

SEC asks for strict enforcement

Bhubaneswar(KCN): The State Election Commission (SEC) has asked the Police DG to ensure strict enforcement of Covid-19 guidelines

from January 17 to 21, 2022. It is being seen that people are gathering in large numbers for filing of nominations and are holding public meet-

ings which contravenes the guidelines, the Secretary mentioned. "A large number of candidates are expected to file nominations on the last day tomorrow, i.e. January 21, 2022. The Commission hereby directs that necessary instructions shall be issued to all S.P.s, including Covid Observers, to ensure that large gatherings do

not take place for filing nominations and holding meetings in public places," Sahu told the DGP. The SEC has forwarded copies of the



while filing nomination papers by candidates for the Panchayat Election, 2022.

SEC Aditya Prasad Padhi has asked DGP Sunil K Bansal to strictly enforce Covid Guidelines and accordingly SEC Secretary RN Sahu has written a letter to State Police Chief on Thursday.

In the letter, Mr.Sahu said that the Commis-

sion has laid down Covid-19 guidelines for strict enforcement at different stages of the election process. There was threadbare discussion in the con-

ference of Collectors' and Superintendents of Police on January 15, 2022 where it was decided to strictly enforce the guidelines, he said. As per the instructions of the Commission, DSP rank officers have also been appointed as Covid Observers in different Districts, Mr.Sahu pointed out.

Now the nomination process is going on

letter to all Collectors and Superintendents of Police for information and necessary action.

As per the guidelines of the SEC, either the candidate or one proposer can enter the election officer's office maintaining proper social distance while filing the nomination papers. Only one vehicle is allowed for the purpose of filing nomination.

Agents of the ruling BJD, the BJP leader said the SEC cannot ignore such violations. The BJP further drew the attention of the SEC to the mismatch in voters' lists prepared by the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commission.

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Odisha panchayat elections: 'Government officers not complying with MCC', alleges BJP



BHUBANESWAR (KCN): The BJP on Wednesday urged the State Election Commissioner (SEC) to take action against government officers who are not complying with the model code of conduct for the three-tier panchayat elec-

tions. A party delegation led by State general secretary Lekshashree Samantsinghar met SEC Aditya Padhi and submitted a memorandum alleging gross violation of model code of conduct. The party lead-

ers alleged that even after enforcement of code of conduct, posters, banners, hoardings carrying photographs of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik can be seen everywhere. Claiming that district officials are working as political

agents of the ruling BJD, the BJP leader said the SEC cannot ignore such violations. The BJP further drew the attention of the SEC to the mismatch in voters' lists prepared by the Election Commission of India and the State Election Commission.

105 nations to get cheaper Merck Covid pill; molnupiravir not added to India's treatment protocol due to safety concerns

GENEVA(KCN): Generic drug manufacturers will make a more affordable version of Merck's anti-Covid pill for 105 of the world's poorer nations, a UN-backed organisation said on Thursday. The global Medicines Patent Pool signed agreements with 27 manufacturers to produce the oral antiviral medicine molnupiravir, for supply in low- and middle-income coun-

tries. "This is a critical step toward ensuring global access to an urgently needed Covid-19 treatment and we are confident that... the anticipated treatments will be rapidly available in LMICs," said

MPP executive director Charles Gore. Merck granted a licence to the MPP in an agreement announced

sub-licences allow manufacturers to produce the raw ingredients for molnupiravir, and/or the finished drug itself. The companies are spread across Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Jordan, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, South Africa, South Korea and Vietnam. However, due to safety concerns, India has not added Merck's pill to its national



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Problems over candidate selection for Odisha panchayat polls persist in BJD

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): More than the challenges posed by the

were struggling to pacify the rival factions fighting for

party is ready with a series of issues which will be taken to the people virtually," BJP general secretary Golak Mohapatra said.

The Congress, in the meanwhile, alleged that both the parties have reached a tacit understanding ahead of the panchayat poll. Leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) Narasingha Mishra alleged that the BJP's silence has proved that it is not going to seriously oppose the BJD in the panchayat elections. "We have been saying from the beginning that the BJD and BJP are two

sides of the same coin," he added.

Mishra said that the first meeting of the Congress Panchayat committee will be held on January 22 to finalise the issues to be raised during the campaign.

Over 52,800 candidates filed their nomination papers on the third day. While 37,232 candidates filed nomination papers for ward members, 8947 filed papers for the post of sarpanch. Besides, 6205 and 484 candidates filed papers for the posts of panchayat samiti members and zilla parishad member.



Opposition BJP and Congress for the panchayat elections, the BJD seems to be hard-pressed to resolve internal matters, with finalising candidates becoming a major problem.

As the filing of nomination papers entered the third day, the BJD leadership at the State and district-level

tickets. "The BJD's problem is within and not from the Opposition political parties," a senior leader told The New Indian Express.

The BJP, however, said that it is getting ready to launch an aggressive campaign once problems with the candidate selection are over. "The

'Draconian': Mamata Banerjee to PM Modi on proposed changes in IAS cadre rules

KOLKATA(KCN): Responding to the Centre's revised proposal to amend the IAS rules that aimed to transfer the bureaucrats to central deputation without the nod of the state governments, Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Thursday wrote to PM Narendra Modi alleging that the revised amendment



proposal is "draconian" and "against the foundations" of the federal polity. In her communique to PM Modi, Mamata

said the amendment will hang on the head of each IAS officer like a "Damocles' sword" and will create "fear psychosis".

This is bound to impact the officers' performance and accountability to the state government, she said.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) earlier wrote to the states on three occasions and the last communication was made on January 12 with the

BJD protests rejection of Odisha's tableau for Centre's Republic Day celebrations

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): The BJD on Wednesday strongly protested the rejection of tableau representations sent by the State government for the 73rd Republic Day celebrations. Alleging that the rejection is deliber-

Mohapatra) and Chakhi Khuntia, hockey infrastructure in Odisha, and the vast development that has taken place in the State in disaster management. Mohanty said that Paika Bidroha made it to the third round before it



ate, BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty said that the party will strongly oppose this at the appropriate forum.

Mohanty said that Odisha had sent five representations which include the Paika Bidroha-the 1817 War of Independence, life and times of Jayi Rajguru (Jayakrushna Rajguru

was rejected by the selection panel. Raising questions over the selection process, Mohanty said the tableau sent by Odisha have been appreciated in the past and some have even won awards. But the rejection this year, that too in the third round, without citing any reason has hurt the

sentiments of Odias worldwide, he added. Alleging that there has been partiality in the selection process, Mohanty said that the Centre has been accepting Gujarat's proposals continuously for the last five years. Odisha's proposal has been rejected without sufficient grounds, he added.

Parent federation appealed the Panchayat election aspirants to take oath for the development of education

Barbil (KCN): In a press release today, Odisha Parents Federation President Basudeb Bhatt, Senior Vice President Ashok Thackar, Kendujhar and Convenor Jitu Patnaik through a press release and appealed all aspirants of Panchayat election to take an oath to develop education when joins their respective chairs. Ninety per cent of the people in Odisha live

in rural areas and they will elect their representatives in the upcoming panchayat elections. Iron of the fact is that true development in the area is impossible without education in rural areas. The Federation has written and met with the leaders of various political parties and requested them to take the oath to develop education scenario in the state in 73rd constitution

amendment in article 11, around 29 department were proposed to hand over to Panchayat in 1992. But this provision has not yet materialised properly till now. About 8,750 primary and secondary schools have been closed in Odisha. They demand to resume these school if required numbers of students available. All schools should use NCERT books instead of

using large number of books of different publication company. All schools should allow 25 percentage of their strength for poor children with free education. All school should provide health check up twice in a year. The candidates who would take oath to implement these five programme, the parent federation will stand aside them and work for their victory, they declare in a joint statement.

Karmaveera Narayan Chandra Mohanty Felicitated by Bholanatha Smruti Sansad



Cuttack(KCN): Eminent Social worker, Karmaveera Narayan Chandra Mohanty the villagers of Patana, 42 mouza and the honourable secretary of Dayanidhi Pratibha Bikash Pratistan felicitated by Bholanatha Smruti Sansad (BSS) as Seva Sanman -

2022 for his best quality. Cuttack Sadar 42 mouza villagers Sriram Brahampur social worker, Gandhibadi Bholanath Nayak & pious Bhababati Devi both husband wife statue inauguration & smriti charan sabha held with around 30 nos great personalities

awarded. The smruti Sabha presided by Er. Ashok Biswal in presence of Sr. Journalist Arun Panda, Bholanatha Smruti Sansad founder Samabayabir Mahendra Nayak, Honourable President of India Awarded Social Worker Gangadhar Behera, Sahitika

Sukadev Parida, Dr. Kalimulla, Natyakar Ashok Pattanik. Other Members are Poet Rudra Narayan Das, Sahitika Chitta Ranjan Behera, Upendra Barik, Bidyadhar Patra, Bikram Keshari Acharya, Satyjit Sahoo, Prasan Behera, Natabar Behera and others.

Cashew sector in Kerala set for major revamp

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM(KCN): A master plan will be prepared for the modernisation and product diversification of the cashew industry in the state, Industries Minister P Rajeeve has said. A high-level meeting attended by Rajeeve and Finance Minister K N Balagopal has decided to strengthen the sector. The state government will provide the necessary financial support for the modernisation of the industry. The rise in the price of raw cashew nuts and high import duty have deepened the crisis in the sector. Also, the production cost in Kerala is relatively high compared to other states. This is mainly because of the delay in implementing the modernisation of the sector, the



meeting opined. Further, the industry has a long way to go in marketing and product diversification which will be addressed in the new master plan, the minister said. The industry will seek the help of professional agencies to modernise the sector, product diversification and marketing. Public sector Restructuring and Internal Audit Board (RIAB) will supervise the functioning of Kerala State Cashew Development Corporation (KSCDC) and Capex.

Collision between bike and bolero, two serious at Barbil



Barbil(KCN)Two people were seriously injured in a collision between a bike and a bolero at Barbil Birsa Munda Square at around 6pm on Wednesday. According to reports, Rohit Patra

and Sonu Kul of Barbil Damu Hatting area collided with a white bolero vide number OD-09-A-1481 near Birsa Munda square on their way home from the Lucky India Hotel on a bike. As

a result, they fell off their bikes. The Bolero driver left the vehicle on the spot and fled away seeing locals rushed towards him. The fire brigade team called and taken these two victims to

Barbil CHC and latter referred to district hospital for further treatment. Police has seized the vehicle. The bolero, which was involved in the accident, is believed to have been used by a multinational company on hire basis.

951 Cr for Rural Infra

Bhubaneswar(KCN): The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has sanctioned an assistance of Rs 951 crore to the State Government under Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF). The fund has been sanctioned for construction of 176 rural road projects to be implemented by the Rural Development Department of the State Government in all the 30 districts of the State. The Road projects with a combined

length of 1434 KM will improve rural road connectivity for 9.92 lakh people in 959 villages, officials said here on Thurs-

day. This sanction is on the line of priority fixed by the State Government for developing critical rural infrastructure. With this sanction,

total cumulative sanctions since inception of RIDF has crossed Rs 32,000 crores for Odisha, the officials informed.



These infrastructure projects will play a key role in supporting the rural economy by improving the livelihoods of people.

Recently, the NABARD has mapped the credit potential of Odisha. It has projected State's overall credit potential under priority sector at Rs 1,34,665 crore for the financial year 2022-23.

Man 'shoots dead' stray dog in Bhubaneswar, injures another

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): In yet another shocking incident of animal cruelty, a man killed a stray dog and injured another allegedly by using a firearm at Jagamara area here on Wednesday. The incident took place at Tala Sahi late in the afternoon. Locals spotted the injured animal and informed an animal welfare organisation, Sewa Hi Sankalp Anusthan. Founder of the organisation Rajesh Prusty and his colleagues rushed to the spot and began treatment of the injured dog when the locals again informed the team about another canine lying on the premises of a house nearby. However, on reaching the house they found the second dog dead. The death prima facie was due to pellet injuries in the chest part. The injured dog too had sus-

tained similar injuries in the spinal cord. "We rushed the injured dog to our shelter in Forest Park. Its condition is critical and the animal is pa-

lice. Meanwhile, the accused has absconded after the organisation members lodged a complaint at the Khandagiri police station and two witnesses are ready to

give their statements too," said Prusty. But what comes as a concern is that the accused in such cases of animal cruelty get away easily. Members of the organisation alleged that the accused dared them to take whatever measures they wanted to take against him including approaching the po-



station. Police informed that efforts are on to nab him. This is not the first time when a stray dog has been killed in the Capital City. In April last year, a pregnant dog was brutally killed by a woman and her neighbour. Similarly, a man had killed five puppies in the city in June, 2021.

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Vikrant Massey's 'Cargo' to be screened at South by Southwest festival in US



MUMBAI(KCN): Vikrant Massey-starrer "Cargo" will have its North American premiere at the 2020 edition of South by Southwest (SXSW) festival. The science fiction film, written and directed by Arati

Kadav, also features Massey's "Mirzapur" co-star Shweta Tripathi and actor Nandu Madhav. The story revolves around a lonely demon Prahastha who has been working on a spaceship for years for the Post Death

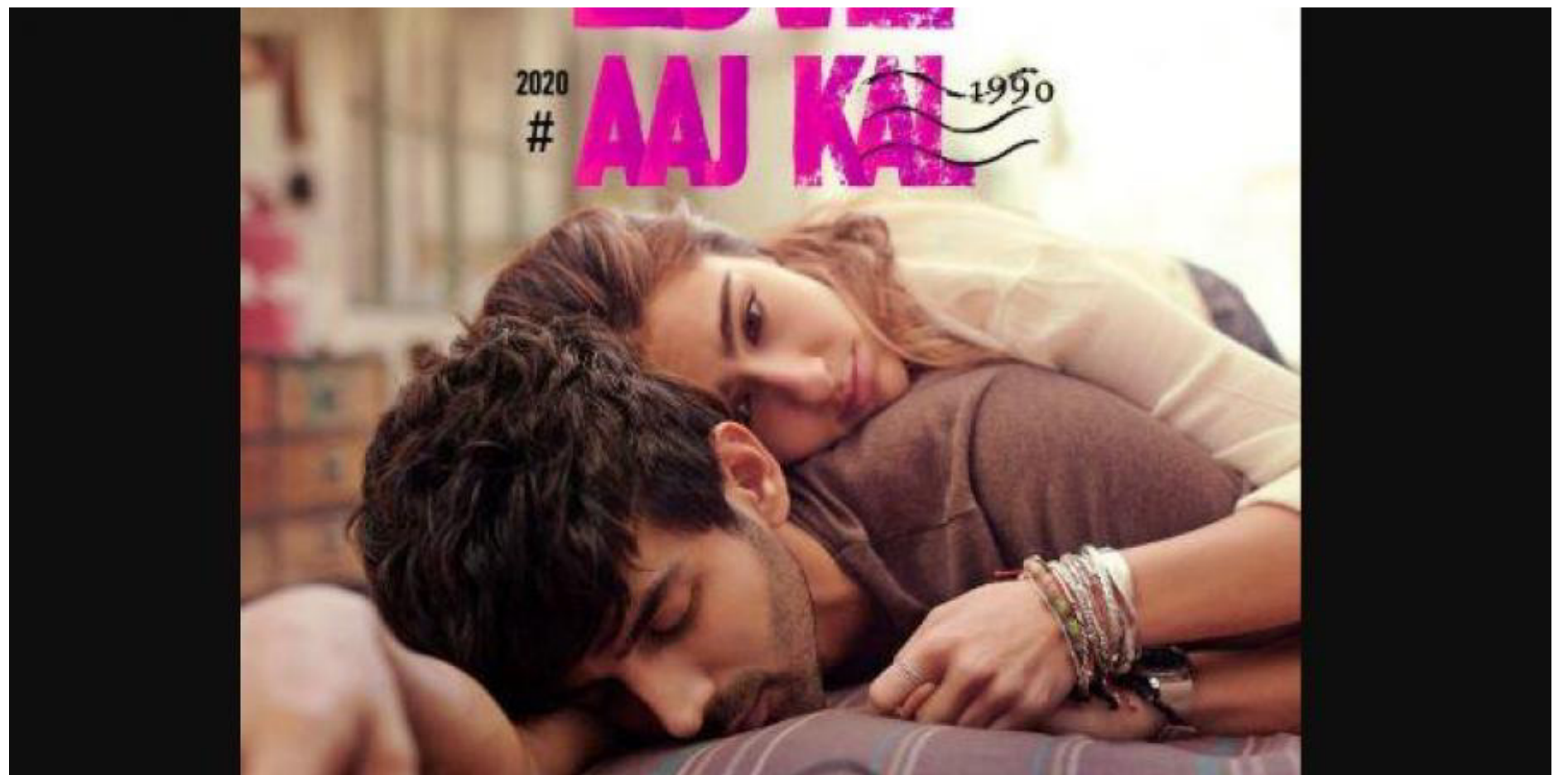
Transition services with the help of a female astronaut where dead people are recycled for rebirth. "Cargo" will be screened under the Global section of the film festival which will run from March 13 to 21.

Vikrant, who most recently featured alongside Deepika Padukone in "Chhapaak", said it makes him "proud" that the film has been chosen for the prestigious film gala. "Cargo" is one of the first Indian sci-fi

films to be there. And I feel blessed for receiving so much applause not just from the country but across the world. People have loved Chhapaak, they have embraced it with open arms and now 'Cargo' being selected

at this big a platform, I feel really fortunate," the actor said in a statement. "Cargo", which had its India premiere at the 2019 MAMI Film Festival under the spotlight section, is produced by Arati, Navin Shetty, Shlok Sharma and Anurag Kashyap.

First look of Imtiaz Ali's Love Aaj Kal two released



Kartik Aryan and Sara Ali Khan are the new romantic pair in Imtiaz Ali's Love Aaj Kal. Yes, the film's titled just that, not Love Aaj

Kal 2 or Aaj Kal. In a poster, we get a glimpse of their characters, Veer and Zoe, nodding off on top of each other. The poster also re-

veals the film's timeline, which will run from 1990 to 2020. "Meet Veer and Zoe, captured in their element. It's in these

simple, candid moments that love plays peekaboo, right? Love Aaj Kal," Imtiaz wrote. "Meet Veer and Zoe. Come get wound up

in our whirlwind wonderland Love Aaj Kal trailer out tomorrow," Sara added. The new Love Aaj Kal was shot in

Himachal Pradesh, Mumbai, and Rajasthan. The sequel also stars Randeep Hooda. The film is slated for Valentine's Day release.

No proof to link Netflix's '13 Reasons Why' to high US suicide rates: Study

NEW YORK(KCN): Contrary to the findings of a 2019 study that associated the Netflix series "13 Reasons Why" with an increase in monthly suicide rates among youth after the show's release, a new analysis finds no evidence to draw such a link.

The reanalysis, published in the journal PLOS ONE, revealed that after controlling for the dramatic increase in adolescent suicide in recent years, the show's release had no clear effect. "Our reanalysis casts

considerable doubt on the show having an effect on boys," said study author Dan Romer and research director of the Annenberg Public Policy Centre (APPC) from the University of Pennsylvania in the US. The reanalysis found that the increase in the suicide rate for boys observed in the original study by Jeffrey Bridge and colleagues for three months after the series' release was no longer evident after controlling for the ongoing trend in adolescent suicide.

In addition, the increase seen during the first month of the release began the month prior to the release, making it difficult to attribute the rise to the show. The reanalysis found no effects in the subsequent months of that year. The original time-series analysis of suicide rates found an additional 195 suicide deaths among boys ages 10 to 17 during the nine months following the series' release, on March 31, 2017, but did not find a similar result among adoles-

cent girls. Romer said he questioned that finding for two reasons: "First, contagion would be expected to be stronger for girls than boys because this show focuses on the suicide of a high school girl. Second, the prior analysis didn't take into account strong secular trends in suicide, especially in boys from 2016-2017." When the first season of the Netflix show appeared in 2017, it created widespread concern that its graphic portrayal of a teenage girl's suicide

would lead to imitation among vulnerable young people, especially adolescent girls. The first such study found evidence of a jump in suicides among boys ages 10 to 17 in the three months following the show's release, but no effect for girls. Romer said that analysis relied on a forecasting method to project the likely trend in suicide for 2017. But that forecast failed to anticipate the actual trend. A second study by different researchers, published in JAMA

Psychiatry had a similar problem, Romer said. That study found an effect in boys and girls 10 to 19 years old in the three months following the series' release. But it similarly failed to control for the secular trend in suicide, again making it difficult to separate the effects of the show from the trend. APPC's reanalysis did find a modest rise in the suicide rate among adolescent girls during the first month following the release of "13 Reasons Why," but it was not statistically reliable, the researchers said.

India's Rising Omicron Wave Brings a Grim Sense of Déjà Vu

When the Omicron coronavirus variant spread through India late in December, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged the nation to be vigilant and follow medical guidelines. Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of the capital region of Delhi, swiftly introduced night curfews, shut down movie theaters, and slashed restaurants and public transport to half capacity.

Then, both men hit the campaign trail, often appearing without masks in packed rallies of thousands.

"When it is our bread and butter at stake, they force restrictions and lockdowns," said Ajay Tiwari, a 41-year-old taxi driver in New Delhi. "There are much bigger crowds at political rallies, but they don't impose any lockdown in those areas. It really pains us deep in the heart."

As Omicron fuels a rapid spread of new in-

fections through India's major urban hubs, the country's pandemic fatigue has been intensified by a sense of déjà vu and the frustration of mixed signals.

A temporary coronavirus care center in New Delhi on Wednesday. Credit...Money Sharma/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

It has been just a few months since the deadly Delta variant ravaged the country, when government leaders vastly underestimated its threat and publicly flouted their own advice. The memories of overwhelmed hospitals and funeral pyres working around the clock are still all too fresh here.

The metropolis of Mumbai on Wednesday reported more than 15,000 new infections in 24 hours — the highest daily caseload since the pandemic began, beating the city's previous record of about 11,000 cases during the second wave in the spring. In New Delhi, the number of daily infections increased by nearly 100 percent overnight.

The sheer size of India's population, at 1.4 billion, has always kept experts wary about the prospects of a new coronavirus variant. In few places around the world was the toll of Delta as stark as in India. The country's official figures show about half a million pan-

democratic deaths — a number that experts say vastly undercounts the real toll.

A temporary coronavirus care facility was set up at the Chennai Trade Center in Chennai. Scientists say any optimism about Omicron is premature simply because of how many people the variant could infect. A temporary coronavirus care facility was set up at the Chennai Trade Center in Chennai. Scientists say any optimism about Omicron is premature simply because of how many people the variant could infect.

On their second date, they got stuck together in lockdown. Would romance bloom? Can vaccinated people who get a breakthrough infection start living like its

2019? New Zealand, a Covid success story, will tighten border restrictions because of the Omicron threat.

Dr. Anand Krishnan, a professor of epidemi-

Mujib Mashal

Delhi, said India's messaging of the new variant as "a mild illness" has led to complacency. "The health system has stopped being complacent. But the population is complacent. People are not wearing masks or changing their behavior," Dr. Krishnan said. "They think it is a mild illness, and whatever restrictions are being imposed are seen more as a nuisance than necessary."

Scientists say any optimism about Omicron is premature simply because of how many people the variant could infect.

"Even if it is a microscopic percentage who require hospitalization," Dr. Sinha said, "the fact is that the total population we're talking about is huge."

A vaccination center in Bangalore. India's vaccination drive has covered about half of the population.

A vaccination center in Bangalore. India's vaccination drive has covered about half of the population. Although the percentage of newly infected people turning to hospitals has been increasing in recent days, data from India's worst-hit cities — Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata — showed that only a small number of Covid-designated beds were occupied so far. Data compiled by the Observer Research Foundation showed that about three percent of the known active cases in Delhi and about 12 percent in Mumbai have required hospitalization.

Dr. J. A. Jayalal, until recently the president of The Indian Medical Association, said what worried him was not hospital beds or oxygen running out — capacity that Indian officials have been trying to expand after the deadly shortfalls during the Delta wave — but that the health system might face an acute shortfall of health workers.

gan, Dr. Jayalal said. Health workers are struggling with pandemic fatigue. Tens of thousands of doctors only recently called off a strike protesting being overworked and a de-



lay in recruiting new doctors. Reports in local media suggest hundreds of doctors and medical workers have tested positive in recent days. Hindu devotees at a religious gathering in Ahmedabad on Monday.

"In our medical fraternity, a lot of positive cases have been reported. That means they will not be available for work," Dr. Jayalal said. "The problem with mild infections is that they may not come to a major hospital for admission, but they will still go to their family doctor or a general practitioner," putting those doctors at risk of infection, he added.

As with the Delta wave, Omicron is spreading in India at a time of high public activity — busy holiday travel, and large election rallies across several states that are going to the polls in the coming months.

Prime Minister Modi and his lieutenants have been holding large rallies in Uttar Pradesh, the state of 200 million people run by a Modi protégé who is up for re-election.

Mr. Kejriwal, the chief minister of Delhi and a prominent opposition leader, has also been a ubiquitous figure at rallies. He has been trying to expand his small party in the several states that are up for elections this year. Even

as he put Delhi under restrictions, he continued campaigning in those states.

Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of the capital region of Delhi, center, last month in Amritsar.

Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of the capital region of Delhi, center, last month in Amritsar.

Credit...Narinder Nanu/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

A day after a large rally in the state of Uttarakhand where Mr. Kejriwal appeared on stage without a mask, he had some bad news to

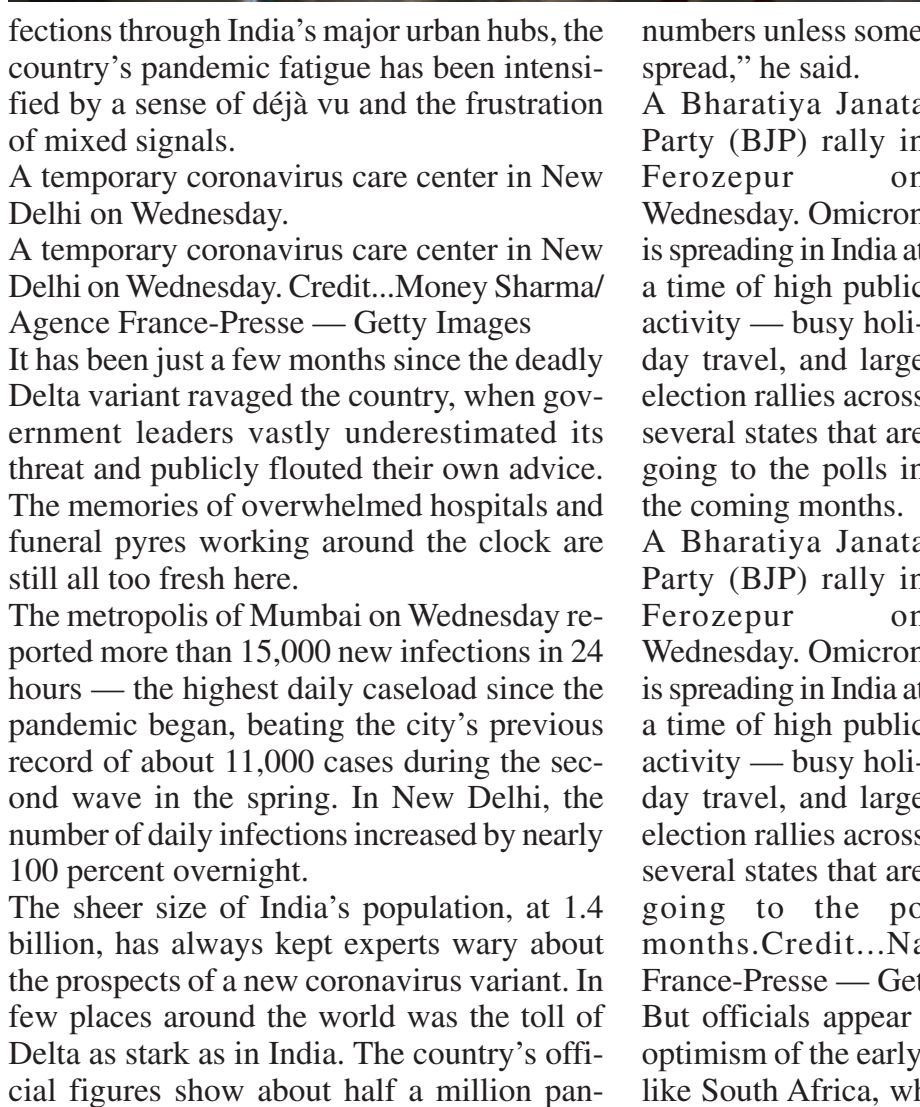
share on Twitter. "I have tested positive for Covid," he said. "Those who came in touch with me in last few days, kindly isolate."

Hours later, his party's Facebook page put out new instructions to residents of Delhi with a poster bearing Mr. Kejriwal's picture.

"The war against corona continues," it said. "WEEKEND CURFEW announced in Delhi."

Mujib Mashal is The New York Times Bureau Chief for South Asia. Born in Kabul, he wrote for magazines such as The Atlantic, Harper's, Time and others before joining The Times. @MujMash Karan Deep Singh is a reporter and visual journalist based in New Delhi, India. He previously worked for The Wall Street Journal, where he was part of a team that was named a finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize in Investigative Reporting and nominated for a national Emmy Award.

Mujib Mashal is The New York Times Bureau Chief for South Asia. In his role based out of New Delhi, he covers India and the broad and diverse region around it that includes Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the island nations of Sri Lanka and Maldives. Previously, he was the paper's senior correspondent in Afghanistan.



India's first virtual platform for spice exporters launched

KOCHI: India's first virtual platform for spice exports 'Spice Xchange India' was launched on Thursday. The spicexchangeindia.com, developed by the Spices Board, is a 3D virtual platform aimed at connecting India's spice exporters with buyers from around the world, a release said here.

The portal uses AI-based technology to connect relevant spice buyers with Indian spice exporters. The buyers and sellers can access



the database to find the potential customers on this platform.

The platform was launched by Som Parkash, the Union Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, at a hybrid event held in Kochi and online. India's first virtual platform for spice exports 'Spice Xchange India'. "Spices have contributed greatly to India's export basket despite the pandemic and India presently en-

joys a dominant share in the global spice market by exporting 225 different spices and spice products to more than 180 countries," the minister said, inaugurating the new platform.

Som Parkash said export development and promotion, value addition, and quality improvement continue to be thrust areas for the government and the online platform introduced by the Spices Board will immensely add value to the government efforts in increasing exports. The portal works as an extended office enabling the subscribers to conduct virtual meetings with their customers. D Sathiyam, secretary, Spices Board said "The pandemic has forced Spices Board to conceptualize and create this unique portal, but we feel it's highly relevant and beneficial even after the pandemic period as it easily connects the exporters and importers". He further said, "This will help in creating greater new business opportunities for the spice sector with the help of technology".

Diwakar Nath Misra, joint secretary, Union Ministry of Commerce & Industry, reckoned this novel initiative 'Spice Xchange India' will facilitate ease of doing business and is a giant leap in strengthening export transactions of spices from India.

India develops virtual museum to tell gallantry award winners tales

NEW DELHI: India has developed a virtual museum to bring together the stories of commitment and sacrifice of the gallantry awards winners in an innovative and user-friendly format. Minister of State (Defence) Ajay Bhatt, inaugurated an interactive Virtual Museum hosted by the Gallantry Awards portal on Thursday. The virtual museum brings together the stories of commitment and sacrifice of the gallantry awards winners in an innovative and user-friendly format. It comprises a 3-D walk-through experience, gallery building, lobby, wall of fame, a tour of war memorials, war room, resource center, selfie

awards portal which is to raise awareness among the youth about the sacrifices and brave deeds of the country's bravehearts.

Kumar made special mention of the Veer Gatha project, one of the initiatives of MoD as part of Republic Day Celebrations 2022, organised by the Gallantry awards portal and Ministry of Education. Over eight lakh students across the country participated in the initiative and shared their inspirational stories through essays, poems, drawings, and multimedia presentations.

He stated that 25 students were declared as winners and they will soon be felicitated as



booth and equipment display, etc. The Virtual Museum has been jointly developed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM), the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, and Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics, as part of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' commemorating 75 years of Independence. Appreciating the efforts of the Ministry, SIDM, and all other stakeholders, Bhatt said, the virtual museum will honor the contribution of the country's Bravehearts who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation and bring their stories to the people, especially the youth. He expressed confidence that the virtual museum will encourage more and more people to visit the Gallantry awards portal and inspire the youth to come forward and join the Armed Forces. Bhatt stressed that soldiers are role models who spread the message of patriotism among the younger generation and lead them on the path to success. He lauded SIDM, for promoting indigenous R&D and manufacturing defence equipment, adding that it is playing an important role in achieving 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Speaking on the occasion, Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar congratulated SIDM and all other stakeholders for developing the virtual museum in a short span of time. He expressed confidence that the museum will go a long way in promoting the objective of the Gallantry

part of the Republic Day celebrations.

ALSO READ: Social justice department sets up disabled-friendly sensory park at museum campus The Virtual Museum offers an opportunity for the visitors to log in/register themselves; scroll through the entire available data of a particular gallantry award winner and pay tribute to the brave hearts in a customised way. It also comprises of a war room hosting the tales of bravery of the Gallantry award winners. An archive of inspirational videos and equipment exhibition is also a part of the museum. The selfie booth provides an opportunity to the visitors to click a selfie with the background image of their choice out of the huge library available on the portal.

The MoD had conceptualised and developed the Gallantry Awards Portal to honor the contribution of the soldiers in the service of the motherland and bring their stories to the citizens. In 2017, Modi had inaugurated the project to acknowledge the bravery and sacrifice of the award winners and felicitate them. The revamped version of the portal, with multiple new features, including allowing citizens to express their patriotism in the form of tributes and pledges and participate in quizzes and events was launched by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in 2021.

The revamped version also enables families and friends of the awardees to share their stories. The portal is a repository of information on award winners, battles, and wars. It is a storehouse of education material for researchers, educationists, and the general public.

PM, Jugnauth jointly inaugurate India-assisted social housing units project in Mauritius

NEW DELHI(KCN): Cooperation between India and Mauritius, including in maritime security, has translated the vision of SAGAR - Security

Mauritius virtually. They also launched the Civil Service College and the 8MW Solar PV Farm projects in Mauritius that are being under-

projects were also exchanged during the event.

In his remarks, Modi recalled that it was in Mauritius, during his 2015 visit, that he had

are united by history, ancestry, culture, language and the shared waters of the Indian Ocean.

"Today, our robust development partner-



and Growth for All in the Region - into action, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday.

Modi made these remarks after he along with his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth jointly inaugurated India-assisted social housing units project in

taken under India's development support. An agreement on extending a USD 190 million Line of Credit from India to Mauritius for the Metro Express Project and other infrastructure projects, and an MoU on the implementation of small development

outlined India's maritime cooperation vision of SAGAR - 'Security and Growth for All in the Region'.

"I am glad that our bilateral cooperation, including in maritime security, has translated this vision into action," Modi said. He underlined that India and Mauritius

ship has emerged as a key pillar of our close ties," he said.

Jugnauth said that in order to pay gratitude for India's support to the metro express project, his government has decided to name one of the major metro stations as 'Mahatma Gandhi' station.



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Cuttack sex determination scam: Two more Orissa High Court Chief Justice S brokers nabbed, search on for 22 others Muralidhar inaugurates six new courts

CUTTACK: Two more persons were arrested on Wednesday by Commissionerate Police for allegedly arranging pregnant women who were willing to undergo sex determination at

Tutu is the owner of Jay Jagannath medicine store located in Metro Manorama complex at Malha Sahi.

"Both Pintu and Tutu were acting as middlemen for the owner of Alfa

Pintu and Tutu were forwarded to court which remanded them in judicial custody.

Police informed that there are 22 more brokers who were engaged by Prasanna in the 10 neighbouring

carrying out sex determination tests and arrested both Prasanna and Basant. The clinic was running without registration for the last six months at Kathagola Sahi.

Prasanna, a Plus Two

CUTTACK: The Chief Justice of Orissa High Court S Muralidhar on Wednesday said that much of the success of the justice delivery system depends on the collective efforts of judges, judicial officers, members of the bar, local administration and police.

He inaugurated six new courts - Court of Civil Judge-cum-JMFC

at Kudumuluguma in Malkangiri district, two women's courts (senior civil judge-cum-assistant sessions judge) at Bhawanipatna and Keonjhar besides and three courts of Senior Civil Judge (LR

The Chief Justice said that opening of the Court of Civil Judge-cum-JMFC at Kudumuluguma is an acknowledgement of the existence of

'Never edgy', Langer ready for contract extension talks with Cricket Australia

SYDNEY: "Content" after guiding Australia to its maiden T20 World Cup title and a dominant Ashes victory, head coach Justin Langer is looking forward to the impending contract discussion with the country's cricket board which has been subject to a lot of speculations. Langer was appointed head coach in the aftermath of the ball-tampering scandal in 2018 to overhaul the team's culture and regain the respect of the Australian public. His contract is due to end in June.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in the judicial map of Odisha. It also ac-

also adopt the best practices prevailing in the traditional system to settle the dis-

and local bar association was fulfilled by the inauguration of the court at



knowledges them as part of the diverse population of Indian citizens and the need for protection of their rights guaranteed under Indian Constitution.

He said that the blend of the prevalent legal system and their traditional dispute redressal system would offer the judge of the newly inaugurated court a different learning experience. "The judge can

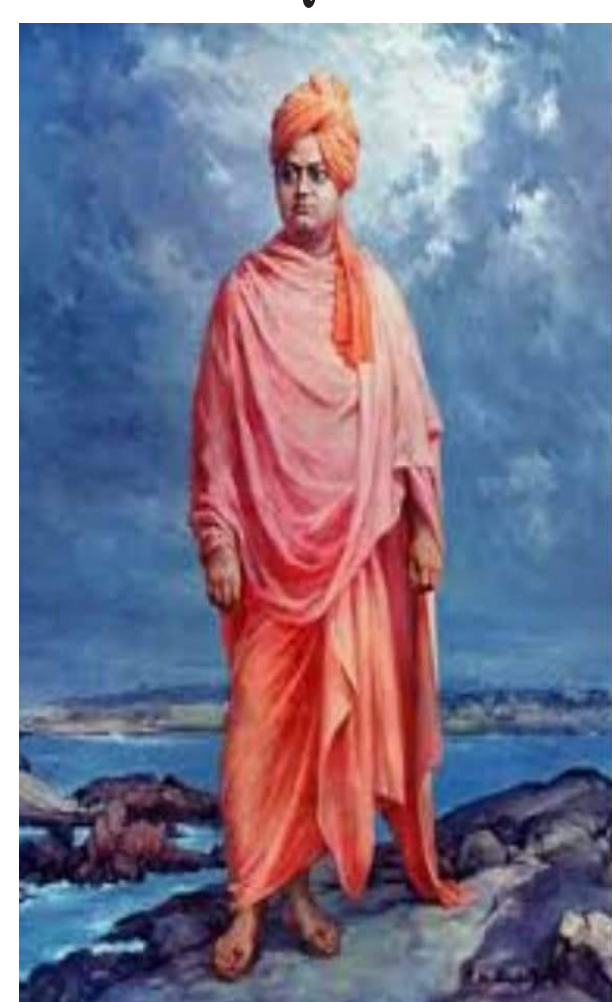
putes through alternative dispute redressal mechanisms," he said.

The Chief Justice expressed hope that the two women's courts at Bhawanipatna and Keonjhar would ensure protection of dignity of women litigants and provide them speedy justice. Speaking on the occasion, Justice SK Panigrahi said that the long-cherished demand of the locals

Kudumuluguma. It is another stepping stone to make justice available at people's doorsteps, he said and added that the quality of dispensation of justice is dependent upon the efforts and mutual co-operation between Bench and Bar.

Among others, Justice S Pujahari, Justice Biswanath Rath, Justice SK Sahoo and Justice BP Routray were present.

Vivekananda's birth anniversary celebrated



Balagarh: Vivekananda Kendra Kanyakumari, Balagarh Karyasthan observed 160th birth anniversary of International Youth Icon Swami Vivekananda on 12th January . 2022 at the auditorium of Sripur Kalyan Samiti Library premises from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. The programme started with chanting of three Omkaras followed by lightening of lamp by our only guest Mr. Ambika Prasad Seth (retired Secondary school Teacher-in-Charge). Samparka Pramukh Mrs. Subarna Halder garlanded Swamijis portrait . All the respected Karyakartees put floral tributes to Swamijis feet . Centre Co-ordinator Smt. Amala Roy Das conducted the whole programme and explained the importance of the day to all of us with a short delivery . There was a happy ending with a cup of tea and snacks for all the participants . Total heads were 20 in number.



Alfa Healthcare Clinic in Cuttack. The accused are Santosh Kumar Lenka alias Pintu(34) of Poparada in Tangi and Hrusikesh Sahoo alias Tutu (43) of Bari Daragha in Jajpur. While Pintu is the proprietor of Prime Diagnostic at Kathagola Road,

Healthcare Clinic Prasanna Kumar Sahoo and his assistant Basant Kumar Bardhan. They used to identify and send pregnant women to Prasanna's clinic for sex determination. Prasanna used to pay them well for the work," informed ACP Ajay Das.

districts for bringing pregnant women to his clinic for sex determination. Das said three special police teams have been constituted under the supervision of DCP Prateek Singh to arrest them at the earliest. Police had on Monday sealed Alfa Healthcare Clinic for

pass-out used to conduct at least 15 to 20 sex determination tests per day and for each such test, he used to charge Rs 5,000. Under Pre-Conception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994, sex determination is illegal.

BJP gears up for 2022 Gujarat polls, PM Modi to interact with party workers on January 25

AHMEDABAD: The Gujarat state BJP president CR Patil on Thursday addressed 40,000 party workers as part of an exercise to strengthen the saffron outfit ahead of the upcoming state Assembly polls. To stay in line with Covid protocols, this interaction was held virtually as workers gathered simultaneously at 579 places across the state. This is the first time in the country that a political party will hold over 500 physical meetings at the same time across the state, the state BJP's media coordinator Yagnesh Dave said. Patil said: "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with BJP workers in Gujarat virtually on January 25. During the interaction, the PM would provide guidance to BJP workers across the state. After finishing the registration process through the NaMo app, the selected workers will get the link to join the interaction," said Patil. The Assembly polls in Gujarat are expected to be held in December this year.

ALSO READ | Gujarat reports 20,966 COVID cases, sets new record in fresh daily infections The BJP has divided its organisation in Gujarat into 579 blocks or Mandals, at taluka or town level. "In view of the Covid pandemic and guidelines issued by the government, only 50 to 100 party workers attended each of these 579 meetings.

Patil came up with this unique idea of holding meetings simultaneously so that all Mandals get covered," Dave said. For the last two and half decades, BJP has been practicing a formula in which 10 youths are assigned to each poll booth -- one to stay at the booth while the rest go out into the field to bring maximum voters out to vote to ensure that the party gets a lion's share of votes. Given that there are 50,000 polling booths in the state for 182 Assembly seats, the BJP will need a minimum of 50,000 polling agents if it is to contest all 182 seats.

UP polls: 16 women in Congress' second list of 41 candidates

LUCKNOW: The Congress party on Thursday released the second list of its 41 candidates for the assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. The party has kept the promise of giving 40% tickets to women and it is evident in the second list as well. Of the total 41 candidates announced in the second list, 16 are women.

Among the 16 women candidates, Sukhwinder Kaur is contesting from Saharanpur Nagar, Kalpana Singh from Bilari, Dr Yasmeen Rana from Charthawal, and Neeraj Kumari Prajapati from Modi Nagar. The party has reposed faith in two women candidates - Monika Suryavanshi from Khair and Preeti

Dhangar from Iglas — both falling in the Aligarh district. ALSO READ | UP

nine Muslim candidates in the second list. Some of the candidates named include

Tyagi from Baghat, Sushil Chaudhary from Bulandshahar and Hemant Chahar

50 women and 45 youth. After being out of power in UP for nearly

has also released a woman-centric pink manifesto promising them 40% reservation in jobs, scooties to girl students pursuing graduation and smartphones to those in class 10th. As per the highly-placed sources in Congress, after wooing the women, the party is now focusing on youth and preparing to release a youth-centric manifesto soon. The Congress has already promised 20 lakh jobs to youth if voted to power.

In UP, of the total over 15 crore voters, the young voter till 39 years of age make a big chunk of 7.5 crore, that is around 50% of the total electorate. Of these, 19.89 lakh are first-time voters in the age group of 18-19 lakh.



polls: Akhilesh Yadav to contest elections from family bastion in Mainpuri. Moreover, the party has given tickets to

Haji Akhlaq from Kairana, Subodh Sharma from Muzaffarnagar, Ranjan Sharma from Meerut, Anil Dev

from Fatehpur Sikri. Last week, Congress had released its first list of 125 candidates for the assembly election which included

30 years, Congress is eyeing to make a comeback in the state with a core focus on women empowerment and welfare. The party

Budget must clarify tax rules: Crypto players

BENGALURU: For a few months now, the crypto industry has been expecting a bill to regulate the assets. But it has been getting delayed, and now crypto players in the country have high hopes that the upcoming Budget will provide clarity on the taxation of cryptocurrencies.

Sathvik Vishwanath, Co-Founder and CEO, Unocoin, says, "I am not expecting anything amazing to come out of the Budget this time. If at all, the income tax confusions may get cleared up." Unocoin is the first entrant into the bitcoin industry, and it has been adding new tokens now

and then for Indian crypto investors and traders.

"Besides regulatory clarity, we expect better clarity from the government on crypto taxation. India has been witnessing an

expect well-defined regulations around crypto and blockchain technology.

"2022 should be a year of clarity for the crypto ecosystem. The upcoming Budget is a good opportunity to start a dialogue

around various undefined aspects of the asset class that need addressing. Businesses and individuals would then be able to operate with much clarity as the ambiguity around taxation is cleared and crypto assets get defined appropriately under various tax-

tion laws," says Vikram Subburaj CEO and Co-founder Giottus

Sharan Nair, Chief Business Officer, CoinSwitch Kuber, says a regularised environment will encourage more Indians to start their crypto investing journey.



Three focus areas for the Union Budget

We are in the season when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her team are engaged in the careful balancing act that is required to meet multiple objectives of the Union Budget.

This Budget is more difficult than most because of the prolonged pandemic, though the robust tax collections of late have allowed her

large gainers in the growth bounceback. Analysis of listed companies over the last two years has shown that as a group, they have registered sharp gains in revenue and profit growth while also reducing debt burden. Billionaires have become even richer.

On the other hand, the middle-income group and the poor have suffered. Re-

view of tax collection prospects, private consumption growth and finally the amount it needs to earmark for social sector spending. That is why it is particularly important for the FM to see if the Budget can address some of these.

Two, the medical and healthcare Issues: The pandemic brought to the fore the weaknesses of the

the specifics. The government has tried to cover a huge range of sectors and attempted to offer something to everyone.

Given the government's limited resources, a focus on a few things that are either crucial to the larger manufacturing sector or particularly important to protect our citizens would perhaps be wiser. The



some elbow room. But even then, she needs to ensure that economic growth remains high, the social sector spending is not cut, and all this is done without compromising on fiscal prudence.

At its core, any Union Budget is just the government's revenue projections and its expenditure plans for the year. In India though, the Union Budget and even more, the finance minister's Budget speech and the expenditure allocations, are accorded far greater importance because they signal policy intentions and priorities.

By now, the finance minister would also have received the wish list from various ministries, chambers of commerce and sundry associations. These mostly focus on the ministry or interest group's specific needs while the FM has to look at the big picture. And there are three things in that picture that are particularly important.

One, the growth sans jobs problem: Evidence of the K-shaped nature of the recovery is piling up. Big listed corporations have been the

search by different bodies—Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), Pew Research Center, the Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment and others—have pointed out that unemployment has grown, incomes of the middle class and the poor have shrunk, and many more people have been pushed into poverty.

While jobs are being created, it is not fast enough or not in adequate numbers. Low-job-creating growth is not a new trend. The economic growth to job creation equation has been weakening for over a decade now.

And, the problem has been aggravated by the pandemic. Meanwhile, the debt profile of poor people is getting worse and their savings are coming down because of the pandemic-induced medical expenses and loans taken. This would be an issue for any country. For India, with its demographic profile, it is far worse.

High unemployment is also bad for the government finances in multiple ways— from the point of

healthcare systems in every country. India is no exception. From the number of doctors to the availability of beds per thousand patients, the shortage of oxygen and drugs, and the problems with vaccination, we need to learn from our mistakes. Offering insurance coverage to the poor does not help if the basic capacities are not augmented.

There is a limited role the Union government can play in healthcare, with much of the responsibility actually lying with the states. But in the past, the Centre has often used the Budget and other policy interventions to kick off schemes that are jointly implemented and accounted for. This Budget provides an ideal opportunity to at least get the conversation going and introduce long-term policies to fix the weaknesses.

Three, the right Atmanirbharta: The Modi government's initial Make in India announcement and its pandemic-induced Atmanirbharta thrust have a consistent and welcome directional vision. The problem has always been in

pandemic and the broken global supply chain have brought two particular problems to the fore.

We have been found wanting in APIs in pharmaceuticals, for which we are still dependent on China, and we have found ourselves grappling (as have other countries) with the global chip shortage, which affects every manufacturing sector today.

In APIs, there is evidence that we can reduce our dependence with proper interventions. In chips, it will be far more difficult despite the recent incentives that the government has offered. Those are things the FM needs to keep in mind.

Of course, in conclusion, the most important thing to keep in mind for the government is that despite our sharp 9% plus growth this year, we will barely be where we were as an economy at the end of FY20. We have lost two years. And therefore it is important to ensure that we keep growing at 8% plus annually for a couple of decades. And that is the biggest picture for the government today.

economic recovery despite the Covid waves. A regulatory clarity will give the crypto sector a boost, accelerate its growth and potential to contribute to our \$5 trillion economy vision," says Nischal Shetty, CEO, WazirX.

The bitcoin and cryptocurrency exchange also expects the Budget to present finetuned clarity on the crypto landscape. "While the legal implementation still seems a while away, any initiative announced in the Budget would at least open a direct line of conversation on crypto classification as an asset class, its taxation policies and the blue-ocean opportunities available in this globally emerging segment. This would not only encourage institutional investments in the space but also open up job opportunities in the underserved markets," he says.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) department recently detected a GST evasion worth ₹40.5 crore by the cryptocurrency exchange. However, WazirX said there was an ambiguity in the interpretation of one of the components which led to a different calculation of GST paid.

Last year, WazirX's trading volume was over \$43 billion, accounting for 1,735% growth from 2020. The crypto exchange also crossed a user base of 10 million. Both CoinSwitch Kuber and Giottus ex-

105 nations to get cheaper Merck Covid pill; molnupiravir not added to India's treatment protocol due to safety concerns

Continued from page-1

treatment protocol for the disease.

Five manufacturers will focus on producing the raw ingredients; 13 will produce both raw ingredients and molnupiravir itself; while nine will simply produce the finished drug.

Antivirals like molnupiravir work by decreasing the ability of a virus to replicate, thereby slowing down the disease.

Given to patients within days of a positive test, the treatment cuts the risk of hospitalisation, according to Merck, also called MSD outside the United States.

"Accelerating broad, affordable access to molnupiravir has been a priority for MSD from the start," said the company's Paul Schaper. "We are pleased to see this vision come to life." Merck jointly developed molnupiravir with the Miami-based company Ridgeback Biotherapeutics.

They will not receive sales royalties while Covid-19 remains classified as a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) by the WHO.

A PHEIC is the highest alarm the WHO can sound and its emergency committee last week reconfirmed the pandemic's top-alert status. The Geneva-based MPP is a United Nations-backed international organisation that works to facilitate the development of medicines for low- and middle-income nations.

It was founded by Unitaid, which works on innovations to prevent, diagnose and treat major diseases in poorer countries.

While the search for vaccines has resulted in multiple products being approved for emergency use in the pandemic, the hunt for treatments for those who have already caught the disease has not been as fruitful.

'Draconian': Mamata Banerjee to PM Modi on proposed changes in IAS cadre rules

Continued from page-1

revised proposed amendments.

Placing strong objection in Thursday's letter, Mamata said, "I find the revised amendment proposal more draconian than the former, and indeed its very grain is against the foundations of our great federal polity and the basic structure of India's Constitutional scheme."

"It is going to completely render them (officers) and all the State Governments at the mercy of the central government since the All India Services serve as the backbone of a State's administrative machinery. It will hand on the head of each officer of the All India Services like a Damocles' sword."

Mamata urged PM Modi to reconsider this move and not to go ahead with the proposed amendments which will reduce the so-called "steel-frame" of India to an entity functioning in fear, pressure or intimidation.

ALSO READ | Tableau row: Rajnath tries to smooth Mamata's ruffled feathers, Trinamool not amused

The latest communication with the states mentioned a few amendments to IAS rules. One of the major changes proposed is if the state government delays posting a state cadre official to the Centre and does not give effect the central government's decision within the specified time, the officer shall stand released from the state cadre. At present, officers have to get a no-objection clearance from the state government.

The other change is the Centre will decide the actual number of officers to be deputed to the central government in consultation with the state and the latter should make eligible the names of such officers. According to the existing practice, states have to depute officers to the central government and at any point, it cannot be more than 40% of the total strength of the state's cadre.

The third proposed amendment says in case of any disagreement between the Centre and the state, the matter shall be decided by the central government and the state shall give effect to its decision within a specified time. The fourth change mentions that in a specific situation where services of cadre officers are required by the Centre in "public interest", the state shall give effect to its decision.

Retired bureaucrats opine that the proposed amendment might create insecurity among the officers. "The move may cater to opportunities to political leaders to remove or bring one of their choices. For example, a state-level leader of a political party which is in power at the Centre may use his influence to remove an officer," said a retired bureaucrat of West Bengal cadre.

Another former IAS officer said, "At present, an officer can move the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) in his or her state if they are not ready to join the central deputation. But the proposed amendments indicate he or she may have to move CAT Delhi to register his or her objection," he said.

COVID continues to play havoc with ISL, game between Mumbai and Jamshedpur postponed



BAMBOLIM: The Indian Super League match between Jamshedpur FC and Mumbai City FC, scheduled for Friday, has been postponed as many players representing the teams are down with the COVID-19 virus. "Hero Indian Super League (ISL) Match No. 67 between Jamshedpur FC and Mumbai City FC scheduled for Friday, January 21, 2022, at Athletic Stadium,

Bambolim, stands postponed," the league organisers said in a statement. "The decision was taken considering advice from the League's medical team on Jamshedpur FC's inability to safely field a team and prepare for the match," the ISL added in its statement.

On Monday, the ISL match between Hyderabad FC and Jamshedpur FC was

also postponed due to COVID-19, and so was Thursday's game between Kerala Blasters FC and ATK Mohun Bagan due to unavailability of enough players in the former's ranks after being hit by COVID-19 inside the bio-bubble.

Three days back, Jamshedpur FC's match against Hyderabad FC was postponed hours before kick-off after the Jharkhand-based club

failed to field a team due to COVID-19 cases in its ranks.

A match between Kerala Blasters FC and Mumbai City FC in Vasco was also postponed on Sunday, hours before kickoff as the southern outfit did not have the requisite number of players to field.

Prior to that, two more matches had been postponed this season after the coronavirus breached the ISL's bio-bubble.

Covid situation set to claim Ranji Trophy for second successive year

CHENNAI: For the second time in as many years, India's domestic season is unlikely to have its premier domestic tournament, the Ranji Trophy. The Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) office-bearers had a meeting on Tuesday and, according to reliable sources, it has been decided that should the Covid situation improve, other domestic events including Cooch Behar, CK Nayudu and the senior women's T20 will be held, but due to the short window, hosting Ranji Trophy will not be possible.

As things stand, the BCCI has not communicated anything officially to the state units. It is believed the BCCI have sought time but state associations have all but given up hope.

the IPL is scheduled to start on April 2 as they need at least 35 days to hold the five group stage matches. With the players supposed to enter IPL bio-bubble by March 20, unless the tournament begins by February first week, it will make it impossible for the BCCI to host it. As a result, the BCCI is being left with no choice but to scrap Ranji Trophy again. If it is not able to host the tournament this season, questions will be raised about their decision to host white-ball events — Syed Mushtaq Ali T20s and Vijay Hazare Trophy — ahead of the Ranji Trophy. While the initial plan was to start the current domestic season with the Ranji Trophy, the BCCI changed the plans keeping the IPL auctions in mind.



While the Ranji Trophy was scheduled to begin on January 13, the onset of the third Covid wave meant the BCCI was forced to suspend the domestic season on January 4. Although the BCCI had stated that it had only postponed the start by 15 days, there has been little development since then and the Covid cases have only been increasing in most cities across the country. As per BCCI's original schedule, it needs around 75 days to host the Ranji Trophy. When the tournament was suspended, the BCCI initially thought of splitting it into two halves, sandwiched between the IPL. Under this method, the group stages were scheduled to be played in February-March, with the knockout stages in June-July or September-October. However, the onset of the southwest monsoon in June would make it impossible to host the matches in June-July.

So, for the BCCI to host Ranji Trophy in two halves, the tournament has to begin at least by February 20, because the next edition of

In fact, state associations and players have been fearing the worst since the rejig as it clearly sent a signal of the BCCI prioritising white-ball meets over Ranji Trophy. Cancelling the Ranji Trophy means several domestic players, umpires and match officials will suffer financial hits.

World over, the BCCI is the only cricket board not to conduct red-ball cricket the previous season. While none of the other mainstream cricket nations has as many as 38 teams, given the BCCI's resources it is not an impossible task. Although playing the entire tournament under a bio-secure environment will definitely shoot up the expenses, it should never be an issue for the board which continues to make huge profits through the IPL.

Plan B for IPL

Meanwhile, it is understood that the BCCI will decide on the IPL host country before the player auction takes place on February 12. At the moment, it is a toss-up between Sri Lanka and South Africa. Supposed the BCCI moves the event to South Africa, franchises believe it won't make much of a difference as they will be forced to use airports to juggle between cities. In Sri Lanka, they can avoid it as Colombo has three stadiums that can be put to use.

Judges explain why they backed deporting Djokovic, say didn't consider 'wisdom' of decision

MELBOURNE: Three Australian Federal Court judges on Thursday revealed their reasons for backing a government order to deport tennis star Novak Djokovic, explaining they did not consider the "merits or wisdom of the decision."

The judges on Sunday unanimously endorsed Immigration Minister Alex Hawke's decision to deport the 34-year-old Serb following an urgent court challenge on the eve of what was to be Djokovic's first match in defense of his Australian Open title. Djokovic accepted the verdict and flew from Melbourne to the United Arab Emirates hours later.

Chief Justice James Allsop and Justices James Besanko and David O'Callaghan on Thursday released a 27-page explanation of why they rejected Djokovic's challenge.

"The court does not consider the merits or wisdom of the decision," the judges said. "The task of the court is to rule upon the lawfulness or legality of the decision."

"Another person in the position of the minister may have not cancelled Mr. Djokovic's visa. The minister did," they added.

Djokovic had his visa revoked at Melbourne's airport on Jan. 6 hours after arriving because he wasn't vaccinated against COVID-19. A judge later found that the border officer's decision to cancel the visa was legally unreasonable and restored it.

But Hawke used his sweeping discretion under the Immigration Act to cancel the visa again on Friday on the broad ground of public interest.

Djokovic was a "high profile unvaccinated individual" whose presence in Melbourne "may foster anti-vaccination sentiment" and increase pressure on the health system, Hawke

said in his 10-page decision to revoke the visa. Hawke had rejected Djokovic's arguments that his deportation would appear to be "politically motivated decision-making" that could jeopardize Australia's role as host of the first Grand Slam of the year.

Many argue the government deported Djokovic in response to public anger that an unvaccinated athlete had been allowed into the country without undergoing quarantine, even as the omicron variant strains hospitals, home COVID-19 tests are in short supply and Australians' relatives overseas are barred from visiting because authorities don't recognize their types of vaccines.

The judges rejected Djokovic's three grounds of appeal. The first was that the decision was illogical, irrational or unreasonable. The second was that the minister could not find that Djokovic's presence in Australia may be a risk to health or good order. The third was that the minister could not find Djokovic had a well known stance opposed to vaccination.

"It was open to infer that it was perceived by the public that Mr. Djokovic was not in favor of vaccinations," the judges said.

Djokovic, who returned to Serbia, is in talks with lawyers about suing the Australian government for £3.2million (\$4.4 million) for "ill treatment," the London-based The Sun newspaper reported, citing an unnamed source close to his agent Edoardo Artladi.

John Karantzis, a partner in Australian firm Carbone Lawyers, said Djokovic could have a case.

"If he concentrates on the ... unreasonable actions he would allege towards him, and not on policy grounds, he may succeed," Karantzis told Seven Network television.

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