

Self-made actress

Actor Meera Chopra says she never wanted to use the names of her cousins - Priyanka & Parineeti Chopra - to boost her career

LEISURE | P2

VOLUME 13, ISSUE 265 | www.orissapost.com



Counter attack

Ukraine claims it shot down 28 out of 31 Russian drones amid an overnight airstrike

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Second unicorn of 2023

InCred becomes India's second unicorn this year after raising \$60 million from new and existing

BUSINESS | P11



India face South Africa

India look to end their 31-year wait for a Test series win in South Africa when the first Test between the sides begins today

SPORTS | P12

SHORT TAKES

Three criminal justice Bills get Prez assent

New Delhi: President Droupadi Murmu Monday gave assent to the three new criminal justice Bills which were cleared by Parliament last week. The three new laws – the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act – will replace the colonial era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872. While replying to a debate in Parliament, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the focus was on delivering justice rather than handing down punishment. The Telecommunications Bill also got the President's assent.

Eight arrested in Capital group clash



BHUBANESWAR: Commissionerate Police Monday arrested eight persons in connection with a group clash that broke out in a locality near Biju Patnaik International Airport here Sunday evening in which two persons suffered injuries of varying degrees. Briefing media persons about the case, Zone-II ACP Giriia Shankar

Chakrabarty said two youths - Rakesh Kumar Guru and Siba Maharana - had threatened an elderly person, Pradeep Singh, for giving his place on rent to a youth for a garage. Singh owns a small market complex in the airport area here. The dispute turned violent Sunday evening when the two youths attacked Pradeen with a sword.

Diarrhoea claims 2 lives in Bolangir



Bolangir: Two people died of suspected diarrhoea at Kantabanji town in this district Monday, said sources. With Rourkela yet to fully control the cholera outbreak, it seems that diarrhoea is spreading its tentacles in Bolangir too. Six patients with symptoms of vomiting and loose motion were admitted

to Kantabanji hospital Sunday. However, two of them died Monday



DETENTION IN PARIS

PLANE WITH INDIANS TO LAND IN MUMBAI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai/Paris, Dec 25: A Romanian aircraft carrying 276 passengers, mostly Indians, left for India Monday, four days after they were detained by the French authorities at an airport near Paris over suspected "human trafficking". The flight is expected to land at Mumbai airport early Tuesday morning. Associated Press reporters out-

side the Vatry Airport in Champagne country saw the unmarked Legend Airlines A340 take off after the crew and about 200 other people boarded the plane. The passengers include a 21-

month-old child and 11 unaccompanied minors who were put under special administrative care. Several passengers requested asylum in France.

Two passengers were detained and are appearing before a judge Monday to face possible charges

Four French judges questioned the detained passengers Sunday The hearings were conducted as part of the investigation opened by the Paris prosecutor's office on the suspicion of human trafficking.

According to French media, some of the passengers spoke Hindi and the others Tamil.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

Let's replace the colonial-era laws

with laws that help us transform the

country into our own colony

BBSR

CTC

26.6°C

WEATHER

Max Temp

Min Temp

Humidity

Rainfall

FORECAST

FOG/MIST IN

THE MORNING

CM nod to spl security battalion for Srimandir

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik Monday approved a proposal for creation of a dedicated special security battalion for Srimandir in Puri. in a bid to ensure proper crowd management at the 12th century shrine, an official said.

It was envisioned and conceptualised to render security, better facilitation of devotees, and crowd management measures at Srimandir, which draws thousands of devotees every day, the official said.

While daily footfall of devotees was estimated to be about 50,000, it doubles and triples on weekends and important religious occasions, official sources said.

"The anticipated flow of devotees is likely to witness a substantial increase after the dedication of the new Heritage Corridor Project – Srimandir Parikrama Prakalpa – to the public," the official mentioned.

The new battalion would have the primary responsibility of providing security to the temple and they will be specially trained for better crowd management and tourist/devotee facilitation



- The special security battalion would comprise around 1,190 personnel and it would be placed under the command and control of the Superintendent of Police, Puri
- While daily footfall of devotees was estimated to be about 50.000, it doubles and triples on weekends and important religious occasions
- The anticipated flow of devotees is likely to witness a substantial increase after the inauguration of the Heritage Corridor Project

for ensuring a hassle-free and orderly 'darshan' by the devotees, said the Inspector General of Police (Central Range) Ashish Singh.

The special security battalion would comprise around 1,190 personnel and it would be placed under the command and control of the Superintendent of

While the temple stands over about 10 acres of land, now after the opening of the Heritage corridor, the area would increase threefold. There will be a big open space to go around the temple and its periphery. This apart, the security of the temple is the top priority of the government, Singh said

Meanwhile, with a large num-

ber of devotees from across Odisha and outside thronging the world famous shrine in Puri to seek the blessings of the Lord Jagannath during the New Year, the authorities have made elaborate arrangements to ensure smooth 'darshan'.

In view of the rush at the shrine, the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) has taken a host of measures to ensure hassle-free darshan for the devotees, an official said, adding that the district police has also made arrangements and installed CCTV cameras outside the temple with barricades.

While special security arrange ments have been made at the temple, the local police have also deployed special police personnel, home guards and lifeguards for tourists near the sea beach.

India records 628 fresh Covid cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: India recorded a single-day rise of 628 new Covid-19 cases while the active caseload jumped to 4,054, even as the country reported 63 cases of sub-variant JN.1 till Sunday.

The total fatalities were recorded at 5,33,334 (5.33 lakh) with one new death reported from Kerala in the previous 24 hours, the data updated at 8 am showed, according to Union Health Ministry. The country's Covid case tally is currently at 4,50,09,248 (4.50 crore).

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has risen to 4,44,71,860 (4.44 crore) while the national recovery rate stands at 98.81 per cent, according to the health ministry website. The case fatality rate stands at 1.19 per cent. According to the ministry website, 220.67 crore Covid vaccine doses have been administered.

Meanwhile, following the detection of a fresh Covid-19 case in the state, the Odisha government Saturday advised elderly persons and those with co-morbidities to wear masks. Taking to its official X handle, Odisha Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) department wrote, 'With the emergence of

JN.1 driving death rates in China

Beijing: Amid the global rise in fresh Covid-19 cases, China is reportedly experiencing increasing death rates due to infection caused by the JN.1 variant, claimed a media report. In a report, The Epoch Times claimed that the country's crematoriums are working round the clock due to a surge in Covid deaths. This comes after China recently saw a pneumonia outbreak, particularly among the children. Locals in Henan province of China reportedly revealed that government-run crematoriums are operating all day, and even during the night.

#JN1Covid Variant, #Odisha Government has advised the elderly people and those with comorbidites to wear face masks while going out and avoid visitcrowded places. #OdishaCares.'

Sixty-three cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 were reported in the country till Sunday, including 34 detected in Goa, official sources said Monday

Nine cases have been detected from Maharashtra, eight from Karnataka, six from Kerala, four from Tamil Nadu and two from Telangana, they added.

ISRAELI STRIKE KILLS 106 IN **CENTRAL GAZA**

AGENCIES

Deir Al-Balah, Dec 25: At least 106 people were killed by an Israeli airstrike in central Gaza. health officials said Monday.

Palestinian medical officials said the death toll from an Israeli airstrike in central Gaza has risen to 106 from 68 earlier. The announcement makes the Sunday night airstrike in Maghazi refugee camp among the deadliest in Israel's air campaign in Gaza, launched October 7 in response to a deadly crossborder attack by Hamas militants. Hospital officials initially said 68 people had died.

The first responders retrieved more than three dozen additional bodies that were taken to the Al-Agsa Martyrs hospital in Deir al-Balah Monday. Later, hospital records seen by The Associated Press listed 106 deaths.

"We were all targeted," said



several family members including his daughter and grandson. "There is no safe place in Gaza anyway," he added.

Earlier, the Health Ministry in Gaza gave the death toll as 68. The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

As Christmas Eve fell, smoke rose over the besieged territory, while in the West Bank Bethlehem was hushed, its holiday celebrations called off. In neighbouring Egypt, tentative efforts continued on a deal for another exchange of hostages for

Palestinians held by Israel. The war has devastated parts of Gaza, killed roughly 20,400 Palestinians and displaced almost all of the territory's 2.3 million people

The mounting death toll among Israeli troops - 154 since the ground offensive began could erode public support for the war, which was sparked when Hamas-led militants stormed communities in southern Israel-October 7, killing 1,200 and taking 240 hostage.

Afghan schoolgirls finishing 6th grade in tears

AGENCIES

Kabul, Dec 25: Bahara Rustam, 13. took her last class at Bibi Razia School in Kabul December 11 knowing it was the end of her education. Under Taliban rule, she is unlikely to step foot in a classroom again.

In September 2021, a month after US and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan following two decades of war, the Taliban announced that girls were barred from studying beyond sixth grade.

They extended this education ban to universities in December 2022. The Taliban have defied global condemnation and warnings that the restrictions will make it almost impossible for them to gain recognition as the

country's legitimate rulers. Last week, UN special envoy



after US and NATO troops withdrew from Afghanistan following two decades of war, the Taliban announced that girls were barred from studying beyond sixth grade

In September 2021, a month

The Taliban extended this education ban to universities in December 2022

The Taliban have defied global condemnation and warnings that the restrictions will make it almost impossible for them to gain recognition as the country's legitimate rulers

pointed. There was no graduation ceremony for the girls at Bibi Razia

School. In another part of Kabul, 13-

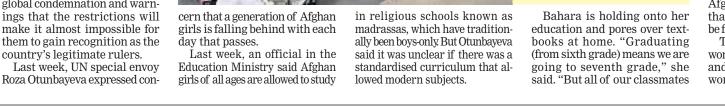
cried and we were very disap-

year old Setayesh Sahibzada wonders what the future holds for her. She is sad she can't go to school anymore to achieve her dreams.

"I can't stand on my own two feet," she said. "I wanted to be a teacher. But now I can't study, I can't go to school.

Analyst Muhammad Saleem Paigir warned that excluding women and girls from education will be disastrous for Afghanistan. "We understand that illiterate people can never be free and prosperous," he said.

The Taliban have barred women from many public spaces and most jobs, all but confining women to their homes.





leisure



CHER DOESN'T CARE IF NO ONE **BUYS HER CHRISTMAS ALBUM**

Singer Cher has put out her first ever festive LP titled Christmas and includes collaborations with the likes of Stevie Wonder, Michael Buble, and Cyndi Lauper. She isn't concerned about how well the record sells as she just knows she's very proud of it.

MIB STAR NUSSBAUM DIES A

Veteran actor Mike Nussbaum, renowned for his role in *Men in Black*, passed away from natural causes Saturday at the age of 99, while residing in a hospice. His demise occurred just a week before he would have





GaneshaSpeaks,co™ accuracy • reliability • trust

Today, you are not in your usual gregarious mood. An unpleasant situation may also prove to be a challenge. Even though you're enterprising, Ganesha suggests that you don't go tripping all over your big difference to your life

TAURUS

It is very likely that you will stay physically alert and spiritually awake today, forecasts Ganesha. You will discover an artistic temperament as you engage in performing arts, designing, graphics and special effects. You will also appear extremely tempting to the opposite gender

GEMINI

You are likely to have a great time with like-minded people, says Ganesha. At work, achieving perfection will be your motto. You will strive for perfection at work and home. You will remain practical and pragmatic throughout the day.

CANCER

It is highly probable that you will be highly pious and dutiful today, foretells Ganesha. You will spend sparingly in the afternoon. You will stay in excellent health condition. Romantic dinner with sweetheart is likely, hopes Ganesha.

LEO

It is fine to make hay while the sun shines, but do not forget to put aside some for a rainy day as well, says Ganesha. Today is one such day when you can do fantasti cally well by putting aside some money for your family's future. At work, pending tasks may have piled up, but today you shall do well to try and clear the backlog.

VIRGO

Your position of strength will be shaken badly today. All chances are, this may invite unwanted troubles and furrow deeper lines of worry. But you may yet do good if you shift out of the usual and

LIBRA

To be or not to be? Well, that may not be your pre-Ganesha does see possibilities of you being puzzled and perplexed today when are that in the afternoon, you may happen to run into an unpleasant situation so just keep your cool. In any case, things shall get better by the evening.

SCORPIO

You shall be a live wire today - full of energy and zest. Freelancers will take imagination to new levels when working. At work, your inspiration will kick-start an epidemic of vigour and high-performance. Surprises in the evening will end the day on a high note, says Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS

Today you shall remain deep in thought. You may have plans to change the look of your home and a romantic evening with your sweetheart is on the cards, says Ganesha. Fine gourmet and a nice ambi ence will arouse those senses more informs Ganesha.

CAPRICORN

You don't shy away from working hard and today, at your work you will do every thing to improve upon your performance. But, perfection seems distant no matter how hard you try, says Ganesha. Your mind is making creative plans, but you are unable to put them on paper and get them executed. You will not get off the

track by a minor bump on the track.

AQUARIUS

Put your best dress on, get a smart hairdo, and polish your shoes - you have to make your presence felt! Don't depend too much on the outer appearance though. You will need to apply your mind and make some vital decisions because they will have a permanent impact on your life, advises Ganesha.

PISCES

You will harbour feelings of attraction towards those of the opposite sex, and are also likely to benefit from them. You will find lady luck favouring you. Post afternoon should see you struggling with a tough decision. Overall, the day ought to be routine, with nothing exceptional lurking to surprise you savs Ganesha.



Mumbai: Actor Arbaaz Khan has tied the knot for the second time with makeup artist Sshura Khan, and dropped first pictures as husband and wife. According to the reports, Arbaaz

and Sshura had met on the sets of the upcoming movie Patna Shukla.

The intimate wedding ceremony which was held at Arbaaz's sister Arpita Khan's residence saw the presence of his family members, including Salman Khan, Sohail Khan and his kids, Arbaaz's son Arhaan, his parents Salim and Salma Khan, Helen, actress Raveena Tandon and her daughter Rasha, and model Lulia Vantur, amongst others.

Taking to his social media. Arbaaz has shared a couple of

wedding pictures. He captioned the post as: "In the presence of our loved ones me and

Never wanted to play

family card: Meera

Mumbai: Actress Meera Chopra

who made her debut with movie

begin a lifetime of love and togetherness from this day on! Need all your blessings and good wishes on our special day!" The celebrities

have showered love and blessings to the newly-wed couple in the comment section.

Arbaaz was married to model Malaika Arora. and they have a son Arhaan. The couple got divorced in May 2017. Arbaaz also dated Giorgia Andriani for several years after his firmed

Saiyami not a fan

of violent movies

last seen in Ghoomer, said that she was disturbed after watching Animal and said that she belongs to the section which didn't quite warm up to the film. During an interview, the Mirzya actress was asked about her opinion on the film Animal.

To which she said, "Personally, for me, I have been told very strongly 'do not tell your opinions, because nobody wants to hear 1920: London, clarified that she never

wanted to use the names of her cousins, actresses Priyanka Chopra and Parineeti Chopra, to progress in her career. In an interview, the actress admitted that she is tired of the struggles that have become a truth in her life. Having spent

that she doesn't mean to give up the fight. Meera shared that she should be getting more roles, which she is not, and is tired of running behind people. She expressed that there should be more movies like Safed where she can honestly and truly show

what she can do. She also took a dig at star kids, noting that many non-actors get lead roles because of their family connections. The actress explained that they come from film families or know people in the industry. This has to stop, and talent needs to move forward, added the actress.

Previously, divorce. The two parted ways as was con-Georgia a few days

thing that

bad way.

one wants, but

somewhere, you have

a responsibility towards

people. Cinema has the power

to influence people and I truly

believe that, in the good and in the

She said, "I personally don't agree

with the phenomenon of glorifying

somebody who is a dark and bad

character. With great power comes

great responsibility, so I would

consider that when working.'

if this is what the country is watch-

ing, then where do I stand in this?

It is not just men, it is women who

are loving the film as well. I am

concluded.

not the biggest fan of that

kind of cinema," she

"I was a little confused, because

Mumbai:

Actress Saiyami Kher, who was

that.' But I was disturbed. Every director has the right make

every-

nearly nine years in the industry with only four projects to her credit, she clarified

odyWc

dica

WEEK BEFORE REACHING 100

celebrated his 100th birthday.



on scrutiny of celebs' love life Mumbai: Actress Ananya Panday feels that the constant attention on celebrities' relationship status makes it difficult for them to navigate smoothly through their love life. In a conversation with media, when asked about the hacks to keep her relationship private, the SOTY 2 actress said, "I think, with me, it depends on the day, it depends on how I am feeling. I feel like some things are actually private.' She further explained, "Imagine a normal relationship without actors being involved. You are figuring it out with the person, what you like, and what you don't like. Then you have the scrutiny of so many people, their judgements, and their opinions, 'oh they don't look happy'. It gets much tougher and it adds a lot of pressure on something that's so special and new. So. you do want to protect it because most of our lives are out there. Whatever you can try to protect, you should." On the work front,

ANANYA

Ananya was last seen in the film Dream Girl 2 and is now looking forward to her debut OTT film Kho Gaye Hum Kahan.

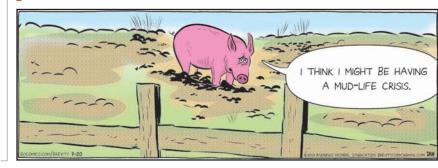
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBES



BREVITY



POST **CROSSWORD**

23

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Across

- 8 Uzi, e.g. 9 Mosaic piece
- 10 Waterproof
- garments
- 11 First
- 13 Pub game
- 15 Act the

17 Noblewoman

- coquette
- 20 Get down 21 Boat movers
- 22 Qajar dynasty's domain
- 23 Like the seas, at times
- **Down**
- 1 Slander 2 Small pigeon

3 Footstool

- 18 Playwright's offering

14 Equity

19 Type of race 21 Double-reed instrument

4 Hunky-dory

5 Repercussion

12 Italian dessert

16 Hang around

6 Verse form

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

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SOLUTIONS

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4 6 1 2 6 9

8 HELD IN CITY GROUP CLASH

downtown





was arrested for attacking Pradeep, while seven others involved in the street clash were taken into custody in the other case

GIRIJA SHANKAR CHAKRABARTY İ

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: The police Monday arrested eight persons in connection with a group clash that broke out in a locality near Biju Patnaik International Airport here Sunday evening in which two persons suffered in-

juries of varying degrees. Briefing media persons about

Odisha vets to go on mass leave from Jan 4

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Veterinarians in the state have threatened to proceed on mass leave from January 4 over their demands for complete revamp of the Odisha Veterinary Service Association (OVSA)

Addressing a press conference here, Monday, association president Jadunath Parida said the reformation includes parity with medical doctors, DACP and non-practicing allowance.

"When the state was selected ınder One Health programme of the United Nations to cover human and veterinary treatment under one umbrella, the responsibilities of veterinarians have been multiplied. In such circumstances, the state government is not fulfilling the demands of OVSA showing apathetic attitidue," general secretary of the association Sankarsan Maahunta said.

This has demoralized the veterinarians' working ability and interest, he added.

Further, he said that currently about 1,300 doctors are shouldering the responsibility of 1,910 vets of the state as the rest posts are lying vacant. Also about 40 per cent of the supporting posts are lying vacant in the department, which has led to undue pressure upon the vets.

"They are even forced to work beyond working hours and even on holidays to cope with the expectations of the livestock owners," Parida said advancing reasons for the proposed mass abstention as a mark of protest.

the case, Zone-II ACP Girija Shankar Chakrabarty said two youths, Rakesh Kumar Guru and Siba Maharana, had threatened an elderly person, Pradeep Singh, for giving his place on rent to a youth for a garage. Singh owns a small market complex in the airport area here.

"The dispute turned violent Sunday evening when the two youths attacked Pradeep with a sword. When the other group members, who were present, intervened in the matter, the duo turned towards them. Meanwhile, the other group members snatched the sword and attacked back the duo, leaving one of them seriously injured," Chakrabarty said.

The ACP said two cases have been registered—one by Pradeep and other by Siba's brother, and so far eight persons have been arrested. Rakesh was arrested for attacking Pradeep, while seven others involved in the street clash were taken into custody in the other case.

All the arrested persons are habitual offenders and have cases in different police stations. Siba was released from jail on bail a month ago. Further investigation is going on to nab other persons involved in the incident, the ACP said.

2 girls drown

Bhubaneswar: Two 10-year-old girls drowned in a pond in their village in Cuttack district, Monday. The deceased were identified as Sofiya Khatun and Nandini Kumari, both from Kuranga Pradhan village under Sadar police lim its in Cuttack . "The two girls, along with another friend, had gone to a pond in the village to take bath. One of the minors slipped into deep water while bathing. Later, two others also fell into the water while trying to save her. "A local youth present near the pond rushed to their help. However, he managed to save one of the minors," said a villager.



JOY BY THE BAY: A family enjoys camel ride as thousands throng the Golden Beach in Puri on Christmas holiday, Monday

PIC: YAGNESWAR MOHANTY

Christmas celebrated with traditional fervour

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Christmas was celebrated with traditional fervour in the state, including the sensitive Kandhamal district, Monday as thousands of people thronged churches for special prayers.

Christmas was celebrated in a big way in the cities of Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Balasore, Berhampur, Rourkela, Jeypore and Rayagada and in the districts of Kandhamal, Gajapati, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and other places where Christians live in large number.

Governor Raghubar Das and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik greeted the people on the occasion.

Describing the festival as a symbol of peace, harmony and humanism, the governor in a message wished the people of Odisha, especially the Christian community happiness, peace and prosperity. Wishing the people of the state on this day, Patnaik appealed for their cooperation to build a developed and empowered Odisha.

Churches across the state were decorated with lights, candles, Christmas trees, bells, Santa Claus figurines, and elaborate decorations.

Celebrations began with midnight prayers on Sunday night marking the birth of Lord Jesus. Mass prayers and special serv-

Churches Monday morning.

Both Roman Catholics and Protestants celebrated the festival with religious fervour visiting the impeccably decorated churches. People lighted candles and joined mass prayers in the churches.

In Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. apart from the Christian community, a large number of locals visited the churches on this special occasion.

'On this auspicious holy day, I appeal to all to experience the love, joy and happiness that God has given to us and share it with all our brothers and sisters," said Archbishop John Barwa, head of the Catholic Church in Odisha.

Meanwhile, tight security arrangements have been made and police have intensified patrolling in the sensitive Kandhamal district, which witnessed a large-scale riots in 2007 and 2008.

As many as 42 platoons (one platoon comprises 30 personnel) of police force were deployed in the Kandhamal district. The police conducted flag marches in all police stations of the district.

People stepped into churches at Phulbani, G.Udayagiri, Balliguda, Raikia, Daringbadi, Kotagarh and Bamunigam and offered prayers to Lord Jesus.

Police said the festival is being celebrated without any report of any untoward incident from anywhere in the state.

To mark this day, internationally acclaimed sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik has created a Santa Claus using two tonne of onions and sand at Blue Flag beach in Puri. The sculpture is 100 feet long, 20 feet high and 40 feet wide in size. Pattnaik and students of his sand art school took eight

hours to complete the sculpture.

Legal literacy –

Met predicts dense fog for 2 days

Dry weather is likely to prevail Tuesday and Wednesday and shallow to moderate fog may occur at a few places over the districts of Odisha in the morning hours

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Dense fog is likely to occur at some places over several districts of Odisha during the next 48 hours, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Monday.

It said there will be no major change in the minimum temperature at many places over the districts of Odisha during next 4 to 5 days.

The Meteorological Centre in Bhubaneswar said that dry weather is likely to prevail over the districts of the state. Shallow to moderate fog is very likely to occur at a few places over the districts of Odisha in the morning hours. Tuesday

 $\underline{\underline{\text{In}}}$ its mid-day bulletin, the IMD mentioned, "Minimum temperatures observed no large change over the districts of Odisha. They were markedly below normal at one or two places, below normal at one or two places, appreciably above normal at one or two places over



the districts of Interior Odisha, above normal at one or two places over the districts of Interior Odisha and at a few places over the districts of Coastal Odisha and normal at elsewhere over the districts of Odisha.'

Issuing yellow warning, it said dense fog is likely to occur at one or two places over Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Angul, Dhenkanal, Balasore, Jajpur, Bhadrak, Kendrapara, Jagatsinghpur, Khurda, Puri, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Sonepur, Boudh, Bolangir, Kandhamal, Kalahandi and Koraput.

However, there will be no major change in the minimum temperature at many places over the districts of Odisha during next 4 to 5 days.

Dry weather is likely to prevail Tuesday and Wednesday and shallow to moderate fog may occur at a few places over the districts of Odisha in the morning

Guv, CM pay tributes to Vajpayee on birth anniv

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Governor Raghubar Das and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik paid tributes to former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his 99th birth anniversary.

Das paid floral tributes to Vajpayee at Raj Bhawan here and remembered his indelible contribution to modern India.

In a post on X, the Governor said Vajpayee will be remembered for his powerful speeches, revolution in the telecom sector, formation of three states, including Jharkhand, nuclear testing, Antyodaya Anna Yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Kisan Credit Card, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana and many other people-centric schemes.

"Humble tributes to former Prime Minister of India and Bharat Ratna recipient #AtalBihariVajpayee on his birth anniversary. He was a great poet, orator and statesman. His significant role in nation-building

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan also paid tributes to the former PM and described him as a mass leader connected to the people and the land

and patriotism will continue to inspire the generations to come,' said the Chief Minister on X.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who hails from Odisha, also paid floral tributes to the former prime minister and described him as a mass leader connected to the people and the land.

"Atal ji left an indelible mark on Indian politics with his ideals, values and principles. He started a new era of Sarva Shiksha, development, good governance and welfare of the poor in India. His life dedicated to the nation and his devotion to duty is a source of eternal inspiration for all of

cestry information, we identified

110 gene regions and had an im-

proved fine-mapping of the po-

tential causal variants in each

drive on forest, women rights ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Union Justice department organised a legal literacy campaign here Monday to create awareness about the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (recognition of forest rights) Act, 2006 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

As part of the campaign, organised in association with the Shadow Advertising and Communications Pvt Ltd, a van mounted with LED screen is dispersing information about the laws in tribal-dominated districts of the state.



"The Information Education and Communication (IEC) van started campaigning Dec 11 and is schedule to continue till Dec 30, 2023. Kandhamal, Rayagada, Koraput, Nabarangpur has been covered and the van will further cover Kalahandi, Nuapada and Bolangir in the last phase,' said an official.

Through this van campaign, people are being informed about Forest Rights Act 2006, with a special focus on the rights of forest dwelling communities and tribal populations over the forest land and forest produced.

Other than forest rights, local leaders like Sarpanchs and ward members are also being made aware about forms of domestic violence women are subjected to, which not only includes physical violence but also emotional, verbal, sexual and economic

Study finds shared genetics of problematic drinking

esearchers revealed that people around the world possess a shared genetic architecture for Problematic Alcohol Use (PAU) - habitual heavy drinking, accompanied by harmful consequences.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Medicine, could help scientists understand the genetic basis of PAU, a major cause of health problems in many age groups. It is a leading cause of death in those it af-

The study is the largest to date for PAU -- it identified many new risk genes and uncovered a large amount of new biology. With a better understanding of PAU biology, scientists will have new possibilities in developing treatments.

"Research with the primary focus on understanding the molecular mechanism underlying PAU and identification of gene targets for potential pharmacological studies is extremely important for future treatments and could help mitigate the consequences of excessive alcohol use," said Hang Zhou, Assistant Professor of psychiatry and of biomedical informatics and data science at Yale University's School of Medicine.

Researchers studied more than 1 million people with PAU and included as many genetic ancestral groups as possible, including people with European,



African, Latin American, East Asian, and South Asian ances-

They found that the genetic ar-

RESEARCHERS STUDIED MORE THAN 1 MILLION PEOPLE WITH PROBLEMATIC ALCOHOL USE (PAU) AND INCLUDED AS MANY GENETIC ANCESTRAL GROUPS AS POSSIBLE, INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH

EUROPEAN, AFRICAN, LATIN AMERICAN, EAST ASIAN, AND **SOUTH ASIAN ANCESTRIES** THE ANALYSIS ALSO IDENTIFIED

SEVERAL EXISTING MEDICATIONS AS POTENTIAL TREATMENTS FOR PAU

chitecture of PAU is substantially shared across these pop-

There are genetic differences in different populations for PAU,

but the similarities are greater. "By leveraging the multi-an-

The researchers also used various methods to prioritise multiple genes with convergent

region," Zhou said.

evidence linking association to PAU with brain biology through gene expression (transcriptionalwide association study in 13 brain tissues) and chromatin interaction analysis in the brain. This work will provide valu-

able resources and targets for future functional analysis and drug development.

The analysis also identified several existing medications as potential treatments for PAU. IANS



Let all circumstances, all happenings in life be occasions, constantly renewed for learning more and ever more.

THE MOTHER



Yi Fuxian

Western observers

criticising Chinese

tend to focus on

leaders' rhetoric

pointing out the

errors in the

constructive

and decisions. But

forecasts that form

the basis of Chinese

policy may be more

Running Out Of Fuel

arlier this month, the ratings agency Moody's cut its outlook on China's sovereign credit rating to negative, citing risks from a deepening property crisis and a prolonged growth slowdown. In fact, Moody's now predicts that annual economic growth will fall to 4% in 2024 and 2025, before slowing further, to 3.8%, on average, for the rest of the decade. Potential growth will decline to 3.5% by 2030. A major driver of this slowdown will be "weaker demographics."

Not surprisingly, China's leaders said they were "disappointed" with the downgrade, claiming that the economy still has "huge development resilience and potential" and will remain a powerful engine of global growth. But China's assessment of its potential growth is based on deeply flawed forecasts.

On August 24, 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping convened nine economists – including former World Bank Chief Economist Justin Yifu Lin – for a symposium that would guide the 14th Five-Year Plan for economic and social development. Based on that discussion, Xi declared that it was "completely possible" for China to double its GDP per capita over the next 16 years.

Lin explained the logic behind this optimistic forecast. In 2019,

China's GDP per capita was only 22.6% of the level in the United States (calculated by purchasing power parity). Germany was at the same level in 1946, Japan in 1956, and South Korea in 1985, and their economies grew at an average rate of 9.4%, 9.6%, and 9%, respectively, over the subsequent 16 years.

Even hampered by low population growth and a trade and technology war with the US, Lin concluded, China's potential annual growth – 8% in 2019-35, and 6% in 2036-50 – could easily translate into real annual growth of 6% and 4%, respectively. Per this forecast, China's GDP would surpass that of the US in 2030, and be twice as large by 2049, at which point there would be four times as many Chinese as Americans.

Lin had previously made even more optimistic predictions. In 2005, he forecast that China's economy would be 1.5-2 times larger than America's by 2030, and that there would be five times as many Chinese. In 2008, he was even more sanguine, predicting that China's economy would be 2.5 times the size of America's by 2030. In 2011, he was back to forecasting that China's economy would be twice as large as that of the US in 2030, and in 2014, he returned to his 2005 forecast that China's economy would be 1.5-2 times larger.

Over the years, China's leaders have embraced Lin's forecasts as a kind of vindication of their political system and governance model. "The world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century," Xi declared in 2021, "but time and situation are in our favor." Similarly, Ma Zhaoxu, the vice minister for foreign affairs, pledged last year that, in the face of efforts to impede China's rise, Chinese diplomats would uphold the "spirit of struggle" to ensure the country's continued development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders eagerly presented China's response as a reflection of its "institutional advan-

But, however appealing to China's leaders Lin's economic forecasts may be, they have proved wildly wrong, not least because they fail to account for China's bleak demographic outlook. Both a higher median age and a higher proportion of people over 64 are negatively correlated with growth, and on both points, China is doing far worse than the three countries to which Lin compares it.

When Germany's GDP per capita was equivalent to 22.6% that of the US, its median age was 34. In Japan and South Korea, the median age was just 24. After those 16 subsequent years of strong growth, the median age in the three countries stood at 35, 30, and 32, respectively. Contrast that with China, where the median age was 41 in 2019, and will reach 49 in 2035.

Likewise, at the beginning of the 16-year period to which Lin refers, the proportion of people over 64 in Germany, Japan, and South Korea was 8%, 5%, and 4%, respectively; at the end, it stood at 12%, 7%, and 7%. In China, that proportion was 13% in 2019 and will be 25% in 2035. In the 16 years after the proportion of people over 64 reached 13% in Germany (in 1966) and Japan (in 1991), these economies' average annual growth was only 2.9% and 1.1%, respectively.

Moreover, in Germany, Japan, and South Korea, the labour force (aged 15-59) began to decline in the 12th, 38th, and 31st years after their per capita GDP equaled 22.6% that of the US. China's began to decline in 2012

If one imagines China's economy as an airplane, the 1978 launch of the policy of reform and opening up would have been what ignited the fuel – the young workers – that enabled the economy to take off and fly at high speeds for three decades. But, in 2012, the fuel began to run low, causing the plane to decelerate.

Instead of adjusting to their new reality, the Chinese authorities – heeding the advice of economists like Lin – continued to lean on the throttle by investing heavily in real estate, thereby creating a massive property bubble. It is obviously dangerous to continue flying at a high speed without enough fuel, which is one reason why some economies are attempting to "de-risk" their trade by shifting supply chains away from China, which is currently more than 140 economies' main trading partner.

Western observers tend to focus on criticising Chinese leaders' rhetoric and decisions. But pointing out the errors in the forecasts that form the basis of Chinese policy may be more constructive. For the country's sake, the decisions made at the upcoming Third Plenum of the Communist Party of China must reflect reality, not more pie-in-the-sky predictions.

The writer is a senior scientist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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WISDOM CORNER



The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts: therefore, guard accordingly, and take care that you entertain no notions unsuitable to virtue and reasonable

MARCUS AURELIUS



Every man is more than just himself; he also represents the unique, the very special and always significant and remarkable point at which the world's phenomena intersect, only once in this way, and never again.

ERMANN HESSE



For everything you have missed, you have gained something else, and for everything you gain, you lose something else.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

FOCUS

ECONOMY

MOUNTING DEBT BURDEN



Ajit Ranade
THE INTEREST
PAYMENT AS A
PROPORTION OF
THE ANNUAL
EXPENDITURE IS
TOO HIGH

The International Monetary Fund recently in its report raised a concern about India's sovereign debt, i.e. the total debt burden on the Union plus state governments. The IMF said that in the next four years this debt could exceed 100% of GDP. This is a worst-case scenario, according to IMF projections. The government has firmly rebuffed this warning, saying that India's debt ratio has actually declined from 88% to 81% in the past two years. And the Union government is determined to bring the fiscal deficit down to 4.5% in the next two years. When we have high deficits, it forces the government to borrow, to bridge the gap. That extra borrowing every year, adds to the already high debt mountain.

When debt is high, the annual interest payment is also high. This is called the debt servicing ratio. Just to keep servicing the debt, i.e. paying interest only, is costing the Union government nearly Rs 10 trillion. One trillion is one lakh crore. This is much higher than the amount collected as individual income tax or corporate income tax (roughly Rs 7 trillion each). Interest payments went up by a whopping 38% in the past two years. The interest payment alone is the single largest component of the government's expenditure, consuming one fifth i.e. 20% of all its obligations. Since the interest burden is high, that causes the deficit to go up, which in turn causes the debt to go up, which causes the interest burden to keep increasing. This can lead to what is called the debt trap. It is like borrowing just to keep paying

When is the government going to decrease the mountain of debt? That can happen only when the tax revenues rise faster than expenditures. Indeed, this has been happening lately, both in income tax as well as indirect taxes (goods and services tax



We have a large stock of capital under government ownership which is not giving any significant returns. That must be passed on to the private ownership wherever possible

chiefly). This has happened partly because the tax laws have plugged many loopholes in the past few years. For instance, long term capital gains tax was zero. Capital gains i.e. profit made by selling stocks or real estate are not completely tax exempt as they used to be. The Mauritius tax treaty had a loophole which was plugged a few vears ago. But much work is needed to increase India's tax collection to GDP ratio which is currently around 17% of GDP. This is at least three to four percentage points lower than the median for all emerging market economies. So, India is undertaxed as far as direct taxes are concerned, a fact that was mentioned in the Economic Survey published by the Union Finance Ministry. However, the indirect tax burden is increasing, given that the median rate of GST is still very high at 18%.

But let us go back to the issue of India's debt sustainability. One of the counter points raised by the government in response to the IMF report is that other countries like USA and UK have much higher debt to GDP ratios. What this fails to mention is that most rich country debts (including all of the 15 OECD economies) have high debt to

GDP ratios, because of their very high social security obligations. In all these countries, all elderly citizens get a pension, and all of them are entitled to free healthcare. These government obligations are met with payroll taxes on the working people. But since these rich countries are aging, and the average age is much higher than India, the payroll taxes are insufficient to meet social security obligations. In a country like Germany, the dependency ratio, is one is to three, i.e. there are only three working people for every one retired person. Hence the rising debt of rich countries is predominantly because of rising (and perhaps unsustainable) social security obligations.

In the case of India, there is hardly any social security payment. Those covered currently are under the Old Pension Scheme. It is unfunded and comes from current revenues. It is restricted to pensions paid to people who retired from government service or the military. That OPS is quite generous. However, that goes to only 3% of the workforce. The pension plus salaries of government servants will soon be nearly 27% of revenues, as per the projections of

a report of the government of Andhra Pradesh. So, it is unfair to defend India's 80 or 90% debt ratio with comparisons to USA or UK's 140 or 150%, because the latter is based on social security payments and their ageing societies.

What is in India's favour are two points. Firstly, much of the debt is in domestic currency, so no foreign dollar obligations arise on the government. Secondly, India's workforce is young and the dependency ratio will be favourable for at least three decades. We have more than five working persons for every one retired person. But our per capita income of workers is low. And we will find it difficult to impose higher payroll taxes. Hence the New Pension Scheme (NPS) in place since 2005 takes away the burden from the government.

Despite the two factors in India's favour, we have to be seriously worried about the sustainability of our debt. The interest payment as a proportion of the annual expenditure is too high. We have a large stock of capital under government ownership which is not giving any significant returns. That must be passed on to the private ownership wherever possible. We have to examine the effectiveness of expenditure, and remove waste and duplication At the same time India has to spend considerably more public funds on enhancing human capital, i.e. on primary healthcare and primary education. Also, there is a need to fund research and innovation via public universities. So, while GDP growth is good, we must focus on how to make the debt situation more sustainable, by narrowing the gap between expenditure (28%) and tax revenues (17%) as well as increasing the efficacy of our expenditures, and increasing

The writer is a noted economist.

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SPECTRUM CYBERCRIMES

Playing havoc with equity market



Shivaji Sarkar

THE SITUATION MAY BE WORSE THAN THE HARSHAD MEHTA SCAM AS OPACITY IS HIGH The stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the 1992 Harshad Mehta boom-bust syndrome. It zooms and goes for "course correction", a phenomenon the Security Exchange Board of India (SEBI) repeatedly failed to check despite its warnings. Anonymous operations on the digital and social media siphon off substantial gains, may be in billions, a day. The cybercrime engulfs stock trading and SEBI has warned people to keep off Telegram and other platforms.

The BSE Sensex's rise to 72000 before a sharp selloff December 20 looks like myth. It calls for investigations for nabbing the people, who fled with profits and dumping Rs 9 lakh crore losses on poor mutual fund-type investors. Most pension, provident and other similar funds bear the brunt. Detailed probe of banks getting hit would reveal how the country's working class suffers. Despite some recovery next the day, the overall trend is considered "subdued." May be the market suspects some opaque operations.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) sold Rs 1322 crore of shares and domestic investors Rs 4754 crore, implying retail investors

The stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the 1992 Harshad replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the 1992 Harshad replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the 1992 Harshad replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the 1992 Harshad replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock market behaves awry again, acting like a replica of the stock on the stock of the stock operators. The platforms against manipulating agents and

The tanking of Nifty by 1.4 percent and Sensex by 1.3 percent is being dumped on the Singapore circulated JN.1 virus mask mandate. It may not be so.

Kotak AMC Managing

Director Nilesh Shah tries to lighten the bust saying that anecdotally, after a rally as long as the latest leg, markets have tended to correct. "The past 30 years have shown us that the market tends to correct after a sevenweek-long rally." A profound statement.

Some experts in the disinvestment ministry possibly could have smelt the market methods.

Some experts in the disinvestment ministry possibly could have smelt the market methods and advised the government to reduce the divestment target. No big-ticket sales are planned. The government has put off stake sells in IDBI Bank, Shipping Corporation of India, BEML and Container Corporation of India. Even BPCL sale that could have fetched around Rs 60,000 crore have been put off.

Still the department of investment (Dipam) is exploring possibilities of 14 transactions, Minister of State for B Kishanrao Karad recently told the Rajya

perhaps followed SEBI's action against manipulating agents and rising cyberattacks on the Bombay Stock Exchange, including a malware attack. SEBI Chairperson Madhavi Puri Buch says cyber risks are rising. In June 2016 it busted an alleged Pakistani-based attack on the bourse. It has acted against 46 YouTubers for manipulating stock prices in 2022.

The system is complicated. In June 2023, the SEBI barred 135 market manipulators through an interim order. They were told to pay penalty of Rs 126 crore for making wrongful gains from stock manipulation of small-cap companies.

The manipulators engineered a mechanism that was a kind of an insider trading though technically cannot be termed so. Different share trading companies formed a cartel for selling shares of some listed companies among themselves. They jacked up the scrip prices -- together through social media and other campaigns for their chosen scrip showering 'bonanza'.

There is a suspicion on the operations of various social media platforms, including

Facebook conniving with the stock operators. The platforms allow linking up different systems, anonymous functioning and loot of billions. The supposed "tutors" teaching the investors never share their names, identities, address of themselves or the companies they are working for. The SEBI cracked the whip on some other stock recommendations as well. In April, it barred six individuals from the securities market for one to three years for passing false tips on Telegram.

Cyber crimes are making deep inroads and expanding to different areas rocking the economy. They have high concentration in the national capital region. Their complex operations need difficult coordination among different states, Central police, information technology and other agencies to insulate the banking, financial, stocks and various other activities.

The situation may be worse than the Harshad Mehta scam as opacity is high. It needs crash action to bust the national and international syndicates as also to pay compensation to victims.

II

etters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST
are most welcome to contribute letters
(200 words), articles and
columns (between 750-1250
words). Contributors are
requested to send their
contact numbers and full
postal address/email ID. They may also
send in their valuable comments, opinion
and suggestions, preferably by email,
to: edit@orissapost.com

OrissaPOST

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Bhubaneswar-751010

Mathematical genius

Sir, The nation remembered math wizard Srinivasa Ramanujan on his 136th birthday December 22, which is observed as National Mathematics Day every year. The main objective of the celebration of this day is to make people aware of the development of mathematics and its importance in the growth of humanity. Srinivasa Ramanujan took the mathematical world by storm with his amazing ability to see remarkable patterns in numbers that none could discern. The self-taught mathematical genius described his insights as deeply visceral and spiritual, and patterns often came to him in vivid dreams. These observations captured the tremendous beauty and sheer possibility of the abstract world of pure mathematics. In recent years Artificial Intelligence has been making breakthroughs in areas involving deep human intuition. Yet, experts say that its latest techniques have not assisted in significant results in pure math research. No wonder that Srinivasa Ramanujan's contributions to the field of mathematics are non-

pareil by any means, and even in the age of AI. *Ranganathan Sivakumar*; CHENNAI

Heinous practice

Sir, Startling revelations have come out that some school managements have engaged students for toilet cleaning in Karnataka. An incident from Andrahalli in Bangalore where students were purportedly seen cleaning the toilet has come to light. Indignant parents of the students have reportedly protested outside the school campus demanding strict action against school administration. The government must take such disciplinary action as may be deemed appropriate against the administration and management. It is for the administration or management to take recourse to legal remedy on the action taken by the government. A report in 2018 had appeared in a section of press that in 69 per cent of 122 government schools, teachers and students were found to be cleaning toilets in Maharashtra. Incidents of this kind happen in government schools only because the money mongers would like to save the money from the grants given by the government so that the so saved money can be pocketed. The government has to issue strict instructions against using students for undesirable purposes by the government school managements.

KV Seetharamaiah, BANGALORE

Chorus for BeMC expansion, district status grows louder

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Dec 25: Demand for merger of suburban areas Municipal Corporation (BeMC) area and the formation of Berhampur district has gained momentum with people from various walks of life raising their voices over the issue.

Recently, a peaceful protest meeting was held near the Gandhi statue in Gandhinagar against the government's indifference and callousness in implementing the Orissa High Court judgment regarding the merger of suburban areas into BeMC fold and the creation of Berhampur district

President Sanjeev Kumar Patnaik, vice president Devi Prasad Das, joint secretary Sudesh Kumar Pote, organisational secretary Srikanth Padhihari and assistant secretary BV Sagar addressed the gathering.

Claiming that BeMC is the smallest municipal corporation in India, the speakers address ing the meeting alleged that the government has neglected Berhampur residents as it never implemented its promise to form a larger civic body by including 18 suburban panchayats into the



fold of BeMC based on the gazette notification of 2008.

They alleged that they have been agitating for the last 12 years, but the government is not paying any heed to their demand. Even though there was a clear directive from the Orissa High Court, the government continued to ignore it, causing dissatisfaction and anger among the local residents.

Notably, all ministers including the Chief Minister, secretaries and other officials have been apprised of their demand by the city-level joint action committee.

A delegation of the committee met the then 5T Secretary and submitted a memorandum to him regarding the merger of suburban areas with BeMC, district status to Berhampur and construction of Brajnagar tower

line road when he visited Berhampur and Gopalpur constituencies in August.

The then 5T Secretary had announced in the meeting the steps being taken in this regard and promised to inform them of the developments within one month. But neither the government nor the office of the present 5T Chairman has given any information to the committee ever since.

Similarly, before the elections in 2019, when the state government was mulling over formation of a new district, a demand letter was given to the state government by the committee regarding the formation of Berhampur district.

They warned of intensifying their protests and holding demonstrations every week in various parts of the Silk City.

Gahirmatha sanctuary officials nab 26 fishers

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, Dec 25: The forest personnel of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary have arrested 26 fishermen in the last two days for catching fish illegally after trespassing into the 'No Fishing Zone' of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.

The forest personnel also seized two trawlers,12.10 quintal marine fish catch, 14 trawler fishing nets, eight VHF sets, and three numbers of GPS sets from the arrested fishermen, Ranger of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary Pradosh Moharana said. He said the forest personnel during patrolling in the mid sea noticed a trawler in the prohibited area of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. The patrolling team intercepted the fishing trawler, arrested nine fishermen and seized 12 quintals of fish catch, four VHF sets, two GPS sets, and 10 trawl fishing nets from their possessions.

Similarly, on the wee hours of Sunday, the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary personnel intercepted a fishing trawler and arrested 17 fishermen for unauthorisedly catching fish at the 'No Zone' Fishing Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary.

They seized 10 kg marine fish catch, fishing nets, a GPS set, and a fish finder along with four VHF sets from the arrested per-



CAPTIVATING ACT: Artistes enacting a scene from a play 'Dahi' at the 26th Veer Surendra Sai state-level Sambalpuri drama competition organised by Yuva Udayan outfit in Sambalpur, Sunday night

Man gives in after killing his brother

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatna, Dec 25: A man reportedly killed his younger brother at Bahadur Bagicha Pada (BBC Pada) under Bhawanipatna Town police limits in Kalahandi district, late Sunday night.

The deceased was identified as Ganesh Bag and the killer was identified as his elder brother Mahendra Bag.

As per reports, a heated argument broke out between Mahendra and his younger brother Ganesh late Sunday night following which Mahendra, in a fit of rage, stabbed his younger brother with a screwdriver repeatedly on the chest and

Following the incident, Ganesh was rushed to the Kalahandi district headquarters hospital by his family members. However, he succumbed to the injuries while undergoing treatment at the hospital, sources said.

On the other hand, hearing about his brother's death, the accused Mahendra surrendered at Bhawanipatna police station,

Monday morning. Meanwhile, further investigation in connection with the incident is underway.

Distraught farmers threaten suicide

PADDY ON 40 ACRES OF FARMLANDS LOST DUE TO DISCHARGE OF TOXIC WATER BY 3 COMPANIES

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, Dec 25: Standing paddy crops on over 40 acres of farmlands have been destroyed in the last one week due to alleged discharge of toxic water full of chemical effluents by three companies at Telibahali village under Danagadi block in Jajpur district, sources informed Monday. This development has pushed

the farmers into distress as they ponder how to make up the losses they have suffered. More importantly, it was close to harvesting time when the crops were destroyed. In frustration, share-cropper Rama Chandra Jena set fire to the rotten crops which he had cultivated on 4.5 acres of land.

On being informed, a team of scientists from the regional office of the state pollution control board (SPCB) at Kalinganagar visited the spot Friday and collected the toxic water samples for

Sources said the waste water of the three industrial plants under Jakhpura police limits are being regularly discharged into Gonda drain. It has been



happening for more than a decade now. The water full of chemical wastes also pollutes the Brahmani river, it has been alleged.

Earlier reports from SPCB experts had also blamed the three companies for polluting both the Gonda drain and the Brahmani river. However, till date no action has been taken, except for the companies being served with notices at regular intervals.

Locals alleged that the companies have failed to establish a common effluent treatment plant (CETP) for treatment of waste water. The Orissa High Court had ordered the construction of

eight years ago. However, no steps have been taken in this regard. The Odisha government is also not instructing the three companies to set up a CETP, sources alleged.

Among the farmers who have suffered and whose paddy crops have been destroyed other than Rama Chandra are Bishnu Charan Sahu (two acres of land), Gobind Chandra Jena (3.5 acres), Nityananda Jena (two acres), Rekanda Munda (1.5 acres), Rabindra Das (4.5 acres), Jagabandhu Sahu (7.5 acres), Punia Munda five acres) while Rasik Munda, Tukuna Munda and Jogendra Das have lost crops on three acres of

land respectively. They had borrowed from banks and private money lenders to raise the paddy crops. Now they are at their wits end regarding the clearance of their loans.

Farmers said that the blocking of the Satabainsia nullah is the root cause of all the problems. Earlier chemical water used to flow through Satabainsia before entering the Gonda drain. However, due to the construction of houses on many farmlands, the Satabainsia drain has been completely blocked leading to the stagnation of toxic water on farmlands.

Farmers with folded hands requested compensation of the losses they suffered. They said that if that is not done, they will have no option, but to end their lives. They pointed out that despite repeated instruction from the pollution board the plants have not stopped discharging of toxic water.

When contacted, SPCB's regional officer Pramod Kumar Behera at Kalinganagar said that action will be initiated against the erring plants, once the latest report of the samples

Diarrhoea rears its head in Bolangir

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bolangir; Dec 25: With Rourkela, yet to fully control the cholera outbreak, it seems that diarrhoea is spreading its tentacles in this district. Two people died Monday of suspected diarrhoea at Kantabanji town in this district, creating new headaches for the administration.

Sources informed that six patients with symptoms of vomiting and loose motion were admitted to Kantabanji hospital Sunday. However, two of them breathed their last Monday morning. Doctors however, remained mum when asked the reason behind the death of the two persons. However, sources added that diarrhoea cannot be ruled out.

The sources also said that two of the patients were discharged Monday while the condition of two others continues to be critical. Doctors are continuously monitoring the health condition of the two still undergoing treatment.

The deceased have been identified as Chandini Sahu from Budapadar village under Titilagarh block and Santosh



Majhi from Malibahal village under Muribahal block.

"We have received information regarding the death of two persons at the Kantabanji hospital. They are from different villages. They were brought to the hospital in critical condition. While the exact reasons behind their deaths are yet to be ascertained, the on-duty doctors at the hospital suspect it to be septicaemia-induced loose motion. However, the exact reason behind their death will only be known after investigation, said Bolangir CDMO, Kuber Chandra Mohanta.

Sources said, there are at least 10 other patients suffering from vomiting and loose motion in Kantabanji town. They are being treated in their homes. When contacted, the family members of the deceased refused to make

Youth loses leg in train mishap

Bhawanipatna: A 32-year old youth lost one of his legs after he was hit by a passenger train near Kesinga police station in Kalahandi district, Monday afternoon. The youth was identified as Rajendra Bihari, of Chichaiguda village under Junagarh police limits in Kalahandi district. On being informed, police rescued the critically injured youth and rushed him to the Kesinga community health centre and later shifted him to the district headquarters hospital in Bhawanipatna after his condition deteriorated.

CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

By the virtue of an affidavit dt.21.12.2023 before the Court of Executive Magistrate, Balangir, I, Smita Dash, W/o- Pradipta Kumar Acharya, At- Kantabania, P.O.- Gambharidihi, P.S. Sarankul, Dist.- Nayagarh have changed my name from 'Smita Dash Acharya' to 'Smita Dash' for all future purposes

Bhitarkanika to be closed for 10 days for croc census

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, Dec 25: The Bhitarkanika National Park will remain closed for ten days for tourists from January 5 to carry out the headcount of estuarine crocodiles

DFO of Rajnagar Mangrove (Forest) and Wildlife Division Gopinath Sudarshan Yadav Monday said the restriction on the visitors' entry into the park is to prevent the noise pollution during the census drive and also to facilitate the census operation smoothly in a tranquil atmosphere.

The headcount drive of saltwater crocodiles will be organised under the supervision of DFO of Rajnagar Mangrove (Forest) and Wildlife Division.

The entire day-and-night census operation will be monitored and supervised by the technical expert deputed from the Wildlife Division headquarters.

The enumerators, assisted by the trained local forest staff, will cover the Bhitarkanika river system besides innumerable



creeks. water inlets and nullahs, where the reptiles are found in abundant numbers.

The saltwater crocodile, being amphibious in nature, can be counted directly on land, while basking on the river bed, and on water surfaces while floating. During day time, crocodiles basking on land are easier to count and their size class can be estimated easily and accu-

rately At night, crocodiles less than six feet floating on water or resting on land can be counted by using a spot light and catching the reflected 'ruby red' glow

from their eyes The park authority will use both traditional methods and also the new technology based mobile application - polygon search method - like last year to ensure the density of crocodile population, Kanika forest

ranger Manas Kumar Das said. As many as 1.793 numbers of estuarine crocodiles were spotted in and outside the water bodies of Rajnagar Mangrove Forest & Wildlife Division during the headcount drive of estuarine crocodiles last year.

Wetland bird census from Jan 6

he midwinter status survey of wetland birds will be conducted in five forest and wildlife ranges under Bhitarkanika National Park January 6, Rajnagar Mangrove Forest and Wildlife Division DFO Gopinath Sudarshan Yaday said Monday.

Yadav said the field survey will be carried out at Kanika, Gahirmatha, Rajnagar, Mahakalapara, and Kujang ranges within Bhitarkanika

National Park As many as 17 teams will be engaged in the bird status survey this year. The Bhitarkanika forest officials along with renowned ornithologists and researchers will conduct bird status survey at Dangamala, Khola, Chinchiri mouth, Jaudia, Bhitarkanika mouth, Rajgarh, Satabhaya, Raitapatia, Barunei mouth, Chataka, Praharajpur Jaudia, Ekakula, Nasi, Nasi-1, Nasi-2, Jatadhar Tanda, Hawakhana, Bandar, Devi river mouth and

other places under Bhitarkanika National Park.

The forest officials generally count the avian species with the traditional method of direct sighting. The wildlife researchers and ornithologists would use VHF handsets, binoculars, and GPS to count birds in the park.

Every year with the arrival of winter, Bhitarkanika water bodies, the abode of avian species, wear a colourful look.

Migratory birds fly thousands of miles to Bhitarkanika to escape the harsh winter in Siberia, Afghanistan, Iraq, northern Asia, and some central European countries. They generally stay in Bhitarkanika for about three to four months to escape from the harsh winter before starting their homeward journey from the park.

Bhitarkanika is considered the transit point for the migratory bird species that return when the water bodies near the Bhitarkanika National Park start drying up.

College girl dies of dengue fever

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rupsa, Dec 25: A meritorious Plus III student of Nilamani Mahavidyalaya, Rupsa under Sadar block in Balasore district died of dengue fever, late Saturday night. The deceased was identified as Kabita Navak, daughter of Pitambar Nayak of Manudiha village under Rasulpur panchayat and Basta police limits in Balasore district.

As per reports, Kabita, who was suffering from fever, was admitted in a serious condition to district headquarters hospital (DHH) in Balasore, Wednesday. As her health deteriorated, she was then immediately shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, where she was diagnosed with dengue fever. However, she died Saturday night around 3am while undergoing treatment. Her body was brought to her village Sunday and the last rites performed at the village crematorium. A pall of gloom descended in her college and native village after the news of her death spread.

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PHOTO POST







 $Traffic \ congestion \ on \ a \ road \ owing \ to \ rush \ of \ tourists \ for \ Christmas \ and \ New \ Year \ celebrations \ in \ Manali$



Security personnel intercept a boat carrying suspected Rohingya refugees near Shaheed Dweep, in Andaman and Nicobar Islands



PM Narendra Modi pays tribute to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on his birth anniversary, at Sadaiv Atal in New Delhi



Tourists visit the historical Hawa Mahal during the Christmas and New Year celebrations at Badi Chaupar in Jaipur



A woman poses for a souvenir photo as a Xiamen Airlines plane flies over a temple in Xiamen in southeast China's Fujian province



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip



A group of geese used to help vigilance patrols around the Penitentiary Complex honk near Florianopolis, Santa Catarina

•

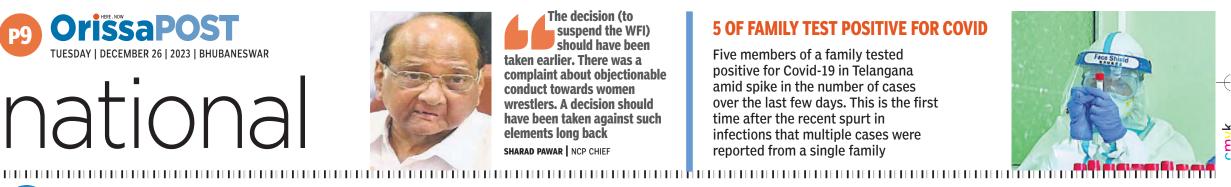
national



The decision (to suspend the WFI) should have been taken earlier. There was a complaint about objectionable conduct towards women wrestlers. A decision should have been taken against such elements long back SHARAD PAWAR | NCP CHIEF

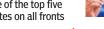
5 OF FAMILY TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID

Five members of a family tested positive for Covid-19 in Telangana amid spike in the number of cases over the last few days. This is the first time after the recent spurt in infections that multiple cases were reported from a single family





years without strikes and 'andolans' would lead to Assam becoming to Assam becoming one of the top five states on all fronts



HIMANTA BISWA SARMA ASSAM CM

Disappointment has now started being spread among the public because the people of Rajasthan gave a clear mandate to the BJP on December 3. But even after 22 days, the cabinet has not been formed, due to which governance has come to a standstill. Every department is also in a state of confusion

ASHOK GEHLOT EX-RAJASTHAN CM

As of now, there is no alternative to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the country. Such a based on various aspects and not

just one or two things AJIT PAWAR MAHARASHTRA DEPUTY CM

SHORT TAKES

Boy dies

Hyderabad: A four-month-old boy succumbed to the injuries sustained after an "attack" by a stray dog in a hut at Shaikpet area, officials said Monday. The incident happened December 8 when the baby's parents, who are labourers, had left him in a cradle in the hut and gone for work, they said. As per information, three stray dogs went near the hut and one of the stray canines went inside the hut which had no door and bit the boy on the face and forehead, a civic official said. The boy was subsequently admitted to a state-run hospital here where he died on Sunday while undergoing treatment, the official said.

70 hospitalised

Bangalore: A woman died and 70 others were hospitalised in a suspected case of food Bangalore Rural limits, police said Monday. Police said they suspect the cause of food poisoning to be an edible offering at a place of worship in the area. Some of those hospitalised have been discharged while others are still undergoing treatment. The health department is closely monitoring the situation. As of now, it is suspected to be a case of food poisoning, but since the investigation is in the initial stage, the exact cause cannot be ascertained at present, they added.

Three killed in MP

Khargone: Three persons were killed when their motorcycle was hit by an unidentified vehicle in Madhva Pradesh's Khargone district Monday, police said. The accident occurred near Guwadi village on Khandwa Road under Mengaon police station limits in the morning, an official said. Three persons were travelling on the motorcycle when an unidentified vehicle rammed into it. Mengaon police station in-charge . Dinesh Solanki said.

Merchant vessel reaches Mumbai

New Delhi: The Indian Navy's explosive ordnance disposal team Monday carried out a detailed inspection of merchant vessel MV Chem Pluto on its arrival in Mumbai, two days after it was hit by a drone off India's west coast in the Arabian Sea. Analysis of the area of attack and debris found on the ship pointed towards a drone attack and further forensic and technical analysis will be required to ascertain all the details, Navy officials said.



Army initiates Court of Inquiry letter war heats up

Jammu, Dec 25: The Army has initiated a Court of Inquiry as police lodged a murder case against unknown persons over the death of three civilians picked up for questioning by the force after three soldiers died in a terrorist attack in Poonch recently, official sources said Monday.

In a related development, a brigadier-level officer was shifted and action is being taken against three officers of 48 Rashtriya Rifles as the Army has taken a serious note of the incident which sparked allegations of custodial torture and widespread outrage.

The soldiers lost their lives when their vehicles were ambushed by terrorists at Dhatyar Morh between Dhera Ki Gali and Buffliaz in the Surankote area of Poonch on December 21.

Three civilians, aged between 27 and 42, were allegedly picked up by the Army for questioning following the attack and they were found dead on December 22. Video clips pur-



Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande during a visit to review the security situation in the Poonch sector, Monday

portedly showing their torture were shared widely on social

In a post on X on December 23. the Additional Directorate General of Public Information (ADGPI) of the Indian Army said, "Search operations by the security forces are continuing in the area of operations after the incident of 21 Dec 23. Reports

have been received regarding three civilian deaths in the area. The matter is under investigation. Indian Army stands committed to extending full support and cooperation in the conduct of investigations."

Taking its investigation forward, the sources said the Army has initiated a Court of Inquiry into the alleged torture and the

civilians.

A brigadier-level officer, incharge of the Surankote belt, was shifted, and action against other officers of the unit concerned will also be taken, the sources said.

The counter-insurgency unit of the Army was in the news for wrong reasons in October also when one of its major-rank officers opened fire on his colleagues and exploded grenades inside the Neeli post camp near Thanamandi, leaving five personnel including three officers

The sources said police have also registered a case under section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal code against unidentified accused army personnel."...After terror incident at DKG on December 21, army troops carried out searches in Topa Peer in buffliaz for the terrorists who escaped after the attack. During searches, Army troops detained a few local youth for questioning, reportedly three such youth namely Safeer Ahmad, Mohd Showkat and Shabir Ahmad succumbed to injuries

Dhankhar, Kharge

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge has told Raiva Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar that the mass suspension of MPs was "premeditated" and "weaponised" by the ruling party to sabotage Parliamentary practices as he declined the Chair's invite for an interaction Monday, saying he was not in Delhi.

Kharge was replying to a second letter on the disruption of parliamentary proceedings and the suspension of MPs by Vice President Dhankhar, who had alleged that the disorder by the Opposition in the House was deliberate and part of a strategy.

In his letter Saturday, Dhankhar had also said, "We need to move ahead", and invited the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha for an interaction on December 25 "or a time of your convenience" at his official residence.

The Congress president, in his reply dated December 24, said that he agrees with the Chairman that they need to move ahead but stressed that the "answer may not lie in a discussion in the Chairman's chambers, if the government is not

keen on running the House". The Congress chief said he is currently out of Delhi and it

would be his "privilege and duty" to meet the Chairman as soon as he is back Replying to the points raised by Dhankhar, Kharge alleged that

the suspensions were "executed without any application of mind" and said that as the custodian of the House, he should protect the people's right to hold its government accountable in Parliament. The opposition leader alleged

that the ruling party has "weaponised the suspension of MPs as a convenient tool to undermine democracy, sabotage Parliamentary practices and throttle the Constitution".

Kharge said the Chairman's letter "unfortunately justifies the autocratic and arrogant attitude of the Government towards Parliament.""If anything, privilege motions have also been weaponised to muzzle the voice of the Opposition. This is a deliberate design of the ruling dispensation to undermine Parliament itself. By suspending MPs, the government is effectively silencing the voice of the voters of 146 MPs altogether," Kharge said

MP: Vijayvargiya among 28 ministers sworn-in

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Dec 25: As many as 28 legislators, including former Union Minister Prahlad Patel and BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, were Monday inducted into the Madhya Pradesh cabinet led by Chief Minister Mohan Yadav.

A total of 18 MLAs took oath as cabinet ministers, while 10 others were sworn in as ministers of state including six with independent charge. The new inductees were administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Mangubhai Patel at a function held in Raj Bhavan here.

The new cabinet includes 17 fresh faces. While five among 28 ministers are women, 12 come from the OBC community, five are tribals and four others are from the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, a BJP functionary said. Four lovalists of Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also found a place in the new council of ministers.

Those who took oath as cabinet ministers are - Vijay Shah,

Kailash Vijayvargiya, Prahlad Patel, Karan Singh Verma, Rakesh Singh, Uday Pratap Singh, Sampatia Uikey, Tulsiram Silawat, Aidal Singh Kansana, Govind Singh Rajput, Vishvas Sarang, Nirmala Bhuria, Narayan Singh Kushawaha, Nagar Singh Chouhan, Pradyumna Singh Tomar, Rakesh Shukla, Chaitanya Kashyap and Inder Singh Parmar.

The ministers of state with independent charge are Krishna Gaur. Dharmendra Bhay Lodhi. Dilip Jaiswal, Gautam Tetwal, Lakhan Patel and Narayan Singh Pawar: The other MLAs who took oath as ministers of state are Narendra Shivaji Patel, Pratima Bagri, Dilip Ahirwar, and Radha Singh, the official said.

resigned to join national politics.



Five women inductees are Sampatia Uikev, Nirmala Bhuria, Krishna Gaur, Pratima Bagri and Radha Singh. Vijayvargiya, elected as MLA from Indore-1 seat in this assembly elections, had served as a minister in the BJP government from 2004 to 2016 before he





Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel and Chief Minister Mohan Yadav pose for a photo with the newly-inducted ministers of the State Cabinet after the swearing-in ceremony in Bhopal



MP Kanimozhi visits flood-affected areas in her constituency in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Dec 25: Being empathetic appears to have cost R Nandhini, a software engineer from Madurai, her life. Little did she or her family suspect that her once-school classmate would go to the ex-

tent of murdering her. Her classmate Vetrimaran, a trans-man, made her believe that he would give her a surprise on her birthday eve on Saturday and convinced her to accompany

him to a deserted place in Ponmar

in Thalambur police limits. He then blindfolded her and chained her hands and feet as a 'surprise," slashed her neck and wrists, emptied a can of petrol and torched her before fleeing from the spot, said police.

Hearing her cries, a few passers-by alerted the police. However, before she was rushed in an ambulance to the Chromepet Government hospital for treatment, Nandhini gave out the mobile number of Vetrimaran, police said.

"Initially, he came to identify Nandhini and had accompanied her to the GH but later disappeared," a police officer said. He was however, nabbed on Sunday and later remanded in judicial custody. Police investigation revealed that Pandi Maheswari, 26, studied with Nandhini at a school in Madurai. Nandhini had continued her friendship on humanitarian grounds even after Maheswari changed the name to Vetrimaran

NEWSCLICK CASE

Portal's HR head moves Delhi court



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: NewsClick's human resources department head Amit Chakravarty has moved a Delhi court seeking its permission to turn an approver in the case lodged under anti-terror law UAPA over allegations that the news portal received money to spread pro-China propaganda, court sources said.

Chakravarty moved the application before Special Judge Hardeep Kaur last week, seeking pardon in the case and claiming he had material information that he was willing to disclose to the Delhi Police, which is investigating the matter.

The judge has posted the matter before a magisterial court for recording Chakravarty's statement. According to police sources, the agency will take a decision on whether to support his application before the court after going through his statement.

The Special Cell of Delhi Police had arrested Chakravarty and news portal's founder and Editorin-Chief Prabir Purkayastha on 🔫 October 3. They are currently in judicial custody.

According to the FIR, a large amount of funds to the news portal came from China to "disrupt the sovereignty of India" and cause disaffection against the country.

Climate change casts a shadow on agriculture

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 25: Climate change has emerged as a formidable challenge to sustainable agriculture as an erratic monsoon this year hit India's farm output triggering a rise in food inflation which forced the government to take mitigation measures such as clamping down on

As kharif production fell due to the freak weather, the growth rate of the country's agriculture sector declined to a meager 1.2 per cent in the July-Sept quarter. The adverse impact has spilled into the ongoing rabi season with the total sown area declining by over three per cent with a below-normal monsoon leading to moisture deficiency in the soil and decreased

water storage in reservoirs. The acreage under wheat and pulses has declined by three per cent and eight per cent respectively which has raised concern over a fall in overall food production going ahead.

There is now a great concern within policymakers and the scientific community to evolve dynamic response strategies to deal with this complex phenomenon of climate change, especially since vast areas in some states are still dependent on rain-fed agriculture.

However, despite the current decline in rabi acreage, officials in the agriculture ministry believe that the gap can potentially be narrowed in the next few weeks. They anticipate that the overall sown areas for rabi crops might reach the average levels of the last five years (648 lakh hectares). Officials attribute the reduced acreage for pulses to late harvesting of kharif crops, like paddy, and a trend toward crop diversi-

There is some consolation in

that the acreage for oilseeds, in-

would help in reducing the country's import bill for edible oils.

Senior officials point out that the emphasis on oilseeds reflects strategic measures to enhance self-sufficiency. While challenges persist due to weather-related constraints, the agriculture ministry's positive outlook of a potential rebound is based on the resilience of the agricultural sector.

cluding mustard and rapeseeds, is higher this year by 1 lakh Balancing crop diversification hectares compared to 2022 which and addressing moisture deficit will be pivotal for securing a robust foodgrain output in the upcoming season.

mate resilient varieties of seeds Besides, 68 location specific climate resilient technologies have been developed and demonstrated for wider adoption among farming communities in districts and regions prone to extreme weather

"Since 2014, as many as 1,888 clihave been developed for crops conditions like droughts, floods,

frost and heat waves," Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Narendra Singh Tomar informed the Lok Sabha earlier this year.

India is the world's secondlargest producer of wheat, rice and sugar, but has been forced to restrict exports of these commodities to rein in rising domestic prices. The country is the world's largest rice exporter and has been ensuring food security in countries across Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

The ban on exports has, therefore, impacted the food availability in these countries as well. India's agricultural exports are expected to drop by \$4 billion to \$5 billion this year.

However, senior government officials are optimistic. Rajesh Agarwal, an additional secretary in the commerce ministry, is of the view that growth in exports of other farm commodities will offset the export deficit this year.

international



May peace come in Israel & Palestine, where war is devastating the lives of those peoples. I embrace them all, particularly the Christian communities of Gaza and the entire Holy Land

POPE FRANCIS | HEAD OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

RAMASWAMY RULES OUT JOINING TRUMP CABINET

Presidential hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy has said that he is not a "Plan B person", rejecting outright the idea or speculation of his joining the Trump cabinet in any official capacity if the former President retake the White House from Joe Biden in 2024





We're living in a there are all kinds of forces that are tearing at democracy, at I

MICHAEL BENNET UNITED STATES SENATOR

There's a recognition that my government is committed to climate action and that we're playing a positive

role, not just with our commitment to reduce our emissions by 43% by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2050, but that, importantly, we are playing a role in the region, and indeed. around the globe

ANTHONY ALBANESE | AUSTRALIAN PM





NAWAZ SHARIF FORMER PAKISTAN PM

SHORT **TAKES**

Minor quakes rattle **Hawaii's Big Island**

Hawaii: Hundreds of people reported feeling minor earthquakes of similar intensity on Hawaii's Big Island and on the Olympic Peninsula northwest of Seattle, but no damage was reported. The earthquakes Saturday afternoon in Hawaii and Sunday morning in Washington state were over 2.600 miles (4.200 kilometres) apart and apparently unrelated.

Gunmen kill 16 in Nigeria

Abuja: At least 16 persons were killed in an attack by suspected gunmen in Nigeria's central Plateau state, local officials have said. Oya James, spokesperson for Operation Safe Haven, a military-led multi-security taskforce in Plateau, told reporters in Jos, the state capital, Sunday that the attack occurred in Mushu, a village in the Bokkos local government area, Xinhua News Agency reported. The villagers were asleep when the gunmen entered the neighborhood, shooting indiscriminately and destroying property, James said.

Five killed in **Brazil plane crash**

Rio De Janeiro: Five people, including a minor, died Saturday when a plane crashed in a residential area in the Brazilian state of Sao Paulo, local media reported. The firefighters did not reveal whether all the victims were traveling on the plane, which was "small in size." said the reports, Xinhua News Agency reported. The plane was a single-engine RV-10 with seating for a pilot and three passengers.

e're all familiar with

the jolly, white-haired

and bearded over-

weight man who sneaks down

chimneys on Christmas Eve de-

livering presents to children.

But where did this come from?

With roots in Christianity, the

origins of the world's most

beloved gift-giver transcend time,

It all starts with St Nicholas,

a man who lived in the fourth cen-

tury. No credible historical

culture and religion.

St Nicholas

Serbia police detain 38 people as Oppn plans more protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Belgrade, Dec 25: Serbian police said Monday they have detained at least 38 people who took part in a protest against widespread reported irregularities during a recent general ballot that declared the governing populists as winners of the parliamentary and local councils' elections.

Opposition group Serbia Against Violence has been staging protests since the December 17 elections, saying there has been election fraud, particularly in the capital, Belgrade. Some politicians began a hunger strike.

On Sunday evening, protesters tried to enter Belgrade's city council, breaking windows, before riot police pushed them back using tear gas, pepper spray and batons

Senior police official Ivica Ivkovic told reporters that those detained were facing charges of inciting violent change of constitutional order — in reference to attempting to overthrow the government and violent behaviour.

Several hundred university students and other citizens Monday blocked traffic at a key Belgrade street that hosts government headquarters, braving a police warning against the blockades of roads and bridges in the capital.



Women dressed in national suits sing carol as they celebrate Christmas in the village of Pirogovo outside Kyiv, Ukraine

Maersk prepares to resume operations in Red Sea

Frankfurt, Dec 25: Shipping firm Maersk says that it's preparing to allow vessels to resume sailing through the Red Sea, thanks to the start of a US-led multinational naval operation to protect shipping from attacks by Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Houthi attacks have led to a

major disruption of shipping through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, one of the most important arteries for trade in oil, natural gas, grain and consumer goods between Europe and Asia. Maersk said in a statement Sunday that "we have received confirmation that the previously announced multi-national security initiative Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG) has now been set up and deployed to allow maritime commerce to pass through the Red Sea-Gulf of Aden and once again return to using the Suez Canal as a gateway between Asia and Europe. "The company said it was working on plans for the first vessels

to make the journey "and for this to happen as soon as operationally possible." The Houthis are Iranian-backed rebels who seized Yemen's capital, Sanaa, in 2014, launching a grinding war against a Saudi-led coalition seeking to restore the government. The Houthis have sporadically targeted ships in the region, but the attacks have increased since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Navalny located in Russia penal colony

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Moscow. Dec 25: Associates of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Monday that he has been located at a prison colony above the Arctic Circle nearly three weeks after contact with him was lost.

Navalny, the most prominent foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin, is serving a 19year sentence on charges of extremism. He had been imprisoned in the Vladimir region of central Russia, about 230 kilometers (140 miles) east of Moscow, but his lawyers said they had not been able to reach him since December 6.

His spokesperson, Kira Yarmysh, said he was located in a prison colony in the town of Kharp, in the Yamalo-Nenets region about 1,900 kilometers (1,200 miles) northeast of Moscow. Navalny is "fine — at least as much as possible after such a long stage" and a lawyer visited him, Yarmysh told The Associated Press. Navalny has been behind bars in Russia since January 202.



UKRAINE DOWNS 28 RUSSIAN DRONES

Russian and Ukrainian military officials both reported Sunday, downing enemy drones in different areas of the 1,000-km-long (621-mile) front of their 22-month-old war

AGENCIES

Kviv. Dec 25: Ukraine's air force Monday reported that it shot down two Russian fighter jets during the night along with two cruise missiles and 28 Shahedtype drones.

The report said the attacks were aimed at southern and central regions of Ukraine, but that no casualties were immediately known. It said that 31 drones were launched in all, but details of what the three that weren't intercepted may have struck weren't given.

A summary from the Ukrainian presidential office said that one civilian was killed and at least four wounded in Russian attacks over the previous 24 hours. The death occurred in the town of Chornobaivka in the Kherson region, which is partly under Russian control and experiences daily fighting.

Ukraine observed Christmas Monday, the first time the country has officially marked the holiday December 25 rather than the January 7 date followed by some Orthodox countries, in-

cluding Russia. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed legislation in July to move the public holiday's date. Ukraine is predominantly Orthodox Christian, but

sources can prove the facts of

his life, but according to tradition,

St Nicholas of Myra, later known

as St Nicholas of Bari, lived dur-

ing the reign of Emperor

was born in Patara, a city in an-

cient Lycia in Asia Minor, part

of what is now Turkey.

Nicholas, who would later be-

come the bishop of Myra, was

known for his profound

Christian faith and extraordi-

According to tradition, he

Constantine the Great.

nary compassion.



the faith is divided between two churches, one of which had long affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which didn't recognize the authority of the Russian church and had been regarded as schismatic, was granted full recognition in 2018 by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Orthodoxy's top authority. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which was a branch of the Russian church, announced in 2022 after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war that it was breaking ties with Moscow and considered itself autonomous. However, its parishes continue to follow the same liturgical calendar as the Russian church and will observe Christmas January 7

Fire breaks out on Russian nuclear ship

Moscow: Russia's emergencies ministry said a fire broke out on a nuclear-powered container ship and icebreaker in the northern port of Murmansk but was quickly extinguished. The ministry said in statements on Telegram that the fire occurred late Sunday in a cabin of the Sevmorput vessel and spread to about 30 square meters (300 square feet). The fire was put out about an hour after the initial report and there were no injuries, it added. The statement did not disclose what caused the fire or how close it was to the ship's reactor. The 260-meter (830foot) Seymorput is the only nuclear cargo ship in service.

SNIPPETS

China vows consular support for detained Vivo employees in India

Beijing: China Monday said it will provide consular protection and assistance to the arrested employees working for China's smartphone maker Vivo in India and expressed its firm backing to the Chinese businesses in protecting their lawful rights and interests. The Enforcement Directorate last week arrested three vivo-India executives in connection with its money laundering probe against the Chinese smartphone maker and some others. Asked for her reaction to the arrests, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here Monday that China is closely following the issue. "The Chinese government firmly supports Chinese businesses in safeguarding their lawful rights and interests," she said.

China earthquake: Toll rises to 149

Beijing: The death toll from the 6.2-magnitude earthquake that jolted northwest China earlier this week has risen to 149 with two people still missing. The quake, the worst in nine years in the region, struck

The Ouake hit Jishishan County, Gansu Province, and Minhe County in the neighbouring Qinghai Province last Saturday causing heavy death and destruction. The death toll in Qinghai Province has risen to 32 while two people are still missing, the Qinghai Emergency Management Department said on Monday. Search for the two missing people was continuing, the department said.

midnight December 18 at a depth of 10 kilometres.

Gunfire erupts at Colorado mall

Colorado Springs: A man was fatally shot and three people were hurt as gunfire rang out at a shopping center in Colorado on Christmas Eve, police said Sunday. A fight broke out between two groups of people in the afternoon at the Citadel Mall in Colorado Springs and officers received a report of gunshots and responded, the Colorado Springs Police Department said in a series of posts on the social media platform X. One adult male was dead at the scene with a gunshot wound, and two more, each of whom had been shot at least once, were taken to hospitals in serious condition, police said.

Jaishankar in Russia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, Dec 25: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar Monday arrived in Moscow a five-day visit to Russia during which he will hold talks with his counterpart and discuss various bilateral and global

"Arrived in Moscow. Look forward to my engagements,' Jaishankar said in a post on X. During his visit, he will also

travel to St. Petersburg. "The time-tested India-Russia partnership has remained stable and resilient and continues to be characterized by the spirit of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi

PAK ELECTIONS

Hafiz Saeed-backed party fields candidates



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lahore, Dec 25: A new political front organisation of the 26/11 terror attacks mastermind Hafiz Saeed has fielded candidates for most of the national and provincial assembly constituencies across Pakistan for the February 8 general elections.

Saeed, the founder of Lashkare-Taiba (LeT), has been in jail since 2019 after being convicted for several years in multiple terror finance cases along with some other leaders of the banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD)

The Pakistan Markazi Muslim League (PMML) party - set up by Saeed - says it is a political party. The electoral symbol for the PMML is 'chair'. In a video message, PMML President Khalid Masood Sindhu said that his party is contesting on most of the national and provincial assem-

"We want to come to power not for corruption but to serve the people and make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state," he said.

Sindhu is a candidate for NA-130 Lahore, from which Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is also contesting. Saeed's son Talha Saeed is contesting from Lahore's

When contacted, Sindhu denied his party's link with Saeed's outfit. "The PMML has no backing of Hafiz Saeed," he claimed Monday.

In 2018, the Milli Muslim League (MML) was the political face of JuD. It had fielded candidates on most seats, especially in Punjab province but failed to win a single seat. For the 2024 polls, the PMML has been formed because of a ban on the MML

The US has placed a 70 million bounty on Saeed, a \$10 million bounty on Saeed, a UN-designated terrorist. Saeed-led JuD is the front organisation for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is responsible for carrying out the 2008-Mumbai attack that killed 166 people, including six Americans.

The origins of Santa Claus

St Nicholas Day

Across Europe, the legacy of St Nicholas's charity and kindness sparked a variety of traditions, with December 6 becoming his feast day

In France, particularly in regions such as Alsace and Lorraine, children would leave their shoes out for St Nicholas, hoping to find them filled with chocolates and gifts the next morning.

This tradition was accompanied by parades in which a donkey would pass through town streets, laden with baskets of biscuits and sweets for the children. In Central Europe, particularly in Alpine regions, St Nicholas Day tradition merged gradually with unique local customs when the non-Christian population adopted Christianity as their religion.

The transformation into

The metamorphosis of St Nicholas into Santa Claus was a gradual process influenced by cultural and religious shifts. In Germany and the

Netherlands in the course of the 17th century, the practice of giftgiving in the name of St Nicholas began to take root. The Dutch called him "Sinterklaas", a term that would eventually evolve into the English colloquial "Santa Claus". This transformation first occurred in Germany and later spread to other European countries. The tradition of St Nicholas was brought to North America in the 17th century. By the 19th century, various iterations of St Nicholas were emerging in English-speaking communities across the world.

The legacy of St Nicholas and

Through centuries of transformation, the core values of St Nicholas - generosity, compassion, and the joy of giving – have remained intact in the figure of Santa Claus. He has gone from being a revered Christian saint to a beloved secular icon.

This evolution reflects the dynamic interplay of religious tradition and popular folklore. English-speaking Santa Claus, with his North Pole workshop, flying reindeer, and elves, may seem a far cry from the historical bishop of Myra. Yet he continues to embody the spirit of giving that characterised St Nicholas.

Today, thanks to global marketing and commercialisation, Santa Claus transcends religious and cultural boundaries.

THE CONVERSATION

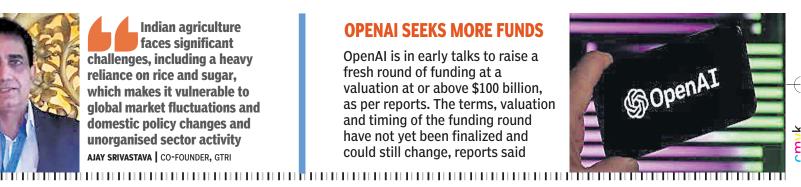
business



Indian agriculture faces significant challenges, including a heavy reliance on rice and sugar, which makes it vulnerable to global market fluctuations and domestic policy changes and unorganised sector activity AJAY SRIVASTAVA | CO-FOUNDER, GTRI

OPENAI SEEKS MORE FUNDS

OpenAI is in early talks to raise a fresh round of funding at a valuation at or above \$100 billion, as per reports. The terms, valuation and timing of the funding round have not yet been finalized and could still change, reports said





Departmental production is cornerstone of the company. Quality coal supply to prime concern of NCL

BHOLA SINGH CMD, NCL

We expect the demand situation to improve as we enter the next financial year. We expect FMCG players to increase the pace of innovation and premiumisation and also focus on significant investment behind expanding the quality of rural

SAUGATA GUPTA | MD AND CEO, MARICO

I think the last 18 months have been very good on the consumer credit side but you are beginning to see green shoots even in the investment cycle

distribution



SHANTI EKAMBARAM WHOLE-TIME DIRECTOR, KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK

SHORT TAKES

Al push: Paytm axes hundreds

New Delhi: Fintech leader Paytm has laid off several hundred employees from its operations, sales and engineering team, according to reports. A company spokesperson did not divulge the number of people affected, but said the company is "transforming our operations with AIpowered automation to drive efficiency, eliminating repetitive tasks and roles to drive efficiency across growth and costs, resulting in a slight reduction in our workforce in operations and marketing". "We will be able to save 10-15 per cent in employee costs as AI has delivered more than we expected it to. Additionally, we constantly evaluate cases of non-performance throughout the year," a Paytm spokesperson

Adani Green inks pact with SECI

New Delhi: Adani Green Energy (AGEL) Monday said it has signed a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) to supply 1,799 MW of solar power. With the signing of this balance PPA. AGEL has completed the power offtake tie-up for the entire 8,000 MW manufacturing-linked solar tender awarded to it by the SECI in June 2020, a company statement said. According to the statement, AGEL has announced the execution of a PPA with the SECI to supply 1.799 MW of solar power, "We are glad to conclude the largest green PPA and enable a sustainable energy landscape. Aligned to India's target of 500 GW non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030, Adani Green is determined to deliver in excess of 45 GW renewable energy, a five-fold increase from our current operating portfolio," Amit Singh, CEO, AGEL, said in the statement.

Bose pumps in \$10mn in Noise

New Delhi: Bose, a global pioneer in consumer electronics and audio, has invested \$10 million in homegrown consumer electronics brand Noise. taking its valuation to nearly \$426 million. Noise's firstever funding was part of the Series A round, where it allowed 2,400 Series A preference shares to Bose, according to its regulatory filings. With this strategic investment, Bose will have 2.17 per cent stake in the company, according to reports. Noise's first-ever funding is a significant milestone for India's largest profitable D2C business.

INCRED: INDIA'S 2ND UNICORN OF 2023

The birth of a new unicorn in the country comes as funding in India's tech startup ecosystem in 2023 has been the lowest in the last five years

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 25: Ending the drought, fintech lender InCred has become India's second unicorn this year after raising \$60 million from new and existing investors, the media reported

According to an Entrackr report, InCred Wealth, the wealth management subsidiary of InCred, led the funding round with investing \$36.76 million, followed by MEMG Family Office at \$9 million.

Ravi Pillai, Chairman at RP Group of Companies, and Ram Nayak, Co-Head of Deutsche Bank, invested \$5.4 million and \$1.2 million, respectively, according to the report.

InCred Special Opportunities Fund VCC, Singapore-registered entity of InCred, Varanium Capital Advisors and NABS

Disinvestment target:

India's distant dream

DISINVESTMENT FETCHES OVER ₹4.20 LAKH CR IN 10 YEARS

BUT TARGET TO BE MISSED AGAIN IN FY24



Vriddhii also participated in the round. With this funding, InCred is now valued at \$1.03 billion.

The firm last raised \$68 million in a debt funding round from public sector banks and public financial institutions. InCred logged 77.4 per cent growth in operating scale to

In the current

fiscal, out of

the budgeted

₹51,000 crore,

about 20 per

₹10,049 crore

has been

collected

through

stake sales

via IPO and

amount of

pared to ₹488 crore in FY22.

Zomato last year entered into a strategic partnership with fintech lender InCred for "hasslefree" credit facilities.

Apart from its SME loans which comprises working capital loans, term loans, and channel finance, the product portfolio of InCred also includes personal loans -- wedding loans, medical loans, and travel loans -- and education loans.

The birth of a new unicorn in the country comes as funding in India's tech startup ecosystem

\$7 billion in total funding until December 5, a significant decline of 72 per cent, compared to \$25 billion in the previous year.

The funding declined across all stages, with late-stage funding dropping over 73 per cent, followed by early-stage funding (70 per cent) and seed-stage funding (60 per cent), according to leading global market intelligence platform Tracxn.

Zepto in August said it has raised \$200 million in a Series E round of funding at a valuation of \$1.4 billion, making the online

Disney, Reliance sign non-binding pact for media ops merger



Bangalore, Dec 25: Reliance Industries, India's most valuable company, and Walt Disney signed a non-binding term sheet to merge their Indian media operations, the Economic Times reported Monday, citing sources it did not name.

Under the merger Reliance would own 51% through a combination of shares and cash, with Disney holding the remaining 49%, giving more control to Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance group, the newspaper said.

The deal is likely to be completed by February, with Reliance aiming to finish the process by the end of January, subject to regulatory approvals, it said.

A merger would create one of India's biggest entertainment empires, competing with television interests such as Zee Entertainment and Sony, and streaming giants including Netflix and Amazon Prime.

Reliance runs many TV channels and the JioCinema streaming app through its media and entertainment unit Viacom18. Ambani has been locked in a fierce battle with Disney, offering free streaming of the Indian Premier League cricket tournament, whose digital rights were once with Disney in India.

This has sparked a user exodus from Disney's streaming app Hotstar in recent quarters. Since early this year, Disney has been exploring a sale or joint venture partnership for its India business, which includes many TV channels.

in 2023 has been the lowest in the grocery company India's first last five years. The year received First ₹ payment for oil to UAE

INDIA IN JULY SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE UAE FOR RUPEE SETTLEMENT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: India's firstever payment in rupees for crude oil purchased from the UAE is helping the world's third largest energy consumer push for taking the local currency global, as it looks for similar deals with other suppliers, officials said, adding internationalisation is a process and there are no tar-

With the nation more than 85 per cent dependent on imports for meeting its oil needs, India has been pursuing a threepronged strategy of buying from the cheapest available source. diversifying sources of supply and not breaching any international obligation like the price cap in case of Russian oil.

While the strategy helped save billions of dollars, when it ramped up imports of Russian oil that was shunned by some in West post Ukraine war, it is looking to settle trade in rupees instead of dollars in a bid to cut transaction costs by eliminating dollar conversions.

India in July signed an agreement with the UAE for rupee settlement and soon after Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) made payments for purchase of a million barrels of crude oil from Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) in Indian rupees

Some of the Russian oil imports too have been settled in

Officials said the default payment currency for import of crude oil has been the US dollar for several decades and the currency traditionally has liquidity as well as lower hedging cost.

But to boost the rupee's role in cross-border payments, the Reserve Bank of India allowed more than a dozen banks to settle trades in rupees with 18 coun-

tries since last year. Since then, India has been encouraging big oil exporters such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia to accept the Indian currency for trade settlements, officials said. adding the first success happened in August this year when IOC made the rupee payment to



ADNOC.

More such deals may happen in future, they said, insisting there was no target as internationalisation is a process and cannot happen overnight. "We have to be mindful that it

(rupee settlement) does not lead to increase in cost and is in no way detrimental to the trade," an official said.

"Settling a trade in rupee where the amount is not big does not pose much problem but when you have each shipload of crude oil costing millions of dollars, there are issues." India, they said, is navigating the situation keeping overarching national interest in mind.

The internationalization of the rupee will help reduce dollar demand and make the Indian economy less vulnerable to global currency shocks.

A parliamentary standing committee report, tabled in Parliament last week, stated that there were not many takers for Indian rupee.

Officials said that situation as true for 2022-23 fiscal and there has been a rupee trade this year.

"During FY 2022-23, no crude oil imports by oil PSUs were settled in Indian rupee. Crude oil suppliers (including UAE's ADNOC) continue to express their concern on the repatriation of funds in the preferred currency and also highlighted high transactional costs associated with conversion of funds along with exchange fluctuation risks.

the ministry told the panel. The ministry, whose subimissions are part of the committee's report which was tabled in Parliament last week, said India Oil Corporation (IOC) has informed that it incurred high transaction costs as crude oil suppliers pass on the additional

SoftBank sells shares worth \$310mn in FirstCry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Japanese conglomerate SoftBank has sold shares worth \$310 million in omnichannel retailer FirstCrv. which is likely to file a draft paper for IPO this week, sources said Monday.

"SoftBank recently sold shares worth ₹630 crore in FirstCry. It was picked up by a few high net worth individuals. With this sale, SoftBank has realised \$310 million from two rounds of stake sale in FirstCry," a source told PTI. The source said that the sale \$3.5-3.75 billion.

SoftBank had invested \$400 million in FirstCrv at an enterprise valuation of \$900 million. Another source said that SoftBank is still left with shares valued in the range of \$800-900 million which it will sell later.

"SoftBank is looking to make around \$1.3 billion from the investment made in FirstCry," the

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: With general elections on the horizon, the government's privatisation bandwagon has almost but stalled as a government wary of being accused of selling family silver opts for minority stake sales on stock exchanges over outright privatisation. The result -- the disinvestment target for current fiscal year is again likely to be missed. Big ticket privatisation plans such as that of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) and CONCOR are already

> feel meaningful privatisation can happen only after April/May general elections. In the current fiscal, out of the budgeted amount of ₹51,000 crore, about 20 per cent or ₹10,049 crore has been collected through

on the backburner and analysts

minority stake sales via IPO (Initial Public Offering) and OFS (Offer For Sale). Strategic sale of a host of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs), including SCI, NMDC

Steel Ltd, BEML, HLL Lifecare and IDBI Bank, are in the pipeline for completion in the current fiscal. However, with the process of

due diligence and demerger of core and non-core assets yet to be completed with respect to most of the CPSEs, there has been a delay in inviting financial

In the case of IDBI Bank, where the government had received multiple EoIs (Expressions of Interest) back in January 2023, the bidders are yet to get security and 'fit & proper' clearance from the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), respectively.

Hence the privatisation of all the CPSEs in the list and IDBI Bank are likely to spill over into the next financial year.



The disinvestment trend

has recently

experienced a

deceleration due to various

factors, including extended

regulatory processes, global

economic volatility, political

opposition to privatisation in

certain sectors and shifting

Public Asset Management) cur-

been invited by DIPAM. "Strategic disinvestment decisions are being governed by political necessities. With elections round the corner, we do not expect any movement on the strategic sale side," a mar-

General elections in India are

processed by DIPAM stment and

There are three more --Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), Container Corporation of India (CONCOR) and subsidiaries of AI Asset Holding Ltd(AIAHL), the entity holding the former subsidiaries of the now-privatised Air India, for which 'in principle' approval of the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs (CCEA) is already in place but EoIs have not

ket expert said.

(NINL), which was bought by Tata Steel Long Products (PSLP) in 2022 for ₹12.100 crore, RINL privatisation still remains a challenge as employees are demand that it be given to a pub-

ployee unions.

After the successful privati sation of the then loss-making Air India to Tata group and NINL to TSLP in 2022, the government was hopeful of going ahead with more CPSE divestments and reaching a quick conclusion. However, 2023 has no good

lic sector company.

due in April-May next year.

One of the challenges before

the government with regard to

strategic sale of Rashtriya Ispat

Nigam Ltd (RINL) or Vizag Steel

is vehement opposition by em-

has been narrating the turn-

around success story of

Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd

Although the government

news on the strategic sale front. The difficulties involved in the strategic sale process, with the involvement of multiple stakeholders, makes the task at hand a long drawn affair. Out of the around ₹4.20 lakh

crore raised in the last 10 years from disinvestments, ₹3.15 lakh crore was realised from minority stake sales and ₹69,412 crore came from strategic transactions in 10 CPSEs -- HPCL, REC. DCIL, HSCC, NPCC, NEEPCO, THDC, Kamarajar Port, Air India

Small stocks lead '23 bull run; give big returns to investors

AFTER A TURBULENT START, THE MARKET **GOT ITS MOJO BACK DURING THE FINAL PART OF THE YEAR**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Smaller stocks have emerged as Dalal Street's favourites in 2023 that has turned out to be a "great year' for equities, rewarding investors with big gains, driven by optimism over the country's macroeconomic fundamentals and heavy retail investors participation.

Experts said equity markets are experiencing a prolonged bull run and it is during this time that the midcap and smallcap segments tend to outshine

their larger counterparts. Till December 22 this year, the BSE smallcap gauge has jumped 13,074.96 points or 45.20 per cent

while the midcap index has surged 10,568.18 points or 41.74 per cent. In comparison, the BSE 30-

share benchmark Sensex has

rallied 10,266.22 points or 16.87 per cent during this period. The smallcap index scaled its all-time high of 42,648.86 points December 20 this year and the midcap gauge also reached its

The BSE benchmark also hit its lifetime high of 71,913.07 points on December 20.

on the same day.

record peak of 36,483.16 points

The midcap index tracks companies with a market value that is on an average one-fifth of blue chips while smallcap firms are almost a tenth of that universe.

Analysts attributed better domestic macroeconomic fundamentals and the confidence of retail investors as the major drivers for the exuberance in equity markets this year.

'When the overall economy becomes robust, small and mid-



cap segments tend to do well," Mukesh Kochar, National Head

of Wealth at AUM Capital, said. Kochar termed 2023 as a "great year" as far as the equity market is concerned. "We have seen a new high with broad-based

participation," he said. In all bull runs, there has al-

ways have a new set of performers and this time PSU, defense and railways emerged as the greatest performers, he said, adding there have been strong **Domestic Institutional Investors** (DIIs) and retail money in a market where Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs)

were consistently selling.

"Despite FII selling, markets have created a new history with domestic liquidity. Overall a wonderful year for equity participants," Kochar added.

But experts believe that smaller stocks may undergo corrections in the near term after a hefty rally in 2023.

The smallcap and midcap indices hit their 52-week lows on March 28 this year. The BSE smallcap gauge fell to its oneyear low of 26,120.32 points on March 28 while the midcap index hit its 52-week low of 23,356.61 points on the same day.

The BSE bellwether index hit its one-year low of 57,084.91 points on March 20 this year.

Investors battled a slew of negative news from turmoil in large global banks to macroeconomic concerns.

Selling by foreign investors in September and the outflow continuing in the succeeding month, elevated US interest rates and conflict in the Middle East played havoc in the markets in the month of October, where the BSE benchmark fell nearly 3 per

But markets bounced back in the months of November and December.

The total investment by Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) surpassed ₹1.62 lakh crore so far this year. FPIs have poured in over ₹57,300 crore into the Indian equity markets so far this month

In 2022, the BSE midcap index climbed 344.42 points or 1.37 per cent while the smallcap gauge declined 530.97 points or 1.80 per cent.The BSE barometer had ended 2022 with an annual gain of 4.44 per cent or 2,586.92 points.

In 2021, the midcap index gained 7,028.65 points or 39.17 per cent while the smallcap index zoomed 11,359.65 points or 62.76 per cent. In comparison, the Sensex jumped 10,502.49 points or 21.99 per cent that year.

MISSION 'SAFARI SUPREMACY'

ROHIT & CO GEAR UP FOR A BIG CHALLENGE AS THEY LOOK FOR MAIDEN TEST SERIES WIN IN SOUTH AFRICA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Centurion, Dec 25: He endured the heartbreak of a lifetime 36 evenings back but Rohit Sharma will give his all to erase the memories of a World Cup final defeat as he trains his eyes on ending India's 31-vear wait for a Test series win on South African soil.

The two-match Test rubber, starting here on the Boxing Day, will be India's ninth away series in the Rainbow Nation since 1992, and captain Rohit will have an onerous task of traversing a difficult terrain in order to conquer what has always been dubbed the team's 'final frontier'.

However, for the action to start at Supersport Park, the heavy rains predicted on the first two days need to subside.

The Centurion track offers variable bounce and is one of the fastest in the region. And that makes up for a compelling contest between bat and ball in relatively cooler and windy con-

it can jag around a bit. In the last 50 over World Cup, skipper Rohit, at best would have emulated Kapil Dev and MS Dhoni, but if he and his men manage to pull off a coup in this country, he would stand first among the equals.

ditions in an open ground where

Mohammed Azharuddin (1992) failed, so did Sachin Tendulkar (1996) and Sourav Ganguly (2001). Rahul Dravid (2006-07), Dhoni (2010-11 and 2013-14) won Test matches, and so did Virat Kohli (2018-19 and 2021-22) but none of them could win the elusive series in South Africa.

So Rohit will have a job at hand and a win might just be the much-needed soothing balm required to heal the World Cup wounds even though the scars



Rohit Sharma (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul (wk), Shreyas Iyer, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Prasidh Krishna, KS Bharat (wk) & Abhimanyu Easwaran (2nd Test)

Temba Bavuma (C), Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Dean Elgar, Keegan Petersen, Kyle Verreynne (wk), Tristan Stubbs (wk), Nandre Burger, Marco Jansen, Wiaan Mulder, Gerald Coetzee, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi & David Bedingham

will remain.

For the golden generation of Indian cricketers, this is also their last African Safari and a chance to conquest what no other team could on eight previous tours.

In Temba Bavuma's South Africa, they have a team that has a crack fast bowling attack, which could make some of the young Indian batters look like cats on hot tin roof.

For Yashasvi Jaiswal, it will be the first big test against a quality attack comprising Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Marco Jansen and Gerald Coetzee. There will be way more bounce than what he got in the Caribbean, and the variable nature of it will ask him probing questions.

Similarly, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer, who have proven their mettle on sub-continental pitches, need to up their game in more challenging batting conditions. Iyer, especially, with his well-documented weakness against the short ball, will have to churn

out something really special. Coach Rahul Dravid doesn't

want Jaiswal and Gill to change their style but wants them to develop game awareness and play as per the need of the hour.

India's performance will depend on three factors: how well the skipper executes his hook and pull shots, for how much time Virat Kohli decides to leave balls outside the off-stump, and how well the team covers up Mohammed Shami's absence. The skiddy Mukesh Kumar looked better at the nets but the extra bounce available makes a case for Prasidh Krishna.

Bavuma, the retiring Dean Elgar, the stylish Aiden Markram, the exciting Tony de Zorzi, and the dogged Keegan Petersen constitute a good batting unit that can make Indian bowlers toil hard.

KL Rahul donning the big gloves is another aspect of this game. The team management handing over keeping responsibilities to Rahul can be viewed from two different prisms.

The positive one would be the faith in his ability as a glovesman



in 50-over cricket and hoping that he can do it for 90 overs in

The not-so-positive aspect will be the sheer desperation not to lose that extra batter in Iyer and also not looking at the bigger picture that Rahul could find it extremely difficult to stand up to Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja in a month's time against England at home,

from his mental health break. It will be another away Test

match which Ashwin might have to miss because of conditions and combinations. At Supersport Park, it normally takes three and half to four days to achieve results and if the toss happens on the second day, after a washout on opening day, batting first will surely be a very difficult proposition.

Want to achieve what nobody has done: Sharma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Centurion, Dec 25: India captain Rohit Sharma Monday said, as a leader, he wants his team to "achieve" what others Indian sides in the past have failed to do in South Africa.

Since their first Test series in South Africa in 1992, India have never achieved success there. India will play South Africa in the first of the two Tests starting here Tuesday. "Want to achieve what nobody has achieved in this part of the world," Rohit said during the pre-match press conference.

Rohit also did not want to speak about his cricketing future, just saying that he wants to enjoy the game. "I want to play whatever cricket is there in front of me," he said without elaborating his plans.

KL Rahul is expected to keep wickets in the first Test but the skipper said it will be up to the wicketkeeper-batter to decide how long he wants to don the gloves in the five-day format. "I am not sure how long KL Rahul would want to keep wickets but he is keen as of now," said Rohit.

India's World Cup hero, Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of the series with an ankle injury and Rohit termed the speedster's absence as a big loss. "Shami will be a big miss for what he has done for us over the years. Someone will fill up (the) hole but it won't be easy," he said.

India: 421 (Johannesburg, December 2013) South Africa: 500 (Durban, December 2013) **LOWEST TOTAL (in last decade)**

INDIA: 135 SOUTH AFRICA: 130

INDIA: VIRAT KOHLI (719 runs; 7 matches) **SOUTH AFRICA: DEAN ELGAR** (442 runs, 6 matches)

INDIA: JASPRIT BUMRAH SOUTH AFRICA: KAGISO RABADA (35 wickets; 6 matches)

Giants hand Warriors second straight loss at Ultimate Kho Kho

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cuttack, Dec 25: Gujarat Giants produced a complete performance in attack and defence as they defeated Rajasthan Warriors 41-30 to begin their Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 campaign on a winning note here Monday.

This was the Warriors' second straight defeat in this edition after their 27-35 loss against the hosts and defending champions Odisha Juggernauts on the opening day, Sunday.

P Narasayya contributed to the Giants' win with eight points while Sanket Kadam and Suyash Gargate secured six points each Shubham Thorat, Abhinandan Patil and Akshay Bhangare defended brilliantly for more than 6.53 minutes to earn crucial dream run bonus points for the winning team.

Gujarat Giants will now clash with Mumbai Khiladis Tuesday while the title holders Odisha Juggernauts will face Chennai Quick Guns in their second match of the season

FIFA threatens to suspend Brazil India women's team for Oz ODIs sees new faces

Rio de Janeiro, Dec 25: FIFA its national teams and clubs from international competitions if an intervention by its football body leads to the election of a new president in January.

FIFA said in a letter to a Brazilian football executive that the country's football body CBF could face suspension if it does not heed its call to wait and instead holds a swift election to replace Ednaldo Rodrigues as president regardless. The document was obtained by this news

A Rio de Janeiro court removed Rodrigues and all his appointees at CBF from office December 7 due to irregularities in his election last year. Brazil's two highest courts upheld that ruling last week.

Football's governing body FIFA historically rejects government and third-party interference in its member associations, which ultimately could leave five-time World Cup win-



ners Brazil out of major com-

petitions until the crisis is solved. The Rio court ruling also named Jose Perdiz, the head of Brazil's top sports court, as an intervener to organize new elections for the presidency within 30 working days. FIFA said in previous letters to CBF it considers the intervention to be undue.

Sunday's letter was signed by FIFA's Kenny Jean-Marie, its chief members' association officer, and CONMEBOL's deputy secretary-general, Monserrat Jimenez Garcia. FIFA and South

American football body CON-MEBOL also said in the letter they will form a commission to discuss the matter in Brazil January 8.

"FIFA and CONMEBOL would like to strongly emphasize that, until such mission takes place, no decision affecting CBF, including any elections or call for elections, shall be taken. Should this not be respected, FIFA will have no other option but to submit the matter to its relevant decision-making body for consideration and decision, which sion," the letter said. "For the sake of good order, we

would also like to underline that should CBF be eventually suspended by the relevant FIFA body, it would lose all of its membership rights with immediate effect and until the suspension is lifted by FIFA.

"This would also mean that CBF representative and clubs teams would no longer be entitled to take part in any international competition while it is suspended," it added.

The document also says that any irregular interference in its member associations "can lead to sanctions as provided for in the FIFA Statutes, including a suspension, and this even if the third-party influence was/is not the fault of the member association concerned.

Perdiz said in a statement he sees FIFA's letter "as a positive sign." He also added he will "call for the elections within the established deadline, with the transparency and integrity that



Harmanpreet Kaur (R) and Smriti Mandhana have been named captain and vice-captain, respectively, for the series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque and Titas Sadhu were Monday included for the first time in the Indian women's ODI squad for the upcoming limited overs assignment against Australia.

The Indian women's team will play in three One-day Internationals and as many T20Is against the visiting Australian team from December 28 with the first ODI at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

A crafty left-arm-spinner, the Patiala-born Kashyap, 20, was earlier called up for the T20I series against England but did not get a game. Shreyanka earned her maiden ODI call-up after she made her debut in the T20I series against England earlier this month.

In three matches against Heather Knight's women, Shreyanka picked up five wickets and won the Player of the Match award in the third and final T20I of the series.

Kashyap was part of India's victorious women's Under-19 World Cup winning squad in February, and so was Titas Sadhu. Saika Ishaque was one of the top bowlers for the Mumbai franchise in the inaugural

Women's Premier League.

The three-match ODI series will be played at the Wankhede Stadium and will start December 28. The next two matches will be played December 30 and January 2. The action will then

Mumbai which will host the three T20Is January 5, 7 and 9. Harmanpreet Kaur remains the captain of both the teams with Smriti Mandhana being her deputy. India won the one-off women's Test against Australia

shift to DY Patil Stadium in Navi

by eight wickets in Mumbai **THE SQUADS**

FOR ODIs: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Sneh Rana, Harleen Deol.

FOR T20Is: Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Yastika Bhatia (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Mannat Kashyap, Saika Ishaque, Renuka Singh Thakur, Titas Sadhu, Pooja Vastrakar, Kanika (Ahuja, Minnu Mani.

Jyoti eyes spot in India's Olympic Qualifiers squad by Hockey India (HI).

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Boosted by her experience on Valencia tour. young forward Jyoti Chhatri is now eyeing a place in the Indian women's hockey team for next year's FIH Olympics Qualifiers in Ranchi.

The 19-year-old from Rourkela was part of the Indian team at the recently-concluded 5 Nations Tournament in Valencia. She has been a key figure in the Junior team setup for the past year and played across all six games for India at the Junior World Cup, scoring a goal during the thrilling 3-3 (3-2 SO) win over New Zealand

She also played a prominent role during India's gold medal-winning performance at the Women's



Junior Asia Cup this year. "The preparatory tour in Valencia has boosted my confidence as an individual and I am hopeful to get

a chance to be a part of the Indian squad for the FIH Hockey Olympics Qualifiers Ranchi 2024, she said in a press release issued

This past year has really helped

me develop as a player and I am eager to grab on to every opportunity that comes my way. The senior players, coaches, and support staff have been thoroughly supportive and have helped me a lot whenever needed. It is a dream for every player to represent India at the Olympics, and our journey to Paris as a team will hopefully begin in January.'

While Jyoti made her senior team debut at the 4 Nations Invitational Women's Tournament in Barcelona earlier this year against England, the 5 Nations Tournament in Valencia was another good chance for her to compete against some of the top teams - Ireland, Germany, Spain, and Belgium.

Jyoti believes her experience in Valencia has helped her grow as a player: "I was elated to be considered for the squad for the Valencia tour. It is always a great opportunity to learn when you get to train alongside the senior team," she said.

"Having competitive matches against such strong oppositions also helped me understand the tenacity and mental strength needed to fight to win at the highest levels.'

India will be competing in the Olympics Qualifiers in Ranchi, aiming to secure a spot in the Paris Games. India will begin the campaign against the USA January 13 before facing New Zealand January 14. Their last Pool B clash will be against Italy January 16.

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