

UKRAINE STRIKES DEEP INTO RUSSIA

Kyiv, Dec 21: Ukraine brought the war into the heart of Russia Saturday morning with drone attacks that local authorities said damaged residential buildings in the city of Kazan in the Tatarstan region, over 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) from the front line.

The press service of Tatarstan's governor, Rustam Mimmikhanov, said that eight drones attacked the city. Six hit residential buildings, one hit an industrial facility and one was shot down over a river, the statement said. A video posted on local Telegram news channel Astra, verified by The Associated Press, shows a drone flying into the upper floors of a high-rise building.



FESTIVE SPIRIT: People took part in the winter Solstice celebrations at Stonehenge, England, Saturday

Forest, tree cover up by 1,445 sq km

Human-induced climate change, caused mostly due to massive destruction of forests, has already brought enough disruptions to the planet. An estimated 420 million hectare of forests, an area larger than the European Union, has been lost worldwide through deforestation between 1990 and 2020. On top of that, the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change last week released its additional guidelines for oil and gas exploration inside forests, which is anything but environment-friendly. Amid such anti-environmental developments, the latest government data on expansion of forests in India by about 1.5k sq km, with Odisha's contribution being 559 sq km, appears to be a silver lining



Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhopender Yadav released the 'India State of Forest Report 2023 (ISFR 2023)' at Forest Research Institute, Dehradun, Saturday

Determined Contributions (NDCs) to meet the Paris Agreement goals, the country has committed to creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

The country's total forest cover increased to 7,15,343 sq km in 2023, reaching 21.76 per cent of its geographical area, the report stated. The tree cover increased by 1,289 sq km and now constitutes 3.41 per cent of the country's geographical area, it said.

Together, the forest and tree cover amount to 8,27,357 sq km or 25.17 per cent of India's geographical area. This marks an overall increase of 1,445 sq km from 2021, with forest cover alone rising by 156 sq km.

According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI), forest cover refers to all land that has a tree canopy density of more than 10 per cent and spans over an area of one hectare or more, regardless of the type of ownership or legal status.

This includes natural forests as well as man-made plantations, orchards and tree patches in urban and rural areas that meet the size and canopy density criteria. Tree cover is defined as patches of trees and isolated trees outside the Reserved Forest Area (RFA) that are less than one hectare.

Releasing the report, Environment Minister Bhopender Yadav said the most positive finding of the report is that India has already created an additional carbon sink of 2.29 billion tonnes.

India's carbon stock in 2023 is estimated at 7,285.5 million tonnes, which is an increase of 81.5 million tonnes compared to 2021.

Odisha among top states in green cover growth

Govt tweaks election rules

Press Trust of India

New Delhi, Dec 21: The government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission (EC), the Union Law Ministry has amended Rule

93 of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of 'papers' or documents open to public inspection. According to Rule 93, all 'papers' related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts 'as specified in these rules' after 'papers'. Law Ministry and EC officials separately explained that a court case was the 'trigger' behind the amendment.

While documents such as nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered. EC functionaries said the misuse of CCTV camera footage from polling booths could compromise voter secrecy. **MORE P7**

₹4,382 crore yarn project in Bhadrak

Bhubaneswar: The Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) has approved a funding of ₹4,382 crore to set up a yarn project in Bhadrak district.



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Saturday said the project will boost the state's economy and create substantial employment opportunities. "Thank you, @IndianOil, for approving the establishment of a Yarn Project worth ₹4,382 Cr in #Bhadrak. This joint venture with MCP Pvt Ltd will greatly enhance Odisha's economy and generate significant employment opportunities," Majhi posted on X.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



I merely asked him to treat us the same—stand up and take our complaint as he does for BJP leaders

DSPL - 263

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- 13 Vitamins, 12 Minerals, 8 Essential Amino Acids
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CLINICALLY TESTED

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leisure



DAKOTA JOHNSON, JOSH HARTNETT JOIN ANNE HATHAWAY IN VERITY
Actors Dakota Johnson and Josh Hartnett are set to star alongside Hollywood star Anne Hathaway in *Verity*, an upcoming film from Amazon MGM Studios. The film is an adaptation of a book by the same name from author Colleen Hoover.

JARED LETO TO PLAY SKELETOR IN MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE
Oscar winner Jared Leto has been roped in to play Skeletor, the skull-faced archenemy of He-Man, in the upcoming movie *Masters of the Universe*. While plot details remain under wraps, the story centers on Prince Adam of Eternia, who transforms into the muscular hero He-Man.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
Your convincing powers are so great that you can even convince people to do what they don't want to do. Today these powers will bear remarkable results. You realise the need to improve your home and your personality. Ganesh says today you will take some concrete steps in this direction.

TAURUS
In all probability, the fair sex will have a wonderful time in kitchen and at the dining table, foresees Ganesh. You may have family friends and close relatives coming over to your place in the evening. Romance will free-flow with your soul mate later in the day, says a beaming Ganesh.

GEMINI
Today, you will look more presentable than ever, predicts Ganesh. At work, you will employ new business strategies to succeed. By evening, you will give a demo of your supreme sense for style, especially when it comes to dressing up. Your spouse will be enamoured by your new avatar.

CANCER
You are honest and straightforward, and today will be no different. It's just that you can be too straight at times, leaving those around you embarrassed. Early in the day, small things may bother you in a big way. You may get involved in big financial transactions. You will get due appreciation for your efforts at work.

LEO
Today, you will most certainly pay close attention to your personal appearance, says Ganesh. After all, no one ever said looking good was a crime. At work, you shall find the resources to dig up a successful business tactic. If you are a job aspirant, an interview in the evening shall go well.

VIRGO
A vital turning point is about to take place in your relationships and will dictate how they will progress. Today you will be preoccupied with the organisational details for a social gathering with friends and near and dear ones. Later in the evening, a member of the opposite sex will make the big difference between hope and despair.

LIBRA
Optimism and a positive mindset are second to your nature today, says Ganesh. So carry it with you wherever you go. You may tend to be slightly overcautious at work, but that will only protect you. Today seems to be one of those days when you can't stop worrying about your career prospects. But everything shall happen in due course, reminds Ganesh. So sit back and relax with your soul mate.

SCORPIO
The itch of love will spread like a rash today. Passion will set you ablaze, says Ganesh. At work, the course of things may shift to being better than before. However, in love relationships, cold logic will rule over intense emotions. But sweat not in the heat of love, and find the poignancy hidden within, advises Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS
Ganesh suggests you get down to looking your dashing best. Preen that plumage and make heads turn. Your social standing, on the other hand, will add that extra jazz. Talking fast and smooth might just help you effect a robust consumption.

CAPRICORN
You will love to play God today, and may make use of every tactic of the power game to yield the desired results, says Ganesh. A clear thought process and non-judgemental attitude will show you a new direction to life, but you will have to be focused to meet success.

AQUARIUS
Today, you will blow hot and cold. Hence, no one will know what to expect from you. This will throw your rivals off balance, keeping you a step ahead of them. At work, you will finally win recognition and respect. Ganesh wants you to be satisfied for now, and wait for a better tomorrow.

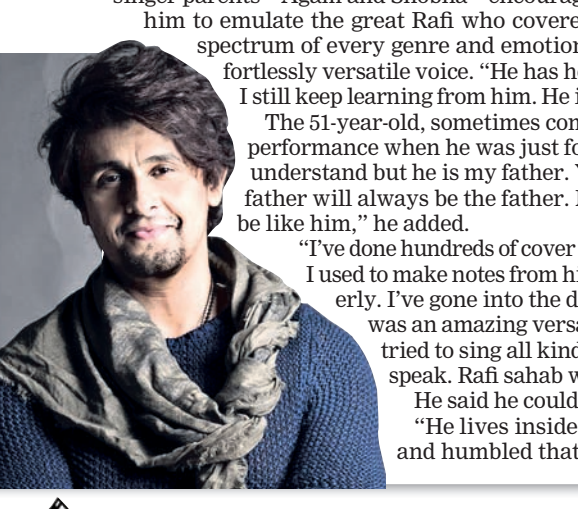
PISCES
You have been under a lot of pressure of late, but today should see a marked change in your fortunes. A progressive day when it comes to business and professional matters. Fun and frolic too is on the agenda, with invitations to parties and other social get-togethers coming your way, says Ganesh.

Mumbai: Actress Kriti Sanon has penned a note expressing gratitude for getting to do what she loves as she finished her last working day of 2024.

Mumbai: There can be no comparison between a father and a son. For Sonu Nigam, who considers Mohammed Rafi his "musical father", the very idea of comparing himself to the legendary singer is unthinkable. After all, whatever he sings, he can never be quite like the master himself, said Nigam ahead of Rafi's 100th birth anniversary December 24.

"Rafi sahab was the prime reference point. It was like 'Be like him, he can sing a qawwali, a bhajan, a sad song, a high-pitch song, a semi-classical'. So that's what a singer should be like. He was my inspiration," Nigam told the news agency.

Sonu: Rafi is my musical father



It began right in childhood itself. Nigam's singer parents – Agam and Shobha – encouraged him to emulate the great Rafi who covered the spectrum of every genre and emotion through his effortlessly versatile voice. "He has helped me be what I'm today and I still keep learning from him. He is my musical father," Nigam said.

The 51-year-old, sometimes compared to Rafi, gave his career's first performance when he was just four. "They will compare but they must understand but he is my father. You cannot compare a father and son. The father will always be the father. No matter what I sing, I will never be able to be like him," he added. "I've done hundreds of cover versions of his songs. That has been my net practice. I used to make notes from his songs and add pointers. I've studied Rafi sahab properly. I've gone into the detailing of Mohammed Rafi like nobody else. Rafi sahab was an amazing versatile singer. I've tried to imbibe that quality in me. I've also tried to sing all kinds of songs. Rafi sahab was an introvert, I'm not an introvert, I speak. Rafi sahab wouldn't speak that much," the self-confessed fan said. He said he could never meet his idol but it doesn't matter. "He lives inside me so I don't really miss not meeting him," he added. "I'm touched and humbled that I'm getting this chance to perform his songs on his 100th birthday."

Kriti's note of gratitude

She wrote: "As I end my last working day of 2024, all I feel is so so much Gratitude for getting to do what I absolutely love and having my Constants, my incredible team, that's been with me for years, hopping from set to set, pushing each other to do better, being there for me in every way on good and more importantly bad days, growing together and making beautiful memories!! My second family... What would I do without you guys!!"

The actress, who was last seen in the film *Do Patti* in a dual role, had earlier shared a string of photographs from a wedding she attended. Kriti was spotted at rumoured beau Kabir Bahia's relative's marriage and had professed her love for "Indian weddings".

On the acting front, Kriti is basking in the success of her back-to-back hits including *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*, *Crew* and *Do Patti*, which marked her debut as a producer. IANS



'UNCOMFORTABLE WORK CONDITIONS' Shruti walks out of *Dacoit*

Mumbai: Actress Shruti Haasan has stepped away from Adivi Sesh's upcoming project, *Dacoit*, citing "uncomfortable work conditions" as the reason for her exit. Earlier several reports suggested that Shruti walked out of *Dacoit* due to a scheduling conflict with her other project, *Coolie*. However, a source close to the development rubbished this. An insider revealed, "Shruti Haasan shot the teaser of the film last year and post that the shoot dates were being pushed every now and then. There were portions which were re-shot multiple times. The other actor in the film was involved too much in the script, and at times there were two people directing the film, which got very confusing."

"Shruti, despite being interested in showcasing a new side to her acting and working with the original director, wasn't comfortable with the over-involvement of the co-star. It made the workplace uncomfortable for her," the source added. December 17, the makers of *Dacoit* introduced Mrunal Thakur as part of the cast, unveiling a special poster and teaser to mark the announcement. However, the news immediately sparked curiosity among fans, who were eager to understand the reasons behind Shruti Haasan's departure from the film. The newly released poster featuring Adivi Sesh and Mrunal quickly went viral.

Reports suggest that Haasan left the film due to creative differences and on-set inconveniences that influenced her decision. Additionally, some sources indicate that her departure was caused by scheduling conflicts. IANS



FILM REVIEW

DEBADURLLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 20: *Parab* signifies festival or celebration, but more than that, it's a part of culture and heritage in Odisha, the southern part of the state in particular, where this tribal festival is organised as a gala event to showcase the splendour of local traditions. So, when a movie is made with this title that too by the makers of *Daman*, a 2022 blockbuster, expectations skyrocket. And an ensemble cast comprising Sidhant Mohapatra, Anu Choudhury, Chaudhury Jayprakash Das, Dipanwit Das Mohapatra, and Suryamayee Mohapatra should do the rest to get the crowd to the theatres even as the euphoria surround-

Parab: Promoting spirit of brotherhood

ing *Pushpa 2* is yet to subside. The movie has somehow managed to achieve that to a certain extent.

Talking about positives, the movie, most importantly, is not a remake of films in other languages and is made in the backdrop of the ongoing border dispute between Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. However, there is more to this fictional take by director Chinmaya Das than the warring administrations of two states.

Parab sheds light on the dispute between the Odia and Telugu communities, residing in a village bordering Odisha's Gajapati with AP's Srikakulam districts. With chest-thumping pride of the local communities



DIRECTOR: Chinmaya Das
CAST: Sidhant Mohapatra, Anu Choudhury, Chaudhury Jayprakash Das, Dipanwit Das Mohapatra, and Suryamayee Mohapatra

showing no signs of diminishing anytime soon, thus begins

a never-ending saga of conflict between them.

Sidhant and Anu, one of the most popular onscreen romantic couples a few years ago, are tasked with something different to do this time. Though playing husband and wife, their encounters as District Collectors of Gajapati and Srikakulam add momentum to the growing tension in the plot. Choudhury Jayprakash, the accomplished actor he is, has justified his character to the T, wearing Odia pride on his sleeve. For instance, the sequence between Jayprakash and Anu over animosity between Odia and Telugu communities will surely be etched on viewers' memory for a long

time. These days, he is synonymous with all content-driven movies made in Odisha. Dipanwit, paired opposite Suryamayee, daughter of Jayprakash's character, played his part effortlessly, especially the way he mouthed thick-Telugu-accented Odia.

Distortion of Odia has been a concern in most of the mainstream movies in recent times. The makers of such movies have a lot to learn on this count from *Parab*.

Anyone who truly aches to see the picturesque beauty of Odisha's bordering district must watch *Parab* for Kartik Paramar's cinematography. The splendidly wide-angle shots, captured in particular in the

valleys, must be commended for their breathtaking visual appeal, offering a rare sense of scale that enhances the film's gripping narrative. Though the movie has a slow start at the box office till the filing of this report, a positive word-of-mouth may bring a drastic turnaround.

On rooms for improvement, in the post-interval part, the plot fails to rescue itself from the trap of banality, as the actors, too, could not rise above the linear dialogues offered to them. However, this would register as a minor complaint, since Biswajit Paital's splendid editing makes up for the flaws.

Overall, a 'thumbs up' as the team has done a decent job at the end of the day.

PEANUTS



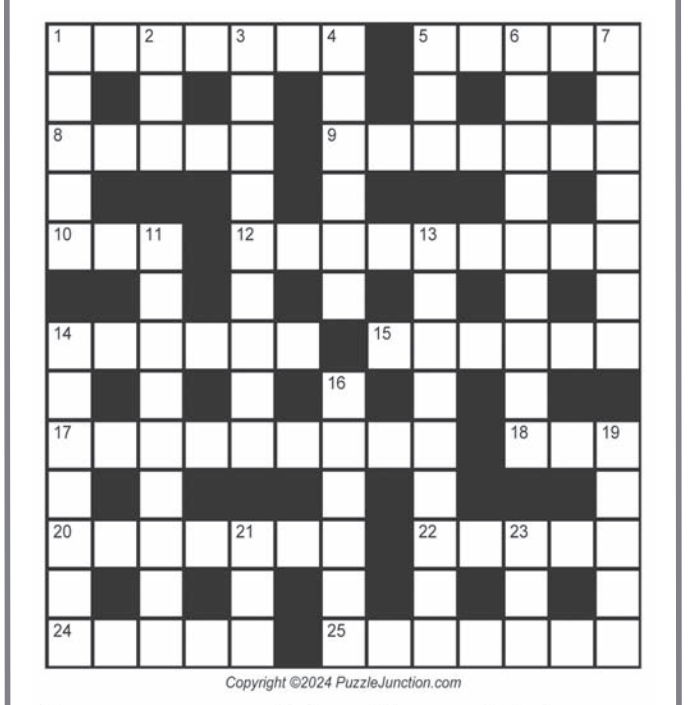
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



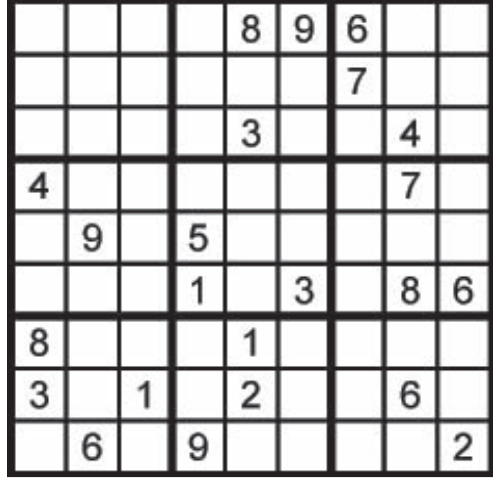
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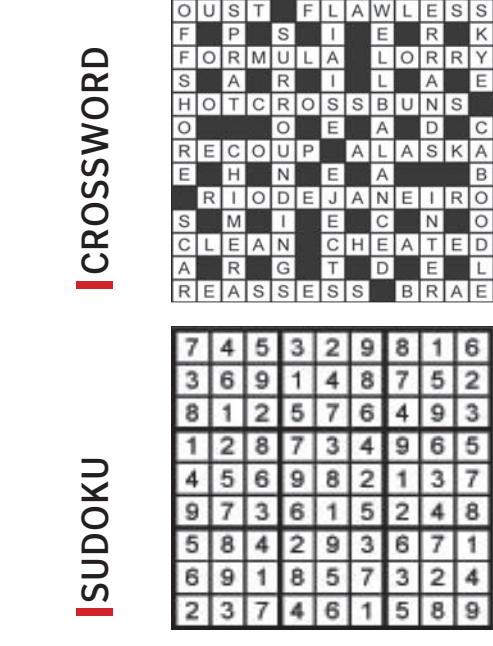
- Across**
- 1 Answered
 - 5 Legions
 - 8 Kind of system
 - 9 Risk taker
 - 10 Buffoon
 - 12 Make stronger
 - 14 Show instability
 - 15 Archaic name for England
 - 17 Denigrated
 - 18 Bubble source
 - 20 Retreat
 - 22 Desensitises
 - 24 Companion of Artemis
 - 25 Add sugar
 - 7 Sawbones
 - 11 Type of writer (4-5)
 - 13 Mazurka, e.g. (4,5)
 - 14 Hot sauce
 - 16 Accuses
 - 19 Trowel wielder
 - 21 Small indefinite amount
 - 23 Yoga class need

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

Bhubaneswar: The Mahila police Saturday arrested a 29-year-old man for allegedly threatening his sister-in-law to upload her private pictures on the internet if she refused to comply with his monetary demands. IIC Mahila police station Reena Mishra said fearing public embarrassment the victim had transferred around ₹4.96 lakh to the accused, Manoranjan Khatei, of Bhangarpur under Baliana police jurisdiction. Mishra said Khatei shared close relationship with the victim who happens to be his distant relative. He had captured some intimate pictures with the victim when the latter visited his house in the first week of December this year. Taking advantage of her vulnerability, he began blackmailing her by threatening her to upload those pictures on the internet. The hapless victim initially gave ₹4 lakh to Khatei as demanded, and later transferred ₹96,500 to his account. However, Mishra said, Khatei kept on demanding more money from her. When the victim failed to arrange the money, Khatei shared the pictures among her family members, she said, adding that it was then the victim approached the police.

downtown

Green cover: State sees 3rd-highest rise in India

POST NEWS NETWORK

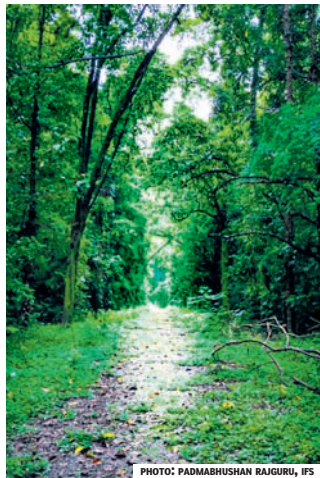
Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Odisha has recorded the third-highest increase in the combined forest and tree cover in the country since 2021, according to the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) - 2023 released, Saturday.

According to the report, India's total forest and tree cover has increased by 1,445 sqkm since 2021.

"Chhattisgarh (683.62 sqkm) recorded the highest increase in combined forest and tree cover, followed by Uttar Pradesh (559.19 sqkm), Odisha (558.57 sqkm) and Rajasthan (394 sqkm)," it said.

For forest cover alone, the largest gain was seen in Mizoram (242 sqkm), followed by Gujarat (180 sqkm) and Odisha (152 sqkm).

Within the Reserved Forest Area (RFA), Mizoram showed the largest increase in forest cover (192.92 sqkm), followed by Odisha (118.17 sqkm), Karnataka (93.14 sqkm), West Ben-



For forest cover alone, the largest gain was seen in Mizoram (242 sqkm), followed by Gujarat (180 sqkm) and Odisha (152 sqkm)

gal (64.79 sqkm) and Jharkhand (52.72 sqkm).

Among the states, the highest growing stock in agro-forestry was observed in Maharashtra, followed by Karnataka, Odisha and Rajasthan.

According to the Forest Survey of India (FSI), forest cover refers to all land that has a tree canopy density of more than 10 per cent and spans over an area of one hectare or more, regardless of the type of ownership or legal status. This includes natural forests as well as man-made plantations, orchards and tree patches in urban and rural areas that meet the size and canopy density criteria.

Tree cover is defined as patches of trees and isolated trees outside the RFA that are less than one hectare.

For ISFR - 2023, the government included bamboo and trees with a diameter of 5-10 centimetres at breast height in the tree cover estimates. It expanded the assessment to 751 districts compared to 636 in 2021.

Depression-induced rain lashes Odisha

Cooperation Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta says the government will provide compensation if the paddy gets affected because of the rain since Friday

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Rain lashed most parts of Odisha Saturday even as the low-pressure area over the Bay of Bengal intensified into a depression, the IMD said.

Of the 30 districts of Odisha, 26 experienced rainfall in the last 24 hours till 8.30am Saturday. The highest of 108.4mm rainfall was recorded at Ranpur in Nayagarh district, followed by Begunia (84), Pipli, Jatni, Khurda and Naugaon (75mm each).

Heavy rain lashed the districts of Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, Bhadrak, Balasore, Keonjhar, Angul, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Sambalpur, and Jharsuguda since Saturday morning.

The IMD said rainfall is likely to decrease from Saturday



due to a gradual change in the weather.

The depression over the Bay of Bengal off Andhra Pradesh coast moved east-north-eastwards with the speed of 12kmph during past six hours and lay centred about 430km south-southeast of Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), 480km east-northeast of Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and 590km south of Gopalpur (Odisha), the IMD said in its 12.30pm bulletin.

The regional office of the IMD here advised fishermen

to stay cautious as the sea conditions will likely be turbulent. Rough to very rough sea is likely across the west-central and southwest Bay of Bengal during this period and along the Andhra Pradesh-north Tamil Nadu and south Odisha coasts.

Regional Meteorological Centre, Bhubaneswar, director Manorama Mohanty said the wind direction has changed to south-easterly and the winds are carrying a lot of moisture as a result of which there was rainfall activities. "While light

to moderate rainfall is expected in interior Odisha, there could be heavy downpour in the coastal belt," Mohanty said.

With reports of depression-induced rainfall damaging standing paddy crops, Cooperation Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta said the state government will provide compensation if the paddy gets affected because of the rain since Friday.

He said arrangements have been made for covering the crops at mandis.

100% electrification in 2025: Vaishnav

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Delhi, Dec 21: The Indian Railways has set a target of achieving 100 per cent electrification in 2025 and efforts in that direction has surged, Union Minister of Railways, Information and Broadcasting, Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnav said Saturday.

Speaking at the 69th Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar at Bharat Mandapam here, Vaishnav said along with the total electrification vision, three times more focus is being laid on safety, maintenance as well as improving quality of service through professional training to the staff in order to give world-class experience to commuters.

On the occasion, Vaishnav conferred the Ati Vishisht Rail

Three ECoR officials receive 69th Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar from Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav at a function in New Delhi Saturday



Seva Puraskar to 101 railway officials for exemplary performance and 22 shields to best performing zones in different categories.

Vaishnav congratulated the awardees for their exceptional work and highlighted the transformative progress achieved in Indian Railways over the past decade. He emphasised the rapid construction pace, complet-

ing projects like the Kashmir to Kanyakumari rail link and pending North-East connectivity initiatives. He said projects such as Vande Bharat, Nam Bharat, and the freight corridors have gained momentum.

Speaking on safety, Vaishnav said the Kavach safety system has been implemented on a massive scale. He also underlined the progress in station

redevelopment, reduction in consequential accidents (from 345 to 90), and efficient filling of 1.5 lakh position in the Railways without any complaints received in relation to the recruitment process.

"Safety remains a top priority, with initiatives such as zero derailment zones being incentivised with shields and financial rewards," Vaishnav said while emphasising the integration of modern technology, policy reforms, and structural changes to ensure sustainable progress.

On the occasion, he announced financial rewards along with shields for bringing excellence in work culture of Railways through excellent SMQT (safest, maintenance, quality and training) practices

from next year.

The 101 awardees of the 69th Ati Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar have been selected across various categories, including innovation leading to improvement in productivity, revenue generation, safety, improvement in operation, security, project completion, and sports.

Out of them, N HariPriya, Chief Commercial Inspector, Pradeep Kumar Jha, Protocol Officer and Suprabhat Mitra, Technical grade-II belong to ECoR.

The 22 shields were presented to the best-performing Railway zones in various categories. East Coast Railway jointly won Electrical Engineering shield with Central Railway. East Coast Railway General Manager Parmeshwar Funkwal received the shield.

4th phase Subhadra Yojana money in Jan: Deputy CM

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida Saturday said over 20 lakh women are likely to receive the first instalment of Subhadra Yojana in January 2025.

The state government had earlier postponed the release of the fourth phase of the first instalment of the yojana scheduled December 25. Under the scheme, each beneficiary will receive ₹50,000 over five years, with ₹10,000 disbursed in two instalments annually.

Parida explained that the delay in disbursement is due to the ongoing verification process, which has been hindered by issues like land disputes.

The government has set a deadline of December 30 to com-

plete the verification process, after which the funds will be released in January if all is in order, she said.

During her visit to the Bonda hills in Malkangiri district, Parida mentioned that over 12,000 women from the PVTG community had applied for the scheme, and 9,000 had already received the first instalment, with 3,000 still waiting. The third phase of the scheme saw the disbursement of funds to 20 lakh women November 24. By the end of the third phase, 80 lakh women had benefited from the Subhadra Yojana, which was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his birthday, September 17, 2024.

The scheme is designed to provide eligible women aged 21 to 60 with ₹50,000 over five years, from 2024-25 to 2028-29.



IN SYNC: Artists perform during 'Katha 2024' organised by Kathak Dance Academy at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Saturday

PHOTO: BIKASH NAYAK

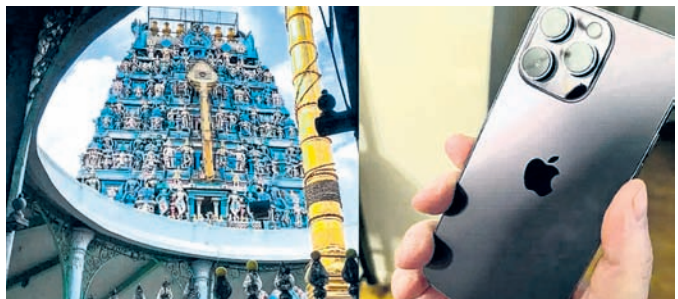
iPhone lands in hundi, becomes temple property

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Dec 21: A devotee who has accidentally dropped his iPhone into the hundi of a temple here is in a peculiar situation. He wants it back, but the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department politely declined his request, saying it has now become temple property.

Immediately after realising his mistake, the devotee later identified as Dinesh, approached the officials of the Sri Kandaswamy temple, Thirupur, and pleaded that his iPhone which inadvertently fell into the offering box when he was making a donation be returned to him.

After opening the offering box Friday, the temple administration contacted him saying the gadget was found in the hundi and he was free to retrieve only the data from it. However, Dinesh refused to ac-



cept and insisted that his phone be returned to him.

When this issue was taken to the notice of the HR & CE Minister P K Sekar Babu Saturday he replied "anything that is deposited into the offering box, even if it be an arbitrary action, goes into god's account."

"As per the practices and tradition at the temples, any offerings made into the hundi directly go into the account of the deity of that temple. Rules do not permit the administration to return the offerings back to the devotees," Babu

told reporters here.

He would discuss with the department officials to see if there was any possibility to compensate the devotee and accordingly make a decision, the Minister said after inspecting the construction of the Arulmigu Mariamman temple in Madhavaram, here, and the renovation of temple tank belonging to the Arulmigu Kailasanathar temple in Venugopal Nagar, here at an estimated cost of ₹2.5 crore.

This incident is not the first such one in the state. According

to a senior HR & CE official a devotee S Sangeetha from Alappuzha in Kerala unwittingly dropped her 1.75 sovereign gold chain into the hundi of the renowned Sri Dhandayuthapani Swamy temple in Palani in May 2023.

The gold chain fell into the hundi when she removed the Tulsi garland around her neck to make an offering. However, considering her financial background and after confirming through CCTV footages that the chain had fallen by accident, the chairman of the temple board of trustees bought a new gold chain of same value at his personal expense and gave it to her.

The official explained that as per the Installation, Safeguarding and Accounting of Hundi Rules, 1975, none of the offerings made into the hundis can be returned to the owner at any point, as they belonged to the temple.

Soldier Ishwar Talia laid to rest

Koraput: The last rites of Lance Daffadar Ishwar Talia, a soldier from Odisha's Koraput district who was killed during a tank field firing exercise in Rajasthan, was conducted with full military honours in his native Badaguda village Saturday. Hundreds of villagers, family members and well-wishers paid their respects when the 32-year-old soldier's mortal remains were cremated. Ishwar was critically injured during a tank field firing exercise at the Mahajan Field Firing Range in Rajasthan when a bomb exploded inside the tank Wednesday. Despite treatment at the Chandigarh Command Hospital, he succumbed to his injuries Thursday.

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Govt to provide monthly ration from January 2025

District collectors have been instructed to ensure timely distribution of PDS rice, with the process to be completed by December 25



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The state government announced Saturday that beneficiaries under the food security scheme will now receive monthly rations under the Public Distribution System (PDS) starting January 2025.

The state has instructed district collectors across all districts to make necessary arrangements for the timely distribution of rice from government godowns.

The process of lifting PDS rice has already commenced, with operations starting December 6. Over the past 14 days, district collectors in Nabarangpur and Deogarh have successfully completed lifting the rice

The government has set a deadline for completing the e-KYC verification by the end of next month

designated for their districts. Other districts are expected to complete the lifting of their allocated rice by the end of today.

The state government has ensured that distribution to beneficiaries is underway at government fair price shops and dealer points in various parts of Odisha. The distribution process is expected to be fully completed by December 25, ensuring that all eligible beneficiaries receive their rations well in

advance of the New Year.

In a meeting held recently, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra, along with principal secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh and other senior officials, discussed and decided on the release of the monthly rations. During the meeting, district collectors and District Chief Civil Supply Officers were instructed to take prompt actions to ensure smooth and timely delivery of food grains to beneficiaries.

As part of the government's efforts to streamline the process, district collectors have also been directed to accelerate the e-KYC (electronic Know Your Customer) process for all beneficiaries. The government has set a deadline for completing the e-KYC verification by the end of next month, further improving the efficiency and transparency of the system.

The initiative is expected to enhance the delivery of essential food grains to the beneficiaries and ensure that the distribution system runs smoothly throughout the state.



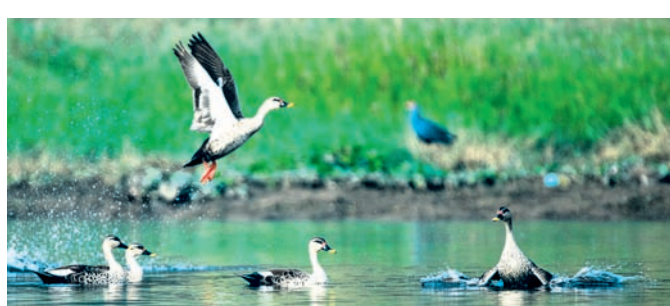
FOR PEACE & HARMONY: People from different walks of life including students take part in an event organised at Government High School, Khandagiri in Bhubaneswar, Saturday on the occasion of World Meditation Day 2024

Migratory birds flock to Hirakud Wetland

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar/Sambalpur, Dec 21: With the onset of winter, the Hirakud Wetland, a Ramsar site since 2021, has become a vibrant hub for migratory birds. Spanning 700 square kilometers, the wetland hosts an impressive array of avian species, including Eurasian Wigeons, Gadwalls, Mallards, Grebes, Northern Shovelers, Gulls, Terns, Bar-Headed Geese, Tufted Ducks, Pochards, Whistling Ducks, Sandpipers, and Northern Pintails.

This year, Ruff birds, rarely seen in the area, have also been spotted. Migrating from the cold regions of Eurasia, these birds find Hirakud an ideal wintering ground, thanks to its abundant food and favourable temperatures, ranging from 20-26°C during the day and dropping to 10°C at night.



SL NO	YEAR	NO. OF BIRDS	NO. OF SPECIES
1	2024	3,42,339	112
2	2023	3,16,676	108
3	2022	2,08,634	104
4	2021	1,24,864	98
5	2020	97,899	93

The annual bird census at Hirakud Wetland is scheduled for January 18, 2025, with the entire reservoir divided into

21 sectors for the count. During the last census January 8, 2024, more than 48,000 birds were recorded in Sector 7 alone, including over 52,000 Tufted

Ducks, 49,000 Lesser Whistling Ducks, and 33,000 Red-Crested Pochards.

To protect the habitat, authorities have restricted tourist and fishing boats from 6pm to 6am, limited river patrolling to human movement areas, and enhanced efforts to minimise disturbances in key congregation zones. Informer networks, supported by local communities, have been strengthened to address poaching threats.

In addition, a special drive to eliminate plastic waste in bird congregation areas has been ongoing since 2022.

Villages such as Govindpur Birds Village and Dhodrukusum Green Village have played a pivotal role in maintaining clean shorelines and supporting conservation efforts, ensuring the wetland remains a sanctuary for migratory birds

Odisha to lead inclusive agri reforms: Singh Deo

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Odisha is set to lead the nation in inclusive and sustainable agricultural reforms, said Deputy Chief Minister and Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo during a policy roundtable conference held recently in Bhubaneswar.

The state government hosted the event in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and CGIAR's National Policies and Strategies (NPS) initiative. Themed "Advancing Inclusive Agricultural Transformation in Odisha," the roundtable focused on addressing common challenges in agriculture through innovative and inclusive approaches.

Over 100 participants, including government officials, researchers, development practitioners, and international experts, gathered to foster regional collaboration and knowledge exchange for sustainable development.

Speaking as the chief guest, Singh Deo reaffirmed



Odisha's commitment to equitable agricultural growth. "Market linkages are crucial for empowering smallholder farmers. Through Farmer Producer Organisations, we are ensuring better access to equitable markets, enabling farmers to secure fair prices and improve their livelihoods," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, department's principal secretary Arabinda Kumar Padhee emphasised the state's leadership in innovation and sustainability. "Odisha's agriculture sector is at the forefront of inclusivity. Let's focus on scaling these successes to benefit every farmer," he added.

IFPRI's South Asia director Shahidur Rashid high-

lighted the importance of evidence-based strategies, noting, "This roundtable sets benchmarks for inclusive agricultural growth in Odisha and beyond."

The state also committed to establishing an advisory group comprising government representatives, IFPRI, and technical partners to refine and implement Inclusive Agricultural Transformation (IAT) indicators in line with long-term development goals.

The roundtable showcased Odisha's potential as a model for sustainable agricultural transformation, paving the way for collaborative efforts toward an equitable farming future.

SIDBI, OASME ink agreement to provide financial aid to MSMEs

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Odisha Assembly of Small and Medium Enterprises (OASME) during an international conference held here recently.

The MoU aims to provide financial assistance to OASME members, with the association facilitating the submission of applications from its member entrepreneurs to SIDBI. The bank will proactively support the availability of financial aid to these members after their credentials are vetted by OASME.



In addition to financial assistance, SIDBI will offer capital expenditure (capex) support for OASME's office, provide hand-holding support to its members, and organise workshops for knowledge dissemination. The bank will also assist members in areas like rating, accreditation, and certification.

During the event, SIDBI general manager Pramod Kumar Vijayvargia expressed his gratitude for the collaboration, highlighting that the MoU would significantly enhance OASME's capacity to provide easier access to credit. He also emphasised that the partnership would help foster the growth and development of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

BIITM ORGANISES GRAD MEET-2024

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Around 210 students from different parts of the state attended the Grad Meet-2024, organised by BIITM recently on its premises.

The event commenced with the inaugural ceremony, followed by welcoming the dignitaries and lighting the ceremonial lamp, followed by BIITM anthem.



BIITM principal Mihir Ranjan Nayak addressed the gathering and encouraged the participants. Dean of the institution Chinmaya Kumar Dash delivered the welcome address.

M/S SRB and Associates principal partner and chartered accountant Rajib Sekhar Sahoo attended the event as the chief guest. Reliance Retail cluster HR Rupsina Rath joined as the guest of honour.

One of the students volunteer delivered the vote of thanks. At the end, the dignitaries were felicitated with a memento as a token of adoration.

Modern Science lab infra at NC Autonomous College, Jajpur

State-of-the-art science labs, classrooms, library & computer labs to enhance the learning and research experience of students



significant milestone in Odisha's efforts to foster academic excellence.

Recognised as one of Odisha's premier educational institutions, NC Autonomous College was established in 1946 and attained autonomous status in

1999. The college has since been a beacon of quality education, offering diverse academic programmes and continually upgrading its facilities to meet the evolving needs of students.

In response to the increasing demand for science education

among students across Odisha, OMBADC has supported the construction of a state-of-the-art four-storied building exclusively for the Science department. This facility equipped with advanced laboratories and dedicated classrooms, underscores the commitment to integrating practical learning with theoretical education.

The new building houses cutting-edge laboratories for Physics, Chemistry, Botany, and Zoology, providing students with the tools and resources to conduct hands-on experiments. Alongside these laboratories, the facility features a head of department room, a research associates' space, a conference hall, a library, a computer lab, and a record room. These additions have created an ecosystem conducive to academic exploration and innovation.

NC Autonomous College principal Ranjan Kumar Behera highlighted the impact of the upgrades, stating, "The students in the Science department require practical education to complement their theoretical studies. With OMBADC's support, we now have world-class infrastructure that resolves previous challenges in our laboratories and provides students with opportunities to delve deeper into research across various disciplines."

a comfortable and enriching educational experience for all students.

The initiative has significantly boosted the college's appeal, attracting students from Jajpur and neighboring districts. Each year, over 500 undergraduate and more than 190 postgraduate students enroll at NC Autonomous College, many of whom aspire to achieve accolades both nationally and internationally.

OMBADC's financial support for this project reflects its larger mission of fostering development in mineral-bearing regions while ensuring long-term benefits for communities. By investing in education, OMBADC is helping to build a skilled workforce capable of driving innovation and growth in Odisha.

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	20.2°	20.5°
Min Temp	16.0°	15.5°
Humidity	96%	100%
Rainfall	51.6	33.4

FORECAST
Generally Cloudy Sky with Light Rain

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No action yet on illegal radio towers

Forest officials have registered cases after reports appeared in media but the illegal radio towers remain untouched and have not yet been dismantled

Mahakalapara, Dec 21: Illegal radio towers in villages under this block in Kendrapara district are being used to alert fishermen catching fish in prohibited zone of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary about any impending raids, thereby threatening the survival of Olive Ridley turtles. Illegal fishing in the restricted zone of Gahirmatha leads the rare sea turtles to get caught in trawler and gill nets and lose their lives prematurely. The fishermen, on receiving the message, give slip to the Forest personnel during raids and escape. The Forest officials have registered cases after reports appeared in media but the towers remain untouched and have not yet been dismantled.

GAHIRMATHA FISHING BAN



The Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary under this block has been declared a restricted zone for the protection of the rare sea turtles. Fishing activities using trawlers, boats, and other equipment have been banned from November 1, 2024, to May 2025. However, several trawler operators and fishermen in villages such as Tantiapal, Ratapanka, Sasanpeta, Narsinghpur, and Suniti have installed more than 20 Very High Frequency (VHF) radio towers fitted to bamboo poles on the

rooftops of houses of fishermen and trawler drivers. These towers allow them to secretly communicate with their kin and close friends while fishing in the sea. A report highlighting the dangers these illegal towers pose to Olive Ridley turtles was recently published in a premier vernacular daily, sparking action by the Forest department. This has raised concerns on internal coastal security. Operators reportedly use the devices to inform the fishermen and trawler drivers of patrol teams' movements, allowing them to flee the restricted zones before the enforcement teams arrive. As a result, Forest department patrol teams often return empty-handed from Gahirmatha. Sashanka Kumar Mandal, a traditional fisherman from Tantiapal, expressing frustration said, "While we depend on small dinghies for fishing to sustain our livelihood, the Forest department harasses us. Meanwhile, trawler owners employ illegal tactics to fish in restricted areas with impunity." He alleged that trawler owners have installed VHF towers, which help the fishermen and trawler drivers to escape after getting alerted about impending raids and despite their illegal operation running for years, authorities like the forest range office, Tantiapal marine police, district police, and intelligence agencies have failed to take any significant action. This negligence and lack of action has emboldened hundreds of trawlers from places like Balasore, Balaramgadi, Bhadrak, Dhamra, Kasafal, Digha, and even West Bengal to dominate the sanctuary areas. They are accused of exploiting marine resources, catching

high-value fish, and becoming rich overnight leaving conservation efforts in jeopardy. A local fisherman, on condition of anonymity, stated that the value of the VHF equipment is estimated to be Rs 40,000-50,000. Reports suggest that the towers are being used to alert fishermen on trawlers at a distance of up to 50 nautical miles from the coast. Unfortunately, turtles, including the Olive Ridley species, are getting caught in trawler and gill nets, leading to their premature deaths. As a result, turtle carcasses are washing ashore and becoming food for dogs, jackals, and crows. Meanwhile, after the transfer of Pradosh Kumar Maharana, the former Gahirmatha forest range officer, Manas Kumar Das, Assistant Conservator of Forests and Range Officer of Bhitarkanika, assumed charge Friday afternoon. When contacted, district Collector Smruti Ranjan Pradhan acknowledged that the district administration became aware of the installation of the VHF tower only after media reports highlighted the matter. A case has been registered, and action will be taken under the relevant provisions of the law, he said.

DIC GM held for bribery

POST NEWS NETWORK



Sonepur, Dec 21: Vigilance sleuths nabbed Bipin Kumar Dehuri, the general manager of District Industries Centre, here on charge of accepting bribe of Rs 500 in lieu of sanctioning a loan under the Centre-sponsored Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Srujan Karyakram (PMEGP), Saturday. Later, the sleuths conducted raids in his office, rented house at Press Colony in the town and parental house at Jayrampur village of Bhograi block in Balasore district. He was arrested and produced in the Bolangir Vigilance Court. Three teams of Vigilance department from Subarnapur, Bargarh and Balasore participated in this raid. A case 32/24 was registered by the Vigilance department in Sambalpur. Vigilance sources said Sunil Mishra of Tarava area in the dis-

trict had applied for a loan from the bank under PMEGP scheme. The loan application was to be sent to the bank by GM Dehuri for sanction of the loan. However, he kept dilly-dallying and demanded Rs 5,000 as bribe to get the work done. Left with no option, Sunil lodged a complaint at the Vigilance office in Subarnapur. A plan was hatched and Dehuri was caught red-handed while accepting the bribe in his office chamber. An amount of Rs 5,000 comprising 10 currency notes of Rs 500 denomination was seized from his possession.

Tusker tramples woman to death

Sambalpur: An elderly woman was trampled to death by a tusker at Kansar village under Jujumura police limits in Sambalpur district, Saturday. The incident occurred when the woman, identified as Mukdi Munda, 65, had gone outside to attend nature's call. She came face to face with a tusker which had strayed into the area. The pachyderm attacked the woman and trampled her to death. Villagers rushed to the spot after hearing her screams, but she was already dead by then. The body was sent for post-mortem as police and Forest personnel launched an investigation.

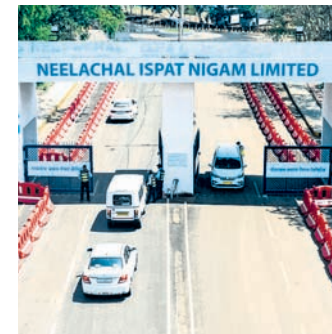
NINL EXPANSION

PNN & AGENCIES

Jajpur, Dec 21: The Odisha State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) held a public hearing for environmental clearance on the proposed expansion project of Nilachal Ispat Nigam Limited (NINL) in Jajpur district. The proposed expansion will increase NINL's production capacity from 0.981 million tonne per annum (MTPA) to 9.5 MTPA without additional land requirements. Over 225 people, including some opposing NINL's proposed expansion project, gave their opinion at the public

SPCB holds public hearing on environment clearance

hearing for the environmental clearance held by SPCB Friday. "Around 225 people have given their opinion on the NINL's expansion project. We will send the people's views to the Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change," said the Regional Officer, SPCB, Kalinga Nagar, Madan Mohan Sahu. Asked about the disturbance during the public hearing, Additional District Magistrate (ADM), Kalinga Nagar, Sapan Kumar Nanda, who presided over the public hearing, said, "The people have given their opinion in the public hearing." The public hearing was also



attended by NINL Executive Sanjeev Kumar Ghosh, who gave a detailed presentation on the plant's proposed expansion plan, while MD and CEO, Sud-

hir Kumar Mehta, addressed public concerns. Tata Steel Long Products Limited acquired NINL in July 2022 and achieved operational milestones swiftly. Within 100 days, the plant resumed operations, and its rated capacity was achieved within nine months. NINL officials informed the participants that comprehensive upgrades included advanced pollution control systems such as Electrostatic Precipitators (ESPs), cyclone separators, dry fog systems, bag filters, and water sprinkling mechanisms. To further minimise environmental impact, a scrubber-based gas cleaning plant was introduced to treat BOF (basic oxygen furnace) gas. Continuous Environmental Monitoring Systems (CEMS) were installed to monitor air quality and emissions, alongside an Effluent Quality Monitoring System (EQMS) to ensure real-time evaluation of water discharge and Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP) performance, they said. The two-phased expansion plan will include state-of-the-art facilities such as raw material handling systems, a coke

plant, sinter plant, blast furnace, steel melting shop, and rebar and wire rod mill. Baseline environmental data collected from March to May 2024, covering air quality, water quality, noise, and soil conditions within a 10-km radius, has already been submitted to the SPCB for review, the company informed the people. The expansion project's design incorporates cutting-edge technology to meet stringent environmental standards, with treated wastewater being fully reused within the plant, the company said.

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TPWODL holds Urja Mela 2024



Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: TP Western Odisha Distribution Limited (TPWODL), a joint venture between Tata Power and the Odisha government, organised the Urja Mela 2024 at Guru Nanak Public School, Sambalpur, Saturday. The event, part of TPWODL's CSR initiative 'Club Enerji', saw participation of over 300 students from 25 schools, aiming to raise awareness about energy conservation and sustainability. The event, inaugurated by SN Nanda, Regional Director of the

Odisha State Pollution Control Board (SPCB), featured various activities such as science exhibitions, quizzes, drawing competitions, and a 'Best out of Waste' contest. A special highlight was a skit on energy conservation performed by students from the Blind School in Burla. In recognition of their talent, TPWODL provided Braille slates, audio devices, and other aids to support the students. Club Enerji focuses on educating students about the importance of energy conservation, climate change, and sustainable development.

RSP wins 15th Kalinga Safety Excellence Award

Rourkela: SAIL, Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) has bagged the prestigious 15th Kalinga Safety Excellence Award - 2023 in Platinum category in two segments. Bolani Ore Mines (BOM), under the Odisha Group of Mines of RSP, received the Kalinga Safety Excellence Award in Platinum category under the Iron Ore Mining Sector. In the National Safety Conclave - 2024 organised at Bhubaneswar December 18, Alok Verma, ED in-charge (Works) and Asha Kartha, CGM (Safety & Fire Services) received the top award on behalf of RSP, while Joydeb Chatopadhyay, CGM (BOM) received the award for the Bolani Ore Mines. Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singhdeo and Minister of Agriculture and Farmer's Empowerment, and Energy department presented the award in the presence of Lebohang Valentine Mochaba, High Commissioner, Kingdom of Lesotho. These awards have reinforced RSP's commitment to occupational safety, health and environment. The function was organised by IQEMS in association with Institute of Public Enterprises, Hyderabad. The 15th National Safety Conclave, organised by OSSC, brought together safety professionals, experts, and organisations from across the country to share best practices, innovations, and experiences in occupational safety and health.

'Both tigresses brought from Maharashtra in good health'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Baripada, Dec 21: Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) officials in Mayurbhanj district Saturday said both the tigresses brought from Maharashtra are in good health, despite one of them having ventured into the forests of neighbouring West Bengal. STR Field Director Prakash Chand Gogineni said, "Tigress Jamuna is fit and healthy within the Similipal landscape, while three-year-old Zeenat moved to West Bengal Friday morning." Gogineni added, "Forest departments of both the states are tracking Zeenat through signals from her radio collar, and efforts are underway to guide her back into Similipal." Jamuna and Zeenat were brought to STR from Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Maharashtra with the goal of introducing a new gene pool to the tiger population, officials said. According to the All Odisha

Tiger Estimation (AOTE) 2023-24 report, Similipal is home to around 27 tigers and 12 cubs. Jamuna was brought from Maharashtra October 27, while Zeenat arrived November 15 and was released into the wild November 24. The tigress is being constantly monitored, and she has successfully hunted, Gogineni confirmed. STR officials said Zeenat travelled to Jharkhand from Similipal December 10. A week later, she was spotted hunting a buffalo in Rajabasa jungles near Chakulia December 17.

Bank of India Gold Auction Notice

Zonal Office: Bhubaneswar Zone, 1/D, Star House, Jaydev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015, Ph. 0674-2362249

It is hereby brought to the notice of the following gold loan borrowers, their legal heirs, person engaged in the business of gold ornaments and general public that in spite of repeated notices by the Bank, the following borrowers are not repaying their dues to the Bank. Notice is hereby published that if they fail to deposit all their dues in their respective gold loan accounts (including Up-to-date interest and all costs, charges/expenses) by 07.01.2025, their pledged gold ornaments will be auctioned at **Concerned Branch Premises on 08.01.2025 at 11.00 AM**. For this Bank shall not be held responsible for any inconvenience or damage caused to the concerned borrowers and no allegations or representations will be entertained from any borrowers in this regard. Bank reserves the right to cancel the auction without assigning any reason in case, the bidding price so arrived at is observed to be low or inadequate. Further, if needed be Bank reserves the right to change the date and time of the above scheduled auction or cancel the same without assigning any reasons thereon. Purity and net weight and reserve price of gold ornaments/ coins etc. will be available to interested bidders on auction date and auction venue/auction portal:

Sl. No.	A/c. No.	Name & Address of the Borrower(s)	Gross Wt. in Gram	Net Wt. in Gram	Total Dues as on 30.11.2024 (excluding unapplied interest Charges, Cost & Expenses)
BANK OF INDIA, SASTRINAGAR BRANCH, PLOT NO.: 206, SASTRINAGAR, BHUBANESWAR-751001, MOB.: 9438456140					
1.	513277610000378	Nirmala Swain, Permanent Address: At/PO: Gokhakhathi, Dist.: Kendrapara, Odisha, PIN-754224, Present Address: D/o- Duryodhan Rout, 1607, SBI Colony, Sastrinagar, Bhubaneswar-751001.	27.450	26.352	₹ 98,639.80
BANK OF INDIA, SUM HOSPITAL BRANCH, PLOT NO.: K8/HIG-1263, KALINGA NAGAR, SUM HOSPITAL SQUARE, BHUBANESWAR-751003, MOB.: 8328953548					
1.	559877610000286	Sushree Priyadarshani Patra, Address: D/o- Babulakothia, W/o- Satya Narayan Patra, At: Mardakot, PO: Mardakot, Beguniapada, Ganjam, Odisha-761031.	54.290	50.500	₹ 1,70,201.00
2.	559877610000299		45.960	44.000	₹ 1,97,797.00
BANK OF INDIA, SAILASHREE VIHAR BRANCH, PLOT NO. 331/2012, FIRST FLOOR, UNIT-41, NEAR DAMANA HAT, CHANDRASEKHARPUR, BHUBANESWAR-751016, MOB.: 8861961676					
1.	511377610000410	Naba Kishore Nayak, HIG-2/41, Kapila Prasad, Bhimatangi, Bhubaneswar-751002	37.670	33.000	₹ 1,61,179.78
BANK OF INDIA, STPI BRANCH, STPI ELITE BUILDING, GOTHAPATANA, BHUBANESWAR-751003, MOB.: 9348856530					
1.	559977610000271	Saraswati Pradhan, Address-1: D/o- Ullas Pradhan, At/PO: Taraboi, Via: Jatni, Dist.: Khurda, Address-2: C/o- Sanjay Mohanty, At: Radhaballabh Sahi, Ward No. 14, Khurda-752055.	52.990	6.400	₹ 17,000.00

Place: Bhubaneswar Date: 21.12.2024 Zonal Manager, Bank of India

Bank of India DEMAND NOTICE

Zonal Office : Star House, 1/D, Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015

Notice under Section 13 (2) of SARFAESI Act, 2002 for Enforcement of Security Interest

The Bank has granted following various credit facilities to the under mentioned Borrower/Legal Heirs & the amount outstanding dues mentioned below has not been paid in time. Therefore Demand Notice under Sec. 13 (2) of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 was issued by the Authorized Officer against the following Borrower/Legal Heirs of the **Bank of India, IIT Bhubaneswar Argul Branch** but the same could not be served to the below mentioned parties. Therefore, the contents of the same including the amount outstanding, Loan amount and details of the secured assets are herein furnished below.

IIT BHUBANESWAR ARGUL BRANCH / Name and Address of Borrower/Legal Heirs	Nature / Limit	Date of NPA / Date of Demand Notice	Amount as per Notice under SARFAESI Act	Details of the mortgaged property
Borrower: Mr. Dillip Kumar Paikaray, S/o.: Late Bhima Paikaray / Legal Heirs of Guarantor Late Bhima Paikaray are: 1) Mr. Dillip Kumar Paikaray, S/o.: Late Bhima Paikaray, 2) Mrs. Lili Jena, D/o.: Late Bhima Paikaray, 3) Mrs. Dali Routray, D/o.: Late Bhima Paikaray, 4) Mrs. Jaliprabha Pradhan, D/o.: Late Bhima Paikaray, 5) Mrs. Pramila Paikaray, W/o.: Late Bhima Paikaray, All are At: Mathasahi, Near Pallabi Public School, PO: Kanti, Dist.: Puri-752104	Loan Against Property / ₹9,20,000/-	29.04.2024 / 29.11.2024	₹7,20,634/- + Interest & expenses thereon	All that part and parcel of Land & Building situated over Plot No.: 482/636, Khata No.: 242/27, Area: 4138.20 sqft., Kissam: Gharabari, At/Mouza: Anantpur, P.S.: Pipili, S/O: Pipili, Dist.: Puri, Standing in the name of Late Bhima Paikaray and bounded by North: Pipili - Jatni Road, South: Bhima Paikaray, East: Babina Routray, West: Kedar Chandra Samantaray

As the above mentioned Borrower of the IIT Bhubaneswar Argul Branch have defaulted in repayment of the principal loan/ facility in installments/interest/ both, the account has been classified as **NPA**, in accordance with the directions or guidelines issued by the RBI. In spite of our repeated demands you (borrower) have not paid any amount towards the amount outstanding in your account, you have not discharged your liabilities. Hence, we are now constrained to make this publication of Demand Notice, required u/s 13(2) of the said Act and Rule 3 of the security interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. You are hereby called upon to pay the aforesaid amount alongwith further interest, cost, Incidental Expenses, Charges etc. within a period of **60 days** from the date of Notice, failing which we will take necessary action under the provisions of sec 13(4) of the said Act. against the secured assets including taking possession of your secured assets and sale them. If the dues are not fully recovered in the course of these actions against secured assets, then the Bank reserves the right to take action by filing recovery action against you before DRT/Court for recovery of the same. It may be noted that under the provisions of Section 13(8) of the SARFAESI Act, right of redemption is available to you, by paying the dues of the Bank together with all cost, charges and expenses incurred by the Bank at any time, till the date of publication of notice for public auction or inviting quotations or tender from public or private treaty for transfer by way of lease, assignment or sale of the secured assets. Please take note that as per sub section (13) of the aforesaid Act, after receipt of this notice, you are restrained from transferring or creating any encumbrances on the aforesaid secured assets whether by way of sale, lease, license, gift, mortgage or otherwise. **This notice is issued without prejudice to the rights of the Bank available under any other law.**

Place : Bhubaneswar Date: 22.12.2024 Chief Manager & Authorized Officer Bank of India

EAST COAST RAILWAY

No.: SDCM/KUR/E-Auction/NFR/Press Clippings/Dec/2024-25/6763 Dtd. 17.12.2024

Sl. No.1: DESCRIPTION OF ASSETS: ADVERTISEMENT THROUGH VINYL STICKER WRAPPING FOR TRAIN NO. 20841/42 BHUBANESWAR-VISAKHAPATNAM VANDE BHARAT EXPRESS. ADVERTISEMENT OFFERED ON INTERIOR OF THE TRAIN ONLY. TOTAL AREA OFFERED FOR ADVERTISEMENT IS 1693 SFT.

Sl. No.2: DESCRIPTION OF ASSETS: SETTING UP 02 NOS. MULTI BRANDED RAIL COACH RESTAURANT AT PURI RAILWAY STATION.

Auction Date/Hours at 1100-1130 hrs. of 03.01.2025 (for Sl. No. 1) & at 1100-1140 hrs. of 03.01.2025 (for Sl. No. 2)

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Complete details & tender documents will be available at website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, PR-821/P/24-25 Khurda Road

EAST COAST RAILWAY

(1) Tender Notice No. C-NIT-TS-KSNG-GMU-PF-3 Dt. 10.12.2024

Name of the Work : TENDER FOR PROVISION OF CATERING STALL (TEA STALL), GENERAL MINOR UNIT AT PLATFORM NO. 2/3, KESINGA (EXISTING) UNDER "B" CATEGORY RAILWAY STATION FOR A PERIOD OF 05 YEARS.

Reserve Price per annum ₹ 1,05,036/-, EMD: ₹ 26,500/-, Tender document cost (non-refundable): ₹ 2,500/- + (18%) GST = ₹ 2,950/-.

(2) Tender Notice No. C-NIT-RR2-BRGA-GMU-W-PF0 Dt. 11.12.2024

Name of the Work : TENDER FOR PROVISION OF REFRESHMENT ROOM, GENERAL MINOR UNIT-WOMEN AT PLATFORM NO. 1, BARGARH ROAD STATION UNDER "B" CATEGORY RAILWAY STATION FOR A PERIOD OF 05 YEARS.

Reserve Price per annum ₹ 1,94,522/-, EMD: ₹ 50,000/-, Tender document cost (non-refundable): ₹ 2,500/- + (18%) GST = ₹ 2,950/-.

Last date and time of submission of tender: upto 1100 hrs. of 03.01.2025 (for both tenders). Date and time of opening of tender: at 1130 hrs. of 03.01.2025 (for both tenders). Contract period: 05 years (for both tenders).

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Complete details & tender documents will be available at website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, PR-817/P/24-25 Sambalpur

EAST COAST RAILWAY

File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/24-25/ E-Tender/90 Dt.: 17.12.2024

(1) Tender No. e-Tender/CenKUR-264-2024 Dt.: 10.12.2024

Description: PROPOSED EXECUTION OF PWAY RELATED WORK FOR PROPOSED RAISING OF SPEED FROM 30 KMPH TO 50 KMPH IN LOOP LINES FROM SADASHIBPUR TO JORANDA ROAD OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx cost of the work: ₹ 44.42 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 88,900/-.

(2) Tender No. e-Tender/SouthKUR-263-2024, Dt.: 10.12.2024

Description: PROPOSED MISCELLANEOUS REPAIRS TO LEVEL CROSSING APPROACH ROADS, CIRCULATING AREA, COLONY ROADS, SERVICE BUILDINGS AND PAINTING TO STEEL STRUCTURE FROM GANJAM (EX) TO ICHCHAPURAM UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER/ BRAHMAPUR OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Approx cost of the work ₹ 204.30 Lakhs, EMD: ₹ 2,52,200/-.

Completion period: 10 months (for both tenders).

Tender closing date & time : at 1500 hrs. of 01.01.2025 (for both tenders).

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

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

Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 10 (Ten) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/ corrigenda issued for this tender.

Divisional Railway Manager (Engg), PR-822/P/24-25 Khurda Road

FOCUS CLIMATE ACTION

INVESTING IN OCEAN



Putting the ocean at the center of our climate strategies would transform it from a silent victim of global warming into an active force for mitigation and resilience-building

limits the global temperature increase to 1.5° Celsius. And mitigating climate change is just the beginning; a healthy ocean plays a pivotal role in creating sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable communities worldwide. Consider nature-based solutions like the restoration of mangroves, seagrasses, and coral reefs. Beyond sequestering carbon, these ecosystems act as natural defenses against rising seas and extreme weather, and they form the basis of local livelihoods. In Palau, marine protected areas safeguard biodiversity, support sustainable fisheries, and bolster the tourism industry. So far, the ocean – including the ecosystems it supports – has largely been treated as an afterthought in global climate strategies, sidelined in favour of more visible priorities like renewable energy and curbs on emissions. The High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy has revealed that many of its member countries – which together govern half the world’s territorial oceans – have yet to integrate the ocean fully into their NDCs. This omission represents a vital opportunity, which countries should seize as they pre-

pare their NDC submissions before the February deadline. Putting the ocean at the center of our climate strategies would transform it from a silent victim of global warming into an active force for mitigation and resilience-building. The Blue Economy and Finance Forum takes place in June, one of the “special events” that will set the stage for the third UN Ocean Conference in Nice. The BEFF aims to unlock financing for ocean-based solutions, particularly biodiversity-positive investments that simultaneously support economic development and climate goals. But, as we saw at COP29, public budgets are already stretched thin. Mobilising private capital alongside public investment is thus essential to drive meaningful change. To understand why, look no further than the shipping industry, which emits more carbon than all but six countries. Critical pieces of the net-zero puzzle are already in place for the industry. Shipping companies are planning their low-carbon transitions. The technologies they need – in particular, “green fuels” like green methanol and ammonia – have been developed. And producers are

ready to increase output, while continuing to innovate. And yet scaling up production has proved difficult, because investors still view crucial green technologies as too risky. This mismatch between ambition and funding underscores the need for creative financing solutions, such as government-backed guarantees or blended-finance instruments. Fortunately, the New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance, agreed at COP29, offers an opportunity to set ambitious targets and leverage innovative mechanisms to unlock private investment at scale. Despite its disappointments, COP29 delivered another reason for cautious optimism: the discussions taken there reflected growing recognition that ocean action is climate action. This idea, which began gaining traction in 2019 during the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue at COP25, has evolved into a powerful movement. As a result, momentum is building behind ocean-based climate solutions. But harnessing this momentum to deliver measurable action – such as the introduction of more marine protected areas covering mangroves and seagrass meadows or scaling up the decarbonization of the shipping industry – will require collaboration across sectors and borders. And it will require far more financing. As we look ahead to the BEFF and beyond, we must make one thing crystal clear: investing in the ocean is investing in our collective future. *The writer is Palau’s Ambassador to the United Nations, and Co-Chair of the Steering Committee for the Blue Economy and Finance Forum.*

TO DATE, INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR CLIMATE ACTION HAS FALLEN FAR SHORT OF MEETING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES’ NEEDS



Ilana Seid

Following the recent 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, we are confronted with one pressing question: What’s next? With countries set to submit early next year their updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, the world has an opportunity – and a responsibility – to take transformative action to address the climate crisis. The ocean must be central to this effort. Nobody understands this better than small island developing states (SIDS) like Palau. For us, climate policy is not some abstract debate about hypothetical future risks; it is a fight for survival. Already, coral reefs are undergoing bleaching; storms are becoming increasingly frequent and destructive; and droughts are undermining food security. Rising sea levels threaten not just our land, but also our culture, our way of life, and our very existence. To date, international support for climate action has fallen far short of meeting developing countries’ needs. SIDS collectively receive less than 2 per cent of global climate finance, even as they oversee 30 per cent of the world’s territorial waters. It is a striking imbalance, especially given the ocean’s enormous untapped potential to help mitigate climate change. The ocean is our planet’s largest carbon sink, absorbing 25 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions and a staggering 90 per cent of the excess heat generated by a warming atmosphere. According to a 2023 report, ocean-based climate solutions can get us as much as 35 per cent closer to our emissions-reduction targets for 2050, on a pathway that

In Anticipation

What should we look forward to in 2025? I mean “look forward to” in the sense of anticipate rather than welcome. It will be a defining year and period in several ways. The most important developments will come after Donald Trump takes over as US president again next month. What happens in US politics has affected the world over the last 100 years, but the US has not had a president like Trump. Most American presidents even when they campaign on the idea of change actually prefer continuity. Even breakthrough figures like Barack Obama did not do much to change policy on things like war and the Middle East and it has not been easy in the last four decades to separate the economic policies of Democrat presidents from Republican ones. Joe Biden for instance continued with Trump’s tariffs on China. Trump is different because of his base and appeal to people who want disruption and want the status quo to end. He is also unusual for having won non-consecutive terms. This means that unlike sitting presidents, he campaigned against continuity but it also means that he will not be seen as a lame-duck especially because he will likely anoint his successor as head of the Republicans. Though he leads a political party seen as representing conservatism, Trump is by instinct not a conservative, he is a radical. For all of these reasons, we should look forward to large shifts. The significant one will come on China. Trump opened his first campaign nine years ago with a speech in which he referred to China 23 times. The 2016-2020 presidency saw tariffs which remain to this day but China has grown by 50 per cent since Trump gave his famous escalator speech. It has not been possible for the US to stop China from growing. And China has now become stronger and can push back, both on the economic and the military front. For this reason, Trump will have to choose to either escalate or give up. It is unlikely he will do the latter. His campaign was founded on escalation. This will affect the world and it will affect us. People talk about the ‘China plus 1’ strategy of India benefiting from companies exiting China or hedging their bets elsewhere. But the fact is that for the last quarter century India has been a beneficiary of global trade becoming open and it tends to lose when it closes. Our exports rise when global trade rises, they flatten or fall when global trade flattens or falls. No matter which government is in power here, this trend does not shift and will not shift. So we should not assume that an escalation in the US-China trade war will favour us, it will harm everyone. Another issue that will affect the world negatively is on climate change. Trump pulled out of the Paris Accords in his first term and has promised to pivot from the green energy focus of Biden (through his Inflation Reduction Act, which gave large subsidies for electrification) towards more drilling and more gasoline. This will create a cocooned America where Ford and General Motors continue making fossil fuel pick-up trucks which only Americans drive while China tightens its stranglehold over the global production of electric and hybrid cars. It is unclear what Trump can do to end the Israeli genocide in Gaza or the Russian war against Ukraine. His general view has been to say that America should get out of wars but not much can be discerned from the team he has picked on what will happen in 2025. Trump won over Arab-American voters, particularly those of Lebanese origin, in states like Michigan because they were furious with Biden. Hoping that America will stop gifting bombs to Israel that are used to murder Palestinian children might be too much given the bipartisan support for Israeli occupation, but any move that ends or even lessens the genocide will be welcome. It is remarkable to those on the outside given the mess America has found itself in since 2001 across the world that it still staggers along in its Middle East policy. Trump has more agency over Israel’s actions than he does over Russia’s. He seems to dislike NATO more than any US president before him and has seen it more as a cost centre than a strategic asset. He wants NATO to pay for European security against a potential Russian threat and not America. If, like his tariffs on China, this view is seen as wise by his successor then it will result in a shift. Trump does not see Europe and Mexico and Canada as strong allies but as nations which have to be brought to heel on the question of trade and also security. This will raise questions inside of these places on whether they should be warming up to China on issues of trade and perhaps even other things such as currency. The future often seems to promise big change but does not fully deliver. It is most unlikely that 2025 and the four years of Trump will conform to that general rule. Things on many fronts — artificial intelligence, climate change, space, inequality, authoritarianism — are moving along more rapidly than had been anticipated, almost to the extent that there is no control. It will be an exciting 2025, though one is not sure if the events that produce the excitement will be welcome.



Aakar Patel

IT WILL BE AN EXCITING 2025, THOUGH ONE IS NOT SURE IF THE EVENTS THAT PRODUCE THE EXCITEMENT WILL BE WELCOME

SPECTRUM DIPLOMACY

Reciprocating the goodwill

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake came on a three-day visit. This was his first overseas visit after assuming power last September. This is also in keeping with the diplomatic tradition that Sri Lankan Heads of the Government should make India their first port of call in reciprocation of India’s goodwill to her neighbours. But in the recent geopolitical situation in South Asia, the Heads of the States have been departing from this tradition. The Interim Prime Minister of Bangladesh Mohammad Yunus made his first visit to the United States. Maldivian President Mohammad Muiz went to Beijing in his first state visit. So, Dissanayake’s maiden foreign visit to India is significant from Sri Lanka’s foreign policy point of view prioritising India. Contrary to anticipations in India and in the neighbourhood about the personality and perspectives of Dissanayake, he has demonstrated pragmatism in his approach to Sri Lanka’s international affairs. Dissanayake has a background of communism and his party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) was decidedly a revolu-



DK Giri

NEIGHBOURS LIKE SRI LANKA HAVE BEGUN TO REALISE THAT NEW DELHI DOES NOT HAVE HEGEMONIC AMBITIONS

tionary party. It had caused two armed uprisings against the government of Sri Lanka: once in 1971 (SLFP), and another in 1987–1989 (UNP). The motive for both uprisings was to establish a socialist state. Many observers were speculating that Dissanayake may tilt towards Communist Party of China. But, unlike his predecessor Mahinda Rajapaksha who was perceived to be pro-Chinese, Dissanayake has called at New Delhi in his first visit. Back home, he enjoys a clean image. Political experience shows that governance responsibility moderates a leader. Dissanayake has done a reality check of the economic and social conditions in Sri Lanka and has put his ideological predilections on the backburner. Sri Lankan economy suffered a severe meltdown in 2022 causing shortage of food, fuel and medicines. This also resulted in a political upheaval causing the overthrow of Rajapaksha government. This was largely the consequence of Colombo falling into the debt-trap of China. India extended massive support to bail Sri Lanka out without attaching strings.

I gathered only last week from Sri Lankan public in Colombo that the President is so far incorruptible. It is another matter that he has been in power less than six months. I also noticed a great deal of goodwill in Sri Lankan public for India. A three-wheeler (tuk-tuk in Sri Lanka) driver who was reasonably politically informed was effusive about Modi supporting Sri Lanka at the time of their need. He lamented, “There was no fuel or gas available. We were struggling to run our vehicles and industries. Prime Minister Modi saved us.” This was certainly a remarkable change of public opinion after the unhappy episode of India and LTTE. In his statements to the media in Delhi, Dissanayake profusely thanked and acknowledged New Delhi’s timely support in one of the worst crises of Sri Lankan economy. As a reciprocal gesture, he committed to India that, “We will never allow our territory to be used in a manner that is detrimental to India’s interests”. Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded warmly to this highly friendly gesture, “We are engaged in economic and devel-

opment cooperation with all 25 districts of Sri Lanka. Our investment and projects are always aligned with Sri Lanka’s development priorities.” This was a hint at Beijing’s predatory and devious approach to trade and aid. India’s relation with some of her neighbours has somewhat deteriorated owing to a ‘big brother’ complex and some lapses by the Ministry of External Affairs. The scope of discussing this is limited here. But what is heartening is that neighbours like Sri Lanka have begun to realise that New Delhi does not have hegemonic ambitions, does not browbeat her smaller neighbours, and is a neighbour in need. This feeling is evident in the Sri Lankan President’s visit. Let this spirit continue in mutual respect, understanding and interest. While South Asian countries may continue to bargain and negotiate with both India and China, New Delhi should give them a healthy, reliable and viable choice. *The writer is Secretary General, Association for Democratic Socialism.*

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WISDOM CORNER

- Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy** DALE CARNEGIE
- All fixed set patterns are incapable of adaptability or pliability. The truth is outside of all fixed patterns** BRUCE LEE
- People have a hard time letting go of their suffering. Out of a fear of the unknown, they prefer suffering that is familiar** THICH NHAT HANH

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1481:** The member states of the Swiss Confederation concluded the Diet of Stans, an agreement whereby civil war was averted.
- 1856:** Frank B. Kellogg, U.S. secretary of state from 1925 to 1929 who negotiated the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928—a multilateral agreement designed to prohibit war as an instrument of national policy—and won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1929, was born.
- 1894:** Alfred Dreyfus sentenced to life in prison. On this day in 1894, on the basis of specious evidence and anti-Semitism, French army officer Alfred Dreyfus was sentenced to life in prison for treason, sparking a controversy that divided France for 12 years.

Letters
TO THE EDITOR
Readers of Orissa Post are most welcome to contribute letters (100 words), articles and columns (between 600-1000 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: edit@orissapost.com
OrissaPOST
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Groundbreaking vaccine
Sir, Russia has made an extraordinary contribution to the fight against cancer with the development of a pioneering mRNA-based cancer vaccine. This innovative vaccine, set to be available free of cost by early 2025, represents a major step forward in cancer treatment. Targeting existing cancer cells, the vaccine has shown impressive results in pre-clinical trials, demonstrating its potential to slow tumour growth and prevent metastasis. Through the use of advanced mRNA technology, this vaccine offers a new hope for cancer patients, with the ability to reduce tumour size and limit cancer spread. Russia’s decision to make this life-saving vaccine available free of cost reflects its strong commitment to ensuring that cutting-edge medical treatments are accessible to all, irrespective of financial status. A crucial factor in the vaccine’s rapid development has been the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI). By leveraging AI-driven neural networks, researchers have significantly reduced the time required to design personalised vaccines, with the process now taking less than an hour. This revolutionary use of AI could redefine the future of cancer treatment, accelerating the development of personalised therapies. Russia’s groundbreaking work stands out for its promise of universal access to this groundbreaking vaccine.
Krishna Kumar Vepakomma, HYDERABAD

Double standards
Sir, This refers to “CB to probe case against Rahul,” Orissa POST, December 21. The scuffle on the Parliament premises which left two BJP MPs injured could have been investigated by the Parliament Street Police, but only to give the incident an extra importance Delhi police’s Crime Branch has taken over the investigation. Surprisingly enough, the local police station made no delay to register an FIR upon receiving a Petition of Complaint from two BJP MPs let alone taking a legal advice, but the same gesture was not shown to the Congress when it accused BJP MPs of misbehaving with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge on the same Parliament premises. The police is now seeking legal advice whether or not a separate FIR could be filed against the BJP MPs. This double standard attitude of the police makes our democracy a laughing stock.
Arun Gupta, KOLKATA



Only responsibilities have changed. The development works (in the state) are a continuation of the efforts in the last two and a half years. Collectively, we have taken all decisions

RAJ ACCIDENT TOLL RISES TO 14

The toll in the LPG tanker accident on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway rose to 14 after three more people succumbed Saturday, while Rajasthan High Court issued notices to the central and the state governments after taking suo-motu cognisance



of the day quote

They (Opposition) do not have any (concrete) issue to raise that is why they are saying this. We have the agenda of taking the nation forward from a political as well as economic point of view



An atmosphere of fear is being created in Beed. We (the opposition) will all counter it collectively. I assure you that we will not rest until the state and Central governments give justice to the family



The police fought insurgency in the Northeast for the past four decades. As insurgency has now ended, we need to change the approach of the force to ensure people get justice within three years of lodging FIRs



GoM to consider cess on GST by states hit by natural calamities

Jaisalmer, Dec 21: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday said the GST Council decided to form a group of ministers (GoM) to consider allowing states to levy cess under Goods and Services Tax to overcome financial distress after natural calamities.

Everybody agreed, even Andhra Pradesh's minister agreed that a Group of Ministers be formed and Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, volunteered (to be a part of it).

Earlier in the day, Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav said that there was a consensus that a GoM be formed to look into the demand for a 1 per cent calamity cess on certain luxury goods.

Earlier in 2018, the GST Council had decided to set up a GoM to look into similar demand made by Kerala.

The GoM in January 2019 decided to approve the levy of 1 per cent 'calamity cess' by Kerala for a period of two years to fund rehabilitation work in the state hit by floods.

Why is ECI afraid of transparency: Cong

New Delhi, Dec 21: The Congress Saturday hit out at the Election Commission for tweaking an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage, asking why the poll panel was afraid of transparency.

The Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of 'papers' or documents open to public inspection.

ECI so afraid of transparency? The Congress general secretary asked. Transparency and openness are key in exposing and eliminating corruption and unethical practices and information restores confidence in the process, Ramesh noted.

Shiv Sena (UBT) might go solo for BMC polls

Talking to reporters, Raut said party workers were insisting the organisation go solo in the local body polls, as there were more aspirants than for the Lok Sabha or state Assembly polls



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 21: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut Saturday hinted that his party might go solo in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) election without exiting the Maha Vikas Aghadi.

had we got more seats to contest in Mumbai (during the assembly polls), it would have won them," he said, claiming that it was necessary to win Mumbai or else the city would be separated from Maharashtra.

The Shiv Sena contested 24 seats in Mumbai and won 10, while the Congress fielded candidates for 10 seats and bagged four, and the NCP (SP) contested two seats unsuccessfully.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the party would legally challenge amendment. "If there was ever a vindication of our assertions regarding the rapidly eroding integrity of the electoral process managed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in recent times, this is it," Ramesh said in a post on X.

According to Rule 93, all 'papers' related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers". Ramesh said sunlight was the best disinfectant and information would restore faith in the process -- a reasoning Punjab and Haryana High Court agreed with when it directed the ECI to share all information it was legally required to with the public.

Law ministry and ECI officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment. Punjab and Haryana High Court had recently directed the poll panel to provide copies of the required documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections to advocate Mehmood Pracha.

SHORT TAKES

Major landslide in Uttarakhand

Pithoragarh: A major landslide occurred on Dharchula-Tawaghat-Lipulekh road here in Uttarakhand, resulting in the closure of the road. There was no casualty, officials said.

Man sentenced to death in rape case

Gonda (UP): A court here Saturday awarded death sentence to a man convicted of rape and murder a four-year-old girl, a senior police officer said.

Mandala puja: TDB to restrict bookings

Sabarimala (Kerala): The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) Saturday decided to restrict the virtual and spot bookings at the Lord Ayyappa temple here December 25 and 26 as part of crowd management initiatives in connection with the annual mandala puja festival.

Two arrested with pistols, cartridges

Chandigarh: The Punjab Police has busted a gangster module with the arrest of two members and seized from them two pistols and cartridges, a top officer said Saturday.

House gutted

Shimla: A multi-storey house was completely gutted in fire in Shimla's Krishna nagar area, officials said. No one was reported hurt.

CENTRE TWEAKS POLL RULES



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Sadhus of Shri Panchayati Akhada Niranjani arrive at Prayagraj railway station ahead of the Mahakumbh festival in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

Declining camel population sets alarm bells ringing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: The camel population in India faces a critical decline that requires immediate intervention, a top animal husbandry official has warned and called for enhanced support for traditional herding communities.



Alka Upadhyaya, Secretary of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), highlighted the urgent need to protect camels while speaking at a national workshop on camel milk production held at Bikaner, Rajasthan Friday.

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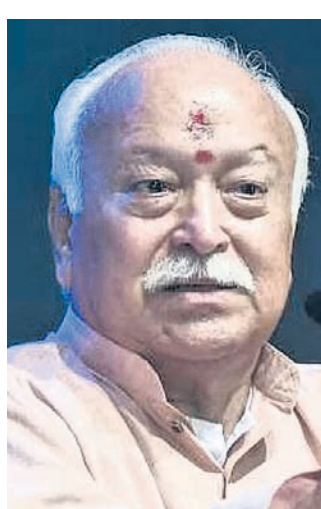
dairy industry representatives, camel milk sector. The gathering coincided with the United

MP to give 2 tigers, get 2 lions from Guj

Bhopal: The Van Vihar National Park in Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal Saturday received two Asiatic lions from Gujarat in exchange for two Bengal tigers, a forest department official said.

Eminent Muslims' group hails Bhagwat's remarks

Bhagwat had expressed concern over resurgence of several temple-mosque disputes and said certain individuals, after the construction of Ayodhya Ram temple, seem to believe they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up such issues



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: A civil society group comprising eminent Muslims, including former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi, Saturday hailed RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's remarks battling for an inclusive society and hoped that this will be a guide to many who are "attacking the very fabric" of the country.

have led to grave communal tensions. "Therefore, a statement from the Sarsanghchalak carries immense weight and gives hope to all right-thinking people in Bharat as indeed across the world," the letter signed by Quraishi, former Delhi Lt Governor Najeeb Jung, former Aligarh Muslim University Vice Chancellor Zameer Uddin Shah, former MP Shahid Siddiqui and industrialist Saeed Sherwani said.

Bhagwat had expressed concern over resurgence of several temple-mosque disputes and said certain individuals, after the construction of Ayodhya Ram temple, seem to believe they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up such issues. Delivering a lecture on "India: The Vishwaguru" at Sahjeevan Vyakhyannala (lecture series) in Pune Thursday, Bhagwat advocated for an inclusive society and said the world needs to be shown that India can live together in harmony.

"We do hope this will be a guide to many who are attacking the very fabric of our country," it said. Highlighting the plurality of Indian society, the RSS chief said Christmas is celebrated in Ramakrishna Mission, adding only we can do this because we are Hindus. "We have been living in harmony for a long time. If we want to provide this harmony to the world, we need to create a model of it. After the construction of the Ram Mandir, some people think they can become leaders of Hindus by raking up similar issues in new places. This is not acceptable," he said.

YEAR OF ELECTIONS

More than 60 countries around the globe, and more than half of the world's population, went to the polling booths in 2024 to cast their votes, in the unprecedented year of elections

In 2024, people voted in countries that were home to almost half the world's population. The votes took place at a time of global unrest, with conflict in Ukraine and the Middle East, and cost-of-living crises in many countries after the COVID-19 pandemic rippled out into supply chain shortages and high inflation. From India to Ireland, the UK to Uruguay, Senegal to South Africa, voters went out to do their civic duty. People lined up in rain or scorching sunshine, some draping themselves in national flags or wearing shirts or even masks bearing the face of their preferred candidate. Many of the elections were disputed and some sparked angry protests from those who felt their voice had not been recognised. Observers said the elections in Mozambique, for example, were not free and fair. The Opposition in Venezuela produced a vote tally that differed from the official one. In Algeria, the incumbent won 95% of the vote and in Indonesia protesters clashed with police over proposed changes to election law. Nationalistic ideologies gained ground in elections in France,

Romania, and Georgia, where the president called for protests after parliamentary elections that were marred by allegations of vote-rigging. In Russia - where opponents of President Vladimir Putin have been censored and imprisoned - Putin won a landslide vote, further cementing his power. Elsewhere, incumbents fell as voters punished them for painful price rises. Britain's Conservatives and Japan's Liberal Democrats received a drubbing. In the United States, Republican Donald Trump beat the Democratic candidate Kamala Harris to return to the helm of the world's biggest economy. Over the border, Mexicans voted in Claudia Sheinbaum, the first woman ever to run the country. In India, a multi-stage election featured over 1 million polling stations, from remote corners of the Himalayas to far-flung forests deep in Nagaland. Narendra Modi won a third term as Prime Minister but saw his majority shrink. It was the largest election in history.

KEY POLLS AT A GLANCE

- RUSSIA**: Amid war, Russia too held its presidential election. The country insists it's a democracy but the results are foreseeable. In March, Vladimir Putin claimed his fifth term in office.
- SOUTH AFRICA**: General elections were held in South Africa 29 May. The African National Congress failed to win a majority of National Assembly seats for the first time since the end of apartheid.
- PORTUGAL**: In March, the far-right Chega party quadrupled its Parliamentary representation to 50 members of Parliament, winning 18 per cent of the popular vote. However, the party won just two of Portugal's 21 seats in the European Parliamentary elections in June.
- CROATIA**: In May, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union party, confirmed a coalition agreement with the far-right Homeland Movement following weeks of political uncertainty after an inconclusive Parliamentary vote.
- FRANCE**: Emmanuel Macron's decision to hold snap polls in the summer backfired. Macron's centrist Ensemble alliance lost ground to both the left-wing New Popular Front and the right-wing National Rally.
- GERMANY**: In September the far-right Alternative for Germany party won the most votes in regional elections in the eastern state of Thuringia and came second in a regional vote in Saxony.

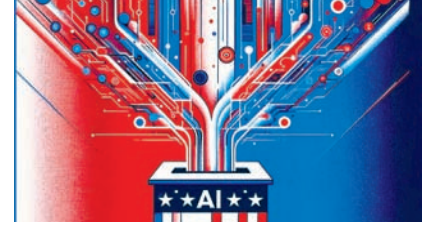
RISE OF EUROPE'S FAR RIGHT
Frustrations with the political class have created opportunities for right-wing populists and other challengers to traditional parties and the political status quo. Several elections this year in Europe highlighted this trend: Right-wing populist parties, many of which campaigned on sharply anti-immigration platforms, gained ground in this year's European Parliamentary elections. Parties on the left and in the center worked together to keep Marine Le Pen's right-wing populist National

ly out of power in France in this year's parliamentary elections. But Le Pen's party nonetheless significantly increased the number of seats it holds in the National Assembly. In early December, National Rally voted with New Popular Front, a coalition of left-leaning parties, to end the government of conservative Michel Barnier after just three months. In Austria, the far-right Freedom Party won 29% of the vote in September elections - a higher share than any other party and its best-ever result. It is unlikely, however, that any governing coalition will include the party. Three far-right parties had a strong showing in Romania's December 1 parliamentary elections. Also, right-wing candidate Calin Georgescu received the most votes in the first round of the country's presidential elections. However, December 6, Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the first-round results after evidence emerged of substantial Russian interference in the election. Portugal joined the list of European nations with a significant right-wing party following Chega's success in the March elections. The party won 50 out of 230 parliamentary seats, up from just 12 in 2022 and one in 2019.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

It was deemed a "make or break year", as around 1.5 billion people went to the polls in more than 50 countries, which held significant elections. Based on statistics from UN Women alongside current election updates, Women's Agenda has calculated there are 30 countries where 31 women serve as Heads of State and/or Government. Just 20 countries have a woman Head of State, and 17 countries have a woman Head of Government. At the current rate, gender equality in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years. As authoritarianism is on the rise worldwide as well, national elections grappled with challenges involving voter participation, free speech, and electoral independence.

POLITICAL DEEPFAKES



Generative AI has already had a clear impact on global politics. In countries across South Asia, candidates used artificial intelligence to flood the public with articles, images and video deepfakes. In February, an audio deepfake was disseminated that falsely purported to depict London Mayor Sadiq Khan making inflammatory comments before a major pro-Palestinian march. Khan says that the audio clip inflamed violent clashes between protestors and counter-protestors. There have been examples in the US too. In February, New Hampshire residents received voicemails from an audio deepfake of Joe Biden, in which the President appeared to discourage them from voting. The FCC promptly banned robocalls containing AI-generated voices, and the Democratic political consultant who created the voicemails was indicted on criminal charges, sending a strong warning to others who might try similar tactics.

YEAR OF POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS ACROSS CONTINENTS

- UNITED KINGDOM**: This year also saw Parliamentary elections being held in the UK. The elections marked a dramatic political shift, resulting in a landslide victory for the Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer.
- BANGLADESH**: The 2024 Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh, held January 7, marked a significant and contentious chapter in the nation's political history. The ruling Awami League (AL), led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, secured a fourth consecutive term, winning 224 of the 300 contested seats. In July and August, a students' protest against job reservations snowballed into a mass uprising that forced Sheikh Hasina to resign.
- BHUTAN**: In the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, National Assembly elections were held in two rounds - a primary round on November 30, 2023, and a runoff January 9, 2024. These were the fourth parliamentary elections to be held in the country after it transitioned into a democracy in 2008.
- PAKISTAN**: In Pakistan, another of India's neighbours, elections to the National Assembly were held February 8. The Pakistan PML-N, led by Nawaz Sharif, emerged as the largest formal party with 75 seats, followed by the PPP with 54 seats. A coalition government was subsequently formed by the PML-N and PPP, along with smaller parties, under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.
- SRI LANKA**: In Sri Lanka, the presidential election held September 21 saw Anura Kumara Dissanayake of the National People's Power (NPP) alliance defeating his rivals to secure the presidency. This victory signified a shift from the previous regimes and was seen as a response to widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling elite during the economic and political crises of recent years.

TRUMP TRIUMPHS

Donald Trump has been elected as the 47th president of the United States, an extraordinary comeback for a former president who refused to accept defeat four years ago, sparked a violent insurrection at the US Capitol, was convicted of felony charges and survived two assassination attempts. With a win in Wisconsin, Trump cleared the 270 electoral votes needed to clinch the presidency. The election was held November 5. Trump, who was the 45th president of the US from 2017 to 2021, and JD Vance, the junior US senator from Ohio - defeated the Democratic Party's ticket - Kamala Harris, the incumbent Vice President, and Tim Walz, the Governor of Minnesota.



The year 2024 has been very crucial as the Lok Sabha elections and polls in several key states, including Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir took place this year, which shaped up the political landscape of India and would continue to impact years to come pertaining to politics

Major political events in India

Lok Sabha polls

The General Elections 2024, held between April 19 and June 1, 2024 in seven phases, was one of the biggest events of the year. The results of the elections were quite shocking as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) failed to achieve the goal - 'Abki Baar, 400 Paar' - set by the ruling coalition. Even though the NDA could not cross 400-mark, it retained power, enabling Narendra Modi to take oath as Prime Minister for the third time in a row. On the other side, the Opposition's INDIA bloc fell to draw political fortune. The Congress managed to improve its tally from 52 seats to 99.



Fadnavis returns as CM

Fadnavis returns as Maharashtra Chief Minister as a leader of the Mahayuti coalition. As the face of the BJP's campaign in the Maharashtra Assembly election this year, his leadership has been widely acknowledged. After a disappointing result in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where the BJP's tally in Maharashtra dropped significantly, Fadnavis once again focused his efforts on party consolidation. He played a crucial role in energising the party machinery in the run-up to the Maharashtra Assembly elections, holding 75 rallies across the state to rally the party's morale.



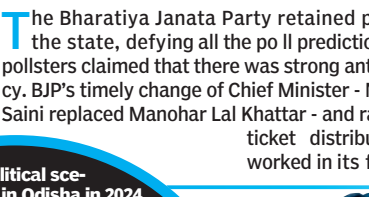
J&K elections

The Jammu and Kashmir Assembly election 2024 was a landmark as it came after one decade in the absence of special status to the state under Article 370, which was abrogated in 2019. In the election, Omar Abdullah-led National Conference (NC) won 42 seats, making a resounding comeback. While the BJP won 29 seats, Mehbooba Mufti's PDP reduced to 3.



Saini replaces Khattar

The Bharatiya Janata Party retained power in the state, defying all the poll predictions in which pollsters claimed that there was strong anti-incumbency. BJP's timely change of Chief Minister - Nayab Singh Saini replaced Manohar Lal Khattar - and rationale ticket distribution worked in its favour.



Soren's comeback

The year 2024 has been unprecedented for Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader and Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren. The new year came with a rude shock for him as he was jailed for an alleged landspace in January. However, he later bounced back. Got bail and fought the election, defeating the Opposition BJP. He returned as Chief Minister as his party won 34 seats in the Jharkhand Assembly elections 2024.



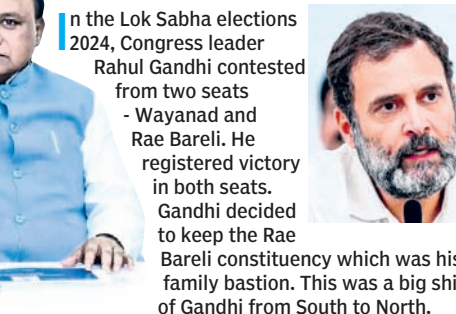
BJP in Odisha

The political scenario in Odisha in 2024 has been nothing short of dramatic, with significant shifts in party dynamics and the rise of the BJP despite the enduring popularity of then Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The year witnessed BJP's surge to power in Odisha, a state long considered a stronghold for the BJD. Prominent tribal leader Mohan Charan Majhi became the first BJP Chief Minister of the state. Majhi won the Keonjhar seat by over 11,000 votes this time. A seasoned RSS member, Majhi comes from a humble background. He was a teacher in Saraswati Sishu Mandir in Keonjhar's Jhumpura before entering politics.



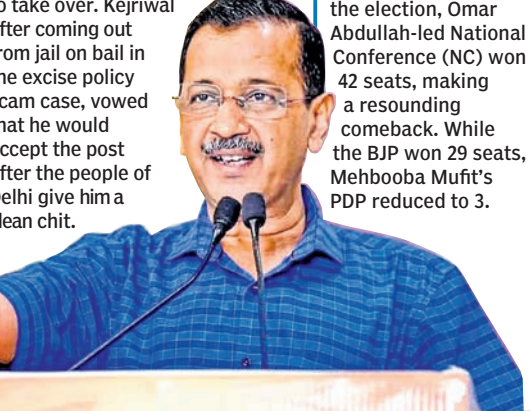
Rahul's return to UP

In the Lok Sabha elections 2024, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi contested from two seats - Wayanad and Rae Bareilly. He registered victory in both seats. Gandhi decided to keep the Rae Bareilly constituency which was his family bastion. This was a big shift of Gandhi from South to North.



Kejriwal's resignation

Arvind Kejriwal, who was adamant not to resign from the post of Delhi Chief Minister, in a surprise move, stepped down September 17, paving a way for his party colleague Atishi to take over. Kejriwal after coming out from jail on bail in the excise policy scam case, vowed that he would accept the post after the people of Delhi give him a clean chit.



Priyanka's electoral debut

Another member of the Nehru-Gandhi family, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra made her electoral debut by winning the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll with an impressive 64.99% vote share.



INDONESIA: Moving away from South Asia, the year 2024 also saw the Southeast Asian nation of Indonesia going for general elections. The presidential election was the focal point of the general elections, with Prabowo Subianto emerging victorious.

TAIWAN: The East Asian nation of Taiwan also conducted pivotal presidential and legislative elections January 13. Lai Ching-te, the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), won the presidency with 40 percent of the vote, defeating Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT) and Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP).

JAPAN: General elections were held in Japan in October this year. The elections were held one month after Shigeru Ishiba took office as Prime Minister after winning a heated contest in September following the resignation of Fumio Kishida.

MAURITIUS: Another Indian Ocean island nation, Mauritius, went for Parliamentary elections this year. The elections saw the Opposition coalition, Alliance du Changement, led by former Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, emerging victorious.



Ten years ago, when government schools lacked basic facilities such as desks, drinking water and clean toilets, who could have imagined that we would now have performing and visual arts Schools of Specialised Excellence, producing world-class artists?

BOAT ACCIDENT: TOLL REACHES 15

The body of a 7-year-old boy missing after the ferry-Navy craft collision off Mumbai coast was found Saturday morning, taking the death toll in the December 18 tragedy to 15, officials said



of the day quote

I am pained and disturbed on two counts -- one, some states have not adopted it. I am sure this is inconceivable on any rational ground. How can this happen? And this happens because academia, intelligentsia, those in journalism they don't generate that pressure

The Kashmiri shawl is not just a means of livelihood for us but an identity of Jammu and Kashmir. It is famous all over the world. The (previous) National Conference government banned the Shahtoosh, which was our heritage. That also caused economic losses

Ambedkarite BSP has demanded that he take back his statement and repent, which has not been done till now

POST OF THE DAY

99.99% people criticising Virat Kohli, would have done "exactly" the same, if they were in his position. PS: Maybe not UK, some other location.

SHORT TAKES

Six killed as container truck overturns on car

Bangalore: Six of a family were killed when a truck carrying a large cargo container overturned on their car near here Saturday, police said. The accident occurred at Nelamangala near Talekere in Bangalore outskirts, they added. The family was on the way to Vijayapura when the accident occurred. Chandrayagappa owned a software firm at HSR Layout, sources added.

4 killed as van rams into truck

Madakasira (Andhra Pradesh): Four people, including a two-year-old girl, died and eight others were injured after their vehicle hit a stationary truck in Sri Satyasai district early Saturday, police said. Penugonda sub-divisional police officer Venkateswarlu said the accident occurred on National Highway 544E around 5.30 am at Kodikonda Sira, about 5 km from Madakasira village.

Fire breaks out in slum

Kolkata: A fire broke out in a slum in Kolkata on Saturday evening, gutting some shanties, an official said. Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim, upon visiting the site, said that no one was injured or trapped in the blaze. The blaze erupted in a slum near a private hospital in New Alipore area in the southwestern part of the metropolis around 6.50 pm, the Fire Brigade official said. Army personnel from the New Alipore Army camp joined the Fire Brigade personnel to fight the flames. Sixteen fire tenders were pressed into service to control the blaze, which has been prevented from spreading further, the official added.

PM hails diaspora in Kuwait



India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, with links dating back to pre-oil Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy, the MEA had said ahead of Modi's visit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kuwait City, Dec 21: Praising the diaspora's contribution to global growth, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here Saturday that India has the potential to become the "skill capital of the world."

Modi was addressing a large gathering of the Indian community at a special event 'Hala Modi' at the Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Indoor Sports Complex in the city.

"Every year, hundreds of Indians come to Kuwait. You have added an Indian touch to Kuwaiti society. You have filled the canvas of Kuwait with the colors of Indian skills. You have mixed the essence of India's tal-

ent, technology, and tradition in Kuwait," Modi said.

The Prime Minister, who is visiting Kuwait at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, expressed happiness about the presence of Indians from diverse corners of the country in the gulf nation and called it a "mini-Hindustan."

India's StartUps, FinTech, smart technology and green technology can develop cutting-edge solutions for every need of Kuwait, he said.

"India is well-equipped to meet the world's demand for skilled talent... India also has the potential to become the skill capital of the world," Modi emphasised and underlined that for many decades to come, India will remain the youngest country in the world.

Highlighting India's strong commitment to supporting Indian workers in Kuwait and across the Gulf, Modi discussed technology-driven initiatives implemented by the government, including the e-Migrate portal. Thanking the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for his gracious invitation, Modi stated

that it was after 43 years that an Indian Prime Minister was visiting Kuwait to strengthen and solidify the age-old friendship.

"The relationship between India and Kuwait is one of civilisation, the sea, affection, trade, and commerce. India and Kuwait are located on two shores of the Arabian Sea. It's not just diplomacy that connects us, but also the bonds of the heart," the Prime Minister said to a loud cheer from the gathering.

"Today, personally, this moment is very special for me. For you all, coming to India takes four hours, but for the Prime Minister of India, it took four decades," he told the Indian gathering. Modi further recalled the centuries old strong trade ties between the two countries.

"Our elders in Gujarat still recall how Kuwaiti traders learnt Gujarati, wrote books in it and traded their world-famous pearls in our markets. We took supplies of horses and many other items. There has been a long-lasting relationship between India and Kuwait," he said.

He also reminded the diaspora that till about 60-65 years ago, Indian rupees were accepted in Kuwait. The PM said that in the coming decades, India and Kuwait will become significant partners in prosperity.

"While the people of Kuwait are dedicated to building a New Kuwait, the people of India are striving to create a developed India by 2047... Kuwait, through trade and innovation, wants to be a dynamic economy. India is also focusing on innovation and strengthening its economy," Modi said. "India has the skill, technology, innovation and manpower that 'New Kuwait' needs."



A pair of moorhen on a frozen Dal Lake on a cold winter morning in Srinagar. Chillai Kalan, the 40-day period of harshest winter, commenced in Kashmir Saturday with Srinagar experiencing its coldest December night in five decades at minus 8.5 degrees Celsius, according to the meteorological department

Chautala cremated with state honours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sirsa, Dec 21: Former Haryana Chief minister Om Prakash Chautala was cremated Saturday with full state honours in Teja Khera village in his native Sirsa district.

Chautala, who was a five-time Chief Minister, died in Gurugram Friday. He was 89. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Shirromani Akali Dal leader Sukhbir Singh Badal were among prominent personalities who reached

Teja Khera to attend the last rites of the departed leader.

People gathered in large numbers for the last rites ceremony.

Political leaders cutting across parties laid floral wreaths to pay their last respects to the departed leader.

Many Haryana ministers, state Assembly Speaker Harvinder Kalyan, former Union minister Venod Sharma, SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia, BJP's Manpreet Badal and Manjinder Singh Sirsa and several other leaders also reached Teja Khera to pay their last respects.

Multistorey building collapses in Mohali, several feared trapped

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Dec 21: Rescue operations were underway after a multistorey building collapsed in the Sohana village of Punjab's Mohali district Saturday, officials said.

Locals said some people were feared trapped under the debris. The district authorities launched a rescue operation. Two excavators were pressed into service as part of the operation.

A National Disaster Response Team (NDRF) team has reached the spot. The fire brigade is also participating in the operation, the officials said.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said, "Sad news has been received that a multistorey building near Sohana in Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar (Mohali) has collapsed. The entire administration and other rescue teams have been deployed at the spot. I am in constant touch with the administration." "We pray that there is no loss of life, we will also take action against the culprits. Appeal to the people to cooperate with the administration," he added in his post on X.

Senior Superintendent of Police (Mohali) Deepak Pareek, who reached the spot to take stock of the situation, said the rescue operation was underway in full swing.

"There is yet no figure whether someone is (trapped) inside or not. Our teams are working. Efforts are on to clear the debris as soon as possible. Lighting arrangements have been made for the rescue operation," he said. A local resident said a loud noise was heard when the building collapsed. Preliminary information suggests that the building collapsed after a basement was dug in a nearby area. Anandpur Sahib MP Malvinder Singh Kang and Mohali MLA Kulwant Singh, among others, also reached the spot.

PUSHPA 2 STAMPEDE

T'gana CM lambast Allu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Dec 21: Despite police permission being denied, top Telugu actor Allu Arjun attended the theatre where 'Pushpa-2' was screened December 4, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy charged Saturday.

Even after the death of a woman in a stampede, the actor did not leave the cinema hall, prompting the police to force him out, CM alleged. Responding to the issue after AIMIM MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi raised it in the Assembly, Reddy, referring to videos in circulation, found fault with Allu Arjun for holding a roadshow and waving to the crowds in spite of the heavy crowd.

Reddy further said the theatre management gave a letter to the police December 2 seeking security for the visit of top actors and others December 4. However, the police rejected the application, citing difficulties in crowd management.

Before entering the theatre and exiting, the actor stood through the sunroof of his car and waved to the crowds leading to thousands of fans jostling to get a glimpse of him, he said.



Allu Arjun was arrested by the city police in connection with the death of the woman December 13

The Telangana High Court granted him a four-week interim bail on the same day and he was released from the prison here December 14 morning

He slammed film personalities for making a beeline for Allu Arjun's residence to meet him after his arrest but not showing empathy to visit the boy who is undergoing treatment in hospital after suffering injuries in the incident. "I appeal to the top film personalities that they should not be inhuman," he said.

He also said there won't be any special privileges when untoward incidents like death in a stampede happen and said the government would not spare those who troubled common people.

Congress to hold campaign seeking Shah's resignation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: The Congress will hold protest marches against Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "insulting" BR Ambedkar and observe a week-long campaign on the issue, party leaders said Saturday.

As part of the "Ambedkar Samman Saptah", Congress workers and leaders will hold marches and press conferences to remember the legacy of B R Ambedkar, they said.

The Congress and the BJP are at loggerheads over Shah's remarks on Ambedkar in Parliament. AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said party MPs and leaders will hold press conferences at 150 locations across the country December 22 and 23 and workers will take out protest marches across the country December 24. "Our agitation demanding Home Minister Amit Shah's resignation will continue! We will fight to protect Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's legacy against the Manusmriti worshippers," Venugopal said in a post on X.



The INC will mark the upcoming week as Dr Ambedkar Samman Saptah, he said. "On 24 December, all across the country, we will hold Babasaheb Ambedkar Samman Marches and submit a memorandum to President of India through District Collectors demanding Amit Shah's resignation.

"On 26-27 December, we will hold an extended CWC session and a mega rally in Belagavi where we will reiterate our commitment to Dr. Ambedkar and his ideals. Jai Bhim! Jai Hind!" Venugopal said in his post. Later addressing a press conference, All India Congress Media and Publicity department head Pawan Khera said On December 24, he said, in every dis-

trict headquarter, there will be a Babasaheb Ambedkar Samman march that will be carried out by Congress leaders and workers.

During a debate on the Constitution in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, Shah had said, "Abhi ek fashion ho gaya hai - Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Itna naam agar Bhagwan ka lete to saat janmon tak swarg mil jata (It has become a fashion to say Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. If they had taken God's name so many times, they would have attained heaven for seven lifetimes)."

Shah Wednesday held a press conference in which he accused the Congress of twisting facts and distorting his comments in the Rajya Sabha. Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha witnessed constant protests from treasury benches and opposition members over the alleged insult of Ambedkar until both the houses were adjourned sine die Friday.

Marriage is relationship built on mutual trust: SC

"Marriage is a relationship built on mutual trust, companionship, and shared experiences. When these essential elements are missing for an extended period, the marital bond becomes a mere legal formality devoid of any substance," the bench said

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: "Marriage is a relationship built on mutual trust, companionship and shared experiences," the Supreme Court has said as it upheld a Madras High Court said a decision granting divorce to an estranged software engineer couple.

A bench of justices Vikram Nath and PB Varale said the length of separation and the evident animosity between husband and wife make it clear that there is no possibility of

the marriage being revived.

"Marriage is a relationship built on mutual trust, companionship, and shared experiences. When these essential elements are missing for an extended period, the marital bond becomes a mere legal formality devoid of any substance," the bench said.

It added that the court has consistently held that prolonged separation, coupled with inability to reconcile, is a relevant factor in deciding matrimonial disputes.

The bench said that both hus-



band and wife have been living separately for two decades now and this fact further reinforces the conclusion that the marriage is no longer viable. It said that the top court has held that prolonged separation creates a presumption of the marriage having irretrievably broken down.

"In this case, the parties have not shared a marital life since 2004, and all attempts at reconciliation have failed," it added.

The top court dismissed the appeal of women who had challenged the June 8, 2018 decision of the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court granting a decree of divorce on the ground

of cruelty.

The bench said the husband has provided sufficient evidence to show that the appellant (wife) was engaged in a pattern of behaviour that caused him immense mental and emotional distress.

"This included filing false and baseless criminal complaints against the respondent and his family, which not only strained their relationship but also caused significant damage to his reputation and peace of mind," it said.

Justice Nath, who penned the verdict on behalf of the bench said, "In matrimonial disputes, this Court has emphasised the need to prioritise welfare and dignity of both parties. Forcing a marriage to continue when it has become a source of unhappiness and conflict undermines the very purpose of the institu-

tion of marriage."

The bench further said in the present case, the interests of both the parties are best served by allowing both parties to move on with their lives independently.

The bench reiterated that cruelty, long separation, and irretrievable breakdown of marriage, as established in this case, and thus, provide sufficient justification for dissolving the marriage.

It said that while granting the decree of divorce, the court deemed it appropriate to award permanent alimony to the appellant wife and the parties' daughter.

The bench noted that both husband and wife are software engineers and were earning handsomely at the time of their marriage more than two decades ago.

international



Yesterday, children were bombed. This is cruelty. This is not war. I wanted to say this because it touches the heart
POPE FRANCIS | CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADER

DEBT DEFAULT ENDED: SL
With the decision by the Hong Kong based Fitch Ratings to upgrade Sri Lanka's credit rating, the island nation has officially ended its debt default, the Finance Ministry said here Saturday



of the day quote

I told the European Union that they must make up their tremendous deficit with the United States by the large scale purchase of our oil and gas. Otherwise, it is TARIFFS all the way!!!
DONALD TRUMP | PRESIDENT-ELECT, US

We are monitoring four diseases, including Covid-19, H5N1 and mpox, as part of our effort to prepare for another possible pandemic
ONG YE KUNG | HEALTH MINISTER, SINGAPORE

As a neighbouring country located just 65 miles from Syria, Cyprus has a vested interest in Syria's future. Developments there will directly impact Cyprus, particularly in terms of potential new migratory flows and the risks of terrorism and extremism
CONSTANTINOS KOMBOIS | FOREIGN MINISTER, CYPRUS

German Christmas market attack kills five, injures 200



REUTERS

Magdeburg, Dec 21: At least five people were killed in a car-ramming attack at a German Christmas market in the city of Magdeburg that also left more than 200 injured, officials said, and a Saudi man was arrested on suspicion of driving a car into the crowd.

The Friday evening attack on market visitors gathered to celebrate the pre-Christmas season comes amid a fierce debate over security and migration during an election campaign in Germany, where the

far right is polling strongly. "What a terrible act it is to injure and kill so many people there with such brutality," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in the central city, part of the former East Germany, where he laid a white rose at a church in honour of the victims.

"We have now learnt that over 200 people have been injured," he added. "Almost 40 are so seriously injured that we must be very worried about them."

German authorities are investigating a 50-year-old Saudi doctor who has lived in Germany for almost two decades in connection with the car-ramming. Police searched his home overnight.

Scholz's Social Democrats are trailing both the far-right AfD and the frontrunner conservative opposition in opinion polls ahead of snap elections set for February 23.

Suspect arrested, identified as Saudi doctor
Media point to anti-Islam, far-right sympathies



Protesters carry a caricature of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol during a rally demanding his arrest in Seoul, South Korea, Saturday. The sign, front, reads, "Rebellion leader" **PTI PHOTO**

US judge finds Pegasus spyware maker liable over WhatsApp hack

AGENCIES

Washington, Dec 21: A US judge Friday ruled in favor of Meta Platforms' WhatsApp in its ongoing lawsuit against Israel's NSO Group, which accuses the spyware company of exploiting a vulnerability in the messaging app to secretly install surveillance software on users' devices.

The ruling by US District Judge Phyllis Hamilton marks a significant victory for WhatsApp, privacy advocates, and cybersecurity experts, as it holds NSO accountable for its actions.

The judge granted WhatsApp's motion for summary judgment, finding that NSO Group was liable for hacking and breach of contract. Hamilton's decision means the case will now proceed to trial, but only on the issue of damages. The court did not immediately set a trial date. NSO Group has not yet commented on the ruling.



In a statement following the decision, Will Cathcart, head of WhatsApp, celebrated the victory as an important step for privacy rights.

"We spent five years presenting our case because we firmly believe that spyware companies could not hide behind immunity or avoid accountability for their unlawful actions," Cathcart wrote on social media. "Surveillance companies should be on notice that illegal spying will not be tolerated."

The case stems from WhatsApp's 2019 lawsuit, which accused NSO of exploiting a vulnerability in the app to install its notorious Pegasus spyware on the phones of over 1,400 individuals, including journalists, human rights activists, and political dissidents. The spyware, which was secretly installed without users' knowledge, allowed NSO's clients—government agencies and law enforcement—to monitor the targets' communications, track their locations, and intercept private messages. WhatsApp claimed the hack violated both US and international laws.

NSO Group has long maintained that its software, Pegasus, is used exclusively by government agencies to combat terrorism and criminal activity, including tracking pedophiles and stopping organized crime.

FUNDING CRISIS US AVERTS SHUTDOWN

The federal government last shut down for 35 days during Trump's first White House term over a dispute about border security

REUTERS

Washington, Dec 21: The US Congress passed spending legislation early Saturday in a down-to-the wire burst of activity that will avert a destabilizing government shutdown ahead of the busy holiday travel season.

The Democratic-controlled Senate in an 85-11 vote passed the bill to continue government funding 38 minutes after it expired at midnight. The government did not invoke shutdown procedures in the interim.

The bill will now be sent to White House, where President Joe Biden is expected to sign it into law.

The package had earlier cleared the Republican-controlled House of Representatives with bipartisan support.

The late-night vote capped a frantic week that saw President-elect Donald Trump and his billionaire ally Elon Musk defeat an initial bipartisan deal, throwing Congress into disarray.

The final version stripped out some provisions championed by Democrats, who accused Republicans of caving in to pressure from an unelected billionaire who has no experience in government.

Congress did not act on Trump's demand to raise the debt ceiling, a politically difficult task, before he takes office January 20.

The federal government spent roughly \$6.2 trillion last year and has more than \$36 trillion in debt, and Congress will need to act to authorize further borrowing by the middle of next year.

The legislation would extend government funding until March 14, provide



CONGRESS APPROVES GOVERNMENT FUNDING BILL ON BIPARTISAN BASIS
BIDEN PLANS TO SIGN IT INTO LAW

MEASURE DOES NOT INCLUDE TRUMP'S DEMAND TO LIFT DEBT CEILING
BILL INCLUDES FUNDING FOR STORM-HIT STATES, FARMERS

\$100 billion for disaster-hit states and \$10 billion for farmers, and extend farm and food aid programs due to expire at the end of the year.

Some Republicans voted against the package because it did not cut spending. House Speaker Mike Johnson said the party will have more influence next year, when they will have majorities in both chambers of Congress and Trump will be in the White House.

"This was a necessary step to bridge the gap, to put us into that moment where we can put our fingerprints on the final decisions on spending," he told reporters after the House vote. He said Trump supported the package.

A government shutdown would have disrupted everything from law enforcement to national parks and suspended paychecks for millions of federal workers.

A travel industry trade group warned it could cost airlines, hotels and other companies \$1 billion per week and lead to widespread disruptions

during the busy Christmas season. Authorities warned travelers could face long lines at airports.

The package resembled a bipartisan plan that was abandoned earlier this week after an online fusillade from Trump and Musk, who said it contained too many unrelated provisions, such as a pay raise for lawmakers and a crack-down on pharmacy benefit managers.

Republicans struck most of those elements from the bill - including a provision limiting investments in China which Democrats said would have conflicted with Musk's interests.

Trump has tasked Musk, the world's richest person, with heading a budget-cutting task force but he will hold no official position in Washington. Musk wrote on his social media platform X that he was happy with the package. "It went from a bill that weighed pounds to a bill that weighed ounces," he posted.

UN commemorates 1st World Meditation Day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

United Nations, Dec 21: Meditation transcends all religions and borders and is also a powerful instrument of diplomacy in the current global landscape marked by escalating conflicts and deep-seated mistrust, top spiritual and UN leaders said on the first World Meditation Day commemorated here.

The Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations organised a special event 'Meditation for Global Peace and Harmony' to mark the first World Meditation Day at the global body's headquarters Friday.

"Today meditation is not a luxury, as it was thought, but it is a necessity," spiritual leader Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar said in his keynote address at the packed event attended by UN Ambassadors, officials, staff, civil society members as well as members of the Indian-American diaspora.

"Meditation is something you can do anywhere, everywhere, by everyone. In this sense, international Meditation Day plays a very important role and opens the door to those who have some reservations," he said.

He added that for many people, the moment they hear the word meditation, they may feel that the practice either has to

be from some religion or it is not taught in their religion.

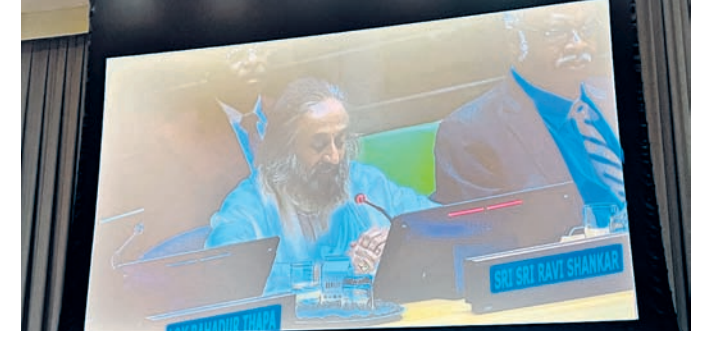
He underscored that meditation "transcends all religions, all geographical boundaries and age groups so it is very, very useful in many, many ways."

President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly Philemon Yang said in his remarks that meditation "transcends borders, faiths, traditions and time, offering each of us the opportunity to pause, to listen and to connect with our inner selves."

Yang said that the world today needs peace more than ever before. "The tensions in the world require that we embrace peace and anything that brings peace... Let us build on the practice we have shared to bring about a safer, more just and equitable future for everyone, everywhere."

Earlier this month, the 193-member UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution declaring December 21 as World Meditation Day.

India was a member of the core group of countries that guided the unanimous adoption of the resolution titled 'World Meditation Day' in the UNGA. Andorra, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Nepal and Sri Lanka were the other members of the core group.



SHORT TAKES

Gang fight: PIO jailed

Singapore: An Indian-origin man was jailed for six weeks here Thursday after he pleaded guilty to one count of voluntarily causing hurt to a rival gang member. Visnu Suriamurthi, 28, was also fined SGD 2,000 after admitting to a separate illegal gambling offence, reports said. A member of Visnu's group, Asvain Pachan Pillai Sukumaran, has been charged with the murder of Mohammad Isrrat Mohammad Ismail (29), following a brawl that happened August 20, 2023 outside the Concorde Hotel and Shopping-Mall in the Orchard Road hotel-tourist belt. The case of 30-year-old Sukumaran, also of Indian origin, is still before the courts. He allegedly took Ismail's knife and stabbed him multiple times with it.

SL prez to visit China

Colombo: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake Saturday announced plans for an official tour to China in mid-January, following his recent visit to India. Dissanayake's announcement came days after he and Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya met with Qin Boyang, Vice-Chairwoman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) here Tuesday and Wednesday, and reaffirmed the island nation's commitment to advancing high-quality development under China's multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). "I will be going to China in mid-January," Dissanayake told reporters in Kandy, a central district town.

Military court jails 25

Karachi: Twenty-five civilians were sentenced by a Pakistani military court to periods of two to 10 years of "rigorous imprisonment" in connection with attacks on military facilities in 2023, the armed forces' media wing said Saturday. The ruling underscores concerns among supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan that military courts are going to play a bigger role in cases involving the 72-year-old, who is facing multiple charges including allegedly inciting attacks against the armed forces. Thousands of Khan supporters stormed military installations and torched a general's house May 9, 2023 to protest against the former premier's arrest by paramilitary soldiers. At least eight people were killed in the violence.

B'desh finds India's 'involvement in enforced disappearances'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 21: An inquiry commission formed by Bangladesh's interim government has said that it has found India's "involvement" in alleged incidents of "enforced disappearances" during deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's regime, the state-run news agency BSS reported Saturday. The Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha quoting the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearance said, "The Indian involvement in Bangladesh's system of enforced disappearances is a matter of public record."

The report said that according to the five-member commission headed by a retired Supreme Court judge, there was a "persistent suggestion in law enforcement circles" that

some Bangladeshi prisoners might still be languishing in Indian jails.

"We recommend the Ministries of Foreign and Home to extend their best efforts to identify any Bangladeshi citizens who may still remain incarcerated in India. It is beyond the jurisdiction of the commission to follow this trail outside Bangladesh," the commission said.

The commission said it found intelligence information about the practice of captive exchanges between the two countries and the possible subsequent fate of detainees.

A few days ago, the commission estimated that the number of enforced disappearances would be over 3,500. Hasina, 77, fled to India August 5 after unprecedented anti-government protests.

Trudeau may lose power

Key ally vows to topple Canadian PM Trudeau in fresh blow to his government

REUTERS

Ottawa, Dec 21: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau Friday looked set to lose power early next year after a key ally said he would move to bring down the minority Liberal government and trigger an election.

New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh, who has been helping keep Trudeau in office, said he would present a formal motion of no-confidence after the House of Commons elected chamber returns from a winter break January 27. If all the opposition parties



back the motion, Trudeau will be out of office after more than nine years as prime minister and an election will take place.

A string of polls over the last 18 months show the Liberals, suffering from voter fatigue and anger over high prices and a housing crisis, would be badly defeated by the official opposition right-of-center Conservatives.

The New Democrats, who like the Liberals aim to attract the support of center-left voters, complain Trudeau is too beholden to big business.

"No matter who is leading the Liberal Party, this government's time is up. We will put forward a clear motion of non-confidence in the next sitting of the House of Commons," said Singh.

The leader of the Bloc Quebecois, a larger opposition party, promised to back the motion and said there was no scenario where Trudeau survived.

The timing of the crisis comes at a critical time, since US President-elect Donald Trump is due to take office January 20 and is promising to impose a 25% tariff on all imports from Canada, which would badly hurt the economy.



We have to adopt technology like electric mobility, biofuels multimodal transport options to bring down overall carbon impact and make sustainability the core of our thinking
PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

OPENAI UNVEILS '03' REASONING AI MODELS

OpenAI testing new reasoning AI models, o3 and o3 mini, in a sign of growing competition with rivals such as Google to create smarter models capable of tackling complex problems. CEO Sam Altman said the AI startup plans to launch o3 mini by the end of January, and full o3 after that, as more robust large language models could outperform existing models and attract new investments and users.



Business

of the day note

With decades of automotive expertise, we have combined advanced electric technology with a customer-first approach to delivering something truly transformative
PARTHO BANERJEE | MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER



With the kind of threat of pollution, the climate challenges, etc., being faced, this government has held sustainability at a very high priority. This is quite contrary to the times till about 10-15 years ago when India was not taken very seriously as far as issues like climate or the green concerns because they thought either India was alien to it or maybe we didn't understand the seriousness of it
JITENDRA SINGH | UNION MINISTER



At Isuzu Motors India, we take immense pride in our journey here in India. Over the years, the company has achieved significant milestones in both production and exports. One key highlight is that about 22 per cent of our production line workforce comprises talented women
RAJESH MITTAL | ISUZU MOTORS INDIA PRESIDENT AND MD



18% GST on used EV car sale

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaisalmer, Dec 21: The goods and services tax council Saturday decided to levy an 18 per cent GST on margin value on sale of used electric vehicles by businesses and agreed to keep jet fuel (ATF) out of the 'one-nation-one-tax' regime.

The GST Council in its 55th meeting also decided to clarify on taxability of popcorn, saying caramelised popcorn will continue to attract tax at the rate of 18 per cent. However, pre-packed and spiced popcorn will attract 12 per cent, while 5 per cent will be levied on unpacked and unlabelled ones.

It has been decided to regularise the issues for the past on "as is where is" basis... "It is a clarification being recommended by the GST Council to settle the disputes arising out of interpretation," an official statement said.

The panel, headed by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising representatives of all states and UTs, deferred decisions on reducing tax rate on insurance products as also on levy of the tax on food delivery by app-based platforms.

The panel cut the tax rate on fortified rice kernels used for public distribution to 5 per cent from 18 per cent, Sitharaman told reporters after the meeting of the Council here.

The Council also decided that no GST will be payable on penal charges levied and collection by banks and NBFCs from borrowers for non-compliance with loan terms.



केंद्रीय राज्य मंत्री (वित्त) श्री निर्मला सिथारमन और वाणिज्य और उद्योग मंत्री श्री पियूष गोयल

The panel deferred a decision on reducing the rate of tax on insurance premium, pending comments of the sector regulator, she said.

A group of ministers examining the issue had recommended exempting insurance premiums paid for term life insurance policies from GST and premium paid by senior citizens for health insurance coverage. It had also suggested GST exemption on premium paid by individuals, other than senior citizens, for health insurance with coverage of up to ₹5 lakh.

Alongside, the GoM on rate rationalisation, which is looking at tweaking rates on 148 items, will be given more time to arrive at a decision.

The finance minister said the council decided to raise the rate of tax to 18 per cent from 12 per cent on all used EV sales, just as in case of non-electric vehicles,

The panel, headed by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, deferred decisions on reducing tax rate on insurance products as also on levy of the tax on food delivery by app-based platforms

and it will be applicable only on the value that represents margin - the difference between the purchase price and selling price (depreciated value if depreciation is claimed) - by businesses. Sale and purchase of used ve-

Inflation impinging on growth: MPC

REUTERS

Mumbai, Dec 21: High prices are the cause for demand slowdown in India, and aligning inflation to the central bank's 4% target is key to ensuring sustained economic growth, members of the rate-setting panel said in the minutes of the December meeting.

"The policy priority at this critical juncture has to be on restoring the inflation growth balance," Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das said in the minutes of his last monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting released Friday. Lower inflation will enhance households' disposable income and increase their purchasing power, and this approach would support consumption and investment demand, Das said.

The RBI kept its key interest rate unchanged earlier in the month, but cut banks' cash reserve ratio for the first time in over four years, effectively easing monetary conditions as economic growth slowed.

India's GDP growth rate fell unexpectedly to 5.4% in the July-September quarter, its slowest pace in seven quarters, while inflation remains well over 4%. "The monetary policy stance is open to support growth, but it must await the ebbing of inflation on a durable basis or else the uneven progress made so far in disinflation will get dissipated," deputy governor Michael Patra wrote.



External member Saugata Bhattacharya said both growth and inflation have worsened, and the risk of making a "policy error" was higher now compared to the October policy.

Four of the six MPC members voted to keep the repo rate on hold but two external members - Nagesh Kumar and Ram Singh - had voted for a 25 basis points reduction. "I believe that a rate cut would help in reviving economic growth without worsening the inflationary situation, which may soften with seasonal correction in prices," said Kumar, who voted for a rate cut at a second straight meeting.

Both Kumar and Singh highlighted the limited impact monetary policy has on food inflation alongside the sharp slowdown in growth as reasons to shift policy gears. They also support a rate cut to avoid the risk of sharp currency appreciation if India does not normalise interest rates when most other global central banks have already embarked on an easing cycle.

Net inflows into SIPs up 233% this year

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Dec 21: There has been a massive 233 per cent growth (year-on-year) in overall net inflows in systematic investment plans (SIPs) in India this year, according to a new report, as the Indian economy remains resilient amid rough geo-political conditions.

Overall net inflows stood at ₹9.14 lakh crore from January to November this year, as against ₹2.74 lakh crore in 2023 which tantamount to a growth of 233 per cent, according to the report by ICRA Analytics. Number of new SIPs registered increased to 49.47 lakh at the end of November, as against 30.80 lakh in November 2023.

Moreover, SIP asset under management (AUM) stood at ₹13.54 lakh crore in November, as against ₹9.31 lakh crore in 2023, said the report.

Indian mutual fund (MF) industry witnessed over 135 per cent surge in net inflows and nearly 39 per cent growth in net AUM (Assets under Management) over the last one year, the report said, adding that the industry is likely to witness a multi-fold growth in the coming years with India being in a bright spot in the global economy.

"With the structural growth story of the Indian economy remaining intact and India a



bright spot in the global economy, the domestic mutual fund industry is expected to witness multi-fold growth in the coming years," said Ashwini Kumar, senior vice president and head market data, ICRA Analytics.

Meanwhile, total inflows into the mutual fund industry grew by 135.38 per cent at ₹60,295.30 crore in November 2024, as against ₹25,615.65 crore in November 2023.

Interestingly, the net AUM which was at ₹49.05 lakh crore in November last year, crossed the historic milestone to touch ₹68.08 lakh crore in November this year. While all funds witnessed a robust growth in India, inflows into large cap funds under equity category were the highest, registering a surge of nearly 731 per cent at ₹2547.92 crore in November 2024 as against ₹306.70 crore same period last year.

NPS AUM to touch ₹15L-cr by fiscal end

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 21: The assets under management (AUM) of the National Pension System are expected to touch ₹15 lakh crore by the end of current fiscal year, Pension Fund Regulatory Development Authority Chairman Deepak Mohanty said Saturday.

At a media interaction following the official launch of the Association of NPS Intermediaries, Mohanty also said the take up rate by the employees in the corporate sector remains a challenge. This Association of NPS comprises stakeholders including pension fund managers, points of presence (bank and non-bank), central record keeping agencies, trustee banks, custodians, aggregators, annuity service providers, pension agents, retirement advisors, and other industry participants.

The association aims to represent the interests of all intermediaries in the NPS ecosystem, promote NPS as a reliable, flexible, and tax-efficient retirement product, focus on subscriber welfare by ensuring smooth and transparent processes within the system and also to collaborate with regulators and policymakers to improve the NPS framework.

"The total subscribers (in the pension sector) at this moment are more than 8 crore (including 6.4 crore in Atal Pension Yojana), out of which in NPS



there are about 1.6 crore subscribers and the corpus what people are contributing to the pension system is almost ₹14 lakh crore, and given that situation, our expectation is that by the end of the year, it should ₹15 lakh crore," Mohanty said.

Of the 1.6 crore NPS subscriber base, 62 lakh are from the private sector and 18 lakh from the corporate sector.

"So, that is the big challenge. We have about 18,000 corporates, including big corporates, who have joined NPS, but the take up rate by employees is less partly because there are so many things (and) partly, because of lack of awareness that we are trying to expand," he said.

The launch of the Association of NPS Intermediaries is a significant milestone for the pension sector, he said adding, "I am confident it will further strengthen and redouble our efforts in creating awareness to expand pension coverage in India through collective efforts

and feedback mechanism."

He noted that the pension potential for NPS is very high as 80 per cent of the workforce in the country is in the informal sector. He said there are different ways of expanding NPS with expanding the intermediary base among one of them, and added that PFRDA has requested the sponsor banks - of RRBs that they should provide NPS as they being in the semi-urban and rural areas are doing well in case of Atal Pension Yojana.

"So, we are expanding the intermediary base and to target younger cohort of population, we are collaborating with the digital companies by giving them POP (point of presence) licence so that they can reach the younger cohort and those who are digitally savvy..." Mohanty said.

Stating that NPS is giving "very good" returns, he said that the annual return in the equity scheme from the inception is 14.4 per cent.

Green steel taxonomy to push adoption of decarbonisation: Experts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: The government's push towards green steel (metal produced through sustainable process) will encourage the adoption of decarbonisation initiatives by the steel industry and help increase the usage of scrap as raw material, experts said.

The government last week rolled out the definition of green steel with an aim to encourage the industry to bring down carbon emissions.

Union Steel Minister H D Kumaraswamy released a 'taxonomy on green steel' with parameters for giving star ratings on products based on the amount of carbon dioxide (CO2) emitted during the production process.

The industry experts hailed the move, saying the green steel taxonomy will help the sector become more competitive globally and increase exports.

"Not only will this propel the decarbonisation initiatives of the industry but would also clearly picture the competitiveness of Indian steel," said Amarendu Prakash, Chair, FICCI Steel Committee & Chairman.

The star-rated green steel will help all stakeholders in identifying the sustainability features and provide opportunities for increasing steel exports, said Prakash.

Housing sales in Dec qtr to fall 21% in top 9 cities: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 21: Housing sales are estimated to fall 21 per cent annually across nine major cities during October-December period to 1.08 lakh units on high base effect, according to PropEquity.

Real estate data analytics firm PropEquity Saturday released the sale numbers for India's top nine housing markets -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad, Chennai, Thane. It has estimated sales to rise only in Delhi-NCR.

As per the data, the total sales of residential properties across the nine cities are likely to decline to 1,08,261 units in

the current quarter as against 1,37,225 units in the same period last year.

However, sales are likely to rise 5 per cent from 1,03,213 units in the preceding September quarter.

Samir Jasuja, CEO & Founder of PropEquity, said the sales have declined on annual basis because of high base effect.

He said the sales are likely to rise quarter-on-quarter on the back of festive demand.

"A closer look at the numbers reveals that despite the drop, the supply to absorption ratio in 2024 remains the same as in 2023 which indicates that the fundamentals of the real estate sector are strong and healthy," Jasuja said.



Housing sales are estimated to fall in Hyderabad by 47 per cent to 12,682 units during October-December 2024 from 24,044 units in the year-ago period.

In Bangalore, sales could drop 13 per cent to 14,957 units

from 17,276 units, while Chennai might see a 9 per cent drop to 4,266 units from 4,673 units.

Housing sales in Mumbai are likely to fall 27 per cent to 10,077 units from 13,878 units.

A 13 per cent decline is seen

in Navi Mumbai to 7,478 units from 8,607 units, while a 16 per cent drop is imminent in Thane to 21,893 units from 26,099 units.

Kolkata is likely to witness a drop of 33 per cent to 3,763 units from 5,653 units.

Sales of residential properties in Pune could decline 24 per cent to 20,230 units from 26,641 units.

However, the Delhi-NCR market is set to buck the trend. Sales in the NCR market are set to rise 25 per cent to 12,915 units during December quarter 2024 from 10,354 units in the year-ago period.

Vivek Singhal, CEO, Smartworld Developers, said the Delhi-NCR market, especially Gurugram, is witnessing a strong

demand from end-users as well as investors.

He said the demand of luxury homes in Gurugram has been unprecedented in the last few years.

Vijay Harsh Jha, founder and CEO of property brokerage firm VS Realtors, said the real estate market continues to display strong growth.

"The rise in sales and launches from previous quarter indicates that the festive season demand was broadly in line with our expectations," Jha added.

PE Analytics, an NSE-listed company, owns and operates PropEquity that covers over 1,70,000+ projects of 57,000+ developers across 44 cities in India.

Boxing Day Test: Bowlers hit nets



The fourth Test between India and Australia will be played at Melbourne Cricket Ground from December 26 as the series is leveled at 1-1

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Melbourne, Dec 21: Indian bowlers, led by pacers Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, and Akash Deep, had an intense bowling nets session ahead of the Boxing Day Test against Australia here Saturday.

The five-Test Border-Gavaskar Trophy series is currently levelled at 1-1 after the rain-hit third Test ended in a draw at the Gabba in Brisbane. India had started their tour on a high with a thumping 295-run win in the series opener in Perth. However, they faltered in the pink-ball Test at the Adelaide Oval to suffer a 10-wicket drubbing and lost the early advantage.

Taking to social media, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) shared a video of Indian bowlers sweating it hard in the nets to gear up for the fourth Test of the series. "There

is no substitute for hard work. The relentless effort behind the scenes translates into success on the field. The Indian bowlers are ticking every box as we get ready for the Boxing Day Test," the BCCI added the caption on the video.

In the video, Bumrah, Siraj, Akash, Harshit Rana, and Yash Dayal were seen hitting the deck hard and honing their skills in the nets under the watchful eyes of head coach Gautam Gambhir. Spinners Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja were also seen bowling in the nets ahead of the crucial encounter.

Bumrah, who captained in the first Test in Perth, is the leading wicket-taker in the series so far with 21 scalps but he did not get the desired support from his teammates. The second bowler in the list - Mitchell Starc - is seven wickets behind Bumrah's tally while Australia captain Pat Cummins is third on the list with 14 scalps, the same as Starc.

Siraj is fourth on the list with 13 scalps to his name across six innings while Harshit and Akash have four and three wickets respectively.

On the batting front, the struggling forms of senior duo Virat Kohli and captain Rohit Sharma are major concerns for the Indian team heading

I've got a few plans against Indian bowlers: Sam Konstas

Melbourne: Young Australian opener Sam Konstas cannot wait to take on the Indian bowlers in the Boxing Day Test and says he already has a "few plans" for Jasprit Bumrah and Co if he gets the nod in the fourth game of the Border-Gavaskar series here. Teenage sensation Konstas was handed a maiden call-up as Australia dropped rookie opener Nathan McSweeney for the final two Tests against India. Konstas' inclusion follows a series of disappointing performances from the Australian top-order in the first three Tests, especially McSweeney. "I've got a few plans against those (Indian) bowlers. Feeling like I'm moving really nice and hopefully I get that opportunity," Konstas told Fox Cricket. "I'm just going to react to the ball and show a bit of intent and put a bit of pressure back on the bowlers," he added. If Konstas, who turned 19 October 2, is selected in the playing XI for the Boxing Day Test, he would become Australia's youngest Test debutant since captain Pat Cummins, who was 18 years and 193 days old when he made his debut against South Africa in Johannesburg in 2011. "It will be a huge honour debuting. A dream come true. I think it's a sellout already (at the MCG)," he said. "I'm very excited to take on (India). I want to be challenged." On the other hand dropped McSweeney has admitted to feeling "devastated" after being dropped for the last two Tests of the BGT Tests but vowed to work hard to reclaim his spot in the national team.

into the business end of the series. Kohli, who scored a hundred in the second innings in Perth, has endured a series of low scores of 7, 11, and 3 in the following three innings while Rohit, who demoted himself to the middle order, has only accumulated 19 runs in the last two Tests. The Indian captain missed the first Test due to the birth of his second child and joined the side for the second Test in Adelaide. Meanwhile, KL Rahul's

sublime touch in the top order is a positive sign for the visiting team, with Yashasvi Jaiswal hoping to regain his form after scoring 161 runs in the second innings of the opening Test.

On the other hand, Shubman Gill and Rishabh Pant also need to step up to the occasion and look for big runs in the remaining two Tests of the series to support India's case for the World Test Championship final.

WOMEN'S NATIONAL FOOTBALL FINAL

Manipur to lock horns with underdogs Odisha

This is the seventh time Odisha will play the final

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Narainpur, Dec 21: Manipur and Odisha booked their spots in the final of the 29th Senior Women's National Football Championship for the Rajmata Jijabai Trophy 2024-25 at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama Ground Saturday. Both teams will lock horns Monday in hopes of lifting the coveted trophy.

In the semifinals, Manipur, the 22-time champions, and considered the powerhouse of Indian women's football, defeated West Bengal 3-0, while Odisha scored once in each half to beat last year's runners-up Haryana 2-0. This is the seventh time Odisha will play the final.

Packed with experienced Internationals, Manipur began the firm favourites but took time to settle down as West Bengal's defensive tactics managed to keep them at bay till half time.

The 22-time champions, however, could not be kept under

check beyond the 53rd minute as Dangmei Grace duly opened the account for Manipur off a long ball from the middle. Grace's graceful run with the ball left two Bengal defenders struggling behind and the international striker moved into the box to beat Bengal goalkeeper Manju with a right footer.

Manju did a creditable job in the first half but proved vulnerable with long rangers in the second. Priyanka Devi picked up the second goal a couple of minutes later from around 25 yards. Her right-footed shot was a dipping drive and Manju had no answer.

The fate of the match was nearly sealed, Manipur added one more goal in the 78th minute. Shilky Devi, in a quick turn from outside the box, took a shot that dropped in the box before eluding the hands of the diving custodian.

Odisha captain and striker Pyari Xaxa played a pivotal role in her team's victory scoring both goals. The second semifinal

between Odisha and Haryana began in an energetic fashion, with attacks from both sides.

A few good saves by India international Shreya Hooda under the Odisha bar prevented an early Odisha opener. Still Hooda could do little when, in the 10th minute, Pyari dribbled past a couple of defenders to give Odisha the lead. It was a fine individual effort on part of the India International.

After the breather, Haryana mostly played through the wings and kept pushing forward, but, unfortunately, could not convert their chances. Odisha goalkeeper, Sasmita Parida was a standout player Saturday as she managed to block the waves of attacks from Haryana in the second half.

Pyari put the game to bed in the 88th minute when her free-kick from the right slipped through Hooda's hands to roll over the line and virtually ended Haryana's chances of making the final for the second time in a row.



SHORT TAKES

Anmolpreet smashes fastest List A hundred

Ahmedabad: Anmolpreet Singh smashed the quickest List A hundred by an Indian, a 35-ball effort, to guide Punjab to an easy nine-wicket win over Arunachal Pradesh in a Group C Vijay Hazare match here Saturday. Anmolpreet, who went unsold in the recent IPL auction, broke the record of former India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan, who had scored a hundred off 40 balls for Baroda against Maharashtra in 2009-10. This knock is also the third fastest List A hundred behind Aussie Jake-Fraser McGurk, who smashed a 29-ball ton for South Australia against Tasmania in 2023-24, and South African AB de Villiers' 31-ball hundred against the West Indies at Johannesburg in 2014-15.

Ajeetesh secures Asian Tour card

Hua Hin: Ajeetesh Sandhu was the sole Indian to secure an Asian Tour card for 2025 despite a tense bogey-bogey finish at the Final Qualifying school, here Saturday. The Chandigarh golfer, who a week earlier won on his home tour, shot 1-over 72 to finish T-23. The top 35 and ties secured their playing rights for 2025 and will join those who have kept their cards through Order of Merit. Sandhu, who shared the lead after day one, was in the top-10 with two holes to go. He finished with two bogeys but managed to gain the all-important card.

Warrant against Robin Uthappa

Bangalore: The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) functioning under the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of India has written a letter to the Bengaluru police seeking assistance in issuing an arrest warrant against former Indian cricketer Robin Uthappa, sources confirmed Saturday. Regional PF Commissioner-II and Recovery Officer, RO KR Puram Shadakshara Gopala Reddy has made the written request to the Inspector of Pulikeshi Nagar police station in Bengaluru in this regard.

VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY

Arjun Tendulkar takes 3 wickets against Odisha

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 21: Arjun Tendulkar shines for Goa in their first game of the Vijay Hazare Trophy and scalps 3 wickets against Odisha.

The left-arm pacer bowled a brilliant spell of 10-0-61-3 in a high-scoring game. Arjun took his first wicket in the 41st over by dismissing Abhishek Raut for 7. He got the prized scalp of Kartik Biswal (49 off 52) in the next over.

Arjun bowled Rajesh Mohanty for 6 to scalp his third wicket of the day. Courtesy of Arjun's three-fer, Goa bowled out Odisha for 344 to win the game by 27 runs. Arjun struggled in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy and was dropped from Goa's squad.

Talking of the Goa-Odisha game, the Darshan Misal-led side registered a big total of 371 after being asked to bat



first. Ishan Gadekar top-scored for Goa and smashed 93 off 96 balls. Suyash Prabhudessai gave a brilliant finishing touch to Goa's score and remained unbeaten on 74 off just 22 balls.

Odisha were off to a brilliant start in the big chase and their openers added 107 runs for the first wicket. Odisha started losing wickets regularly after they lost the wicket of Gourav Choudhury and there was no looking back for Goa after that. Goa will face Haryana in their next league stage match Monday.

India to host ISSF Jr World Cup for first time in 2025

This will be the ninth top-level shooting championship to be held in India over the past decade

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 21: India will be hosting the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Junior World Cup for the first time in the second half of 2025. The ISSF awarded the hosting rights for the top junior international shooting competition for Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun to the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI), making it another achievement for the country in shooting sport.

This will be the third top ISSF-level event to be held in India after the senior World Cup in Bhopal in 2023 and the



season-ending ISSF World Cup Final earlier this year, reinforcing India's stature as one of the sport's top destinations in the world, the NRAI informed in a release Saturday.

Reacting to the development after the NRAI received the official confirmation letter from the ISSF Friday, NRAI President Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo said, "We had a very fruitful executive committee meeting of the ISSF in Rome last month and all member federations as well as the ISSF

President Luciano Rossi were all praise with the way India has been hosting top international Shooting competitions and helping to grow the sport globally."

"We obviously got the sense then but now that the official confirmation has come, we are excited and energised to put our best foot forward as usual. We are of course indebted to the Government of India and the Ministry of Sports for supporting in every possible way, our efforts to grow the sport in the country," he said.

This will be the ninth top-level shooting championship to be held in India over the past decade, and it will be the first ISSF Junior World Cup. Before this India had hosted continental championships and six ISSF competitions, including two World Cup Final competitions besides four senior ISSF World Cups.

IN A FIRST

Djokovic, Kyrgios team up for doubles

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Brisbane, Dec 21: Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios are set to team up in the doubles draw of the Brisbane International, an ATP 250 event scheduled from December 29 to January 5, 2025.

The announcement was first hinted by Kyrgios himself, who took to Instagram with a playful post featuring a photo from their 2022 Wimbledon singles final.

His caption, "Doubles at Brisbane. See y'all there," immediately sparked excitement among fans. The Brisbane International confirmed the news with a cheeky graphic on social media, captioned, "When the plans make it out of the group chat."

However, ATP confirmed the news Saturday in a statement. "Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios will play doubles together at the Brisbane International presented by Evie, the tournament confirmed on Saturday morning in Australia."

Kyrgios, has been sidelined for much of the past two years due to injuries. The 29-year-old Australian last played on the ATP Tour in June 2023. His return to competitive tennis at Brisbane will be closely watched, as fans hope to see flashes of the form that earned him seven singles titles and four doubles crowns, including his memorable Australian Open doubles victory in 2022 alongside compatriot Thanasi Kokkinakis.

For Djokovic, the Brisbane International marks another milestone in his illustrious career. The Serbian legend will not only be looking to fine-tune his game ahead of the Australian Open but will also aim to capture his 100th ATP singles title, a feat that would solidify his position as one of the greatest players of all time.

This will be the first time Djokovic and Kyrgios team up on the doubles court.

Weightlifting Taiwan granny garners cheers

Cheng Chen was not the only nonagenarian in the competition. The oldest participant is 92

REUTERS

Taipei, Dec 21: Cheng Chen Chin-Mei beamed broadly as she hoisted a 35-kg (77-pound) weightlifting bar to her waist, dropped it and waved confidently to the enthusiastic crowd in a competition in Taipei.

Cheng Chen, 90, has been pumping iron since last year, encouraged by her granddaughter to take up the sport after she was diagnosed with



Parkinson's disease. She credits the regimen with helping to fix her posture.

Three generations of her family were among a couple of hundred people watching Cheng Chen and 44 others aged 70 or over in a weightlifting competition Saturday.

In the three-round competi-

tion, Cheng Chen lifted as much as 45 kg (99 pounds) using a hexagonal-shaped bar that is said to allow the lifter more stability and options for gripping.

"I want to tell all the old people to join the workout," Cheng Chen told Reuters after the competition. "You don't need to work extremely hard, but

I want to tell all the old people to join the workout. You don't need to work extremely hard, but this is to stay healthy

CHENG CHEN CHIN-MEI | WEIGHTLIFTER

this is to stay healthy."

Cheng Chen was not the only nonagenarian in the competition. The oldest participant is 92. Taiwan is projected to become a "super-aged society" next year, with 20% or more of its 23 million people aged 65 or older, according to National Development Council data.

The government has set up fitness centres across the island with equipment suitable for older people, to encourage them to train, according to the Health Promotion Administration, which

encourages healthy lifestyles.

"The hex bar dead-lift is an easy workout. It is similar to squats or sitting down and standing up," said Cheng Yu-shao, head coach at LKK Wellness, which organised the event. It can help prevent muscle loss and minimise the risk of falls, he told Reuters during a training session with Cheng Chen this week.

During the workout, Cheng Chen said weight training has helped with some of her health issues. "My shoulders have become lighter after some time of continuous workouts," she said.

Cheng Chen won only a medal and a certificate for her performance but received the adulation of the crowd and the chance to wave like a superstar.