

## Class X & XII Exams in Time

Bhubaneswar(KCN): Class X and XII students to be ready with As the schools have



remained closed due to a spike in Covid-19 cases in the State, School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash on Monday cleared some air on conduct of Class X and XII Board Examinations. Mr.Dash advised the

their preparations for the board examinations. As the Covid-19 situation is improving in the State, there are possibilities of holding the board examinations for Class X and XII students, he said.

If any special situation arises in the country as well as the State due to Covid-19, the State Government will take a final decision on this, said the Minister.

As per prevailing situation is concerned, there is every possibility for the conduct of the examinations, Mr.Dash added.

The summative examination-1 for the Class X students has already been completed in the State.

Mr.Dash further informed that the Department will always try to ensure that the examinations are held and the results are published on time.

The State Government had earlier reduced the syllabus as part of the reforms which were initiated following the cancellation of the Matriculation and other examinations last year due to Covid-19 situation.

At present, the State is showing a declining trend as far as the daily reporting of Covid-19 cases are concerned. Odisha reported 7,291 fresh COVID-19 cases on Monday, pushing the tally to 12,11,951, while the death toll mounted to 8,525 with five more fatalities.

Public Health Director Niranjan Mishra on Monday said Omicron variant will soon be in a community transmission stage in Odisha as the transmission rate of the variant is high.

Omicron cases have risen significantly in the state. Previous analysis shows that 60 per cent of the Omicron cases in the State were local contacts, he said.

At any moment, the cases might explode, as the variant is highly transmissible, Dr.Mishra added.

## Sri Lanka hopeful of obtaining further Indian aid of USD 1.5 billion: Foreign Minister

COLOMBO(KCN): The Sri Lankan government has said that there is a possibility of obtaining a further USD 1.5 billion in aid from India, weeks after New Delhi announced a billion-dollar assistance package and a balance of payment support to the island nation which is facing a severe foreign exchange crisis.



Foreign Minister G L Peiris told reporters in the central town of Kandy on Sunday that further Indian assistance was forthcoming. (Finance minister) Basil Rajapaksa, as a result of his talks held in (New) Delhi with madam (India's Finance Minister) Nirmala Sitharaman and foreign minister Dr S Jaishankar, was able to obtain a relief package. "Similarly, there is a possibility of us obtaining a further 1.5 billion dollars," Peiris said.

ALSO READ | Sri Lanka settles sovereign bond payment as re-

imposed.

He also said that the option of approaching the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was still on the table.

"The doors are still open, we are a member of that organisation (IMF)," Peiris said, adding that the government, however, would be wary of tough conditions being

imposed. The minister claimed that despite the foreign exchange crisis, Sri Lanka has not hit the rock bottom yet. The government is rejecting the option of going for an economic bailout package from the IMF. The Cabinet is also divided on the issue of approaching the US-based global financial institution. Earlier this month, India announced a USD 400 million currency swap facility to improve Sri Lanka's gross reserves and deferred the

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## Israeli PM likely to visit India as two nations celebrate 30 years of diplomatic ties: Envoy

JERUSALEM (KCN): Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and other se-



nior officials are likely to visit India this year as the two countries celebrate 30 years of diplomatic relations, Israel's Ambassador to India Naor Gilon said on Monday. In a Webinar held for the virtual launch of

a special logo to set in motion the year-long celebrations to commemorate the occa-

sion, Gilon said he feels very lucky to be Israel's Ambassador in India when "relations are exceptional" and "beyond regular", one of "partnership between ancient civilisations". To further deepen bilateral cooperation in

diverse areas, Gilon said Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and other officials are likely to visit India as the two countries celebrate 30 years of establishment of diplomatic ties.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had extended an invitation to Bennett from Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Israel last year.

"This is an important occasion to reflect on our mutual successes as well as a good opportunity to look ahead and shape the next 30 years of our

relations. I am sure that our close existing cooperation in different fields will only continue to grow and flourish in the coming years," Gilon stressed.

Gilon launched the logo virtually along with his Indian counterpart in Tel Aviv, Ambassador Sanjeev Singla.

The logo features the Star of David and the Ashoka Chakra, the two symbols that adorn the national flags of both countries, and forms the numeral 30 depicting the 30th anniversary

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down.

The party failed to field candidates in all the six zilla parishad (ZP) zones in Satyabadi Assembly constituency as the in charge of ticket distribution Prasad Harichandan allegedly did not do so.

The party claimed that tickets had been released for all the 853 ZP zones by the president of the Odisha Pradesh Con-

gress Committee (OPCC) Niranjan Patnaik. But Harichandan did not distribute them till the last minute despite reminders from the party aspirants and leadership.

The former minister But Harichandan did not attend the meeting. Former Odisha Minister Anjali Behera is now a Samiti member candidate Harichandan has kept himself away from Congress activities

party candidates during campaigning. Besides, local issues like the alleged lathicharge of police at Dhinkia will be raised by the party in Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts. The Congress leaders

noted that the party does not have the problem of rebel candidates like the BJD and has been able to field candidates in a majority of seats for ward members, sarpanch, and panchayat Samiti members.

Party has fielded candidates in 90 per cent of seats for the sarpanch post, party spokesperson Manoranjan Das said.

## US draws down Ukraine embassy presence as war fears mount

WASHINGTON(KCN): The State Department on Sunday ordered the families of all American personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine to leave the country amid heightened fears of a Russian invasion.

The department told the dependents of staffers at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv that they must leave the country. It also said that non-essential embassy staff could leave Ukraine at government expense. The move came amid rising tensions about Russia's military buildup on the Ukraine border that were not eased dur-



ing talks Friday between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva.

State Department officials stressed the Kyiv embassy will remain open and that the announcement does not constitute an evacuation. The move had been under consideration for some time and does not reflect an easing of U.S. support for Ukraine, the officials said.

In a statement, the State Department noted recent reports that Russia was planning significant military action

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Sarangi takes DGFT charge

New Delhi(KCN): Senior Mandarin, Santosh Kumar Sarangi has taken over as Director General Foreign Trade (DGFT). 1994 Batch IAS Officer, Mr.Sarangi took new charge here on Monday after De-



partment of Personnel & Training notified his assignment after approval of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC).

After taking the charge of DGFT, Mr.Sarangi talked to senior officials of DGFT and discussed at length about the export-import scenario of the country. While Mr.Sarangi is having long experience in Ministry of Commerce as Joint Secretary and Chairman of APEDA, he harped on scaling up exports through various initiatives.

India aims to achieve a target of \$400 billion in the current fiscal year, and has met nearly two-thirds of its annual export target during April-November.

## Faction-ridden Congress fails to distribute tickets

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): Even as the congress aims to regain lost ground in the panchayat elections by improving its performance, factionalism has come to the fore, threatening to pull the party further

down. The party failed to field candidates in all the six zilla parishad (ZP) zones in Satyabadi Assembly constituency as the in charge of ticket distribution Prasad Harichandan allegedly did not do so.

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# SAIL Gaurav Diwas celebrated at Rourkela Steel Plant to mark the Foundation Day of SAIL

Rourkela (KCN): SAIL Gaurav Diwas was celebrated by Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) at Ispat sta-



programme. It was followed by rendering of SAIL Anthem. The ED (Mines) released colourful balloons to the sky as part of the celebrations and administered the health and fitness pledge.

programme. It was followed by rendering of SAIL Anthem. The ED (Mines) released colourful balloons to the sky as part of the celebrations and administered the health and fitness pledge.

He along with Mr. S R Suryawanshi, ED (Works), Mr. A K Pradhan, ED (Projects), Mr. P K

Satapathy, ED Mohapatra, CGM In-



(P&A), Mr. C R charge (MM & Mar-

keting), Dr. B K Hota, CMO In-charge (M&HS) and other CGMs and Senior Officers walked around the stadium to promote the idea of physical fitness. Mr. B K Rout, GM (P.H &SW) welcomed the gathering, while Mr. Anil Mallick, Senior Technician, CRM coordinated the programme.

In the afternoon a cultural programme presented by the employees and their family members was telecast online through various social media platforms. A musical programme 'Hum Hindustani', a skit 'Mera SAIL Mera Garav' a dance to the tunes of the iconic song 'Rangabati' and a dance drama 'Ispat Katah Sarita' pre-

sented in a fusion of Odissi, Pala and Dasakathia were the highlights of the programme. It is worth mentioning here that SAIL Foundation Day is being celebrated all across SAIL as SAIL Gaurav Diwas to rekindle the sense of pride amongst the employees, ex-employees as well as their family members.



It is worth mentioning here that Steel Authority of India Ltd. was incorporated on 24th January, 1973. One of the largest steel-making companies in India and one of the country's Central Public Sector Enterprises. SAIL produces a broad range of steel products at network. Since its inception, SAIL has been instrumental in laying a sound infrastructure for the industrial development of the country. Besides, it has immensely contributed to the development of technical and managerial expertise. It has triggered the secondary and tertiary waves of economic growth by continuously providing the inputs for the consuming industry.

## Heritage Institute of Technology comes within 5 percent of the total engineering institutions in the Country and within 15 percent of the applicable engineering institutions in the Country in terms of ranking and accreditation: Prof. K. K. Aggarwal, Chairman, National Board of Accreditation

Kolkata (KCN): On 22nd January 2022, Heritage Institute of Technology, Kolkata (HITK) organized its Fifth Graduation



Ceremony 2022 at Swami Vivekananda Auditorium, The Heritage campus, Kolkata on a Hybrid Platform. The entire event was live



telecasted on the Facebook Page of HITK and YouTube Channel of Heritage Group of Institutions, Kolkata.

In this Graduation Ceremony, degrees were conferred to the 5th batch of B.Tech, 6th batch of M.Tech and 3rd batch of MCA students of autonomous HITK who have successfully completed their respective degree programmes in the year 2021. Total number of graduands were 1204 with 1109 B.Tech, 47 M.Tech and 48 MCA degree recipients.

The ceremony was inaugurated by Prof. (Dr.) K K Aggarwal, Chairman, National Board of Accreditation, Chief Guest. Padma Shri (Dr.) H R Nagendra, Chancellor, Svyasa University. Prof. (Dr.) Anupam Basu, Director, National Institute of Technology, Durgapur and Mr Madan Mohanka, Chairman, Tega Industries Ltd joined the ceremony as the Guests of Honour.

The ceremony also witnessed the presence of Shri H.K. Chaudhary, Chairman, Heritage Group of Institutions, Kolkata, Shri P.R. Agarwala, Chairman, HITK, Shri H.P. Budhia, Member, BOG HITK among the others. The entire event was presided over by Prof. Saikat Maitra, Vice-Chancellor, MAKAUT, WB as the Chairman of the Fifth Graduation Ceremony. During the inaugural address, Dr. Basab Chaudhuri, Principal, HITK inspired the Graduands by motivating them to lead the nation in the tough turbulent times since they will be the torch bearers of the future. Dr. H. R. Nagendra stressed on

harmony in life and reminded all about the teachings of Swami Vivekananda that Education is the manifestation of the



perfection already in man. Prof. Anupam Basu told students to take vocation that will make them happy at the end of the day.

Shri Madan Mohanka in his address informed students about the problems they will face in real life and prepare them accordingly.

Prof. K. K. Aggarwal told students about the multidisciplinary culture in engineering education that will emerge when the NEP becomes functional. He reminded students that they must be life-long learners and they fall under the 1 percent privileged ones who had the opportunity to complete their graduation in technical education out of the total Gross Enrollment Ratio. "I must complement the management of the Institute and dear friends you must feel proud that Heritage Institute of Technology comes within 5 percent of the total engineering institutions in the Country and within 15 percent of the applicable engineering institutions in the Country in terms of ranking and accreditation within a short span of 20 years," said Prof. K. K. Aggarwal, Chairman, National Board of Accreditation.

Prof. Saikat Maitra, before handing over the medals and certificates to the graduating students, told the audience that HITK was one of the most prominent institutes affiliated to MAKAUT and was doing well. The coming days will see rapid changes in engineering education and graduates must keep up with the changing needs of the industry.

The event also witnessed the release of the Souvenir of the Fifth Graduation Ceremony in the presence of Swami Suparnandaji Maharaj, Secretary Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Prof S P Singh, Vice Chancellor, Royal Golbal University, Guwahati, Prof B B Paira, Founding Director, HITK, Mr Pranabesh Das, Director, Department of Technical Education, Govt of West Bengal among others. "This Graduation Ceremony marks an important milestone in the careers of all the Graduands. On behalf of the entire Heritage family, I wish all the Graduands all the best for their future endeavours," said Shri Pradip Agarwal, CEO, Heritage Group of Institutions, Kolkata.

## All Candidates in Bodapokharia GP Elected Uncontested

Khordha (KCN): Residents of Bodapokharia Grampanchayat under Tangi Block in Khordha Assembly Constituency showed unusual unity and elected Candidates uncontested for the three-tier panchayat elections. Residents

sus. Single candidates filed nomination for all 14 ward members. Sarpanch and Samiti member who were eventually declared elected. Their elections on consensus have created a history. M L A, Khordha Joytrindra Nath Mitra spread the



in this panchayat have so much unity among them that they did not want to strains their relationships for the sake of elections despite the fact that the region in plagued by a host of problems. Come what may we will not strains out ties, said a villager. The panchayat selected all the candidates for the post of 14 ward members as well as sarpanch and samiti member on consensus.

message of electing candidates uncontested among residents and achieved their desired goals. The residents and newly elected GP members extended their support to MLA, Khordha J.N. Mitra and thanked CM, Naveen Patnaik for his dynamic leadership towards the progress of Odisha. The BJD supported candidates in Bodapokharia GP Ward no-1 Santoshi raj, Ward no-9 Kalu Charan Brahma, Ward no-10 Kartika Mangaraj, Ward no-11, Bishnupriya Bhatta, Ward no-12 Srinibash Pradhan, Ward no-13 Anita Pradhan, Ward no-14 Mamata Sethi. Similarly Runubala Sethi was elected as Sarpanch and Joystna Rani Jena as Samiti member. In a press meet at BJD party office Khordha MLA, Joytrindra Nath Mitra said "the area. In this press meet BJD observer Butu Patra, Former Sarpanch Bodapokharia Sagar Baliarsingh, Khordha Zilla Parishad Zone no-9, BJD candidate Mitanjali Baliarsingh and all the newly elected members of Bodapokharia GP were present. MLA, Khordha J.N. Mitra felicitated all the newly elected candidates of Bodapokharia GP.

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'Shakeela' trailer falls flat, lacks the punch expected in a star biopic



The trailer of Indrajit Lankesh's Hindi language film "Shakeela" doesn't hold much to impress. From using modern-day Hindi music to cliched film sets, it feels like a repackaging of Vidya Balan's 'Dirty Picture' except that this version fails to bring the charm Vidya brought to the

screen. The film, as described by the filmmakers of 'Shakeela', is "inspired by life events of a famous star Shakeela who predominantly starred in southern cinema." It features Richa Chadha as the titular adult actor who was one of the biggest stars of the 1990s ar-

iving from Kerala who went on to act in several adult films in languages spanning Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada, while Pankaj Tripathi is the male lead. The film is described to "portray the hardships of the actress as she had to face a lot of criticism, insults and betrayals from

her own family members and the film fraternity who were influential in getting her films banned." The main reason for the success of 'Kinnarathumbikal', one of the films that catapulted her into the limelight, was solely her screen presence and energy, and with no other male lead in the

movie. Trying to fill in the gaping hole left by Silk Smitha in the low-budget softcore industry, Shakeela made her own mark with around 250 movies in her kitty -- heralding the 'Shakeela Tharangam' (The wave of Shakeela). Meanwhile, the Shakeela that

Indrajith is trying to portray doesn't look like she has much story to tell. The screen-space also seems to be overpowered by star cast Pankaj Tripathi. Let's hope the full length movie holds more than what the trailer showed. The film is produced by Sammy Nanwani and Sahil Nanwani, with music by Meet Bros and Veer Samarth.

Priyanka Chopra reveals husband Nick Jonas likes her 'natural' looks, calls him 'appreciator'

WASHINGTON(K-CN): Nick Jonas has

Chopra. The actor re-

2019 and revealed how her husband is

natural or a more glamorous look.

"there are days when he likes a really natu-

went all out for the event, wearing a sheer black top with a pussycat bow, a white blazer paired with a matching pair of pants. Adding a pop of colour to the whole look, she opted for striking pink eye makeup with a matching bold lip colour.

Earlier this month, Priyanka joined her fellow J sisters Sophie Turner and Danielle Jonas in celebrating the first night of their husbands' 'Happiness Begins' tour. All three women rocked Jonas Brothers T-shirts.

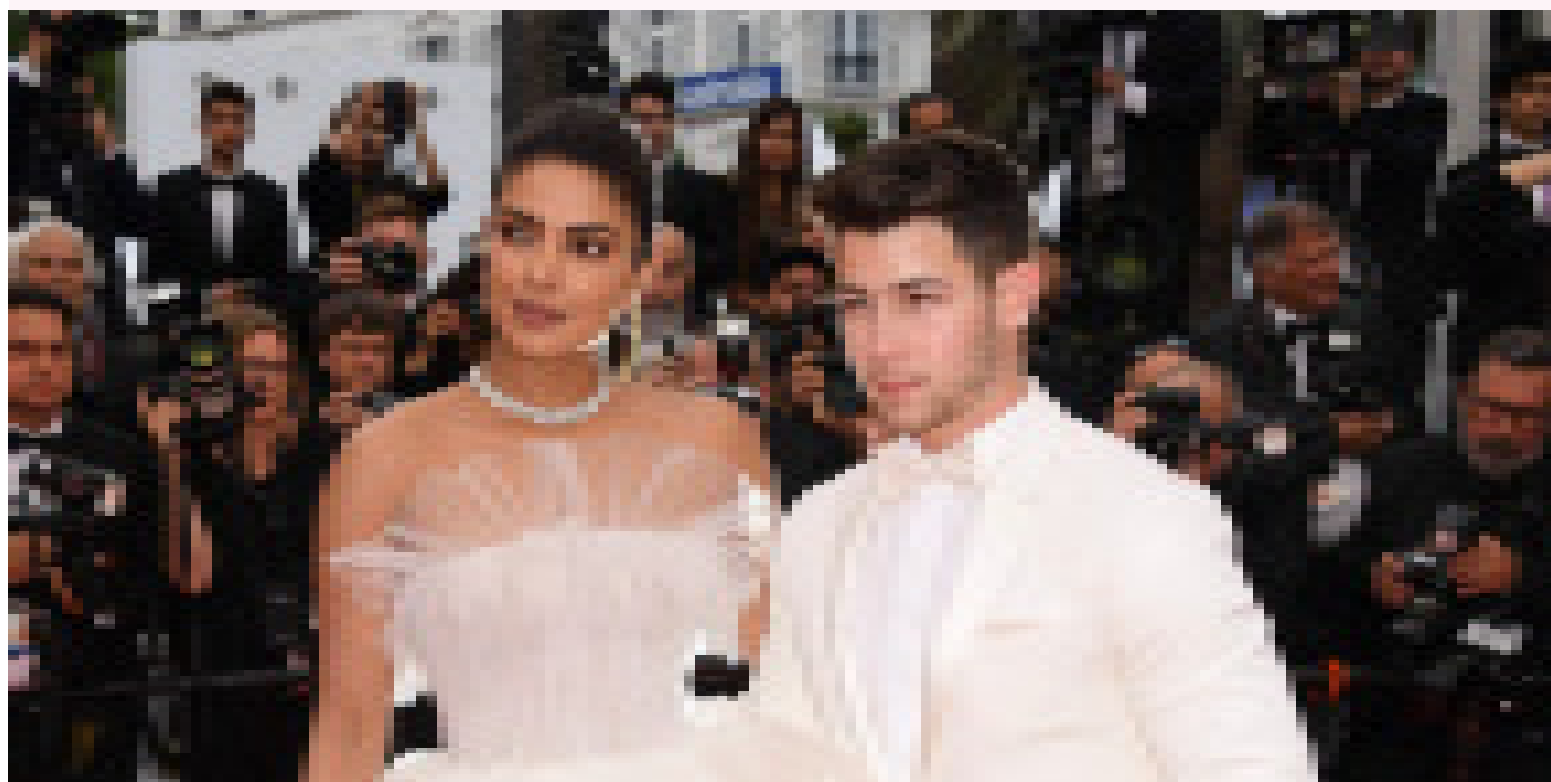
The actor shared that it was "really cool" that they all decided on coordinating their outfits since they "have such distinct personalities."

Just 'normal' to exclude women in decision making process: Adil Hussain

MUMBAI(KCN): Actor Adil Hussain has offered support to the growing group of female artistes who are asking the reason for women's absence from the Bollywood delegation of producers and actors that recently met Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss issues faced by the film industry.

Ritesh Sidhwani and CBFC chief Prasoon Joshi, met Modi to discuss how to take the entertainment industry to the next stage.

The meeting of the delegation came under fire on Wednesday for its exclusion of female representation with some activists and filmmakers pointing out that it was 2018 and asking, "Where are the women?" Adil took to Twitter to criticise the panel that met the prime minister.



nothing but love and admiration for his wife Priyanka

cently spoke to People at Beautycon Festival Los Angeles

full of admiration for her whether she decides to go for a more

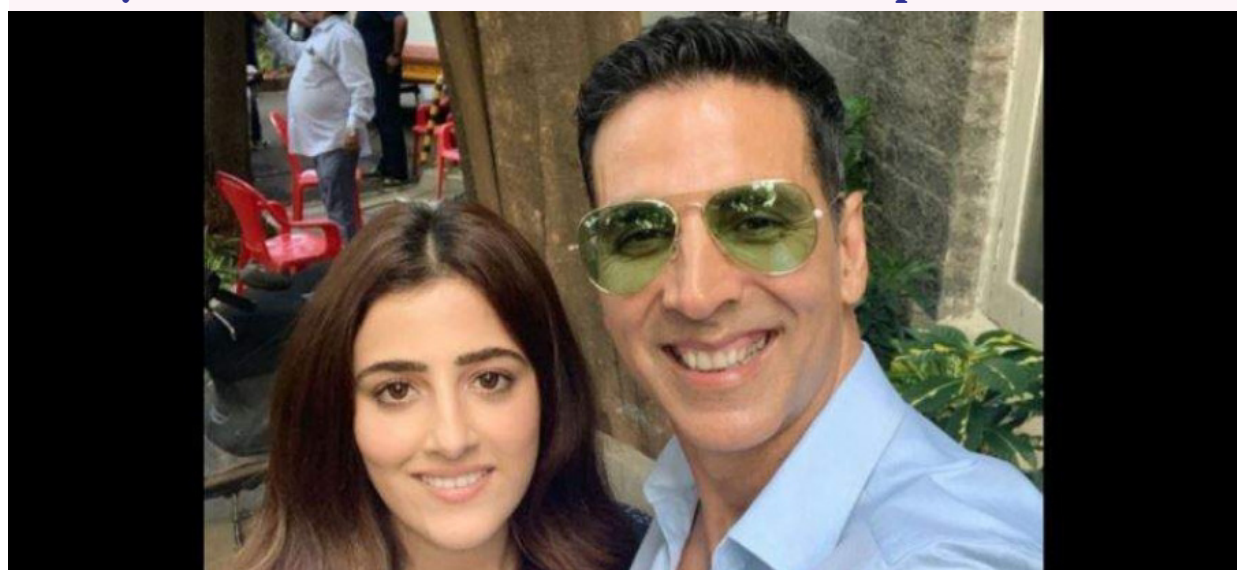
"He likes a bit of both," the 'Quantico' star, said, adding that

real thing."

The 'Mary Kom' actor added, "He's an appreciator. He's someone who can appreciate both things."

In honour of Beautycon, Priyanka

Akshay Kumar shoots with Kriti Sanon's sister Nupur for music video



MUMBAI(KCN): Actor Akshay Kumar on Sunday shot for singer B Praaks new single with actress Kriti Sanon's younger sister Nupur.

written by Jaani. B Praak has previously lent his voice to the song "Teri Mitti" in Akshay's film "Kesari".

London! The song will also feature renowned Punjabi singer Ammy Virk.

posing with Nupur and Ammy at the St. Xavier's college in Mumbai.

ALSO READ: Akshay Kumar has a namesake actor in

A lot of pictures are doing the rounds on the internet in which Akshay is seen

On the work front, Akshay will be seen in "Housefull 4" and "Good Newwz" this year.

## NOTA and Indian Electoral Reform- Are We a Matured Democracy?

Elections are at the centre of the democratic process. People in a democracy participate in public affairs and express their will through elections. In a democracy, power is transferred in a peaceful and orderly manner through elections, and the government's authority is given



legitimacy. „Elections, in this way, not only sustain but also enliven democracy. As a result, free and fair elections are a requirement of democracy. India is both the world's largest and one of the world's most populated democracies. Apart from that, in compared to most developed democracies throughout the world, illiteracy, poverty, and other issues persist in India, as they do in most developing countries.

Periodic elections as a mechanism of peaceful power transition have been a regular and successful component of India's democracy for the past seventy years, according to India's track record. Not only that, but Indians have consistently viewed elections as the most effective nonviolent and peaceful means of protesting government omissions and actions. Elections have thus become an important part of India's democracy, as they have been in many other successful liberal democracies across the world.

However, over time, several anomalies in the electoral system's operation have become apparent. The necessity to address such troubling circumstances has sparked a debate in the country over election changes. The Election Commission, which is entrusted with the actual power of superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the country under the Constitution, has made tangible proposals/suggestions based on objective issues experienced during the conduct of elections from time to time. Politicians have expressed their desire for reform through the platforms of parties and Parliament, including the different committees established for that reason. Governments have also taken corrective action in response to suggestions from various committees.

### Issues in Indian Elections

The substantial criminal past of the candidates is one of the key irregularities impacting a fair election. The sudden increase in the number of legislators facing criminal charges will have a significant influence on voters' faith in India's democracy and its working mechanisms. This might have terrible consequences for the people's democratic spirit and their faith in the current system. According to a poll conducted by the Association for Democratic Reforms after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, approximately 43 percent of newly elected members of the lower house have criminal cases pending against them. In the 2004 national election, 24 percent of candidates had ongoing criminal convictions, which increased to 33 percent in 2008.

The criminalization of politics in India might have a variety of factors. In most situations in India, there is a link between criminals and politicians. This link could be because to the criminals' physical power and influence over the people in their districts, which can be a boon to politicians when they go election campaigning to win, while the criminals obtain exemption from prosecution and

backing from the administration to carry out their unlawful activities. This nexus could prove to be a ticket for crooks to run for office. The criminalization of politics is gaining traction as a result of the public's lack of understanding of how to choose their representatives and how to vote.

### NOTA- certainly not a panacea but a powerful tool

Since 2009, Indian voters have had the option of voting "None of the Above" (or NOTA) in most elections. The

**Pratap Kishore Mohanty**

*forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity."*

The problem has been with implementation of the judgment. The Election Commission of India decided, in its wisdom, to implement the letter of the judgment while overlooking its spirit. It provided a NOTA button on the EVMs but did not change the process of deciding the winner. The result is that even if the NOTA button gets more votes than any of the candidates, the candidate

with the highest number of votes after NOTA is declared elected. This goes completely against the "will of the people" to which the Supreme Court gave primacy. Another factor that has prevented NOTA from achieving its full



Supreme Court recommended the adoption of NOTA in the context of direct elections to the Lok Sabha and respective state assemblies in PUCI vs. Union of India Judgement 2013. A citizen can choose not to vote for any of the candidates running for office by expressing a preference for none of the above. The vote has no electoral value: even if a majority of ballots are cast, the candidate who receives the most votes is deemed the winner. The NOTA option was first used in four states (Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh) during the 2013 assembly elections. In the current dispensation, NOTA is seen as a citizen's right to reject affiliation. The 2013 verdict recognised the voter's two most fundamental rights in the election system:

- Right to Reject
- Right to Secrecy

As a result, India has become the 14th country to use negative voting. However, the electorate in India did not have a true 'right to reject,' meaning that the candidate with the most votes would win the election regardless of the number of NOTA votes cast. Votes cast on NOTA, in particular, have no bearing on the election's legality or outcome. Even if NOTA gained a majority of votes, the election would be decided by the candidate who received the most votes in each constituency.

This is what democracy should really mean: the ability of the general population to compel political parties to change their positions. However, it will only be effective if the legislation allows for re-election in any seat where the NOTA has received a majority of votes. Unfortunately, such a rule does not exist in India at the moment, so the candidates who receive the second greatest number of votes will be considered elected under Rule 64 of the Representation of Peoples Act. Now, the question arises: what is the legality of an election if the majority of votes are cast against a candidate, and what is the purpose of include NOTA on the ballot paper?

The Supreme Court made very significant observations in the judgment, one of which said, "When the political parties realize that a large number of people are expressing their disapproval with the candidates being put up by them, gradually there will be a systemic change and the political parties will be

potential is that political parties and their leaders have been actively campaigning against NOTA. They have been asking people not to opt for NOTA because these votes have no impact on who gets elected. This, when the votes polled by NOTA have continued to increase gradually. Several constituencies have seen NOTA getting more votes than the winning margin, the difference between the votes polled by the winner and the candidate who came second. There have also been some, very few, cases where NOTA came at number 2, getting more votes than any of the candidates except the winner.

### Maharashtra and Haryana's Case

Maharashtra experienced the most substantial change as a result of NOTA. The State Election Commission (SEC) approved the clause and declared that if NOTA won any election in Maharashtra, a necessary re-poll would be held. This was the first major modification in the electoral system since NOTA was founded. The State Election Commission of Maharashtra issued a notification on November 6, 2018 that treats NOTA as a fictional candidate and states categorically that clause 7 of the ECI order dated declaring that if NOTA receives the most votes, the candidate receiving the second most votes after NOTA shall be declared the winner violates the accepted principle (the candidate with the majority of votes winning the election) by declaring the candidate as elect. The order also considers the PUCI case, arguing that the adoption of NOTA:

- has not led to increased voter participation,
- has not compelled political parties to field good candidates,
- does not reflect negative votes in election results and
- does not honor and respect the majority will/ opinion of the people expressed through NOTA

Although the Supreme Court intended and expected that NOTA would increase voter participation in elections, this does not appear to have occurred, if the election commission, whether state or federal, gives teeth to NOTA, as in Maharashtra and Haryana, it may address the concerns of many, including Major General (Retd) Anil Verma. Fear of 'rejection' by the power of NOTA, by 'We the people of India,' the process of

purifying the political system by driving parties to put up stronger candidates appears to have started already. The key benefit of including NOTA is that it upholds and recognises citizens' right to abstain from voting while retaining anonymity during that time. The essential spirit of democracy is the public' freedom to choose their representatives on a regular basis. Clearly, the goals of democracy can only be achieved if a majority of citizens use this privilege. At the same time, it must be ensured that citizens are not forced to pick between the best and the worst (which, regrettably, is often the case). This is precisely what NOTA aspire to.

This is hardly surprising, because citizens would rather not vote than express their dissatisfaction, which will have no impact on the election results. Even if more than half of the voters chose negative voting, the election result will not be influenced or a particular candidate will not win. It is for this reason that NOTA has been heavily criticised, and it is for this reason that voters have been unable to exercise their right to record a negative vote. The inclusion of NOTA in electronic voting machines is undoubtedly a significant step forward in implementing electoral reforms, bringing it closer to the goal of democracy. However, its full impact and potential can only be realised if it is allowed to be used in its full and unrestricted sense, i.e. not only the right to register a negative vote but also the right to reject it.

### Electronic Media and NOTA

It's really surprising to see that very few electronic media have taken up the issue of NOTA in recent years. The same media house which are devoting much of their prime time in highlighting the so called achievements of the government, have not taken up reflecting the provisions of NOTA in prime time. Possibly they have taken it for granted that NOTA have no teeth and it will not enforce clean elections. This very attitude needs to be changed. While reflecting upon the criminalization of politics on the one hand, it is equally their responsibility to make aware the voters and electorate that they have the much needed tool at their disposal and they can use it to provide an opportunity of self introspection to political parties.

### Conclusion

The subject of NOTA is as divisive as any other national issue. It has numerous benefits and drawbacks. Few individuals see it as a good thing, while others see it as a bad one. In elections, a skewed free option is never a bad thing. When the option of NOTA was not available, people squandered their right to vote by remaining in their homes; however, with NOTA, people realised their rights and opted to vote rather than sit at home. It is undoubtedly a great systemic development in society, but the main negative is that its enforcement is not as robust as it should be, necessitating suggested modifications. Simultaneously, this needs to be debated, discussed and deliberated upon in as many forums as possible and every inch of social and electronic media must highlight the issue. May be NOTA is not very effective to cleanse the political democracy but nonetheless, it has emerged as the one of the most powerful tool to empower people and make the political parties more responsible. May be, there might have hundred of such options more effective than NOTA, but somewhere we need to have nationwide discussion on the same and may be, a fine morning, we will get some robust system for the same.

Academic Consultant in Sociology,  
Odisha State Open University,  
Sambalpur

## BJD wants Union Min Tudu's resignation

BARIPADA: The district unit of the BJD on Sunday demanded immediate resignation of Minister of State for Tribal Affairs and Jal Shakti Bisweshwar Tudu for

action against him. "If Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not ask the Union Minister to resign within three days, the BJD will take to the streets and launch an

Mohapatra's left hand and injuries on Mallick's body. Both officers were admitted to Pandit Raghunath Murmu Medical College and Hospital. Mohapatra

ALSO READ: Two Odisha government officers allege manhandling by Union Minister Bishweshwar Tudu Based on the complaint of Mallick, an



allegedly manhandling two officers of the Mayurbhanj district planning board at his Takatpur office two days back. Condemning the incident, Revenue and Disaster Management Minister and BJD district president Sudam Marndi demanded immediate resignation of Minister Tudu besides legal

agitation," he said. As per the officer duo's claim, Tudu had called Assistant Director Debashish Mohapatra and in charge Deputy Director Aswini Mallick to his Takatpur office to discuss MP and MLA funds on Friday. During the discussion, he allegedly flung a chair at them, leaving a fracture on

was later shifted to SCB medical college in Cuttack as his condition deteriorated. However, Tudu has denied all the allegations and claimed that the officers were acting on behalf of the BJD since elections were near. He said he had called the officers but since they arrived late, he asked them to come the next day.

FIR was lodged under sections 323, 341, 294, and 506 of the IPC against Minister Tudu at Baripada town police station on the day of the incident. Contacted, Mayurbhanj SP Rishikesh D Khilari said IIC of Baripada town police station Birendra Senapati is investigating the case and action will be taken as per law.

## AIEBA SOS for coal

Bhubaneswar: Struggling to cope with the acute coal shortage in Odisha that continues to plague local industries, the Association of Industrial Entrepreneurs of Bhubaneswar (AIEBA) has sought personal intervention of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in the resumption of adequate coal supplies to the State-based industries.



The ongoing crisis has deeply affected the manufacturing sector and threatens their survival. A respite from the crisis would help ward off any shutdown of the State's industries and enable sustainable industry operations. In a letter to the Chief Minister, Ali Kishore Patnaik, President of AIEBA, acknowledged the State Government's progressive policy reforms and support towards industries, also sought to draw attention towards the continued coal shortage facing them. Owing to the curtailment of the coal supplies and rakes, the viability of industries that form a significant part of the State's business landscape driving employment and revenue generation is now seriously threatened, he said. Mr. Patnaik further highlighted that Captive Power Plants (CPPs) based industries in the State were facing alarmingly depleted coal stocks of only 2-3 days as compared to the prescribed levels of 15 days. On the other hand, the situation of the power sector has drastically improved to 9-10 days of stocks. The CPPs, which are heavily dependent on coal as their primary raw material, are unable to run smoothly due to the current situation, he mentioned. Surprisingly, despite the ongoing crisis, the Coal India Limited/Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) has once again issued directives this week to divert coal supplies from the non-

power sector to the power sector. The association said the decision to divert coal supplies from major coal bearing areas in Odisha will further take a toll on the hampered manufacturing sector and deprive the already ailing non-power sector from getting coal, heavily impeding the industrial operations. The letter further brings to attention that since August 2021, the CPPs have been receiving only 40-50% of the required coal supplies needed for them to function optimally, creating a backlog of over 1500 coal rakes as most of the available coal rakes are being diverted away from CPPs. This struggle to receive uninterrupted coal supplies for continued operations has brought the industry to a veritable standstill, leaving them with limited time to devise mitigation plans for sustained operations. Due to the aforesaid reasons, the operational power plants are forced to operate at drastically reduced power generation levels, creating a huge risk of closure, he warned. The AIEBA also emphasized on the crucial role the manufacturing sector has played in the socio-economic development of Odisha. However, the current situation has brought the CPPs to a grinding halt and resulted in the increased prices of finished products that is affecting the end consumer. He reiterated that the state's booming manufacturing sector is at risk if the current situation remains unaddressed. The intermittent coal supplies to CPP-based industries in Odisha made the very survival of local industries a challenge. This could cause cascading effects, in terms of loss of employment of over one million people, closure of ancillary industries and MSMEs, loss of revenue & state exchequer accounting to over Rs. 15,000 crore, forex loss due to loss of exports and hurt the sentiments of global investors. Seeking government support in this matter of critical importance, the AIEBA President requested the Chief Minister's intervention in resolving the crisis, to resume the coal and rake supplies from the MCL towards meeting 100% coal requirements for CPP-based industries in Odisha. He requested that the demands of the local industries be prioritized and met through the State's own coal production before being supplied to other areas. This timely action could spur growth opportunities in the state and create millions of jobs while bringing in revenue.

## Good that Yogi Adityanath isn't BJP's Ayodhya candidate: Ram Temple chief priest

AYODHYA: The chief priest of the Ram Temple here on Monday said it is good that Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath is not contesting the state Assembly polls from this seat as he would have faced a lot of opposition. When asked why he suggested that Adityanath should not to contest from Ayodhya, Acharya Satyendra Das said he advised this "after asking Ram Lalla (Lord Ram)". Das said that he suggested that Adityanath should contest from Gorakhpur as people whose houses and shops were demolished here due to infrastructure projects in the wake of the construction of the temple were opposing him. "It's good that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is not contesting from here. I had suggested it earlier and advised that it will be better that he contest from any seat of Gorakhpur. I speak after asking Ram Lalla. I spoke with Ram Lalla's inspiration," said Das, who is the chief priest of the makeshift Ram Lalla temple, which is being replaced by a grand temple. The 84-year-old priest said that the seers here are divided in their opinion and those whose houses and shops were demolished are against him. "All are saying that it's his work. This opposition is there. I said he better go there (Gorakhpur). He would have won from here but could have faced problems," the priest said. There was a strong buzz in political circles that Adityanath would enter the fray from Ayodhya but the BJP leadership decided to field him from the Gorakhpur (Urban) Assembly segment. About the election mood in Ayodhya, Das said it is not yet clear as all parties have not declared their candidates. The priest, however, said the ruling BJP will not let go the Ram temple issue and it will remain on their agenda. "Earlier, there was Ram Lalla andolan, then came the court's order and the construction of the Ram temple started. This Ram temple issue will never go away. They will say firing was opened here (on 'kar sewaks'), application was moved in the court to prevent the construction - but the temple construction

is on. They will certainly take the name (of Ram temple). This will not go away," Das said. Das hoped to see the completed Ram temple in his lifetime. "Let's see how many days it takes for the construction to complete. A majority of those who were with me have gone (passed away)," Das said, adding that he will be serving



here till his last. Das said he joined as the priest of the makeshift Ram Lalla temple in 1992, the year the Babri mosque was demolished. When asked if he was present when the mosque was demolished, Das said, "I was there. It happened before me. I was witness to it. Out of three domes, north and south domes were demolished by 'kar sewaks'. I took Ram Lalla with its throne in my hand. The demolition was over by 5 pm. Later, 'kar sewaks' pitched a tent and levelled the place and by 7 pm, I kept Ram Lalla there." When asked whether local politicians have started coming to him to take his blessings, Das said, "Till now, wife of Samajwadi Party leader Pawan Pandey has come to me. He is a strong candidate from the SP." Pawan Pandey had won the 2012 Assembly elections from Ayodhya and was made a minister in the previous Akhilesh Yadav government. In 2017, BJP's Ved Prakash Gupta won the Ayodhya seat. All five Assembly seats in the district—Ayodhya, Bikapur, Rudauli, Gosaiganj and Milkipur—are held by the BJP now. Ayodhya will go to the polls in the fifth phase on February 27.

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The Traditional Netaji Birth Assembly on Netaji's 125th Birth Anniversary organised at Netaji Bhavan. Sugata Bose Chairperson, Nakamura Yutaka Concul General of Japan, Ram Krishna Jaiswal honorary consul for Maldives in Kolkata amongst distinguishes guests

Kolkata (KCN): The Traditional Netaji Birth Assembly on Netaji's 125th Birth Anniversary organised at Netaji Bhavan. Sugata Bose Chairperson, Nakamura Yutaka Concul General of Japan, Ram Krishna Jaiswal honorary consul for Maldives in Kolkata amongst distinguishes guests



Sugata Bose Chairperson, Nakamura Yutaka Concul General of Japan, Ram Krishna Jaiswal honorary consul for Maldives in Kolkata amongst distinguishes guests. Honourable Sri Sugato Basu, Intellectual, eminent historian, former MP, director of Netaji research bureau and Netaji's grand-nephew described



Krishna Jaiswal Honorary Consul of Maldives in India said, "Indeed it is a great honour & pleasure attending the

INA Radio Connects Konark

Bhubaneswar(KCN): The equipment for a clandestine radio as well as radio ex-

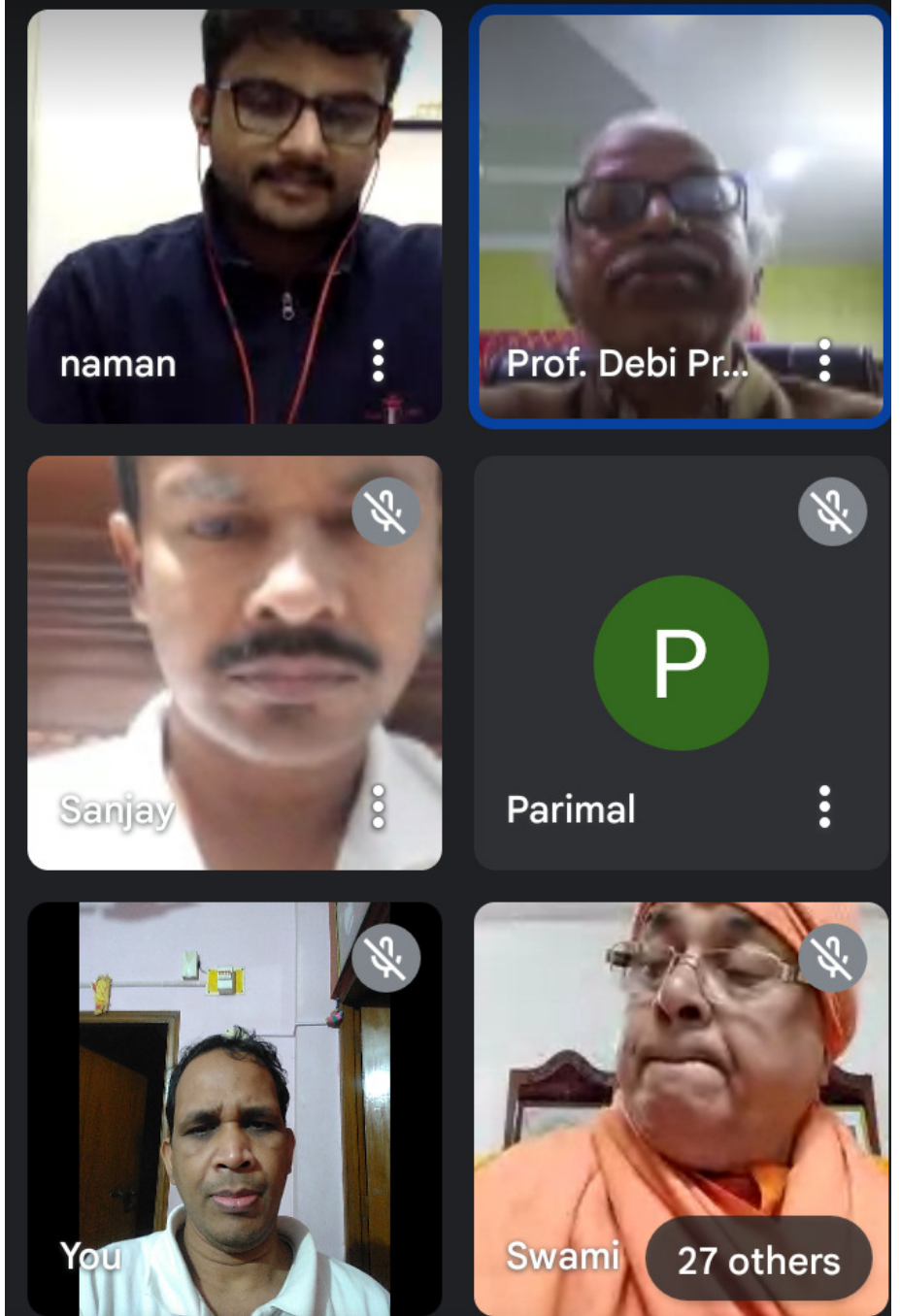


Odisha. Led by Pabitra Mohan Roy, there were three radio experts, Mohinder Singh, Tuhin Mukherjee and Amrik Singh Gill in the team. Before they embarked on the journey, Netaji had messaged them directly saying: "Though few in number, your mission will strike a deadly blow at the entire British secret service. The radio base must be set up in Calcutta at all cost". The submarine reached its destina-

tion on March 14 and they landed with the equipment at daybreak. "They buried their equipment in the sand near the Konark temple. Later, they dispersed with the parts, camouflaged as Gramophones and made their separate ways to Puri, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack railway stations," Mr.Dhir said in his book. However, one of them was caught at Puri, while the remaining members separately boarded the Madras Mail and reached Calcutta. They met at the Metro Cinema on March 19, he said. After the transmitter was set up in the house of a dental surgeon Dr. Dutt at Behala, the team started sending coded messages to INA Headquarters about British troop movements, the landing of bombers at Dum Dum airbase and naval movements. The INA's radio service functioned actively for six months before the British intelligence closed in on it and ultimately arrested all involved. The military trial of the INA Secret Ser-

A webinar on the occasion of Foundation Day celebration of Anandam Foundation

Bhubaneswar (KCN): A webinar was organized on Google Meet on 23rd January on the occasion of the foundation day of the socio-spiritual organization Anandam Foundation. The program started with Vedic chanting by Shubhangi Upadhyay, Social Media Coordinator of Anandam Foundation. After that, the Chairman of Anandam Foundation Swami Nityabodhanand Ji Maharaj said in his address that, "Anandam Foundation is an organisation working on the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda and Swamiji's excellent, awake, attainable blessings! With the inspiration of this Mool Mantra, we work continuously. May the blessings of Swamiji be on all of us and may all be engaged in the work of service to the nation. Swami Aryananda Ji Maharaj (Vice President, Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar) was the chief guest of this program. He said in his blessings that, "Swami Vivekananda's eloquent words are beneficial not only for India but for the entire humanity. We should read more and more of his biography and his thoughts and assimilate in our lives." Professor Debi Prasad Mishra (Director-NITTTR, Kolkata), the keynote speaker of this func-



tion, said in his statement that, "Blind imitation of western culture should be stopped. Technology is necessary, but it should be used in Indian perspective. "Mata Bhoomi Putroham Prithivya" -Development taking this sentence. There should be a model, in which there is a sense of "Samatvam Yoga Uchyate." is that man has to remove the polluted thoughts in his mind, the remedy for which Swami Vivekananda has told by saying that first humanity has to be awakened then the deity. The General Secretary of the organization Shri Manoj Dasji called for joining this divine work and talked about the revival of India with Shubhangi Upadhyay presented the song in the program and in the end, vote of thanks by Shri Ajit Kumar Barik (Treasurer, Anandam Foundation). The program was conducted by Shri Naman Sharma (Member, Foundation Day Celebrations Samiti). A total of 54 people participated in this webinar.

Ex-Union Minister seeks PM help for NINL revival

BHUBANESWAR: Former Union Minister for Steel Braja Kishore Tripathy know that financial bids were invited recently after around four years of the dis-



investment decision and though January 10 was the date for the opening of bids for declaration of the highest bidder, this has not happened yet. "NINL has captive iron ore mines worth more than `1 lakh crore. The decision of disinvestment of 100 pc shares of NINL is unfair, unjust, and illogical. Now, this has become a case of looting of public money by using the coercive power of authorities. It is an urgent requirement to put an immediate stay on the disinvestment process," he said. During his tenure in the Ministry of Steel, Tripathy claimed that the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) was introduced as a promoter to infuse money for the betterment of NINL. The fate of 10,000 families who are directly and indirectly dependent on the plant now hangs in balance as the production has stopped over the last two years. In March last year, though NINL got permission to sell 50 pc of annual production capacity of iron ore mines in the open market to meet employee salary and arrears with other legitimate dues, the employees are hapless as only part salary has been cleared up to February 2021 by selling finished products lying on NINL premises.

## Markets tank on institutional selling amid rising rate fears, expert predicts savage correction

MUMBAI: Indian shares tanked Monday on relentless selling by FIIs who have net sold almost Rs 9000 crore of eq-

in the red and the Sensex traded down 2.5% with all 30 major stocks having declined intraday Monday.

into negative territory for calendar year, following in the footsteps of the benchmark Nifty and the Sensex.

The Nifty made a low of 16410.2 on December 20 last year from where it bounced to a high of 18350.95 on January 18. Since then the Nifty has shed 1190 points.

Navneet Daga, Vice President, Yes Securities, believed the correction this time around would be more savage with the best performing parts of the market tanking globally amid fears of a rise in the cost of capital due to rising inflation.

"IT, metals, consumption plays are collapsing... something has changed globally," Daga said. In the fiscal year to date, FIIs have sold equities worth Rs 38782 crore, with the bulk having happened in December and so far this month. The rising inflationary expectations were reflected in the 35 bps rise in the Indian ten-year bond yield to around 6.65%.



uities so far this calendar year on rising inflationary expectations and the rising cost of capital in the face of a spike in crude oil prices. Such was the selling momentum, a key technical index level was taken out with consummate ease, causing benchmark indices like Nifty and Sensex to capitulate in its face.

The Nifty traded 2.6% lower at 17161.55 with 48 of 50 Nifty constituents

A key technical level at 17381 gave way, triggering stop losses and escalating the correction.

The correction in mid-caps was deeper, underscoring the pain among retail investors, many of whom were first-timers to the stock markets since the pandemic emerged in March 2020.

The NSE Midcap 150 traded down almost 4%. With Monday's fall, the midcap index moved

Asked whether the market will get support at its December 20 low of 16410.2, ace investor Vijay Kedia, MD, Kedia Securities, said he didn't think so.

"You get a dead cat bounce when the cat is dead. The cat has yet to die for it to bounce," he said, remarking that the correction looked starker with "global inflation and rising interest rates" posing a risk to stock markets.

## All set for Odisha Open Super 100

Cuttack(KCN): Odisha Open Super 100, the first ever International badminton tournament of Badminton World Federation at Odisha soil is all set to be kicked off at Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium, Cuttack on Tuesday.

About three hundred fifty players from as many as seventeen countries are participating in this tournament. While the preparations of this mega tournament is almost ready, players



had their warm up practice sessions at Cuttack on Monday.

The tournament, a BWF event, is being organised with the joint efforts of state sports and youth service department, Badminton Association of India and Odisha State Badminton Association.

The tournament will be played in four courts at JNIS Cuttack. The venue is absolutely made ready to host the first ever international badminton event at Odisha. Since the tournament is played as per the covid guidelines and therefore no spectators will be allowed to enter into the stadium. Covid tests of all players, technical officials, volunteers have been conducted, after their arrival at Bhubaneswar and only those found negative will be allowed to enter into stadium premises.

Significantly, while Odisha has earned a name in international circuit for organising international sports event successfully, mainly in the fields of hockey and athletics etc., the Odisha Open Super 100 is all set to add another feather to its cap. While all out efforts are made by the organisers to make the tournament a grand success, State sports minister Tushar Kanti Behera on Monday expressed his good wishes for the success of the tournament. "It is a mat-

ter of pride for our state to host such a prestigious sports event." Sports minister Tushar Kanti Behera said. "I hope each members of the organising team will exhibit their same zeal and enthusiasm, which they had shown during hosting of other international sports events in the state, for making this tournament a grand success," Behera added. According to the officials, the matches would be played in five

categories, i.e. men's singles, women's single, men's doubles, women's doubles and mixed doubles. "About three hundred fifty players from as many as seventeen countries of the Globe are competing in five

events in this tournament, in which there has been seventy five thousand US dollar cash prize will be given to the winners," said Girish Nattu, Deputy Chief Referee of this tournament. "I am glad that organisers have made excellent arrangements to make this international badminton tournament a grand success and I am sure many more such tournament will come to Odisha in future days," Nattu added. Nileen Kumar, Secretary of Odisha State Badminton Association and Organising Secretary of Odisha Open Super 100, thanked department of sports and youth services for their co-operation for extending whole hearted support for organising this tournament. "This tournament is obviously going to add another landmark in Odisha's glorious sports journey and take one step closer to Chief Minister Naveen Pattnaik's dream to convert state capital Bhubaneswar as the sports capital of the country," said Nileen Kumar, "I am extremely thankful to the department of sports and youth services, for extending all support to make this tournament a grand success," Nileen Kumar added. Later in the day, legendary Badminton coach, Pullela Gopichand arrived in the city and interacted with the players practising at JN Indoor Stadium and encouraged them for their events ahead.

## Air India likely to be handed over to Tata group by weekend

NEW DELHI: Air India is likely to be handed over to the Tata group by the end of this week, senior government officials said on Monday. After a competitive bidding process, the government had on October 8 last year sold Air India to Talace Private Limited -- a subsidiary of the Tata group's holding company -- for Rs 18,000 crore. Following that, on October 11, a Letter of Intent (LoI) was issued to the Tata group confirming the

government's willingness to sell its 100 percent stake in the airline. On October 25, the Centre signed the share purchase agreement (SPA) for this deal. Officials said on Monday that the remaining formalities regarding this deal are expected to be completed in the next few days and the airline will be handed over to the Tata group by the end of this week. As a part of the deal, the Tata group will also be handed over Air India Express and a 50

percent stake in ground handling arm Air India SATS. Tatas had on October 8 beat the Rs 15,100-crore offer by a consortium led by SpiceJet promoter Ajay Singh and the reserve price of Rs 12,906 crore set by the government for the sale of its 100 percent

stake in the loss-making carrier. While this will be the first privatisation since 2003-04, Air India will be the third airline brand in the Tatas' stable' it holds a majority interest in AirAsia India and Vistara, a joint venture with Singapore Airlines Ltd.

## Israeli PM likely to visit India as two nations celebrate 30 years of diplomatic ties: Envoy

Continued from page-1

of bilateral relations.

The Israeli envoy in his speech highlighted ties going back thousands of years with no trace of anti-semitism in India, unlike in Europe and other parts of the world.

Recalling the visit of Jaishankar, Gilon mentioned India's role in shaping the region with Indian soldiers participating in the World Wars and buried in different parts of Israel.

Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion saw India and Israel's national movement as "sister liberation movements", he said, pointing out the deep respect the Israeli leader had for Mahatma Gandhi whose picture he had on the wall of his bedroom.

Singla in his address said 2022 also marks five years of a bilateral strategic partnership which was established during the historic visit of Prime Minister Modi to Israel in 2017.

The year, therefore, provides an opportunity to not only look back and take account of the bilateral achievements of the past thirty years but also the past five years when the relationship was put on a "qualitatively higher trajectory", he said.

As the two countries celebrate this milestone, it is also an opportunity to appreciate the efforts of our leaders, diplomats, thinkers, strategists and all the people who have led our partnership and continue to nurture this important relationship, Singla said.

"Our two peoples are connected by civilisational bonds that go beyond trade and economic ties. The Jewish people have thrived in India for centuries and, in fact, enriched the composite culture of India," he said.

As International Holocaust Remembrance Day approaches on January 27, the Indian envoy narrated how Maharaja Jam Sahib of Nawanagar not only saved the lives of several Jewish children but provided them shelter during World War II, also took care of them as long as they chose to be under his guardianship.

Addressing the Indian Jewish community in Israel, Singla said they "form the organic link, a bridge" which "continues to grow with shared traditions, cultural practices, mutual trust and friendship".

"For the last five years our thrust has been on tapping our strengths as two knowledge economies", he asserted, highlighting deeper collaboration in research and development, innovation, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

To create the 30th-anniversary logo, both countries launched a contest last year for students of prominent design colleges in Israel and India.

Entries were invited from the Israel Holon Institute of Technology and India's National Institute of Design (NIT).

NIT's Nikhil Kumar Rai's design was unanimously selected as the commemorative logo for the celebrations.

Nikhil, hailing from Varanasi, is a final year student at NIT Ahmedabad and has also studied in the Faculty of Visual Arts at Banaras Hindu University (BHU).

"I wanted my design to be simple and bold that connects audiences from both the countries", Nikhil said during the Webinar to launch the logo.

"It should depict the rich history of the two countries and also be forward-looking," he added.

The event's moderator, Dr Oshrit Birvadker, said the special logo symbolises the strong friendship, love and admiration that exists between the people of Israel and the people of India.

"It also depicts the growing strategic partnership between the two sides," Birvadker said.

## US draws down Ukraine embassy presence as war fears mount

Continued from page-1

against Ukraine. However, the Russian Foreign Ministry has accused NATO countries of escalating tensions around Ukraine with disinformation.

The State Department added: "The security conditions, particularly along Ukraine's borders, in Russia-occupied Crimea, and in Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine, are unpredictable and can deteriorate with little notice. Demonstrations, which have turned violent at times, regularly occur throughout Ukraine, including in Kyiv."

The department's travel advisory, which had warned against travelling to Ukraine because of COVID-19 as well as the tensions over Russia, was changed Sunday to carry a stronger warning.

"Do not travel to Ukraine due to the increased threats of Russian military action and COVID-19. Exercise increased caution in Ukraine due to crime and civil unrest. Some areas have increased risk," the department advised.

The travel advisory for Russia was also changed: "Do not travel to Russia due to ongoing tension along the border with Ukraine, the potential for harassment against U.S. citizens, the embassy's limited ability to assist U.S. citizens in Russia, COVID-19 and related entry restrictions, terrorism, harassment by Russian government security officials, and the arbitrary enforcement of local law."

The State Department would not say how many Americans it believes are currently in Ukraine. U.S. citizens are not required to register with embassies when they arrive or plan to stay abroad for extended periods.

## Sri Lanka hopeful of obtaining further Indian aid of USD 1.5 billion: Foreign Minister

Continued from page-1

Asian Currency Union settlement of USD 515 million which the local analysts said stopped the bleeding of reserves.

New Delhi also announced a billion-dollar assistance package in addition to other balance of payment support for the island nation. The billion-dollar loan credit facility is to be used to avert a food crisis while allowing for the import of items and medicines.

Additionally, there will be USD 500 million for importing fuel from India.

Sri Lanka is currently facing a severe foreign exchange crisis with falling reserves. The country is grappling with a shortage of almost all essentials due to the lack of dollars to pay for the imports.

ALSO READ | Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa vows to fix 'misconceptions' over human rights record

Additionally, power cuts are imposed at peak hours as the state power entity is unable to obtain fuel to run turbines.

The state fuel entity has stopped oil supplies as the electricity board has large unpaid bills. The only refinery was recently shut as it was unable to pay dollars for crude imports.

The Sri Lankan government is also in talks with China to overcome the current financial crisis.

During the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Colombo earlier this month, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa requested Beijing's assistance in mitigating his country's deepening forex crisis and spiralling external debt, saying it will help Colombo to the best of its capacity.

## In her 63rd try, Alize Cornet makes Grand Slam quarterfinals

MELBOURNE: Alize Cornet has finally reached the quarterfinals of a Grand Slam tournament in her 63rd attempt.

The 32-year-old Cornet survived a second-set meltdown to advance to the last eight at the Australian Open with a 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 win over two-time major winner Simona Halep.

"It's never too late to try again!" Cornet said in her on-court TV interview. "To be in my first quarterfinal. It's a dream come true."

"The journey goes on. I still can't believe it. Cornet led by a set and 3-1 before losing five consecutive games and 16 straight points to send the match to a decider.

Halep saved two match points on her serve in the ninth game before Cornet clinched the match in the 10th. She dropped to her knees on the court and clasped her hands together, putting them over her face before looking into the stadium at her support team.

"It feels amazing," said Cornet, who is playing in her 17th Australian Open. "The battle we had with Simone, with this heat. After 30 minutes, we were dying."

Cornet will next play Danielle Collins, who beat 19th-seeded Elise Mertens 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 in an almost three-hour match to open play on Rod Laver Arena. Collins was a semifinalist in Australia in 2019.

Cornet has never made it past the fourth round since making her Grand Slam singles debut as a wild-card entry at the 2005 French Open. The marquee men's match was on Margaret Court Arena, where U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev needed 3 1/2 hours to beat No. 70-ranked Maxime Cressy 6-2, 7-6 (4), 6-7 (4), 7-5.

The No. 2-ranked Medvedev is trying to be the first man in the Open era to win his second major singles title in the next Grand Slam event. He's now potentially three wins from

achieving that.

Medvedev was a runner-up in Australia last year but avenged that with a win over Novak Djokovic in the U.S. Open final. Djokovic isn't defending his Australian Open title after being deported on the eve of the year's first major for failing to meet the country's strict



COVID-19 vaccination criteria.

Cressy's serve-and-volley style created some frustrations for Medvedev, who late in the fourth set that this was the "most unlucky day I've ever had in my life." His luck changed quickly. After saving eight break-point chances in the set, Cressy was broken in that game and Medvedev served out at love. "Hell of a match," Medvedev said.

He'll next play ninth-seeded Felix Auger-

Aliassime, who beat 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic 2-6, 7-6 (7), 6-2, 7-6 (4). Medvedev beat the Canadian in the semifinals at last year's U.S. Open.

Both women's matches on Day 8 were played in temperatures of up to 34 Celsius (93 F). Cornet used bags of ice to cool down her head

of the court, she was not feeling much better than me."

Cornet, playing in her 60th Grand Slam tournament in a row, was 0-5 in fourth-round matches at the majors before Monday.

Her victory over Halep, a former Wimbledon and French Open champion and runner-up in Australia, gave her a record for most appearances at a major before reaching the last eight. Tamarine Tanasugarn previously held the mark at 45, set at Wimbledon in 2008.

Cornet had to do the hard way, too. Cornet beat third-seeded Garbiñe Muguruza in straight sets in the second round but had to rally from 6-4, 4-1 down to beat 2021 French Open semifinalist Tamara Zidasek in a 2-hour, 43-minute third-round win.

Collins hasn't had a straight-forward path, either, having to rally from a set down to win back-to-back matches at a Grand Slam tournament for the first time.

The 28-year-old American also dropped the first set in her third-round win over Clara Tauson.

Against Mertens, Collins was aggressive with her ground strokes, hitting 45 winners and making 41 errors. She converted five of her 18 break-point chances and clinched the victory when Mertens, a semifinalist in Australia in 2018, served a double-fault.

"Today it was really physically tough for me," Collins said. "I played a long match the other day — 2 1/2 hours — and then I played doubles, so I spent about five hours on court."

"I had to make a lot of technical adjustments to make myself comfortable moving around, especially serving.

## Mumbai City seek to snap winless run in match against NorthEast United FC

MARGAO: Mumbai City FC would look to snap a five-game winless streak when they take on bottom-placed NorthEast United FC in an Indian Super League match here on Tuesday.

Mumbai are out of the top-four in the standings for the first

game in hand. NorthEast United are last in the table having only nine points from 13 games.

But, the defending champions are undergoing a wretched run with no wins in the last five games and against NorthEast United, who have not won in their last six

have not been able to come up with the results. With nine games to go, we are in a good position to finish off strongly in the second half of the season. It starts with NorthEast tomorrow," said Buckingham.

"In fact, I was im-

pressed with the way they played their last game. They could have ended the game at least with a result as they had a lot of chances in the game."

NorthEast United displayed a gritty performance in their last game and were unlucky not to get anything out of it. Marcelinho looked

Chennaiyin FC, NorthEast United conceded two goals in quick succession to lose grip of the game. NorthEast United have dropped points from winning positions in five of their last six games.

The last time the two sides met, it was a thrilling game that ended in a 3-3 draw.



time this season, sitting in fifth place tied on points with Hyderabad FC on 17 from 11 games.

Even if Hyderabad beat SC East Bengal on Monday, a win for Mumbai would mean they go level on points with league leaders Kerala Blasters who are also on 20 points but with a

games, losing four of them, the Islanders would fancy their chances.

Head coach Des Buckingham would want his side to improve defensively after Mumbai leaked 13 goals in their last five matches.

"In the last few games we have played some good football but we

pressed with the way they played their last game. They could have ended the game at least with a result as they had a lot of chances in the game."

Chennaiyin FC, NorthEast United conceded two goals in quick succession to lose grip of the game. NorthEast United have dropped points from winning positions in five of their last six games.

The last time the two sides met, it was a thrilling game that ended in a 3-3 draw.




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