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The women behind the mask

Chhau dance, with its martial origin and strenuous body movements, was once a strictly-guarded male domain. Now women have breached the bastion and are going places.

Changes in tradition

1. A decade or so ago in Purulia, men decked in dazzling costumes and larger-than-life masks would dance to the intoxicating rhythm of dhol, dhamsa, madol, shehnai, and flute at night-long performances during the spring festival of **Gajan Parab**, dedicated to Shiva.
2. These days, of course, Chhau festivals are held through the year and dancers are called to perform on national and international stages.
3. And, in another development, women dancers have entered this male domain, with all-women troupes sharply on the rise.

Background

1. The word 'Chhau' probably comes from chhauni (camp), and the art form was arguably invented to keep foot soldiers war-ready. The martial movements and mock fights subsequently took the shape of dance, becoming popular in the Chota Nagpur Plateau region.
2. With stories are taken from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas, the dance dramas celebrate the triumph of good over evil. In these pandemic times, Chhau has even been used to spread awareness about COVID-19.
3. Chhau is found in three styles named after the location where they are performed, i.e. the Purulia Chau of Bengal, the Seraikella Chau of Jharkhand, and the Mayurbhanj Chau of Odisha.
4. The most prominent difference between the three subgenres is regarding the use of masks. While the Seraikella and Purulia subgenres of Chhau use masks during the dance, the Mayurbhanj Chhau uses none.



'Economy is on fast recovery track'

With GST collections hitting a record in December 2020, the government is confident that the economy is recovering fast and will bounce back over 2021. The 'Vivaad se Vishwas' scheme for resolving tax disputes has already helped settle cases worth ₹83,000 crores out of an estimated ₹8 lakh crore.

Highlights:

1. The government agencies have been working on improving compliance for over a year now. We now have a very close data exchange between Income tax, Customs, banks and GST [Goods and Services Tax], and are able to undertake data analytics, using artificial intelligence (AI).
2. Technology has helped in increased compliance through surveillance leading to increased GST collection.

FSSAI slashes limit for transfat levels in foods

Highlights:

1. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.
2. The FSSAI notified the amendment on December 29, more than a year after it issued a draft on the subject for consultation with stakeholders.
3. The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.

Background:

1. Transfats are associated with an increased risk of heart attacks and death from coronary heart disease. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of the intake of industrially-produced trans-fatty acids.
2. The WHO has also called for the global elimination of trans fats by 2023.



3. The FSSAI rule comes at the time of a pandemic where the burden of non-communicable diseases has risen. Cardiovascular diseases, along with diabetes, are proving fatal for COVID-19 patients.

2018 pledge

While the regulation comes into effect immediately, industry players were made to take a pledge back in 2018 that they would comply with the WHO's call for action to reduce TFA by 3% by 2021 allowing them three years to comply with the latest norm.