

Mamta's revelation

Yesteryear actor Mamta Kulkarni spills beans about her relationship with drug lord Vicky Goswami


LEISURE | P2



Putin's big statement

Putin expresses readiness for negotiations and compromises with Ukraine in possible talks with Donald Trump on ending the war

INTERNATIONAL | P10



₹ breaches 85-mark

Rupee depreciates 19 paise and breaches the crucial 85-level to close at a low of 85.13 against the US dollar

BUSINESS | P11



Deadlock ends

Deadlock over hosting of next year's Champions Trophy ends as ICC announces that India will play their matches at a neutral venue

SPORTS | P12

CM on 5-day visit to Rajasthan, Delhi

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday embarked on a five-day visit to New Delhi and Rajasthan during which he will attend several official meetings, CMO sources said.

Majhi, who left Bhubaneswar Thursday evening, will reach the national capital and spend night there before going to Jaipur in Rajasthan Friday.

During his stay in the desert state, Majhi is scheduled to attend the pre-Budget consultation meeting and the 55th GST council meeting to be held at Jaisalmer December 21.

The Chief Minister is slated to leave Rajasthan for New Delhi on the same day and expected to meet some Union Ministers and top leaders of BJP and discuss key issues.

He is likely to invite some ministers, leaders and other dignitaries to attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas programme hosted by Odisha in January.

Majhi is scheduled to return to Bhubaneswar December 23, the sources said.

5 terrorists killed in Kulgam encounter

Srinagar, Dec 19: Five Hizbul Mujahideen terrorists, including a self-styled top commander of the outfit, were killed in an encounter with security forces in Kulgam district of Jammu and Kashmir Thursday, officials said here.

Two security forces personnel sustained injuries in the operation that was launched in the early hours of the day, they said.

Security forces launched a cordon and search operation at Kadder in Behibagh area of the district Wednesday night following information about the presence of suspected terrorists there, the officials said.

They said the search operation turned into an encounter as the terrorists opened fire on security forces, who retaliated.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



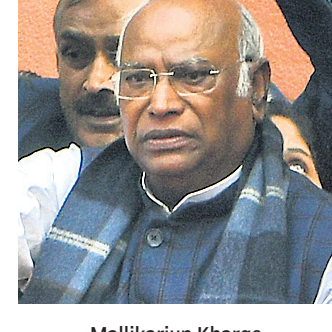
Why all the fuss? We treat everyone the same—we respect no one



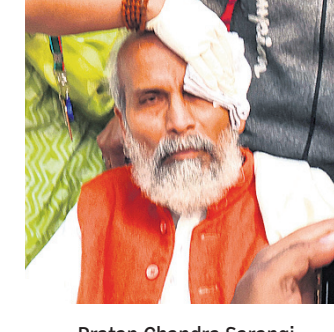
FOR A CAUSE: Kerala Students' Union (KSU) members brave water cannons used by police to disperse them during their protest march against Class X exam question paper leak issue in Thiruvananthapuram, Thursday

Parl scuffle leaves MPs hurt

The raging political storm over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar took an ugly turn when lawmakers from BJP and Congress had an acrimonious face-off on the Parliament premises Thursday. While LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi alleged that he was pushed by BJP MPs who tried stopping him and other Opposition MPs from entering House, the BJP accused Gandhi of physically assaulting two of their MPs, including Odisha's Pratap Chandra Sarangi who suffered injuries, and 'misbehaving' with a woman parliamentarian. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, on the other hand, claimed that he suffered knee injuries after being pushed by BJP MPs during the scuffle. Matters didn't end there as both sides later filed police complaints, accusing each other of assault and misconduct. Nevertheless, the incident has raised serious questions over the conduct of lawmakers.



Mallikarjun Kharge



Pratap Chandra Sarangi

protest outside Parliament over 'insult' to BR Ambedkar.

The incident perhaps without parallel started in the morning when MPs of the ruling BJP-led NDA were protesting at the steps of Parliament's 'Makar Dwar' against the Congress' 'insult' of Ambedkar, while MPs from the Congress and its allies were demonstrating over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on Ambedkar. As the both sides came closer, tempers and voices rose, resulting in a melee.

BJP MPs claimed that Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi tried to push his way inside Parliament through the middle of the stairs where they were standing, ignoring a side passage, and caused injuries to the saffron party MPs in

the ensuing jostling. However, some Opposition MPs claimed that the BJP members refused to give way to Gandhi who was headed to the Lok Sabha to attend proceedings.

Two BJP MPs were hospitalised with injuries as Gandhi became the centre of the ruling dispensation's accusations, including one by a woman MP who said Gandhi 'misbehaved' with her.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said he was pushed so violently that he lost his balance and sat down. "This inflicted (an) injury on my knees, which have undergone surgery. Now they are the ones who are accusing us of shoving them," he said.

The more apparent injuries were sustained by BJP's Balas-

ore MP Pratap Sarangi, 69, who had to get stitches in the temple. His colleague Mukesh Rajput was also injured in the head.

The Congress denied the charges. Party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said Gandhi and the others were protesting peacefully, but were prevented from entering Parliament by BJP MPs carrying 'sticks'. "BJP MPs stopped, threatened and intimidated me," Rahul Gandhi said.

Delhi Police registered an FIR against Gandhi under various Sections after BJP leaders filed a police complaint. The Congress also filed a complaint against the BJP in the Parliament House police station.

Both sides also complained to the respective Chairs in both the Houses against each other.

In a letter to Rajya Sabha Chairman, BJP MP from Nagaland S Phangnon Konyak said, "He (Gandhi) misbehaved with me in a loud voice and his physical proximity to me was so close that I being a lady member felt extremely uncomfortable. My dignity and self-esteem have been deeply hurt by LoP Shri Rahul Gandhi ji. Therefore, Hon'ble Chairman sir, I seek your protection."

MORE P3 & 8

Notice for removal of Dhankhar junked

New Delhi, Dec 19: Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Thursday dismissed the impeachment notice given by the Opposition seeking the removal of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar while ruling it as an act of impropriety, being severely flawed and drawn in haste to mar his reputation.

In his three-page ruling, which was tabled in the House by Rajya Sabha secretary general PC Mody, the Deputy Chairman said the impeachment notice is part of a design to denigrate the nation's constitutional institutions and malign the incumbent Vice President. At least 60 Opposition members had signed the notice for removal of Dhankhar from his post December 10, alleging that they did not have trust in him and that he was 'biased'.

The notice was moved by the Opposition members under Article 67(b) of the Constitution as intention of a no-confidence motion against the Vice President.

The Deputy Chairman ruled that this 'personally targeted' notice, which is bereft of facts and aimed at securing publicity, needs to be exposed.

He also held that the notice was a 'misadventure' in 'deliberate trivialising and demeaning' of the high constitutional office of the Vice President of the largest democracy. Worrisomely for the prestige of Parliament and its members, the notice is replete with assertions only to malign the incumbent Vice President, the Deputy Chairman ruled.

He also said, "The notice is 'lack of bona fides', and subsequent events unfolding revealed 'it being a calculated unwholesome attempt to garnish publicity; run down the constitutional institution; insinuate the personal image of the incumbent Vice President- notably, the first from the agricultural community to hold this office in the history of independent India.'

Dedicated armed unit for STR

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: The state government has set up a dedicated company of Armed Police Reserve (APR) force to strengthen wildlife protection in Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR), a notification by the Home department said.

The APR force with 131 personnel of different categories will form a joint task force, said another notification issued by the Forest department. Administrative control of the force will be under Mayurbhanj SP, while operational control will be managed in consultation with the field director of Similipal Tiger Reserve and the joint task force. The purpose of this force is to bol-

ster anti-poaching efforts, protect wildlife and forest resources, and maintain law and order within the reserve, the Home department notification said.

"Government of Odisha has created one dedicated Company of Armed Police Constabulary for strengthening of protection measures in Similipal Tiger Reserve, Mayurbhanj. One of its kind in the entire country," former PCCF Susanta Nanda posted on X.

While there is a Special Rhino Protection Force (SRPF) for protection of one-horned rhinoceroses in Kaziranga National Park in Assam, this unit in Odisha is considered the first of its kind where an armed police company is specifically created for the protection of a wildlife sanctuary.

Bloodthirsty California squirrels go nuts for vole meat

California, Dec 19: With their bushy tails and bulging cheeks, squirrels are often seen as cute animals. But a new study has painted the rodents in an entirely new light.

Scientists have captured shocking footage of California ground squirrels hunting, killing and then eating voles. Until now, squirrels have been considered 'granivorous' (those feeding on grain). But the new footage suggests that squirrels are evolving to become carnivorous.

"This was shocking," said Dr Jennifer E Smith, an associate professor of biology at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire,

who led the study published in the Journal of Ethology.

"We had never seen this behaviour before. Squirrels are one of the most familiar animals to people. We see them right outside our windows and we interact with them. Yet here's this never-before-encountered-in-science behaviour that sheds light on the fact that there's so much more to learn about the natural history of the world around us," Smith said.

The observations were made at Briones Regional Park in Contra Costa County between June 10 and July 30 this year. They were amazed to see California ground squirrels of all ages and genders hunting, eat-

ing, and competing over vole prey. Out of 74 observed interactions with voles, almost half (42 per cent) involved active hunting of these small rodents by ground squirrels.

Their carnivorous eating habits peaked during the first two weeks of July, which coincided with an explosion of vole numbers in the park.

Co-author Sonja Wild, a post-doctoral researcher at the University of California, Davis, admitted she was initially sceptical of the reports brought to her by undergraduate students who first witnessed the behaviour.

"I could barely believe my eyes. But once we started looking, we saw it everywhere," said Wild. "In a changing world, it can be daunting to consider all of the challenges that human presence, habitat loss, and climate change impose on animals," said Smith, adding, "Our study offers an exciting silver lining, demonstrating the incredible flexibility that some animals possess."



leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Your ability to let go things will reflect in your personal as well as your professional life. Today could be a significant day for you, and Ganesh advises you not to forget your special abilities. Make good use of them so that others too can benefit.

TAURUS
This day you will be prone to be stubborn and uncompromising in your business and professional dealings and thereby inviting unnecessary problems. Ganesh urges you to guard against this tendency and conduct yourself cordially and amiably with your colleagues and clients. The day will turn out well for executives and administrators. Do not fret too much about the work in hand. Things will turn out fine.

GEMINI
You need to break free from the shackles of your daily routine. Trying to finish all your tasks as per your schedule will give rise to unnecessary worry. To manage your time creatively is the best way to beat the stress. Talking to your elders is a good way to calm your shot nerves, says Ganesh.

CANCER
Your social prestige will go up. People will praise your personality traits and try to emulate you. You will be a role model, too. Ganesh feels that this will be highly profitable day for you.

LEO
You will try to take up new projects to the best of your abilities today. You will be able to successfully tackle all your tasks today. You will face a little instability in your personal relationships, but will be able to solve all issues successfully, says Ganesh.

VIRGO
Today you will feel monetarily much stronger than you have ever felt, says Ganesh. You will realise the need to make monetary arrangements for some unforeseen financial instability that may occur in the future. Your leadership qualities will be appreciated by people around you. Ganesh warns that there may be wild fluctuations in monetary transactions.

LIBRA
Ganesh says today you will use your mental competency to complete all your work on time. You may not give complete attention to your family as you will be spending time in the office or at work. Your extraordinary intelligence will be showcased at work today. Ganesh says do not forget your family which has played a huge role in your success.

SCORPIO
Be vigilant; keep your eyes and ears open for all the events happening around you, says Ganesh. Your intuition is trying to tell you something, trust it. Think and act positively, the rest would fall in place.

SAGITTARIUS
Keeping all the work aside, you may be painting the town red today. Falling in love is exciting, isn't it? However, for all those who are already in a relationship, Ganesh shows a red signal. Avoid arguments with your loved one, He suggests. Impress 'the special one' with a bouquet of red roses and make up for all the petty fights during the day.

CAPRICORN
Opportunities don't knock on the door twice. Today, you'll answer the door and utilise the opportunity to the most, predicts Ganesh. Positive results will be visible and you'll stand a chance to overtake your competitors. Even if the competition is fierce and opponents try everything to pull you down, you'll not let them win the battle. Socially, you will be very popular today.

AQUARIUS
You have changed your approach towards life from materialism to mysticism. Your friends and family members are pleasantly surprised to see this change. Later on the day, you may plan to visit a temple or other religious places, foresees Ganesh. You are on the right track, keep on going, you'll find the solace you have been seeking.

PISCES
You are striving hard to influence your destiny. You are not going to kneel down without a fight against heavy odds. With persistent efforts you will succeed in achieving your goals. While victory is a given, hard work will be necessary. In brief, today will be a challenging day for you, says Ganesh.



TOM HOLLAND TO SPEND X-MAS WITH ZENDAYA

Tom Holland revealed his Christmas plans, confirming he'll be spending the holidays with his co-star and special lady Zendaya and her family in the US. Looking ahead, the couple aims to bring both families together for future Christmas celebrations.

JENNIFER LOPEZ, BEN AFFLECK STRUGGLE TO FINALISE DIVORCE

Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck's highly publicised divorce has taken a turn for the worse, with tensions reportedly escalating behind the scenes. After nearly six months of back-and-forth drama surrounding their split, the couple is struggling to finalize the details.



Rashmika's ultimate 'heroine moment'

Mumbai: Actress Rashmika Mandanna embraced her ultimate 'heroine moment' in a recent social media post. Taking to Instagram, the *Pushpa* actress shared her stunning photos, accompanied by a note highlighting the effort and determination it takes to achieve perfection. In her caption, Rashmika wrote, "My heroine moment. Just going back in time, I'd always be fascinated seeing models and actors look so perfect and worked really, really hard to achieve it. I have—to some extent—achieved it (I think). But it's mostly about working super-duper hard and having the right people work with you to look a certain way. And of course, there's also the editing and really talented people working behind the lenses. Ok, I am done now." The photos feature Rashmika exuding elegance in a stylish black saree paired with statement earrings. She enhanced her look with subtle makeup, including kohl-rimmed eyes, mascara, and nude lipstick, adding to her timeless charm. Just days earlier, Rashmika shared another series of photos in an orange saree, thanking fans for their love and support for *Pushpa*. In her caption, she expressed gratitude, guys were asking love, and here it is! THANK YOU for all your love for Pushpa and guys!"



Mamta spills beans about relationship with drug lord

Mumbai: Bollywood actress Mamta Kulkarni, who was linked to a drug trafficking case, is back in the country after 24 years. She spilled the beans in an exclusive conversation with the news agency. She also talked about her relationship with Vicky Goswami and drugs. Mamta Kulkarni told, "I met Vicky Goswami in 1996 and in 1997 Vicky was arrested in a drugs case. He remained in jail for 12 years. During this time he also asked me

to meet him, after which I met him once. During this time I focused all my attention towards spirituality. I came to take a holy bath in the Kumbh Mela in 2012 and after that Vicky also went to Kenya." On the question of marriage with Vicky Goswami, the actress said, "All this is wrong. I have not married Vicky. I was celibate for 12 years and did not even eat onion and garlic during this time." However, the former actress acknowledged her relationship with the drug lord. "Yes, it is true that I was with Vicky and will always love him. However, everything ended due to my focus on spirituality. I also met him in Kenya. However, he was taken to America in a drug case. It has been almost eight years and now everything is over," explained Mamta.

Virushka to settle down in London!

Mumbai: Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli, also known as Virushka to their fans, are considered a power couple of Hindi film industry. While the duo enjoys crazy fan following and popularity, there have been ru-

mours that the two are planning to settle abroad with their kids. These rumours were given further credibility when Virat's ex-coach Rajkumar Sharma shared the information that the cricketer has decided to move to London with Anushka and kids. In an interview, Sharma confirmed that the cricketer is moving to London with his wife and kids, Vamika and

Akaay. He also mentioned that Kohli would be shifting his base to the UK and spending his life there post-retirement. He said, "Yes, Virat is planning to move to London with his children and wife. He will soon leave India and settle there." Notably, several pictures and videos of the couple from London stirred the internet. The Kohlis, who reportedly owns a property in London, were there for most of the year. On the work front, Anushka was last seen in *Zero* in 2018. She also made a cameo in her brother Karnesh Sharma's *Qala* in 2022.



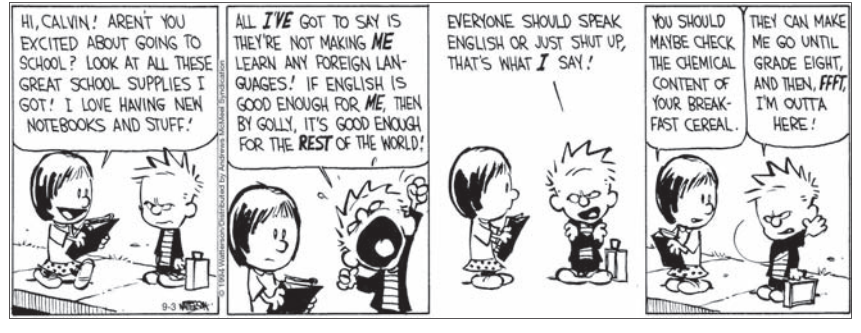
Control your man: Furious PeeCee fans

Actress Priyanka Chopra seem to be miffed with her singer-songwriter husband, after his recent tweet to billionaire Elon Musk. A few days ago, Tesla head-honcho Elon Musk, who is also the richest man in the world, reacted to a Tesla Owners Silicon Valley's X post which stated that the company's profit increased in light of Donald Trump winning the US Presidential elections of 2024. Elon re-shared the tweet with the popular Jonas Brothers meme in which Nick Jonas and Kevin Jonas were rotating a table when Joe Jonas entered. Elon wrote, "My, how the tables have turned". Responding to the same, Nick shared an image of Elon Musk pointing his finger and also wrote, "Take us to the year 3000". The tweet went viral in no time and registered 27.1 million views. However, this irked the fans of Nick Jonas and Priyanka, who interpreted this tweet as Nick endorsing Elon Musk. One user on X, formerly Twitter, wrote, "Is this a trump post?! @priyankachopra get your man." Another commented, "Priyanka get your man under control PLEASE".

PEANUTS



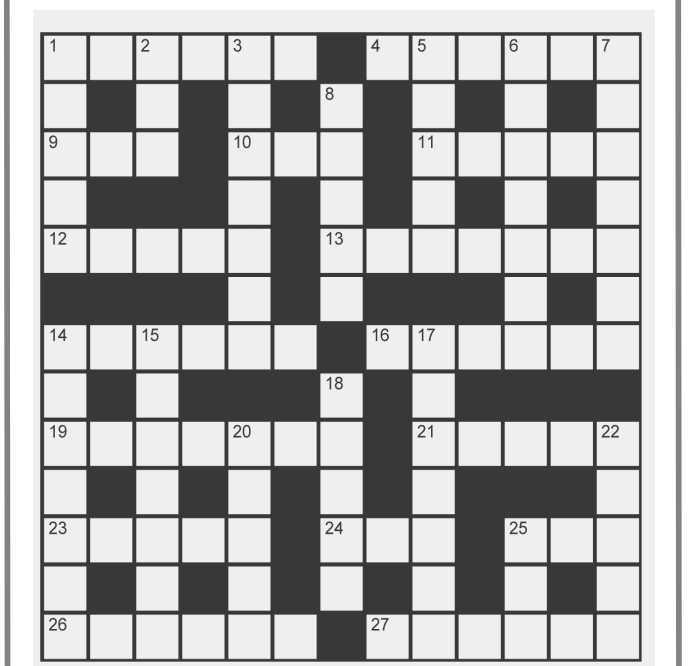
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



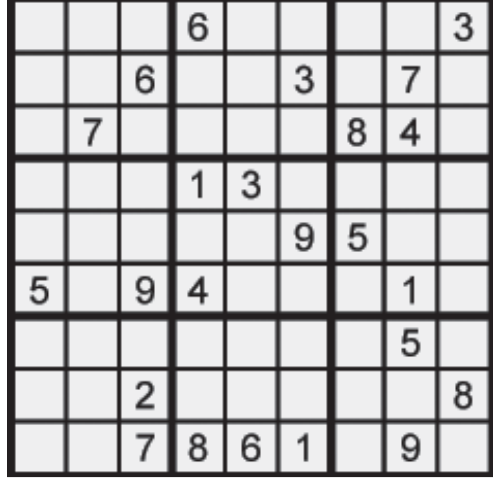
FUN POST CROSSWORD



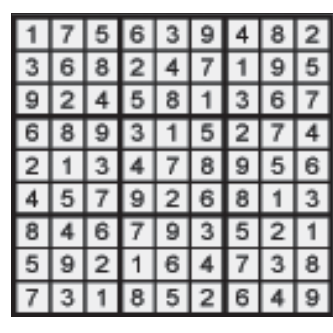
- Across**
1 Stand firm
4 Farm building
9 Put to the test
10 Roofing material
11 Moxie
12 Bridle parts
13 Scorn
14 Hunter's lures
16 Equinox starter
19 Shellfish
21 Emissary
23 Peninsula name
- Down**
24 New Zealand parrot
25 Sealing wax ingredient
26 Consents
27 Dasht-e-Kavir, e.g.
6 Great buy
7 Enduring
8 Said with a sneer
14 Catch-22
15 Deep-dish fruit pie
17 Promote
18 Golden Hind captain
20 Stew seasoning
22 Marina sight
25 Leaching product

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

Students and teachers of New Stewart School pose for a photo following distribution of certificates and trophies in competitions held as part of the annual day celebrations, at Mission Road in Cuttack Thursday



SCUFFLE IN PARLIAMENT

Majhi slams Rahul; incident shouldn't be politicised: BJD



chief minister Naveen Patnaik, said that the incident has belittled the glory of Parliament. "The truth behind the incident should come to the fore," the BJD said in a statement. Stating that it is the duty and responsibility of all to upkeep the dignity of Parliament, BJD spokesperson Lelin Mohanty said that there is no place for violence in democracy.

are not only unacceptable but it is also an insult to the sacred house of democracy," he said in a post on X.

"I pray for the speedy recovery of Shri @pcsarangi ji and strongly condemn such acts in Parliament. This type of violence has no place in a democracy," he added. A face-off between the Opposition and NDA MPs in Parliament premises over the alleged insult to BR Ambedkar left former Union minister Sarangi injured. The BJP accused Gandhi of pushing the senior member, a charge rejected by the Congress leader.

State BJP president Manmohan Samal said, "This is not an act of a person with a sound mind. It is unfortunate that the leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha indulged in such kind of action. I wish for the speedy recovery of the Balasore MP."

Opposition Biju Janata Dal (BJD) Thursday said there should be no politics over the alleged physical altercation between MPs of the Congress and BJP in Parliament earlier in the day. The BJD, headed by former

"Realising the importance of non-violence, BJD president Naveen Patnaik has proposed that the word - "Ahimsa" should be included in the Preamble of the Constitution," Mohanty said. The regional party demanded that action be taken against the persons responsible for Thursday's incident in Parliament.

"There should be no politics over this incident. No one is above the law, be him/her an MLA, MP or son of a Governor," the BJD said. Meanwhile, Congress members staged demonstrations against Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged remarks on BR Ambedkar in places including Bhubaneswar, Nuapada and Balasore.

Senior party leader Jaydev Jena said, "The people of India will never accept the remark made by Shah on Ambedkar. To cover up the issue and provide protection to Shah, the BJP and other NDA parties have conspired the high-drama in Parliament today."

Similarly, Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha organised a demonstration here against Rahul Gandhi, accusing him of physically assaulting two BJP MPs in the Parliament premises.



TAKING GUARD: Security forces deployed at Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar Thursday as Youth Congress activists stage a protest over the recent remarks of Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Dr BR Ambedkar

Shah likely to visit state in Dec last week

Bhubaneswar: Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to undertake a two-day visit to the state in the last week of this month mainly to attend several BJP programmes, state party president Manmohan Samal said Thursday. Stating that the detailed schedule on Shah was yet to be finalised, Samal said that the Union Home Minister would remain in Odisha from December 29 to 30. Shah is scheduled to attend the BJP MLAs training in Bhubaneswar and also review the progress in the ongoing organizational elections in the state.

2 get 20 years in jail for ganja smuggling

Bhubaneswar: A local court here Thursday handed down 20 years imprisonment to two drug peddlers after convicting them of smuggling 1 quintal ganja under Tamando police limits in 2022. The court also slapped a penalty of ₹1 lakh each on the convicts and said that failure to pay the fine would entail an additional one year in jail. Additional Public Prosecutor (APP) Salil Pradhan said the convicts have been identified as Paramananda Subudhi, 50, and Samim Khan, 34. Subudhi and Khan were transporting the contraband in an Innova car when Tamando police received a tip-off and intercepted them near Saina Motors. The cops conducted a search of the vehicle and seized the contraband wrapped in a gunny bag in the boot of the car. Later, the police arrested them and produced them in the court. Pronouncing the verdict, Judge Bandana Kar said Subudhi and Khan were convicted under Section 20 (B) (ii) C of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. A total of 12 witnesses were examined during the trial.

₹33.7 crore Central funds for heritage sites

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: ₹33.7 crore Central funds has been allocated to Odisha in the last three years, including ₹12.29 crore in 2023-24, for conservation, maintenance and development works at heritage sites in the state, Minister of Culture, Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekawat informed the Parliament Thursday.

Replying to a question raised by BJD Rajya Sabha MP Subhashish Khuntia on whether the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has undertaken any recent development or conservation projects for heritage sites in Puri and Konark, Shekawat said there are 3698 Centrally protected monuments/sites under care and maintenance of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in the country, including 81 monuments/sites in Odisha. "ASI undertakes conservation, restoration, maintenance and development works of ancient monuments and archaeological sites including the monuments in Puri and Konark as per the National Policy for Conservation and provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958," the minister said.

He said all conservation works are carried out as per available resources and the

Minister of Culture, Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekawat informed the Parliament Thursday that Odisha was allocated ₹12.29 crore in 2023-24, ₹13.18 crore in 2022-23, and ₹8.23 crore in 2021-22 for restoration and maintenance of 81 ASI rotedected monuments/sites in the state, including those in Puri and Konark

monuments are in good state of preservation. "Wherever necessary, all concerned local stakeholders are also involved in taking conservation related decisions," he added.

As per information, the funds allocated to Odisha in 2022-23 stood at ₹13.18 crore, while it was 8.23 crore in 2021-22.

To another question raised by BJD Rajya Sabha MP Debashish Samantaray on whether the Central government has organised any cultural exchange programmes to showcase Odisha's rich heritage, such as Odissi dance, Pattachitra and tribal art, the minister said, "The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Odisha government September 27, 2024 to promote the state's culture abroad."

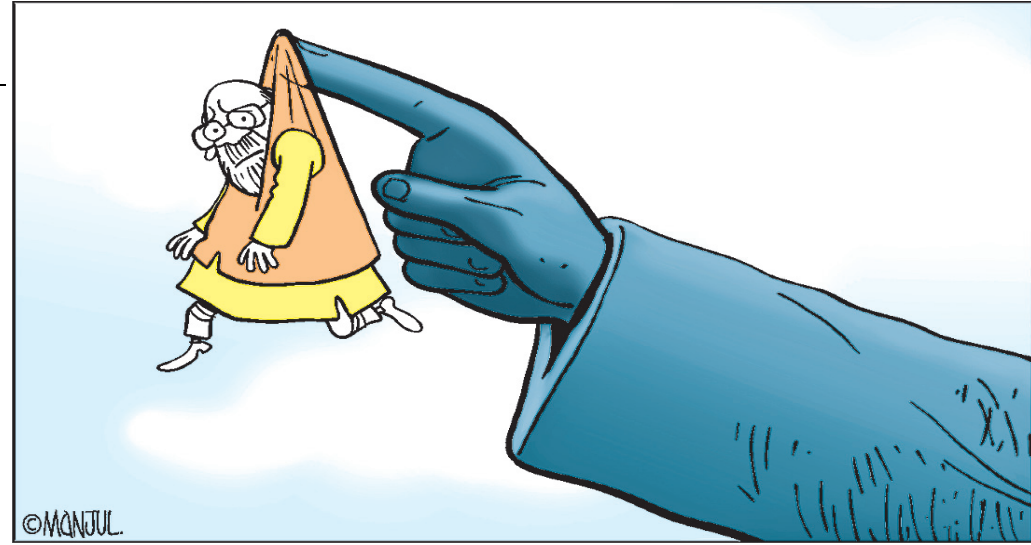
Shekawat said that Ministry of Culture implements "Global Engagement Scheme" to promote India's rich cultural heritage and enhance India's image in the global arena in a

concerted manner. Under the Scheme, the Festival of India (FoI) is organized abroad to promote people to people connect and bilateral cultural contacts. "Artistes, including those from Odisha belonging to diverse cultural fields such as folk art, including folk music, folk dance, folk theatre & puppetry, classical and traditional dance, experimental/ contemporary dance, classical/ semi classical music and theatre perform in the 'Festivals of India' abroad," he said.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), an autonomous organisation under Ministry of External Affairs, promotes Indian culture, including Odisha's, worldwide through its cultural centres and missions/posts abroad, the minister said.

The ICCR had organized different events in other countries to popularise and create interest about Odisha during the last three years for global recognition of the state's culture, Shekawat added.

POLITICKLE By MANJUL



MPs seek expansion of state's air connectivity



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: A delegation of MPs from the state, including Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan called on Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu in New Delhi Thursday over demands to expand and improve airport connectivity, passenger facilities and strengthen communication infrastructure in the state.

The delegation held discussions with the Civil Aviation minister on the construction of a new terminal building at Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) here, second phase renovation of Jharsuguda airport, setting up of the Puri airport and conversion of Charbatia into a full-fledged civil airport.

A delegation of MPs from Odisha, including Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, urge Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu for construction of a new BPIA terminal building, second phase renovation of Jharsuguda airport, setting up of the Puri airport and conversion of Charbatia into a full-fledged civil airport

The MPs also sought the minister's intervention for expansion of Rourkela and Jeyepore airstrips, and renovation of Balangir's Tusura airstrip, a release said.

They MPs urged the inclusion of Birasal in Dhenkanal, Hirakud in Sambalpur, Rangelund in Ganjam, Paradip in Jagatsinghpur, Utakela in Kalahandi, Kalinaganagar in Jajpur, Raisuan in Keonjhar, Padampur in

Bargarh district, Rasagobindpur and Rairungpur airports in Mayurbhanj district in the 'UDAN' Yojana.

The lawmakers told the minister that Odisha can bring about a revolution in the field of air communication in the "Purvodaya" mission and create a new identity nationally and internationally in terms of employment opportunities, tourism and trade.

In a letter submitted to the

minister, the MPs said sanctioning of a new domestic terminal building-3 at the BPIA will help solve the problems posed by the increasing air traffic and number of domestic and international passengers at the airport. That will also result in the increase of the demand for the airport in eastern India, they said.

The renovation of Veer Surendra Sai Airport Phase-II has become essential for passenger traffic in the industrial city of Jharsuguda. Also, the Charbatia airfield in Cuttack, serving as an aviation research center, will serve public interest. "These initiatives will help Odisha's industrial development as the state's major industrial and commercial hub Angul, the steel hub of Killingnagar and the country's largest port Paradip are close to the Capital Region Ring Road in and around Bhubaneswar," they pointed out.

They said the establishment of an airport in Puri will help lakhs of tourists and pilgrims coming from other states and abroad to get direct and uninterrupted air services.

Similarly, expansion and renovation of other airports can bring a big revolutionary change in the field of air communication in the development of Odisha as part of the Prime Minister's "Purvodaya" mission.

Bombs found

Kanas: Police Thursday recovered two crude bombs stashed in a haystack on the backyard of Kedar Sahu of Kanas village in Puri district. Sources said Sahu was pulling a bundle of paddy straw from the stack when he found two crude bombs. When he raised an alarm, Santosh Mallick of the village rushed to the spot and, later, informed the police. The cops asked him to pour water on the bombs to defuse them. A team of Kanas police reached the spot and started a probe to find out the source of the explosives.

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Har Pal Apke Saath

Research & devpt key to driving progress: Minister

IIIT-Bhubaneswar hosts the first IEEE international conference on Advances in Signal Processing, Power, Communication, and Computing



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: Research and development is crucial for driving progress and creating a robust foundation for future generations...

The three-day event was organised by the departments of Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering (ETC) and Electrical Engineering (EEE)...

The inaugural edition of ASPCC-2024 aimed to serve as a platform for researchers, industry experts, and academicians to exchange transformative ideas and foster innovation.

order to discuss modern-day challenges and advancements in technology.

Ram Bilas Pachori from IIT-Indore highlighted the theme of the conference. Guest of honour Subhransu Ranjan Samantaray pointed out the relevance of the conference in fostering innovation and addressing real-world problems.

ASPCC-2024 witnessed an overwhelming response, with 155 submissions from across the globe. Papers were received from countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Westminster...

The inaugural session concluded with a vote of thanks by organising chairperson Pradyut Kumar Biswal who expressed gratitude to the dignitaries, organising committees, participants, and collaborators for their contributions.



UP IN ARMS: Members of Odisha Ashakarmi Association and CITU stage a demonstration at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Thursday to press for fulfillment of their 17-point charter of demands

'True peace found in giving back to society'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: True peace is found in giving back to society, said former Prime Minister of Slovakia Eduard Heger...

KIIT KNOWLEDGE TREE LECTURE



dents should not only think about how to establish them

by getting an education but also invest their knowledge and skills in maintaining peace, harmony, and brotherhood in their environment...

Hague also lauded KIIT and KISS founder Achyuta Samanta and cited him as a prime example of a person with com-

mitment and giving back to society. He said that a person of good character can be a good leader and leaders with ethics and values can be role models for others.

You should always be humble and kind to others. Those who have courage and dedication can bring about a positive change in society, Hague added.

At the event, Samanta delivered the welcome address and KIIT VC Sharanjit Singh proposed the vote of thanks.

Odisha Khadi Mela 2024 concludes

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: Odisha Khadi Mela 2024, organised by state's Khadi and Village Industry Board successfully concluded here Thursday.

The event showcased handi-crafts products made by rural artisans and PMEGP entrepreneurs from the state, from neighbouring states like West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

The closing ceremony was graced by the presence of KVIC member Manoj Kumar Singh, MSME special secretary Bibhuti Bhusan Dash and KVIC director Subash Chandra Chhetri...

The mela was a testament to the thriving Khadi industries in the state with a wide range of products on display including handspun and hand-woven cloths.

Khadi Mela provided a platform for rural artisans and entrepreneurs to display and sell their products promoting employment and economic growth in rural areas.

Recover industrial units' electricity dues: Dy CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo asked Energy department officials to take steps for recovery of pending electricity dues of industrial units.

Singh Deo gave this direction while chairing a review meeting focused on the recovery of pending electricity dues from industrial units Wednesday, an official statement said.

The Deputy CM, who is in charge of the Energy department, reviewed the outstanding arrears related to electricity dues, particularly those from industrial units' own generation and consumption of electricity.



During the meeting, it was highlighted that the collection of pending electricity dues has been hindered due to several ongoing legal cases, particularly those pending in the High Court of Orissa and other legal forums...

The deputy chief minister directed the officers concerned to take all necessary steps, in consultation with Advocate General Odisha and the advisor to the department, to expedite the resolution of these pending cases.

According to data provided by Singh Deo during the last session of the Odisha Assembly, electricity dues worth ₹1,096.32 crore have been pending against 23 industries till October this year.

Min's thrust on ensuring paddy procurement, PDS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra held a review meeting Thursday to assess the activities of the department at the Lok Seva Bhawan conference hall.

The meeting was attended by department principal secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh, Odisha State Civil Supplies Corporation managing director Shubham Saxena, and other senior officials.

During the meeting, Singh briefed the minister on various ongoing initiatives within the department. Minister Patra emphasised the importance of ensuring a smooth paddy procurement process during the current kharif season.

He urged officials to prioritise farmers' interests and promptly address any grievances. He further directed that



no registered farmer should be deprived of the paddy procurement process.

The minister also discussed the Public Distribution System (PDS), announcing that eligible beneficiaries will receive their monthly rations starting in January.

He stressed that the rations should be distributed by the last week of the preceding month and, in cases of need, for two months at a time. To expedite this, Patra instructed timely lifting of supplies to en-

sure smooth distribution.

Additionally, Minister Patra highlighted the progress of e-KYC verification, noting that 84 percent of the process had been completed in the state. He directed officials to complete the e-KYC process at the earliest and maintain vigilance on price rises.

Patra called for increased enforcement against hoarders and emphasised the importance of public awareness campaigns. The filling of vacancies in district consumer forums was also discussed.

EPS-95 members protest for hike in pension, DA

POST NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi, Dec 19: Leaders and members of the Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 (EPS-95), an association of pensioners, staged a demonstration at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, Wednesday to press the government to hike minimum pension under the scheme.

Members from several states across India took part in the protest which was organised by the National Coordination Committee of EPS-95.

The event was presided over by national president Prakash Yende and witnessed participation from state leaders and cadres representing Odisha, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Goa, Karnataka, Punjab, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Jharkhand, and Haryana.

National vice president Bhagyadhar Brahma, along with leaders Prafulla Kumar Das, Saroj Kanta Mallick, Krishna Chandra Mohanty, Abhay Das, Bikram Chhotray, Geetanjali Patra, Urbashi Mishra, Bijaya Mohanty, Prakash Patnaik, Bulei Behera, Gagan Paikaray, Gouri Shankar Rao, Durga Prasad Das and others addressed the gathering.

Prominent national leaders, including Bhimrao Dongre, Pundalik Pandey, Dada Zode, Chandra Sekhar Parsai, Ritesh Mourya, and Hargovind Sharma, condemned the perceived 'anti-pensioner attitude' of the Central government. They urged the government to resolve their issues promptly, warning of nationwide large-scale agitations if their demands are not met.

The protestors submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, outlining their key demands which include an enhancement of the minimum pension to ₹9,000, along with dearness allowance (DA), implementation of higher pension payments as per Supreme Court orders and extension of free medical treatment facilities under Central government schemes.

ECoR sanctions 170 ROB projects as spl railway initiatives

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: In a significant boost to infrastructure development and public safety, the East Coast Railway (ECoR) has approved 170 Road Over Bridge (ROB) construction projects as Special Railway Projects under the provisions of the Railway (Amendment) Act, 2008.

The decision aims to accelerate the execution of these critical infrastructure projects by streamlining land acquisition processes and expediting necessary approvals. Declaring these projects as Special Railway Projects ensures smoother coordination with state author-

ities, facilitating timely completion and improved operational efficiency.

Of the 170 projects, 110 will be implemented in Odisha, while the remaining 60 will be in Andhra Pradesh. These ROB projects are expected to enhance the safety and convenience of road and rail users by eliminating manned level crossings, reducing the risk of accidents, and enabling seamless traffic flow.

"The approval of these ROB projects reflects our commitment to public safety and infrastructure development," said an ECoR official. "These projects align with national



objectives to expand and modernise transportation systems while enhancing public welfare," he said.

ECoR reiterated its dedication to advancing regional development through projects that address the growing infrastructure needs of road and rail users, ensuring safe and efficient services.

Workshop on Steel Industry's transportation needs

In another initiative, ECoR organised a comprehensive workshop to address the evolving transportation requirements of the steel industry. Held Thursday in Bhubaneswar, the workshop was chaired by ECoR GM Parmeshwar Funkwal and attended by delegates from major steel manufacturers, logistics experts, and representatives from the Railway Board and the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO).

The workshop focused on fostering collaboration between the steel industry and the railways to overcome challenges in transportation logistics, enhance operational efficiency, and improve safety in the movement of steel consignments.

One of the primary topics

of discussion was the exploration of new wagon designs to improve throughput, increase cost-efficiency, and make wagons more versatile to handle various types of steel products.

Prominent steel manufacturers, including Tata Steel Ltd., Jindal Stainless Ltd., and NMDC Steel Ltd. shared their insights and operational challenges. Suggestions were made to improve rail connectivity, streamline loading and unloading processes, and reduce wagon turnaround times within ECoR's jurisdiction.

Funkwal emphasised the importance of strengthening partnerships to meet growing steel demand and ensure timely deliveries. He also stressed improving coordination between steel plants, rail networks, and state authorities to expedite critical approvals.

WEATHER forecast table with BBSR, CTC, Max Temp, Min Temp, Humidity, Rainfall, and a forecast icon.

MARKET WATCH table showing INDEX, VARIATION, SENSEX, NIFTY, DOLLAR, EURO, GOLD, and SILVER prices.

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Paradip stares at water crisis

AUTHORITIES CLAMP ODD-EVEN WATER SUPPLY SCHEME IN PORT TOWN

POST NEWS NETWORK

Paradip, Dec 19: Port town Paradip stares at a water shortage ahead of summer season as authorities Wednesday clamped odd-even water supply scheme to combat the impending water supply crisis in the town.



with the administration and make judicious use of water.

However, the odd-even scheme is not new to the port town, and has been in practice since 2013. Locals said the scheme was being implemented every year from January.

Restricted water supply has hit the denizens as many families alleged they were not getting enough water for daily

consumption. Sources said the renovation of 90-km long Taladanda canal, which stretches from Jobra area in Cuttack city till Atharbanki in Paradip, is yet to be completed as work is taken up for only six months in a year.

However, with passage of time, the water body has been buried and is only four feet in depth at present. All attempts by port authorities to excavate it further and make it deeper have failed. An engineer of the Paradip Port's public health department said that the excavation work was aborted as it was found during a review that further digging of the pond will result in accumulation of saline water.

The previous BJD government had announced construction of an anicut at Bhotmun-

dai near Paradip last year. However, with the change in state government, talks on construction of the anicut have disappeared.

Paradip Port draws water from Mahanadi in Cuttack through the Taladanda canal and stores it in a large pond spread over 175 acre at Atharbanki. The pond was initially 13 feet in depth, which helped the port town manage its water needs for a period of six months.

However, with passage of time, the water body has been buried and is only four feet in depth at present. All attempts by port authorities to excavate it further and make it deeper have failed. An engineer of the Paradip Port's public health department said that the excavation work was aborted as it was found during a review that further digging of the pond will result in accumulation of saline water. As an alternative, planning is on to bring water to the town through pipelines, he said.

Odia jawan injured during training dies

POST NEWS NETWORK

Boipariguda, Dec 19: An Odia jawan who was critically injured in an explosion during training at Pokhran in Rajasthan died Thursday.



The deceased jawan was identified as Ishwar Talia, 34, of Badaguda village in Kenduguda panchayat and Boipariguda police limits of Koraput district. He was employed under 46 Armoured Regiment in Jammu.

Ishwar sustained critical injuries after an explosion in a tank during a training exercise at Pokhran in Rajasthan, Wednesday. The mishap claimed lives of SDM Ashutosh Mishra of Uttar Pradesh and LD Jeetendra Kumar of Andhra Pradesh, who died on the spot. The explosion took place while the three were reportedly loading ammunition to the tank.

NHRC seeks ATR on rape of minor girl in Kandhamal

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, Dec 19: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought an Action Taken Report (ATR) from the District Magistrate (DM) and the Superintendent of Police (SP), of Kandhamal, on the rape of a minor girl, September 1.

The NHRC Wednesday directed the DM and the SP of Kandhamal to submit the health status report of the victim, the status of the police investigation, and compensation, if any, paid to the aggrieved family.

The apex rights panel issued directions while acting on the complaint filed by rights activist Sagar Jena. The petitioner alleged before the commission that a minor girl was subjected to rape September 1 in Kandhamal district when she had gone to the market to purchase some material for her dress.

The accused, who is reportedly a distant relative of the victim, had dragged the victim to nearby bushes where she was



subjected to rape.

The accused also threatened to kill the victim if she reported the matter to anyone. The complainant has requested the commission to intervene in the matter.

Acting on the complaint, the NHRC issued direction to the DM and the SP, Kandhamal calling for a report on the matter within four weeks including the health status of the victim, the status of police investigation and compensation if any paid to the aggrieved family.

The top rights body said it would be constrained to invoke coercive process u/s 13 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 calling for a personal appearance of the authority concerned for submission of the report, in case the report is not received within the stipulated time.

Class XI girl student found hanging in hostel bathroom

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhawanipatna, Dec 19: The body of a Class XI girl student was found hanging in her hostel bathroom in Bhawanipatna town Thursday, police said.

The deceased has been identified as Tofali Naik, a native of Birikote village under Thumal Rampur block of Kalahandi district, the police said. Tofali was studying in Commerce stream and staying in Indravati girls' hostel in the

campus of the Maa Manikswari University here.

When her hostel inmates found the bathroom locked from inside in the morning and no one was responding, they informed the hostel authority. Later, with the help of local police, the door was broken open and Tofali's body was found hanging from the shower pipe tied with a towel, a police officer said.

The police recovered the body and sent it for post-mortem. A forensic team has been

sent to the spot for further investigation, he said.

The police suspect that it was a suicide case. Nibedita Nath, Vice-Chancellor of the university, said the police are conducting the investigation and the exact reason behind her death would be known from the post-mortem report.

Tofali's father said he and his wife talked to her last night and she was a little depressed. But, he is ignorant about why she has taken such an extreme step.

50 students injured in bee attack

Derabhis: As many as 50 students and teachers were injured in honeybee attack during the annual sports meet of Ramachandra Nodal High School at Fakirabad in Chatarachakadapanchayat under this block in Kendrapara district Thursday. The students were participating in various events when a swarm of bees from a tree on the playground attacked them.

Kodinga tehsildar awarded 3-year RI

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sonepur, Dec 19: A special judge, Vigilance in Bolangir sentenced the incumbent tehsildar of Kodinga tehsil in Nabarangpur district to three years of rigorous imprisonment (RI) after convicting him in a bribery case, Thursday.

The convict identified as Subrat Kumar Behera, the incumbent tehsildar of Kodinga tehsil in Nabarangpur district, was previously posted as tehsildar and sub-registrar of Tarava tehsil in Subarnapur district. Special Judge, Vigilance Malaya Ranjan Das also slapped a penalty of ₹30,000 on Behera, apart from the punishment, Special Public Prosecutor Jaykrushna Sahu said.

The court passed the order after examining all the documents submitted by the Vigilance de-

partment and the statements recorded by the witnesses. The Vigilance department is planning to appeal before the authorities for dismissal of Behera from government service.

According to the case diary, Kanhu Charan Dash, an advocate of Ghatkaintara village in Shibatula panchayat of Tarava block, had applied in the tehsil office for registration of his land at Antarda mouza. However, the then tehsildar Behera demanded ₹20,000 from him as bribe to get his work done. Angered, Dash lodged a complaint in the Vigilance department. Accordingly, a plan was hatched and the complainant Dash handed over ₹20,000 bribe to Dash when he was in his government residence. The Vigilance sleuths who were hiding nearby caught Behera red-handed.

2 bank officials suspended for gold loan fraud

Jajpur: Two officials of a rural bank have been suspended in connection with a loan fraud of over ₹42 lakh by mortgaging counterfeit gold in Jajpur, an official said. The suspended officials have been identified as Satabdee Pradhan, former manager and Pratibha Mishra, former assistant manager of the Jaraka branch of Odisha Gramya Bank (OGB). The fraud came to light during a joint routine inspection recently, after which the bank authorities suspended the two officials and removed the gold appraiser for the offence, a bank official said. The bank's regional manager, Dig Bijay Bahadur Das, filed a complaint with Dharmasala police station Thursday. According to the complaint, seven people from local villages had taken a loan of ₹42.67 lakh from the bank by mortgaging fake gold jewellery. All the loanees were known to the branch's gold appraiser, who had recommended the loans, police said. The regional manager of the bank has named seven loanees, a former manager, an ex-assistant manager and a former gold appraiser of the branch in his police complaint. Based on the complaint, police have registered a case against 10 people under various sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and initiated a probe into it.

New research sheds light on horseshoe crab conservation

Odia scientist among 18 international scientists behind the study

POST NEWS NETWORK

Balasure, Dec 19: A groundbreaking study offering the first-ever genetic baseline data for the conservation status of the Asian horseshoe crab (commonly known as the blue-blood crab) has been published in 'Conservation Letters', December 16.

re, has been commended for his contributions to the research.

The horseshoe crab, often referred to as a 'living fossil', has survived for over 400 million years with little evolutionary change. However, anthropogenic pressures have led to a sharp decline in their global populations. Of the four known species worldwide, three are found in Asia, with two inhabiting Odisha's coastline.

The research employed extensive geographical and genomic sampling, integrating DNA data with environmental and climatic datasets. This approach successfully analysed the genetic structure and historical trends of the horseshoe crab population. According to Pati, the findings provide critical baseline information and a significant impetus for habitat preservation efforts necessary for the species' survival.

Notably, earlier this year, Pati received the prestigious Biju Patnaik Wildlife Conservation Award-2024 from the Department of Forests, Environment, and Climate Change.



The collaborative research highlights the species' primary habitats, which act as corridors and refuges crucial for their survival amid global warming. This significant study involved 18 scientists from India, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Thailand, and Australia. Dr Siddhartha Pati, an Odia scientist from Balasore,

Advertisement for East Coast Railway Procurement Systems, listing various tender notices for steel, batteries, and other materials.

Advertisement for East Coast Railway e-Tender Notice, detailing the process for bidding on construction and supply contracts.

Advertisement for UCO Bank Recovery Department, offering services for debt recovery and legal assistance.

Advertisement for UCO Bank Recovery Department, offering services for debt recovery and legal assistance.

Advertisement for the Dhenkanal Municipal Council, regarding an E-Procurement Notice for construction work.

Advertisement for the 10th Battalion, Indo Tibetan Border Police Force, regarding a recruitment notice for constables.

Large advertisement for Bank of India, featuring an E-Auction Sale Notice for various properties and land parcels.

FOCUS ECONOMY

PROPPING UP GROWTH



Stubbornly high inflation is eroding the real income and purchasing power of people. This has forced consumers to prioritise essentials over discretionary goods, with ripple effects across the economy

ostrich-like posture, and is now conceding that indeed there is a crisis of falling consumption. The government has been now talking about the demand side solution. So stress should be given to increase employment and wage growth.

Chief Economic Advisor to the Ministry of Finance V Anantha Nageswaran, who advocated to double down on deregulation earlier to free up economic activity, has now expressed concern that workers' salaries have not grown commensurate with corporate profitability. He said that without a judicious balance between the share of corporations' income making up their profits and that going to workers as wages, there won't be adequate demand in the economy for companies' own products.

In order to prop up consumption, the CEA nudged the private sector to raise wages and hire more and find the "right balance between capital-intensive and labour-intensive growth." The CEA said that sustained income growth bolsters both consumption and savings, eventually spurring economic expansion.

Hence, apart from job creation and wage hike, to raise the purchasing power of people, the government should reduce taxes especially GST and excise taxes on petroleum products and spend more on health and education. However, the important thing is not just high growth but making growth inclusive, equitable and sustainable. Since resources are not infinite, growth can't be infinite. The government should try to improve the quality of life and living standards of people instead of getting obsessed with growth or wealth creation.

The writer is an Odisha-based economist and columnist.

The latest GDP numbers paint a sobering picture. The much-trumpeted supercilious growth engine of India has spluttered amid strained middle-class consumption. India's GDP growth in the July-September quarter of 2024 has plummeted to a seven-quarter low of 5.4% from 8.1% in the same period last year. The quantum of deceleration turned out much sharper than anticipated. This has triggered a concern about corrosion of India's medium and long-term economic potential.

It is not just slowdown, but the spectre of stagflation – an economy characterised by high inflation, low economic growth and high unemployment – looms large too. Though the government considers this slowdown as a temporary blip, the grim reality is different. Barring agriculture and services, all sectors report deceleration. While the government has blamed global headwinds and fragile geopolitical conditions, numbers point to a subterranean malaise: sluggish private consumption, inflationary spiral, weak rupee, falling private investment, soaring real estate costs, poor infrastructure spending, declining exports and dwindling capital expenditure. The main reason is shrinking and financially strained urban middle class and resultant dwindling private consumption. There is no problem if consumption declines, provided savings increase in tandem. But India's economic landscape faces a worsening trend as household financial savings have plummeted to 47-year low of 5.1% of GDP in 2022-23, while household debt skyrocketed to an all-time high, reaching 40% of GDP by December 2023. Higher household debt is exacerbating the spending squeeze and affecting growth

prospects.

Stubbornly high inflation is eroding the real income and purchasing power of people. This has forced consumers to prioritise essentials over discretionary goods, with ripple effects across the economy. In addition to this, the urban middle classes — the mainstay of this consumption — is facing stagnating real wages, and surging costs of living. Reports indicate that real wage growth in India has been negligible, at just 0.01% over the past five years. Similarly, the real wages of the majority of salaried Indian workers have either declined or remained stagnant in the past six years, which has led to a squeeze in demand, despite an exponential surge in profits of large companies.

In India, the corporate profit to GDP ratio increased to 15-year high in 2023-24, as per an analysis by brokerage firm Motilal Oswal. The profit-GDP ratio of Nifty 500 companies swelled to 4.8% in 2023-24 from 4% in the previous year. The number stood at 2.1% during 2020-21.

However, amidst decline in growth, there is clamour for rate cut to reduce cost of borrowing and stimulate consumption splurge. It is true

that the elevated rate of interest has affected the borrowing capacity of consumers. But the main role of RBI is to control inflation. The government is the largest borrower, while the corporate sector is the second largest borrower. The interest rate cut, as a supply side solution, reduces their interest and debt liability more than helping consumers. Lowering rates won't spur growth unless consumption demand is strong. Investors borrow and invest only when demand exists.

In its latest credit policy, the RBI unexpectedly cut the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points from 4.5% to 4% to inject ₹1.16 lakh crore into the banking system. This move aims to improve liquidity and transmission of rate cuts amid high inflation and slowing economic growth. The CRR cut is an indirect way of reducing the interest rate.

Everybody is thinking about borrowers, the corporates' interest or borrowing-driven consumption splurge. But nobody is thinking about the interest of savers whose savings help banks and other financial institutions to survive and ensure lending activities. It is noteworthy that the government has finally given up its



Santosh Kumar Mohapatra

LOWERING RATES WON'T SPUR GROWTH UNLESS CONSUMPTION DEMAND IS STRONG



Mauricio Cabrera Leal

ILLEGAL GOLD AND MINERAL MINING IN THE COLOMBIAN AMAZON AND ALONG THE PACIFIC COAST – OFTEN CONTROLLED BY ARMED CRIMINAL GROUPS – HAS CONTAMINATED WATER SOURCES WITH MERCURY AND ENDANGERED LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Responsible Mining

Fueled by the clean-energy transition and surging gold prices, demand for critical minerals and metals is rising at an unprecedented pace. This trend has supercharged mining activities, posing a serious threat to biodiversity and vulnerable populations, especially indigenous communities. To mitigate the impact and stave off the worst, coordinated global action is more urgent than ever.

To be sure, minerals and metals mining is vital for the energy transition and global economic growth. However, it also jeopardises the ecosystems that sustain life, leading to habitat destruction and fragmentation, deforestation, water and soil pollution, wildlife poisoning, food insecurity, and watershed loss. Indigenous and local communities often bear the brunt of this crisis, which threatens their livelihoods and their right to a clean and healthy environment.

At the same time, recent studies project that demand for critical minerals, largely driven by the accelerating pace of the green transition, will double by 2030 and quadruple by 2040. Meanwhile, falling interest rates, geopolitical uncertainty, portfolio diversification, and speculative investments are expected to push gold prices even higher.

Against this backdrop, Colombia has recently called for a binding international agreement to ensure traceability, transparency, and accountability across the entire minerals value chain – from mining to recycling – by next year's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Brazil.

Unveiled during the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in Colombia, this proposal follows the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals. It aims to bolster due diligence, promote corporate accountability, and establish a global market for essential clean-energy inputs. At its core is a commitment to promote the responsible extraction of minerals and metals without abandoning environmental and biodiversity goals. To that end, Colombia's proposal was accompanied by a joint voluntary declaration on responsible mining practices that outlined a series of concrete steps, including the formation of an ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder working group.

It should not come as a surprise that Colombia, one of the world's most biodiverse countries, is spearheading efforts to promote responsible mining practices. Illegal gold and mineral mining in the Colombian Amazon and along the Pacific coast – often controlled by armed criminal groups – has contaminated water sources with mercury and endangered local and indigenous communities. Rare-earth exploration in the Amazon-Orinoco region has further exacerbated these environmental and social shocks, with the industry's most vulnerable workers forced to endure precarious conditions verging on slavery.

Colombia's own history of armed conflict and internal displacement, along with the threat posed by criminal groups targeting indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local communities, underscores the need for a human-rights-based approach to mineral extraction. With this in mind, the joint declaration advocates a just green transition that ensures dignified livelihoods for all.

Africa's experience offers valuable insights into how to achieve responsible resource extraction. Over the past decade, multiple African countries have adopted due-diligence requirements and traceability standards for tantalum, tin, tungsten, and gold, drawing on frameworks like the 2010 Lusaka Declaration. This landmark agreement, adopted by member states of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, introduced several accountability mechanisms, including a regional certification system aimed at enhancing transparency and reducing illegal mining.

Similarly, the 2016 OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas provided companies that source raw materials from volatile regions with practical tools to identify and report human-rights violations and environmental harm. Subsequent frameworks, such as the OECD's 2018 Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct and 2023 Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, urged firms to consider the broader effects of their activities, addressing issues like labor rights, sustainability, and ethical governance.

Regrettably, the application and enforcement of these measures remain largely confined to specific regions. By facilitating the cross-border exchange of knowledge and expertise, global policymakers could develop robust accountability mechanisms spanning the entire lifecycle of metals and minerals, from extraction and trade to recycling and disposal.

Multilateral cooperation is crucial for driving this transformation. Colombia's initiative, it is hoped, will mark the emergence of a new paradigm that spurs global climate action and paves the way for sustainable development.

The writer is Deputy Minister of Policy and Regulation at the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in Colombia.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

SPECTRUM TAIWAN

Democracy, inclusiveness & innovation

Taiwan's presidential vote in 2020 was over 74% and in 2024 it was 76%, which testifies to the strong and enduring involvement of the society in the country's democratic process. The Chinese-language Liberty Times notes that a month before the American elections, Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te outlined his vision for the island's future in a dynamically changing geopolitical situation. It is based on three assumptions: strengthening democracy, building social inclusiveness, and defending sovereignty.

Taiwan's future will depend on the ability to balance between the fight to maintain a political system different from the People's Republic of China and the need to develop such civic activity as is evidence of the maturity of Taiwanese democracy and its deep roots in society. In his October speech, President Lai strongly emphasised Taiwan's historical aspirations for democracy and freedom. Referring to the revolution of 113 years ago, he emphasised that republican and democratic ideals are the basis of national identity.

Comments in Taiwanese media can also be read in this spirit. United Daily News,

among others, writes that "the government plans to increase investment in intercultural education and support programs for ethnic minorities in order to build a society based on equality and mutual respect."

In the social sphere, the president announced a series of initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life of citizens. Support programs for young parents, investments in education and healthcare are priorities for his administration. According to the 2023 Social Development Report, the government plans to increase spending on social welfare by 15% over the next five years.

Relations with the PRC are the most important challenge for Taiwan's foreign policy. President Lai has made it clear that the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China are not subordinate to each other. This is a continuation of his earlier position, which rejects the concept of "one China" in agreement with Beijing's interpretation. At the same time, the president expressed his willingness to cooperate with China on global issues such as climate change and public health. China Times notes that this approach is an attempt to find common ground for dia-

logue without renouncing sovereignty. This is important, as the largest daily is known for its political sympathies located on the side of the opposition Nationalist Party (KMT).

President Lai is seeking to strengthen relations with allies in the region and in the international arena to balance the influence of the People's Republic of China. Through strategic partnerships with countries such as Japan, Australia and India, Taiwan wants to maintain stability in the Asia-Pacific region. According to data from the Ministry of National Defence, the defence budget for 2023 amounted to a record 2.4% of GDP, reflecting a growing sense of threat. The president announced an intensification of efforts to strengthen the country's defence capabilities.

The "Four Pillars of Peace" plan includes modernising the armed forces, increasing the defence budget, and developing the defence industry. One element of building Taiwan's strength is investment in innovation and sustainable development. According to the Ministry of Economy, semiconductor exports in 2022 exceeded 45% of the country's total exports. Initiatives such as the

Asia Silicon Valley plan are aimed at further developing the technology sector, with an emphasis on AI and 5G.

President Lai emphasises the importance of an innovation-based economy, especially in the technology sector. Taiwan is a world leader in semiconductor production, and companies such as TSMC play a key role in global supply chains.

In the face of growing tensions with the People's Republic of China and global challenges, Taiwan is focusing on democracy, inclusiveness and innovation. Public support, strengthening international alliances and consistent implementation of strategic goals can make Taiwan not only a regional leader, but also a model for other countries striving for democracy and sovereignty.

On the other hand, the international community is increasingly appreciating Taiwan's role as a stable and democratic partner in the region. In the perspective of global problems such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change or the refugee crisis in the Middle East since 2012, Taiwan has proven its ability to cooperate and provide assistance to other countries.

The writer is a Polish Sinologist.

INFIA

WISDOM CORNER

A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the 'why' for his existence, and will be able to bear almost any 'how.'

VIKTOR E. FRANKL

Through pride we are ever deceiving ourselves. But deep down below the surface of the average conscience a still, small voice says to us, something is out of tune.

CARL JUNG

Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.

JOHN MUIR

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

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Road safety

Sir, Illegal, unplanned and unscientific construction of speed breakers are becoming a pain in the neck for motorists. Ironically, meant for safety, these speed breakers are increasingly causing accidents in major cities besides damaging the vehicles and contributing to noise pollution. It is suggested that speed breakers be a rounded hump of 17-metre radius and 3.7-metre width with 0.10-metre height for the preferred advisory crossing speed of 25 km per hour. Width of the speed breakers should commonly be more than the wheel base. But these guidelines of the topmost body of India's highway engineers, the Indian Roads Congress (IRC), are not very commonly adhered to, leading to accidents. A triangle warning sign indicating the presence of speed breakers should be placed at least 40 metres before the hump. The IRC has made it clear that the humps have to be triangular in shape and coloured in black and white.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

Extraordinary talent

Sir, The world of music mourns the loss of Ustad Zakir Hussain. He was a virtuoso whose influence transcended borders and musical genres, leaving an indelible mark on both Indian classical and world music. Zakir Hussain began his journey with the tabla at a young age, under the tutelage of his father, and quickly emerged as a prodigious talent. His exceptional skill, dexterity, and creativity on the tabla set him apart as one of the greatest percussionists of all time. Throughout his illustrious career, Zakir Hussain collaborated with a myriad of artists from around the globe. His partnerships with luminaries such as Ravi Shankar, John McLaughlin and Mickey Hart brought Indian classical music to the forefront of the international stage. As a member of groundbreaking ensembles like Shakti and Planet Drum, he helped bridge cultural divides and introduce diverse audiences to the rich traditions of Indian music. Zakir Hussain's contributions extended beyond performances; he was also a gifted composer and actor. His passing leaves a void in the world of music, but his spirit and artistry will live on through his recordings, teachings, and the countless lives he touched with his extraordinary talent.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

MID-SEA CRASH

Tourist inflow to Elephanta Island dwindles

Some tourists who were seen in the queue to get their ferry tickets to visit the iconic Elephanta caves were unaware of the Neel Kamal ferry tragedy a day earlier



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 19: A day after a Navy craft rammed into a ferry killing 14 persons, there was a decline in the number of tourists taking the ferry to visit Elephanta Island, a popular tourist attraction near Mumbai coast, going by the number of ferry passengers Thursday.

were unaware of the Neel Kamal ferry tragedy a day earlier. The ferry service for the Elephanta caves, which is a part of the 'Mumbai Darshan' guided tour, began at 9 am as usual, a booking supervisor of Mumbai Jal Vahatuk Sanstha told PTI at the Gateway of India.

ists, who prefer to ride boats in the Mumbai harbour, also dwindled this morning. Ferry boats with depleted strength of passengers were seen leaving from the Gateway of India for Elephanta Island.

pen every day," he said. Madinaben, a tourist from Ahmedabad who enjoyed the harbour boat ride Thursday with her two children said she was unaware about the tragedy.

Life jackets must for boat rides

A day after a ferry-Navy craft collision claimed 13 lives off the Mumbai coast, authorities Thursday made life jackets mandatory for all people taking boat rides from the Gateway of India. Some tourists, however, said the life jackets would be of help only if people know how to use them.

the boat ride. "There was no question of getting scared as we were provided life jackets during the boat ride," he said.

Khandu warns of stern action against corrupt govt employees



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Itanagar, Dec 19: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu Wednesday warned of stern action against government employees indulging in corrupt practices. Speaking at the Passing-Out Parade of the 49th batch of Arunachal Pradesh Police (APP) recruits at the Police Training Centre (PTC) in Banderdewa near here, Khandu said there are rumours of contractual ANM and GNM nurses being demanded huge sums of money for regularisation of their jobs.

I have been repeating my warning against corruption from every possible platform available. I have personally requested Director General of Police (DGP) Anand Mohan to thoroughly investigate the matter and if there is any truth to the rumour, those involved will not be spared

PEMA KHANDU | CM, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Mohan, Khandu expressed satisfaction that the 49th batch of recruits consists of 885 constables, the largest contingent ever to pass out from the training centre. The 49th batch includes 738 Civil Police personnel, among who are 96 women constables, 140 AAPBn personnel (including 14 women constables) and seven IRBn personnel. The new batch of recruits is set to join duty January 13 next year.

Gangetic dolphin in Assam tagged

The Ganges river dolphin, the national aquatic animal, is unique in its ecology, being nearly blind and relying on echo location for its biological needs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 19: A male Ganges river dolphin in Assam was tagged and released with the aim to understand their seasonal and migratory patterns and habitat utilisation, particularly in fragmented or disturbed river systems. The initiative has been conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and implemented by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in collaboration with the Assam Forest Department and biodiversity organisation Aaranyak, with funding from the National CAMPA Authority, according to a release.

declined over the past century. Despite its wide range, significant knowledge gaps remain regarding this species due to its elusive behaviour, it surfaces for only 5-30 seconds at a time, posing a significant challenge in understanding the ecological needs of the species and for any scientifically sound conservation interventions.

"Tagging river dolphins will contribute to evidence-based conservation strategies that are urgently needed for this species. I am delighted that this historic step has been undertaken", Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Director Virendra R Tiwari said. Project investigator Vishnupriya Kolipakam said this is a significant advancement in understanding the ecological needs of river dolphins, which will help conserve critical habitats within these vast river ecosystems.

Ganges river dolphins are apex predators and serve as umbrella species for the river systems, which makes it important to ensure their well-being, as it will ensure the sustenance of the entire river ecosystem. There is a paucity of information on Ganges river dolphin habitat needs, movement patterns or home-range information and it was decided to undertake satellite tagging of dolphins in its distribution range



Maha Vikas Aghadi MLAs stage a protest against the Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar, during the Winter session of Maharashtra Assembly, at Vidhan Bhavan Premises, in Nagpur, Thursday

Gauhati High Court bans buffalo, bulbul fights

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 19: The Gauhati High Court quashed an Assam government SOP of last year that permitted buffalo and bulbul fights during the Magh Bihu festival, stating that if it wanted to allow these traditional activities it could amend the existing laws.

The bench, disposing of two writ petitions filed in the matter, said the notification issued by the state government in December 2023 along with an SOP for the conduct of buffalo and bulbul fights was in contravention of provisions of different wildlife protection laws and a previous Supreme Court order.

issuing an executive order to overcome the existing provisions "is not permissible". "The notification of December 2023 is set aside and quashed. The state of Assam is further directed to ensure due compliance of acts for animal welfare," the court said.

the bulbul fights also violate the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Buffalo and bulbul bird fights, traditionally organised as part of Magh Bihu celebrations in mid-January, resumed this year after a gap of nine years, with the state government publishing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for organising them.

control them. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attended both buffalo and bulbul fights in January. He had said that it was "our duty to preserve and take forward our heritage, but with responsibility".

MAHA'S FIRST TRANS WOMAN FOREST GUARD

Vijaya Vasave's journey from hardships to dignity

Once she acquired a scientific knowledge about her sexuality and got family support, she mustered courage to undergo gender transition from a male to a trans woman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, Dec 19: Facing hardships and torment early on due to her sexual orientation, Vijaya Vasave has not only overcome obstacles but shown grit to lead a dignified life by becoming the first trans woman forest guard in Maharashtra. Vasave (30) had been mocked at and abused by people, leading her to attempt suicide three times. But once she acquired a scientific knowledge about her sexuality and got family support, she mustered courage to undergo gender transition from a male to a trans woman.

"I am happy now that I am treated with dignity and respect by my family, village and at my workplace," Vasave told PTI over phone Wednesday. Hailing from a tribal community native of the Satpuda mountain range in Nandurbar district, Vasave is currently posted in Akalkuwa tehsil of Nandurbar as a forest guard. She holds a master's degree in social welfare from the Pune-based Karve Institute of Social Service. Born as a male, named 'Vijay', Vasave studied at a residential school for tribal students in Nandurbar.



feminate nature. The constant abuse fuelled suicidal tendencies, and I attempted suicide three times. During my early school and graduation days, I was trapped in a male body, yearning to be free," she said. Her struggles continued even during the college years in Nashik.

"As I lost confidence, I approached a counsellor who prescribed some pills to 'cure' me. The pills didn't help. I then confided in my sister, who was also unaware what could be done," Vasave said. Vasave's life took a positive turn when Pune-based LGBTQ+ activist Bindumadhav Khire conducted a lecture on 'sexuality' at her college. "I finally got scientific answers to questions about my sexuality. He introduced me to a renowned psychiatrist in Pune. I also watched interviews of successful transgender individuals and showed them to my family, which helped them understand and accept me," she said.

reer was never on the cards. But the support and help from the Deepstambh Foundation in Jalgaon gave me the right direction," Vasave said. With its guidance and encouragement, she started preparing for competitive exams. Vasave initially appeared for a police recruitment exam but could not succeed. In 2023, an advertisement for forest guard positions was issued and she appeared for the exam. She cleared both the written and physical tests, and secured the posting in Akalkuwa tehsil two months back, Vasave said. Before preparing for the competitive exams, she worked with the National AIDS Research Institute (NARI) on a project. Vasave expressed gratitude to people at her workplace in the Forest department, where she is treated with dignity and respect, facing no discrimination from her colleagues.



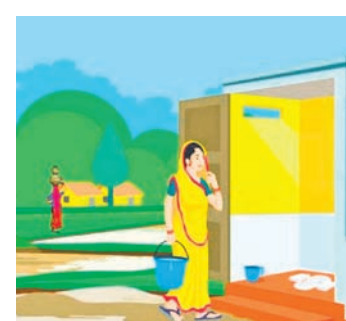


The mask has fallen! As Parliament reflects on 75 glorious years of the Constitution, HM @AmitShah chose to TARNISH this occasion with DEROGATORY remarks against Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, that too in the temple of Democracy

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

95% OF VILLAGES DECLARED ODF PLUS TILL NOW: GOVT

About 95 per cent of villages have declared themselves "open defecation free plus" till now, the Jal Shakti ministry said Thursday. The "ODF Plus" status goes beyond the construction of toilets, focusing on overall sanitation and solid-liquid waste management



of the day uote

Big announcements are being made about world peace. We (India) are also being advised about world peace, but at the same time, wars are not stopping



MOHAN BHAGWAT | RSS CHIEF

If you win, it is people's mandate and victory of democracy. But if you lose, blame it on EVMs and the Election Commission of India (ECI). You are creating mistrust about the institutions which have constitutional authority



DEVENDRA FADNIVS | MAHARASHTRA CM

I started with a Sangh shakha and then with a Shiv Sena shakha, Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray's ideology and Anand Dighe sahab's teachings



EKNATH SHINDE | MAHA DEPUTY CM

Assam Police arrest 8 'fundamentalists' from three states

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 19: The Assam Police have arrested eight 'fundamentalists', including one Bangladeshi, in coordinated inter-state operations and busted an attempt to carry out subversive activities across the country, a top official said Thursday.

The arrests were made on the intervening night of December 17-18 from Assam, West Bengal and Kerala under 'Operation Praghat', Special Director General of Police (SDGP) Harmeet Singh said at a press conference here. The operation was launched by the Special Task Force (STF) of the state police in November.



Those arrested allegedly had handlers in Pakistan and Bangladesh and they were working on plans to assassinate Hindu and RSS leaders, he said.

"In a major intelligence-led inter-state operation, undertaken with the active assistance of the Kerala and West Bengal Police against a known global terrorist organisation, the Assam Police Special Task Force (STF) has arrested eight fundamentalists, thus unearthing a terror module which was preparing to strike," Singh said.

He said the operation was launched after a detailed and prolonged examination of intelligence inputs regarding the anti-national activities being carried out by a group of individuals, under the direction of one Md Farhan Israk.

Israk is a close associate of Jasimuddin Rahmani, chief of Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), an affiliate of Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS). Singh said a Bangladeshi, Md Sad Radi alias Md Shab Seikh, was sent to India in November to spread their ideology and create sleeper cells among like-minded individuals across India to initiate violent and subversive actions.

Kharge pushed, Rahul manhandled: Cong

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 19: Accusing the BJP of lowering the dignity of Parliament, the Congress on Thursday claimed that BJP MPs pushed its chief Mallikarjun Kharge and "physically manhandled" Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

In a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, senior Congress MPs asked him to initiate an inquiry into the incident. Separate marches by opposition and ruling party MPs over the alleged insult to B R Ambedkar led to jostling in Parliament premises in the morning, leaving BJP MPs Pratap Chandra Sarangi and Mukesh Rajput injured. The BJP accused Rahul Gandhi of pushing the senior member, a charge rejected by the Congress leader.

Several Congress leaders, including Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Gaurav Gogoi and K C Venugopal, spoke on the matter.

The Congress said BJP MPs had sticks in their hands and Kharge was threatened and pushed. Kharge, Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, wrote to Birla, claiming he was physically pushed by BJP MPs in Parliament premises following which he lost his balance.

"I was physically pushed by BJP MPs; lost my balance and was forced to sit down on ground in front of Makar Dwar... This inflicted injuries



Kharge submits privilege notice in RS against Shah

New Delhi: Congress president and Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge Thursday submitted a privilege notice against Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks against B R Ambedkar. In his notice submitted to the RS Chairman, Kharge alleged that the remarks made by Shah were an insult to the architect of the Constitution and amounted to breach of privilege and contempt of the House. "I hereby give a notice of question of privilege against Shri Amit Shah, Minister of Home Affairs under Rule 188 of Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States (Rajya Sabha)," Kharge said in his notice. He said December 17, Shah during his reply in the Rajya Sabha on the discussion on 'Glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India', had referred to Ambedkar which was "insulting and defamatory".

ries on my knees which have already undergone surgery," Kharge said.

Kharge asked the speaker to order an inquiry into the BJP MPs "pushing" him, and said it was an assault not just on him but on the Rajya Sabha LoP and the Congress president.

"I was trying to enter Parliament and the BJP MPs were

stopping me, pushing me and threatening me," Rahul Gandhi told reporters in Parliament premises.

Asked if Kharge and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi had also been pushed, Rahul Gandhi said, "It has happened but we don't get bothered with this pushing around."

"This is the entry to Parliament, we

have a right to go inside and the BJP members were stopping us from going inside," he alleged and pointed to the Makar Dwar.

In their letter to Birla, some senior Congress MPs said they were writing to express their "deep anguish" over the incident that happened when members of the INDIA alliance were peacefully protesting and marching from the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar statue to Makar Dwar. "However, as we attempted to enter the Parliament through Makar Dwar, the protesting MPs were physically obstructed from entering," said the letter signed by Congress MPs K C Venugopal, Kodikunnil Suresh, Ravindra Chavan Dean Kuriakose and V K Sreekandan.

"We would also like to bring to your notice that Shri Rahul Gandhi Leader of Opposition was physically manhandled by three MPs from the ruling party. This is a clear violation of the privileges extended to the Leader of Opposition and infringes on the rights accorded to him in his official capacity as an MP," they said. Their conduct was not only a blatant assault on the personal dignity of Rahul Gandhi, but antithetical to the democratic spirit of our parliament, the letter said.

The MPs expressed the hope that the speaker would treat this matter with utmost seriousness and take appropriate action.

Govt: ASI abides by courts directions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: The government Thursday said the "ASI abides by the directions of the hon'ble courts" on matters related to the places of worship belonging to the Muslim community which have been surveyed by the Archaeological Survey of India from January 2019 and November 2024.

Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said this in response to a query from TMC MP Saket Gokhale.

Gokhale asked the details of places of worship belonging to the Muslim community that have been surveyed by theI between January 2019 to November 2024 and the number of these places surveyed, according to theI, that show "concrete evidence" of an "older place of worship" belonging to another religion buried underneath.

"The Archaeological Survey of India abides by the directions of the hon'ble courts in such matters," the Union minister said in his response.

In a separate query, the minister was asked whether it is a fact that hundreds of attempts have been made by scholars from different fields to "decode the Indus script", without much success and "conflicting theories" on the origins of ancient Indian communities.

Aaditya flays Cong MLA's call to make Mumbai a UT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 19: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray Thursday said his party will not tolerate any attempt to separate Mumbai from Maharashtra, and asked ally Congress to reprimand its Karnataka MLA for demanding to declare the country's financial capital a Union Territory.

Calling Mumbai his "motherland", Thackeray said "Marathi mannos" spilled his blood to get it. He was apparently referring to Karnataka Congress MLA Laxman Savadi's reported statement that if leaders in Maharashtra are demanding to make Belagavi a Union Territory, then Mumbai should also be made a UT.

Maharashtra and its neighbouring state Karnataka have been locked a dispute for decades over the control of Belagavi, a border town in Karnataka formerly known as Belgaum. It has a significant Marathi-speaking population.

In a post of X, Thackeray,

the MLA from Worli in Mumbai said, "The demand to make Mumbai a Union Territory is condemnable. Be it the Congress or the BJP, the Shiv Sena (UBT) will never tolerate any attempt to break Mumbai away from Maharashtra. Mumbai is our motherland. Marathi mannos achieved it by spilling his blood. Mumbai was not given to us by anyone." "The Congress leadership should reprimand its MLAs," he said.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) is part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra, which also has the Congress and the NCP (SP) as its constituents. These three parties are part of the Opposition INDIA bloc at the national level with several other parties.

Shiv Sena minister Pratap Sarnaik said Mumbai was built by the "Marathi mannos" and does not belong to any "Tom Dick and Harry". "Our party's stand has been that Belgaum, Karwar and Nipani belong to Maharashtra. Many of our Shiv Saniks have been jailed."



AMBEDKAR ROW Kejriwal attacks Amit Shah

Kejriwal, who administered an oath to people during his speech, further said "the BJP has always insulted Baba Saheb and the Constitution he wrote"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal Thursday targeted Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks on Baba Saheb in Parliament, saying "Ambedkar is no less than the god of modern India".

"You have to choose between Baba Saheb and the BJP. Jo



Baba Saheb se kare pyaar, vo BJP ko kare inkaar (those who love Baba Saheb should reject the BJP)," said Kejriwal during his visit to Bhagwan Valmiki Mandir at Mandir Marg here. "These words in themselves were very painful and insulting to Ambedkar. But the tone in which he said

it seemed that how much he hates Baba Saheb. At first, I thought it must have come out of his mouth, but next day even Prime Minister Narendra Modi also supported Shah," he alleged. The AAP supremo claimed this shows that Shah had said it in Parliament deliberately in order to give a message what

they feel about Ambedkar. "I don't just consider myself a fan of Ambedkar - I am his Bhakt (devotee). I had read a lot about him before, but when I was imprisoned, I immersed myself in his biography multiple times. His life story is a profound source of inspiration," said Kejriwal.

"The struggles he faced were unparalleled and only a few in history can compare. He was declared the greatest scholar of the century by Columbia University, which honoured him in a way that brought glory to India worldwide. Yet, such a towering figure has often been disrespected," he added.

Marriage not commercial venture: Top court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: The Supreme Court Thursday said the strict provisions of law were for the welfare of women and not means to "chastise, threaten, domineer or extort" their husbands.

Justices B V Nagarathna and Pankaj Mithal observed a Hindu marriage was considered to be a sacred institution, as a foundation for a family and not a "commercial venture".

Notably, the bench observed the invocation of IPC sections including rape, criminal intimidation and subjecting a married woman to cruelty -- as a "combined package" in most of the complaints related

to matrimonial disputes -- was condemned by the top court on several occasions.

"The women need to be careful about the fact that these strict provisions of law in their hands are beneficial legislations for their welfare and not means to chastise, threaten, domineer or extort from their husbands," it said.

The observations came when the bench dissolved the marriage between an estranged couple on the ground of its irretrievable breakdown.

"The provisions in the criminal law are for the protection and empowerment of women but sometimes are used by certain women more for purposes



The observations came when the bench dissolved the marriage between an estranged couple on the ground of its irretrievable breakdown

that they are never meant for," the bench said.

The husband in the case was ordered to pay ₹12 crore

as permanent alimony to the estranged wife as a full and final settlement for all her claims within a month.

The bench however commented on cases, where the wife and her family tended to use a criminal complaint with these serious offences as a platform for negotiation and as a tool to get the husband and his family to comply with their demands, which were mostly monetary in nature.

It said the police were sometimes quick to jump into action in selective cases and arrest the husband or even his relatives, including aged and bedridden parents and grandparents with trial courts refraining from giving bail to accused owing to the "gravity of the offences" in the FIR.

"The collective effect of this chain of events is often over-

looked by the actual individual players involved therein, which is that even minor disputes between husband and wife tend to snowball into ugly prodigious battles of ego and reputation and washing dirty linen in public, eventually leading to the relationship turning sour to the extent that there remains no possibility of a reconciliation or cohabitation," it said.

The apex court noted a plea was filed before it by the wife seeking transfer of a divorce petition filed under section 13 (1) of Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 pending in a court in Bhopal to a court in Pune.

The husband had sought dissolution of marriage under Article 142(1) of the Constitution.

national



It is the duty of the central government to talk to the farmers. Any issue can be resolved only through talks. The central government should give up its stubbornness

PM MODI SPEAKS TO KING CHARLES

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Thursday spoke to UK's King Charles and reaffirmed India's commitment to strengthening the comprehensive strategic partnership. During their discussion, they reflected on the historic relationship and emphasised their shared goal of fostering deeper collaboration in various areas



of the day quote

It is the responsibility of the Lok Sabha Speaker to ensure that all MPs enter the House with respect. The Lok Sabha Speaker should investigate this incident as soon as possible and take action against the guilty BJP MPs

Shah should immediately apologise for insulting Ambedkar and resign as a minister

Ambedkar's followers have not yet been able to forget the innumerable misdeeds of the Congress party against Babasaheb. They are never going to forgive the Congress party, no matter how much it changes its style and conduct etc

Farmers protest: SC raps Punjab govt

The top court pulled up the AAP government for not conducting medical tests on Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast at Punjab-Haryana Khanauri border

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: Irom Sharmila also continued with her protest under medical supervision, the Supreme Court Thursday said and asked the Punjab government to convince 70-year-old farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast, to undergo a health examination.

The top court pulled up the Punjab government for not conducting medical tests on Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast at Punjab-Haryana Khanauri border. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said while no one was trying to uproot the farmers' protest, it only wanted to ensure Dallewal's safety, calling him a "mass leader."

"Take the case of civil rights activist Irom Sharmila from Imphal, she continued her protest for over 10 years under medical supervision. Similarly, Dallewal can also continue his protest under medical supervision," said Justice Bhuyan.

The top court was critical of Punjab government doctors' report saying Dallewal's health was alright even without conducting basic medical tests. "Nobody should take us for granted. We are more concerned with his health. We want to know that he is alright. You people are saying he is alright. You all are not doctors... Will you be able to tell that a



person who is sitting there for the last 21 days on hunger strike in the age group of 73-75 with serious ailments? You please bring that doctor before us, who says he is perfectly alright," the bench said.

It noted Dallewal's refusal to undergo any medical intervention and not allowing his blood samples to be taken or undergoing ECG or a CT scan. The bench said, "Once he is certified to be in safe health condition, we will definitely interact with him. It is the farmers issue and you need not thank us because we have done nothing out of the way. We are only performing our duties... Convince him to go to the hospital for a week and take medical treatment and thereafter he can continue with the protest. If he is in command of the agitation, then there are other members who can continue with the agitations."

The bench's remarks came after Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh said the farmer leader had conveyed through officials on the ground that he personally wanted to address the court.

The top court told Singh that it wanted to know about his health conditions and medical parameters which could only be done after he underwent certain tests. The Punjab advocate general said between 3,000 and 4,000 farmers had welded their trolleys with each other around Dallewal's trolley and even a deputy commissioner rank officer was stopped from stepping inside December 18. He said the state government had set up a makeshift hospital, two-minutes away from where Dallewal's protest site, and also stationed an ambulance with a

team of seven doctors for a round-the-clock vigil.

Singh referred to reports from the ground saying physical confrontations could lead to casualties from both sides.

The bench however said, "The farmers or their leaders have never entered into any physical confrontation. These expressions and terminologies are concoctions by your officers. They (farmers) will never do any such things. They are sitting on peaceful agitation. He (Dallewal) will again join if he is provided all these basic facilities and is out of danger. Then all these things can continue. It's not that their dharma will be uprooted. There are other people who can continue with the protest."

Justice Kant said, "We don't want his fast to be broken but medical assistance can be provided to him even without forcing him to take anything. He doesn't need to take any juice or any such thing as there are several other things." Singh sought a day's time to convince Dallewal and convey the court's sentiments for ensuring his well-being.

The bench posted the matter December 20. Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border since November 26 to press the Centre into accepting the agitating farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) on crops.

DOVAL-WANG TALKS

China highlights broader consensus



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 19: As National Security Advisor Ajit Doval left Beijing after his crucial talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to normalise ties, China Thursday said that the readouts issued by both countries after the talks shared "very much similar gist and elements" highlighting broader consensus.

Special Representatives for the border question, Wang and Doval, held "substantive talks" and reached a six-point "consensus" on the China-India boundary question in a "positive and constructive attitude," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here while replying to a question on the outcome of talks.

After the talks, China said a six-point consensus was

reached between the two sides.

Lin said that it is important to channel the two countries' respective valuable resources into development and revitalisation, make sure that the boundary question is appropriately placed in bilateral relations, jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in border areas, and strive to bring China-India relations back to a healthy and steady track at an early date.

Doval left Beijing Thursday. The Special Representatives dialogue was regarded as significant as it was the first structured engagement between the two countries after relations were frozen for over four years due to the military standoff in eastern Ladakh.

Constituted in 2003 to comprehensively address the vexed dispute of the India-China border spanning 3,488 km, Wednesday's meeting, which was held after a gap of five years, was the 23rd conference between the two countries.

Commenting on the talks, Long Xingchun, a professor from the School of International Relations at Sichuan International Studies University, said the resumption of the Special Representatives' meeting sends a signal that both sides are willing and confident to resolve border disputes through peaceful negotiations.

POST OF THE DAY

Amit Shah is furious that his incomplete clip about Ambedkar is making rounds. Someone tell him that his party's entire existence depends on making Edited and doctored clips viral. Remember 'Aaloo daalo Sonakalega'? Even Modi made it viral. Karma eventually catches up. @Nher_who

Delhi govt imposes 'perpetual ban' on firecrackers in city

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: The Delhi government Thursday imposed a "perpetual ban" on the manufacture, use and sale of firecrackers, including through online platforms, in the national capital, according to an official order.

Principal Secretary (environment) of the Delhi government A K Singh invoked the "perpetual ban" on firecrackers under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The ban covers manufacturing, storage, and selling, including delivery through online marketing platforms, of all kinds of firecrackers and bursting them in Delhi, said the order.

The move comes amid Delhi facing hazardous air pollution levels leading to a range of restrictions including a ban on construction activities and entry of trucks in the city.



Security personnel during a search operation for missing passengers a day after a ferry-Navy craft collision claimed 14 lives off the Mumbai coast in Mumbai, Maharashtra

Air pollution linked to more hospitalisations, says study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: A research has found an increased hospital admissions for all causes, including mental illnesses, in relation to a long-term exposure to air pollution.

The Scottish study, published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Open, found that a higher exposure to nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) combined was linked to a higher hospitalisations for cardiovascular, respiratory and infectious diseases.

Researchers from the University of St Andrews, UK, found that for every one micron per cubic metre increase in PM2.5 and NO2 pollutants, the incidence for hospitalisations for respiratory conditions rose by over four per cent and one per cent, respectively. Further, higher hospital admissions for mental or behavioural disorders were associated with an increased exposure to nitrogen dioxide.

While the average yearly levels of NO2, PM10 and PM2.5 were lower than the 2005 World Health Organization guide-



Higher exposure to nitrogen dioxide (NO2) and particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5) combined was linked to a higher hospitalisations for cardiovascular, respiratory and infectious diseases

lines, the team said. They added that previous studies analysing the health impacts of long-term exposure to air pollution have tended to look at deaths, rather than hospital admissions. The study tracked 202,237 people (representing five per cent of the country's population), aged 17 and above, from the Public Health Scotland database between 2002 and 2017. "Air pollution was associated with higher rates of hospital admissions for both physical (eg, respiratory, cardiovascular and infectious) and mental/behavioural diseases," the authors wrote.

lines, the levels of NO2 and PM2.5 were higher than those in the more recent 2021 guide-

SNIPPETS

SC directs UP, Haryana to impose ban on firecrackers

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court Thursday directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers until further orders. A bench comprising Justices A S Oka and Augustine George Masih was also informed that GRAP IV was restored in Delhi-NCR due to the worsening air quality. The bench noted the Delhi government had enforced a complete ban on the manufacture, storage and sale, including delivery of firecrackers through online marketing round the year with immediate effect.

'Blast' takes place outside police post in Gurdaspur

CHANDIGARH: An alleged blast took place Wednesday night outside the Bakshival police chowki in Gurdaspur district, Punjab police said Thursday. The police launched a probe Thursday following reports that a "blast" took place. In an unverified post circulating on social media, terror outfit Khalistan Zindabad Force has claimed the responsibility for the alleged attack. This is the second incident of blast in Punjab this week and the third this month.

Shahjahanpur road accident claims 6 lives

SHAHJAHANPUR: A car rammed into a truck, leaving six members of a family dead and four others critically injured in Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur district, police said Thursday. Superintendent of Police (SP) Rajesh S said, "The accident occurred near the Barkheda Jaipal crossroads on the Bareilly-Etawah highway when a family travelling to Delhi in an Ertiga car collided with an oncoming truck late Wednesday night."

AAP stages protest across Delhi

NEW DELHI: The AAP Thursday slammed the BJP and its leader Amit Shah over his remark on BR Ambedkar in the Parliament, staging protests in all 70 Assembly constituencies across the city. The party's candidate from Jangpura, Manish Sisodia, in a protest, said, "Amit Shah ji, Constitution will guide this nation, not your politics of hatred; those who find Ambedkar's ideas unsettling are free to leave the country." He charged Shah's remark revealed a "deep-seated prejudice" against Dalits, adding, the nation would never forgive him for insulting Ambedkar.

Case registered against Rama Rao

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Dec 19: The Telangana Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) Thursday registered a case against BRS working president and MLA K T Rama Rao as prime accused over alleged payments, some of it in foreign currency without approvals, to conduct Formula-E race in Hyderabad during the previous regime, official sources said.

Formula E had announced the cancellation of Hyderabad E-Prix, alleging a contract breach by the new Telangana government. The second Formula E Race in India was slated to be held February 10. Governor Jishnu Dev Varma had recently granted permission to register a case against Rama Rao, over the issue. The FIR named senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar and retired bureaucrat BLN Reddy as accused no 2 and 3 respectively.

The case was registered under relevant sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act and criminal breach of trust, conspiracy under IPC. Reacting to the ACB case against him, Rama Rao told the Assembly today that if the government is sincere in revealing facts of the issue, it should call for a debate.

"Just now my MLAs informed me (about the case). I am requesting you (the Speaker) and the government. The Assembly sessions are going on. If the government is sincere, if it is courageous enough to reveal the facts to the public, let there be a discussion on E race (in the assembly). I am ready to reply," he said.

The FIR alleged that the agreement between the state government and the race organisers without the approval of the cabinet and also that it was done during the Model Code of Conduct was in force.

The Telangana government had written to the governor in November, seeking permission to register an FIR against Rama Rao over the alleged irregularities in paying Rs 55 crore worth in foreign currency. Earlier this year, the government had sought an explanation from Arvind Kumar over signing an agreement concerning the Formula-E race allegedly without the approval of the competent authority and also making a payment of Rs 55 crore with majority of it in foreign currency.

international



India is a vital partner for the UK and we have huge ambition to unlock more opportunities together, building on our already strong relationship

SL LIFTS VEHICLES IMPORT BAN

Sri Lanka has announced that they will lift the vehicles import ban which was put in place in 2020 to ease the pressure on foreign exchange reserves due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By the gazette issued Wednesday the importation of public transport vehicles have been allowed for the first time since early 2020



of the day note

We need to stand with Ukraine, and every step ... needs to be taken with Ukraine and in the presence of the European Union. The future of Ukraine is decided in Europe and not elsewhere



I'm proud that my administration is carrying out the boldest climate agenda in American history



Our goal is to ensure that Vietnam has what it needs to defend its interests at sea, in the air, on the ground and in cyberspace



US urges SC to dismiss Rana's petition against extradition to India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Dec 19: The United States government has urged the Supreme Court to dismiss a petition filed by Mumbai-attack convict Tahawwur Rana, a Canadian national of Pakistani origin, to avoid his extradition to India.

India is seeking the extradition of Rana as he is wanted in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack case. Having lost the legal battle against his extraditions in lower courts and several federal courts, including the US Court of Appeals for the North Circuit in San Francisco, Rana November 13 filed a "petition for a writ of certiorari" before the US Supreme Court.

In a long battle, this is Rana's last legal chance to avoid extradition to India.

Rana, currently lodged in a jail in Los Angeles, faces charges for his role in the Mumbai attacks and is known to be associated with Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, one of the main conspirators of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. "The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied," US Solicitor General Elizabeth B Prelogar said in its filing before the Supreme Court December 16. "Rana is not entitled to relief from extradition to India in this case, she argued in a 20-page submission.

In his "petition for a writ of certiorari to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit", Rana has argued that he was tried and acquitted in the federal court in the Northern District of Illinois (Chicago) on charges relating to the 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai.



US sanctions Pak aerospace agency

Washington: The United States Wednesday slapped sanctions on four Pakistani entities, including the state-owned flagship aerospace and defence agency -- National Development Complex (NDC) -- on charges of them contributing to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme. In light of the continuing proliferation threat of Pakistan's long-range missile development, the United States is designating four entities for sanctions which targets proliferators of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, the State Department said. In addition to the NDC, the three other entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise.

Israel strikes port, energy targets in Yemen

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, Dec 19: A series of intense Israeli airstrikes shook Yemen's rebel-held capital and a port city early Thursday and killed at least nine people, officials said, shortly after a Houthi missile targeted central Israel.

Thursday's strikes risk further escalating conflict with the Iranian-backed Houthis, whose attacks on the Red Sea corridor have drastically impacted global shipping. The rebels have so far avoided the same level of intense military strikes that have targeted Palestinian militant group Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, fellow members of Tehran's self-described "Axis of Resistance".

Israel's military said it conducted two waves of strikes in a preplanned operation that began early Thursday and involved 14 fighter jets. The military said the first wave of strikes targeted Houthi infrastructure at the ports of Ho-deida, Salif and the Ras Isa oil terminal on the Red Sea.

Then, in a second wave of strikes, the military said its fighter jets targeted Houthi energy infrastructure in Sanaa. "After Hamas, Hezbollah and the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis are almost the last remaining arm of Iran's axis of

UKRAINE WAR

Putin: Russia ready to compromise with Trump

Putin addressed the possibility of talks with Donald Trump, the status of Russian bases in Syria, and the case of missing US reporter Austin Tice

REUTERS

Moscow, Dec 19: Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that he was ready to compromise over Ukraine in possible talks with US President-elect Donald Trump on ending the war and had no conditions for starting talks with the Ukrainian authorities.

Trump, a self-styled master of brokering agreements and author of the 1987 book "Trump: The Art of the Deal", has vowed to swiftly end the conflict, but has not yet given any details on how he might achieve that.

Putin, fielding questions on state TV during his annual question and answer session with Russians, told a reporter for a US news channel that he was ready to meet Trump, whom he said he had not spoken to for years.

Asked what he might be able to offer Trump, Putin dismissed an assertion that Russia was in a weak position, saying that Russia had got much stronger since he ordered troops into Ukraine in 2022.

"We have always said that we are ready for negotiations and compromises," Putin said, after saying that Russian forces, advancing across the entire



Soon, those Ukrainians who want to fight will run out, in my opinion, soon there will be no one left who wants to fight. We are ready, but the other side needs to be ready for both negotiations and compromises

VLADIMIR PUTIN | PRESIDENT, RUSSIA

- PUTIN SAYS BOTH SIDES MUST COMPROMISE
- PROMISES TO ASK ABOUT US REPORTER TICE
- QUIPS ABOUT MISSILE DUEL WITH UNITED STATES

front, were moving towards achieving their primary goals in Ukraine.

"Soon, those Ukrainians who want to fight will run out, in my opinion, soon there will be no one left who wants to fight. We are ready, but the other side needs to be ready for both negotiations and compromises."

Reuters reported last month that Putin was open to discussing a Ukraine ceasefire deal with Trump, but ruled out making any major territorial concessions and insisted Kyiv abandon its ambitions to join NATO.

Putin said Thursday that Russia had no conditions to start talks with Ukraine and was ready to negotiate with anyone, including President

Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

But he said any deal could only be signed with Ukraine's legitimate authorities, which for now the Kremlin considered to be only the Ukrainian parliament.

Zelenskyy, whose term has technically expired but who has delayed an election because of the war, would need to be re-elected for Moscow to consider him a legitimate signatory to any deal to ensure it was legally watertight, said Putin.

Any talks should take as their starting point a preliminary agreement reached between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators in the early weeks of the war at talks in Istanbul, which was never implemented, he added.

US funding plan collapses as Trump issues demands

The president-elect made an almost unrealistic proposal that combined some continuation of gov't funds along with a much more controversial provision to raise the nation's debt limit -- something his own party routinely rejects

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington, Dec 19: President-elect Donald Trump abruptly rejected a bipartisan plan Wednesday to prevent a Christmastime government shutdown, instead telling House Speaker Mike Johnson and Republicans to essentially renegotiate -- days before a deadline when federal funding runs out.

Trump's sudden entrance into the debate and new demands sent Congress spiralling as lawmakers are trying to wrap up work and head home for the holidays. It leaves Johnson scrambling to engineer a new plan before Friday's deadline to keep government open.

"Republicans must GET SMART and TOUGH," Trump and Vice President-elect JD Vance said in a statement.

The president-elect made an almost unrealistic proposal that combined some continuation of government funds along with a much more controversial provision to raise the nation's debt limit -- something his own party routinely rejects. "Anything else is a betrayal of our country," they wrote.

Democrats decried the GOP revolt over the stopgap measure, which would have also provided some \$100.4 billion in disaster aid to states hammered by Hurricanes Helene and Milton and other natural disasters.

"House Republicans have been ordered to shut down the government and hurt everyday



Americans all across this country," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

Jeffries said "an agreement is an agreement", and by backing out of it, "the House Republicans will now own any harm that is visited upon the American people".

Already, the massive 1,500-page bill was on the verge of collapse, as hard right conservatives rejected the increased spending, egged on by Trump's billionaire ally Elon Musk who rejected the plan almost as soon as it was released late Tuesday night.

Rank-and-file lawmakers complained about the extras, which included their first pay-raises in more than a decade -- a shock after one of the most unproductive chaotic sessions in modern times.

Even the addition of much-needed disaster aid, some \$100.4 billion in the aftermath of hurricanes and other natural calamities that ravaged states this year, plus \$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers failed to win over the budget-slashing GOP. A number of Republicans had been waiting for Trump to signal whether they should vote yes or no.



The wreckage of a private plane lays next to houses after crashing near the airport in San Fernando on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday

NEW CLIMATE FINANCE PACKAGE

Developed countries spent more on fossil fuel subsidies in 2023

The 10 largest subsidisers of fossil fuels in 2023 included Russia, Germany, Iran, China, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, France, and Indonesia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 19: Developed countries spent \$378 billion subsidising fossil fuels in 2023, more than the \$300 billion they have collectively committed to provide annually to the developing world by 2035 to tackle climate change, according to the latest data.

An analysis by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) showed that government support for fossil fuels reached at least \$1.5

trillion in 2023, the second-highest annual total on record, after 2022 when the Russia-Ukraine war triggered a global fossil fuel price crisis.

The 10 largest subsidisers of fossil fuels in 2023 included Russia, Germany, Iran, China, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, France, and Indonesia.

The data revealed that 23 developed nations (Annex II countries) -- mandated under the UN climate convention to provide climate finance to the developing world -- spent \$378 billion on fossil fuel subsidies.

At the UN climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, last month, these nations committed to providing \$300 billion to developing countries by 2035 to help them tackle climate change -- a far cry from the \$1.3 trillion that the Global South needs annually to cope with the rapidly warming world.

India, Bolivia, Nigeria, and Malawi, speaking on behalf of



a group of 45 least developed countries (LDCs), severely criticised the new climate finance package for the developing world.

India argued that \$300 billion is insufficient to implement ambitious national climate plans known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and pointed out that when adjusted for inflation, it falls short of the previous \$100 billion goal agreed in 2009.

IISD researchers said developed countries spending \$378

billion on fossil fuel subsidies shows that public funds are available but are being "diverted in the wrong direction". They suggested that fiscal space freed up through fossil fuel subsidy reforms could be redirected to meet climate finance commitments.

Houthis vow response, Israel threatens more attacks

Attacks hit ports of Salif, Ras Issa and capital Sanaa

Israel says it intercepts missile, debris hits school

evil," said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a statement released Thursday. "They are learning and they will learn the hard way, that whoever harms Israel pays a very heavy price for it."

The Houthi-controlled satellite channel al-Masirah said that some of the strikes targeted power stations in the capital, posting videos of flames engulfing one structure, as civil defence workers doused it in water, trying to extinguish the fire.

NOLAN, WIFE HONOURED WITH KNIGHTHOOD, DAMEHOOD

AGENCIES

London, Dec 19: Oscar-winning filmmaker Christopher Nolan and his wife Emma Thomas were honoured by the King of the United Kingdom for their contributions to the film industry.

The ceremony was conducted Wednesday at Buckingham Palace, where King Charles III felicitated the couple with a knighthood and damehood.

The royal family also posted pictures from the ceremony on their official Instagram and X handles.

"Arise, Sir Christopher Nolan and Dame Emma Thomas!" the post read.

"Congratulations to all who received honours during today's Investiture ceremonies, including film director Christopher Nolan and film producer Emma Thomas," the post read.



nized "for their extraordinary contribution to Film, with their partnership producing major blockbusters such as The Dark Knight trilogy and Oppenheimer," as per New York Post.

A knighthood is a title given to a male by the reigning monarch for achievements or service to the country, while a damehood is awarded to females. These ranks entitle recipients to use the title of Sir or Dame before their forename.

Earlier this year, Nolan won his first Best Director Oscar for Cillian Murphy-starrer Oppenheimer, which revolves around the life of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American theoretical physicist who helped develop the first nuclear weapons during World War II.

Business



We need together to lower tariffs, not to see them go up. We need together to increase trade and to make it more fair and equal
ERIC GARCETTI | US AMBASSADOR TO INDIA

SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES: 102 AIRCRAFT GROUNDED

The government Thursday said 102 aircraft are on the ground due to supply chain issues and that it has been encouraging development of the ecosystem for manufacturing of planes by public as well as private enterprises in the country. Supply chain woes have been impacting the airlines' industry in recent years, especially after the coronavirus pandemic and due to certain geopolitical developments



of the day note

The Indian electric vehicles market potential is of ₹20 lakh crore by 2030, creating five crore jobs across the entire EV ecosystem
NITIN GADKARI | UNION MINISTER

India has seen a rise in investments, particularly over the past decade, driven by economic stability and consistent growth
SHISHIR BAIJAL | CHAIRMAN & MD, KNIGHT FRANK

By leveraging AI-driven technologies such as autonomous agents, SMBs are unlocking efficient ways to scale—delivering personalised customer experiences and optimising back-office operations
ARUN KUMAR PARAMESWARAN | MD (SALES), SALESFORCE

FOUR DAYS OF MARKET SELL-OFF

Investors lose ₹9.65L-cr

Indian markets join global selloff as US Fed indicates fewer rate cuts ahead

New Delhi, Dec 19: Investors' wealth eroded by ₹9.65 lakh crore in four days of sharp decline in the equity market where the BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 2,915 points. In the past four days, the BSE benchmark slumped 2,915.07 points or 3.54 per cent. Falling for the fourth day running Thursday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 964.15 points or 1.20 per cent to settle at 79,218.05. During the day, the blue-chip index cracked 1,162.12 points or 1.44 per cent to 79,020.08.

The NSE Nifty tumbled 247.15 points or 1.02 per cent to sink below the 24,000 mark at 23,951.70. Tracking the weak trend in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by ₹9,65,935.96 crore to ₹4,49,76,402.63 crore (\$5.29 trillion) in four days. "Markets were plundered tracking negative global cues as benchmark indices slipped below their psychological levels on broad-based selling after the US Fed's hawkish stance raised concerns over further rate



Rising US bond yields has pushed global currencies, including the rupee to new lows while renewed foreign fund outflows from domestic equities could prompt investors to turn risk averse
PRASHANTH TAPSE | SENIOR VP (RESEARCH), MEHTA EQUITIES

settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. Wall Street ended sharply lower Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹1,316.81 crore Wednesday, according to exchange data. As many as 2,315 stocks declined while 1,680 advanced and 100 remained unchanged on the BSE. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.30 per cent and small-cap index dipped 0.28 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT tanked 1.20 per cent, consumer durables (1.15 per cent), IT (1.13 per cent), capital goods (1.07 per cent), teck (1.05 per cent) and financial services (1.05 per cent).

cuts next year. Rising US bond yields has pushed global currencies, including the rupee to new lows while renewed foreign fund outflows from domestic equities could prompt investors to turn risk averse," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. From the 30 blue-chip pack, Infosys, Bajaj Finserv, JSW

Steel, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, ICI-CI Bank, Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tata Motors and Tech Mahindra were the biggest laggards. On the other hand, Sun Pharma, Hindustan Unilever and Power Grid were the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong

TCPL denies reports on Starbucks' India exit

New Delhi, Dec 19: Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) Thursday denied reports on the exit of cafe chain Starbucks from the Indian market, terming them as "baseless". Tata in a 50:50 joint venture with US-based Starbucks Corporation operates a cafe chain in India under the brand name of Starbucks, which is the leading cafe chain in India. Starbucks had 457 stores across 70 cities at September-end and the company aims to take it to 1,000 by FY28. The company's revenue from operations was up 12 per cent to ₹1,218.06 crore in FY24. However, its loss for the period widened to ₹79.97 crore from ₹24.97 crore in FY23 due to the expansion. Its advertising promotional expenses were up 26.8 per cent to ₹43.20 crore and royalty was at ₹86.15 crore, according to financial data accessed through the business intelligence platform Tofler. Last month TCPL MD & CEO Sunil D'souza told PTI that it will focus on scaling up the Starbucks cafe chain here and is not looking at store profitability. "With Starbucks, we are very clear that the store profitability is not an issue. And as we get to scale, we know that we can generate profits out of it," D'souza had told PTI in the last week of November. Starbucks was responding to reports that suggested that the American company was planning to quit Indian operations due to high operating cost, mounting losses, and availability of cheaper local alternatives in the market.

progress towards fiscal consolidation by containing their aggregate gross fiscal deficit within 3 per cent of GDP for three consecutive years (2021-22 to 2023-24), while restricting revenue deficit at 0.2 per cent of the GDP in 2022-23 and 2023-24. "This has allowed states to scale up their capital spending and improve the quality of expenditure," the report said. It further said several states have announced sops pertaining to farm loan waiver, free electricity to agriculture and households, free transport, allowances to unemployed youth and monetary assistance to women in their Budget for 2024-25. "Such spending could crowd out the resources available with them and hamper their capacity to build critical social and economic infrastructure," it said. The report said an area of incipient stress is the sharp rise in expenditure on subsidies, driven by farm loan waivers, free/subsidised services and cash transfers to farmers, youth and women

Zetwerk plans IPO in 18 months

New Delhi: Manufacturing unicorn Zetwerk has raised \$90 million, about ₹766 crore, in a fresh funding round at a valuation of \$3.1 billion, a top company official said Thursday. The valuation of the company was \$2.7 billion early this year. "We have raised close to \$90 million across many installments in a funding round led by Khosla Ventures. From here onwards, it's not like we're trying to raise rounds or anything, but if we come across high-quality people who are going to be long-term shareholders for the next 5-10 years then we will not say no," Zetwerk Co-Founder and CEO Amrit Acharya told PTI. Zetwerk works with various partners for manufacturing of electronics, renewable energy, aviation, and infrastructure solutions etc.

DAM Capital IPO gets 2.75X subscription

New Delhi: The initial share sale of investment bank DAM Capital Advisors Ltd got fully subscribed hours after opening for bidding Thursday and ended with 2.75 times subscription. The initial public offering (IPO) received bids for 5,71,69,722 shares against 2,08,04,632 shares on offer, reflecting 2.75 times subscription, as per NSE data. Retail individual investors (RIIs) part attracted 3.87 times subscription while the quota for non-institutional investors got subscribed 3.72 times. The category for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) received 1 per cent subscription.

Transrail Lighting's IPO fully subscribed

New Delhi: Transrail Lighting's initial public offering (IPO) got fully subscribed hours after opening for bidding Thursday and ended the day with 2 times subscription. The initial share sale got bids for 2,87,61,926 shares against 1,39,16,742 shares on offer, translating into 2.07 times subscription, according to NSE data. Retail individual investors (RIIs) part received 2.85 times subscription while the category for non-institutional investors got subscribed 2.10 times. The portion for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) got subscribed 78 per cent. Transrail Lighting Ltd has mobilised ₹ 246 crore from anchor investors.

Airtel clears 2016 dues

New Delhi: Bharti Airtel has prepaid ₹3,626 crore to the Department of Telecom to clear all its liabilities for spectrum it had acquired in 2016, the company said Thursday. With this payment, Bharti Airtel has now prepaid all its spectrum dues that had interest costs higher than 8.65 per cent, the company said in a statement. "Bharti Airtel has prepaid ₹3,626 crore to the Department of Telecom (Government of India) clearing all its liabilities for spectrum it had acquired in 2016," the statement said. Airtel has prepaid a total of ₹28,320 crore of spectrum liabilities this calendar year, the company said.

IOC to invest ₹21K-cr

Patna: Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) -- the nation's top oil firm -- will invest over ₹21,000 crore to expand the Barauni refinery in Bihar as well as in setting up a city gas distribution network across the state, a senior executive said Thursday. IOC is expanding its Barauni refinery to 9 million tonne per annum from current 6 million tonne together with a petrochemical plant at a cost of about ₹16,000 crore and invest another ₹5,600 crore in setting up network to retail CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households and industries in 27 cities of Bihar, company Executive Director Suman Kumar said while speaking at the Bihar Business Connect 2024 investor summit.

double-counted. Economic think tank GTRI said there is speculation that some gold imported may have been double-counted. However, gold entering the Indian border through a bill of entry filed at Customs alone is the country's import, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said, adding that movements within the country, such as for use in SEZs, EOUs (export oriented units), or Gift City, should not qualify as imports and should not be included in total import data. "DGCI&S and CBIC may need to verify if there has been any deviation from this practice. The government must address these concerns to ensure trust in data integrity," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

RBI warns states: Freebies crowd out economic development

The report said an area of incipient stress is the sharp rise in expenditure on subsidies, driven by farm loan waivers, free/subsidised services and cash transfers to farmers, youth and women



According to the RBI study, high debt-GDP ratio, outstanding guarantees and the increasing subsidy burden require states to persevere with fiscal consolidation while laying greater emphasis on developmental and capital spending. It further said the improvement in the quality of expenditure was sustained, with capital expenditure rising from 2.4 per cent of GDP in 2021-22 to 2.8 per cent in 2023-24 and budgeted at 3.1 per cent of GDP in 2024-25. State-specific Fiscal Responsibility Legislations (FRLs), along with tax and expenditure reforms, have strengthened their finances over the past two decades. Strengthening of State Finance Commissions is also critical for ensuring adequate and timely fund transfers to local bodies, it added. The report further said the weak financial health of state-owned electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs) constitutes a persisting challenge for state government finances. Despite multiple financial restructuring efforts, DISCOMs' total outstanding debt has grown at an average annual rate of 8.7 per cent since 2016-17, rising from ₹4.2 lakh crore to ₹6.8 lakh crore in 2022-23 (2.5 per cent of GDP).

Comm min may face possible repeat of 2011 trade data error

This time, the issue involves suspected errors in calculating gold import figures for November 2024

problems in the computer software, which was getting upgraded. Noticing an unusual surge in the gold imports in November this year, pushing the country's trade deficit to a record, a commerce ministry official Wednesday said that DGCIS (Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics) has taken up detailed examination of the gold import data and reconciliation would be done with the data received by CBIC (Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs).



The country's gold imports in November reached a record high of \$14.86 billion, registering a four-fold increase, mainly on account of festival and wedding demands. The jump in gold imports pushed the trade deficit (the difference between imports and exports) to a record \$37.84 billion in November. Trade experts and jewellers have mixed opinions on the matter, with some suspecting a possible error in the data compilation, while others are stating that double-counting is "very" unlikely. The downward correction in import data, if any, would lower the trade deficit figures, they added. "The gold import data in November looks different. It should not be this much high," an official of the gems and jewellery industry said. However, a trade expert said that it is "very" unlikely that the bill of entry data has been

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SHORT TAKES

Rider Raju bags spot in Asian Continental



New Delhi: Rider Raju Singh finished twice on the podium at the FEI's CCI 3-star event to qualify for next year's Asian Continental Championships in Pattaya, Thailand. Singh secured first place with his horse Mawilan and a close second with Matakali, cementing his superiority in the prestigious event that concluded Wednesday. Showcasing their prowess, Singh, Pradeep Kumar and Kumabhar Mahesh K Sharayu also successfully met the challenging Minimum Eligibility Requirements by completing the event with penalties of 48 or less—and will make up the Indian team at the Asian Continental Championships. "The exceptional performances witnessed here in Jaipur reflect the growing calibre of equestrian sports in India," EFI Secretary General Col. Jaiveer Singh said.

Lawson joins Max's F1 team for 2025



Milton Keynes: Liam Lawson will partner world champion Max Verstappen at Red Bull in 2025, the Formula 1 team said Thursday. Lawson, a New Zealander, replaces Sergio Perez, who was dropped Wednesday after months of poor results. The 22-year-old Lawson will switch from Racing Bulls, Red Bull's sister team, after racing as a replacement driver in 2023 and this year. He started in Red Bull's junior program. "There's no doubt that racing alongside Max, a four-time champion and undoubtedly one of the greatest drivers ever seen in F1, is a daunting task," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said, "but I'm sure Liam can rise to that challenge and deliver some outstanding results for us next year."

Defender apologises after PSG goalie hurt



Monaco: Monaco defender Wilfried Singo has apologized for his dangerous move that left PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with multiple cuts and a facial trauma during a French league game. Donnarumma's face was bloodied after being hit by his opponent's cleat during PSG's 4-2 win at Monaco Wednesday. The Italy international took the studs of Singo's cleat in the 17th minute. Singo, whose shot had been blocked, tried to jump over the sliding Donnarumma but instead struck his face. "My gesture was obviously not intentional, but I was able to see afterwards that he had a significant injury to his face," Singo wrote on social media, in a message posted in both French and Italian. "I wish you a good recovery."

Hyderabad FC sack coach for poor show



Hyderabad: Hyderabad FC have sacked head coach Thangboi Singto with immediate effect after the side's disappointing run so far in the Indian Super League (ISL) season. Hyderabad FC are currently in the 12th spot on the points table, with two wins and a draw from 11 matches. Singto has been associated with the club for close to half a decade. He was appointed as the head coach in July 2023 after having served as the assistant coach and technical director (youth) since 2020. "Hyderabad FC thanks Mr Singto for his dedication, professionalism, and contributions to the club and wishes him the very best for his future endeavours," the club said in a statement.

CT deadlock ends

India to play its matches at neutral venue most likely UAE; Pak gets reciprocal arrangement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, Dec 19: The deadlock over the hosting of next year's Champions Trophy finally ended Thursday when the ICC announced that India will play their matches of the 50-over event at a neutral venue instead of host country Pakistan, which will get a similar arrangement for tournaments to be held in India till 2027.

The agreement will also extend to the 2028 women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in Pakistan. Although no formal announcement has been made, but India's Champions Trophy matches are likely to be held in the UAE.

"The ICC Board has approved that all matches between India and Pakistan played at ICC Events during the current rights cycle from 2024 to 2027 (which are to be hosted in India or Pakistan) will be played at a neutral venue proposed by the tournament host," said the ICC in a statement, confirming what PTI reported December 5.

The arrangement will also cover next year's women's World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka. "India's Champions Trophy games will most likely be played in the UAE. As far as the Women's ODI World Cup in India is concerned, the India-Pa-



kistan game could be held in Sri Lanka," said a source.

Travelling to Pakistan also requires Indian government's clearance which has remained firm on the status quo.

"The schedule for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 is set to be confirmed soon," the ICC added.

The decision, that came after a series of back-channel talks, was on expected lines after the sport's governing body maintained prolonged silence on the contentious matter during the previous set-up led by chairman Greg Barclay.

His successor Jay Shah took charge December 1 and all stakeholders, including the

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event scheduled in February-March due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was back in 2012

Pakistan Cricket Board, the BCCI and the broadcasters, were running out of time to organise the 50-over event that was last played in the UK in 2017.

Thursday's announcement meant it was the first major decision taken in Shah's tenure.

While BCCI's stance was always clear, the matter got stretched because of PCB's refusal to allow a "one-sided" arrangement of neutral venues. Led by Pakistan interior minister Mohsin Naqvi, the PCB was determined not to lose face in front of the local public.

PCB, which had sent its team to India for the ODI World Cup last year, had categorically opposed the hybrid model but

eventually agreed to it on reciprocal grounds.

The PCB had earlier indicated that it wanted a greater share in the annual revenue cycle to accommodate the Indian demand for a hybrid model but there is no word yet on whether that has been discussed or accepted.

The tournament will feature eight teams, divided into two groups. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers unveil jersey and anthem

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 19: Vedanta Kalinga Lancers, the Odisha-based franchise in the upcoming Hockey India League (HIL), unveiled their official jersey and team anthem at Kalinga Stadium here Thursday.

The jersey was revealed by Suryabanshi Suraj, Minister of Sports and Youth Services, Government of Odisha and Sunil Gupta, COO of Vedanta Aluminium and Director of Kalinga Lancers.

The event also featured India's first K-pop star Sriya Lenka, Padmashri Aruna Mohanty, Secretary of the Orissa Dance Academy, and other influential personalities, along with the Indian players who will represent Vedanta Kalinga Lancers in the league starting December 28th.

Designed to reflect Odisha's rich heritage and progressive spirit, the jersey blends history, art, geography, and modernity. At the heart of the design is the Konark Wheel, a tribute to the Sun Temple of Konark.



The jersey also incorporates motifs from the Chhau and Ghumra dances and Sambalpur patterns, celebrating the state's diverse art forms. Modern design elements include a leafy wave symbolizing growth, inspired by the Vedanta logo, and waves representing the Mahanadi River, symbolizing Odisha's connection to the sea.

The team's mascot, Jeet, is based on the Odisha state bird, the Indian Roller (Blue Jay).

The event also saw the release of the team anthem 'Jaba Jeet Ka', sung by Bollywood singer Rituraj Mohanty and produced by Campaign Scout India.

During the inauguration, Gupta expressed, "Hockey holds a special place in Odisha, and being part of a franchise that represents the state's deep-rooted love for the sport is a matter of immense pride. The jersey beautifully embodies Odisha's history, culture, and aspirations, and we are excited to take the field and contribute to the growth of hockey in India."

Jr Asia Cup was huge confidence booster

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 19: Rising star of Indian hockey, Kanika Siwach, is excited to ply her trade in the inaugural Women's Hockey India League (HIL) with Odisha Warriors.

After a stellar performance in the recently concluded Women's Junior Asia Cup 2024, where she netted eight goals in as many games to finish as the second top scorer for champions India and the fourth overall, Kanika is eager to transition from the junior ranks to the senior stage in this prestigious league.

Reflecting on her journey from the Junior Asia Cup to the HIL, Kanika expressed her excitement, saying, "I'm thrilled about this transition. Playing alongside such talented players and learning from experienced seniors and coaches is something I've been looking forward to. This is a new journey for me, and I'm eager to grow through it."

Having scored eight goals in the Junior Asia Cup, the 19-year-old forward believes her recent success has bolstered her confidence for the HIL. "The Junior Asia Cup was a huge confidence booster. The experience I gained there will be invaluable as I prepare for this next challenge in the Hockey India League," she remarked.

Joining the Odisha Warriors, Kanika is excited to contribute to the team's success. Known for her goal-scoring prowess, Kanika emphasised the impor-



I feel fortunate to be part of a team like Odisha Warriors, which has some incredible players and coaches. I'm ready to give my best and take full advantage of this opportunity to showcase what we, as women players, are capable of

KANIKA SIWACH

Importance of teamwork in maintaining her form. "Scoring in hockey is always a team effort. Trusting my teammates and working together will be key to continuing my scoring streak in the HIL," she explained.

Adapting to the fast-paced and dynamic format of the HIL is a challenge Kanika welcomes with open arms. She credits the guidance of senior players and coaches in helping her prepare. "I plan to lean on the advice of experienced players and our coaches, who are helping us adjust to the league's dynamic nature. Their support will be crucial in my role as a striker," she noted.

Women in Blue crush WI, clinch T20I series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Navi Mumbai, Dec 19: Richa Ghosh smashed a record-equalling fastest fifty while Smriti Mandhana made a graceful half-century to propel India to a 60-run victory over the West Indies in the third and final women's T20I here Thursday.

Thus India clinched the three-match series 2-1, and it was also the home side's first T20I series win at home since October 2019.

Ghosh struck a 21-ball 54 (3x4s, 5x6s) while bringing up her fifty off a mere 18 balls and Mandhana made a robust 77 to power India to their highest ever T20I total of 217 for four.

In reply, West Indies crumbled against a mountainous target and crawled to 157/9 in their 20 overs, as left-arm spinner Radha Yadav returned with a four-wicket haul.

The West Indies could never really attain any momentum and lost Qiana Joseph (11) early, while mainstays Hayley Matthews (22) and Deandra Dottin (25) also fell cheaply which severely hampered the visitors' hopes.

The two teams will now move to Vadodra for a three-match ODI series to be played at the new Kotambi Stadium from December 22.

Earlier, Ghosh equalled the world record for the fastest fifty in women's T20Is (18 balls) after Mandhana's fireworks as India registered their highest-ever total in the shortest format, going past the 201/5 against the UAE in the Asia Cup earlier this year.

Real Madrid win Intercontinental Cup

ANCELOTTI WINS RECORD 15TH TITLE WITH CLUB



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kylian Mbappé, Rodrygo and Vinicius Júnior scored a goal each as Madrid became the most successful club in the competition with four titles. It also won in 1960, 1998 and 2002

Lusail (Qatar), Dec 19: Real Madrid beat Mexican team Pachuca 3-0 in the Intercontinental Cup final Wednesday, making Carlo Ancelotti the most decorated coach in the club's history.

Ancelotti lifted his 15th title with the Spanish powerhouse, surpassing the 14 trophies that he and Miguel Muñoz had won. Muñoz coached the team in the 1960s and 70s.

"Very happy, it's a triumph," said the 65-year-old Ancelotti, who Tuesday was named men's coach of the year at the FIFA's "The Best" awards. "We didn't get off to a good start but finished well, showing great attitude."

Kylian Mbappé, Rodrygo and Vinicius Júnior scored a goal each as Madrid became the most successful club in the

competition with four titles. It also won in 1960, 1998 and 2002. Pachuca has never won the tournament, which brings together the champions of all six soccer confederations.

The competition is being played in a new format after FIFA expanded the Club World Cup to 32 teams for 2025.

Madrid won the annual Club World Cup five times — in 2014, 2016, 2017-18 and 2022.

Eleven of Ancelotti's titles

Just-retired Ashwin returns home with 'zero regrets'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Dec 19: There was the mandatory shower of flower petals, lots of smiles and a live band too as Ravichandran Ashwin returned home Thursday after his shock international retirement in the middle of a Test series in Australia, insisting that he made an "instinctive" decision and is walking away with "zero regrets".

He landed at the Chennai International Airport early this morning and was escorted out by officials of the state cricket association. The 38-year-old owner of 765 international duties did not speak to the waiting media there as he hopped into his car where his wife Prithi and two daughters were waiting for him.

However, once he reached home and was surrounded by his parents, and other well-wishers, Ashwin did oblige

the waiting newsmen, opening up a bit about his decision.

"It's emotional for a lot of people, and may be it will sink in (in some time) but for me, personally, it is a great sense of relief and satisfaction. It was very instinctive and it has been running in my head for a while. I just felt (it) on Day 4 and I just called it a day," Ashwin said, referring to the drawn third Test in Brisbane.

"...it (retirement) is a not a big decision as far as I am concerned because I am going to embrace a new path," he went on. Asked if he regretted not being the captain of the national side, Ashwin dismissed the suggestion. "I can't do it now. I have no such regrets. In fact, I have zero regrets. I have seen from a distance those people with regrets but I don't have any such regrets," asserted the bowler, who has 537 Test wickets to his credit, making him



RAVICHANDRAN ASHWIN

India's second highest wicket-taker in the format behind the great Anil Kumble (619).

As he entered his house, his parents embraced him and the seasoned bowler was garlanded

Ashwin was being humiliated, says father; off-spinner plays it down

RAshwin's father Ravichandran kicked up a controversy Thursday by claiming that "humiliation" could have been a reason for his son's decision to call it quits but the veteran off-spinner made light of the "dad comment", blaming it on lack of media training. Although Ashwin described his decision as an "instinctive" call that was on his mind for a while, his father raised eyebrows by hinting at other factors, including humiliation. "I too came to know at the last minute. The way in which he gave that (retirement), there could be many reasons. Only Ashwin knows, maybe humiliation," Ravichandran said. However, Ashwin later tried to douse the fire, saying his father was not "media trained" and his comment should not be taken seriously. "Request you all to forgive him and leave him alone," Ashwin wrote on X.

too. A few from among the gathering took his autograph, shook hands and congratulated him for a stellar run as an India player. "I never thought so many people will come here. I just wanted a quiet entry, and was looking forward to relax at home. But you have made my day. I have played Test cricket for so many years, but the last time (I saw

something) like this was after the 2011 World Cup," he said.

Ashwin Wednesday announced retirement with immediate effect in the middle of the five-match Test series that is currently locked 1-1 after three games. He will continue to play club cricket, including the IPL, where he will return to play for Chennai Super Kings next year.