

Ananya's inspiration

Ananya Panday talks about icon from the industry who motivated her when she started off in the showbiz

LEISURE | P2



Cracks in Netanyahu's coalition

Israeli lawmakers narrowly approve the country's 2025 state Budget in an initial vote despite a rebellion demanding he fire Israel's attorney general

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Alarming import surge

India's gold imports surge alarmingly, posing a potential threat to its trade balance and economic stability

BUSINESS | P11



Defiant stand

Akash Deep and Jasprit Bumrah add 39 runs for the 9th wicket to help India avoid the follow on against Australia

SPORTS | P12

NTA won't conduct recruitment tests

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 17: The National Testing Agency (NTA) will not conduct any recruitment exams from 2025. Instead, it would focus only on higher education entrance tests, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced Tuesday.

The agency will be restructured next year and new posts are being created, he added.

The move is part of examination reforms based on the recommendations of a high-level panel set up earlier this year following alleged leaks in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) and a series of cancellations of other tests due to suspected leaks and other glitches.

The Education Ministry is also in conversation with the Health Ministry on conducting NEET in traditional pen-and-paper mode or switch to a Computer Based Test (CBT).

"The NTA will be limited to conducting only entrance exams for higher education and not conduct any recruitment exams from next year," Pradhan told reporters. He clarified that the Common University Entrance Test - Undergraduate (CUET-UG) would continue to be held once a year.

The high-level panel headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief R Radhakrishnan noted that the NTA outstretched itself to accommodate diverse requests from many test indenting agencies for handling end-to-end operations of tests.

"The NTA should primarily conduct entrance examinations. Enhancing its scope for other examinations may be considered after the capacity of the NTA is augmented," the panel said in its report. Suggesting restructuring of the NTA, the committee recommended 10 specific verticals, headed at the director level.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



When did this ONOE idea first strike you? Before or after the electoral bonds were banned?



FESTIVE FERVOUR: A girl checks a mannequin of Santa Claus ahead of Christmas at Satya Nagar in Bhubaneswar Tuesday

1 poll Bill hits LS hurdle

YES 263 NO 198

ONOE TRIVIA

Simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and all state Assemblies were conducted from 1951 to 1967. The first general elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951-52, a practice that continued for three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967. However, this cycle of synchronised elections was disrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to the premature dissolution of some State Legislative Assemblies.

The contentious Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, aimed at conducting simultaneous polls across the country, hit its first hurdle in the Lok Sabha Tuesday when it failed to garner the support of 2/3rd members present and voting, as per the provision of the Constitution. The Bill faced stiff resistance from the Opposition in Lok Sabha after it was introduced by Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal. While 263 members voted in favour of the Bill, 198 voted against it. Launching a scathing attack on the BJP-led govt, the Opposition termed the introduction of the Bill as an assault on the federal structure of the Constitution and sought its immediate withdrawal. Stating that the NDA government at the Centre is trying to bring dictatorship in the country, Opposition members claimed that the Bill aims at taking away the autonomy of state Assemblies. The BJP, however, rubbished the charges, saying separation of powers, secular character and supremacy of the Constitution have remained intact. Home Minister Amit Shah, meanwhile, said the government is ready to send the Bill to a joint parliamentary committee for wider deliberations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Two Bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections in the country were introduced in Lok Sabha Tuesday after a fi-

ery debate, with the Opposition terming the move "anti-constitutional" and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal asserting that the legislation would not tamper with the powers enjoyed by states.

Amid uproar by the Opposition, Home Minister Amit Shah told Lok Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said during a meeting of the Union Cabinet that 'The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill should be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for wider deliberations at every level.

The government is likely to move a resolution to refer the Bill to the JPC Wednesday in Lok Sabha. The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha by Meghwal after a nearly 90-minute debate, followed by a division of votes - the first step towards completion of BJP's long-cherished dream.

As many as 263 members voted in favour of introduction of the Bill and 198 against it.

Opposition Congress, DMK, Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, NCP-SP, Shiv Sena-UBT, AIMIM among others objected to the introduction of the Bill contending that it was an assault on the basic struc-

ture of the Constitution. During the consultations held by former president Ram Nath Kovind-led high level committee on 'One Nation, One Election', 32 political parties supported the measure and 15 parties opposed it.

YSRCP, which has four members in Lok Sabha, is the only non-NDA party to have declared support for the Bill. BJD, another fence sitter, is yet to spell out its stand. BJD failed to open its account in Lok Sabha in elections this year, but has seven members in Rajya Sabha.

Congress member Manickam Tagore pointed out that the government did not have a two-thirds majority among the 461 members who took part in the voting Tuesday. In Lok Sabha, 263 members voted in favour of the Bill against the two-thirds mark of 307.

Meanwhile, BJP is enquiring into the absence of its nearly 20 MPs from the Lok Sabha during the voting.

3-month deadline for Ratna Bhandar repair

PNN & AGENCIES

Puri, Dec 17: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Tuesday commenced repair work of Ratna Bhandar of the Srimandir here, and assured that it would complete the work within three months.

Speaking to reporters in Bhubaneswar, Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said, "The ASI has assured us a three-month timeline, but we have requested them to expedite the process."

Harichandan said the repair work will be carried out without affecting the daily rituals of deities inside the 12th century shrine, and the timings for devotees, who can enter the temple till a certain point during the renovation.

Every day, the repair work will be conducted for five to six hours after the second 'Bhoga Mandap' (ritual ending around 12.30 pm).



ASI Superintending Archaeologist DB Garnayak said: "We will set up scaffolding first before removing plasters from the walls of the Ratna Bhandar (temple treasury). The entire structure will then be cleaned, and the repair of old iron beams and cracked stones will be undertaken."

Both the inner and outer chambers of the temple vault will undergo repairs.

The renovation of the Ratna Bhandar will not be carried out Saturdays and Sundays, and other holidays, keeping in view the crowd of devotees, the ASI official said.

Scooter bomb kills top Russian Gen

REUTERS

Moscow, Dec 17: A top Russian general accused by Ukraine of being responsible for the use of chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops was assassinated in Moscow by Ukraine's SBU intelligence service Tuesday morning in the most high-profile killing of its kind. Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov, who was chief of Russia's Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Protection Troops, was killed outside an apartment building along with his assistant when a bomb hidden in an electric



scooter went off, Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said.

An SBU source confirmed to Reuters that the Ukrainian intelligence agency had been along with the hit. "The liquidation of the chief of the radiation and

chemical protection troops of the Russian Federation is the work of the SBU," the source said.

The source said that a scooter containing explosives was detonated, killing both Kirillov and his aide, as they stepped into the entrance of a house on Ryazansky Prospekt in Moscow.

Kirillov, 54, is the most senior Russian military officer to be assassinated inside Russia by Ukraine and his murder is likely to prompt the Russian authorities to review security protocols for the army's top brass and to find a way to avenge his killing.

Elderly man found hanging at AIIMS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The body of a 70-year-old man from Jajpur district was found hanging at Orthopaedics Ward of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here, Tuesday, under mysterious circumstances.

The deceased, identified as Dilip Sahoo, was admitted to the hospital December 5 for Osteoarthritis of his knee. After careful evaluation of Dilip's co-morbidities, his operation was scheduled for December 10. However, Dilip caught high fever December 9, and had later developed Hematuria.

Subsequently, he was treated by an Urologist at the healthcare facility. On being informed, Dilip's daughter

reached AIIMS from Jajpur, and attended to her father. As Dilip's health showed some signs of normalcy, his daughter left for Jajpur Monday, a source inside the hospital said.

As part of regular checking, when a security personnel visited D5 ward around 1am Tuesday, he found Dilip sitting on his bed. "A little later, around 1:15am, when the nursing officer went to the room, he saw Dilip hanging from the ceiling fan. Soon, Khandagiri police was informed about the incident, with the knowledge of the Head of the Department (HOD)", he added.

He said Dilip was declared dead after a clinical examination and ECG were conducted at 2:15am. The body was then handed over to Khandagiri police.

India, Japan tie up to clear space debris

AGENCIES

Tokyo, Dec 17: Space startups in Japan and India Tuesday said they had agreed to jointly study using laser-equipped satellites to remove debris from orbit, an experimental approach to the increasingly imminent problem of orbital congestion.

Tokyo-based Orbital Lasers and Indian robotics company Inspecity said they would study business opportunities for in-space services such as de-orbiting a defunct satellite and extending a spacecraft's life.

Carved out from Japanese satellite giant SKY Perfect JSAT this year, Orbital Lasers is building a system that will use laser energy to stop the rotation of space junk by vaporising small parts of its surface, making it easier for a servicing spacecraft to rendezvous.

Orbital Lasers plans to



demonstrate the system in space and supply it to operators after 2027, said Aditya Baraskar, the company's global business lead. It can be mounted on Inspecity satellites if the companies clear regulatory requirements in India and Japan, Baraskar added.

- Orbital Lasers and Inspecity to collaborate on in-space services
- Laser demonstration in space planned after 2027
- United Nations warned of risks of space junk in October

A United Nations panel on space traffic coordination in late October said that urgent action was necessary to track and manage objects in low Earth orbit because of the rapid increase in satellites and space junk.

There are already more than 100 companies in the space servicing market as satellite constellations expand, Nobu Okada, chief executive of Japanese debris mitigation pioneer Astroscale said earlier this year.

The project is the latest example of collaboration between Japan and India, whose govern-

ments are working together on the joint Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) mission, which could launch as early as 2026.

Indian rocket maker Skyroot and satellite builder HEX20 are also working with Japanese moon exploration firm Inpace on a future lunar orbiter mission.

The two countries' commercial space tie-ups have been driven by Japanese satellite data solutions for India's disaster management and agriculture, and can expand to more fields such as manufacturing, said Masayasu Ishida, chief executive of Tokyo-based nonprofit SPACETIDE, which has hosted space business conferences since 2015.

"The key is finding where and how to build complementary relationships" that align with national policies such as Make in India, which aims to boost local production, Ishida said.

leisure



BYRAN ADAMS PROFESSES LOVE FOR INDIAN DELICACIES

Global music icon Bryan Adams, who is currently in India for his *So Happy It Hurts Tour 2024*, has expressed his love for Indian delicacies such as rajma chawal, momos, vada pavs and masala dosa.

MASON GOODING IS SET TO RETURN FOR SCREAM 7

Hollywood actor Mason Gooding is returning for the upcoming part of the *Scream* franchise. The actor is reportedly set to reprise his role of Chad Meeks-Martin for the seventh installment of the horror franchise.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You will achieve things today, not by the sleight of your hand but by your communication skills, says Ganesha. Your eloquence shall win many hearts. The stars suggest monetary benefits, but you need to guard against injury and minor ailments.

TAURUS
You are likely to confront a turning point in relationships today, foresees Ganesha. Because you are in need of some compassion and support, you will feel the need to spend time with friends and relatives. You beloved or better half may bring a change in mood by helping you shed your negative frame of mind, says Ganesha.

GEMINI
Your desire for a clean house will reach the level of obsession, predicts Ganesha. You may plan to wash your car, clean your yard and arrange your wardrobe. And you don't trust the housemaid with any of the chores, because no one can clean the house better than you. Personal hygiene will also get your full attention, feels Ganesha.

CANCER
Today is a crucial and fascinating day for you, predicts Ganesha. You will learn and gain from your bosses and elders. Peers and siblings may extend their full support to you. Your chances of winning legal battles are remote, so an out-of-court settlement may be your best bet.

LEO
If it's a fresh start that you have been looking for, then this day promises to give you just that, predicts Ganesha. If you have already chalked out any plans for your future, today is the day to initiate the implementation. Remember Lions, though, that rushing blindly into anything is not the solution. The slow and steady approach always works. Hence, consider executing your ideas in phases, advises Ganesha.

VIRGO
Today finds you ambitious and meticulous. Actions will not speak - they'll roar! Your planning and scruples will set the pace at work. Expect pats on the back from your bosses and a round of cheers from your peers.

LIBRA
Of late, you have been very concerned about the health of one of your close friends. Take this day to lay your fears to rest by spending time with that friend. Work can wait, as today you must prove to yourself, if not to others, that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'. Ganesha wishes you the very best.

SCORPIO
Your mind shall take over the proceedings today. And it shall, in all likelihood, draw you to the work bench and keep your nose to the grindstone. But your heart will flutter like a butterfly, and if you manage to strike the right balance, you may win over your special one and your boss too, says Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS
The way you keep your interests alive will keep your mind occupied. Leisure activities and by-lines will by-pass the mundane routine today, foretells Ganesha. Pamper yourself by doing what you like, be it gardening, cooking or even plain old reading. Ganesha also sees a heavy meal with friends late in the day today.

CAPRICORN
Today, you will remain unruffled by the commotion around you, says Ganesha. However, the emotions locked up inside you will probably cloud your power of reasoning and may leave you feeling a little lost. But this will only be a passing phase, and you will come out of the bewilderment in no time.

AQUARIUS
Today, you will experience the harmonious balance between logic and emotion. You will consequently know how to mix business with pleasure. Money wise, you are content, but trivial issues may bother you today, says Ganesha.

PISCES
An action-packed day awaits you, busy as you will be corresponding with old contacts, telephonic interviews, organising meetings and scheduling tasks, says Ganesha. Do not forget to breathe!

LAAPATAA LADIES

Nitanshi's homework to nail emotional act

Mumbai: Nitanshi Goel won hearts with her portrayal of Phool in Kiran Rao's *Laapataa Ladies*. In a recent interview with *Zoom*, the actor opened up on whom she emulated to perform an emotional act in *Laapataa Ladies*.

Talking about her initial days of shoot, Nitanshi said, "Kiran ma'am was so kind. In the initial days itself, we had to shoot very heavy scenes. The first scene was the breakdown scene and that scene was initiated by me. So I was like if I am unable to perform this scene, then it'll be embarrassing." She then explained how she pitched some changes in the scene to Kiran Rao and to her surprise, the

filmmaker was on the same page with her. She then revealed how Kiran Rao trusted her with the scene and she didn't want to break her trust so she prepared for it the whole night.

"The entire night I googled Kiara Advani's crying scene, Deepika Padukone's crying scenes, Alia Bhatt's crying scenes. How do they cry like this? I wanted the breakdown to look very amazing. I then heard some emotional songs in the morning and then something happened during the take that when I saw myself in the mirror, I started crying on my own and then Kiran ma'am had to ask me to stop crying," shared the actress.



Ananya's inspiration

Mumbai: Actress Ananya Panday has heaped praise on Deepika Padukone and shared that the Bollywood star's a woman who stands up for every person on the set.

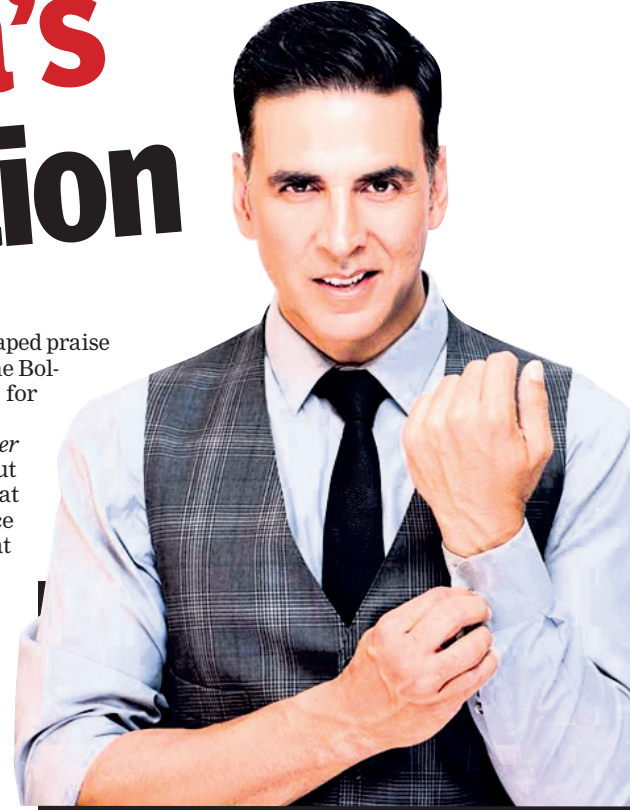
Sharing an anecdote about the *Fighter* actress, Ananya said: "When I started out in the industry, I didn't really know that one could really stand up and reinforce what they want. I used to simply do what I was asked to do."

"Deepika is a woman who stands up for every person on the set, in a very polite way. Because whenever a girl speaks up she is called bossy, or difficult to work with, but she used to convey her needs in a very polite and empathetic way, which made me realise that there is a way in which you can do this," added the actress, who worked with Deepika in *Gehraiyaan*.

The actress said that Deepika made a huge positive impact on her.

"Deepika inspired me as a younger female actress to go on further to make a change. Now I do speak up when I am not comfortable doing certain things or saying certain things, because I don't want a young girl to be spoken to in a certain manner because I am being shown like that on-screen."

"So now I am way more conscious about my choices, more than I have been in the past," she added.



Pushpa 2 fever grips Akshay

Mumbai: As *Pushpa 2* fever continues to take over, Akshay Kumar has joined in on the excitement by recreating the film's most iconic dialogue, "Wildfire hu."

In a video circulating on the internet, Akshay is seen delivering Allu Arjun's iconic line, "Wildfire hu." Soon after the video surfaced online, fans couldn't help but gush over Khiladi Kumar. One netizen commented, "Wow, amazing @akshaykumar sir, wildfire pose of mega superstar @alluarjun from #Pushpa2TheRule, great!" Another said, "I remember he supported *Pushpa 1* also."

Not to forget, in 2021, Akshay had penned a congratulatory note for Allu Arjun after the success of *Pushpa: The Rise*.

The *Airlift* actor had written, "Congratulations @alluarjun on the massive response you have received from all over India for #PushpaTheRise, another big win for our industry... planning to watch it real soon. @GTelefilms." In response, Allu Arjun replied, "Thank you very much, Akshay ji. Nice of you to send your warm wishes. Congratulations to you too. Glad people are coming back to theatres & the Indian film industry is shining again."

Pushpa 2: The Rule, directed by Sukumar, features Allu Arjun, Rashmika Mandanna, and Fahadh Faasil. Released in theatres on December 5, the movie has crossed a remarkable Rs 1,000 crore globally within just seven days.

Aamir scared of cinematising Mahabharata

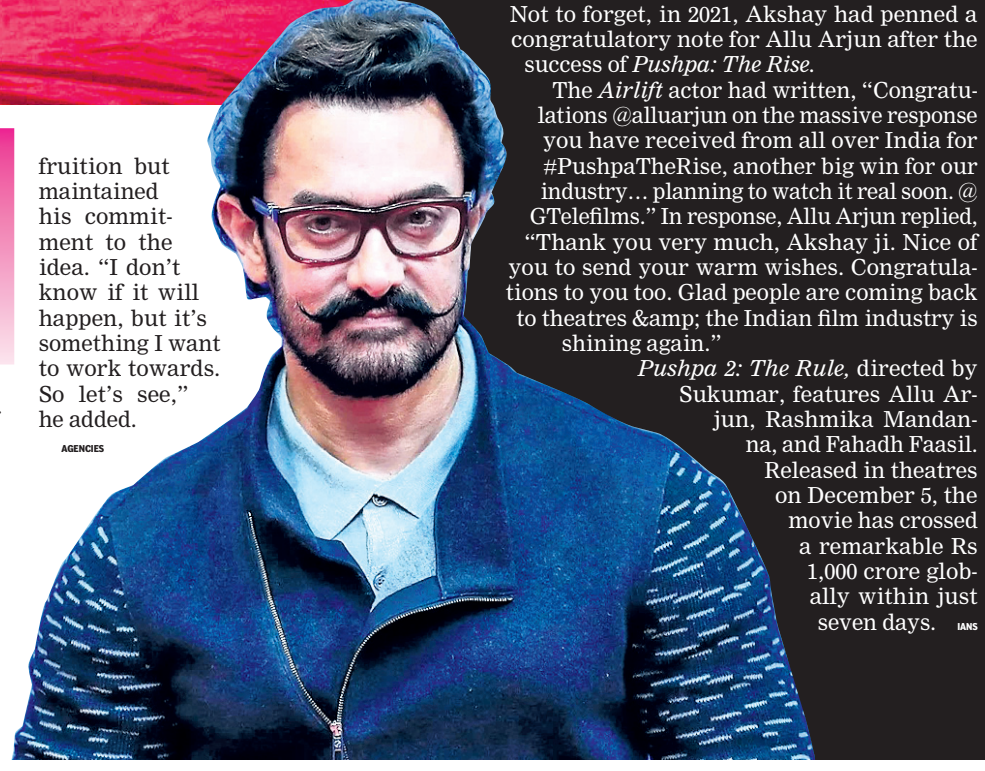
Mumbai: Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan has revealed fresh insights into his long-discussed dream project, *Mahabharata*. Speaking in an interview with the *BBC*, Khan described the mythological adaptation as both exciting and daunting, underscoring its cultural importance to Indians.

"Well, that's my dream project, and it's

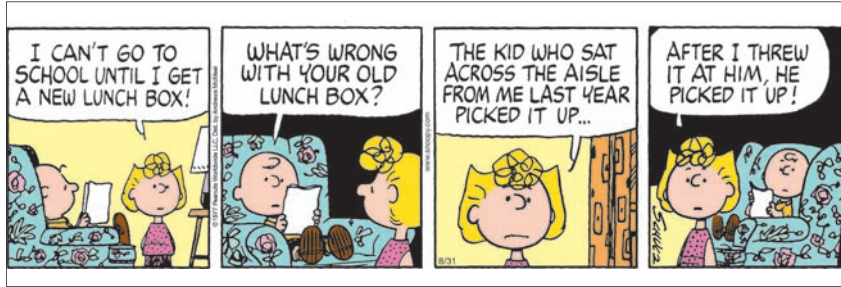
a very scary project. It's so huge, and I am scared of getting it wrong. It's a huge responsibility because, as Indians, it's something so close to us, it's in our blood. So I want to get it right. I want to make every Indian proud. I also want to show the world what India has," Aamir shared.

He admitted uncertainty about when or if the project will come to

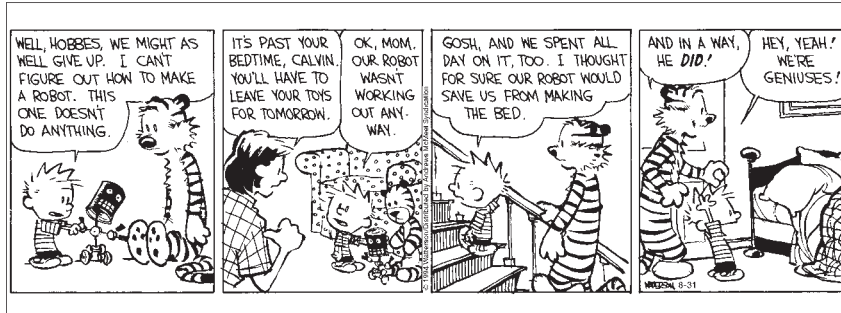
fruition but maintained his commitment to the idea. "I don't know if it will happen, but it's something I want to work towards. So let's see," he added.



PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

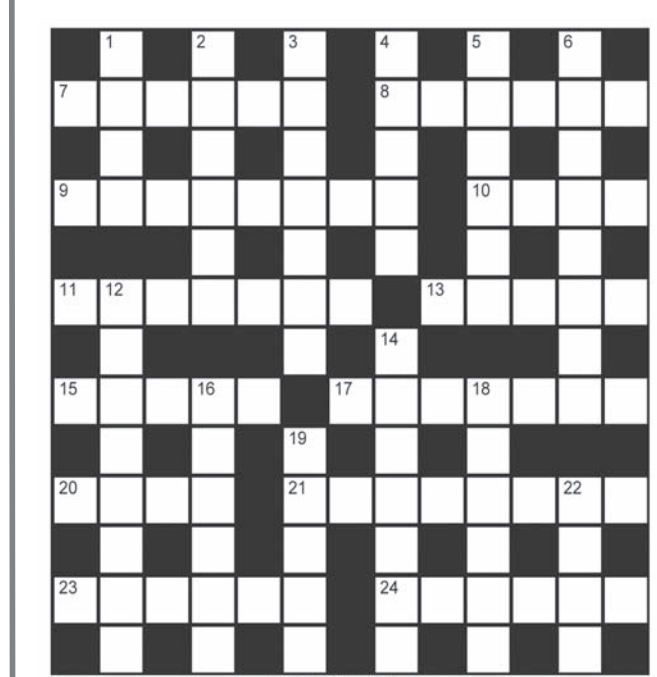


BREVITY



FUN POST

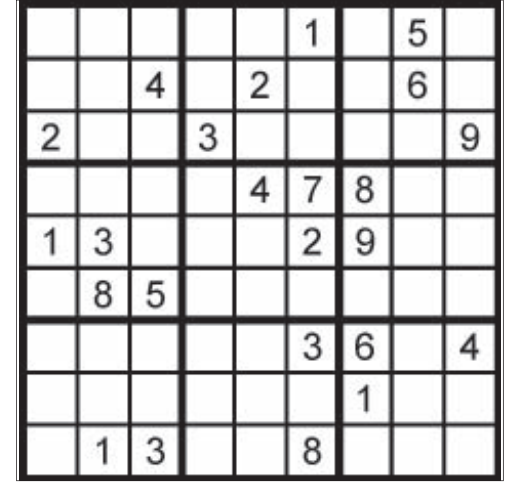
CROSSWORD



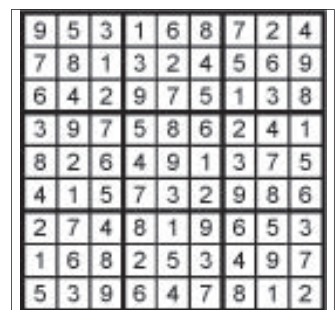
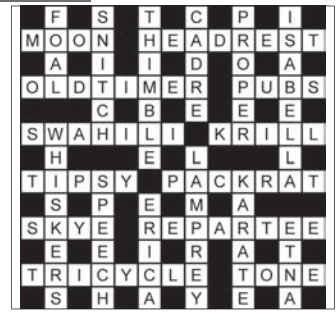
- Across**
- 7 Frail and sickly
 - 8 Almost
 - 9 Aquitanian cop
 - 10 Partner
 - 11 Medicated candy
 - 13 Fantastic
 - 15 Despot's duration
 - 17 Plunder
 - 20 H.M.S. Bounty, e.g.
 - 21 Unwelcome visitor
 - 23 Chest of drawers
 - 24 Neva River locale
- Down**
- 1 It's just for openers
 - 2 Amati, for one
 - 3 Offence
 - 4 Arm of the sea
 - 5 Tool box item
 - 6 Relationship type
 - 12 Give a face lift
 - 14 Auto need
 - 16 Pouched rat
 - 18 Court game
 - 19 Negative
 - 22 Door sign

SUDOKU

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.



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

downtown

CM: Govt mulling KG to PG education in Santali language



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The state government is considering introducing education in Santali language from kindergarten (KG) to postgraduate (PG) levels, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said during the seventh annual conference of the Odisha unit of All India Santali Writers' Association in Keonjhar, Tuesday.

Majhi emphasised that providing education in the Ol Chiki script and Santali language by 2025 would be a fitting tribute to Pandit Raghunath Murmu, the creator of the Ol Chiki script.

Remembering Guru Gomke Pandit Raghunath Murmu on the occasion, the Chief Minister called for the successful implementation of 'Mission Ol Chiki 2025', aligning it with the centenary of the script's creation in 2025.

He stated that the mother tongue is the cornerstone of the progress and identity of the tribal community.

Majhi highlighted that the inclusion of Santali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 2003, under the leadership of the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the then Centre, was a moment of pride

Majhi emphasised that providing education in the Ol Chiki script and Santali language by 2025 would be a fitting tribute to Pandit Raghunath Murmu, the creator of the Ol Chiki script

for the community. The Chief Minister urged Santali writers to work selflessly and with dedication to promote the language, culture, tradition, and education of the Santali-speaking community. He encouraged efforts to translate prominent books from other languages into Santali and Santali educational books into various languages.

Majhi called for unity among the tribal community, emphasising the importance of preserving their language, culture, and tradition while advancing through education. He expressed hope that the tribal society would contribute significantly to 'Developed Odisha 2036' and play a vital role in shaping a developed Odisha and India.

On the occasion, the Chief Minister released a literary magazine and a souvenir published by the association.

Suresh Kumar Hembram

was honoured with the Shyam Sundar Hembram Award 2024 for his notable contribution to Santali literature through his book 'Sonali Gharanj'.

Durga Soren received the Yuva Puraskar for his short story 'Uni Kulid Akay?', while Arsu Hansdah was awarded the Yadumani Beshra Samman for her poetry book 'RC'. Eminent writer and social worker Laxman Marndi was recognised for his lifelong contributions to Santali literature.

Additionally, the Chief Minister felicitated Bhagwat Hembram, Govinda Hansada, Mohan Soren, Madhusudan Murmu, and Jyothilal Hembram for their efforts in supporting Santali writers at the grassroots level.

He also honoured Ramjit Tudu and YouTuber Lav Hansada for promoting the Santali script's type board, which was appreciated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his 'Mann Ki Baat' program.

Missing retd RU prof found dead

AGENCIES

Cuttack, Dec 17: The body of a retired professor, who had been missing since December 15, was found in Mahanadi river here Tuesday, police said.

The deceased was identified as Baishnab Charan Singh, 78, a retired Chemistry professor of Ravenshaw University (RU) here.

Singh had been staying with his son in an apartment in Nandankanan area of Bhubaneswar. Singh was missing after leaving his home in the morning of December 15 for a walk, said Arun Kumar Swain, ACP-Zone-1, Cuttack.

His family filed a missing complaint at Nandankanan police station when he did not return, he said.

The decomposed body of the retired professor was found at Jobra Barrage in Cuttack around 8.30am Tuesday, the ACP said.

"According to his family members, Singh had made an attempt to die by suicide a few days ago. He was a psychiatric patient and was under treatment. So, we suspect that he might have died by suicide," Swain told reporters in Cuttack.

"The body of Singh has been sent for post-mortem examination. The exact reason behind his death can be ascertained after getting the autopsy report," he added.

13 places record temp below 10 °C

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Thirteen towns in Odisha recorded minimum temperature below 10 degree Celsius with G Udayagiri in Kandhamal district being the coldest place in the state at 4.7 degree Celsius, the Met office here said Tuesday.

The minimum temperature at Rourkela was 5.7 degree Celsius, followed by Similiguda in Koraput district at 7.2 degree Celsius.

Phulbani recorded a minimum temperature of 7.5 degree Celsius, Sundargarh 8.6 degree Celsius, and Keonjhar 8.9 degree Celsius.

2 FROM ODISHA BRUTALLY KILLED IN TN

Namakkal (TN): Two Odisha youths were brutally killed by some unidentified persons at Veppadai in the district, police said Tuesday. Their bodies with their heads smashed and lying on the roadside were noticed by passersby, who later informed the police. The two have been identified as Munna and Dhupalish from Odisha, according to police. A fingerprint expert collected evidence at the spot, while a police sniffer dog was used to obtain clues. The police have sent the bodies to the Namakkal Government Hospital for postmortem. Further investigation is on.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Bishnupada now GA&PG dept OSD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The state government Tuesday transferred and appointed senior IAS officer Bishnupada Sethi as the officer on special duty (OSD) in the General Administration and Public Grievance (GA&PG) department after the CBI issued a summons to him in a bribery case.

Sethi, a 1995-batch IAS officer, was the Principal Secretary of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) and ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare departments. He also had additional charge as Principal Secretary of Odia Language, Literature and Culture (OLL&C) department.

"The post of the OSD, GA&PG department is declared equivalent in status and responsibility to the post of principal secretary provided in the IAS cadre of the state," a notification said.

The government also appointed Sanjeeb Kumar Mishra, a 1997-batch IAS officer, as the Principal Secretary of ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare department. Mishra returned to Odisha cadre after a Central deputation.



Bishnupada Sethi, a 1995-batch IAS officer, was the Principal Secretary of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) and ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare departments. He also had additional charge as Principal Secretary of Odia Language, Literature and Culture (OLL&C) department

Mishra has also been given the additional charge as Principal Secretary of the SSEPD and OLL&C departments.

Manoj Kumar Sahoo, a 2006-batch IAS officer was appointed as Special Secretary to the Chief Minister.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which has arrested three persons including Chanchal Mukherjee, group general manager of the CPSP Bridge and Roof Company (India) Limited, had issued

summons to Sethi December 10 asking him to appear before the investigating agency December 11.

However, Sethi has not yet appeared before the CBI, even as his three drivers have been questioned by the Central agency.

The CBI, in a letter to Sethi, December 10, said, "It is learnt that you are acquainted with some important and relevant facts and circumstances of the instant CBI case, which are required to be ascertained from you."

State government sources said that October 19, Sethi had written to Mukherjee regarding assignments of projects for upgrading an ashram school to a high school and a high school to a higher secondary school in Boudh and Nayagarh districts. The two projects are worth ₹37 crore.

The CBI has not made it clear whether these school upgradation projects have anything to do with the bribery case in which three persons were arrested December 7.

Meanwhile, a senior official of the Bridge and Roof Company (India) Limited, Bhubaneswar, Tuesday appeared before the CBI for questioning, sources said.



GEARING UP FOR BIZ SUMMIT: Industries Minister Sampad Chandra Swain launches the website of 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' at a hotel in Bhubaneswar, Tuesday, as Industries department Principal Secretary Hemant Sharma and IDCO MD Bhupendra Singh Poonia look on

Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025 website launched

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Industries Minister Sampad Chandra Swain Tuesday launched the website of 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025', which will be held here January 28 and 29 next year.

The official website <https://mio.investodisha.gov.in> provides a one-stop platform for the stakeholders, industry leaders, industry associations, and partners to register for various sectoral sessions, officials said.

The website also offers comprehensive insights into sectoral focus areas, a digital investor intent form, the event

schedule, and registration details, they said. Swain said, "The Utkarsh Odisha website is the gateway to register for the mega conclave. We invite all industry leaders, enthusiasts, and associations to join us."

It's a one-stop platform with all the information about the

investors' conclave, he said.

The 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha Conclave 2025' is designed with various sessions spread across two days in two phases, to be held in five different halls at Janata Maidan here.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also likely to attend the business summit, the officials said.

BJP seeks Naveen's clarification on Deo 'targeting' Prez

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Odisha's ruling BJP Tuesday sought a reply from BJD president Naveen Patnaik on his party MP Sulata Deo's statement in Rajya Sabha 'targeting' President Droupadi Murmu.

Deo, while participating in the discussion on the 'Glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India' in the Rajya Sabha Monday, had 'targeted' Murmu, who hails from Odisha, BJP Odisha spokesperson Anil Biswal said.

"Honourable President is a daughter of Odisha. She has expressed her anguish over the RG Kar rape case. But

BJD MP Sulata Deo, while participating in the discussion on the 'Glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India' in the Rajya Sabha Monday, had 'targeted' Murmu, who hails from Odisha, BJP state spokesperson Anil Biswal said

why is she silent on Manipur which is on boil for over the last 1.5 years? Why is she silent on Sambhal? There have been 1,250 rapes in Odisha in the last six months. Where is the President? When will she break her silence? Is this what our Constitution teaches us?" Deo had said.

Reacting to Deo's statement in the Upper House of the Par-

liament, Biswal in a post on X said, "The manner in which a BJD Rajya Sabha MP dragged President Droupadi Murmu into petty politics is not acceptable. She is the pride of Odisha. But, the RS MP's statement has hurt the people of Odisha."

"The question arises whether this is the personal opinion of the Rajya Sabha MP or does BJD chief Naveen Babu also

agrees with this opinion? If there is no consensus, then why is Naveen Babu silent?" Biswal asked.

Biswal also alleged that when the BJD was in power in the state, it had 'insulted' the President by causing power cuts during her programmes. "Now, there is an attempt to insult her in the Rajya Sabha. This is not the ideal sign of a political party," the BJP spokesperson said.

The BJP said that Murmu was the pride and glory of Odisha. The respect and admiration that Murmu is getting all over the country after becoming the President is a matter of pride for the entire state.

Team leaves for Nayagarh

Puri: A three-member team led by Sudarshan Mekap, the supervisor of chariot construction, has left for Nayagarh to select trees for construction of three majestic chariots for the annual Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath and His siblings in the Holy City here.

According to Srimandir tradition, on Dhanu Sankranti, the 12th century shrine dis-patches a team, comprising the chariot construction supervisor and two of his assistants, to Nayagarh in search of trees for construction of chariots. The team, in cooperation with Daspalla Forest Ranger, will move through the forest to select mature trees of Asan, Dhaura, and Phasi suitable for constructing the chariots.

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Min stresses stronger labour laws for workers

The Labour and Employees' State Insurance (ESI) department hands over appointment letters to 13 newly-recruited employees, including junior assistants, typists, and stenographers



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Labour and ESI Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia emphasised the need for stronger implementation of labour laws while prioritising social security and welfare measures for Odia workers employed both within and outside the state. He directed officials to increase labour registrations and expedite financial aid to beneficiaries during an event held at the Lok Seva Bhawan convention centre Tuesday.

Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia emphasises prioritising social security and welfare measures for Odia workers, urging officials to boost registrations and expedite financial aid

Addressing the function, Minister Khuntia expressed confidence in the new appointees' ability to contribute to the welfare of Odisha's labour force. "Odisha is a labour-rich state, and the role of the labour force is vital for its economic and overall development. I am sure the new recruits will play

an important role in improving the lives of lakhs of labourers in the state," he said.

The event also featured a state-level review meeting to assess the performance of Divisional Labour Commissioners (DLCs). Minister Khuntia urged the DLCs to ensure the effective delivery of various state government labour welfare schemes. He particularly emphasised timely monetary assistance under the Odisha Construction and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board and the Odisha Unorganised Workers Social Security Board.

Labour and ESI department principal secretary Chitra Arumugam informed that 44 lakh construction workers and 4 lakh unorganised workers have been registered under the respective welfare boards in Odisha. She urged labour officers to maximise the registration of eligible workers while ensuring hassle-free services.

Labour Commissioner Indramani Tripathi called for efforts to promote industrial harmony and raise awareness about welfare provisions under various labour laws.

The event reaffirmed the Labour department's commitment to enhancing workers' welfare and ensuring the effective implementation of government schemes across the state.



FESTIVE MOOD: A local baker in the Sutahat area of Cuttack prepares special cake, Tuesday, ahead of the Christmas celebrations

'Action against contractors failing to meet deadlines'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: Contractors failing to complete projects within stipulated timelines will face strict action, warned Law, Works, and Excise Minister Prithviraj Harichandan during a comprehensive review meeting held Tuesday. The minister emphasised that maintaining high-quality standards in all construction projects is non-negotiable.

The meeting assessed the progress of various key infrastructure projects across the state, including the Sonepur Binika-Rampur Dunguripa



li Road, Marshaghai-Jambu Road, Berhampur Ring Road, and Cuttack Ring Road (from Khannagar to Link Road).

Additionally, the status of high-level bridges such as the Subarnarekha River bridge at Gobarghat, the second Mahanadi bridge at Banshuni in Boudh, and the Kharasrota River bridge at Nuabazar was reviewed.

The minister also conducted a detailed evaluation of major projects under departments such as Roads, National Highways, Buildings, and Odisha Bridge and Construction Corporation (OBCC). For the first time, departmental officers, contractors, and consultants participated together to address progress and resolve challenges. Harichandan reviewed the

status of healthcare infrastructure, including teaching hospitals in Balasore, Baripada, Koraput, Phulbani, and Puri. The improvement of Capital Hospital and the under-construction SCB Medical College were also discussed.

The minister directed officials and contractors to ensure timely completion of all projects while maintaining top-quality standards. He stressed the need to enhance the stability of construction land and strengthen the state's long-term road network to support sustainable development.

Nature lover rescues injured peacock

POST NEWS NETWORK

Subarnapur, Dec 17: In an inspiring act of compassion, Satyajit Gadu, a nature enthusiast from Ulunda block in Subarnapur district, recently rescued an injured peacock near the Chandili Reserved Forest, close to Khajuriapali village.

According to sourcing, the peacock was found in a distressed and unwell condition, possibly due to an injury. Upon receiving information, Satyajit rushed to the location and provided immediate care. He fed the bird glucose water to help it recover and applied a traditional turmeric paste to its injured wing.

Additionally, he carefully adjusted its disheveled feathers and ensured the bird was stable. After a period of care, Satyajit safely released the peacock back into its natural habitat.

WEATHER table with columns for BBSR, CTC, Max Temp, Min Temp, Humidity, Rainfall, and FORECAST.

MARKET WATCH table with columns for INDEX, VARIATION, SENSEX, NIFTY, DOLLAR, EURO, GOLD, SILVER.

SAHID BAJI ROUT NOUJATRA SURAKSHA YOJANA

Govt to enhance safety in inland water transport

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: With the objective of enhancing passenger safety in inland water transport across the state, Commerce and Transport department, led by Secretary Usha Padhee, conducted a virtual meeting with all district collectors Tuesday, focusing on sensitising district administrations about the flagship initiative 'Sahid Baji Rout Noujatra Suraksha Yojana'.

The scheme, in honour of state's youngest martyr Sahid Baji Rout is designed to provide life-saving appliances such as lifebuoys, life jackets, and fire extinguishers to boats operating in the state.

The scheme also provides 95 per cent subsidy for private operators on essential safety equipments. For government and PSU boats, the necessary equipment will be provided free of cost under the scheme. Distribution of life-saving appliances under the first phase has been successfully completed, and the second phase is currently in progress.

During the meeting, the District Collectors were apprised of the scheme's guidelines, including eligibility criteria, implementation protocols, and the roles and responsibilities of the officers.

Padhee also emphasised the need for district administrations to assess the requirements of life-saving appliances and submit requisitions to the Directorate of Ports and Inland Water Transport within seven days.

Feedback on the first phase of distribution was also requested to ensure continuous improvement in the scheme's implementation.

Padhee highlighted the government's unwavering commitment to passenger safety, stating, "Sahid Baji Rout Noujatra Suraksha Yojana reflects the state government's dedication to improving safety standards in inland water transport. We urge all stakeholders to work collectively in implementing the initiative, ensuring safer journeys for passengers while promoting sustainable transport practices."

Pact to promote green economic growth

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The state's Planning and Convergence department signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) as part of its Green Odisha Initiative.

The agreement aims to accelerate green economic growth and promote sustainable development in the state. The MoU was signed in the presence of Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja and Development Commissioner-cum-ACS Anu Garg at Lokseva Bhawan Tuesday.

Representing the state government, Bhupendra Singh Poonia, Managing Director of IPICOL and IDCO, signed the MoU along with CEEW CEO Arunabha Ghosh. The collaboration focuses on scaling the green economy through promoting green value chains, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting private capital, and engaging civil society organisations for support.



Under the Green Odisha Initiative, CEEW will serve as a knowledge partner, assisting the state in translating its vision into actionable policies and projects. The initiative will focus on three main pillars: Energy Transition, Circular Economy, and Bio-economy. These efforts aim to create green jobs while fostering a resilient and sustainable economy for the state.

Garg highlighted the importance of the partnership, emphasising the potential of the initiative. "Our goal is to support Odisha in integrating diverse green economic sectors, including energy transition, bio-economy, nature-based solutions, and the circular economy. These sectors hold tremendous potential for creating green jobs and driving inclusive economic prosperity. We are excited to partner with Odisha to build a holistic green economy that will benefit the people both now and in the future," he said.

Ahuja, in his address, emphasised the importance of actionable outcomes. He urged CEEW to implement at least six projects in the state within three months, drawing from its action-oriented programs based on state government data and research.

The partnership marks a major step toward Odisha becoming a leader in green economic growth, combining environmental sustainability with economic development.

Paddy procurement under govt scanner

BHUBANESWAR: The state government has directed officials to keep a strict vigil on every mandi to make the paddy procurement process transparent. Extensive measures have been taken by the concerned district administration in this regard. Adequate attention is being paid to ensure that no eligible farmer faces any problem while procuring paddy. Ancillary arrangements have also been made for the benefit of the farmers.

At present, paddy procurement is going on in 11 districts including Bargarh, Sambalpur, Nuapada, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Subarnapur, Koraput, Jharsuguda, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur and Keonjhar districts. Nodal officers have been appointed in each mandi to help the farmers and a supervisor has been appointed in charge of two to three mandis. More officers are also being appointed by the district administration as per the requirement.

Adolescent-friendly spaces initiative launched by BMC



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), in collaboration with the World Resources Institute (WRI) and Humara Bachpan Trust (HBT), has launched a significant initiative to reimagining public spaces in the City for adolescents.

The project, part of the Healthy Cities for Adolescents (HCA-II) programme, aims to create safe, healthy, and vibrant spaces while empowering adolescents as Public Space Ambassadors (PSAs) to engage in urban planning and decision-making.

As part of the initiative, Rajdhani College frontage will be developed as a model adolescent-friendly public space. The project uses Tactical Urbanism (TU) methods, setting a precedent for similar developments across the City.

Tuesday, a capacity-building workshop and public space audit were conducted at Rajdhani College, with over 100 adolescents in attendance. The workshop focused on the significance of public spaces, their role in urban planning,

and how to address challenges and opportunities in frequently visited areas.

Participants conducted audits, shared ideas, and proposed actionable designs to transform the space into a more inclusive and vibrant environment.

The event featured hands-on sessions and an on-site audit, where students provided actionable recommendations for improving the space.

A preliminary design was also presented for further feedback. The students, now equipped with new skills, will play an essential role in the upcoming TU development process for the college frontage.

The workshop was inaugurated by Rajdhani College principal Minati Mishra, alongside HBT director Arpita Pattnaik, trustee Dipanjali Swain, and career counseling cell OIC Subrat Kumar Samal.

Mishra emphasised the importance of addressing the needs of all age groups in the city, while Pattnaik encouraged participants to voice their ideas for making Bhubaneswar's public spaces more adolescent-friendly.

AS PART OF THE INITIATIVE, RAJDHANI COLLEGE FRONTAGE TO BE DEVELOPED AS A MODEL TACTICAL URBANISM METHODS, SETTING A PRECEDENT FOR SIMILAR DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS CITY

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Crusher, stone quarries bring misery to two tribal villages



However, despite repeated complaints, administrative inaction persists, forcing affected families to continue their fight for justice.

Additionally, the use of explosives for blasting operations on agricultural land, aided by heavy machinery and wagon drills, is causing significant damage to their homes.

They alleged that the blasting also poses fears of an imminent explosion in the gas pipeline laid by Gas Authority of India Ltd (GAIL) just 100 meters away from the crusher unit.

They said they had approached the district Collector over these complaints following which the latter had formed a committee to conduct an investigation. The Collector had also issued a letter, dated- February 16, 2023, directing the Gondia Tehsildar to shut down the crusher unit and relocate it elsewhere. However, no administrative action has been taken so far though more than 18 months have elapsed.

The administrative inaction has led the villagers to suspect a tacit understanding between some officials and the private entity.

When contacted, Gondia Tehsildar Satyajit Mahapatra claimed that he was unaware of the allegations pertaining to the crusher unit and mining operations on tribal land. "I assumed office only two months ago," he said, adding that necessary steps will be taken following a review of documents.

Meanwhile, allegations have surfaced that the crusher unit is illegally procuring black stone from nearby areas and processing those into chips and metal. When quizzed over the reports, Jajpur Deputy Director of Mines Jayaprakash Nayak said directions have been issued to Tehsildars to take action against the crusher unit.

the Orissa High Court, seeking a demarcation of the land they had received under Vasundhara Yojana.

Acting on the petitions, the High Court had, November 30, 2022 (and again December 16, 2022) directed the Gondia Tehsildar to identify and demarcate the plots within a period of two months. However, the Tehsildar is still to act though two years have passed since the high court issued the direction, the tribals alleged.

Not just residents of Nuakastipal, residents of Srimantapur village under adjoining Bega panchayat have also alleged that the private entity was initially granted temporary permission to run the crusher unit and quarry. However, the company has allegedly exceeded the permissible mining limits by tenfold, extracting large quantities of black stone daily and transporting thousands of truckloads of metal to Jajpur district, leading to loss of state revenue to the tune of crores of rupees.

The residents alleged that the crusher unit which is operating around 200 metres from residential areas in violation of safety norms is causing perpetual air pollution which is contributing to the spread of various chronic and respiratory diseases in the area.

Jajpur, Dec 17: Villagers, mostly belonging to various tribal communities, in two villages of an equal number of panchayats under Gondia Tehsil of Dhenkanal district have alleged illegal encroachment of their land and brazen environmental pollution by a private crusher and metal quarry unit situated dangerously close to their settlements.

This place where the private unit operates is located near Chadheidhara Square in adjoining Jajpur district.

Residents of Nuakastipal village under Nihalprasad panchayat have alleged that the privately owned entity has encroached upon two fallow plots in setting up its crusher units at a distance of about 200 metres from their village.

They claim the dumping of soil by the firm on the encroached land has also resulted in the destruction of some patches of land allotted to 61 tribal families (one guntha each) under Vasundhara Yojana.

Sources said in 2022 the affected villagers had lodged a formal complaint against the private entity with the Dhenkanal Collector. Additionally, they had filed writ petitions (32212/2022 and 34205/2022) in



RUN FOR GLORY: Students participate in a track and field event at a Junior Sports Meet held at PM Shri Kendriya Vidyalaya in Boudh Tuesday

Startup Odisha outreach event at GEC Keonjhar

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, Dec 17: An outreach program organised by Startup Odisha at the Government College of Engineering (GCE) here witnessed the enthusiastic participation of over 100 students actively engaging in the various interactive sessions, Tuesday.

At the outset, principal of GCE in his introductory address welcomed the guests and participants and shared valuable remarks on the importance of entrepreneurship in shaping the future of Odisha.

The event featured prominent speakers, including Sandeep Kumar Pattnaik of 'Voice Of Kendujhar', and Shasank Sekhar Patro of Sabhyasa Retail tech Private Limited, who emphasized the role of innovation and entrepreneurial mindset in driving socio-economic development.

The event organised under the guidance of Kamaljit Das, chief administrative officer Startup Odisha, also saw insightful sessions by key offi-



cial, including Chief Financial Officer Prafulla Mallick, Itishree Panigrahi, Shivankit Das and Sudeshna Moharana.

The sessions covered a wide range of topics, including the Odisha Startup ecosystem, initiatives to nurture entrepreneurial ventures, and strategies to promote innovation under Utkarsh Odisha 2025 initiatives.

This initiative was undertaken on the direction of Hemant Sharma, Principal Secretary, MSME department. Such programmes are also being conducted across all 30 districts

Section Officer held over graft

Papadahandi/Nabarangpur: Vigilance sleuths nabbed a Section Officer attached to the Papadahandi block education office while accepting a bribe of ₹10,000 from a retired headmaster for preparing the latter's final pension papers, Tuesday. The accused was identified as Ranjit Kumar Sarangi. The anti-corruption sleuths also conducted searches at Sarangi's Raju Sahi residence in Nabarangpur town. A case has been registered in this connection and further investigations are on. Sources said that Sarangi allegedly demanded ₹10,000 bribe from the retired headmaster for preparing the latter's final pension papers. Left with no option, the victim approached the Vigilance authorities with a complaint. Accordingly, the Vigilance sleuths set a trap and caught Sarangi red-handed when he accepted the bribe money from the complainant, Tuesday morning. Following arrest, the sleuths took the accused to the Vigilance office at Jeypore for interrogation.

Panic grips villages over Jamuna's entry

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nilgiri, Dec 17: Fear gripped the forest-fringe villages here Tuesday after reports of tigress Jamuna straying into the Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary in Balasore district - from Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Mayurbhanj district - surfaced Monday.

The development has created panic especially in areas including Mankadapada, Tangana, Jharanaghati, Jamuna, Betakata, and Rishia. While the villagers are fearful of their safety, local leaders have expressed concerns over the Forest department's lack of transparency in disclosing the whereabouts of the wandering big cat. They said withholding information about the location of the tigress would cause further harm to the residents.

Jamuna, the Royal Bengal tigress, relocated from a tiger reserve in Maharashtra was released into the dense STR November 9. The tigress reportedly strayed into the Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary in Balasore district. Jamuna is believed to have crossed from Similipal's Kaptipada range through the hilly Sukhua Pata region be-

fore entering Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary.

After being released into the southern division of STR, Jamuna initially explored the forested hills to establish her territory. However, her movement near the forest fringes sparked speculation as she made efforts to adapt to the new habitat.

Meanwhile, following reports of her presence in Kuldiha, Forest officials and staff have intensified patrolling in the sanctuary. Two days ago, Balasore Divisional Forest Officer Khushwant Singh, along with STR staff, conducted inspections in the area. Additionally, the connecting route from Juriatota under Kuldiha Sanctuary has been sealed, and tourists have been barred from visiting the region.

Subrata Behera, in charge of Kuldiha range, stated that the route closure was implemented to safeguard deer relocated from Nandankanan Zoo. However, he refrained from disclosing any information about the tigress.

Kuldiha wildlife sanctuary, spread over 272.75 square kilometers of hilly forests, is home to elephants, leopards, bears, sambhars, deer, pangolins, nilgai, and other wildlife species.

Relaxation demanded on fishing ban near Rushikulya river mouth



POST NEWS NETWORK

Chhatrapur, Dec 17: Fishermen in Ganjam have urged the government to make relaxations in the present ban on fishing near the Rushikulya river mouth which has been imposed by the Forest department in view of the nesting and hatching season of endangered Olive Ridley turtles.

In a letter to Ganjam Collector Dibya Jyoti Parida Tuesday, the fishermen's association has demanded that they be permitted to use ring nets which are meant for catching fish in the deep sea. Moreover, the government should provide a compen-

sation of ₹15,000 to each fisherman in the age group of 18 - 70 years during the Olive Ridley conservation period. Also, the existing restricted period till May 31, 2025 be reduced to April 30, 2025.

With the nesting season of the iconic Olive Ridley turtles looming, the Forest department had imposed a ban on casting nets near the Rushikulya river mouth from November 1 till May 31, 2025. This was done keeping in mind the whole period - from the turtles laying eggs to the hatchlings swimming back in to the sea.

However, traditional fishermen, who are into this

Traditional fishermen, who are into this business across generations, denied of any harm caused by their nets to the turtles. They said that they are, in fact, taking extra precaution not to harm the nesting of the turtles during their egg laying season

business across generations, denied of any harm caused by their nets to the turtles. They said that they are, in fact, taking extra precaution not to harm the nesting of the turtles during their egg laying season as they never cast nets close to the area.

According to the specifications in the order, the Forest department had restricted the fishermen from spreading nets around the turtles' conservation area.

2 dead, one critical in train accident

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 17: Two persons were killed while another person sustained critical injuries after a passenger train hit them while they were crossing a level crossing on motorcycles near Kalunga Railway Station here in Sundargarh district Tuesday night.

The Government Railway Police (GRP) and local police which rushed to the spot following receipt of the information were still to ascertain the identity of the dead and injured persons when reports last came in. The bodies were sent for post mortem, while the injured has

been admitted to the Rourkela General Hospital (RGH).

According to eyewitnesses, the incident occurred when some motorcyclists were trying to cross the tracks at the level crossing even though the guard had shut the gates. A passing passenger train hit the motorcyclists, causing death to two of them instantaneously, while another sustained serious injuries.

The GRP and local police have launched separate investigations to ascertain the identity of the dead and injured while the mangled motorcycles that lay scattered on the tracks were still to be cleared.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 (2) (ii) CrPC

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused Namely: **Santosh Kumar Panda, Proprietor of M/s. Pragati Pharma, Plot No. 3285/3301, Khato No. 215/388 at P.O. Paralakhemundi, Distt. Gajapati, Odisha - 761200** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in a case vide **CC Reg. No. 13113/2020 U/S 138 NI Act** registered at **P.S North Rohini, Delhi** and it has been returned on a warrant of arrest thereupon issued stating that the said **Santosh Kumar Panda** could not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that accused **Santosh Kumar Panda** is absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Santosh Kumar Panda** is required to appear before the court to answer the said complaint on or before **16.04.2025**.

By Order
Ebbani Aggarwal
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03
North-West, Court No.107, 1st Floor
Rohini Courts, Delhi

DP/16382/ED/2024

CORRIGENDUM

No. MM-340: "Instruction to Bidders: (Tender Notice No. 6311/1F/2024 Dt.06.12.2024) has been changed to as Notice No. 6324/1F/2024 Dt.07.12.2024 for the Construction of Staff Barrack at Kiakata under Madhapur Range of Athmallik Forest Division and Notice No. 6322/1F/2024 Dt.07.12.2024 for the Construction of Staff Barrack at Charkhaman under Handapa Range of Athmallik Forest Division. The corresponding documents have been uploaded in the **www.odishastate.in** website. The last date for tender submission remains the same.

Sd./- Divisional Forest Officer Athmallik Division
OIFR-08125/11/0011/2425

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Letter No. S&T/OT/AMC/IPS/HBL-444, Dt. 12.12.2024

PROVISION FOR COMPREHENSIVE ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT OF INTEGRATED POWER SUPPLY SYSTEMS, MANUFACTURED BY MS HBL POWER SYSTEMS LIMITED, HYDERABAD AT 79 LOCATIONS OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION OF EAST COAST RAILWAY FOR A PERIOD OF 36 (THIRTY SIX) MONTHS.

Tender Value: ₹ 3,74,44,613.55, EMD: ₹ 3,37,200/- Tender document cost: ₹ 5,900/- (including 18% GST).

Bidding start date: 20.12.2024, Tender closing date & time : at 1100 hrs. of 03.01.2025.

No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website **www.irops.gov.in**

Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigenda issued for this tender.

Divisional Railway Manager (S&T) PR-804/P/24-25
Khurda Road

BUDDING TALENT

Guests admire a model displayed at a science and miscellaneous art exhibition held at Saraswati Vidya Mandir in Rourkela Tuesday

OP PHOTO

FOCUS GEOPOLITICS

THE MISSING LINKS



Why did the secular resistance to Assad disappear, leaving only Muslim fundamentalists to seize the day?

tionaries' indifference toward their own survival. Theirs was a "partisan and agonistic form of truth-telling," Patrick Gamez explains. They sought a "transformation through struggle and ordeal, as opposed to the pacifying, neutralizing, and normalizing forms of modern Western power. ... Crucial for understanding this point is the conception of truth at work...a conception of truth as partial, as reserved for partisans."

As Foucault himself put it: "... if this subject who speaks of right (or rather, rights) is speaking the truth, that truth is no longer the universal truth of the philosopher. ... It is interested in the totality only to the extent that it can see it in one-sided terms, distort it and see it from its own point of view. The truth is, in other words, a truth that can be deployed only from its combat position, from the perspective of the sought-for victory and ultimately, so to speak, of the survival of the speaking subject himself."

Can this perspective be dismissed as evidence of a premodern "primitive" society that has not yet discovered modern individualism? To anyone minimally acquainted with Western Marxism, the answer is clear. As the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukacs argued, Marxism is "universally true" precisely because it is "partial" to a particular subjective position. What Foucault was looking for in Iran – the agonistic ("war") form of truth-telling – was there

from the beginning in Marx, who saw that participating in the class struggle is not an obstacle to acquiring "objective" knowledge of history, but rather a precondition for doing so.

The positivist conception of knowledge as an "objective" expression of reality – what Foucault characterised as "the pacifying, neutralizing, and normalizing forms of modern Western power" – is the ideology of the "end of ideology." On one hand, we have supposedly non-ideological expert knowledge; on the other hand, we have dispersed individuals, each of whom is focused on his or her idiosyncratic "care of the Self" (Foucault's term) – the small things that bring pleasure to one's life. From this standpoint of liberal individualism, any universal commitment, especially if it includes risk to life and limb, is suspicious and "irrational."

Here we encounter an interesting paradox: While traditional Marxism probably cannot provide a convincing account of the Taliban's success, it does help clarify what Foucault was looking for in Iran (and what should fascinate us in Syria). At a time when the triumph of global capitalism had repressed the secular spirit of collective engagement in pursuit of a better life, Foucault hoped to find an example of collective engagement that did not rely on religious fundamentalism. He didn't.

The best explanation of

why religion now seems to hold a monopoly on collective commitment and self-sacrifice comes from Boris Buden, who argues that religion as a political force reflects the post-political disintegration of society – the dissolution of traditional mechanisms that guaranteed stable communal links. Fundamentalist religion is not only political; it is politics itself. For its adherents, it is no longer just a social phenomenon, but the very texture of society.

Thus, it is no longer possible to distinguish the purely spiritual aspect of religion from its politicisation: in a post-political universe, religion is the channel through which antagonistic passions return. Recent developments that look like triumphs of religious fundamentalism represent not a return of religion in politics, but simply the return of the political as such.

The question, then, is what ever happened to secular radical politics? In its absence, Noam Chomsky believes we are approaching the end of organised society – the point of no return beyond which we cannot even adopt commonsense measures to "avert cataclysmic destruction of the environment." While Chomsky focuses on our indifference toward the environment, I would extend his point to our general unwillingness to engage in political struggles generally. Making collective decisions to avert foreseeable calamities is an eminently political process.

The West's problem is that it is wholly unwilling to fight for a big common cause. The "peaceniks" who want to end Russia's war in Ukraine on any terms, for example, will ultimately defend their comfortable lives, and they are ready to sacrifice Ukraine for that purpose. The Italian philosopher Franco Berardi is right. We are witnessing "the disintegration of the Western world."

The writer is Professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS THAT LOOK LIKE TRIUMPHS OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM REPRESENT NOT A RETURN OF RELIGION IN POLITICS, BUT SIMPLY THE RETURN OF THE POLITICAL AS SUCH



Slavoj Žižek

The downfall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria surprised even the opposition, led by Abu Mohammad al-Jolani's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, offering fertile ground for conspiracy theories. What roles did Israel, Turkey, Russia, and the US play in this sudden reversal? Did Russia abstain from intervening on Assad's behalf simply because it cannot afford another military operation outside the Ukrainian theater, or was there some behind-the-scenes deal? Did the US again fall into the trap of supporting Islamists against Russia, ignoring the lessons from its support of the mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s? What did Israel do? It is certainly benefiting from the diversion of the world's attention from Gaza and the West Bank, and it is even seizing new territory in southern Syria for itself.

Like most commentators, I simply don't know the answers to these questions, which is why I prefer to focus on the bigger picture. A general feature of the story, like in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal and in Iran during the 1979 revolution, is that there was no big, decisive battle. The regime simply collapsed like a house of cards. Victory went to the side that was actually willing to fight and die for its cause.

The fact that the regime was universally despised does not fully explain what happened. Why did the secular resistance to Assad disappear, leaving only Muslim fundamentalists to seize the day? One could apply the same question to Afghanistan. Why were thousands willing to risk their lives to catch a flight out of Kabul, but not to fight the Taliban? The armed forces of the old Afghan regime were better armed, but they simply were not committed to that fight.

A similar set of facts fascinated the philosopher Michel Foucault when he visited Iran (twice) in 1979. He was struck by what he saw as the revolu-

IN JEST THIS

Character more important than achievements

It must be a great feeling to be a world champion at age 18. Gukesh, the chess phenom, has certainly been getting plenty of adulation — and deservedly so — since he defeated Ding Liren to become the youngest undisputed classical chess world champion.

His parents are undoubtedly proud of his many achievements in chess, but I was happy to hear Gukesh say, during a FIDE interview, that his mother had expressed her feelings like this: "I will be happy to know that you are a great chess player but I would be happier to hear that you are a greater person."

Indeed, this is exactly how I feel about my three children and any achievements they might attain. They could become presidents or prime ministers, Nobel Prize-winning scientists or Oscar-winning actors, but it would give me little pride if they lacked the basic character traits that define a good person. What are

these traits? Well, here are just five that I hope my children will display:

Humility: I admire celebrities and other high-achievers who are truly humble, especially if they do not bring attention to it by saying something like, "I am the most humble person in the world." Many people can't resist bragging about their achievements and often do it through what's known as a humble brag. "I don't know how it happened, but another one of my books has been short-listed for the Booker Prize," they say. Being humble means that you remember where you came from — your humble beginnings — and you recognise that you didn't achieve success merely through hard work and merit. Luck also played a role, as did teachers, mentors and many others who are too humble to brag about it.

Kindness: This is an extremely important trait. Some people are unkind, while many

others are kind only to their own kind. If someone is from their community, they receive kindness, while outsiders get the cold shoulder. If you are a truly kind person, you show kindness indiscriminately. You are not just kind to your fellow humans, you are also kind to other creatures. You are often seen treating animals like humans, but you are never seen treating humans like animals.

Compassion: This is related to kindness, but goes even deeper. It means showing sympathy for those who are suffering from misfortune. Mother Teresa showed a lot of compassion for orphaned and abandoned children in Kolkata. She gave them food, shelter and love. The great basketball player Michael Jordan showed compassion for his opponents. He didn't just dunk on them. He also patted them on the back and said, "Don't give up. You'll win a championship one day — as soon as

I retire."

Respect: It is important to respect your elders, but it's also important to respect everyone, not just those who have higher status in society than you. Anyone can show respect to the cricket star, but it takes a person of good character to show respect to the cleaning lady. We convey our respect through our words and our actions, showing others that we value them, regardless of whether they're swinging a bat or a broom.

Integrity: This means following moral and ethical principles. Being honest and truthful are part of this. In sporting events and other venues, people of integrity do not cheat. They don't take performance-enhancing drugs. They resist the temptation to take shortcuts, even if it's the only way to reach the finish line before the Kenyans. It's better to finish in last place with zero medals than to finish in first place with zero integrity.



Melvin Durai

IT'S BETTER TO FINISH IN LAST PLACE WITH ZERO MEDALS THAN TO FINISH IN FIRST PLACE WITH ZERO INTEGRITY

Power vacuum

Sir, This refers to "Middle East Opportunity," Orissa POST, Dec 17. The sudden collapse of President Bashar al-Assad's regime marked a historic turning point in Syria's civil war, ending over five decades of Assad family rule. The fall of Damascus to rebel forces has reshaped the political and military landscape of Syria and reverberated across the region. Yet, while many Syrians celebrate the end of a repressive dictatorship, the question of what follows looms ominously. For years, Assad, backed by Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, had clung to power, using brutal force to suppress dissent and crush rebel opposition. Exploiting the withdrawal of Russian air support and the overstretched resources of Hezbollah, the rebels advanced rapidly, isolating the regime's strongholds. Years of civil war has left Syria shattered, with millions displaced and critical infrastructure destroyed. In the wake of the regime's collapse, a power vacuum threatens to deepen instability. The international community must prioritise aid and security to prevent further suffering and chaos. Whether the country descends into further chaos or begins a slow journey toward peace will depend on the collective resolve of Syrians.

N Sathasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Art transcends borders

Sir, It is delightful to see eternal showman Raj Kapoor's 100th birth anniversary being celebrated in Pakistan's Peshawar where his fans in gathered at the ace actor-director's ancestral home to pay tribute to the late icon of Indian cinema. The World Bank's announcement to allocate Rs 100 million each for the restoration of the ancestral homes of Raj Kapoor and another Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar has been welcomed by movie buffs around the world. Peshawar's deep ties with Indian cinema is well known as the ancestral houses of Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan are situated there. The centenary celebration of the master craftsman in Peshawar goes to show that art in all forms and literature transcends boundaries and enlivens, connects and inspires people beyond boundaries.

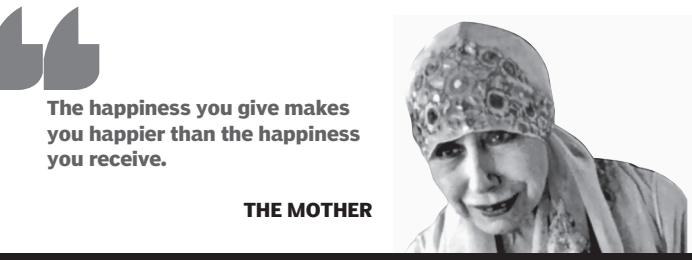
M Pradyu, KANNUR

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 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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The happiness you give makes you happier than the happiness you receive.

THE MOTHER

Losing To Win

It may appear strange in most democracies, including India, that losing a no-confidence vote against a government leading to its fall is a cause for celebration for the ruling party. But, this is a normal phenomenon in German politics where defeat in a no-trust vote is lapped up by the ruling party as an opportunity to try its luck again to form a government with renewed energy in fresh elections which are an automatic fallout of the parliamentary exercise. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has just lost a vote of confidence in the German parliament. It is the outcome he seems to have hoped for when he called for the confidence vote last week. His aim, experts say, was to lose this vote now, win fresh elections and come back stronger next time.

To give an idea of what his intention was he told members of parliament, the Bundestag, ahead of the 16 December vote, that "Politics is not a game" and that politicians need to think of the welfare of the country far more than their party or individual interests. In the Bundestag, 394 members voted "no," 207 voted "yes" and 116 abstained. Scholz needed 367 "no" votes to achieve his goal. His three-party coalition government had collapsed in early November following the sacking by the Chancellor of his finance minister, Christian Lindner, head of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), who did not allow the government to make fresh borrowings to shore up the country's stagnant economy. The FDP is one of three parties in the governing coalition Scholz led since December 2021. That left the remaining two coalition partners without a majority in parliament.

In Germany, a motion for a vote of confidence is a rarely used, double-edged weapon that Chancellors use to manage political crises. While a successful vote can strengthen and even help repair fractures within a coalition, a lost vote automatically triggers new elections that may, if the gamble pays off, help the Chancellor's party win in parliamentary elections with larger share of seats guaranteeing the stability of the new government.

During the past 75 years since the new federal republic was formed in Germany in 1949 after the end of Nazi rule, four Chancellors have used a motion for a vote of confidence to try to secure their hold on leadership. The results have been mixed.

The first chancellor to call for such a vote was Willy Brandt in 1972. His politics of reconciliation with socialist and communist countries in Eastern Europe caused a rift among his SPD-led coalition. As per his plan, Brandt lost the vote, but scored a decisive win in the following snap elections and strengthened his mandate to govern. Ten years later, another SPD chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, also called for a vote of confidence. He won that vote, but he was ousted soon after.

Now another SPD Chancellor Scholz is using the no confidence vote to seek a fresh mandate from the people so as to allow the formation of a new government with an outright majority and thus in a better position to run the government without any pressure from any alliance partner.

The move is questionable. Scholz's chances of winning the snap election look slim, though not impossible, analysts say. The reason is there is no clear frontrunner to challenge Scholz in the election likely to be held in February, 2025. However, Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz, a conservative former businessman, is currently topping most polls, which show the CDU may emerge a winner. No wonder, he had called the confidence vote shortly before it was held that it was "a day of relief."

What may turn out to be the biggest surprise is a victory for the right-wing party Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) if it can cash in on voters' disillusionment with Germany's current political dysfunction. If that happens, Europe's already shrinking liberal space may shrink further to the detriment of the world at large.

WISDOM CORNER

Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty. ALBERT EINSTEIN

Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing. HELEN KELLER

Our specious present as such is very short. We do, however, experience passing events; part of the process of the passage of events is directly there in our experience, including some of the past and some of the future. GEORGE HERBERT MEAD

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1865: US abolishes slavery. The US secretary of state proclaimed the adoption of the 13th Amendment, officially bringing it into force. The first of the 3 Reconstruction Amendments, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude. The other two Reconstruction Amendments – the 14th and the 15th Amendments – extended citizenship rights, equal protection of the law, and the right to vote to all Americans irrespective of their "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

1892: The Nutcracker makes its debut in St. Petersburg, Russia. The two-part ballet was inspired by German author Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann's novella The Nutcracker and the Mouse King. Even though the ballet's score was composed by the famous Russian composer, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, it did not get good reviews. It was only in the mid-20th century, that The Nutcracker gained popularity among theater goers, especially during Christmas time in the United States.

1958: World's first communication satellite launched. A product of a highly secretive project, SCORE (Signal Communications by Orbiting Relay Equipment) was launched aboard the Atlas rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Once in orbit, it relayed the first message sent to Earth from space - a short statement by American President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

1966: Richard Walker discovers Epimetheus. One of Saturn's 150 natural satellites or moons, Epimetheus shares its orbit with another moon, Janus. Saturn's largest moon is Titan, which is the only natural satellite in the Solar System with an atmosphere.

LOL CHIEF IN LOCKUP

A police officer stopped a motorist who was speeding down Main Street. "But officer," the man began, "I can explain." "Just be quiet," snapped the officer. "I'm going to let you cool your heels in jail until the chief gets back." "But, officer, I just wanted to say," "And I said to keep quiet! You're

going to jail!" A few hours later the officer looked in on his prisoner and said, "Lucky for you that the chief's at his daughter's wedding... He'll be in a good mood when he gets back." "Don't count on it," answered the fellow in the cell. "I'm the groom."



ELEPHANT PARADE RESTRICTIONS

Kerala temple trusts move SC

The Kerala High Court had restrained the use of elephants in the state's temples on the pretext of tradition, while considering a batch of writ petitions for the prohibition of cruelty against captive elephants in Kerala by their parading and exhibition in temples and festivals



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 17: The temple trusts of Thiruvambady and Paramakkavu Devaswoms have petitioned the Supreme Court challenging the restrictions imposed by the Kerala High Court on elephant management in Thrissur Pooram.

Billed as the "mother of all festivals" in Kerala, the Thrissur Pooram was started by Sakthan Thampuran, the Maharaja of the erstwhile Kochi state, in the late 18th century.

The most keenly watched event of the Pooram festivities is the elephant parade -- of more than 50 jumbos, besides the fire-cracker displays, that starts in the afternoon and continues till the early hours of the next day.

The special leave petition filed before the apex court said that the Kerala HC erred in issuing directions for festival-specific matters without any violation of the Central statute such as the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 or the 2012 Rules.

It added that judicial interference was warranted only

in the absence of a statutory framework and by ignoring the robust statutory scheme provided by the 2012 Rules, the Kerala High Court "has arbitrarily supplanted the role of the legislature and executive in regulating such festivals".

The appeal, filed through advocate Abhilash MR, said that the "spatial restriction" mandating a minimum distance of 3 meters between elephants brings the historic festival to a grinding halt, as the thousand-year-old venue, the Vadakkunnathan Temple, integral to Thrissur Pooram, cannot accommodate such constraints.

"This venue, with its traditional layout, has been the epicentre of the Pooram for centuries and the direction by the Kerala High Court disregards the significance of the historic and UNESCO-recognised tradition," it added.

The Kerala High Court had restrained the use of elephants in the state's temples on the pretext of tradition, while considering a batch of writ petitions

for the prohibition of cruelty against captive elephants in Kerala by their parading and exhibition in temples and festivals.

In its impugned decision, the Kerala HC said, "We do not believe that there is any essential religious practice of any religion that mandates the use of elephants in festivals. In other words, the animal is treated as a tradable commodity with its owner or custodian being concerned only with commercial returns. Reportedly, the festivals in Kerala are now so commercialised that even before a festival, there is a war or a sort of competition amongst temple committees tasked with the conduct of festivals regarding the number of elephants being paraded as well as the fame of particular elephants/elephants being paraded."

It took note of the submission that between 2018-2024, 160 captive elephants have died or in other words, in Kerala, for the years 2018-2024, nearly 33 per cent of the total number of re-

corded captive elephants (509 in 2018) have died during this short period of seven years.

Looking into all aspects, the Kerala High Court ordered that henceforth, festival organisers must submit applications with all the relevant details before the authorities concerned at least one month prior to the festival.

It also directed the authorities concerned that they should ensure that elephants must get a rest period between two exhibitions which will not be less than three days; besides, the exhibitors have to ensure that elephants are given sufficient food, a continuous supply of potable water and a temporary tethering facility which is clean and spacious.

Further, it ordered that elephants must not be paraded on public roads between 9 am and 5 pm and they should not be transported between 10 pm and 4 am besides elephants must get at least eight hours of rest during a continuous period of 24 hours.

Prayers offered to Hanuman in reopened Sambhal temple

Former local says shrine belonged to Rastogi community

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sambhal (UP), Dec 17: Devotees thronged the Khaggu Sarai area here Tuesday to offer prayers to a Lord Hanuman idol that was discovered in the Bhasma Shankar temple, reopened last week after being shut for 46 years.

Tuesday is dedicated to the worship of Lord Hanuman. "The temple was cleaned around 4 am. A 'chola' (cloth meant for gods and goddesses) was offered to Lord Hanuman and the Hanuman Chalisa recited," said the temple's priest Shashikant Shukla.

He added that "shringaar (decoration)" of Lord Shiva was also done in the temple's sanctum sanctorum.

The Shri Kartik Mahadev Temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened December 13 after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive.

The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivaling. It had remained locked since 1978. The temple also has a well nearby.

Meanwhile, the owner of a house opposite the temple that was flagged for encroachment said he would remove the illegal structure.

Shukla, the temple priest, said devotees had started coming to the temple from near and far.

He added that his "heart aches, thinking of the years that the idols had remained in darkness".



The temple is situated just over a kilometre from the Shahi Jama Masjid where violence took place November 24 during a protest over a court-ordered survey of the mosque

The Sambhal district administration has written to the Archaeological Survey of India for carbon dating of the temple and the well

Carbon dating is a method used to determine the age of archaeological artefact from ancient sites

He also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the district magistrate and the superintendent of police for the temple's reopening.

Vikki Kumar, a devotee who came to the temple, said, "Such an ancient temple has opened after 46 years. Tuesday, being devoted to Lord Hanuman, I have come to visit with my family."

Three damaged idols were found inside the temple well

Monday, officials had said.

Meanwhile, Vishnu Shankar Rastogi, a former resident of the area, claimed the temple was of the Rastogi community.

"After the riots of 1978, the 40-45 people from Rastogi families who lived here shut the temple and left," said the 82-year-old.

Rastogi, whose early life was spent in Khaggu Sarai, now lives in another locality of Sambhal.

"People left due to fear. We also left due to the massacre in 1978. My shop was burnt," he said.

There used to be a four-foot circumambulation path and a peepal tree near the temple well, he claimed.

Meanwhile, Mateen Ahmed, whose house was flagged for encroachment, said there was nothing wrong in the blueprint.

"There is a balcony in the upper portion that extends about two-and-a-half feet. This part is an encroachment. We have spoken to the administration and are getting it removed."

The work will be completed in four to five days, he added.

3 mn short neck clam seeds released into Kerala lake



This clam species has substantial export potential, as international demand for clams continues to rise, offering significant economic opportunities for local communities

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kochi, Dec 17: As part of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) Blue Growth Project and to address the alarming decline in the short neck clam population, the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) launched a stock enhancement programme by releasing three lakh short clam seeds into Kerala's Ashtamudi Lake Tuesday.

According to CMFRI estimates, recent annual catches have fallen below 1,000 tonnes as against 10,000 tonnes during the early 1990s.

This clam species has substantial export potential, as international demand for clams continues to rise, offering significant economic opportunities for local communities.

These seeds, produced in the hatchery of Vizhinjam Regional Centre of the CMFRI, were released into the Ashtamudi Lake in Kollam district, where depletion of this species has been reported.

The ranching is a sustainable solution by replenishing the clam stocks and ensuring the continuity of this critical resource in the backwaters. It

is aimed at restoring the clam stocks, ensuring sustainability, supporting local fishermen and providing leverage for boosting export revenues.

The stock enhancement programme was made possible after the CMFRI's year-long research efforts led to the successful development of captive breeding technology for this clam species, enabling the production of seeds for the release.

MK Anil, Principal Scientist at the CMFRI's Vizhinjam Regional Centre, said the short neck clam is a treasured resource in Ashtamudi Lake with significant economic and ecological importance.

"However, in recent years, the fishery of this clam has witnessed a drastic decline, threatening the livelihoods of thousands of fishermen who rely on this resource," he said.

CMFRI scientists pointed out that key issues such as environmental pollution, invasion of non-native species like the Charru mussel, and the impacts of climate change, including altered salinity and water temperature, have significantly reduced the clam population.

The event also witnessed the launch of hatchery facilities to produce bivalves for enhancing sustainable aquaculture practices and meeting the growing demand for high-quality seeds. Mussel seeds were distributed to local farmers, providing them with resources to strengthen their aquaculture operations and improve their livelihoods.

Revamped visitors' gallery unveiled in UP House

Speaker gifts original copy of Constitution to CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Dec 17: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the revamped visitors' gallery in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Monday ahead of the start of the Winter Session.

On the occasion, Speaker Satish Mahana presented an original copy of the Constitution to the chief minister, his two deputies, the opposition leader, and the parliamentary affairs minister.

Copies of the Constitution will also be distributed to all Assembly members.

At 10:30 am on the first day of the Winter Session, members entered the Assembly

where Mahana, Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, and Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey occupied the designated chairs near the speaker's podium. Mahana invited Adityanath to inaugurate the revamped visitors' gallery. As the chief minister pressed the remote button, the curtains over the gallery parted and illuminated the House.

Following the inauguration, Mahana presented original copies of the Constitution to the chief minister and the other key dignitaries.

Adityanath, along with the guests, also released books documenting the contributions of all chief ministers and opposition leaders since Independence.



In his address, Adityanath praised Mahana for transforming the Assembly into a "robust democratic institution" during his nearly three-year tenure and "for integrating modern advancements such as transitioning to a paperless Assembly, introducing e-Vidhan, and amending rules dating back to 1952". The chief minister also reassured the opposition, saying, "Differences on issues are

natural but dialogue must not be disrupted."

He noted that gifting original copies of the Constitution to the members was a significant gesture ahead of the 75th year of its adoption.

"Every page of this document reflects the spirit and vision of India and presents our philosophy," he said, emphasising BR Ambedkar's role as chairman of the drafting committee.

Speaker Mahana said law graduate members would receive English copies of the Constitution while other members would receive the Hindi version. Earlier in the day, Opposition members had entered the Assembly and made sarcastic remarks about the subdued lighting and curtains over the gallery.

Samajwadi Party member Samarpal Singh had quipped that "everything has been left in darkness" while one of his party colleagues remarked, "The entire state is engulfed in darkness."

Every page of this document reflects the spirit and vision of India and presents our philosophy

YOGI ADITYANATH | CM, UTTAR PRADESH

MAHA KUMBH 2025

Tethered drones deployed to ensure devotees' safety



The high-tech device capable of capturing high-resolution images, videos, and sensor data leaves no corner of Mahakumbh Nagar unmonitored

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mahakumbh Nagar (UP), Dec 17: Tethered drones have been deployed in the Maha Kumbh area to provide comprehensive

aerial surveillance ahead of next year's event, officials said Tuesday. The high-tech device capable of capturing high-resolution images, videos, and sensor data leaves no corner of Mahakumbh Nagar unmonitored, they said.

Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh is scheduled to take place in Prayagraj from January 14 to February 26. The state-of-the-art system is a major step towards safeguarding the devotees, officials said, adding that Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajesh Dwivedi has appointed an expert team to oversee its operation.

Calling it a unique and advanced security tool, Dwivedi highlighted its ability to switch to alert mode within seconds.

"The tethered drone's secure data transmission ensures that it captures every detail, big or small, from above, making it a cornerstone of the hi-tech security measures in place," the officer said, adding that it will act as an "third eye" of the police.

Positioned strategically, the drones are monitoring the Sangam bank, crowded ghats, temples, and other significant locations. They can instantly alert officers about any developments, Dwivedi said. Deployed at a fixed height using ropes attached to large balloons, these drones have been installed on the high towers across Mahakumbh Nagar. Their elevated position allows them to provide continuous monitoring of the entire Mela area without the need for frequent adjustments, Dwivedi said.

With their high-resolution cameras, these drones transmit real-time footage to the control room, enabling the identification of the overcrowded areas and immediate deployment of police personnel.

Kerala moves forward with Sabari Rail project expansion

Thiruvananthapuram: A meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Tuesday decided to seek approval from the Central government for implementing the Sabari Rail Project through the Angamaly - Erumeli - Nilakkal route in an expanded manner. According to a CMO statement here, if the plan is approved, the first phase will see the completion of the Angamaly-Erumeli-Nilakkal route, and the project will proceed as a single line. The CM said that track doubling could be considered during the development phase. He said that the expansion of the Sabari Rail Project should be viewed as it could provide a significant boost to Kerala's development. "In the future, this project could be developed as a connection to Vizhinjam, where an International Transhipment Deepwater Multipurpose Seaport has been established, instead of the currently considered Chengannur - Pamba project by the central government," Vijayan said. The move by the state government comes as the Railways is conducting a study on an alignment between Angamaly and Erumeli and a second alignment from Chengannur to Pamba.



ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସ୍ଥାବର ସମ୍ପତ୍ତି ନିୟାମକ ପ୍ରାଧିକରଣ
ODISHA REAL ESTATE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

Block-A-1, 3rd Floor, Toshali Bhawan, Satya Nagar,
Bhubaneswar- 751007
Telephone No.-0674-2571977, Email: reraodisha@gmail.com

PUBLIC NOTICE

No.CAD-1923: ORERA intends to Go-Live with its ORERA 2.0 version w.e.f. 20.12.2024.

All the Real Estate Promoters/ Agents applying for registration and parties intending to file complaint case U/s 31 of RE(R&D) Act, 2016 can now log-in to ORERA version 2.0 in the following website:- <https://rera.odisha.gov.in> with effect from 20.12.2024.

Sd/- Secretary
Odisha RERA

OIPR-13223/11/0004/2425



One nation, one election means, it is a clear intention -- one nation, no election. BJP's main agenda is one nation, no election. They don't want to have a democratic process at all. To sabotage the entire democratic process gradually, they are bringing this new idea of one nation, one election

K C VENUGOPAL | AICC GENERAL SECY

SEVERAL DELHI SCHOOLS RECEIVE BOMB THREATS

Bomb threats were received by a few schools in Delhi Tuesday, making it the second such incident this week and the fifth in nine days in the national capital, officials said. Around 20 schools including DPS RK Puram had received threat emails Monday



Tribal environmental activist Tulasi Gouda passes away at 86

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bengaluru, Dec 17: Environmental activist and Padma Shri awardee Tulasi Gouda passed away at her residence in Honnali village in Uttara district Monday due to age-related ailments, official sources said.

She was 86, they said. Gouda belonged to primitive Halakki tribe and is survived by a son and a daughter.



In recognition of her work, she was conferred with Padma Shri in 2021. She has planted more than 30,000 saplings and was known as the "Encyclopedia of the Forest" due to her vast knowledge of diverse species of plants and herbs.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah expressed sadness over the passing of Gouda and prayed for her departed soul.

"I am saddened by the passing away of Tulasi Gouda, an environmentalist from Honnali, Ankola taluk, who planted and watered lakhs of trees. Tulasi Gouda, who worked as a daily wage labourer in the Forest Department to earn a living, continued to plant trees even after retirement... and was awarded the highest honour Padma Shri," he said in a post on 'X'.

IIT-Madras introduces cultural excellence quota in UG admissions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: IIT-Madras has become the first IIT in the country to introduce a "Fine Arts and Culture Excellence" quota in admissions to undergraduate programmes, according to Director V Kamakoti.

Its objective is to reward and encourage students who have achieved excellence in fine arts and culture, Kamakoti said. IIT-Madras was also the first IIT to introduce a sports quota for undergraduate admissions from the 2024-25 academic session. Of the two seats, one will be reserved for women and the other will be gender neutral.

Concept of simultaneous polls not new to India: Govt

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 17: Ahead of the introduction of bills on holding simultaneous polls, the government Tuesday said the concept is not new to the country.

Following the adoption of the Constitution, elections to the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies were conducted simultaneously from 1951 to 1967, it noted. The government said the first general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951-52, a practice that continued for three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967.

The Fourth Lok Sabha was also dissolved prematurely in 1970, with fresh elections held in 1971. Unlike the first, second, and third Lok Sabha, which completed their full five-year terms, the fifth Lok Sabha's term was extended until 1977 under Article 352 because of the declaration of Emergency. Since then, only a few Lok Sabha terms have lasted the full five years, such as the eighth, 10th, 14th and 15th.

State assemblies have faced similar disruptions over the years. Premature dissolutions and term extensions have become a "recurring challenge", the government said. "These developments have firmly disrupted the cycle of simultaneous elections, leading to the current pattern of staggered



Following the adoption of the Constitution, elections to the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies were conducted simultaneously from 1951 to 1967, it noted

The government said the first general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951-52, a practice that continued for three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967

"However, this cycle of synchronised elections was disrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to the premature dissolution of some State Legislative Assemblies," an official explainer said

electoral schedules across the country," it observed. Citing a report of the high-level committee on 'one nation, one election', the explainer said simultaneous polls promote consistency in governance.

"Due to the ongoing cycle of elections in various parts of the country, political parties, their leaders, legislators, and both state and Central governments often focus their efforts on preparing for upcoming

BJP inquiring into absence of MPs

New Delhi: The BJP is inquiring into the absence of its nearly 20 MPs from the Lok Sabha during the voting on Tuesday on the introduction of the bill for simultaneous elections.

As the party had issued a whip asking all its members to be present in the House, the absence of so many MPs has irked its leadership, sources said. However, they added that a number of MPs had informed in advance about their absence due to various personal and work-related reasons.

elections rather than prioritising governance," it said, citing the 'rationale' for holding simultaneous polls as recommended by the panel headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind. The adoption of simultaneous elections would refocus the government's attention towards developmental activities and the implementation of policies aimed at promoting the welfare of the masses, it added.

Delhi's air quality slips to 'very poor'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Delhi's air quality plummeted to alarming levels Tuesday after 24 days, with many areas witnessing a significant spike in pollution despite the strictest measures, including a ban on construction activities and the entry of trucks into the city, coming into force.

The city's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded in the 'severe' category with a reading of 433 at 4 pm against 379 Monday, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. The last time Delhi's air quality was recorded in the 'severe' category was November 23, with a reading of 412.

Experts pointed to a significant drop in wind speeds as the primary cause of the sudden spike in pollution, explaining that the lower speed allowed local pollutants to concentrate in the atmosphere. They said the AQI was expected to remain in the 'severe' category for the next two days. Of Delhi's 35 monitoring stations, 28 recorded the air quality in the 'severe' category, with some breaching the 450 mark that is classified as 'severe plus'.

Monitoring stations in Mandir Marg, Jahangirpuri, Narela, Nehru Nagar, Patparganj, Punjabi Bagh, Rohini, ITO, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, DTU, Major Dhyani Chand National Stadium, Mandir Marg, Pusa, Shadipur recorded the AQI in the 'severe' category. The AQI was in the 'severe plus' category in Alipur, Anand Vihar, Ashok Vihar, Bawana, Burari, CRRI Mathura Road, North Campus, Okhla Phase 2, Sirifort, Sonia Vihar and Vivek Vihar.

During winters, the national capital enforces restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which categorises the city's air quality in four stages -- Stage I (Poor, AQI 201-300), Stage II (Very Poor, AQI 301-400), Stage III (Severe, AQI 401-450), and Stage IV (Severe



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Plus, AQI above 450). The major source of Delhi's pollution was vehicular emission, contributing 18.8 per cent of PM2.5. There was no contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution as the season is over in Punjab and Haryana. PM2.5 remained the primary pollutant, with levels recorded at 252 micrograms per cubic metre at 4 pm.

These fine particles pose significant health risks as they can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. The national safe standard for PM2.5 is 60 micrograms per cubic metre while the World Health Organization (WHO) safe limit is 15 micrograms per cubic metre.

On Monday, the Centre's air quality panel for Delhi-NCR imposed the strictest Stage IV curbs under GRAP, including a ban on the entry of polluting trucks carrying non-essential goods into Delhi and mandatory shifting of classes, except those for classes 10 and 12, to hybrid mode.

Stage IV also includes a ban on all construction and demolition activities, including public projects such as highways, flyovers, power lines and pipelines.

of the day uote

I am assuring you, we are building Amaravati in a big way. We are spending nearly ₹50,000 crore within three years to make Amaravati one of the most beautiful cities

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | AP CM

Our government has successfully carried out more than 1.60 lakh recruitment in the education sector

YOGI ADITYANATH | UP CM

Ever since the BJP has come to power in the state, drug dealers have been having a field day and they have fearlessly spread their network all over the state. Today, drugs have reached every village, street and locality of the state

BHUPINDER SINGH HOUDA | FORMER HARYANA CM

SHORT TAKES

40 lambs killed in leopard attack

Hamirpur (HP): As many as 40 lambs were mauled to death in a leopard attack in Himachal Pradesh's Hamirpur district, forest officers said Tuesday. The incident occurred Monday evening in the Narayana Da Tal area of Galod Khas gram panchayat, where sheep herders had set up a camp en route to their destinations, police said. The lambs belonged to Pritam Chand, a resident of Chamba. According to the police, Chand had taken his sheep and goats to graze in the forest, leaving some lambs behind at the camp. Upon his return, Chand found 32 lambs dead and 12 others injured. Of these, eight succumbed to their injuries later.

TN minister Ponmudy appears before ED

Chennai: Tamil Nadu forest minister K Ponmudy Tuesday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate here for questioning in a money laundering case investigation, official sources said. The minister's statement was recorded under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said. The central agency had in July attached assets worth more than ₹14 crore in an alleged illegal mining-linked money laundering case against the 74-year-old minister, a DMK leader, his ex-MP son P Gautham Sigamani and some family members.

SC grants bail to 'middleman'

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Tuesday granted bail to an alleged middleman arrested in connection with a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in Rajasthan's Jal Jeevan Mission scheme. While granting the reprieve to Sanjay Badaya, a bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan asked the Enforcement Directorate (ED) whether the then minister of the department concerned, on whose behalf the accused allegedly received money, was made an accused in the case.

Manipur: Bomb recovered, defused

Imphal: A mortar was found at Khongampat in Manipur's Imphal East district Tuesday, police said. Security forces cordoned off the area and later defused the bomb, they said. The spot is a few hundred metres from a BSF camp and nearly one-and-a-half km from the private residence of Chief Minister N Biren Singh, a police officer said.

SNIPPETS

SFI, TMCP clash outside college over RG Kar issue

Kolkata: Members of the student wings of the Trinamool Congress and CPI(M) Tuesday clashed over the RG Kar issue outside Barasat College in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, police said. Clashes broke out between members of the Student Federation of India (SFI) and the Trinamool Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) outside the college when the former tried to begin a demonstration demanding justice for the RG Kar victim when an examination was on, police said. A large number of police personnel were posted outside the institute, a senior police officer said. The body of an on-duty medic, who was raped and murdered, was recovered August 9 from the seminar hall of the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital here, sparking nationwide outrage.

Uddhav meets CM Fadnavis, Speaker Narwekar in Nagpur

Nagpur: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray and his MLA son Aaditya Thackeray Tuesday met with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar on the premises of Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur. Aaditya later told reporters that he and his father extended good wishes to Fadnavis and Narwekar. "We talked about taking a step towards showing political maturity and working together in the interest of the people of Maharashtra," the former minister said. Aaditya said no discussion was held on the post of the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

Badshah fined ₹15K for traffic rule violation

Gurugram: Gurugram Traffic Police has issued a challan of ₹15,000 after a Mahindra Thar carrying popular rapper Badshah was found driving on the wrong side of the road, officials said Tuesday. The incident took place on the evening of December 15 when Badshah went to the Airia Mall on Sohana Road to make a special appearance in a concert by Punjabi singer Karan Aujlia, police said. The SUV in which the singer was present is registered in the name of Deepender Malik, a resident of Panipat.



Young women from the tribal community of Jhargram make graffiti ahead of 'Behala Art Fest 2024' in Kolkata, West Bengal

Rising cancer cases linked to Ghaggar's pollution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

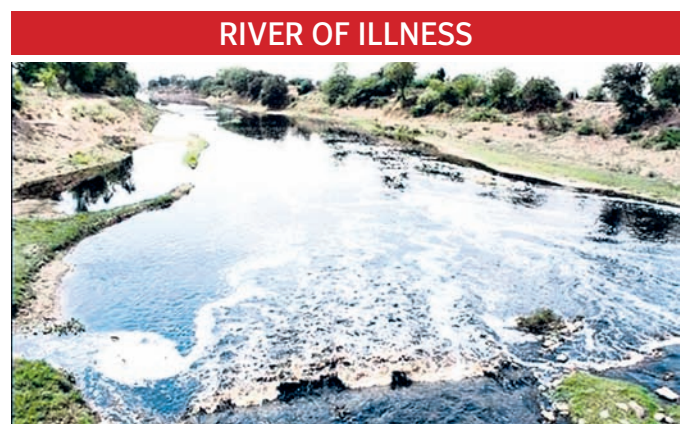
New Delhi, Dec 17: Sirsa MP Kumari Selja flagged the issue of rising cancer cases in Haryana during the ongoing Winter Session of Parliament, linking the spread of the disease to pollution in the Ghaggar river.

Responding to a question by the Congress member in Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Health Prataprao Jadhav recently said that the ICMR has informed that a study published in the Indian Academy of Sciences on Human health risk assessment revealed that people dwelling near river drains are highly prone to cancer disease. Hazard quotients were observed above the threshold limit that poses high non-carcinogenic risks, Jadhav said in a written reply.

The minister also said that the Haryana State Pollution Control Board has found the water of the Ghaggar River is not fit for drinking.

Jadhav was responding to a question posed by Selja who had asked about the number of cancer patients in Haryana, the details of special cancer wards set up in various districts for treating these patients, and the extent to which polluted water from the Ghaggar River is responsible for spreading cancer.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in coordination with State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs)/ Pollution Control Committees (PCCs) has established a Water Quality Monitoring Network the National Water Quality Monitoring Programme (NWMP), Jadhav stated. River Ghaggar



is monitored at 18 locations in Punjab and nine locations in Haryana by respective SPCB/CPCB.

CPCB has informed that the analysis of water quality monitoring results of river Ghaggar in the state of Punjab and Haryana for the year 2023 reveals that it is found non-complying w.r.t. notified primary water quality criteria for outdoor bathing at all the monitored locations in the state of Punjab and Haryana for the year 2023.

Haryana State Pollution Control Board has found the water of the Ghaggar River is not fit for drinking

tion Control Board has found the water of the Ghaggar River not fit for drinking, the minister said. Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the National River Conservation Plan, a sewage treatment capacity of 15 million litres per day (MLD) was created in different towns in Punjab for the conservation of the Ghaggar River. Punjab Pollution Control Board has informed that to treat wastewater from the towns in the catchment of

river Ghaggar, 28 STPs of total capacity of 291.7 MLD had been installed.

Haryana State Pollution Control Board has informed that sewage treatment capacity of 588 MLD had been created in the river catchment in the state under the Ghaggar Action Plan. Selja also inquired about whether the government has any plans to clean this river and if the central government provides any special assistance to cancer patients from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.

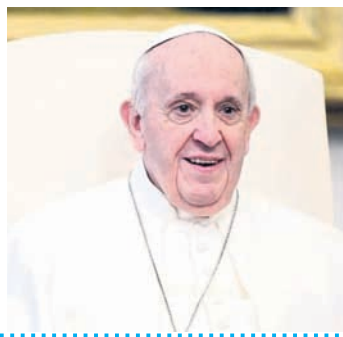
In response, Health and Family Welfare Minister Prataprao Jadhav stated that under the National Cancer Registry Program of the Indian Council of Medical Research, Haryana reported 1,486 cancer cases in 2019, 1,536 in 2020, 1,580 in 2021, 1,630 in 2022, and 1,678 in 2023.



The government has taken up several schemes, including Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme and made treatment accessible for those facing difficulties in accessing treatment

'POPE FRANCIS' VISIT TO INDIA LIKELY AFTER 2025'

Cardinal George Jacob Koovakad Tuesday said that Pope Francis's visit to India will most likely be after 2025, which has been announced as the 'Jubilee Year' by the Catholic Church, due to celebrations in Rome that year.



HATHRAS RAPE

Justice delayed, justice denied: Rahul slams BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Asserting that justice delayed is justice denied, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi Tuesday said the promises made by the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh to the family of the Hathras gangrape victim have not been fulfilled till date.

Gandhi also shared a video of his meeting with the victim's family in Hathras last week. 'Justice delayed is justice denied! But something else is happening in Hathras where the accused are roaming free and the victim's family is held hostage,' the former Congress chief said in his post on YouTube along with the video.

The 19-year-old Dalit woman was brutally gang-raped by four upper caste men in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh and two weeks later, September 28, 2020, the woman died in a hospital in New Delhi, he said.

'At 2.30 am the same night, without the consent of the woman's family, the Uttar Pradesh police forcefully cremated her body. After a long phase of destroying evidence and misleading the judiciary, today four years later, the accused are roaming free in the same village and the victim's family is held hostage, still waiting for justice,' Gandhi alleged.

The promises made to them by the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh have not been fulfilled till date, he claimed. 'Neither have they been given a government job nor has the promise of shifting them to another place been fulfilled, Gandhi said.

'In this labyrinth of casteism and power, it has become impossible for Dalits to even hope for justice,' he said. The INDIA bloc, which respects the Constitution, vows that it will protect the Bahunians from these oppressors who follow the path of Manusmriti, Gandhi said.

'We will get all the promises fulfilled, we will get them justice,' he said. In a post on X, Gandhi said, 'Listen carefully and feel every word filled with despair of the family of Hathras rape victim.'

Kerala cracks down on teachers moonlighting as tutors

The Left government has taken a decision in this regard to curb such activities as part of efforts to further strengthen the state's general education sector

day warned of stringent action against teachers of state-run schools if they are found working in private tuition centres.

He said it is against the rules and norms for government employees to engage in parallel jobs while serving in government positions. 'Teachers in state-run schools should not work in private tuition centres,' Sivankutty said

in a statement. The state Vigilance Department and the vigilance wing of the General Education Department will closely monitor the matter, he added.

Action will be taken against those found guilty, the minister said and requested Parents and Teachers Associations (PTAs) in schools to report to the department if any government teachers are found working in private tuition centres. Sivankutty emphasised that the state's general education sector



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

has flourished with society's support and must continue to do so. A senior official of the General Education Department said action would be taken against the errant teachers based on the rules and norms under the Kerala Education Rules (KER) and the Right to Education Act. 'It is not possible to initiate any

criminal proceedings against the teachers of the government and aided schools even if they are found working in any private tuition centres. But we can take departmental actions against them, like an increment cut for the service rules violation,' he told PTI. He said it is an existing practice, and

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 17: If teachers of state-run schools in Kerala are found working in private tuition centres, they will face departmental action, including cuts to their increments.

The Left government has taken a decision in this regard to curb such activities as part of efforts to further strengthen the state's general education sector. State General Education Minister V Sivankutty Tues-

Doval in Beijing for talks to restore ties

Ahead of crucial talks, China said Tuesday that it is ready to work with India to implement the commitments based on the common understandings reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping during their meeting at Kazan in Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS summit October 24

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 17: National Security Advisor Ajit Doval arrived here Tuesday to take part in the India-China Special Representatives' talks to be held on Wednesday aimed at restoring the bilateral ties stalled for over four years due to the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

Doval will hold the 23rd round of the Special Representatives' (SR) talks with his Chinese counterpart and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and was expected to discuss a range of issues to rebuild the bilateral ties following the October 21 agreement of disengagement and patrolling in eastern Ladakh between the two countries.

Ahead of crucial talks, China said Tuesday that it is ready to work with India to implement the commitments based on the common understandings reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping during their meeting at Kazan in Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS summit October 24.

When asked about the SR talks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a media briefing that China is prepared to settle differences with sincerity. 'China is ready to work with India to implement the important common understandings between the leaders of China and India, respect each other's core interests and major concerns, strengthen mutual trust through dialogue and communication, properly settle differences with sincerity and good faith, and bring bilateral relations back to the track of stable and healthy development as soon as possible,' he said.

The External Affairs Ministry said on Monday said, as agreed during the meeting of the two leaders in Kazan October 23, the two SRs will discuss the management of peace and tranquility in the border areas and explore a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question.

After Modi-Xi meeting, which was their first after five years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brazil followed by a meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on China-India Border Affairs (WMCC).

The military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh began in May 2020 and followed by a deadly clash at the Galwan Valley in June that year resulted in a severe strain in ties between the two neighbours.

Barring trade, relations between the two countries virtually came to a standstill. The face-off effectively ended following completion of the disengagement process from the last two friction points of Demchok and Depsang under an agreement finalised October 21.



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Cold wave hits Northern India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Cold weather conditions persisted in many parts of north and east India Tuesday, with minimum temperature in parts of Kashmir dropping several notches below freezing point, and Kanke in Jharkhand recording a low of 2.5 degrees Celsius.

Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of minus 5.3 degrees Celsius Tuesday, down from minus 3.4 degrees Celsius the previous night, with water supply lines in many parts of the city and elsewhere in the Valley getting frozen due to the cold, officials said.

Gulmarg recorded a low of minus 4 degrees Celsius, the same as the previous night, while Pahalgam recorded a low of minus 6.8 degrees Celsius, down from the previous night's minus 5 degrees Celsius.

Konibal on the outskirts of Pampore was the coldest in the Valley at minus 8.5 degrees Celsius, officials said. Other places where the minimum temperature dropped well below the freezing point included Qazigund (minus 6 degrees



PTI PHOTO

Celsius), Kupwara (minus 5.6 degrees Celsius), and Kokernag (minus 5.7 degrees Celsius). The Met office has forecast mainly dry weather until December 26, with the possibility of light snowfall in the higher reaches of the Valley on the intervening night of December 21-22.

In Himachal Pradesh, the local meteorological office Tuesday issued an orange warning for severe cold wave conditions at isolated places in the lower hills and plain areas of four out of 12 districts for the next two days. Severe cold wave is likely to persist at isolated places in Una, Bilaspur, Hamirpur and Mandi districts, the Met office said.

Tabo in Lahaul and Spiti was coldest at night, recording a low of minus 6.5 degrees Celsius, while Kukumseri shivered at minus 4.6 degrees, Manali at

minus 2.1 degrees, Hamirpur at 1.3 degrees, Sundernagar at 0.5 degrees, Una at 0.4 degrees, and Bilaspur at 2.2 degrees Celsius, Met office data showed.

Shimla and its suburbs remained warmer with the state capital recording a low of 7.6 degrees Celsius, Jubberhatti 8.3 degrees Celsius, and Kufri 6.9 degree Celsius. Delhi Tuesday recorded a minimum temperature of 5.9 degrees Celsius, 2.2 degrees below normal, while the maximum temperature settled at 24.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above normal.

No cold wave conditions prevailed in any part of the city Tuesday, with humidity levels fluctuating between 67 per cent and 97 per cent during the day.

The weather department has forecast dense fog for Wednesday with maximum and minimum temperatures expected to hover around 24 degrees Celsius and 6 degrees Celsius, respectively. Meanwhile, cold weather conditions continued in several parts of Punjab and Haryana, with Faridkot recording a minimum temperature of 0 degree Celsius Tuesday, the lowest in the region.

of the day quote Best wishes to His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, the King of Bhutan, and to the wonderful people of the Kingdom on #BhutanNationalDay



HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

The government may erect barricades or use police force, but Congress workers are prepared to fight. We are committed to confronting the government and exposing its tyrannical behavior



AJAY RAI | UP CONG CHIEF

According to media reports, anti-India slogans were raised in Bangladesh yesterday on the occasion of Vijay Diwas. India gave independence to Bangladesh under the strong leadership of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Bangladesh shared good relations with India, but such bitterness in ties between the two countries is very worrying



ASHOK GEHLOT | EX-RAJASTHAN CM

POST OF THE DAY

Basic problems India had in 2014:- Corruption - Reservation - Pollution - Lack of jobs - Not growing fast enough to build genuine wealth Basic problems India has now in 2024:- Corruption - Reservation - Pollution - Lack of jobs - Not growing fast enough to build genuine wealth In the last 10 years, we lost 10 years. Point: no political party is here to save you.

@Akshat_World

SHORT TAKES

Driver killed as tree falls on truck

Banihal/Jammu: A driver was killed and another injured when a tree fell on a truck on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district Tuesday, officials said. The incident occurred in the Nachalana area when the tree fell on the truck after catching fire in a forested area, they said. Both the 38-year-old driver Muzamil Gul and his helper Owais Ahmed were injured and shifted to the sub-district hospital in Banihal, where Gul succumbed to his injuries, they added.

Youtuber 'Savukku' Shankar again held

Chennai: Tamil Nadu Police have arrested YouTuber and whistleblower 'Savukku' Shankar in a case related to the possession of ganja. Shankar was arrested in Chennai Tuesday after the Special Court for Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) cases in Madurai issued a non-bailable warrant earlier in the day for his failure to appear for proceedings in the case.

Mandaviya flags off 'Fit India Cycling Drive'

New Delhi: Close to 500 cycling enthusiasts in Delhi joined a 3-km ride Tuesday from the National Stadium to Raisina Hills and back, in order to promote cycling as a sustainable and healthy mode of transportation under the stewardship of Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya.



Indian Coast Guard personnel during a rehearsal for the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

Over 67% sewer, septic tank workers belong to SC category

Out of 54,574 validated sewer and septic tank workers profiled under the 'National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem' scheme, 37,060 are from the SC category

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Over 67 per cent of sewer and septic tank workers (SSWs) in India belong to the Scheduled Caste category, according to official data.

In a written response to a question in the Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale said that out of 54,574 validated sewer and

septic tank workers profiled under the 'National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem' (NAMASTE) scheme, 37,060 are from the SC category.

The statistics further show that 15.73 per cent of the workers belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), 8.31 per cent are from the Scheduled Tribes (STs), while only 8.05 per cent come from the General category. In total, 57,758 workers across 33 States and Union

Territories have been profiled, out of which 54,574 have been validated. Data integration for states like Odisha and Tamil Nadu into the central NAMASTE database is currently underway.

The NAMASTE scheme, launched in 2023-24 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), aims to ensure the safety, dignity, and empowerment of sanitation workers.

Under the initiative, various measures have been implemented to enhance worker safety and provide socio-economic opportunities: A total of 16,791



PPE kits and 43 Safety Devices Kits for Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs) have been distributed. Ayushman cards for health

insurance have been issued to 13,604 beneficiaries. Capital subsidies totalling ₹13.96 crore have been provided to 503 workers and their dependents for

sanitation-related projects.

An additional ₹2.85 crore has been released to 226 beneficiaries from the manual scavenger category for alternate self-employment projects.

To raise awareness on the hazards of unsafe cleaning practices, 837 workshops have been conducted since the scheme's launch. Efforts to mechanise sanitation work and reduce hazardous manual cleaning have also been prioritised.

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U) 2.0, MoHUA has sanctioned Rs. 371 crore to 26 states and UTs for the procurement of 2,585 desludging vehicles.



Frances Perkins accepted the position as the first female Cabinet member only after President Franklin D Roosevelt agreed to support her goals to improve working conditions for all people

EARTHQUAKE HITS VANUATU

A powerful magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck just off the coast of Vanuatu Tuesday, causing widespread destruction in the South Pacific island nation as the injured began arriving at a hospital and unconfirmed reports of casualties emerged



of the day uote

In the situation when our soldiers are risking their lives in the battle for Russia's sovereignty, there are no neutral or 'peaceful' organisations on the enemy side

We pledged to the country that we would ensure that those holding high public positions are as same as the rest of the citizens. We wanted to end the culture of big VIP convoys speeding on our roads disregarding traffic rules

The committee will be composed of experts and respected personalities, who are reflective of the spectrum of Libyan political forces, social, cultural and geographical components

Cracks in Netanyahu's coalition

Israeli PM Netanyahu continues testifying in his long-running corruption trial in Tel Aviv court



Jerusalem, Dec 17: Israeli lawmakers narrowly approved the country's 2025 state budget in an initial vote despite a rebellion by one of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition partners demanding he fire Israel's attorney general.

The 59-57 vote in the Knesset, or parliament, to pass the wartime austerity budget in its first of three readings underscored divisions within the coalition that heavily relies on ultra-Orthodox and far-right parties.

group Hamas. He has asked for the issue to be raised at cabinet meetings.

Ben-Gvir said on X that his faction would no longer be bound by the coalition's positions, including the budget law, and would operate independently.

Addressing Smotrich, he said the government must fire the attorney general so it can implement its policy. The right-wing government had to either to send her home or face having her bring the government down, Ben-Gvir wrote.

A month ago, in a letter to Netanyahu, Baharav-Miara asked the prime minister to consider firing Ben-Gvir, citing evidence

Gaza ceasefire talk swirls as officials push for deal

Washington/Cairo: Uncertainty surrounded Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's whereabouts Tuesday after sources briefed on talks about a Gaza ceasefire said he was travelling to Cairo but his office said he was on the northern border with Syria.

behind us," Ben-Gvir added.

In posts on X, Smotrich accused Ben-Gvir of irresponsibly aligning with the opposition and Arab parties and putting their right-wing government in danger in time of war.

Smotrich said Ben-Gvir and his party were jeopardising a historic opportunity for further Israeli settlement of the occupied West Bank and for the State of Israel itself with Donald Trump's administration moving into the White House next month.

- Knesset votes 59-57 to approve 2025 budget in initial vote
○ Right-wing party led by Itamar Ben-Gvir votes against budget
○ Ben-Gvir seeks the firing of Israel's Attorney General
○ Finance Minister accuses Ben-Gvir of being irresponsible
○ Spending on wartime austerity budget to hit \$210 billion

that he allegedly interfered directly in police operations and politicized promotions within the force, threatening its status outside politics. Should the issue be raised at Sunday's cabinet meeting, "the crisis will be

NO RELIEF FOR PM TRUDEAU

Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks at the Laurier Club holiday party in Gatineau



Ottawa, Dec 17: Canada's ruling Liberals lost a special election in the western province of British Columbia, provisional results showed Tuesday, deepening the political woes of beleaguered Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The minority Liberal government was rocked Monday when Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland unexpectedly resigned, citing policy differences with the prime minister whom she said had asked her to take on a lesser post.

A string of opinion polls over the last 18 months suggests the Liberals are going to be crushed at the next election by the official opposition Conservatives.

Elections Canada said the Conservatives had taken 66% of Monday's vote in the constituency of Cloverdale—Langley City with the Liberals in second on 16%. The election was held to fill a vacant seat.

The defeat marked the third

Liberals lose special election in British Columbia, adding to Trudeau's struggles

Finance minister resigned unexpectedly on Monday, citing policy differences with Trudeau

Some Liberal politicians and pro-Liberal Toronto Star call for Trudeau to step down

time in a row that the Liberals had lost a special election to the Conservatives. Angry Liberal legislators met Trudeau Monday night, with some repeating calls for him to go.

"We're not united. There's still a number of our members who feel we need a change in leadership," said Chad Collins, a legislator from Ontario, Canada's most populous province and a Liberal stronghold.

"I think the only path forward for us is to choose a new leader and to present a new plan to Canadians with a different vision," he said after the meeting.

SHORT TAKES

Khan, wife in soup

Islamabad: A Pakistani court Tuesday extended the interim bail of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the second Toshakhana case until January 7. While the 72-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician remains behind bars due to other ongoing cases, Bibi was released in October after the Islamabad High Court approved her post-arrest bail plea.

Hasina probe: ICT extends deadline

Dhaka: Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal Tuesday extended the deadline for completing the investigation into the crimes against humanity charges filed against ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by two months, a media report said. A three-member bench, led by its Chairman Justice Golam Mortuza Mazumder, passed the order and also extended the deadline until February 18 to complete the investigation in a case filed against Hasina and 45 others, including former ministers, for genocide during the July-August student-led protests, The Daily Star newspaper reported.

China witnesses largest corruption

Beijing: China Tuesday executed Li Jianping, a former official in the north Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, who was convicted in the largest-ever corruption case in the country totalling to over \$421 million. The death sentence of Li, former secretary of the ruling Communist Party working committee of the Hohhot economic and technological development zone, was initially issued in September 2022 and upheld on appeal in August 2024. Tuesday's execution followed the approval of the Supreme People's Court and was carried out by a court in Inner Mongolia, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Chinese 'spy' linked to Prince Andrew denies wrongdoing

London, Dec 17: A Chinese national with close links to Prince Andrew said he had done nothing wrong and was not a spy, after the businessman was named in court as being a suspected Chinese agent by the British authorities.

Yang Tengbo, described in a ruling last week by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) as a "close confidant" of Andrew, waived his right to anonymity on Monday so he could respond to the accusation.

"I have done nothing wrong or unlawful, and the concerns raised by the Home Office against me are ill-founded," he said in a statement released by his lawyer, referring to Britain's interior ministry. "The widespread description of me as a 'spy' is entirely untrue."

The 50-year-old, who had previously been granted anonymity in the SIAC proceedings, was removed from a flight from Beijing to London in February 2023 and told that Britain intended to ban him from the country. This happened the following month on national security grounds.

Yang appealed against the ban at the Special Immigration Appeals Commission, which rejected his case in a written ruling last Thursday — the first time the reported relationship had come to light.



The 50-year-old investment consultancy director, pictured here with the prince, was barred from Britain in 2023

Britain's Home Office told Yang they had reason to believe he was "engaging, or had previously engaged, in covert and deceptive activity on behalf of the United Front Work Department (UFWD) which is an arm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) state apparatus", in a July 2023 letter quoted in SIAC's ruling.

The Home Office said it believed Yang was "likely to pose a threat to UK national security". Yang's lawyer, Guy Vassall-Adams, told the High Court on Monday that his client had waived his right to anonymity to make a statement, and the judge, Martin Chamberlain, agreed.

The ruling said evidence obtained from Yang's phone showed Andrew had authorised him to set up an international financial initiative to engage with potential partners and investors in China. The ruling did not say what the fund was intended for.

Trump loses bid to toss hush money conviction

New York, Dec 17: Donald Trump Monday lost a bid to overturn his criminal conviction stemming from hush money paid to a porn star in light of the US Supreme Court's July ruling recognizing immunity from prosecution for a president's official acts.

Justice Juan Merchan's denial of Trump's motion to dismiss the New York state case forecloses one avenue for the Republican president-elect to enter the White House Jan 20 for his second four-year term without the stain of a criminal conviction.

Trump's lawyers are separately trying to have the verdict overturned on separate grounds in the wake of his defeat of Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris in the Nov 5 election. Merchan has not yet ruled on that motion.

In Monday's 41-page decision, Merchan sided with Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office, which brought the case. The prosecutors argued their case dealt with Trump's personal conduct, not his official acts as president.

The judge said Trump's prosecution for "decidedly personal acts of falsifying business records poses no danger of intru-



Trump was convicted by jury in Manhattan in May

Defense argued Supreme Court ruling on immunity applied

Trump has separate pending motion seeking case's dismissal

sion on the authority and function of the executive branch."

In a statement, Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung called Merchan's decision "a direct violation of the Supreme Court's decision on immunity."

The case stemmed from a \$130,000 payment that Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen

made to adult film actor Stormy Daniels. The payment was for her silence before the 2016 election about a sexual encounter she has said she had a decade earlier with Trump, who denies it.

A Manhattan jury in May found Trump guilty of 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up the payment. It was the first time a US president - former or sitting - had been convicted of or charged with a criminal offense.

Trump pleaded not guilty and called the case an attempt by Bragg, a Democrat, to harm his 2024 campaign.

Parties unveil plans to rescue Germany from economic doldrums

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Berlin, Dec 17: Leading contenders in Germany's upcoming election presented their programmes Tuesday, setting out contrasting visions of how to put new vigour into Europe's biggest economy and tackle other issues such as migration.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz, a centre-left Social Democrat, will seek a second term in the parliamentary election expected February 23 — more than three months after his unpopular three-party coalition collapsed in a dispute about how to revive the stagnant economy. He hopes for a come-from-behind victory against centre-right challenger Friedrich Merz, whose Union bloc leads all recent polls.

Also seeking the top job are Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck of the environmentalist Greens,

Scholz's remaining coalition partner; and Alice Weidel of the far-right Alternative for Germany, which is polling strongly but has no realistic chance of governing because other parties refuse to work with it.

The Social Democrats, Union and Greens all hope to implement as much as they can of their programmes presented Tuesday, but any new government will almost certainly be a coalition and require extensive compromises.

IT'S THE ECONOMY

The Union is pledging tax cuts for individuals and companies and wants to raise the level at which the highest level of income tax, 42 per cent, kicks in. It wants to make working overtime more financially attractive. It also wants to abolish a tax once paid by everyone to finance the costs of integrating



the former East Germany, now levied only on higher earners. It hopes to free up money by reforming the benefit system for the long-term unemployed and getting more people into jobs. It also wants to cut the value-added tax rate on dining out.

TO BORROW OR NOT TO BORROW

The Social Democrats and Greens want to reform Germany's self-imposed restrictions on borrowing — the "debt brake," introduced more than a decade ago, which allows new borrowing to the tune of only 0.35 per cent of annual gross domestic product, though it can be suspended for emergencies

- Germany to hold snap election Feb 23
— Comes at testing time for Europe's biggest economy
— Parties announce manifestos, economy in focus
— Migration, welfare, Ukraine war also key concerns
— Economists question whether parties can bring change

that are out of the state's control. The two centre-left parties, which are vague about how exactly they would modify it, argue that it has become a barrier to investment.

MIGRATION

The Union wants Germany to turn back at its border migrants trying to enter from other countries in Europe's free travel zone and seek asylum. It wants to increase depor-

tations of migrants who aren't entitled to stay and designate more "safe countries of origin," allowing authorities to speed up asylum proceedings. It is pledging to reverse legislation approved under Scholz that eased the rules on gaining citizenship and ended restrictions on holding dual citizenship.

WHAT ABOUT UKRAINE?

Germany is Ukraine's top military supplier in Europe and its biggest after the United States. All three leading contenders pledge continued aid, but there are differences of emphasis. Scholz says he wants Germany to remain the biggest supplier in Europe but is touting his "prudence" in ensuring that the war doesn't expand into a conflict between Russia and NATO and underlining his insistence that he won't supply long-range Taurus cruise missiles to Kyiv.



MARUTI MILESTONE

Maruti Suzuki India Tuesday said it has crossed 20 lakh production-mark in a calendar year for the first time in 2024. The company has also become the first among Suzuki Motor Corporation's global automobile manufacturing facilities to reach this landmark, the auto major said in a statement. Eriga was the 2 millionth vehicle to be rolled out from the production line at the company's Manesar-based manufacturing facility, it added.



of the day quote

India has long been a key focus for MSI, and the country's growing demand for high-performance laptops has been integral to our decision to begin manufacturing locally



We are cognisant of the fact that we need to prevent exuberance, price manipulation or fraudulent trading practices



With end-to-end value chain capability, a strong raw material base and factories focusing on sustainable responsible business practices, India will surely see substantial growth in times to come



Surging gold imports threaten trade balance

The country's gold imports in November reached a record high of USD 14.86 billion, registering a four-fold increase, mainly on account of festival and wedding demands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: India's gold imports have surged alarmingly, posing a potential threat to its trade balance and economic stability, and the government should take action to address this issue, think tank GTRI said Tuesday.



FOR THE FIRST TIME, GOLD SURPASSED CRUDE PETROLEUM AS THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST SINGLE IMPORT ITEM

The country's gold imports in November reached a record high of USD 14.86 billion, registering a four-fold increase, mainly on account of festival and wedding demands, according to commerce ministry data.

The GTRI said that the imports are driven by multiple factors, including growing investment demand, tariff reductions, and loopholes in trade agreements.

This surge has raised significant economic concerns, distorting the trade balance, weakening the rupee, and widening the current account deficit, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) added.

Gold imports stood at USD 3.44 billion in November 2023.

The GTRI said that the imports are driven by multiple factors, including growing investment demand, tariff reductions, and loopholes in trade agreements.

Gold imports in November accounted for 21.2 per cent of India's total merchandise imports of USD 70 billion.

For the first time, gold surpassed crude petroleum as the country's largest single import item.

"This sharp increase pushed India's monthly trade deficit to its highest level, exerting pressure on the rupee, which has depreciated against the US dollar. A weaker rupee raises import costs further, worsening the current account deficit," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said that most gold enters India as bars and rods with 99.99 per cent purity, but traders are also using other tariff-free or concessional

categories to bypass import duties.

The "surging gold imports threaten India's trade balance and economic stability, and urgent action is needed" to address this, he said.

He added that the country's experience with a free trade agreement with the UAE highlights the risks of offering tariff concessions on precious metals like gold, silver, and platinum in FTAs.

"These high-value, low-volume imports disproportionately impact India's trade deficit and forex reserves, undermining macroeconomic stability. Excluding precious metals from FTAs is crucial to curb speculative imports, safeguard foreign exchange reserves, and protect India's trade balance and economic resilience," Srivastava said.

Sebi introduces new asset class

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 17: Markets regulator Sebi has notified norms for introducing a new asset class -- Specialized Investment Fund -- for high-risk profile investors along with liberalised mutual funds lite (MF Lite) framework for passively managed schemes.

Specialized Investment Funds (SIFs), which allow mutual funds to launch advanced investment strategies as open-ended, closed-ended and interval structures, will add depth and variety to the investment landscape of the country.

The minimum amount of Rs 10 lakh can be invested per investor, except for accredited investors, across all investment strategies of the new product in a particular AMC, Sebi said in a notification issued Monday.

The structure ensures limits on exposure to single issuers, companies, and sectors, maintaining risk controls. Also, Sebi has emphasised distinct branding, transparency and investor protection for these funds.

The new product is intended to bridge the gap between mutual funds and portfolio management services in terms of flexibility in portfolio construction.

Besides, it is aimed at curbing the proliferation of unregistered and unauthorised investment schemes, which often promise unrealistic high returns and exploit investors' expectations for better yields, leading to potential financial risks.

"The asset management company shall ensure that the Specialized Investment Fund has distinct identification, separate from that of the Mutual Fund, to maintain clear differentia-



Specialized Investment Funds, which allow MFs to launch advanced investment strategies as open-ended, closed-ended and interval structures, will add depth and variety to the investment landscape of the country

tion between the offerings of the Specialized Investment Fund and that of a Mutual Fund," Sebi said.

Additionally, the regulator has introduced a liberalised Mutual Funds Lite framework for passively managed schemes of mutual funds.

Passively managed MF schemes replicate an underlying index such as ETFs and index funds where portfolios of index funds can be easily tracked. Active fund schemes

require expert fund managers who define investment philosophy and select securities.

The amendment would enable a relaxed framework with light-touch regulations for entities desirous of launching only passive mutual fund schemes.

The light touch regulations include relaxed requirements relating to eligibility criteria for sponsors; including net worth, track record and profitability, responsibility of trustees, approval process and disclosures.

The framework intends to promote ease of entry, encourage new players, reduce compliance requirements, increase penetration, enhance market liquidity, facilitate investment diversification and foster innovation. In its notification, Sebi said that the mutual fund lite asset management company is required to have a net worth of at least Rs 35 crore deployed in assets. This can be brought down to Rs 25 crore in case it has profits for five consecutive years. To give this effect, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has amended mutual fund rules.

SHORT TAKES

ITC demerger from Jan, 2025

New Delhi: ITC Tuesday said all conditions for the demerger of its hotel business are "fulfilled" and the scheme would be effective from January 1, 2025. The multi-conglomerate has already received regulatory approvals, including from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) October 4, sanctioning the scheme between ITC and ITC Hotels. "ITC Ltd and ITC Hotels Ltd have mutually acknowledged that all the conditions specified in Clause 28 of the Scheme have been fulfilled and satisfied, including filing of the aforesaid order with the Registrar of Companies, West Bengal, and accordingly, the appointed date and the effective date of the scheme shall be the first day of the following month i.e., January 1, 2025," it said. The shareholders of ITC had already approved the demerger of ITC Hotels into a separate entity.

Skoda Auto India hikes car prices

Mumbai: Skoda Auto India Tuesday announced a price hike of up to 3 per cent across its range of cars, effective January 1. This adjustment is necessitated by rising input and operational costs, ensuring the company continues to deliver premium vehicles and services to its customers, Skoda Auto India said in a statement. The company is a subsidiary of European carmaker Skoda Auto. The price increase will apply to the company's entire portfolio, including the Kushaq, Slavia, Superb, and Kodiaq.

Stellantis to hike prices from Jan

New Delhi: Automaker Stellantis India Tuesday said it will increase prices of Jeep and Citroen models by up to 2 per cent from January. The price increase is aimed at offsetting the impact of rising input costs and ensuring sustainable operations in line with the industry, the company said in a statement. "While the price revision is necessitated by increasing input costs and exchange rates, we stand steadfast in our commitment to continue to be focused on providing value, high quality, and a great driving experience to its customers," Stellantis India MD and CEO Shailesh Hazela said.

Bad loans of P2P lenders more than double in FY24



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 17: Non-performing assets (NPAs) of peer-to-peer lending entities more than doubled to Rs 1,163 crore at the end of FY24, a report said.

Peer-to-peer (P2P) lenders raise funds from investors for on-lending to individuals or entities.

The total quantum of sour loans stood at Rs 472.1 crore at the end of FY23, Capitalmind Financial Services said, citing RBI data revealed in response to an RTI (right to information) application.

The NPAs for the relatively new line of lenders are estimated to be 17 per cent of the total lending by such financiers, it said.

Data showing the heightened stress comes at a time when the P2P sector has been imposed with strict regulatory measures following concerns from various quarters. P2P entities say the new guidelines are a body blow to the sector.

In a statement, Capitalmind

said the RBI measures focus on elimination of loan pooling, which ensures direct exposure between lenders and borrowers, and increase transparency by mandating platforms to provide detailed borrower information, including credit scores, to help lenders make informed decisions.

Additionally, it has been mandated to settle transactions within one day via escrow accounts, and caps have been put on both lending (at Rs 50 lakh across platforms per lender) and borrowing (at Rs 10 lakh with a Rs 50,000 limit for single lender), it said.

Capitalmind said that while these measures aim to stabilise the sector, they also present hurdles that could stifle growth and innovation.

"The current crisis underscores the need for a balanced approach to regulation -- one that protects stakeholders without stifling the industry's potential to bridge India's vast credit gap," it added.

Markets slump over 1% amid widespread selloff

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 17: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slumped over 1 per cent Tuesday, weighed down by an across-the-board selloff amid cautious investors approach ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision.

Besides, the continued flight of foreign capital from Indian markets amid a negative global market trend also affected the sentiment, traders said.

Falling for the second day in a row, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 1,064.12 points or 1.30 per cent to sink below the 81,000 level at 80,684.45. During the day, it slumped 1,136.37 points or 1.39 per cent to 80,612.20.

As many as 2,442 stocks declined, while 1,576 advanced and 89 remained unchanged on the BSE.

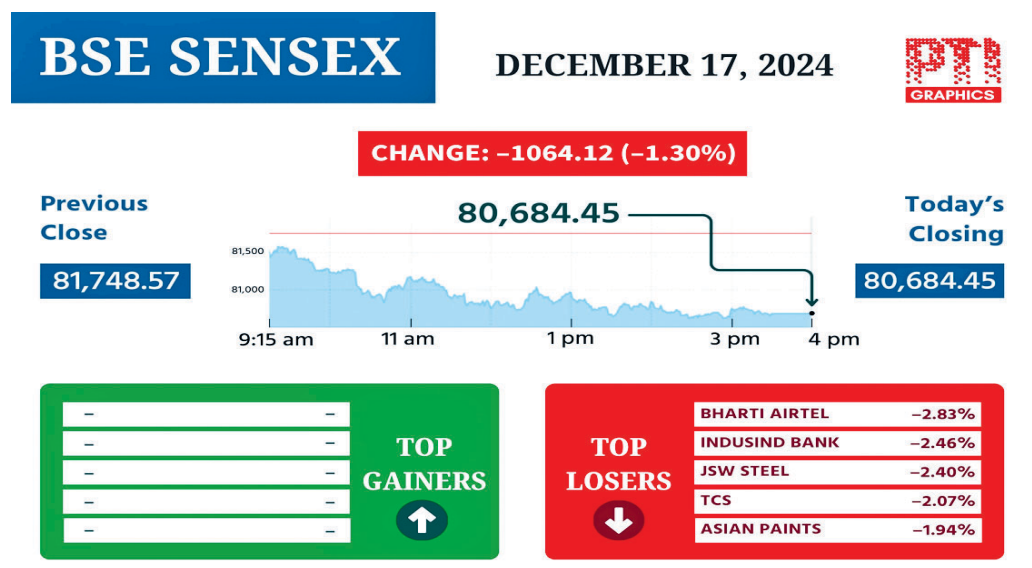
The NSE Nifty tumbled 332.25 points or 1.35 per cent to 24,336.

"Widespread pessimism prevails across all sectors ahead of key policy decisions from the US Fed, BoJ (Bank of Japan), and BoE (Bank of England). While the market has already factored in a 25 bps cut from the US Fed, it remains vigilant for any hawkish signals. The BoJ and BoE are largely expected to maintain their current rates for the year. Concurrently, the rupee has depreciated to an all-time low, and a record-high trade deficit is exacerbating the pressure," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Ser-

vices, said. From the 30-share blue-chip pack, all firms ended in the red. Bharti Airtel, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel, Tata Consultancy Services, Asian Paints, Larsen & Toubro, Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank were the biggest laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge declined by 0.65 per cent, and smallcap index slipped by 0.52 per cent.

"The liquidity deficit in the Indian banking system hit the highest in nearly six months on advance tax payments by companies and likely dollar sales by the central bank to curb rupee volatility. Banking stocks were a major drag on the indices, as Bank Nifty closed 1.5 per cent lower for the day," Devarsh



Meta hit with 251 million euros in fines for 2018 data breach

Under the 27-nation EU's strict privacy regime, the Irish watchdog is Meta's lead privacy regulator because the company's regional headquarters are based in Dublin



ASSOCIATED PRESS

London, Dec 17: European Union privacy watchdogs hit Facebook owner Meta with fines totalling 251 million euros Monday after an investigation into a 2018 data breach on the social media platform that exposed millions of accounts.

Ireland's Data Protection Commission issued the pen-

alties after wrapping up its inquiry into the breach, when hackers gained access to user accounts by exploiting bugs in the platform's code that allowed them to steal digital keys, known as "access tokens."

Under the 27-nation EU's strict privacy regime, the Irish watchdog is Meta's lead privacy regulator because the company's regional headquarters are

based in Dublin. The watchdog issued reprimands and "administrative

penalties" worth 251 million euros (USD 264 million) after it found multiple infringe-

ments of the rules, known as the General Data Protection Regulation.

The company said it would appeal the decision.

"This decision relates to an incident from 2018. We took immediate action to fix the problem as soon as it was identified," Meta said in a statement. The company said it "proactively informed people impacted" as well as the Irish watchdog.

When it first disclosed the problem, Facebook said 50 million user accounts were affected. But the actual number was around 29 million, including 3 million in Europe, the Irish

watchdog said Tuesday.

The company has said that after discovering the bug, it alerted the FBI and regulators in the US and Europe.

The hack involved three distinct bugs in Facebook's "View As" feature, which let people see how their profiles appear to others. The attackers used the vulnerability to steal access tokens from the accounts of people whose profiles came up in searches using the "View As" feature. The attack then moved from one user's Facebook friend to another. Possession of those tokens would allow attackers to control those accounts.

After KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja's heroics, Akash Deep and Jasprit Bumrah help India avoid follow on with gritty stand

Indian tail wags merrily



(Left): Ravindra Jadeja cuts during his fighting knock; Akash Deep and Jasprit Bumrah celebrate after taking India past the follow on target



PTI PHOTOS

AGENCIES

Brisbane, Dec 17: KL Rahul (84, 119b, 8x4) and Ravindra Jadeja (77, 123b, 7x4, 1x6) played their parts with gritty determination, but had it not been for the tail wagging and putting on a priceless stand of 39 unbeaten runs for the last wicket, India would not have been able to avoid the follow on against Australia on the fourth day of the rain-interrupted third Test at the Gabba here Tuesday. In the end it took the heroics of Akash Deep (27 batting, 31b, 2x4, 1x6) and Jasprit Bumrah (10 batting, 27b, 1x6) to help India breathe with relief after bad light ended play prematurely.

The dressing room as Akash Deep managed to cut Australian skipper Pat Cummins over a fully-stretched Nathan McSweeney for a boundary over the slips to take India past the follow on mark. There were high fives in the dressing room and one could easily sense the sigh of relief. It was clear that Akash Deep had given India another chance to look forward to the next game as a defeat here could have effectively shut the doors on India for the remainder of the series.

The visitors have hope now as there is news of more rains Wednesday, which effectively means that Australia's chances of forcing the pace will suffer. However, India with such hal-

lowed names in the batting order like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma will have to introspect as to what is going wrong.

The visitors at 252 for nine trail Aussies by 193 runs. But they wouldn't mind that one bit as Australia will now have to bat again and forcing a result in three sessions looks an improbable target, considering the weather pattern here. The city is bracing up for rain and a thunderstorm or two Wednesday.

At 213 for nine, the Australians had India on the mat literally with Rahul thinking of padding up again. But both Akash Deep and Bumrah showed the senior batters of the side, how the job can be done even while showing flamboyance at times.

The six that Akash Deep hit of Cummins... it went deep into the galleries was just the manifestation of relief that the side were going through.

But while resuming from a wafer-thin overnight score of 51 for four, India needed someone to offer fight, and Rahul, India's standout batter in this series so far, did precisely that.

Rahul displayed admirable technical nous to withstand the stern test posed by the Australian bowlers to take the game deep into the day. Rahul and an equally feisty Jadeja added 67 runs for the sixth wicket, and it was the first sign of India's fight. In the process, Rahul notched up his 17th half century in Tests.

Rahul looked a class apart from the rest of his colleagues. The Bangalore man's sagacity shone in how he defended too - all soft hands and playing close to the body. However, a remarkable redemption catch by Steven Smith at slip off Nathan Lyon ended his stay.

But Jadeja carried on and he added 53 runs for the seventh wicket with Nitish Reddy to keep India afloat. Jadeja brought up his 22nd fifty in Tests and the innings was also dotted with sweep shots that he effectively employed against off-spinner Lyon.

Brief scores: Australia 445; India 252 for 9 (KL Rahul 84, Ravindra Jadeja 77, Pat Cummins 4/80). Match to continue.

Rahul elaborates on his success mantra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Brisbane, Dec 17: Tightening up defence and giving bowlers respect in the first 30 overs of an innings have been the mantra to KL Rahul's success during the ongoing series against Australia in which his other India teammates have struggled. Rahul has by far looked the most assured Indian batter on the tour and it was on display once again Tuesday.

Rahul was expectedly asked about his style of play compared to the other struggling Indian batters.

"See I'm quite certain that everybody has their own set plans... You also need to have a bit of luck as a top-order batter," Rahul stated. "Just a little bit that goes your way if you can get through those first 10-15 overs and get a bit of confidence then you start feeling good and you start enjoying playing with the Kookaburra ball with the pace and bounce here in Australia," he added.

What has made Rahul's success more remarkable is that he was not the first-choice opener before the start of the series. He did well in the first Test and then skipper Rohit Sharma decided to drop himself down the order.

It is crucial to leave deliveries at the start of the innings and respect the bowlers. Once you get used to the bounce, it becomes a lot easier to bat

The classy right-hander said it is all about sticking to the basics in overseas conditions and that includes giving due respect to the bowlers when the ball is hard and new.

"It's just about getting through those first 20-30 balls for everybody and everyone's trying their best to do that and it's a long series. So we played three games five innings now, so I'm sure everyone will go back and come up with their own plans the next time we bat," Rahul stated. "The only thing you can do in the first 30 overs is to tighten up your defence, try and respect that the first 30 overs is the bowler's time and give them their time, leave deliveries, try and play as tight as possible and then really try to cash in once the ball gets older. So that's my plan, and that's pretty simple, and I'm sure that's the plan for everybody," Rahul added.

When on tours, Rahul reckons one has to earn the right to score runs. "When you travel overseas and when you're playing quality fast bowlers, you have to respect the first 20-30 overs. You have to respect the bowlers," he asserted.



KL Rahul closely watches the ball as he leaves a delivery during his fighting knock Tuesday

SHORT TAKES

Free entries for HIL games

New Delhi: Hockey India (HI) announced Tuesday free entry for fans for both men's and women's matches of the Hockey India League (HIL) to be played at Rourkela and Ranchi. The eight-team men's HIL in a new format will start December 28 at Rourkela's Birsa Munda Stadium and will conclude February 1, 2025. The women's edition comprising four teams will be held at Ranchi's Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro Turf Stadium January 12-26. "By foregoing revenue from ticket sales, Hockey India aims to build a stronger connection between the sport and its passionate supporters, encouraging more people to experience the thrill of live hockey," HI said in a media release.

DDCA polls: Azad suffers heavy loss

New Delhi: Rohan Jaitley has been appointed as the Delhi District Cricket Association (DDCA) president for another term, beating former India player Kirti Azad in the polls. The 35-year-old Rohan, son of former Union Minister late Arun Jaitley, secured 1,577 votes compared to Azad's 777 in the race to the top position. A total of 2,413 votes were cast, and 1,207 votes were required to win. In 2020, Rohan was elected unopposed as DDCA president and a year later, he defeated advocate Vikas Singh.

Matthews powers Windies to victory

Navi Mumbai: Hayley Matthews' scintillating unbeaten 85 (47b, 17x4) overshadowed Smriti Mandhana's classy 62 as West Indies women ended their nine-match losing streak against India, winning the second T20I here by nine wickets to level the three-match series 1-1, here Tuesday. After Mandhana's 41-ball-knock and Richa Ghosh's quickfire 32 took the hosts to 159/9, West Indies tore apart the Indian bowling attack in a ruthless display of power-hitting to record their biggest win in terms of wickets against India. It was West Indies' first win against India since 2016. Matthews was rightly chosen the woman of the match as she had picked up two wickets. The sixth-ranked West Indies needed just 15.4 overs to reach the victory target.

Odisha stun formidable Goa

1st victory for football team in Santosh Trophy final round

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 17: The Odisha football team put up a stupendous display Tuesday to beat former champions Goa 2-0 in a match of the Santosh Trophy in Hyderabad. It is no doubt a great victory as Goa have won the Santosh Trophy on a number of occasions. With the win, Odisha are now third in the four-team Group B. They will have to finish at least second to qualify for the knockouts.

Both the goals came in the second half with Rahul Mukhi (60th) opening the scoring. The issue was put beyond doubt when Kartik Hantal (65th) added a second. In between Odisha had a number of opportunities to score, but failed to utilise the chances that came their way.

The game was played at a fast pace with both sides playing attacking football. The midfield trio of Hantal, Roshan Panna and Srikanth Bhoi combined effectively to keep the Goa defenders on their toes. The Goa defenders were effective in the first half, but then in the second half, the Odisha footballers were a much superior lot.

Siddhant Pradhan, the Odisha goalkeeper made a couple of good saves in the first half. Had



KARTIK HANTAL



RAHUL MUKHI

the efforts of Selwyn Miranda and Ivon Costa not been saved by Pradhan, Goa would have had a different tale to tell.

Fifteen minutes into the second half, Mukhi, latching on to a through ball down the middle, beat the opposition goalkeeper with a stinging shot. Five times Santosh Trophy champions Goa were left shell-shocked after conceding the goal. Taking advantage of the situation, Hantal, after getting the ball from a free-

kick scored five minutes later to script an upset victory for Odisha in Group B.

It was indeed a creditable win for Odisha, who had lost their first match of the group to Delhi. Fancied Goa now remain winless in the group.

In another match of Group B, Delhi defeated Tamil Nadu 2-0 to notch up their second successive win in the tournament and increased their chances for a place in the knockouts.

Kiwi pacer Southee walks into sunset

AGENCIES

Hamilton, Dec 17: Tim Southee said Tuesday he would never forget his 'incredible journey' after the New Zealand great confirmed Tuesday he had retired fully from international cricket. Southee said he would 'fade out' a happy man after taking two wickets in his 107th and final Test, during a 423-run drubbing of England here.

The 36-year-old swing bowler then revealed he would also play no more limited-overs matches for his country, ending a record-breaking 17 years across all three formats.

"It's time for these young guys," Southee said. "We've seen a number of them come through in the last couple of years and I'm excited to sit back and watch them continue to take this team forward. I've lived it for so long. So yeah, I'll be done."

Southee's 391 wickets is second only to Richard Hadlee in the New Zealand Test cricket history books. But Southee stands alone for total New Zealand international wickets, with 776 since his debut in 2008. He is the only player globally to take more than 300 wickets in Tests, 200 in ODIs (221) and 100 in T20Is (164), with the T20



figure the most by any player.

Southee said he would pursue playing opportunities in professional T20 leagues but had decided a Test at his home ground of Seddon Park here was the best way to sign off for New Zealand.

"Test cricket's the pinnacle for me and it's pretty special to win by 400-odd runs against a brilliant opposition," he said. "It's a nice way to fade out after what's been an incredible journey. Every opportunity to play for New Zealand has been a special moment. It's been a great ride and I've got 17 years of memories which I'll take with me," he added.

Southee also said he would remember with particular fondness a 'golden period' for New Zealand in which he shared the new ball with Trent Boult, supported by aggressive first-change exponent Neil Wagner. "To be a part of that was pretty special," Southee said.

Mandhana in top 3 Gukesh conquers fear of heights

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, Dec 17: India's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana has surged three places to second in the latest ICC Women's ODI rankings while climbing one spot to third among T20I batters, following her stellar displays against Australia and the West Indies.

The left-hander struck 105 in the final match of the series against Australia in Perth and 54 in the first game of the ongoing T20I rubber against the West Indies in Mumbai to headline the latest rankings update released here Tuesday.

Mandhana is the lone Indian batter in the top 10 as her skip-

per Harmanpreet Kaur moved down two spots to 13th while Jemimah Rodrigues climbed six places to 15th and Harleen Deol moved up nine runs to 64th.

Among bowlers, Deepti Sharma has slipped two spots to five. India seam bowler Arundhati Reddy has shot up 48 places to 51st after a haul of four for 26 while Renuka Thakur has moved up from 28th to joint 26th. In the T20I rankings, Kaur is in the top 10 and Rodrigues has gained six slots to reach 15th position after a fine 73 against the West Indies.

In the bowling rankings, Deepti has moved up two places to take the second position in the bowling rankings and Titas Sadhu is up to 52nd.

AGENCIES

Chennai, Dec 17: The youngest-ever chess World Champion D Gukesh has revealed the thrilling way he celebrated his fantastic victory over Ding Liren of China. Gukesh took to 'X' to say that he enjoyed his victory in an exciting manner, by conquering his fear of heights.

The 18-year-old Grandmaster had promised his trainer, Polish GM Grzegorz Gajewski, that he would try bungee jumping if he won the world chess championship, and he kept his word. Before leaving Singapore, Gukesh visited Sky-park Sentosa and performed his first-ever bungee jump. He



shared a video of the daring leap on 'X' with the caption, "I did it!" In the video, Gukesh admitted to feeling 'scared' but also expressed excitement about the experience.

The video quickly went viral, garnering over 9,64,000 views

and hundreds of comments from fans celebrating his courage. One user wrote, "You did it. You made us all proud," while another commented, "You Dreamed It And Made It Come True. Much Respect." Gukesh's victory at the

world championship last week made him the second Indian to win the prestigious title after Viswanathan Anand.

In addition to his World Chess Championship win, Gukesh made history earlier this year by becoming the youngest-ever challenger in the FIDE Candidates Chess Tournament 2024.

Gukesh also took to X to thank all the members of his team, including mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton, who had once worked with the Indian cricket team. He wrote: "Thanks @PaddyUpton1 for preparing me mentally and physically & thanks to IM Jan Klimkowski for his support."