

### SEC tough on Model Code Enforcement

Bhubaneswar(KCN): State Election Commission (SEC) Aditya Prasad Padhi has taken tough stand on implementation of Model Code of Conduct.

Accordingly he has directed officials in SEC



to write to Collectors asking them to ensure strict enforcement of the model code of conduct for the upcoming rural and urban polls in Odisha.

In a letter to the Collectors, SEC Secretary R N Sahu cited that hoardings highlighting the achievements of Government with or without the photographs of **CONTINUED ON: P-7**



Maharishi's Birthday celebrated as Gyan yug Diwas By Maharishi' Public school,Baripada Mr Ganeswar sahu, Principal, Mr Ashok kar, Administrator & staff were present on the occasion



Maharishi's Birthday celebration at Maharishi Public school, Nayapall, Bhubaneswar attended by Director, MPS Mrs Hena Mahapatra & staff

## End of an Era: Versatile actor Mihir Das no more

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): The Odia film industry lost yet another gem with the demise

of veteran actor Mihir Das on Tuesday. He was 64. He is survived by his son and daughter-in-law. His wife Sangita Das had passed away in 2010. The actor was suffering from kidney ailments for the last one year and hospitalised recently after his con-

dition deteriorated. He was on ventilator support at a private hospital in Cuttack

'Ramayan', directed by Govind Tej, Das began his film journey by playing a small role of 'Satrugana' in the film that was released in 1980. Five years later, he again worked with Tej in 'School Master' which gave his career a head start. In 1987, he did M a n m o h a n Mohapatra's 'Majhi Pahacha' which won the National Film Award for Best Regional Film. His acting was appreciated by both public and critics. Several other films like 'K a n y a d a a n', 'Akashra Aakhi', 'Sagar', 'Pua Mora Bhola Sankara', 'Subhagyabati', 'Abhimanyu', 'Rakhi Bandhili Mo Rakhiba Mana', 'Sakhi Rahila Ae Singha Duara', 'Kiese Dakuchi Kouthi Mate', 'Je Panche Para Manda' followed.

Counted among the few versatile actors in the industry, Das started his career with lead roles and went on to play supporting characters, villain and even did comedy. In a career spanning four decades, he is credited to have done over 150 films and kept acting till his health condition deteriorated last year. During the journey, many State Film Awards for both best actor and best supporting actor came his way, the first being in 1996 for 'Pua Mora Bhola Shankara'. He kept winning the state awards for the years 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2006 for his f i l m s 'Soubhagyabati', 'Laxmi Pratima', 'Vidhata', 'Rakhi Bandhili Mo Rakhiba Mana' and 'Pheria Mo Suna Bhauni' re

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dition deteriorated. He was on ventilator support at a private hospital in Cuttack

Born and brought up in Cuttack, Das was associated with amateur theatre groups since his college days. He had no formal training in acting. Feb 11, 1958 - Jan 11, 2022

Debuting in the Odia film industry with

## Covid case positivity rate very high, don't treat Omicron as common cold: Centre

NEW DELHI(KCN): As many as 300 districts in India are reporting weekly Covid case positivity of more than 5 per cent, the Union gov-

ernment said on Wednesday as it urged people not to treat infection due to Omicron variant as common cold and get vaccinated.

It said Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and

Gujarat are emerging as states of concern due to the rise in Covid cases there. Addressing a press conference, Joint Secretary in Health Ministry Lav Agarwal said a sharp rise in COVID-19 infections has been noted in India with the case positivity climbing to 11.05 per cent on Wednesday from 1.1 per cent on December 30. Concurrently, Covid cases have been rising globally with January 10 recording the highest ever single-day rise of 31.59 lakh cases world-

wide, he said. The official said that currently, 300 districts in India are reporting weekly case positivity of more than 5 per cent. Coronavirus loses 90% **CONTINUED ON: P-7**



## Once in a lifetime Covid pandemic has reaffirmed importance of health sector: PM

CHENNAI(KCN): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated 11 government medical colleges in Tamil Nadu and said the future will belong to societies that invest in healthcare.

Earlier, he inaugurated new medical colleges at Virudhunagar, Namakkal, Nilgiris, Tiruppur, Tiruvallur, Nagapattinam, Dindigul, Kallakurichi, Ariyalur, Ramanathapuram and Krishnagiri districts in the state and these institutions would have a cumulative capacity of 1,450 medical seats.



Noting that it was important to address regional imbalances, Modi pointed out that two of the colleges have come up in the "aspirational districts of Ramanathapuram and Virudhunagar,"

which need development attention. Besides, one campus has been established at the remote, hilly Nilgiris. The government had earlier said establishment of these medical colleges was in line with the prime minister's constant endeavour to promote affordable medical education and improve health infrastructure in all parts of the country.

The new colleges have been set up under the centrally-sponsored scheme of establishing new medical colleges attached with existing district/referral hospital. Over 1.5 crore people in these districts and adjoining areas would benefit from the new initiative. Modi also inaugurated the new building of Central Institute of Classical Tamil here. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin and Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya were present here for the inauguration. In his address, Stalin reiterated his government's demand for exempting the state from the ambit of the National Entrance-cum-Eligibility Test (NEET), citing the interests of the rural students.

After virtually inaugurating the medical institutions, Modi said the covid-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of the health sector and listed out the various health and medical education related initiatives of his government.

"The once in a lifetime covid-19 pandemic has reaffirmed the importance of the health sector. The future will belong to societies which invest in health care. The government of India has brought many reforms in the health sector," he said in his virtual address. "Learning from the pandemic, we keep working to ensure inclusive, quality health services to all our countrymen," he said. India's covid-19 vaccination programme was making "remarkable progress," he said, while pointing to the expansion of the campaign by including the 15-18 years age group and the administration of the precaution dose to persons aged 60 years and above with comorbidities.

Thanks to the Ayushman Bharat scheme, the poor now have access to top quality and affordable health care, the Prime Minister added.

## Pakistan's new security policy seeks 'peace' with India

ISLAMABAD(KCN): Pakistan is willing to make peace with immediate neighbours, including India, under its first-ever National Security Policy which leaves doors open for trade with New Delhi even without the settlement of the Kashmir issue provided there is headway in bilateral talks, according to a media report. The National Security Policy, separately endorsed by the National Security Com-

mittee and the Cabinet last month, is scheduled to be formally unveiled by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday. Peace with immediate neighbours and



economic diplomacy will be the central theme of Pakistan's foreign policy in the new National Security Policy, the Express Tribune newspaper reported on Tuesday. The five-year-policy document covering a period between 2022-26, is being propped up by the Pakistan government as the country's first-ever strategy paper of its kind that spells out the national security vision and guidelines for the attainment of **CONTINUED ON: P-7**

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## Surrealism

Shreeta Sikruti Kuanr



I stand stranded  
On this lovely expanded  
Night of November  
Grey as December  
With metals clashing  
Against my air  
Whisper to the cold air  
About my intruder's invading glare  
With my seeking soul  
I climb the mountains  
Reap the sorrow  
Melt down as honey  
Eutopia this land  
With my ethereal body  
I dig hollow  
A soil so futile  
I plant love  
Out of misery  
For the moon so flawless  
Like black spots on loss  
I raise this glass  
To my lover  
Shining with glitters and sash  
Away with this breeze  
I separate from my heat  
Frozen finger, frozen eyes  
Shimmering as diamond  
In the golden sky  
Eloping from this loosened flesh  
Of bones and time  
I raise trees of love  
Out of misery and crime.

## My Short Poems

Adeeb Khan



**1 Oh lords of the Olympian**  
Hear this oath  
And make it a curse  
I don't want him to grow hate  
I want him to bloom love  
A love he may never get  
Let that love tree bloom with the bright colours  
babalon has ever seen  
But then they rot as his love poison the root of  
that tree

### 2 Closed doors

Heightened walls  
Asking me to stop  
To gaze at the fence rods

There was blood rushing through the walls  
My blood was barely pushed to the top  
Unguarded but still strong  
This time the right was wrong

Chosen fear feels like fetters on legs and keys  
in hands  
Bend or kneel the misfortune isn't gonna end

My chapels have no wine  
I am next in line  
Jeremial wouldn't reach in time  
Keep yourself in my shoes and complete the  
lines .....

### 3 I made a house

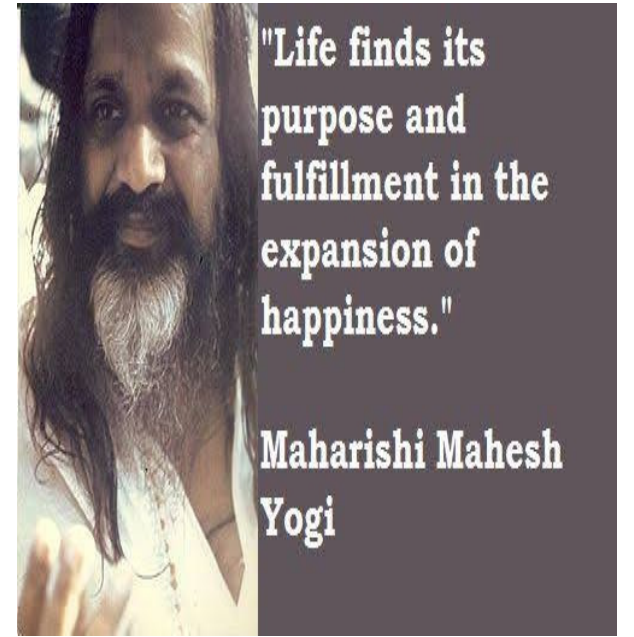
The first day felt so old  
But then u knocked on the door  
U made the house of brick and stone  
A home.  
A home of love , like dew on the morning bud  
But the u got board started taking walks near  
the coast  
And then the house went u in flames when u  
knocked at someone else's door

### 4 Be wise on who you choose as your pole star as there are a lot to live of reflection

Those who flourish in shadows are those who  
end in shadows.

Reflection might be brighter but can't top the  
radians of the origin.

The one believing in the glow that depends  
on distance is the one believing that  
indulgences washes sins.



"Life finds its purpose and fulfillment in the expansion of happiness."

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Your glow haven't increased you have just put  
on reflectors so as to hide the flaws.  
The name wouldn't give the fame, what will  
you do when the reflectors will fade ?  
[ How much more clown of me you will make,  
how much more you will break me,  
How much more you will pain give me,  
How much more you will hate me.  
These belts wouldn't pain now, these tears  
wouldn't rain now.  
Emotions were long dead,  
Fear was long lost,  
Fear of Death was long gone

# Famous works of art from 30 countries around the world

Unlike nations, art knows no boundaries. It can be forged in a vacuum, inspired solely by a burning, inner conflict, or created by wistful expatriates wishing to bridge a long-lost past with an uncertain future. It can emerge organically, in harmony with the natural landscape, or as a carefully crafted response to cultural or political touchstones.

Museums and private collections heave with such works, yet only a select few demonstrate a rare confluence of intent, emotion, and artistic genius. These masterpieces are seared into the collective consciousness, reproduced in varying sizes and shapes on walls, stationary, and coffee mugs the world over.

Traditionally, art history has sought to neatly categorize a multitude of overlapping movements and styles, geography and epochs—Impressionism, Antiquity, Romanticism, Realism, and the Middle Ages, to name just a few. Borders, however, are frequently fluid, artists often itinerant and occasionally anonymous. With this in mind, Stacker took on the task of curating this list of 30 famous works of art from 30 countries around the globe, consulting internet databases and museum websites as well as scholarly books and journals. Residence in a given museum or collection alone was not deemed reason enough for inclusion (in addition to being a source of contention

works made the final cut, and find out which images

changed the course of Korean painting, de-

Erin Joslyn



Erin Joslyn depicts a dream-like vision of an Eastern European shtetl, or were inspired by a Pagan fertility ritual.

You may also like: U.S. Marine Corps history from the year you were born

Although an aristocrat by birth, Toulouse-Lautrec's work captures the grit and glamour of working-class nightlife in Belle Époque Paris. Local performers and personalities inhabit his canvases, underscoring the artist's inimitable brand of post-impressionist realism. Here, "Valentine the Boneless," a Moulin Rouge veteran, instructs a new dancer in the art of the cancan. This striking portrait bust of the enigmatic

Egyptian queen is believed to have been executed by Thutmose—a favorite artist at the court of Akhenaten. Uncovered during the 1912 excavation headed by German archeologist Ludwig Borchardt, the painted limestone sculpture continues to be exhibited in Berlin's Neues Museum despite repeated requests from Egyptian officials to return the celebrated work to its homeland.

Over 300 monumental stone visages hover over the South Pacific Easter Island's coast-

line. Characterized by rectangular heads, broad noses, the sculptures also have lengthy torsos now buried due to centuries of sediment deposits. Although their original purpose is unknown, it has been suggested that the carvings represent deceased members of an ancient community.

Frida Kahlo produced 55 self-portraits during her prolific career, merging a personal iconography of pain and loss with potent symbols of her Mexican heritage. "Self Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird" depicts Kahlo in a lush jungle wearing a necklace made of thorns. The artistic process served as a cathartic outlet for Kahlo's traumatic split from fellow artist Diego Rivera.

One of the most celebrated works in Japanese art, "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" is part of a series of block prints known as the "Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji." Hokusai began his career at the tender age of 6, and is believed to have been in his 70s when he created his masterpiece. It's estimated that a staggering 5 million paint-

ings were produced in the Netherlands during the 17th century, a period dubbed by art historians as the Dutch Golden Age. No work represents this era more ambitiously than Jan Vermeer's "The Art of Painting." The image

depicts the painter, his back to the viewer, capturing the likeness of a comely model posing as Clio, the muse of history.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a 19th-century English aesthetic movement, were drawn to religious and literary subjects painted in a highly realistic manner. Waterhouse's "The Lady of Shalott" illustrates a verse from Tennyson's 1832 poem based on a medieval Arthurian legend. The landscape was painted by the artist en plein air in the English countryside.

Dubbed the Norman Rockwell of Sweden, Carl Larsson is famous for his warm-hearted representations of middle-class Swedes engaged in work and play. This watercolor depicts Larsson's wife walking pensively along the banks of the Sundborn River. The couple's daughter, Brita, dressed in local costume, occupies the rowboat to the right of the scene, together with the family dog.

Some of the most striking examples of Nigerian art were produced by the Nok civilization approximately 2,000 years ago. This terracotta figure, now in the Louvre, exhibits the oversized head and bold, stylized features typical of Nok sculpture.

Few paintings pack the political or emotional punch of "Guernica"—an anguished testament to the Nazi bombing of the eponymous Basque town at the request of Spanish Nationalists. Commissioned by the Spanish Republican Government for the 1937 Paris World's Fair, the monumental canvas brought the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War to international attention.

Distinguished by its circular center and intricate carving, this sandstone cross is one of the most celebrated examples of Celtic iconography in Ireland. An inscription references Flann Sinna, a medieval Irish king, and Colman, possibly an abbot of Clonmacnoise who commissioned the cross.

Art Nouveau legend Alphonse Mucha was (To be continued)



among several nations). Selected works had to express or reflect a direct relationship between the artist and their country of birth, the object and its place of production. Vincent van Gogh may be the Netherlands' most well-known artist, but most of his masterworks depict French rather than Dutch subjects. Ceremonial objects created by Pre-Columbian societies, however, speak volumes about these lost cultures.

Scroll through the list to see which master-



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Erin is a contributing writer and photo editor for Stacker. A native New Yorker, today she makes her home in Milwaukee with her husband and son. When Erin's not working, she can be found in her studio experimenting with various inks.

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## Go Girl: Tollywood heroines get a professional identity finally, but is that change enough?

The Telugu film heroine finally has a Curriculum Vitae in her professional dossier. Take the recent movies of 2021. Most Eligible Bachelor has Pooja Hegde playing Vibha, a stand-up comedian. In Tuck Jagadeesh, Ritu Verma plays a village revenue officer called Gummadi Varalakshmi. Verma also essays the role of a chef in Ninnila Ninnila.

Tamannaah Bhatia is the Telangana women kabaddi team's coach in Jwala Reddy. Sai Pallavi is a Zumba instructor in Sekhar Kammula's Love Story. A professional identity, finally. A refreshing change from the time they were just romantic interests with nothing but a name to themselves. This is a departure from barely a dozen movies out of the 250 movies that Tollywood churns out every year.

'A change in perspective influenced partly by real world employment dynamics, and in part propelled by the actors themselves in putting their foot down and demanding for 'meatier roles'. Now, this has resulted in a new interesting situation altogether -- a role created for female leads only to serve the purposes of the male lead. Case in point, Most Eligible Bachelor. When we see Vibha do stand-up comedy, it seems her 'profession' exists purely to attract the male lead's attention. Worse even, she ends up changing her whole stance over the course of the film. Contextually, she might belong to any other profession for that matter and the story would remain the same. This sort of pseudo representation is harmful as it creates an unhealthy impression that no matter what you do, you still need a proverbial hero in your life to be successful," comments Hyderabad-based Siddharth Naidu, writer and founder of VoxSpace, a portal that features 'stories which matter'.

Sai Pallavi as Zumba instructor in Love Story. The same can be said of many other roles that start as promising, but then sway to the whims of the narrative. It almost seems that the writers, just to coax the female actors into signing the film, create such 'nothing' roles.

"When we look at roles like Gowri (Nithya Menen in Skylab), we see the stark contrast in creating a female character who is absolutely essential to the story. She doesn't happen to be in the story, she makes the story happen. That's the difference. The Bechdel Test, a scale of female representation, among other things states that female roles need to exist and interact independently on their own accord and despite the hero's so-called journey. It is a good thing we are creating roles of working women, even professionals at that. But that's not enough. If we need to make our films socially relevant, we also

need to give these roles their own distinct agencies," Naidu adds. Spurthi Kolipaka, the Campaign Strategist for WomComMatters, who was instrumental in getting the Women's Commission of Telangana operational and known for her feminist stance, believes that some movies do a disservice by

are responsible for inspiring casual sexism. We have no clue why we never got to see Shruti Hassan be a practicing lawyer in Vakeel Saab, even once. Although, we did see the character's pregnant self." That female roles have a strong impact on the audience and the masses was evident in the 90s



portraying the women in roles that the filmmaker is not invested in. "The Most Eligible Bachelor



starts and ends with a wife joke. These films

when Telugu superstar Vijayashanthi (nicknamed Lady Amitabh by her fans) played the role of a supercop (IPS officer Kiran Bedi) in Kartavyam. "It wasn't just a coincidence that the number of girls who started taking Police Inspector/Constable exams that following year trebled," recalls Prakash Reddy Jeera of JOBS Study Circle, a coaching centre, in Ameerpet, Hyderabad. Six of his girl students were inspired by the portrayal and decided to sit for the exam. He remembers training 26 girls that year, thrice of what he did in the previous years.

Giving a south Indian perspective to the issue, cinephile and independent film journalist Ashameera Aiyappan says, "Malayalam cinema has embraced showing an everyday woman at a more intricate level in movies such as The Great Indian Kitchen. Telugu and Tamil are commercial markets that celebrate the hero and his heroism. Unless there is a market around women-centric cinema, female characters will continue to remain insignificant."

Will 2022 bring home the Telugu heroine's CV? The box office holds the answers. Stand-up comedian, social entrepreneur, chef, and kabaddi coach are some of the roles that Telugu female protagonists have played onscreen in 2021. Is it the beginning of a new trend to reinstate the Telugu heroine or a flash in the pan?

## Abhishek Bachchan: My job is to entertain, not give morality lesson

Francis Ford Coppola famously said, "Sequels are not done for the audience or cinema or the filmmakers. It's for the distributor. The film becomes a brand." The same thing can be said about spinoffs too. Given how superhero franchise films have turned into money-spinners, can we really blame the studios for going down that path? Almost every social media list of prospective Hindi film characters that deserve spinoffs, had one name prominently featured in them: Kahaani's Bob Biswas. Come December 3, this story is set to unfold on Zee5 with Abhishek Bachchan stepping into the huge shoes of actor Saswata Chatterjee, whose eight-minute role, achieved cult status. "He is more than just a contract killer. He is a father, a husband, and a patient too. There are contradictions in this character. How can someone so nice and soft-spoken be a contract killer? I'm grateful that there are people who consider me worthy of such a challenging role," says Abhishek.

Life has come full circle for Abhishek, given that this character was originally written by Sujoy Ghosh with the former in mind. Kahaani was supposed to be a two-person story featuring Bob and Vidya Bagchi. However, fate had other plans, the script was reworked, and the rest is history. "It is definitely flattering that characters are being written for me, but I don't read too much into it because at the end of the day, the work we do talks more about us than the work we didn't," says Abhishek, who has had a golden run with the characters he has done recently.

Post his self-imposed break, Abhishek has played an accommodative romantic in Manmarziyan, a street thug with a strong emotional core in Ludo, an untameable stockbroker in The Big Bull, and now a soft-spoken contract killer in Bob Biswas. He has particularly thrived in roles coloured in grey waala shades—be it Beera Munda or Gurukanth Desai or Shankar Nagre or Roy Kapoor or Rakesh Trivedi or Lallan Singh. If Big B said the line begins from wherever he stands, Junior B has thrived in operating between the lines. "I am attracted to flawed characters. I

am excited by these characters rising above flaws and realising their inner potential," says Abhishek, who next plays yet another flawed

of OTT in India. Notably, Abhishek has a strong emotional connection with Tamil Nadu courtesy of owning Chennaiyin FC, the football club that represents the city in the Indian Super League.



character in SSS-7, the official remake of the Tamil film, Oththa Seruppu Size 7. While his previous Tamil remake (Run) had him trying to establish commercial hero credentials, this time, the film is an attempt to stand out from the rest. "When Parthiban (the director of OS 7) met me on the sets of Ponniyin Selvan, which stars Aishwarya (Rai Bachchan), he was so humble and showed the film to me. I loved it; it was a work of pure genius. When he asked if we should make it in Hindi, I knew it was an opportunity I shouldn't miss," reveals Abhishek, and goes on to talk about how it is such "huge challenges" that he enjoys. The rise of OTT has made these challenges more frequent, and Abhishek has been at the heart of bridging the divide between content for theatres and OTT. He wastes no time in shooing away questions about the possibility of his OTT sojourns being detrimental to cinema 'stardom'. "It is an exciting medium and it is here to stay. There is a lot of impactful storytelling that is happening in this space," says the actor, who also touches upon the blurring linguistic boundaries due to the spread

"Language barriers are immaterial today. Last year's Breathe 2 had a Tamil dubbed version. My dear friend Suriya is doing such wonderful work, and his last two films -- Soorari Pottru and Jai Bhim -- had Hindi dubbed versions. The lines are definitely blurring." These observations are also a result of Abhishek being active on social media. Per-

haps one of Indian cinema's most active Twitter personalities, the actor's responses to his fans and trolls alike are well-documented. His Twitter bio reads, "Actor; sports fan" and it is on social media that the sports fan in him runs rampant. Though he owns football and kabaddi teams, his sports tweets are not just limited to cricket, football, and kabaddi. "That's because we have immense sporting talent in India, and if I can aid it in any way with my tweets, I will do it." He is, however, clear about compartmentalising his various personas. 'Sports fan Abhishek' is as distinct as 'actor Abhishek', and his bundle of positivity on social media is quite far removed from his acting roles that are mostly nuzzled in the grey zones. "With my films, I am just telling a story. Each actor has their own approach as to the subject matter they want to be part of. As for the whole morality debate, with all due respect, I am not your parent. If you want a lesson in morality and value, speak to your parents. Our job is only to entertain you!" signs off Abhishek Bachchan, with a characteristic punch line.

# Vaccines Versus the Mutants

The optimistic mood around COVID-19 vaccine rollouts has been clouded by new variants of the virus, which could trample



the efficacy of vaccines or escape them entirely. Already, recent trial results from Johnson & Johnson and from Novavax suggest that a variant that first arose in South Africa

(B.1.351) and probably a variant identified in Brazil (P.1) are partially escaping protection provided by their vaccines.

Specifically, mutations in the viruses' spike proteins allow them to avoid being bound by antibodies produced after vaccination or natural infection. "The South African variant appears to partially escape antibody responses," says Dan Barouch, the director of the Center for Virology and Vaccine Research at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. With novel variants expected to emerge, the question is, which vaccines would be quickest to rejig and manufacture if updates become necessary?

A few vaccine makers have already announced that they are gearing up for second generation vaccines. "It may not be necessary, but is probably good insurance to buy right now," says immunologist Alessandro Sette of the La Jolla Institute for Immunology.

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A few vaccine makers have already announced that they are gearing up for second generation vaccines. "It may not be necessary, but is probably good insurance to buy right now," says immunologist Alessandro Sette of the La Jolla Institute for Immunology.

Of the common approaches to design—or redesign—a vaccine, mRNA vaccines are the most expeditious. They pack the genetic recipe for the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein inside a nanoparticle, which is engulfed by cells that then manufacture the protein and tutor the immune system to recognize it. "They are using chemically synthesized mRNA. There's no cells needed, so it is so much quicker to make and then purify," says immunologist Sarah Caddy of the University of Cambridge. Moderna designed its mRNA construct last January and had it ready for testing by March 2020. Pfizer/BioNTech's mRNA vaccine was not far behind, and was the first to gain emergency use authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration, beating Moderna by one week last December.

It wouldn't surprise me if every vaccine maker is now making versions that will tackle the Brazilian and South African

strain, and [the] UK [strain] for good measure.

**Anthony King**

—Luke O'Neill, Trinity College Dublin  
"The simpler the vaccine, the easier and faster it would be to 'update' it," Wolfgang Leitner, head of the innate immunity section of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), tells *The Scientist* in an email. "Changing an RNA-sequence would 'only' require switching out the plasmid that's used as a template to make the RNA, and modifying a sequence in a plasmid is also quite simple." Indeed, Moderna was quick off the blocks again, announcing late last month that it had a candidate booster vaccine encoding B.1.351's spike protein ready to be tested in a clinical trial in the US.

Arguably the next quickest vaccine type to manufacture is the vector-based variety, which delivers the spike protein recipe using a live virus. To make the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca's product, for example, living "producer cells" from a human cell line are engineered to become mini vaccine factories, before being burst open to release a weakened adenovirus vector carrying the spike protein gene. "That will take about twice as long [as mRNA vaccine production], so three months to make an AstraZeneca-type vaccine," says Luke O'Neill, an immunologist at Trinity College Dublin. But according to Caddy, updating vector-based vaccines should be as straightforward as re-vamping mRNA ones. "The sequence just needs to be inserted into the adenovirus sequence, then the adenovirus grown and purified."

Another option to fight off mutants is to change not just the spike sequence delivered by vector-based and mRNA vaccines, but to add additional proteins from the virus to their cargo. Caddy advocates for including the nucleoprotein that wraps around the virus genome in COVID-19 vaccines. "The nucleoprotein doesn't mutate anywhere near as much," she says, "and mutations there are more likely to make the virus nonfunctional."

"There are a couple vaccines in the pipeline (but far from being ready for prime-time) that encode additional viral proteins," notes Leitner. "The challenge is that they are more complex and, therefore, take longer to develop."

Barouch agrees. Adding nonspike proteins would "increase complexity and slow down timelines," he says, so will likely not be done unless the spike-only vaccines fail.

While adding additional antigens to mRNA and vector-based vaccines would slow down production times for these rapidly produced vaccines, another popular vaccine approach already has the advantage of triggering the immune system to recognize multiple parts of the virus: inactivated SARS-CoV-2 viruses. This approach involves producing large amounts of virus in cell culture, then treating the viruses with a chemical to render them no longer infectious. This process can take more time—not to mention the challenges of standardizing inactivation and conducting essential quality checks to ensure the virus is indeed safe—and so vaccines of this type have lagged behind mRNA and vector-based vaccines. But the upside is that the immune system sees an entire virus, not just the spike protein.

"Even if there are spike mutants, there will be other antibodies that [inactivated vaccines] will bring onto other proteins in the virus," says O'Neill. For that reason, these vaccines are "more likely to be valuable in the face of variants," adds Caddy, "because you get a response against other pro-

teins, which are not mutating as quickly as the spike."

If and when these upgraded vaccines will be needed is still a big question.

Leitner adds that producing new vaccines for COVID-19 would simply involve growing a new variant. "When it comes to inactivated viruses, I would actually rank them among the very easy ones to 'update,'" he says—"as long as the variant grows just as well (maybe even better) as the original virus."

Not everyone agrees that targeting more antigens will be helpful. Immunologist Danny Altmann of Imperial College London says T cell and B cell immunity is elicited from many parts of the wildtype virus, "but I can see no hard evidence that there's strong correlates of protection outside of spike neutralization." In other words, vaccines that target the spike protein are the most likely to offer protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Immunologist Kingston Mills of Trinity College Dublin agrees that neutralizing the spike is crucial, and that other targets are of peripheral importance to COVID-19 vaccines. "Nonspike proteins may generate T cell responses that may help, but won't generate neutralizing antibodies, and antibodies against N [nucleoprotein] or other proteins will not have a role in protective immunity," he says.

For now, then, vaccine makers are focused on updating the spike protein sequences in their shots to match the variants that appear to be partially evading SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. Even for protein-based vaccines—the fourth major strategy for making vaccines for COVID-19, involving the production of the spike protein in the lab, which in Leitner considers to "be the most involved process of them all"—companies are already moving on a second generation of shots. In January, for example, Novavax announced that it started developing new versions of its protein-based vaccine against emerging strains. "Animal studies are underway and we could be in the clinic as soon as a month or two from now," a spokesperson from Novavax informs *The Scientist* in an email.

"It wouldn't surprise me if every vaccine maker is now making versions that will tackle the Brazilian and South African strain, and [the] UK [strain] for good measure," says O'Neill.

How soon are vaccine updates needed?

If and when these upgraded vaccines will be needed is still a big question. There are two main strands of evidence to consider in determining how newly emerged variants are affecting vaccine efficacy. First, the most recent clinical trial results: Novavax achieved more than 90 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 in a Phase 3 trial in the UK, according to an interim analysis, but just 60 percent effective in a smaller trial in South Africa where B.1.351 is rife. For its adenovirus vector-based vaccine, Johnson & Johnson reported efficacy of 72 percent in the US but 66 percent in Latin America and 57 percent in South Africa, where troubling variants are more prevalent. The conclusion is that these spike mutants indeed seem to be reducing the protection that vaccines can provide.

Second, the lab studies: To explore the effects of variants on the Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines, researchers took serum from vaccinated people and tested how it fared against the new spike variants. These experiments showed that antibody responses declined six- to eight-fold. But because of the high antibody titers the vaccines generate, this is still in the protective range, according to

Barouch, who was involved in the development of Johnson & Johnson vaccine. These in vitro results suggest that these vaccines elicit high enough antibody levels to neutralize the new variants.

However, the challenge posed by new variants was highlighted by an announcement that similar lab studies found the AstraZeneca vaccine to provide minimal protection against mild and moderate COVID-19 upon infection with the B.1.351 variant, far less than the protection it provides against the original SARS-CoV-2 strain. The *Financial Times* reported that it had seen trial results to support this finding, though the vaccine's effectiveness against severe disease has not yet been determined. South Africa paused rollout of the vaccine following the announcement. Sarah Gilbert at the University of Oxford says in a press release that efforts to develop a new generation of the vaccine are now underway.

It will be difficult to know from serum samples if or when a mutant has escaped a vaccine, partly because researchers do not know where to draw the line between an immune response that is protective against SARS-CoV-2 and one that is not. "We don't know for sure exactly what kinds of immune responses or what antibody titers are truly necessary for clinical vaccine protection in humans," says Barouch. When he and his colleagues transferred convalescent serum to macaques and challenged them with SARS-CoV-2, they found that relatively low antibody levels protected the primates, but only if the serum contained adequate levels of CD8+ killer T cells.

The involvement of these T cells, which kill cells infected with virus, complicates the picture. Having more CD8+ T cells is linked to milder COVID-19. So far, from his calculations, Sette says the T cells stimulated by vaccines or infection to an early lineage of SARS-CoV-2 should largely recognize the new variants. He studied T cell responses in COVID-19 and found that an average person's T cells recognize multiple parts of SARS-CoV-2—"at least 15 to 20 different pieces," he says, including on the spike and several other proteins. For that reason, he concludes, "it is very unlikely that the virus could mutate to escape T cell recognition."

Some vaccines are suspected to provoke a stronger T cell response than others do. Vector-based and mRNA vaccines, for example, mirror natural infection with SARS-CoV-2, forming the spike protein inside cells—a process that is thought to strongly activate killer T cells, says Barouch, whereas "protein-based and inactivated-virus vaccines generally don't raise a strong CD8 T cell response." Chemical adjuvants used in protein and inactivated-virus vaccines may promote killer T cells, says Sette, and side-by-side comparisons of T cell and antibodies have not been done yet between vaccines.

"There could be differences among [vaccine] platforms in terms of different immune responses, or different levels of T cell responses," says Barouch. "That could be why some platforms may be better than others for tackling variants. But that is theoretical, and we don't know that for sure."

Anthony King is a freelance science journalist based in Dublin, Ireland, who contributes to *The Scientist*. He reports on a variety of topics in chemical and biological sciences, as well as science policy and health. His articles have appeared in *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, *Chemistry World*, *New Scientist*, the *Irish Times*, *EMBO Reports*, *Chemistry & Industry*, and more. He is President of the Irish Science & Technology Journalists Association

## 90 per cent of Bhubaneswar's Covid patients in home isolation

**BHUBANESWAR:** As hospitalisation of Covid positive persons during the current wave remains low in the Capital city and more than 90 per cent patients undergoing treatment in

visory services to these patients effectively. BMC Deputy Commissioner for Health and Sanitation Suwendu Kumar Sahoo said 40 Ayush doctors have been

ing service for patients in home isolation. On being contacted via helpline 1929, the teams will visit patients in home isolation to give them medical advice and isolation kit, he said.

reporting over 500 cases for the last four days. The city reported another 710 new cases against 107 recoveries in the last 24 hours. Meanwhile, AIIMS-Bhubaneswar has de-

of patients for the departments like General Medicine, Orthopedics, Dermatology, General Surgery, Pulmonary Medicine, ENT, Ophthalmology, Gastroenterol-



home isolation, the BMC has added more rapid response teams (RRTs) to its Covid management system to provide health ad-

roped in and the number of RRTs in the field increased from existing 16 to 40 to strengthen health advisory and monitor-

The Capital city which has remained a Covid hotspot from the beginning of the outbreak of pandemic in Odisha, has been

cided to curtail new registration of patients in some of the departments in phases from Wednesday. The registration

ogy, Pediatrics will be limited to 100 per day, except the departments like Urology, Neurology, Nephrology, Endocrinology, Cardiology, which will continue as before till further orders.

## Study finds new foraging grounds, routes of gharials

**KENDRAPARA(KCN):** Gharials have been found travelling several hundred kilometers in Mahanadi - sometimes through the tributaries to reach as far as Kendrapara- into unknown territories charting new routes, a latest survey has revealed. Wildlife bi-

leased in Mahanadi under the Forest department's 'Recovery of Gharial in the river Mahanadi' scheme in June, 2019. Earlier, 13 gharials were tagged with radio transmitters for post-release monitoring. Last year, four adult gharials were tagged with satellite

and four females died. Three died due to blasting in the river by unscrupulous persons to catch fish, one was killed by a mugger and another by entanglement in a nylon fishing net. Of the gharials which were released in Mahanadi on December 2 last year, one

area of Satkosia gorge. Of the total hatchlings, three were swept away in flood. On October 22 last year, a baby gharial was caught in the net of a fisherman in Birupa river near Choti village in Kendrapara district. On August 29, another baby gharial



ologists who monitored the endangered species through satellite transmitters saw that the gharials dispersed in both upstream (up to 190 km in Sambalpur) and downstream (up to 207 km in Kendrapara) from the release point at Satkosia gorge. At least 17 gharials including six males and 11 females between five and 16 years of age were re-

transmitters and released in the river. Some gharials returned establishing Satkosia gorge as the most suitable habitat for them, informed project advisor and noted herpetologist Prof Sudarsan Maharana who was involved in breeding of gharials in captivity in Nandankanan Zoological Park during 1980s. However, five released gharials including one male

moved downstream (around 57 km) but its jaws were caught in a torn fishing net. Unable to eat, it was reportedly swimming erratically in water. The gharial was located on the left bank of Mahanadi at Padamal in Athagarh on December 20. It was caught the next day. Under the scheme, 28 hatchlings were born from a nest inside the 'No Fishing Zone'

was caught by a fisherman in Paika river in Kendrapara. Moharana said gharials are not a danger to human beings unlike saltwater crocodiles. Many persons wrongly equate gharials with the estuarine crocodiles as a result of which their lives are now in danger. The study found the ways in which nylon fishing net kills the gharials and how to save the crocodiles in river systems.

## Sulia Jatra begins in Odisha's Balangir district with traditional fervour

**BALANGIR(KCN):** Sulia Jatra, one of the major tribal festivals of western Odisha, began on Tuesday in Khaireguda and Kumuria villages with mass sacrifice of animals amid strict adherence to Covid protocol. The Jatra takes place on the second Tuesday of the 'paua' month every year among eight sub-castes of the Kondh tribe. Sources said, the tribals marched in a

procession to the ritual site at Bada Khala in Khaireguda and Sankhala in Kumuria village where all the arrangements were made to carry out the sacrifice of hens and goats. The tribals believe that offering the blood of animals and birds to their presiding deity Sulia results in good harvest and prosperity for the community. This year, the 500-year-old tradition saw fewer devotees in the

wake of an impending third wave of Covid-19. Chairperson of Deogaon block Reena Meher, ex-chairman Laxman Kumar Meher and Balangir MLA Narasingha Mishra were present on the occasion. Earlier, there had been a tussle between the district administration and Zilla Adivasi Sangha following Orissa High Court orders to abolish the practice and mass killing of animals.

## Rajnath Singh is recovering well after tested Covid-19 positive: Defence Ministry

**NEW DELHI (KCN):** Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who

Hospital (R and R), Delhi Cantt, informed A Bharat Bhushan Babu, Prin-

from Army Hospital (R and R), Delhi Cantt examined Defence Minister Rajnath Singh who had tested Covid positive, yesterday. He is recovering well," said A Bharat Bhushan Babu. The Union Defence Minister went under home quarantine as he had mild symptoms after getting infected with the coronavirus infection.



tested Covid-19 on Monday was examined by a team of doctors from Army

Ministry of Defence on Tuesday. "A team of doctors



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MLA, Khordha Inaugurated Several Development Projects



Khordha (KCN) MLA, Khordha Joytrindra Nath Mitra inaugurated several development projects in Khordha and Tangi Block Area under Khordha Assembly Constituency. MLA, J. N. Mitra inaugurated five development projects and put foundation stones for 16 no National Highway to Pariorada via Tutumbar Palli road under Pradhan Mantri Gramya Sadak Yojana (PMGSY). Tangi Block Chairman Bijaya Jena, Sarapancha Pariorada, Tangi Block Yuva Biju Janta Dal President Chinmaya Prusty among others were present. MLA, Sri. Mitra emphasized the need to include the people in the mainstream of the society and access to basic amenities.

Silver jubilee commemorative inter - school quiz competition organised by DAV, Kalinga Nagar

Bhubaneswar(KCN): DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar organized an Inter-school Quiz Competition to mark the occasion of its silver jubilee year. Around 58 students from 29 DAV schools of Zone-1, Odisha participated wholeheartedly in this grand event to showcase their talent and aptitude on the virtual platform. "Pandemic COVID-19 can be a barrier between us, but can never stop us from unraveling our talent and potential", said the Principal of the school Mr Bipin Kumar Sahoo in his welcome address to the gathering. The quiz competition, held on the occasion of National Youth Day was preceded by a floral tribute to Swami Vivekananda: the spiritual guru who enlightened the world with his blaze of spiritualism. In this connection, Marathi language in line with Ek Bharat Shresth Bharat programme introduced by CBSE. In the online quiz contest conducted by Quiz Master Mr Bivash Mishra, the founder member of Odisha Quiz Association, DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar represented by Abha Priyadarsinee and Lekisha Mohanty emerged as the champion while DAV Public School,



its silver jubilee year. Around 58 students from 29 DAV schools of Zone-1, Odisha participated wholeheartedly in this grand event to showcase their talent and aptitude on the virtual platform. "Pandemic COVID-19 can be a barrier between us, but can never stop us from unraveling our talent and potential", said the Principal of the school Mr Bipin Kumar Sahoo in his welcome address to the gathering. The quiz competition, held on the occasion of National Youth Day was preceded by a floral tribute to Swami Vivekananda: the spiritual guru who enlightened the world with his blaze of spiritualism. In this connection, Marathi language in line with Ek Bharat Shresth Bharat programme introduced by CBSE. In the online quiz contest conducted by Quiz Master Mr Bivash Mishra, the founder member of Odisha Quiz Association, DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar represented by Abha Priyadarsinee and Lekisha Mohanty emerged as the champion while DAV Public School, Chandrasekarpur became the 1st Runners up and 2nd runners up respectively. The competition was smoothly organized by the whole-hearted cooperation of all the staff with complete adherence to COVID-19 SOPs.

General Manager, Eastern Railway Shri Arun Arora paid homage to Swami Vivekananda Ji. Eastern Railway CELEBRATED BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SWAMI VIVEKANADA

Kolkata (KCN): As part of observance of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav', Eastern Railway celebrated birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda at ER Head Quarters, Fairlie Place on 12.01.2022. Shri Arun Arora, General Manager, Eastern Railway paid homage to Swami Vivekananda on the auspicious occasion of birth anniversary of Swamiji. Shri Shekhar Ranjan Ghoshal, AGM/ER, and other officers of Eastern Railway also offered floral tribute to the portrait of Swami Vivekananda on this occasion. Swami Vivekananda was one of the most distinguished and celebrated spiritual leaders of India who took the ancient Indian message of Vedanta to the West and at the same time called upon Indians to serve God in man. His was more than just a spiritual mind; he was a prolific thinker, great orator and passionate patriot. His message of universal brotherhood and self-awakening remains relevant even today. His teachings have been an inspiration to many, and his words have become goals of self-improvement especially for the youth of the country. For this very reason, his birthday, January 12, is celebrated as the National Youth Day in India. Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendranath Datta in a Bengali family[ at his ancestral home in Calcutta, the then capital of British India, on 12 January 1863 on the occasion of Makar Sankranti. He belonged to a traditional family and was one of nine siblings. His father, Vishwanath Datta, was an attorney at the Calcutta High Court and his mother Dakshineswar who later became his spiritual master. He completed his graduation in 1884



derer). In the next two years, he travelled across the length and breadth of the country. It was during this period that he acquired his monastic name 'Vivekananda'. During his parivrajaka days, he had heard about the forthcoming World's Parliament of Religions, which was to take place in Chicago. Some of his disciples and followers, especially the Raja of Ramnad, were of the opinion that he should attend the Parliament. His disciples, especially those based in Madras, raised funds for his journey to the West and the Raja of Khetri also provided support to facilitate this journey. Vivekananda gave his first lecture at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on the inaugural day, September 11, 1893. He was an instant success at the Parliament, given his personality, articulation and authenticity on account of spiritual realisation. He gave five more lectures at the Parliament on September 15, 19, 20, 26 and 27. From 1893 to 1896, he gave several lectures in public and private gatherings in the East Coast and Mid-West of America as well as in London in Europe. Many earnest spiritual seekers of the West became his disciples. On May 1, 1897, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math with headquarters at Belur, in the outskirts of Calcutta. The motto of this institution is 'Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha' (for one's spiritual liberation and for the welfare of the world). His purpose behind setting up this organisation was to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the ancient Vedantic teachings of the Upanisads. Vivekananda said: "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity..." The Mission was also to undertake activities for serving the poor in the spirit of serving God in man. On July 4, 1902, Swami Vivekananda attained Mahasamadhi at Belur Math. Some of his prominent works are 'Raja Yoga', 'Karma Yoga' and 'Bartaman Bharat'(in Bengali). Besides ER Headquarters, the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda which is also marked as "National Youth Day" has been observed at all four Divisions viz. Howrah, Sealdah, Asansol, Malda and three workshops viz. Liluah, Jamalpur & Kanchrapara Workshops of Eastern Railway.

## BSF Personnel Received Precautionary Dose of Covid-19 in DHH, Khordha

Khordha (KCN): India has been reporting a step rise in the daily covid-19 infections since the start of -2022. In fact just on January -6 the over all cases surpassed

again begun looming across the country. Even with a considerable chunks of the population fully vaccinated and the existence of early links between hospi-

the country from January -10. Today, the BSF personnel including, IG, BSF, Satish Chandra Budakati, B.B. Gusain, FTR HQ, OD, Dharendra

khordha District Administration as we'll as the government for providing booster dose. Earlier we were administered two doses which give us the courage to work



the one lakhs mark the highest for the first time in the last seven months. Modelling studies have indicated that the wave might peak between January end and the beginning of February by notching infections up to 10 lakhs. Amid the spike fear's of catching the infection have once

the one lakhs mark the highest for the first time in the last seven months. Modelling studies have indicated that the wave might peak between January end and the beginning of February by notching infections up to 10 lakhs. Amid the spike fear's of catching the infection have once

Kumar, DIG, BSF, K. K. Dash, A/C/Adm, M. N. Prusty, HC/NA, Amerendra Das, ASI/PH, Narendra Kumar Das, HC received the precautionary dose of Covid-19 in presence of Pradyumna Mishra, DPHO at District Head Quatre Hospital, Khordha. IG, BSF thanked the

during a pandemic. I am satisfied this. We were Covid warriors worked a lot and are still working. I urge all the eligible people to take the third dose of vaccine and all those who have not taken covid-19 vaccine should take. So, that the pandemic is over.

## Bhubaneswar's ILS scientists decode genes of drumstick

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): In a first, scientists at the Institute of Life Sciences (ILS), Bhubaneswar have conducted the whole genome sequencing of one of the impor-

tors of response to abiotic stress in plants as the Moringa plant can withstand drought conditions. ILS Director Dr. Ajay Parida said the high-quality genome se-

quencing of M oleifera var Bhagya (the variety available in Odisha) and a comparison of its genome with genomes of other plants revealed a number of orthologous groups that are important for growth and survival of plants.

"We have identified 32,062 protein-coding genes in the assembled genome. The major categories of the genes included those related to molecular, cellular and metabolic processes. We have analysed their expression in

response to drought stress. Moringa can withstand both severe drought and mild frost conditions," he said. The scientists analysed its genes by

sugar, present in leaves, pods, and seeds. Its seed, a natural coagulant, is extensively used in water treatment while the leaves are rich in minerals, vitamins and other essential phytochemicals. Seeds for four varieties of M oleifera - Bhagya, ODC3, PKM1, and PKM2, were collected from Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Dhenkanal for the study. The seeds were soaked in distilled water overnight and planted in a mix of soil rite and vermicompost in a ratio of 3:1. Plants were grown under controlled conditions. Young leaves of M oleifera var Bhagya were collected for high-quality DNA isolation for whole-genome sequencing. Apart from Dr. Parida, scientists Sushree Shyamali, Seema Pradhan and Mitrabinda Panda were involved in the study that has been published recently in the international journal Frontiers in Plant Sciences.



tant plant species Moringa oleifera (drumstick) that everybody is fond of. Known for its high nutritive values, Moringa represents a promising species capable of minimising the adverse effects of drought stress and can enhance the soil of arid regions. It is used as a potential antioxidant, anticancer, anti-inflammatory, antidiabetic and antimicrobial agent. The study of genes found that heat shock transcription factors (HSFs) have emerged as important regula-

quencing of M oleifera var Bhagya (the variety available in Odisha) and a comparison of its genome with genomes of other plants revealed a number of orthologous groups that are important for growth and survival of plants.

## SEC tough on Model Code Enforcement

Continued from page-1

politicians / Ministers are being displayed in different Government offices / public places in the District.

"Further, stickers of different Government schemes are being used in the vehicles of Government officers. Many of these also carry the photograph of politicians / Ministers. Both of these actions violate the Model Code of Conduct which is in force throughout the State (including Urban areas)."

The Commission has directed that all such hoardings and stickers be immediately removed and compliance be furnished with the SEC.

The three-tier panchayat elections in Odisha will be held in five phases on February 16, 18, 20, 22 and 24. The results will be declared on February 26, 27 and 28.

While announcing the date of polling, the SEC, Mr. Padhi, had on Tuesday declared that the model code of conduct came into force immediately.

Meanwhile, official sources said that Padhi will hold a meeting with district collectors and superintendents of police at 10.30 am on January 15 in virtual mode on conducting the panchayat polls.

The elections will be held to elect 853 Zilla Parishad members, 6,794 Sarpanchs and 91,913 ward members.

Over 2.79 crore voters will be eligible to exercise their franchise

## Covid case positivity rate very high, don't treat Omicron as common cold: Centre

Continued from page-1

of ability to infect after 20 minutes in air: Study Informing the press conference that 19 states have over 10,000 active Covid cases, Agarwal said Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and Gujarat are emerging as states of concern due to the rise in Covid cases there.

Stressing on the importance of getting inoculated, he quoted the World Health Organisation to say that vaccine effectiveness against hospitalization appears to be substantially higher than against symptomatic COVID-19 disease. NITI Aayog Member (Health) V K Paul said, "Omicron is not the common cold, cannot take it lightly. We need to be vigilant, get vaccinated and follow Covid-appropriate behaviour."

"Vaccination is an important pillar in our Covid response programme," he added.

India added 1,94,720 new infections to its tally of COVID-19 cases pushing it to 3,60,70,510, according to the Union Health Ministry data on Wednesday.

Active cases have increased to 9,55,319, the highest in 211 days, while the death toll has climbed to 4,84,655 with 442 fresh fatalities. Of the total 4,868 cases of the Omicron variant, 1,805 people have recovered or migrated so far.

## End of an Era: Versatile actor Mihir Das no more

Continued from page-1

spectively. He also acted in an art film 'Bhija Matira Swarga' directed by Manmohan Mohapatra that won six awards in the 30th Odisha State Film Awards in the year 2019 including the Best Actor Award for Das.

Political leaders, members of the film industry and people from all walks of life condoled the demise of the legendary actor. While Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal said Das will always be remembered for his superlative acting skills, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said the impression that the actor left behind in Odia cinema will immortalise him. "His demise is an irreparable loss to the Odia cinema," Naveen tweeted while expressing his sympathy for the bereaved family members.

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said Das was a fine human being and a household name in Odisha. "His performances won millions of hearts. An elder brother to me, Mihir's passing away is a personal loss," Pradhan tweeted. BJP National Vice President Bajjayant Jay Panda said an era in the Odia film world has come to an end. His mortal remains will be consigned to flames with full state honours at Cuttack on Wednesday.

## Pakistan's new security policy seeks 'peace' with India

Continued from page-1

those goals.

The original 100-page policy, which would be kept under wraps, leaves the door open for trade and business ties with India without the final settlement of the longstanding Kashmir dispute provided there is progress in the talks between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, an official was quoted as saying by the paper. "We are not seeking hostility with India for the next 100 years. The new policy seeks peace with immediate neighbours," the official said on condition of anonymity.

If there is a dialogue and progress, there would be a possibility of normalising trade and commercial ties with India as it had happened in the past, the official added.

Ties between India and Pakistan nose-dived after a terror attack on the Pathankot Air Force base in 2016 by terror groups based in the neighbouring country.

Subsequent attacks, including one on an Indian Army camp in Uri, further deteriorated the relationship.

The relationship dipped further after India's war planes pounded a Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist training camp deep inside Pakistan on February 26, 2019 in response to the Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF jawans were killed.

The relations deteriorated after India announced withdrawing the special powers of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcation of the state into two union territories in August, 2019. India has told Pakistan that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Islamabad in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence.

As the new national security policy seeks a shift in Pakistan's approach from geo-strategic to geo-economics, there is a renewed optimism of a possible thaw with India, the report said.

"Economic security will be the central theme of the new national security policy," the official disclosed.

"But geo-economics does not necessarily mean we overlook our geo-strategic and geopolitical interests," the official said, adding the long-standing Kashmir dispute with India has been identified as a 'vital national policy' issue for Pakistan.

The official, however, clarified that there were no prospects of rapprochement with India under the current government in New Delhi. The official said this would be the first-ever codified national security policy that would cover both internal security as well as foreign policy.

"Only a part of the national security policy will be made public," the official clarified, saying in the rest of the world such policies often remained classified.

The official said though Pakistan did have defence, foreign and internal policies, the new policy would act as an "umbrella document" providing direction for the future.

It took seven years to prepare this policy, which was started by then-national security adviser Sartaj Aziz in 2014.

"Inputs were taken from all the federal, provincial institutions as well as military and other departments," the official said.

The official said the Opposition was not taken on board since policy making was the domain of the executive but for a consensus, "we are ready to sit with the Opposition." However, the Opposition had boycotted the session when National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf briefed the parliamentary committee on national security a few weeks ago.

When asked to comment on the implementation of the policy, the official said the classified document lays out a complete implementation mechanism and the prime minister will review the progress on a monthly basis.

The policy will be reviewed every year and at the time of change of government, the official said, adding the issue of political stability was also taken care of in it.

Pakistan has a chequered history with no elected prime minister having ever been able to complete his/her five-year term.

The new policy also deals with the issue of militant and dissident groups and advocates dialogue with 'reconcilable elements.' On the internal front, the new policy identifies five key areas of population/migration, health, climate and water, food security and gender mainstreaming, according to the report.

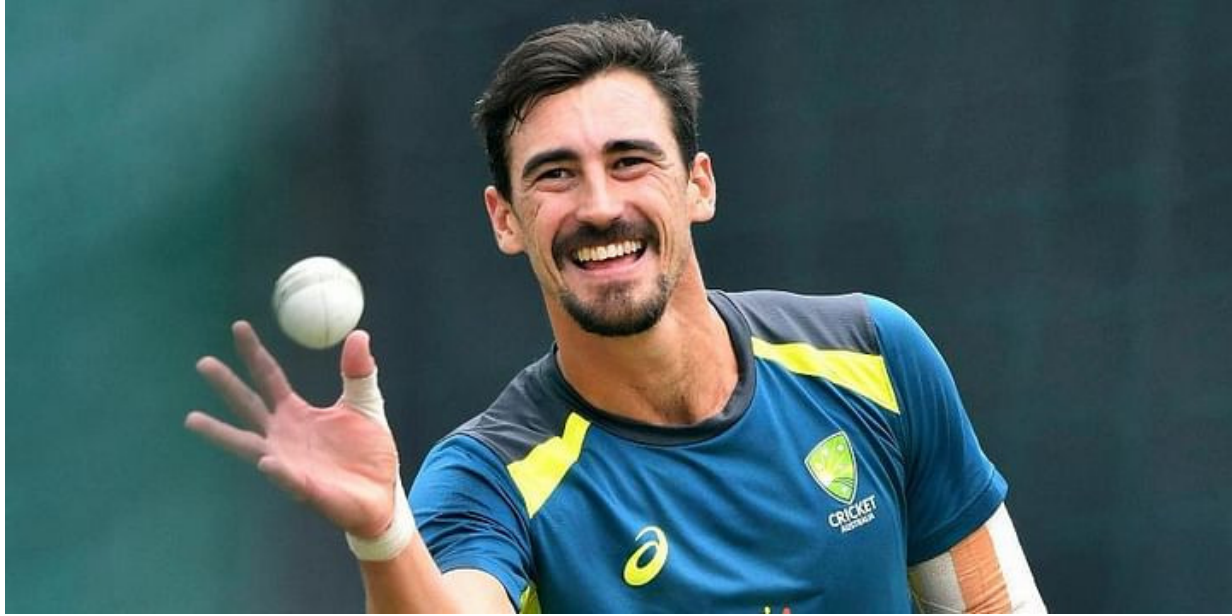
## It's certainly on the table: Starc on returning to IPL

Australian pacer Mitchell Starc is contemplating making a comeback to the IPL after a lengthy hiatus despite a hectic schedule that includes touring the subcontinent and the

Bengaluru. "I've got two days to get my paperwork in, so that might be something to do today before training," Starc was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au.

strike rate of 17. However, workload will once again become a key factor as the 31-year-old takes a call. As a multi format player, Starc will have to juggle a

into consideration as well," he added. While the IPL, which has expanded to 10 teams this year, is expected to start in April and go on till June.



T20 World Cup title defence at home later this year.

Starc, who last played in the IPL in 2015, said he hasn't made the decision yet but entering his name for the league's mega auction, the nominations for which close on Friday, is "certainly on the table." Starc clinched a contract worth Rs 9.4 crore with Kolkata Knight Riders in 2018 but had to be released because of an injury.

The mega-auction ahead of the upcoming season is scheduled to be held on February 12 and 13 in

"I've not put my name down just yet, but I've got a couple more days to decide on that. It's certainly on the table regardless of what the schedule has got coming up," he added.

Despite being one of the most valuable T20 bowlers, the left-arm pacer has featured in just two seasons of the IPL due to injury and workload management.

In the 27 matches that he played for Royal Challengers Bangalore in 2014 and 2015, Starc snared 34 wickets at an economy rate of 7.16 and an impressive

packed schedule. After the fifth Ashes Test, Australia have a three-match ODI series and one-off T20I at home against New Zealand.

A five-match T20I series against Sri Lanka is scheduled for next month followed by a full series comprising three Tests as many ODIs and a T20I in Pakistan, starting March. "I haven't been for six years or so," Starc said. "Obviously with a heavy weighting towards T20s over the last period of time and the World Cup coming up later this year, that's one to take

Australia is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka for a Test and limited-overs series in June and July.

"There's a bit going on with scheduling and what-not to get our heads around, certainly for us multi-format players.

"The schedules are quite jam-packed when you throw in all the tours, we've got a couple of white-ball series post the Ashes before that Pakistan tour, then you take into consideration the IPL and the Sri Lanka tour after that.

"So it's a massive six months of cricket for everyone," Starc said.

## Deportation row: Novak Djokovic clarifies movements, Australian visa saga continues

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic has moved to clarify how mistakes were made on the immigration document he submitted on his arrival in Melbourne last week, before his visa was revoked and then reinstated in a COVID-19 vaccination saga that has overshadowed the days leading up to the Australian Open.



A statement was posted on Djokovic's social media accounts on Wednesday while the men's tennis No. 1 was in Rod Laver Arena holding a practice session against Tristan Schoolkate, a 20-year-old Australian. The nine-time and defending Australian Open champion is in limbo before the year's first tennis major starts next Monday.

Djokovic won a legal battle on Monday allowing him to stay in the country, but he still faces the prospect of deportation because he's not vaccinated against COVID-19.

Reports emerged that he'd been attending events in his native Serbia last month while infectious, and he'd made errors on an immigration form to enter Australia that could po-

tentially result in the cancellation of his visa. On the form, Djokovic said he had not traveled in the 14 days before his flight to Australia. The Monte Carlo-based athlete was seen in Spain and Serbia in that two-week period. In a statement posted on Instagram, Djokovic described the speculation as "hurtful" and said

he wanted to address "continuing misinformation" in the interest of "alleviating broader concern in the community about my presence in Australia".

Djokovic said that he'd taken rapid tests that were negative in the days before he returned a positive on a test he undertook out of an "abundance of

caution" because he was asymptomatic. He addressed the travel declaration by saying it was submitted on his behalf by his support team and "my agent sincerely apologizes for the administrative mistake in ticking the incorrect box". "This was a human error and certainly not deliberate. The team has provided additional information to the Australian Government to clarify this matter," he wrote.

At issue is whether he has a valid exemption to rules requiring vaccination to enter Australia since he recently recovered from COVID-19. Immigration Minister Alex Hawke's office said Djokovic's legal team had filed further submissions against the the potential cancellation of his visa.

## Omicron Tally to 170

Bhubaneswar: The State has detected 67 fresh Omicron cases on Wednesday taking the total tally to 170. The Institute of Life Science (ILS), Bhubaneswar, has informed the Health and Family Welfare Department about detection of new Omicron cases after conducting genome sequencing of the samples. However, the details of new Omicron cases are yet to be revealed by the officials.

Meanwhile, the State has reported 8,778 fresh Covid cases on Wednesday taking the active caseload to 35,242.

As per the information shared on the State Covid dashboard, out of the 8778 cases, 792 are children below 18 years of age. Highest 2,615 cases were reported from Khurda district, followed by Sundargarh (1252),

Cuttack (766), Sambalpur (596), Mayurbhanj (338), Balasore (231),

Districts like S a u n d a r g a r h , Khurda, Sambalpur and Cuttack have



Balangir (216), Puri (216) and Jharsuguda (203). Remaining districts have reported below 200 cases.

A total of 74,611 samples were tested in the State in the past 24 hours. The daily test positivity rate (TPR) increased to 11.76% from 10.25% recorded on the previous day.

been put under red zone due to reporting of high number of cases while Balasore has been classified as yellow zone. Remaining 25 districts are under the green zone as these districts have below 1000 active cases.

The Covid infection rate is increasing in other countries and some other States too.

Here in Odisha also the cases are increasing and the TPR also increased to 11.7% as four to five districts reports high rate, said director of public health, Niranjan Mishra.

However, most of the people infected with the virus get mild symptoms or asymptomatic and rate of hospitalization & fatality and demand of ICU beds have remained very low, said Mishra, adding, "We can say the situation is totally under control now."

"As per our prediction, such scenario will continue to remain throughout January, February and some days of March," he said. All district collectors have been asked to adopt cluster containment strategy to break the chain of transmission of the virus, added the director.



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