India started coming up with innovative captions and showcased their creative skills. A day ago, the 65-year-old star shared a clip of his mother lauding PM Modi and scientist's efforts for the new COVID-19 vaccines.

SC grants Ekta Kapoor interim protection from arrest in FIR over web series

NEW DELHI(K-CN): The Supreme

leged objectionable content in her web



Court on Thursday granted interim protection from arrest to TV producer Ekta Kapoor in an FIR against her for al-

series "XXX season 2". A bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde granted interim protection to

Phenomenal experience: Riteish Deshmukh praises Anil Kapoor, Anurag Kashyap's 'AK vs AK'

NEW DELHI(K-CN): Actor Riteish Deshmukh lauded Vikramaditya Motwane's 'AK vs AK' and termed the

blown!!! #AKvsAK is a phenomenal experience - @VikramMotwane take a bow my friend," tweeted

only you could do this, you are pure gold in this film but @HarshKapoor_has outdone your entire performance in one

movie star and a film director who get into a public spat, following which the director retaliates by kidnapping the actor's



Netflix based film "a phenomenal experience". Deshmukh took to Twitter to share a poster of the movie, which features Anurag Kashyap and Anil Kapoor in lead roles. "Mind has been

Deshmukh. He then went on to heap praise on Kashyap, Kapoor, and his actor son Harshvardhan Kapoor who has a cameo in the film. "@anuragkashyap72 how good are you, @AnilKapoor Sir,

scene," the 'Housefull' actor's tweet further read. While Kapoor essays the role of a yesterday actor, Kashyap plays the role of a disgraced film director in the film. 'AK vs AK,' revolves around the story of a

daughter and films the search for her in real-time. The Netflix India Original film was released on the platform on December 24, which also happens to be Anil Kapoor's birthday.

Aakanksha Singh joins team Mayday

Ajay Devgn's Mayday has been creating a massive buzz because of its interest-

the icing on the cake is that Ajay Sir is directing the film. It's actually happening!



ing star cast, which includes Amitabh Bachchan, Ajay Devgn, Rakul Preet Singh and Angira Dhar. Talented actress, Aakanksha Singh has now joined the team. Aakanksha will essaying the role of Ajay Devgn's wife in the film. She joined the shoot yesterday. Aakanksha says, "It's like a dream come true to be a part of such a big and much-awaited film. I am so excited to share the screen with Ajay Sir and Amitabh Sir; and

It's an important role and I am lucky that the first muhurat shot of the film had me in it." Ajay Devgn took to social media to announce that the shoot had begun yesterday. "Happy to officially begin Mayday in a start-to-finish shooting schedule. Seek blessings from the Almighty and my parents. Nothing is complete without the support of all my fans, family and well-wishers. Releases on 29th April 2022 (sic)" he posted.

'Wanted to make a film on Indian Army with Shah Rukh Khan', says Director Kabir Khan

MUMBAI(KCN): Filmmaker Kabir Khan, who is gearing up for the release of his web series "The Forgotten Army: Azaadi Ke Liye", based on Indian National Army (INA), says he wanted to make a film on the subject starring Shah Rukh Khan. He added that Shah Rukh didn't charge a fee for the voiceover he gave for the series. "Shah Rukh has very graciously given the voiceover. The series is based on a true story, so there is an introduction of a few minutes before every episode along with real footage, where he has lent his voice. I talked about it with Shah Rukh earlier as well, when this was a film script. Back then, I wanted Shah Rukh to do the film. We even had a few meetings but we couldn't take it forward," said Kabir while promoting the series along with its lead actors Sunny Kaushal and Sharvari Wagh. Kabir added that Shah Rukh didn't charge a single

paisa for his voiceover assignment. "When I was making this series, I thought I should ask Shah Rukh (to be the narrator) because Shah Rukh's father had involvement with this army. His father knew General Shahnawaz Khan, who was an important part of INA. So, I knew he (Shah Rukh Khan) has sympathy and attachment with Azad Hind Fauj and I called him up. It's not an easy task to ask a superstar for a voiceover but Shah Rukh instantly agreed to do it. Usually, when you discuss a film with Shah Rukh, it's a long process, but in this case Shah Rukh literally did the voiceover for us on the second day. I don't know whether he would like me to reveal this, but he didn't take a fee from us. I think the kind of attachment he has with Azad Hind Fauj reflects in his act." Incidentally, Shah Rukh did a cameo in Kabir Khan's 2017 release "Tubelight", starring Salman Khan.

Ensuring Quality Higher Education & Odisha State Open University: Reaching the Unreached

Introduction:

The term "Open and Distant Learning" refers to the fact that all or most of the teaching is done by someone who is not in the same room as the learner, as well as the fact that the mission strives to incorporate more openness and flexibility in terms of access, curriculum, and other aspects of the structure. The mission or goal of a particular system, programmes and curricula, teaching/learning strategies and techniques, learning

material and resources, communication and interaction, support and delivery systems, students, tutors, staff and other experts, management, housing and equipment, and evaluation are all examples of components found in open and distance learning systems. The Open and Distant Learning (ODL) system is utilized for school-aged children and youth who are unable to attend regular schools, as well as to supplement education in primary and secondary schools. A significant number of courses and activities, on the other hand, are geared toward adults.

Open and Distant Learning education for primary and secondary schools, in particular, is a significant technique of expanding educational options to the semi-adult and adult population in developing nations. Open and Distant Learning (ODL) has made a significant contribution to the teacher training program. In developing countries, it has been established that online teacher training can reach huge groups of students and have a significant impact on the growth of national education systems. Initial training for formal qualifications, in-service supplementary training for formal upgrading, and ongoing in-service training in specific courses and topics are all examples of this. When the public education system needs to expand or improve its quality, the utilization of the Open and Distant Learning system for teacher education is a critical strategy. Through technical and vocational education programs, both private and public providers have made significant contributions to the development of industry and trade. The main goal is to bring the ability to respond quickly to the demand for working people to get training, as well as to give chances for individuals who are currently underserved.

Odisha State Open University

In 2015, the Odisha State Open University was formed by a law passed by the state legislature. The university has jurisdiction over the entire state of Odisha. The mandate is to promote education, research, training, and capacity

building using a variety of methods, including distance and online education, as well as the use of innovative educational technology that is accessible to the average person. The University's degrees, diplomas, and certificates are treated on the same footing with degrees/diplomas issued by other universities created by centers/states and recognized by the UGC. To improve students' employability, a strong emphasis is placed on skill-based education. To carry out its mission, the Open University has established Regional Centers and Study Centers around the state. Apart from skill-based and vocational courses, Teacher Education, Business & Management Studies, Computer Science courses, Engineering Science (short-term), paramedical courses, agriculture, and foreign language courses receive special attention. Students who have already excelled in Undergraduate and Postgraduate degrees in the State can enroll in add-on courses. Students' fees are modest and affordable for disadvantaged and underprivileged groups. All statutory bodies' norms and regulations, such as the UGC, AICTE, NCTE, INC, BCI, DEB, MCI, and others, are rigorously observed by the Odisha State Open University when it comes to offering academic programs.

Five Regional Centres and 88 Study Centres including 6 jails have been created by Odisha State Open University. Between 2020 and 2030, the University will expand its network of Regional Centres to all 13 of Odisha's undivided districts, as well as its network of study centers to all 315 of the state's blocks. 82% of the students are from the rural and tribal areas of the state, thereby the University is catering the need of the much inaccessible and scheduled areas of Odisha, where even the penetration of IGNOU is not very successful. Regional Centres will serve as an extension office of the Headquarters, facilitating student support, examinations, administration, and financial matters at Study Centres. During the last five years, the University has shown a considerable increase in student enrolment, with more than 30000 students admitted to various academic programs. Odisha State Open University has a female student population of 52.1 percent, 11.2 percent ST students, 15 percent SC students, and 18 percent OBC students. Academic staff and departments are busy planning, devising, and implementing academic programmes, which the Centre for Internal Quality Assurance monitors on a regular basis. English, History, Journalism, Odiya, Political Science, Public Administration, Rural Development, Sociology, Commerce, Cyber Security, Hindi, Economics, Public Policy, and Sanskrit, Business & Management Studies, Computer Science courses, Rural Development, Disaster Management, Communication Skills, Translation Studies, and functional aspects of

Pratap Kishore Mohanty

Odiya and Hindi language courses are currently available at

the university.

The objective of the University

- To conduct research, training, and extension programmes to impart a wide range of development in the state, based on the state's rich legacy, in order to promote and enhance the people of Odisha's employment status and human resources;
- To supplement existing degree, certificate, and diploma programmes by offering add-on courses that are relevant to workplace demands.
- To use technology to develop and share learning and information in various ways;
- To ensure that wide segments of the population, particularly disadvantaged groups such as those living in distant and rural areas, have access to higher education, including working people, housewives, and other individuals who seek to update or acquire knowledge through studies in many subjects;

The University's academic programs have a particular focus on Science, Technology, and Humanities, and Social Sciences, which reflects the university's mission. Currently, the university offers master's degrees in 14 subjects, bachelor's degrees in 11 disciplines, postgraduate diplomas in eight disciplines, diplomas in sixteen disciplines, and certificate programs in fifteen disciplines. The University also offers online Add-on skill-based programs using the e-Gyanjyoti smart e-learning platform. With the consent of the statutory agencies, the University wants to provide new Undergraduate and Postgraduate programs in the fields of Science, Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Psychology, Anthropology, Education, and Social Work. It also proposes that regular Ph.D. programs are being offered.

Odisha State Open University has developed a policy for Research Promotion and Felicitation with the goal of creating a suitable environment for both applied and fundamental research. It is created in accordance with Odisha State Open University's vision and objectives. Discipline-specific research, action research, and systems-based research are the focus of the current policy. It seldom loses sight of the ethical problems that must be addressed in all forms of research while doing so. Via the Open and Distant Learning system, Odisha State Open University seeks to provide quality teaching and learning through the use of information and communication technology. India is transitioning to the digital era when distance is no longer a barrier to obtaining education thanks to the use of ICT. In India, more than 500 million people use the Internet, largely through their smartphones, with 200 million of them living in rural areas. With the use of technology-enabled learning, Odisha State Open University aims to bring high-quality education to the doorsteps of its students. The present Vice-

Chancellor Prof. (Dr.) Arka Das Mohapatra is taking proactive steps in ensuring that, in every aspect, the university maintains quality with special reference to the self-learning materials and quality of counselors and related infrastructures. He is an erudite scholar and researcher having more than 25 years of experience and administrative acumen. Now the University is venturing into adapting innovative modes of teaching-learning and also prioritizing its endeavor with regard not only to teaching and learning rather reaching the learners and enriching the learners through diversified manners. Under the able guidance of the Vice-chancellor, the University is currently venturing into many areas of expertise and collaborating with some national-level institutions and universities, thereby enriching the overall quality of education in the university. The University is also having Prof. (Dr.) Manas Ranjan Pujari, an accomplished academic and astute administrator as the Registrar. Dr. Pujari's earlier experience as Co-ordinator with Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) (G M University study Centre) is an added advantage for the Odisha State Open University. The Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar duo, have been working hard in ensuring the quality in every aspect of the process in the University. The Lockdown has taught the university, how to create opportunities out of adversities wherein the university took online initiatives in every aspect of its activities such as online admission, examination, result publication, evaluation of assignments and projects, etc.

Achievements by Odisha State Open University

Although a new University, Odisha State Open University has been the proud recipient of the Unnat Bharat Abhiyaan Perinneeal Fund Award and ranked 78th among the top Universities in India, wherein various developmental initiatives have been taken up by the University in its adopted villages in the adjacent villages of its permanent campus. The University has taken initiatives for providing free education to the youths residing in its five adopted villages. The University has been engaged in different extension programs like awareness on Covid-19, exchange programs with other universities, participating in book fairs, and organizing different webinars and socio-cultural activities. The university is striving hard to ensure that the student learners get the most appropriate and enriching study materials and the distant learning initiatives take them to the pinnacle of success in life. Every step is being taken to ensure the quality of education and make them proud to be associated with such a glorious university. Hopefully, Odisha State Open University will add value to the overall higher and professional educational scenario of Odisha.

The author is Academic Consultant (Sociology) Odisha State Open University, Sambalpur

A grounded theory approach for the assessment of urban development policies in Indian cities

Urbanization in India has led to the development of new urban centres and an increase in the number of million-plus cities. The planning principles keep on evolving with time. In India, these principles are implemented through development plans. This study examines the extent to which Indian urban planning policies address contemporary urban planning principles in the perspective of rapidly evolving global urban policies. Development plans of 13 million-plus state capital cities across India have been analysed following grounded theory. The study reveals that Indian cities are not completely embracing global contemporary urban planning principles in their development plans, and the provision of these principles also differs among cities. The study proposes suggestive planning measures which might be incorporated in the urban planning process to address the challenges arising out of complexities of urbanization. The study explores how development plans endorse and implement particular urban development strategies and more generally, contributes to enforcement of contemporary urban planning principles. The goal of the study is to establish a link between contemporary urban development principles articulated through the development plans.

URBAN planning researchers globally deal with the issues pertaining to congestion, haphazard development, overcrowded spaces, encroached walkways, limited transport options, avoidance of public facilities, biased housing promotion, lack of awareness regarding new technologies, inadequate infrastructure, exploitation of natural resources, degradation of heritage, etc. These issues might be addressed to a large extent by enforcing contemporary urban planning principles through statutory provisions.

Modern town planning initiatives like comprehensive mobility plan, land transport integration, transit-oriented development, urban renewal, transferable development rights, public-private partnership, inclusive development, compact city, smart city, sustainable planning, medi-city, heritage city, sports city, green city, industrial city and liveable city have been introduced in many cities worldwide. These cities have adopted contemporary principles of urban planning to regulate urban issues and mandating their urban plans to integrate alternate liberal policies. Urban research discusses planning issues and proposes innovative solutions. These studies highlight the necessity to formulate appropriate planning policies to effectively regulate the urban planning issues. Current Indian practices and policies of urban development are incompetent to handle the situation efficiently. The sheer magnitude of urbanization calls for devising innovative urban planning systems with solutions for the new era. The national economic growth has a direct bearing on the efficient and productive guidance of the urbanization process, with emphasis on housing and basic infrastructure development which need to be addressed in priority. The urban development process needs to be efficient as well as ensure equity of urban development benefits for improving liveability.

Research responds to the need for working on such urban issues by evaluating development plans (DPs) and identifying the challenges which India is experiencing in addressing sustainable-smart growth. The key question is whether or not urban development plans in India promote contemporary urban principles through their policies. Urbanization in India The world's population is anticipated to grow

Sanjeev Kumar* and Krishna Kumar Dhote

by 9.6 billion by 2050, while the urban population is projected to grow by 2.5 billion, showing concentration of growth in urban centres

. According to the Census of India 2011, the population of the country was 1.21 billion, of which 31.1% lived in urban areas. The urban population has increased from 290 to 377 million, while the number of cities and towns has increased from 5161 to 7935 in 2011 compared to 2001. The number of million-plus cities has increased from 35 in 2001 to 53 and 3 megacities in 2011. These million-plus cities (53) together hold 42.63% of the total urban population. It has also been projected that the urban population will exceed 600 million, distributed unevenly in 87 metropolitan centres within the next RESEARCH ARTICLES 1562 CURRENT SCIENCE, VOL. 121, NO. 12, 25 DECEMBER 2021 two decades. India's urban population is expected to reach about 810 million by 2050 (ref. 7) and the number of metropolitan cities would be more than 100 (ref. 5). The statistics confirms India's rapid urbanization. 8.

The urbanization issues have been ranging from the local to global level. High population growth, rural-urban migration, reclassification of urban centres and expansion of cities have been identified as the root causes for urbanization. The challenges of rapid urbanization necessitate provision of infrastructure and urban facilities. There are serious concerns regarding the negative impacts of urbanization on the environment, transportation, public health and deficiency in urban infrastructure. Failure to address these issues will lead to urban decay rather than planned development. The problems due to urbanization cannot be addressed

with conventional approaches and need to be revisited in view of emerging planning principles. Therefore, inclusion of new principles in urban policy is a necessary precondition for undertaking planning. A close review of urban growth pattern of Indian cities indicates the prominence of urbanization in million-plus cities. These cities have shown a population growth of over 48% and five cities have attained more than 0.5 million population. These cities are facing urban issues and demand a paradigm shift in urban development strategies that would combat negative effects and brings in prosperity. In this study we propose a comparative city ranking framework incorporating urban policies drafted in the respective DP of Indian cities. Urban planning challenges in India Urban planning is an envisioning process which provides alternatives for sustainable-smart development. These alternatives are an outcome of strategies adopted after due consideration of the demographic, environmental, socio-economic, administrative and financial aspects. The planned development of towns and cities has witnessed a sea change since independence. During 1950s, the focus was on rehabilitation of refugees. In the sixties, a new era began for agricultural and industrial infrastructure, and many public sector townships were established. With the green revolution in the seventies, efforts were made to develop trading towns and infrastructure was augmented in small and medium towns. The eighties saw a spurt in employment opportunities, thereby leading to unprecedented migration to large cities. The nineties were marked with the initiation of reforms (To be continued)

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Pakistan-India ties: Too near yet far apart

ISLAMABAD: When Pakistan and India agreed to restore peace along the highly volatile Line of Control (LoC) in February 2021, it appeared that they were again ready to take a turn on the bumpy road of animosity and mistrust. The ensuing months, however, showed that it was yet another mirage. The story of Pakistan-India relations is a tale of the proverbial 'one step forward, two steps backward'. So far, almost every positive development in terms of the bilateral ties has been overtaken by innate hostility that is often driven by popular sentiments. In a surprise announcement on February 25, India and Pakistan said that they have agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the LoC. India and Pakistan signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003, but it has hardly been followed in letter and spirit over the past several years with more violations than observance of the pact. The restoration of the ceasefire agreement of 2003 on the LoC was not an exception. Soon it was followed by reports, insinuating that the two sides were engaged in a secret diplomacy in some shady haunt of the Arabian deserts (the so-called talks reportedly being held in the UAE). No official statement was issued about the status of

talks but ties remain frozen. Weeks later in March, Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa said that it was time for India and Pakistan to "bury the past and move forward". In his address to first-

ever Islamabad Security Dialogue, participated by 'Who's Who' of Pakistan's security establishment, Gen Bajwa said that "stable Indo-Pak relation is a key to unlock the untapped potential of

South and Central Asia by ensuring connectivity between East and West Asia" but also mentioned that Kashmir was the main stumbling block in normalisation of bilateral ties.

Mercury Dips Low

Bhubaneswar: Severe cold wave conditions continued to sweep across Odisha in the

Rayagada (8), Bolangir (9), Sambalpur (9.5), Koraput (9.5) and

21, 2021, respectively, the Met centre officials said. Cold wave condition



past 24 hours with the falling of mercury below 10 degrees Celsius at 12 places. With a minimum temperature of 5 degrees Celsius, western Odisha town Phulbani has become the coldest place in the State. As per India Meteorological Department (IMD)'s Bhubaneswar regional centre, Daringbadi was the second coldest place with recording of 6.5 degrees Celsius, followed by Jharsuguda (7.1), Titilagarh (7.3), Sundargarh (7.5), Keonjhar (7.6), Bhawanipatna (8),

Boudh (9.6). Capital city Bhubaneswar along with Angul and Nayagarh district towns recorded a minimum temperature of 10 degrees Celsius each. Bhubaneswar city has recorded a minimum temperature of 10 degrees or below temperature in the month of December, for the fourth time in the past 11 years (2011 to 2021). The city had witnessed 8.2 degrees, 9.8 degrees and 10 degrees on December 30, 2018 (all time record), December 31, 2019 and December

is very likely to prevail over the districts of J h a r s u g u d a , Sundargarh, Boudh, Sonepur, Bargarh, Bolangir and Nuapada in the next 24 hours, it said. After 48 hours, the situation is likely to improve as temperature is set to increase in many places across the State, sources said. The weather forecasting office has advised people to stay indoors during night & early morning and use multiple clothes to avoid exposure to cold. It also suggested people to

Omicron threat: PM Modi holds Covid review meeting; vaccination figures near 141 crore mark

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a review meeting on the COVID-19 situation in the country on Thursday evening amid rising concerns over the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Official sources said Modi took stock of the pandemic situation across the country in a high-level meeting attended by senior officials and experts. India has recorded 236 cases of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus across 16 states and Union Territories (UTs) so far, out of which 104 people have recovered or migrated, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Thursday.

In a communication to the states and UTs on Tuesday, the Centre said the Omicron variant of the coronavirus is at least thrice more transmissible than its

Delta variant and asked them to "activate" war rooms, keep analysing even small trends and surges and keep taking strict and prompt containment action at the district and local levels. There have been demands that the government allow booster doses of vaccines to be

140.24 crore on Thursday, the Union Health Ministry said. Over 51 lakh vaccine doses have been administered on Thursday till 7 pm, it said. The ministry said the daily vaccination tally is expected to increase with the compilation of the final reports for the day by late in the

started from February 2. The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination commenced from March 1 for people over 60 years of age and those aged 45 years and above with specified co-morbid conditions. The country launched



administered to those already fully inoculated against COVID-19, as has been done by many countries. Meanwhile, the cumulative COVID-19 vaccine doses administered in India crossed

night. The countrywide vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with healthcare workers getting inoculated in the first phase. The vaccination of frontline workers

vaccination for all people aged more than 45 years from April 1. The government then decided to expand its vaccination drive by allowing everyone above 18 to be vaccinated from May 1.

Hate speech row: Trinamool demands action against Dharma Sansad organisers

DEHRADUN: A senior TMC leader on Thursday demanded immediate action

in Haridwar district, asking the SHO to register an FIR within 24 hours.

If an FIR is not registered against those involved within 24 hours, a complaint will be

which the speakers are seen making hate speeches. Held at Ved Niketan



against organisers and speakers of a Dharma Sansad held recently in Haridwar, where hate speeches were allegedly made against a community. All-India Trinamool Congress national spokesman Saket Gokhale lodged a complaint in this connection at the Jwalapur police sta-

Gokhale, who shared a copy of his complaint on his Twitter handle, also set the police a deadline of December 27 to arrest organisers of the Dharma Sansad and those who allegedly delivered inflammatory and violence-provoking speeches against the Muslims at the event.

made to the judicial magistrate, Gokhale said in his complaint to the SHO. At the event, several speakers allegedly made inflammatory and provocative speeches, calling for the killing of people from the minority community. He also shared links of the video clip, in

Dham in Haridwar from December 17-20, the Dharma Sansad was organised by Yati Narasimhanand Giri of the Juna Akhada, who is already under police scanner for making hate speeches and inciting violence against the Muslims.



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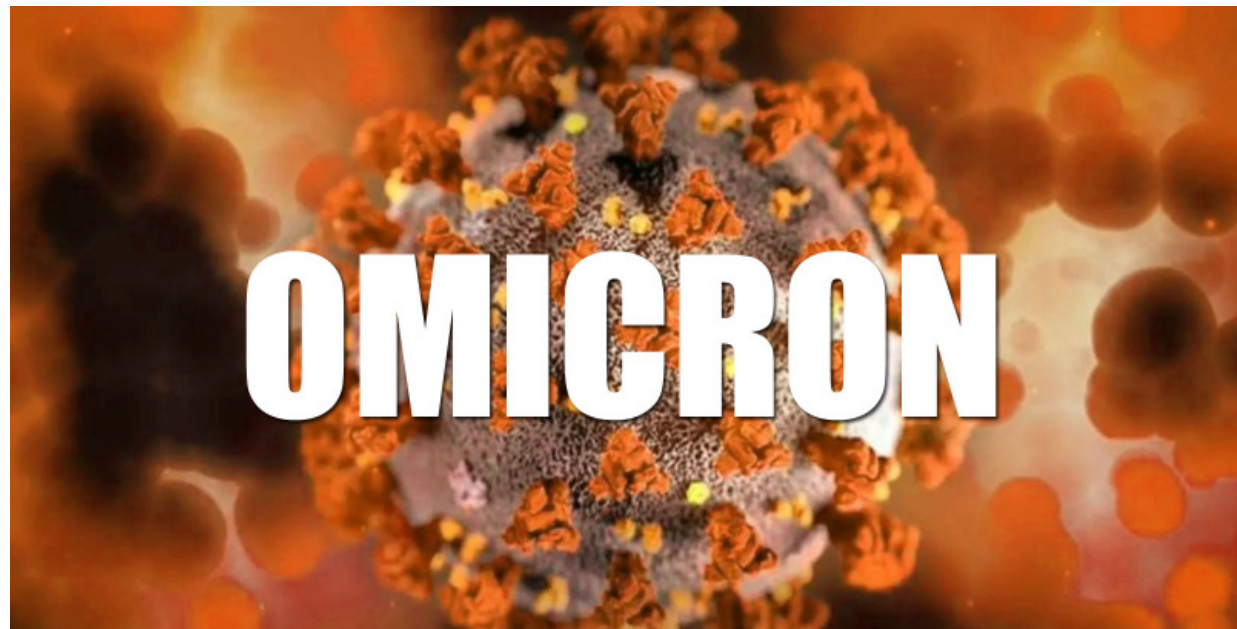
More Omicron Cases Detected

Bhubaneswar: Two minor girls, returned from Nigeria, have tested Omicron positive, taking the total

ported its first two Omicron cases among returnees from Nigeria and Qatar. The patients,

tested negative. Contact tracing of the new cases has been done, informed Mishra.

Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Commissioner SK Singh said that at least six micro-



number of Omicron cases in the State to 4.

The minor girls (siblings) of one family have tested Omicron positive following genome sequencing conducted by Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), Bhubaneswar. One is 11 years old while another is 15 years, said State Director Public Health, Niranjana Mishra told reporters here Thursday.

Earlier on December 21, the state had re-

ported its first two Omicron cases among returnees from Nigeria and Qatar. The patients,

aged 43 and 41, hail from Khurda and Jagatsinghpur districts. The two girls along with their parents had returned from Nigeria on December 13, and were in isolation as per the norms, he said, adding, "They are asymptomatic, undergoing treatment in a hospital in Bhubaneswar and their health condition is stable."

However, parents of the siblings have

Earlier, two Omicron cases have been detected in Odisha. While one person returned from Nigeria, another returned from Qatar.

Director health service Bijay Mohapatra said that the State government has expedited surveillance and increased testing to 70,000 per day. All the district administrations have been directed to ramp up testing and vaccination drive, he stated.

containment zones have been declared in the state capital, and Christmas and New Year celebrations will be allowed with adherence to Covid-19 guidelines.

Meanwhile, Odisha recorded 155 new Covid cases from 17 districts and one death in the last 24 hours taking the active cases to 1784 and death toll to 8448. Avoid movement during night especially through two wheelers/ open vehicles.

Naveen Patnaik cautions public on Omicron threat, districts to step up jab drive

BHUBANESWAR: A day after two Omicron cases were detected in Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday appealed to the people of the State to strictly follow Covid appropriate behaviour and

sonal distance and avoid unnecessary exposure to crowds. On the day, Chief Secretary Suresh Mahapatra reviewed the situation and asked district administrations to stay prepared for combating possible spread of the

health workers for taking the jab on the dates assigned to them.

According to government reports, 88.2 per cent of the 18 and above age group is vaccinated with the first dose while around 66 per cent of

ily Welfare department was asked to give advance intimation to the private hospitals to remain in readiness for dealing with the situation. Collectors and SPs were asked to enforce the Covid norms and ensure that the proto-



avoid crowds. Speaking at an event organised here for launching distribution of special livelihood assistance of Rs 960 crore to 96 lakh beneficiaries covered under Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY), the Chief Minister cautioned people about the super mutant Covid variant.

"We have to stay alert as the new variant is spreading very fast", Naveen said and urged the people to wear masks, practice regular hand washing, maintain per-

new Omicron variant. He asked all collectors, SPs, and CDMOs to be extremely vigilant, and intensify testing, vaccination, and enforcement.

M a h a p a t r a emphasised that all people above 18 years of age need to be vaccinated. The authorities were asked to prepare village-wise vaccination charts and inform the villagers in advance through panchayat functionaries, ward members, Anganwadi workers, ASHA karmis and

them took their second dose. Around 99.8 per cent of the healthcare and frontline workers were vaccinated.

It was decided to enhance daily testing to 70,000 and accordingly, the district targets were fixed. The Chief Secretary directed the CDMOs to keep stock of necessary medicines, oxygen cylinders, beds, ICUs and ventilators ready in all government hospitals. The oxygen plants must be kept in good running condition.

The Health and Fam-

Odisha BJP seeks Centre intervention in paddy purchase irregularities

BHUBANESWAR: Taking the battle against the BJD government over alleged mismanagement in paddy procurement in Odisha to the Centre, the BJP on Wednesday sought the intervention of Union Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal on the issue. A delegation of BJP MPs led by Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan met Goyal and submitted a memorandum to the latter alleging gross irregularities in Kharif paddy procurement in the State. The delegation comprising Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, BJP MPs and the party's Krushak Morcha president Pradip Purohit ap-

prised Goyal on how the decentralised procurement system is benefiting the rice millers rather than farmers.

While the number of mandis operating in the State is inadequate to handle the high volume of paddy being brought to the markets for sale under minimum support price, the window open for delivery of paddy through the online token system is too small. The tokens often get lapsed due to delay in procurement and the State government is reluctant to issue fresh tokens.

Referring to the fact-finding team of the Central government that toured Odisha from March 23 to 25 following complaints from the

State BJP MPs on alleged mismanagement in procurement, the memorandum said the team detected serious lapses and irregularities in the decentralised purchase of paddy in Odisha during the current Kharif marketing season.

The window for paddy procurement operation was opened only for 40 to 43 days instead of available 151 days. The team found that a substantial number of allotted tokens had lapsed. Similarly, the quality control process was almost non-existent and the inspector, appointed on contract, generally filled up the parameters as per whims and fancies without actual analysis. The entire

procurement process was found to be miller-driven.

The BJP MPs said the State government has allowed millers to perform all mandi operations such as the supply of used gunny bags, transportation of paddy, loading and other labour works. This is against the guidelines of the Centre, the team observed. The distribution of paddy among millers was not found to be transparent as it was at the discretion of the PACS secretary. The delegation urged Goyal to direct the State government to remove the shortcomings pointed out by the Central team and ensure all paddy stock of the farmers is purchased.

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SOS call answered, now telecom sector to ring in 5G in 2022

NEW DELHI: A rare bonhomie among three private telecom companies in raising tariffs coming on the back of a bailout package by the government may have helped the telecom sector avert a crisis but the challenges haven't ceased to exist as the industry faces a cash-guzzling task of rolling out 5G networks in the coming months.

The sector that provides direct and indirect employment to millions is projected to see Rs 1.3 lakh crore to Rs 2.3 lakh crore of investments in the coming years in creating robust infrastructure and building telecom and network products that have been incentivised by the government through PLI and other initiatives.

After years of cut-throat competition and the apex court ruling on payment of past statutory dues left some players in the lurch, billionaire Sunil Mittal's Bharti Airtel and struggling Vodafone Idea almost in tandem raised tariffs, taking the plunge they had long been talking about.

Shortly thereafter, richest Indian Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio too followed suit.

The tariff hike alongside the government's relief package that included a four-year break on payment of dues lifted the industry's spirits and ignited hopes of fuel-

ing investment in new-age technology that a nation aspiring to become a USD 5 trillion economy deserves.

With the government promising more reforms, the industry is entering the new year on a buoyant note, keen to see a positive outcome on 5G spectrum pricing at the

ARPU prospects for players, and unveiling of JioPhone Next smartphone with easy EMI options kept up the tempo in the market.

"Investments in key components of 5G network, that is, spectrum, OFC (Optical Fibre Cable) deployment and building towers as pan-India

offered breather to all players but, more importantly, gave Vodafone Idea a shot at survival.

The possibility of market shrinking to two private players had once appeared imminent but the September announcements brought in the much-needed cheer. Both Vodafone Idea

900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300-3670 MHz.

The last round of auctions, in March, had attracted bids of over Rs 77,800 crore for 855.6 MHz of spectrum but 63 per cent of total radiowaves on offer remained unsold.

connectivity challenges of far-flung areas and rural India." A K Bhatt, Director General of Indian Space Association (ISpA), said.

The fight for spectrum has already entered a fresh round, from infighting among telecom operators to the one between terrestrial and satellite-based service providers.

The biggest opportunity for the entire telecom ecosystem is 5G, Ericsson India head Nitin Bansal said, adding "if spectrum gets allocated at the right time and with affordable pricing, we can expect commercial rollout in the second half of 2022."

With 5G promise ready to unfold and given headroom for growth in the world's largest data market even amid pandemic, telcos have already started building their war chest.

Jio Platforms -- which houses India's youngest but largest telecom firm Jio and apps -- had raised a staggering Rs 1,52,056 crore from marquee investors earlier and seems all set to tap into new opportunities.

Airtel, whose Rs 21,000 crore rights issue in October was oversubscribed, plans to use the proceeds to strengthen its balance sheet, build its arsenal, and gear up for 5G.

Vodafone Idea's fundraising plans are significantly delayed but the company expects to conclude it this fiscal.

"The next year will see a convergence of industries with telecom taking centre stage for multiple sectors to leverage. Collaborations are expected to be the key strategy to drive revenues from enterprises and commercial sector," Peeyush Vaish, Partner and Telecom Leader at Deloitte India, said. The Indian telecom

market is poised for a slew of innovations in 2022, according to Prashant Singhal, Emerging Markets, Technology, Media, Telecom (TMT) Leader at EY.

The year 2022, he said, will be a "defining year" and the sector will get back to the "golden period of accelerated growth".

Omicron will not cause economic derailment: Ameya Prabhu

Continued from page-1

is that everything is traceable."

On cryptocurrency, he said whenever a new form of payment is brought in there is always resistance from incumbents. But regulations need to be brought in to prevent their misuse in crime or terrorism. "Cryptos are here to stay. The problem is not cryptos, but their misuse." On being asked which sectors of the Indian economy will be leading the surge, he said anything related to consumers will fuel growth. There is a lot of space for new brands. He said digital platforms for service and delivery will be extremely critical irrespective of the line of the business and infrastructure push by the government.

He underlined the importance of setting up a good team in a business and said a good sector with a bad team will always fail but a good team in a bad sector might succeed.

"Honesty, integrity, quality, depth of the team, the ability of the team to de-risk their product, not only have an IQ but also EQ are very important," he said and added that businesses must have softer aspects of dealing with ESG (environment, social and corporate governance) with a 360-degree approach which he said is the core philosophy of his own company.

"Building sustainability-focused business is an opportunity. Key concerns will be how to build reducing our carbon footprint, how to build with ESG focus, how to build protecting tribal and indigenous resources and protecting wildlife and without drawing too much water. Businesses in India will do well. Key is the process management and having the ability to de-risk situations in the country," he said.

Prabhu, who is designated Young Global Leader 2021 by the World Economic Forum, says, "Most businesses fail. An entrepreneur has to face many challenges and failures. He must have the ability to deal with situations when he may not only face uncertainties but also situations when he is not able to pay salaries."

Asked if Indian investors are ready to value a future business model, he said the valuation matrix of a company cannot be the same when the company starts and when it is in a steady state of growth.

In the case of tech companies where valuations are high, he said making a profit is a problem. "Tech companies have to mature. The fact that these companies are listed is good. Markets will bring discipline, greater disclosure."

He however said that Indian startups are maturing, they are coming of age. There will be some successes and there will be some failures. "For a listed company, a retail investor is God and should be treated like that," he said. His company, NAFA Capital, together with IDF Eurasia will start a US \$100 million distressed assets fund. The collaboration will focus on distressed retail loans (credit card, mortgage, home, car loans receivables).

Prabhu, who started his career as a writer and gradually got into financial services, said the lockdown gave him the time to write his book, 'The Rock Babas and Other Stories'. The book, he said, is a call for hope. It is about the need to realise that instead of fighting wars, finding differences against one another, proving one-upmanship over each other, we should identify things that unite us. The book has a positive message to unite to work together and make this planet a better place.



mega auction that is just months away.

The buzzing pace of developments in 2021 -- from bureaucrat-turned-politician Ashwini Vaishnaw being named the new Minister for Communications and IT to the unveiling of a blockbuster relief package in record time to prepaid tariff hikes to key milestones in 5G trials -- kept the sector in news.

A website for giving clearance to trusted and secure products that telcos can install in their network, over Rs 12,000-crore production linked incentives push for telecom sector, improving

coverage is estimated to be about Rs 1.3-2.3 lakh crore," S P Kochhar, Director General of industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI), said. The mega relief package has offered sweeteners like a four-year break for companies from paying statutory dues related to AGR (Adjusted Gross Revenue) and spectrum, permission to share scarce airwaves, change in the definition of revenue on which levies are paid, and allowing 100 per cent foreign investment through the automatic route.

The big bang reforms

and Airtel have decided to avail the four-year moratorium being offered by the government under the telecom package while cash-rich Reliance Jio has declined the payment moratorium offer.

The relief measures, it is expected, will enable the industry to redirect cash flows towards building futuristic networks -- 5G and beyond.

The telecom regulator is working out spectrum pricing and norms for new frequencies such as 526-698 MHz and millimetre band, that is 24.25 - 28.5 GHz, as also bands such as 700 MHz, 800 MHz,

Players have long been voicing concerns over high spectrum pricing and all eyes are now on the regulator to see if the spectrum valuation methodology is rehauled, and pricing made attractive. The sector is expected to see satellite-based broadband services with OneWeb and Elon Musk-led Starlink already in the fray to start their service in 2022.

"Roll out of Spacecom Policy would bring in significant opportunities for the Space Communication segment, especially the Space-based broadband, wherein LEO (Low Earth Orbit) satellites with low latency would help address

IndiGo to sign codeshare agreement with Air France-KLM

Air France-KLM and IndiGo on Thursday announced that they have entered into a codeshare agreement

force, Air France-KLM group will be able to sell seats, on its distribution system, of IndiGo flights

other's flights. From their hubs in Paris and Amsterdam, Air France and KLM op-

Airlines, Qatar Airways and American Airlines. Scheduled international passenger



that allows each airline to sell seats on the other's flights.

With this new partnership, Air France and KLM will offer their customers access to 25 new Indian destinations, a joint statement mentioned. This means that once the codeshare agreement comes into

on 25 domestic routes.

Similarly, IndiGo will also be able to sell seats on the European airline group's flights on more than 250 routes, the joint statement noted.

In a codeshare agreement, each airline on its distribution system can sell seats of

erate flights to four Indian cities - Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru.

"Subject to government approval, this cooperation (codeshare) will start in February 2022," the statement mentioned. IndiGo also has codeshare agreements with Turkish

flights have been suspended in India since March 23 last year.

However, limited passenger flights have been operating between India and approximately 32 countries, including France and the Netherlands, under 'air bubble' arrangements.

Blasters go third after outplaying Chennaiyin

KOCHI: Kerala Blasters have a spring in their step these days as their 3-0 win against Chennaiyin and continue their impressive form. Goals from Jorge Pereyra Diaz (9), Sahal Abdul Samad



some momentum. The Ivan Vukomanovic coached side are also unbeaten in six matches now. Chennaiyin meanwhile has slipped to sixth in the table as they were thoroughly

We have stranglehold over India at home, don't see that changing: Ex-Proteas pacer Ntini

JOHANNESBURG: Former pacer Makhaya Ntini doesn't see India winning their maiden Test series in South Africa while the great Allan Donald feels the Proteas' inexperienced batting will be tested by Jasprit Bumrah and Co. The first Test begins in Centurion from December 26.

India are primed for their maiden success in South Africa, having lost 1-2 in 2018 when the hosts boasted the likes of now-retired AB de Villiers, Faf du Plessis, Hashim Amla, Vernon Philander and Dale Steyn.

"India have a very good bowling attack this time



around, but the Proteas know the South African conditions better. This for me will be key," Ntini, who featured in the 2001 and 2006-07 home series' against India, said in a CSA release.

"We have to back ourselves because we have that home advantage. Our players know the wickets very well and that will give us the edge." Donald, on the other hand, says whichever team bats better will win the series.

He was a central figure in the 1992-93 series against India and also the 1996-97 series win on home soil.

"Both teams line up really well, both have strong bowling line-ups and that will mean the batting on both sides will be tested," said Donald.

"Our batting has lost some key players in the last couple of seasons. There's no hiding from the fact that it's a young line-up and they will be tested by the Indian attack. For me that is where the series will be decided. In the last few seasons, we haven't scored enough runs and that will be the challenge. If we can put the runs on the board, we undoubtedly have the bowlers who can take 20 wickets," he said.

Donald played 72 Tests for South Africa taking 330 wickets. He said that India have worked really hard for success on overseas tours.

"(Virat) Kohli's comments a few years ago were that you'll never be classed as a great side if you don't win away from home and that has been something he really worked towards. You saw them win in Australia and also reach the WTC (World Test Championship) Final. "This is a quality Indian team that is here. I'm looking forward to it," he said.

"Nitni, who took 390 wickets in 101 Tests, has a different take on the two teams.

"There's nothing better than playing at home in familiar surroundings, especially against a very good India team," he stated.

"We have the likes of (captain) Dean Elgar and Temba Bavuma, who have the ability to dig in and score big runs and I also like the way that Rassie (van der Dussen) has come in and grown in that team. Then we also have a guy like Quinny (de Kock), who we know will not hold back. He will play his natural game. In a nutshell, he feels South Africa will maintain their winning streak at home," he said.

"Then when it comes to our bowling attack, we have a settled unit and one that can definitely put India under pressure. We still have that stranglehold over them because they've never won here and I don't think that will change. It will mean a lot if we can win, but I'm hoping to see some good cricket," he added.

outplayed in the clash between the southern rivals despite a spirited showing in the second half. Blasters got off the blocks quickly as the Chennaiyin defence was caught napping in the ninth minute. Lalitha naga Khawhring saw the well-timed run of Diaz and chipped the ball over the defence. The Argentine player kept his calm and smartly finished past Vishal Kaith to break the deadlock.

Blasters kept attacking as Chennaiyin tried to sit back and defend, but

Vukomanovic's side kept them under pressure and the second goal arrived at a mistake from Kaith. The Chennaiyin keeper ended up clearing the ball straight to a Blasters player who went onto break quickly. Sahal was fed inside the box and even though the midfielder's first attempt was kept out, he made no mistake with the rebound to score his third goal of the season. Despite the pressure put on their defence in the second half, Blasters went on to extend their lead in the 79th minute, taking the game away from Chennaiyin.

Suspended national dope testing lab has got back WADA recognition: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur

NEW DELHI: Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Thursday said that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has restored the accreditation of the

rapid strides, and now its facilities are fully geared to be at par with the peer-WADA accredited labs across the globe," read a statement from the

abroad. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed in slowing down the anti-doping activities in India with NADA admitting to have col-



National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL), which was suspended in 2019 because of its failure to comply with global standards.

The NDTL is based in the national capital and can resume testing with immediate effect. "National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL) regains the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accreditation," Thakur posted on his official Twitter page.

"Restoration of accreditation is a boost to India's efforts to achieve the highest global standards of excellence in sport. This is the result of untiring efforts by GOI (Government of India)," he added.

India is currently third in the WADA's global list of dope violators led by Russia.

"Last week in Parliament, we introduced 'The National Anti-Doping Bill 2021', which is another step in India's quest to become a sporting powerhouse," Thakur said referring to the legislation which give the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) powers to conduct raids to nab dope offenders.

The suspension of the NDTL had prohibited it from carrying out any anti-doping activities, including all analysis of urine and blood samples. "NDTL has made

sports ministry. "In its continuous efforts to excel, NDTL has been collaborating with the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) Guwahati and the CSIR-IIIM Jammu for research in Anti-Doping Science. NDTL has also been collaborating with other WADA accredited laboratories for strengthening its research activities and anti-doping efforts," it added.

The WADA first suspended NDTL in August 2019 for a period of six months and extended the de-recognition period after its inspections showed that non-conformities still existed.

The laboratory's non-conformities pertained to the International Standard for Laboratories (ISL) identified during a WADA site visit, including the isotope ratio mass spectrometry — the analytical technique of choice for confirmation of prohibited substances.

During the suspension period, urine samples collected by NADA were being sent primarily to the WADA-accredited lab in Doha. The process had made the anti-doping programme very expensive for the country because of the significant cost involved in sending samples

lected a lesser volume of samples.

After outstanding non-conformities were not addressed to WADA's satisfaction, its Laboratory Expert Group (LabEG) recommended the initiation of further disciplinary proceedings against NDTL in January this year.

The disciplinary committee that was mandated to make a recommendation to the WADA chair then asked for an extension in suspension.

Because of the suspension, NDTL could not carry out any testing before Tokyo Olympics in this year.

"Sending of samples for analysis to Qatar lab involves cost and also delays the result management process," lawyer Parth Goswami, who regularly handles doping related cases, had said in an interview to PTI earlier this year.

The ministry said it is keen to establish and recognise more Dope Testing Laboratories in the country.

"Such laboratories will strengthen the capability for testing a greater number of samples, considering the sizable population and growing number of sportspersons in the country. These will also facilitate India to host mega sports events in the country," he said.

Jennifer Brady joins growing list of absentees for Australian Open

MELBOURNE: Jennifer Brady has become the latest withdrawal from next month's Australian Open and two warm-up tournaments because of injury.

Australian Open officials on Sunday confirmed the 2021 finalist would miss the tournament due to a left foot injury, and said in a tweet: "wishing you a speedy recovery Jen." Brady, ranked 25, made her maiden grand slam final at last year's event at

Melbourne Park, losing in straight sets to Naomi Osaka. The 26-year-old American has not played competitively since being forced to retire from her second-round match against Jelena Ostapenko at Cincinnati in August. Brady's withdrawal follows that of the world fourth-ranked player, Karolina Pliskova, who announced Thursday that she would not be coming to Australia due to a right-hand injury sustained during a practice session.

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