

Sexism in sports

Actor Mandira Bedi opens up about the struggles she faced as a lady cricket presenter

LEISURE | P2



PLA slams Pentagon

The Chinese military has denounced a recent Pentagon report alleging corruption is denting PLA's modernisation INTERNATIONAL | P10



Record IPO frenzy

Fundraising via IPOs in India hits another landmark as companies raise a record ₹1.6 lakh crore in 2024

BUSINESS | P11



First-ever winners

India beat Bangladesh by 41 runs to become first-ever winners of the inaugural U19 Women's Asia Cup

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BHUBANESWAR | MONDAY | DECEMBER 23, 2024

Collectors asked to assess crop damage

NDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: The Mohan Charan Majhi-led state government has directed the Collectors of districts affected due to the recent unseasonal rainfall to carry out proper assessment of the damages to crops, Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said Sunday.

Speaking to mediapersons, Revenue Minister Pujari said, 'The Collectors have been instructed to carry out the proper assessment of crop loss due to the unseasonal rainfall. The assessment couldn't be carried out properly due to rainfall which continued till yesterday."

'The revenue officials- Tehsildars, Revenue Inspectors, Amins- from the unaffected areas have also been roped in to do assessment of the loss in the affected areas of the state. The assessment will be conducted accurately after the rain subsides," Pujari said.

Pujari assured the farmers that the state government will provide adequate compensation for the crop loss and also extend help for the sale of the remaining crops. The Revenue Minister stated that he would personally visit the affected

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

So what if you couldn't see the culprit's number plate. You can

always name RaGa

STR officials mull

tranquilisation to

bring Zeenat back

Baripada, Dec 22: The au-

thorities of the Similipal Tiger

Reserve (STR) Sunday said that

they are not averse to putting

the tigress under sedation in

order to bring her back to the

core area of the national park.

STR Field Director Prakash

Chand Gogineni said, "Tigress

(Zeenat) is moving in West Ben-

gal. The Odisha and West Bengal

Forest departments are tracking

and moving with it. It is fit and

fine. Efforts are being made to

bring it back by tranquilisation." Claiming that tigress Zeenat, which strayed into Jharkhand

on the northern side of STR.

later moved into West Bengal

forests Friday, he said, "Forest

department personnel of both

the states are tracking Zeenat

through signals from her radio

collar and efforts are underway

to guide her back into Similipal."

not return to her habitation in

the core area of STR, the author-

ities may apply tranquilisation

as an alternative mode to bring

Zeenat and Jamuna were

brought from Tadoba-Andhari

Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Maha-

rashtra with the goal of introduc-

ing a new gene pool to the tiger

More P3

her back," he said.

population.

'However, if the animal does

PNN & AGENCIES

UNSEASONAL RAINFALL



Meanwhile, the state government has urged the farmers who have insured their Kharif crops under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (Kharif -2024) to report about the crop loss due to the unseasonal rainfall to avail the insurance compensation.

As per a press statement of the state government, the harvested crops of farmers in many coastal and interior districts Angul, Balasore, Bhadrak, Boudh, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Deogarh, Gajapati, Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur, Kandhamal, Kendrapara, Keonjhar, Khurda, Koraput, Mayurbhanj, Nabarangpur, Nayagarh, Puri and Rayagada, would have been damaged due to the unseasonal rainfall over the last two days.

"About 15 lakh farmers from these districts have been enrolled under the scheme. The farmers who have insured their Kharif crops under PMFBY (Kharif -2024) are required to report loss of their harvested crops for claiming insurance compensation," the statement read.

The farmers have been advised to upload the information on crop loss using "Krishi Rakshak" app within 72 hours of the crop loss or inform through the Help Line No. 14447.

The state government further said that the post-harvest loss is covered under PMFBY -Crop Insurance Scheme, if the crop loss has occurred in cut & spread condition or in small bundled condition within 14 days of harvest.

The insurance compensation will be paid to the farmers after a joint survey of the affected fields by the officials of implementing insurance companies and government officers. The compensation will be paid to insured farmers on the entire sum insured amount

RUBBLE TROUBLE: Rescue operation continues after a multi-storey building collapsed Saturday evening, at Sohana village in Punjab's Mohali district. Sunday. At least two people were killed in the incident while several others are feared trapped under the debris, according to officials

India, Kuwait boost ties to strategic partnership

PM MODI RECEIVES KUWAIT'S TOP HONOUR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kuwait City, Dec 22: India and Kuwait Sunday elevated their relationship to a strategic partnership and inked a key pact on forging deeper defence ties as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held extensive talks with the top leaders of the Gulf nation, including Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, on ways to intensify the overall trajectory of bilateral cooperation.



Kuwait Sunday also conferred its highest honour - 'The Order of Muharak Al-Kabeer' - on PM Modi for his role in strengthening the good relations between the two countries. The 'Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer' is a knighthood or-

Besides the Emir, Modi held wide-ranging talks with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah and Crown Prince Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah with a focus on giving new momentum to the overall bilateral ties. In their delegation-level talks,

the two prime ministers discussed a roadmap to strengthen the strategic partnership in diverse areas including trade, investment, energy, defence, security, health, education, technology and people-to-people ties, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

In the meetings, the Indian side also showed keen interest in intensifying its cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) through Kuwait's presidency of the influential grouping.

Modi arrived here Saturday on a two-day trip - the first to this Gulf nation by an Indian prime minister in 43 years. The last Indian prime minister to visit Kuwait was Indira Gand-

Forest staffer faces villagers' ire as tusker tramples man to death

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 22: A Forest staff member was thrashed by angry villagers following the death of a man in an elephant attack at Rugudi Sahi in Jakeikela panchayat under Bonai Forest Division, Sunday.

The victim, 40-year-old Dharanidhar Patra, was trampled by a tusker while he was sweeping in front of his house early Sunday morning.

This marks the fourth fatality in the region within a fortnight. Similar incidents have occurred recently, claiming the lives of three more people, including a minor, in elephant



attacks in nearby areas.

Tension erupted at the Bonai Hospital when Patra was declared dead. His nephew, Rohit Patra, was the first to find his uncle's body. "Around 4am, I heard the elephant's trumpet. I called my uncle, but his phone went unanswered, so I went outside. Near the crop field. I saw the elephant standing about 200 metres away, and my uncle's body was lying near it," he said. Patra's niece added that the elephant had trampled her uncle on his chest and neck. "When the villagers tried to take him to the hospital, the elephant attempted to attack them. However, they managed to drive it away," she said.

In the midst of the unrest, one forest staff member was attacked and beaten by the villagers. They also staged a protest outside the residence of the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), demanding action to address the elephant menace and compensation for the victim's family.

SHORT TAKES

New 'darshan' system in Srimandir from Jan 1

Bhubaneswar: The state government is going to introduce a new system in Srimandir from January 1 to provide devotees better facilities to have 'darshan' of the sibling deities, Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said Sunday. "Required arrangements are being made. The necessary work will be completed by December 27 or 28. For two days, December 30 and 31, the new system will be introduced on an experimental basis," Harichandan said, adding that from January 1, the new darshan arrangements will be fully implemented. Special arrangements are also being made for women, children, differently abled persons, and senior individuals visiting the temple, as part of the move, the minister said.

Smuggler caught from theatre during 'Pushpa 2' show

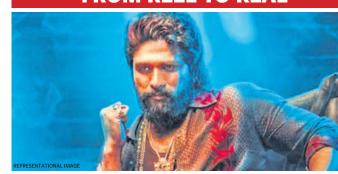
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Nagpur, Dec 22: Moviegoers watching a late-night show of 'Pushpa 2' at a multiplex in Maharashtra's Nagpur witnessed a real-life action scene as police stormed the cinema hall and arrested a man wanted in murder and drug cases.

The dramatic arrest of Vishal Meshram shortly after midnight Thursday left the packed audience stunned, but police assured them that they could continue enjoying the movie as they nabbed the ac-

cused and took him away. Meshram was on the run for

FROM REEL TO REAL



10 months and was eventually tracked down after police learnt about his interest in

the recently-released film, an official from Pachpaoli police station said Sunday.

The gangster had 27 cases against him, including two of murder and drug trafficking, and was known for his violent tendencies, even attacking police in the past, he said.

Authorities had been pursuing him relentlessly, using cyber surveillance and tracking his movements in a new sports utility vehicle (SUV), the official said.

After tracking him Thursday, police deflated the vehicle's tyres outside the cinema hall, located in central part of the city, to prevent his escape,

When police personnel en-

tered the hall during the movie's climax, Meshram was engrossed in the film.

The police surrounded him and made the arrest swiftly, giving him no chance to resist, the official said

Meshram is currently lodged in the Nagpur Central Jail and will soon be transferred to a prison in Nashik, the police said.

'Pushpa 2 The Rule', the blockbuster movie starring Allu Arjun, is a sequel to 2021's Telugu film 'Pushpa The Rise'. It was released December 5 with dubbed versions in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali and Malayalam.

Rahul summoned by Bareilly court

Bareilly (UP): A court here has summoned Congress MP and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi to appear before it January 7 for his remarks related to the Economic Survey during the Lok Sabha polls. District and Sessions Judge Sudhir Kumar Saturday issued notice to Gandhi. The summons is related to a plea filed by Pankaj Pathak, Mandal president of the All India Hindu Mahasangh outfit. Gupta alleged that Gandhi tried to provoke the financially weaker sections with his statements which were aimed at creating class hatred for political gain.



eisure



BLAKE ACCUSES BALDONI OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Hollywood actor Blake Lively has levelled sexual harassment accusations against her It Ends With Us co-star and director Justin Baldoni and alleged that there were coordinated PR efforts to "destroy" her reputation in a legal complaint.

ANGELINA JOLIE'S RECENT RED **CARPET LOOKS SPARK CONCERN**

Angelina Jolie's recent red carpet looks for her Maria Callas' biopic has sparked concerns about her health on social media. Fans are attempting to emulate her noticeably thin frame and prominent veins, resorting to dangerous dieting tips like dehydration and starvation.



accuracy • reliability • trust

Without annarent reason you may go into your shell today. No doubt you will acknowledge the contribution of others, but Ganesha says you have to do more than that; you will have to share your knowledge with your peers.

Ganesha sees you being very planned and focuses, poised and practical in handling your affairs today. You'll be able to take identify the best strategy, course of action that the situations demand This day you would be performing like a specialist, a real expert and will not fail to accomplish whatever you have set out to do.

You are on your way to falling in love. Your parents or children are likely to fetch you substantial gains, financially or otherwise. You may want to make a few changes at work, probably a new business strategy.

CANCER

You will not only make plans, but will also act on them. So you can save money, time and energy for creative pursuits. The quality of your work and accomplishments will be high. Your creativity plays a key role in your accomplishments in career or business.

You will need to work hard to achieve your goals today. Those who are serious about their work will be easily able to tide over the day. You need to be cautious today. Not only at work, but even in personal relationships, you need to be on guard. You need to maintain a balance between home and at work, says Ganesha.

Issues regarding religious

VIRGO

beliefs and spirituality will surface today. Pursue your goals single-mindedly to attain success in the field of your choice, and exploit your abilities and talents to the hilt, advises Ganesha. You will be more logical and calculative, rather than emotional, in mat ters of your relationships.

Ganesha savs that today

in your office you should be very careful in your work. It is likely that your superiors will not be happy about your work or your ability today. Those of you who are businessmen should try and delay sending off tenders today.

SCORPIO At work, you would want

to change the perspective with which people see you. Your colleagues recognise you as the emerging alpha-lion, Ideas and opinions will impress your bosses. But keep a level head and learn where to stop, even when winning, counsels Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS

Lengthy business meetings keep you occupied almost throughout the day. You may also do some value addition to your work by taking co-workers' suggestions and inputs, says Ganesha. Implementation of these inputs will prove highly beneficial in the long run.

CAPRICORN

The day will be of para-mount significance as you are likely to meet someone who will be associated with you for life, says Ganesha. Also, relationships and relatives will keep you busy for major part of the day. You may not find it interesting, but you will not have any options either. A visit to holy places for some peace of mind is also likely.

AQUARIUS

The day begins on high note. You work hard, put your best foot forward and at the end get the final output as $% \left(t\right) =\left(t\right) \left(t\right)$ per your requirements. Romantic and beautiful, the setting Sun will bring the softer side of your personality to the fore as you will spend the evening with your sweetheart, predicts Ganesha.

PISCES

For you, today may all be work and no play, says Ganesha. This, however, will not stop you from putting in extra efforts to finish your pending projects and to meet your deadlines. But then who else but a Pisces is known to handle the pain nonchalantly without bemoaning the lack of pleasure?

Are Triptii, Sam vacationing together?

MUMBAI: Animal star indicating that they Triptii Dimri, who was were enjoying the recently seen in Bhool outing together. Bhulaiyaa 3, is enjoy-Despite the shared ing the end of the year moments, neither has officially comin Cotswolds in south central England. mented on their However, the acrelationship status. On the work front, Triptii Dimtress is not alone. She

is in the company of her rumoured boyri was last seen in friend Sam Merchant. Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3 Triptii recently shared with Kartik Aarya series of Instagram an, Vidya Balan and Madhuri showcasing her holiday spirit. Dixit. She will In one snap, she is next appear seen feeding goats, in Dhadak 2 while another with features her in dhant a cozy attire Chaturveenjoying hot di. Triptii chocolate. The also has third picture, Vishal likely tak-Bharaden by her

rumoured Arjun Usbeau Sam. tara in the captures line-up. She her at a will share restauscreen space rant. with Sha-Sam hid Ka Merchant also shared similar moments on his Instagram stories, clearly



rala, who was recently seen in the period drama streaming series Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar, is voicing her support for everything local. The actress recently visited her homeland, and appreciated the local culture, food and craftsmanship. The actress took to her Instagram Sunday, and

shared an array of pictures from her visit to Nepal. The actress was seen dressed in winter wear, and also attended an event where she took to the mic. She also penned a long note in the caption, as she

wrote, "Yesterday was truly an inspiring day! I attended an incredible exhibition showcasing local entrepreneurs who are promoting handmade products, using local fabrics like Dhaka, creating unique jewelry, and preparing healthy, homemade food right from their kitchens. It was heartwarming to see a community so dedicated to preserving tradition and supporting sustainable, local practices' She further mentioned, "What made the experience

even more special was meeting the young and dynamic Deputy Mayor of Budhanilkantha. Listening to her speak so eloquently about why it's every citizen's duty to promote local goods was truly motivating. Her passion for community development and supporting local talent was contagious! Here's to celebrating and supporting those who work tirelessly to uplift our heritage and make a difference. #SupportLocal #Sustainability #HandmadeWithLove #Inspiration".

MANDIRA talks about sexism in sports

MUMBAI: Mandira Bedi started her career as an actor in the 1990s. She was also appointed as a presenter during the cricket World Cup in 2003. However, her journey was not easy, at least for the first few days. Mandira recently opened up about the challenges she faced as a lady cricket presenter.

In an interview. Mandira revealed that she used to feel disrespected by the cricket legends, she said,

'One week went by with absolute hesitation, fumbles mistakes. At the end of every show, I would put my head down and cry. The legends on either sides of me, I would ask them questions and they just stared at

They turned to the camera and answered whatever the hell they wanted to answer, nothing connected to my question. because my question was probably not relevant or important enough for them. It was very unnerving. I felt disrespected"

However, things changed after the channel's intervention. "At the end of the first week, there was an intervention and the channel called me and said, 'We have chosen you amongst a thousand

women, we believe you belong there. You are not an analyst, expert or a commentator, you are a presenter. Go out there and have fun, show them your personality'. That intervention was really helpful, it was a turning point for me. I flipped a switch that day, she expressed.

When Ameen Sayani explained the reason behind 'punch style' less. You shout'. So, in this wav. MUMBAI: Ameen Sayani, the In college obviously all of the proved. The tape was

Sid-

poor

the

mov-

iconic radio personality, had once revealed how the "punch style" of rendering the voice on radio became a norm. An old video of the late radio legend has surfaced on the Internet. and it shows him explaining that the "dhoom, dhadaka" style of radio announcements and programs was born out of necessity.

He said in the video, "In the beginning, the style of dhoom. dhadaka, this and that, which is called the 'punch style', was there because it had a reason. Our recording used to happen in our college. St. Xavier's College which also had a radio technical institute. The studio was not soundproofed properly

students used to make a lot we got used to shouting. of noise, they still do. That became the style. So, because the sound-Yes. But, after that, proofing of that studio when the equipwas not good, the rement became corder used to tell us. better, the 'look, there is a lot of studio noise outside. We keep the volume of the fader a lit-

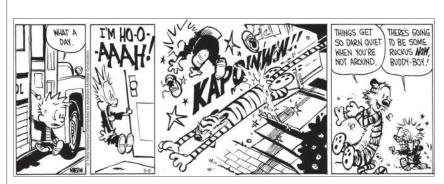
good, the transmission was good, so, the sound kept changing", he added.

Ameen achieved huge popularity through his radio program Geetmala which has gone down as a milestone in India's radio landscape. His captivating voice and engaging style spelled a cast at the listeners cultivating fans across the country, and popularised the medium of radio which got a further boost in early 2000s as the dotcom bubble burst. His signature way of addressing listeners as "Behno aur Bhaiyo" (sisters and brothers) became instantly recognisable and widely imitated.He passed away at the age of 91 due to cardiac

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBES

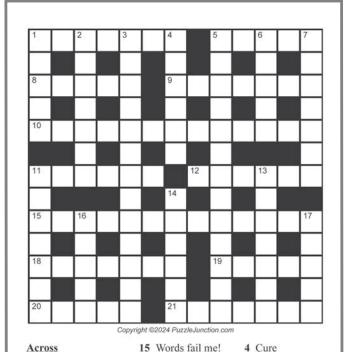


BREVITY



FUN

CROSSWORD



Across

- 1 Books are his
- thing 5 No-frills
- 8 Foxy-faced primate
- 9 Jean-Baptiste
- Poquelin's pen
- name 10 Store's interior decorator?
- (6,7)
- 11 Certain print 12 Old Testament

hunter

Down

18 Specific

19 Vigilant

arts?

vocabulary

20 Supporter of the

21 Vessel turners

- Santo
- butterfly
- 1 Let happen 2 Dominican
- Republic's
- 3 Brush-footed

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

- 4 Cure 5 Message centre
 - (8,5)
 - 6 Lawn starters 7 Gave the home team a rousing welcome
- 11 Cooking utensil
- 13 Chest protector (3,4)
- 14 Caldera
- 16 Troy ounce
- parts 17 Foil relatives

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

CROSSWORD

A A A A A B A B A N C T U M NUMBS SWEETEN

SUDOKU

8 2 9 3 7 1 4 2 5 5 6 4 9 7 8

owntown

SCIENTIFIC TEMPER

Students showcase their models during an exhibition-cum-competition 'Mathmagic Fest- 2024' organised by Regional Science Centre, Bhubaneswar in collaboration with Smart Vision Learning System on the occasion of National Mathematics Day in Capital City, Sunday



New 'darshan' system trial run Dec 30 & 31

Devotees to benefit from enhanced darshan facilities at Srimandir starting January 1, with special provisions for women, children, seniors and differently-abled visitors



Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Experimental run for the proposed new 'darshan' system at the Srimandir in Puri will start December 30 and will continue till the next day, to ensure that the system is introduced seamlessly from January 1.

The state government is going to introduce a new system in Puri Srimandir to provide devotees better facilities to have 'darshan' of the deities, Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said Sunday.

Speaking to mediapersons here, Harichandan said the government is taking steps to introduce the new system for public 'darshan' in the 12th century shrine from January 1.

As per the new arrangements, devotees will enter the shrine through the existing gate (Satapahacha) while exit will be made through two different gates (Ghanti and Garada)

arrangements are being made. The necessary work will be completed by December 27 or 28. For two days. December 30 and 31, the new system will be introduced on an experimental basis," he said, adding that from January 1, the new darshan arrangements will he fully implemented

Special arrangements are also being made for women, children, differently-abled persons, and senior individuals visiting the temple, as part of the move, the minister said.

As per the new arrangements, devotees will enter the shrine through the existing gate (Satapahacha) while exit will be made through two different gates (Ghanti and Garada).

Harichandan said he and Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) chief administrator Arabinda Padhee visited the temple Saturday and reviewed the work being carried out for the introduction of the new facility in the temple.

Ex-MLA Bijaya Mohanty passes away at 60

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Former MLA Bijaya Kumar Mohanty died here Sunday. He

Mohanty, a two-time BJD MLA from Bhubaneswar-Central constituency, was admitted to Capital Hospital after he fell unconscious at a guest house. He had been keeping unwell for the last few weeks.

Upon his arrival at the hospital, medical tests were conducted and he was declared dead, its deputy superintendent Dhananjaya Das said.

Later, Mohanty's body was brought to the Assembly premises and the BJD party office, where MLAs and party leaders paid their last respects.

Mohanty was elected to the Assembly for the first time in 2009 on a BJD ticket from the Bhubaneswar-Central constituency and re-elected in 2014.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi expressed his grief over Mohanty's demise and prayed for eternal peace of the departed soul.

BJD president Naveen Patnaik said he was saddened to learn about the death of Mohanty. Mohanty's contributions to the welfare of people will always be remembered, Patnaik



POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Jatra troupe owner held for duping actress

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Lingaraj police Sunday arrested the owner of a Jatra troupe for allegedly swindling over ₹8.25 lakh from a woman on the pretext of making her his business partner. The accused has been identified as Amaresh Sahu, 45 who lives in Cuttack along with his family.

Complainant Manorama Dash, 28, also an actress in the same troupe, had accused the owner of distributing salaries of the artistes from her account, said Purna Chandra Nayak, IIC of Lingaraj police station.

Navak said the complainant came across Amaresh and his theatre group 'Om Siva Shakti' in February 2024. Subsequent-



ly, she joined the troupe with a monthly payment of ₹80,000. However, in March, Manorama received a salary of ₹50,000, and was asked by Amaresh to be his partner in the group. Then the duo reached a consensus that Manorama would start bearing the financial expenses of the group. Soon, Manorama stopped taking her salary from the group.

so lent ₹3.53 lakh to Amaresh, owing to their cordial relations Amaresh had promised to settle the loan within a few months.

In September first week when Manorama met Amaresh to discuss about her profit share in the business, the latter snubbed her, and threatened to kill her if she raises this issue again. Later, several attempts by Manorama for settling the financial issues also went in vain. Finding no other option she quit the group and lodged a police complaint against Ama resh, September 26.

Nayak said Amaresh has been booked under Sections 318 (4), 296, and 315 (2) of BNS, and was produced before a local court Sunday for remand.

Min launches medicinal plantation drive in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Acknowledging the crucial role of trees in maintaining ecological balance and ensuring a disease-free society, Forest and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia initiated a medicinal tree plantation drive at his official residence here Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister highlighted the divine contribution of trees as nature's gift to humanity. He emphasised the importance of medicinal plants in primary and Ayurvedic healthcare, urging everyone to cultivate medicinal gardens in their home premises.

"This initiative will not only contribute to a cleaner and healthier environment but also provide essential primary medicines at home," the minister said. He encouraged citizens to actively participate in such eco-friendly initiatives to enhance environmental sustainability and community health.

SIRS FOUNDER'S DAY

'ACADEMICS, SPORTS KEY TO STUDENTS' HOLISTIC DEVPT'



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Cuttack District Magistrate Dattatraya Bhausaheb Shinde emphasised the importance of integrating academics, sports, and arts for the holistic development of students during the 7th Annual Founder's Day (AFD) celebration of SAI International Residential School (SIRS) held December 19 and 20.

The two-day event began with Sports Day at the SAI International Stadium, where former cricketer Narendra Hirwani inaugurated the annual sports meet. The evening featured a captivating performance by students, including the Founder's English Play and Chronicles of Harry Potter, which left the audience enthralled.

On the second day, Shinde attended the event as the chief guest and addressed the gathering. He encouraged students to integrate their studies with sports and arts, stating, "Education is the solution to all issues. It teaches you to distinguish between right and wrong." Shinde also recounted his collaborative efforts with the late founder-chairman Bijaya Kumar Sahoo in Ganjam to support underprivileged communities.

Shinde lauded SAI International Education Group chairperson Silpi Sahoo for continuing the inspirational legacy of the late founder-chairman. He praised the group's contributions to government schools through initiatives like the Odisha Adarsh Vidyalayas.

The day also included a felicitation ceremony to honour students excelling in academics and extracurricular activities. Additionally, an exhibition showcasing students' innovative projects and creative works was a highlight of the celebration.

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Tigress 'Zeenat' spotted in Purulia



Kolkata/Bhubaneswar, Dec 22: Forest personnel are monitoring the movement of a tigress which strayed from Similipal Reserve Forest and is currently in West Bengal's Purulia

district, an official said Sunday. The three-year-old tigress brought from Maharashtra to Similipal Reserve Forest is fitted with a radio collar and is currently located in Bandwan area of Purulia district, West Bengal's Chief Wildlife Warden Debal Rov told PTI.

It earlier crossed over to West Bengal from neighbouring Jharkhand and roamed around in Jhargram and West Medinipur district, all parts of the forested 'Jangalmahal' belt.

Asked about reports that another tigress from Similipal which had escaped around the same time and roamed around the forested corridor of three neighbouring states has already headed back to her old habitat, Roy said, "We don't have information about two tigresses escaping from Simlipal and having strayed into West Bengal."

'Whether you call her Zeenat or Jamuna, we have information about one tigress leaving Similipal, en-

tering Jharkhand and now having crossed over to our state for the past three days. Our men are keeping a constant vigil on her movement,"

He said forest personnel from Odisha are also working with their Bengal counterparts in monitoring the movement of the big cat which has so far not shown any signs of aggression.

The tigress had covered not less than 50 km after straying from Similipal but such behaviour is normal for tigers who wander several kilometres in search of a new territory, another forest official said.

"Probably the forest belt of neighbouring states, having similar habitat, became a corridor for her and she is trying to set up a new territory. We are at work to drive her away to Similipal through the same route or if she is captured, release her back into the reserve forest in Odisha. We are hopeful there is no man-animal conflict," the senior state forest official said.

"The prey base is low in the areas where it is presently located. So, we hope she turns back to the reserve since there is more prey there," he said.

Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism



SRI AUROBINDO

Transparency Missing

ne of the cornerstones of a functioning democracy is transparency as the people have every right to information on all matters that concern them. The electoral procedure is one such aspect of a democracy that needs to be sacrosanct and kept out of any sort of controversy. In this context, the Centre's tweaking of 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 has snowballed into a row with the Opposition seeing it as a sinister attempt to compromise elections.

Following the recommendation of the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Law Ministry amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, on 21 December. This amendment limits the types of "papers" or documents that are available for public inspection. As per Rule 93, all election-related "papers" are generally open to public scrutiny, but the amendment adds the phrase "as specified in these rules" after "papers."

However, this amendment runs counter to a recent ruling by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. In the Mahmoud Pracha vs EC case, the High Court directed the poll body to share all the documents related to the Haryana Assembly elections, including treating CCTV camera footage as permissible under Rule 93(2), with the petitioner. Mahmoud Pracha, an advocate, had filed a petition seeking the videography, CCTV camera footage, and copies of Forms 17-C Parts I and II related to the conduct of elections.

While both the ECI and the Law Ministry defended the move claiming that it will safeguard the misuse of CCTV camera footage of polling stations, the Congress sees it as yet another attempt to "erode the integrity of the electoral process," and accused the poll body of opacity and a pro-government attitude in its dealings.

The Conduct of Election Rules has mention of various documents, including nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results, and election account statements. The Rules mention election materials. However, they do not explicitly mention electronic records in relation to these election documents. In a bid to remove this ambiguity, the Rules were amended, a poll panel official said, justifying the move. Election Commission officials also expressed concerns that the misuse of CCTV footage from polling booths could jeopardize voter confidentiality. They also claimed that such footage could be manipulated to create misleading narratives using artificial intelligence.

Earlier, the Parliament passed the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023. This legislation sought to govern the appointment and service conditions of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners. Notably, the Bill excluded the Chief Justice of India from the selection panel, which includes the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. This change had led to a huge backlash from the Opposition parties.

These developments come at a time when the independence and integrity of an autonomous institution such as the ECI are being questioned by several quarters, while there are allegations on the misuse of electronic voting machines (EVMs), with some parties even demanding a return to the ballot paper system of voting. No matter how imperfect our democracy is elections are still taken seriously by the people, notwithstanding the occasional cribbing by parties on the losing side. However, opaque rules, such as the latest one, are sure to erode the common man's faith in the electoral system.

WISDOM CORNER

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They came through you but not from you and though they are with you yet they belong not to you

On the mountains of truth you can never climb in vain: either you will reach a point higher up today, or you will be training your powers so that you will be able to climb higher

The simplest principles become difficult of practice, when habits, formed in error, have been fixed by time, and the simplest truths hard to receive when prejudice has warped

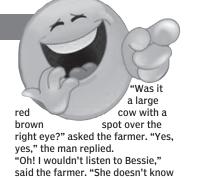
THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- **1815:** British author Jane Austen published her fourth novel, Emma, which centres on a precocious young woman whose misplaced confidence in her matchmaking abilities occasions several romantic misadventures.
- **1876:** The first comprehensive constitution of the Ottoman Empire went into effect, giving the sultan full executive power.
- 1941: Early in World War II, invading Japanese forces defeated U.S. troops at the Battle of Wake Island.
- 1975: Metric Conversion Act signed by U.S. President Gerald Ford. The act made the metric system the preferred system of weights and measures in the United States. Today, the metric system is predominantly only used by scientists and academics in the U.S. Common people tend to follow the customary units that were developed before American Independence. The U.S. is 1 of 3 countries in the world that do not use the metric system. Liberia and Myanmar are the other two.
- 1990: Slovenian referendum on independence from Yugoslavia. The Eastern European country had joined the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a socialist republic state in 1945. Actual independence for the country did not occur until June of 1991, when the Slovenians rejected Yugoslavian interference in the form of a 10-day war that ended on July 7, 1991. A new constitution for the country came into force on December 23,

LO

A TALKING COW

man's car stalled on a country Aroad one morning. When the man got out to fix it, a cow came along and stopped beside him. "Your trouble is probably in the carburetor," said the cow. Startled, the man jumped back and ran down the road until he met a farmer. The amazed man told the farmer his story.



a thing about cars."



FOCUS ECONOMY

BEYOND MONETARY POLICY

outh Korea's remarkable transformation from one of the world's poorest countries to one of the richest is unparalleled in recent history. But while official data show robust growth and low unemployment, the South Korean economy remains beset by deep structural challenges that could have a profound impact on its future prosperity.

Many Koreans are pessimistic about the future, which reflects the intense competition that defines their lives, from education to employment. Young children spend most of their time in school or with private tutors, rather than playing outside with friends. Teenagers are under enormous pressure to secure a spot at a prestigious university. No wonder more than 27% of high-school students in South Korea report

Soohyung Lee

KOREA'S

EARLIER THIS

YEAR, SOUTH

CENTRAL BANK

WORKED WITH

GOVERNMENT

MINISTRIES TO

DEVISE MACRO

PRUDENTIAL

MEASURES TO

STABILISE THE

COUNTRY'S

HOUSING

MARKET

symptoms of depression. Moreover, this enormous investment in education, especially college-admission prep, does not always translate into career success. It often takes graduates - even of elite institutions – years to find regular employment, resulting in many prolonging their time at university or enrolling in master's degree programmes. Recent research shows that Korean college graduates land their first full-time non-temporary job at age 31, on average, only to be pushed out of these secure positions by the time they are 49. Unemployed middle-aged workers are forced to accept low-paying, temporary jobs or leave the labour market.

Meanwhile, the cost of living has risen sharply. In June, the Bank of Korea (BOK) reported that the country's food prices are 55% higher than the OECD average, while clothing and housing are 61% and 20% more expensive, respectively. Seoul's housing market is similarly brutal: the price-to-income



As countries increasingly grapple with rising housing costs, declining birth rates, and slow wage growth, more central banks may expand their remit and address the structural challenges that societies face today

ratio, at nearly 27, tops that of New York and Tokyo.

The financial squeeze of high prices and low wages leaves many Koreans reluctant to have children - a trend that has accelerated over the past 20 years. In 2021, the country's fertility rate was 0.81, the lowest in the OECD, behind Spain (1.19), Italy (1.25), and Japan (1.30). This decline, coupled with rising life expectancy, means that South Korea's population is aging more rapidly than those of other developed countries.

Structural challenges such as a dearth of quality jobs, excessive spending on education, soaring housing prices, and an aging population are typically not the purview of central banks, which tend to focus on inflation and employment goals. But the BOK has increasingly channeled its resources toward addressing these problems, including by identifying potential policy responses and considering how to incorporate them into its operations.

In October, the BOK's Monetary Policy Board (of which I am a member) cut the benchmark interest rate for the first time since it began raising rates in August 2021, from 3.5% to 3.25%. The Board first considered a rate cut in August, as inflation showed clear signs of moderating, and the Korean won was stable relative to the US dollar. But a rapid increase in household debt and high housing prices raised concerns about financial stability, delaying the decision.

The housing market is a particularly thorny problem for monetary policymakers. Around 64% of Korean household assets are held in real estate, and only 36% are financial, whereas the ratio is typically the reverse in the United States and Japan. Moreover, many Koreans rent property through a system called jeonse, whereby tenants make a large upfront deposit, usually around 50% of the property's value, in lieu of monthly rent. Given the sums involved, renters often rely on bank lending, making them vulnerable to housing-related debt, in contrast to countries like the US. where only homeowners take on such risk. Thus, there is a strong correlation in South Korea between financial-market liquidity, rising housing prices, and higher household

Earlier this year, the housing market was heating up, particularly in Seoul's highend residential areas. At the same time, government programmes that provided subsidies and liquidity to the market, intended to make it easier for young families to find homes, began to fuel the spread of high housing prices to other parts of Seoul and surrounding areas. The BOK spotted these trends early and worked with relevant ministries to devise macroprudential measures that were implemented in September. Its interest-rate adjustment came only after signs that the housing market had stabilised and the growth

of household debt had slowed. The BOK's proactive measures were a challenge to the status quo, prompting resistance from some policymakers and experts. To increase transparency and confidence, the BOK is devoting more resources to engaging directly with the public and market participants. Establishing direct lines of communication will build trust in the BOK's actions, without which it cannot effectively fulfill its mandate.

As countries increasingly grapple with rising housing costs, declining birth rates, and slow wage growth, more central banks may expand their remit and address the structural challenges that societies face today. The BOK's approach shows that monetary policymakers can, and perhaps should, play a critical role in tackling these deeper issues to ensure greater economic resilience.

The writer, Professor of **Economics and Data** Analytics at Seoul National University, is a member of the Monetary Policy Board of the Bank of Korea.

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SPECTRUM

ROAD TRANSPORT

Time to scrap highway tolls



Shivaji Sarkar

THE LANDMARK **SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT MAY ENSURE ALL HIGHWAYS REMAIN FREE OF CHARGES TO USERS AND NO LEVYING OF** ARBITRARY AND **ILLEGAL FEE ON ROAD USERS**

ndians tormented by high prices, high tolls and irrational 'Fastag' got a minor relief on consideration of the concept as anti-people. The Supreme Court ruled that the 9.2-km Delhi-Noida-Direct (DND) flyway will be toll-free as it dismissed a plea by a private firm challenging the 2016 decision of the Allahabad High Court order asking it to stop collecting toll from commuters.

In effect, the SC upheld the concept that awarding a contract to private firm Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd (NTBCL) to collect toll from commuters plying on the DND flyway was unjust, unfair and arbitrary. This is the sine qua non of a continuous strife going on with both the Central government and its National Highway Authority of India (NHAI), which go on imposing irrational toll on people's highways. The

landmark SC judgement may ensure all highways remain free of charges to users and no levving of arbitrary and illegal fee on road users. "There is no reason for the collection of user or toll-tax to continue. We hold that the agreement (for toll collection) is invalid,' the bench of Justices Surva Kant and Uijal Bhuvan held. It found the company realised costs within a short span.

The high court, in October 2016, had ruled following a PIL that there would be no toll collected from those using the 9.2 km-long, eightlane DND flyway. In an over 100-page judgement, the high court had held, "the user fee which is being levied/realised is not supported by the legal provisions relied upon by the Concessionaire (Noida Toll Bridge Company), Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (promoter and developer of the project)

and the Noida Authority." It had said the "right to levy and collect user fee from the commuters suffers from excessive delegation and is contrary to the provisions of the UP Industrial Development Act."

The PIL, filed in 2012, had challenged the "levy and collection of toll in the name of user fee by the Noida Toll Bridge Company."

The court further suggested that the Prevention of Corruption Act could have been invoked had it not been for the long passage of time. It held "this blatant misuse of power and breach of public trust has profoundly shocked the conscience of the court.' This is a landmark judgment in toll grey areas. There are too many grey areas. In 2024, toll collection revenue on national highways was over ₹648 billion, a 35% increase from the previous year. Despite

that, since 3 June toll rates are hiked by 5% without an explanation. The total toll length in India has increased from 25.996 km in 2019 to 45,428 km as of November 2024.

The year-wise revenue collected as cess on petrol (quietly rephrased Excise duty) on all petroleum products during the last three years is: 2018-19 and 2020-21 -- ₹3,71,726. This is a huge fraud committed on the road user. The figures if added to toll levies mean almost 50% extra amount is collected for the purpose of road construction.

This calls for scrapping of all tolls collected by the NHAI. The year 2024-25 could be unique if the DND toll principles applied universally over all NHAI tolls ensuring recoveries from the NHAI and state highway systems.

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:

OrissaPOST B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Polluted cities

Sir, Studies and statistics have revealed a disturbing trend with regard to air pollution in India: most cities have crossed the threshold limit imposed by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Particularly, the particle pollution, or the particulate matter pollution (PM), is a cause for worry. India has exceeded the WHO standard threshold of PM 2.5 long ago. A latest study conducted by a reputed international journal has said that over 1.5 million Indians succumb to the ill-effects of air pollution everv year. As many as 655 districts were analysed in a ten-year period from the year 2009 by the journal. Shockingly, the journal has claimed that there is no city in India which can be considered safe from air pollution. Everything boils down to effective implementation and better regulation of vehicular emissions and dust particles -- the two major causes of air pollution.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

III-conceived policy

Sir, The proposal of holding simultaneous elections is fraught with a lack of clarity in its implementation and practicality for a country as vast and diverse as its expanse. The proposal has several loopholes, like midterm polls and the President's rule, and there is a lack of consideration for regional parties as well. Primarily, the proposal fails to address how precisely the Central government plans to hold simultaneous elections for the nation's 96.88 crore voters at the same time, as such a gargantuan exercise will be practically challenging to execute considering India's demography. Also, conducting all the elections in the same year becomes a major federal issue because it would force current state legislatures to shorten or lengthen their terms to make the election dates coincide with the national deadline. The attempt to impose an artificial cycle of elections and restrict electoral choice compromises with the spirit of democracy, which is a direct threat to the constitutional recognition of India as a democratic republic. A rushed and ill-conceived policy can produce unprecedented challenges to the polity of the nation.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI



ART EXPO: Students appreciate a painting displayed at the art gallery, which was inaugurated by state Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, at Gangadhar Meher University, Amrut Vihar in Sambalpur, Sunday

WEATHER

BBSR CTC Max Temp Min Temp Humidity 16.2



CLASSIFIED

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Puri, dated 20.12.2024 Jyotsnamayee Mahapatra, W/o Haraprasad Mahapatra resident of at Balabhadra Lane, Baliapanda Road, Puri-1, P.S.- Baliapanda, Dist.- Puri, Pin-752001, Odisha, State that my actual name is Jyotsnamayee Mahapatra. But in K.V. Certificate of my son Lokanath Mahapatra, my name has been mentioned as Jyotsnamayee Dash. That Jyotsnamayee Dash and Jyotsnamayee Mahapatra is one and same person i.e myself.

The original sale deed 719/02 dated 2.4.2002 in the name of Tunimani Khandayataray W/o - Baidyanath Baral property bearing khata No. - 238/980, plot No. - 10/2007 AC 0.072 decs situated at mouza khordha, Odisha has been lost by Smt. Tunimani Khandayataray W/o - Baidyanath Baral at Nayapalli, BBSR on the way to ICICI Bank, Nayapalli, BBSR in this regard FIR has been registered at Nayapalli police station, BBSR. Vide station diary / diary No. 019 dt - 4.12.2024 at time 20:09. Smt. Tunimani Khandayataray W/o - Baidyanath Baral (7848804020) wish to creat charge ViZ mortgage on the said property for loan facility from State Bank of India RACPC, Jatani branch Code- 12028 for construction overthere.

'Operation Surakhya' to make Rourkela safe

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 22: Rourkela police have launched 'Operation Surakhya" to tackle habitual offenders and bolster public safety in the region. The operation aims to enhance surveillance on criminals using scientific and technical means, assuring citizens of a safer environment.

Explaining the initiative's purpose, Superintendent of Police (SP) Nitesh Wadhwani said, "Rourkela, as the industrial and cultural hub of western Odisha, faces a range of criminal activities, from property crimes like theft and robbery to organised crime such as interstate and inter-district drug



trafficking. The expansive area of Rourkela police district, having porous borders with neighbouring states, allows habitual and hardened criminals to evade the police on occasion. Operation Surakhya sends a clear message that we are closely monitoring their movements and activities.'

The operation is focused on a series of measures to strengthen the surveillance of habitual offenders and reduce crime rates. These include

identification and monitoring of offenders, maintaining photographic and fingerprint database, regular surveillance and attendance checks, legal action against offenders, cross-border surveillance, execution of warrants, and public engagement.

"Through these efforts, we aim to reduce property crimes, improve vigilance, and create a stronger sense of security and alertness among the public," SP Wadhwani added.

Currently, around 1,340 habitual offenders have been identified, with 60 profiled and under surveillance. The exercise is ongoing in a mission mode, with plans to profile all habitual offenders by the end of January 2025, he said.

HC orders release of 6 **MV Debi crew members** Paradip, Dec 22: Six among

the 21 Vietnamese crew members aboard cargo ship MV Debi who have been detained at the Paradip Port since November 30 last year, were released by the Sunday evening following an order of the Orissa High Court Saturday.

As per the conditions laid down by the court, six other crew members who arrived here boarded the ship in exchange for the released crew Sunday evening. The released crew will stay for two more days in the country, before subsequently returning to Vietnam, sources in the Customs department said.

The remaining 15 crew members will be released in phases in exchange of same numbers of sailors, a security officer said while adding that the clearance process is taking time due to foreign policy, legal restrictions and the court order.

The clearance for the release of the crew was granted as per rules framed by International Maritime Organisation (IMO) which states that a sailor can stay for a maximum of nine months in ship, and has to unboard after completion of the period. Any period beyond nine months will take a toll on their physical and mental health.

As per the directives issued by the Orissa High Court, a fresh group of 21 Vietnamese crew members will replace



them on the vessel. Of the incoming crew, 11 members have already arrived in Paradip, while the remaining 10 are expected to join within a week.

Medical examinations, Customs verifications, and immigration procedures for the new crew were completed by Saturday. MV Debi will, however, remain detained at the port.

The vessel has been held at Paradip International Cargo Terminal (PICT), a private berth at Paradip Port, since November 30, 2023, after 22 packets of cocaine were discovered during loading of steel cargo. Customs authorities then reported that the seized drug were valued at Rs 220 crore at the time. Since then, the ship and its crew, all Vietnamese nationals, have been put under

Initially docked at the berth, the vessel accrued berth occupancy charges, prompting PICT to file a complaint against the ship's owners in the High Court. The court later ordered the sale of the ship.

However, the issue has not been resolved so far. Later, the Customs department instructed the ship to remain in the anchorage area of the sea. The ship stayed in the anchorage area and occasionally docked at the berth to load food, wa ter, and oil. On November 29 2024, when the ship approached the berth, 21 sailors on board staged a protest. Since then, the ship has remained at the EQ berth.

The primary reason for the protest was the sailors' demand to return home. The ship's owner is now making arrangements to send new crew members while facilitating the return of the current sailors to their homes.

RMC polls pending for over a decade

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, December 22: A big question haunting the residents here is about the withholding of elections to the Rourkela Municipal Corporation (RMC) for over a decade now when elections to the Restricted Market Committee (RMC), which coincidentally shares abbreviation with the former, was held a few months back.

For reference, Rourkela received the status of a municipal corporation November 14, 2014 and, in August 2013, the tenure of the last municipal body came to an end. Though, 11 years have passed since then, the industrial town doesn't have an elected municipal body.

After assuming the status of a corporation, some more areas, including a few Gram Panchayats (GPs), were included under the coverage area of the civic body, taking the number of municipal Wards to 40, from the earlier 33. However, following the move, a section of tribal community came out in op-



position to the inclusion of Jagda and Jhartarang GPs in the corporation. They moved the Orissa High Court, under the leadership of George Tirkey who is now with BJD. against the decision and obtained a stay in March 2015. Following this, the fate of RMC remained in suspended animation.

In 2021, a writ petition was filed by a former chairman of Rourkela Municipality in the Orissa High Court, urging to direct the then BJD government to hold elections to RMC. He argued that the stay was the over formation of RMC, which would mean that the municipality still exists.

Therefore, the Reservation of Seats and Conduct of Election Rules, 1994 are applicable for administration of Rourkela Municipality, he pointed out.

The RMC polls became a major political plank for key contenders during the 2024 Assembly elections. Dilip Ray, contesting on a BJP ticket, had assured that he would ensure early conduct of the RMC elections if voted to power. His opponent, Sarada Navak, too had promised the same.

Meanwhile, when contacted by this correspondent for comments, Navak said, "I can raise this issue since now I am in the Opposition, and I am doing that. However, it is the duty of the government of the day to act. More so, since their candidate had promised

early RMC elections. Nevertheless, the stalemate over conduct of elections to the important civic body has resulted in inordinate delay in the availability of many basic facilities to the citizens. Late issuance of death and birth certificates can be cited

INCULCATING DISCIPLINE: Students showcase their skills at the annual sports meet of Saraswati Sishu Mandir at Sahupada under Gopinathpur panchayat of Bant block in Bhadrak district Sunday

PEO in Vig net over fund embezzlement Youth 'shot at'

Nabarangpur, Dec 22: Vigilance sleuths Sunday arrested a former panchayat extension officer (PEO) of Tarudihi panchayat, under Raighar block in the district, from Nabarangpur town on charges of misappropriation of government funds to the tune of over Rs 1 crore

The accused, identified as Surendra Bhatra, had earlier been suspended by the district Collector from the post following corruption allegations against him. After his arrest. Bhatra was taken to the SP office at Jeypore in Koraput district for interrogation.

Bhatra was the PEO of Kachrapara-3 and Parchipara zones in Tarudihi panchayat. His name cropped up when Raighar BDO Lakshmi Sagar Majhi lodged a complaint at Kundei police station alleging misappropriation of Rs 65 lakh government funds in Tarudihi panchavat. Bhatra was put under suspension subsequently.

Vigilance has accused Bhatra of misappropriating Rs 50 lakh government funds in two other panchayats; siphoning off over Rs 15 lakh sanctioned towards rice. development works, pension, CFC and SFC in Parchipara zone, and another Rs 35 lakh funds in Kacharapara-3 panchayat.

during marathon

Rourkela: A youth received a gunshot injury this morning during the flagging off a marathon. The incident took place at Durga Puja ground in Sector-2 under Sector-3 police station. The police are still clueless about how the youth, Salil Kumar Sahu, 46, was shot at, or the identity of the accused. The marathon was organised by Youth Hostel Associations of India (YHAI) on the occasion of its platinum jubilee celebrations. Sahu, a Railways employee posted at Bimlagarh and also a member of YHAI was engaged in registration of participants when the bullet

allegedly hit his back.

New bridge to connect Rayagada with Andhra



POST NEWS NETWORK

Rayagada, Dec 22: Works on a new bridge, connecting Rayagada with Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, on Jhanjabati river near the Majhighariani temple here is on its last leg.

Works department started construction of the 62-metre bridge in 2017. After completion. Chief Minister Mohan

Charan Majhi is likely to inaugurate it during his visit to the district to attend cultural festival 'Chaiti', December 26.

Sources said residents of Ravagada district are dependent on Parbatipuram, Bobili, Vizianagaram and Vishakhapatnam for healthcare services, trade and business, and other purposes. The old bridge on Jhaniabati river near the Majhighariani temple has become derelict with passage of time. The bridge will help people

commute easily to Andhra Pradesh and lead to growth of business and commerce in Rayagada district.

When contacted, Superintendent Engineer Ambikeya Mishra said the bridge work has reached its last legs and the consultancy agency has been asked to hand over the bridge to the department by December 31.

Questioned whether the Chief Minister will inaugurate the bridge, he clarified that the consultancy agency has been asked to complete the works before the Chief Minister's visit to the district.

OFFICE OF THE SR. GENERAL MANAGER (ELECTRICAL) UPPER INDRAVATI HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT, MUKHIGUDA, DIST: KALAHANDI-766026, E-mail: sgmel_uihep@ohpcitd.com ODISHA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD. (A GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA UNDERTAKING) Regd. Office OSPH & W.C Building, Vanivihar Chhak, Janpath, Bhoinagar, Bhuban Tel: 91-0674-2542983, 2542802, 2545526, 2542826, Fax: 2542102,

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WRITTEN & COMPILED BY SAKYASEN MITTRA

cation news

national



The registration for the scheme will start tomorrow, and women don't have to go anywhere for registration. **Our volunteers will come** to your home and complete the registration ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP SUPREMO

RITUALS TO MARK ANNIV OF RAM LALLA'S CONSECRATION

Three-day rituals beginning January 11 will be held at the Ayodhya Ram temple to mark the first anniversary of the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol





mandate to the BJP twice. For the third time (2028 Assembly elections), I will

come with report card of our 10-year-rule and compare it with that of 35-year-rule of the CPI(M). I hope our report card will outweigh that of the communists AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER

Every scheme in the country is being implemented with the aim of benefiting the common



Saheb got full respect and honour only when there was a BSP government. which these casteist parties cannot digest

SHORT **TAKES**

Ride to funeral turns fatal in UP

Banda: A ride to attend a funeral turned fatal in Uttar Pradesh's Banda district Sunday when an elderly woman and her nephew were killed after a speeding truck hit their bike, police said. Another woman riding on the same bike sustained serious injuries in the accident which occurred near the Mahaveeran temple on Atarra bypass under the Nagar Kotwali police station limits

Jewellery store staffer shot dead

Thane: A 25-year-old jewellery store salesman was killed after two unidentified persons fired at him and his employer in Shahapur in Maharashtra's Thane district, a police official said Sunday. The incident took place at 10:30pm on Saturday when deceased Dineshkumar Manaram Chaudhary, his employer and one more person had called it a day and were waiting outside Mahalaxmi Jewellers in Gotheghar area, the official said.

NCB busts int'l drug racket

Ahmedabad: The Narcotics Control Bureau Ahmedabad has busted an international drug syndicate with the seizure of two kg ketamine and arrested four persons. including three Nigerian nationals, the NCB said Sunday, The accused conspired to traffic ketamine from India to foreign countries through courier parcels.

Man booked for employing minors

Thane: Police have registered a case against a 49-year-old person for allegedly making children work as labourers in his company premises in Maharashtra's Thane district, an official said Sunday. Personnel of the labour, women and child welfare departments and local police Friday raided four shops owned by the person who ran a packaging company at Vehale village in Bhiwandi area here.

Trainee cop dies of bullet wound

Srinagar: A trainee cop was killed at a police training institute in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district after being hit by a bullet allegedly fired by a sentry, officials said Sunday. Sentry Babu Ram, who was guarding a post at the Manigam police training institute, reportedly fired upon Mohammad Sareer. an under training recruit, in the

Tejashwi joins calls for unearthed in Sambhal **BPSC** exam cancellation

The former deputy chief minister, who had on late Saturday night visited the site in the state capital where candidates have been carrying out a round-the-clock protest, shared on X a screenshot of the two-page letter addressed to his ex-boss



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, Dec 22: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav Sunday wrote to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, seeking the cancellation of competitive exams conducted recently, under controversial circumstances, by the state's Public Service Commission. The former deputy chief

minister, who had on late Saturday night visited the site in the state capital where candidates have been carrying out a round-the-clock protest, shared on X a screenshot of the two-page letter addressed to his ex-boss

Yadav, who is now the Leader of the Opposition, warned "many of the protesters I met last night have fallen ill. If anything untoward happens, the blame shall be on the government and the BPSC Chair-

RULE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

casting footage.

New Delhi, Dec 22: The

CPI(M) Sunday demanded the

immediate withdrawal of an

election rule amendment pre-

venting public inspection of

certain electronic documents

such as CCTV camera and web-

In a statement, the CPI(M)

Politburo expressed its strong

objection to the amendment, re-

stricting the access of political

parties and candidates to elec-

tronic records, including video

CPI(M) demands

Yadav had visited Gardani Bagh locality where he was told by the protesters that they were opposed to the decision of the Bihar Public Service Commission to order re-exam only at Bapu Pariksha Parisar, one of the over 900 centres where. on December 13, the combined competitive exams were held. The young leader had told the protesters, "Be steadfast in your resolve. Rest assured that for every step you take, Tejashwi shall move forward

In his letter to the JD(U) supremo, the RJD leader said he agreed with the protesting candidates' contention that if an exam for some aspirants was held "on a different date, with a different set of question papers" there will be "no lev-

el-playing field". Notably, hundreds of aspi-

The government tweaked

the election rule to prevent public inspection of certain

electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting

footage as well as video record-

ings of candidates to check

Based on the recommenda-

tion of the Election Commis-

sion (EC), the Union law min-

istry Friday amended Rule

93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Elec-

tion Rules, 1961, to restrict the

type of "papers" or documents

were initially introduced by

the EC in consultation with

political parties to ensure

greater transparency, and

described as "retrograde" the

move to amend the rule.

The CPI(M) said these steps

open to public inspection.

and other digital trails.

their misuse.

tests, alleging that question papers had been leaked. The allegation met with a

rants at the Bapu Pariksha

Parisar had boycotted the

strong denial from the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC), which claimed the disruptions were caused by "anti-social elements" who had turned up as part of a "conspiracy" to get the exams cancelled.

The commission, however, has ordered re-examination for about 5,000 candidates who were assigned to the examination centre. Yaday also drew the attention of the chief minister to the protesters' objection to "private agencies" being hired for the manpower required for holding such exams.

Invigilators and fourthgrade staff deployed at exam centres were appointed through these agencies. Incidentally, one such personnel, appointed through a private agency, was Ram Iqbal Singh, who suffered a heart attack at the Bapu Pariksha Parisar and died on his way to a hospital, prompting the local administration to blame protesting candidates for the death and recommending that they be charged with murder.

Yadav also demanded an investigation into the claim of protesters that "model test papers" of many private coaching institutes "tallied more than 25 per cent" with the actual question papers and remarked "this could be more than a mere coincidence".

Making it clear that he would settle for nothing less than a re-examination for all the nearly five lakh candidates who had appeared for the December 13 tests, the RJD leader also said, "About 90,000 students could not take the tests as online forms could not be submitted in time because of a problem with the server. They should also get a chance".



Sambhal (UP), Dec 22: A stepwell, approximately 125 to 150 years old and covering an area of 400 square metres, was unearthed during excavation in the Laxman Ganj area of Chandausi here, an official said.

Excavation at the site began Saturday, said Krishna Kumar Sonkar, the Executive Officer of Chandausi Nagar Palika.

The excavation follows the reopening of the Bhasma Shankar temple in Sambhal December 13, after being closed for 46 years. Authorities said they discovered the structure during an anti-encroachment drive. Two damaged idols were found inside the well of the temple, officials had said.

According to local sources, the stepwell was constructed during the reign of the maternal grandfather of the king of Bilari. Sambhal District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya said the possibility of a survey by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at the site is being considered, and a request may be submitted to ASI if necessary. Speaking to the media, Pensi-

ya confirmed that the site was previously registered as a pond. The well's upper floor is made of bricks, while the second and third floors are of marble. The structure also features four rooms and a well, he said. Pensiya added that work is

being carried out cautiously to avoid damage to the structure.

"The excavation, which has so far uncovered 210 square meters

reopening of the Bhasma Shankar temple in Sambhal December 13, after being closed for 46 years

Authorities said they discovered the structure during an anti-encroachment

wo damaged idols were I found inside the well of the temple, officials had said

of the site, will continue, and encroachments in the area will be removed. Preliminary estimates suggest the stepwell is approximately 125 to 150 years old," said the DM. The officer also addressed

concerns about the Banke Bihari temple, located nearby the stepwell, which has fallen into disrepair. The DM said that the temple.

believed to be about 150 years old, houses two idols that are safely kept in separate temples. He assured that steps will be taken to renovate the temple, and any encroachments around it will be removed. During a public meeting held

two days ago, Kaushal Kishore, a Chandausi resident, informed the District Office about the ancient stepwell and highlighted the deteriorating condition of the nearby Banke Bihari temple. Kishore claimed that, in earlier times, the area was inhabited by the Hindu community and that the queen of Bilari used to stay there.

Vandalism at Allu Arjun's residence PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Dec 22: A group of persons, claiming to be members of Osmania University Joint Action Committee, Sunday vandalised flower pots and other things at the residence of top Telugu actor Allu Arjun here, demanding justice to the woman who died in 'Pushpa-2' screening stampede here. Some of them climbed the compound wall and threw tomatoes

Allu Arjun and demanding financial assistance of ₹one crore rupees for victim woman's family. A placard left by them said crores of rupees are made by making films, while those watching films are dying. The protesters were taken away by the police.

They raised slogans against

Police sources indicated that Allu Arjun was not at home when the incident happened. Police security is being provided at the actor's residence in the wake of the vandalism. they said.

Allu Arjun's father and veteran producer Allu Aravind said they would like to observe restraint and that law will take its own course. "You have seen what happened outside our house. But, this is time for us to observe restraint. We should not react to all this at present. Police came and took them away. They filed a case. Police are ready to take away if anyone comes here to cause any trouble. No one should encourage this type of incidents. We will not react to this. Law will take its own course," he told reporters. The OU-JAC was in the forefront of Telangana statehood agitation.

UP PCS prelims conclude with 42% turnout

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Prayagraj (UP), Dec 22: The PCS prelims, hit by large-scale protests at the beginning, were concluded Sunday, with only about 42 per cent of the candidates appearing.

Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) Secretary Ashok Kumar said the exams were conducted peacefully under the watch of police and other agencies.

"The PCS Pre exam was completed peacefully on Sun day. For the fairness of the exam, a double-layer system was put in place in which the police and the agency were conducting separate investigations," he told PTI.

He said all exams were conducted under the watch of CCTV and live streamed and candidates' iris and other biometrics were screened to filter out proxies

"Every candidate of every centre was monitored from the control room set up in the commission. This monitoring was done through CCTV cameras installed in 1.331 centres across the state. As soon as any candidate was seen roam ing around, we immediately alerted the concerned centre about what the particular candidate was doing," Kumar



Newly-recruited transgender traffic assistants of Hyderabad Police at an event, in Hyderabad, Telangana

ISRO to study how crops grow in space on PSLV-C60 mission

The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an yearend launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to demonstrate the space docking technologies that are crucial for building *India's space station*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: Demon-

ments planned on the POEM-4 - the fourth stage of ISRO's PSLV rocket that remains in

orbit after launching a satellite. The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an yearend launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to demonstrate the space docking technologies that are crucial for building India's space station.

The PSLV Orbital Experiment Module (POEM) will carry 24 experiments -- 14 from various ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and start-ups -- to demonstrate various technologies in space.

thermal control as part of the Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) developed by the Vikram tal Module in Space (APEMS), developed by Amity Universigrowth of spinach in a microgravity environment.

will be carried out simultaneously -- one on POEM-4 in space and one on the ground at the university

The experiment's outcome will provide insights into how higher plants sense the direction of gravity and light. The Debris Capture Robot-

ic Manipulator, developed by VSSC, will demonstrate the capturing of tethered debris by a robotic manipulator using visual servoing and object motion prediction in the space environment.

The robotic manipulator will be capable of capturing Manastu Space will test Vy om-2U, the green propulsion thruster, that uses a blend of hydrogen peroxide and inhouse additives as fuel, with the goal of providing a safer and higher-performing alternative to hydrazine for space applications.

Varuna payload The developed by Piersight Space-Ahmedabad, is an in-or bit demonstration of a Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) in a CubeSat form factor. This mission marks the ini-

tial step towards establishing a constellation of SAR and Au tomatic Identification System (AIS) satellites, aiming to provide persistent, near real-time monitoring of all human and

ISRO plans to grow eight cowfree-floating debris and refuelstration of seed germination in outer space, a robotic arm to pea seeds from seed germinaty, Mumbai, plans to study the ling tethered and free-floating catch a tethered debris there. tion and plant sustenance until spacecraft in future POEM the two-leaf stage in a closed-Sarabhai Space Centre. missions. and testing of green propulsion Two parallel experiments wee hours Sunday, they said. systems are some of the experibox environment with active The Amity Plant Experimen-Mumbai-based start-up industrial activity at sea.

nationa



Those who did not shed a drop of blood for the country's freedom are today parading as custodians of nationalism

GANDHIS ENJOY SUNDAY FAMILY LUNCH AT KWALITY RESTAURANT

The Gandhi family was seen enjoying Sunday lunch at the famous Kwality restaurant at Connaught Place. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, her husband Robert Vadra, daughter Miraya, and mother-inlaw Maureen Vadra enjoyed lunch at the restaurant





number of ministers is high, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had to give each minister a portfolio. Obviously, some are happy and some are not AJIT PAWAR | MAHA DY CM

improper and incomplete knowledge of Dharma leads to persecution and atrocities that took place across the world in the name of Dharma misunderstanding and lack of understanding of Dharma

Independence

MOHAN BHAGWAT | RSS CHIEF

should never

and for global good without being intimidated to conform. Bharat can

S JAISHANKAR | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER



while having coffee at the restaurant. I ordered Nirmala to increase the GST rates of

Black Coffee without sugar - 5% GST Black Coffee with sugar - 12% GST Coffee without sugar - 18% GST Coffee with sugar - 28% GST All other types - 35% GST

@The_Nehru

SHORT **TAKES**

4 killed in two road accidents

Raisen (MP): Four persons road accidents in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district, police said Sunday. A motorbike collided with a tractor-trolley Saturday night in Udaipura town, around 100 km from the district headquarters

IT serves notice to **PDP's MLA Para**

Srinagar: The Income Tax department has served a notice to senior PDP leader and Jammu and Kashmir MLA Waheed Para to submit his books of accounts. officials said Sunday. Though. according to the notice. Para was scheduled to appear before the Income Tax authorities December 20, he received the intimation on the same day.

Narcotics worth

₹ 20 crore seized

Guwahati: Narcotics worth ₹20 crore has been seized and a person arrested in Assam's Cachar district, police said Sunday. Acting on a tip-off, an operation was launched by the Special Task Force (STF) unde the supervision of IGP Parthasarathi Mahanta at Silcoori Road that led to the seizure of Yaba tablets and heroin from a person who was moving in a motorcycle in the early hours of Sunday.

Couple beaten up

Muzaffarpur (Bihar): A couple, who were in love with each other, were tied to a pole and beaten up mercilessly in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, police said Sunday. A purported video of the incident went viral on social media Sunday.

JAIPUR The U-turn that should never have been there

The U-turn is just one of many dangerous cuts on this highway. According to NHAI norms, a U-turn should be spaced every 2 km, yet this stretch is riddled with frequent, short-distance cuts, making it resemble a street rather than a national highway

Jaipur, Dec 22: The devastating incident on the Jaipur-Ajmer Highway December 20, which claimed 13 lives, has its roots in a sharp U-turn near Delhi Public School (DPS), a dangerous spot that has now become infamous for claiming numerous lives. According to officials, this U-turn should not have been in use, as it was sanctioned as a temporary arrangement in a hid to ease traffic flow during construction activity.

Originally, the U-turn was supposed to be closed by March 2023, as part of a plan

but the project was stalled, leaving it open. Built in November 2020, it was intended to streamline traffic flow from Road. The cloverleaf interchange remained incomplete, and the U-turn stayed operational, facilitating traffic from both directions, also creating a jam-like situation most times.

Had the accident occurred even an hour later, the consequences could have been far worse, particularly for DPS students and other nearby schools, whose buses pass through this stretch. Additionally, office



workers from the nearby SEZ would have faced severe risks. 'The situation could have been horrific if it were a little later," said Pawan Bairagi, a govern-

The U-turn is just one of many dangerous cuts on this highway. According to NHAI norms, a U-turn should

short-distance cuts, making it resemble a street rather than a national

Surprisingly, there are around 12 cuts on the service lane between Jaipur and Ajmer and 15 cuts on the opposite stretch. In addition, the railing along the service road is broken in several places, with people often seen jumping across. Traffic jams spanning kilometres are a daily occurrence, yet there is no visible traffic police presence to alleviate the situation, despite the road being a key route for

travellers to Jodhpur, Udaipur, Chittorgarh, and other import ant destinations.

The Jaipur-Ajmer Expressway, which witnessed a hor rific inferno that left over a dozen dead due to burn injuries, has become a hotspot for accidents in the last year. In July 2023, the local admin istration clashed with NHAl over the ongoing flyover construction, which had caused massive traffic jams. Despite assurances from NHAI that the work would be completed quickly, over a year later, the work remains unfinished, exacerbating traffic issues.



Naga sadhus of 'Panch Dashnam Avahan Akhara' take part in a religious procession called 'Peshwai', to reach the Mahakumbh ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

Cong slams govt over different tax slabs for popcorn

New Delhi, Dec 22: The Congress Sunday said the "absurdity" of three different tax slabs for popcorn under GST only brings to light the growing complexity of the system and asked whether the Modi government will show the courage to launch a complete overhaul for instituting a GST 2.0.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh also claimed GST evasion is significant, input tax credit fraud is common, and the number of bogus companies set up to "game" the GST system runs into thousands.

'The absurdity of three different tax slabs for popcorn under GST, which has unleashed a tsunami of memes on social media, only brings to light a deeper issue: the growing complexity of a system that was supposed to be a Good and

Simple Tax," he said in a post on X. "GST evasion is significant, input tax credit fraud is common, and the number of bogus companies set up to 'game' the GST system runs into thousands." He said the recent data on tax frauds uncovered by the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) reveal GST evasion of ₹2.01 lakh crore

GST Council Saturday agreed to issue a clarification on taxation of popcorn, saying that pre-packed and labelled ready-to-eat snacks will attract a 12 per cent tax while an 18 per cent GST will be levied if it is caramelised.

There is no change in the tax rate of popcorn and the GST Council has only agreed that the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) will issue a circular clarifying the current taxation regime of

Kejriwal slams govt over R-Day tableau exclusion

Kejriwal attacks the BJP, saying Delhi being the national capital, its tableau should be included in the Republic Day parade every year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: Amid reports claiming that Delhi's tableau has missed the cut for next year's Republic Day parade, AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal Sunday accused the Centre of playing politics over the issue.

Kejriwal also slammed the BJP, saying Delhi being the national capital, its tableau should be included in the Republic Day parade every year.

'I want to ask them -- why is Delhi's tableau being excluded once again this year? Why are the people of Delhi being prevented from participating in the Republic Day celebrations," Kejri-

Claiming that Delhi's tableau has been missing the cut for several years now, Kejriwal said, "What kind of politics Why is there so much hatred towards Delhi and its people? If these leaders hold such animosity, why should the people of Delhi vote for them?"

Notably, Assembly elections in Delhi are due in February. Hitting back at the AAP chief, Delhi BJP President



Virendra Sachdeva claimed Kejriwal shows his "true colour" whenever a national festival approaches.

"Delhiites have not forgotten the incident from 2014 when the entire city was gearing up to celebrate Republic Day, but Kejriwal tarnished its dignity by staging a protest," Sachdeva said.

He also said the decision to select tableaux for the Republic Day parade is made by a designated committee, and their numbers are also limited, which Kejriwal is well aware of.

'However, since elections are approaching in Delhi, Kejriwal wants to divert people's the BJP leader said. At the presser, Kejriwal also hit out at the BJP, claiming its election campaign lacked "any narrative, vision, or programme for the people of Delhi' "They have no plans to

attention from the real issues,"

show as to what they would do if they form the government," the AAP leader said.

The former Chief Minister also claimed that BJP is only focused on "hurling abuses at Kejriwal from morning till night". Alleging that BJP's sole mission is "Kejriwal Hatao", Kejriwal asked if people should vote for a party just because it

MOHALI BUILDING COLLAPSE

2 dead; rescue operation ends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Dec 22: The collapse of a three-storey building in Puniab's Mohali has claimed two lives, with rescuers pull ing out the body of a man and a fatally injured woman from under the rubble during a multi-agency 23-hour rescue op eration that concluded Sunday evening, officials said. A magisterial probe has

been ordered into the incident which, according to a prelimi nary inquiry, occurred during alleged unauthorised digging in the adjacent plot belong the building. Drishti Verma 20. from Himachal Pradesh was rescued from the rubble in critical condition and was rushed to a hospital, where she succumbed to injuries on Saturday night, while the body of Abhishek Dhanwal, 29, was pulled out Sunday.

The two owners of the building and the contractor undertaking the digging work have been booked, the officials said, adding strict action will be taken against anyone found responsible.

A short video clip circulating on social media purportedly of the incident shows the building, which housed a gym and paying guest accommoda tions, tilting to one side before

3rd special drive against child marriage in Assam; 431 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 22: Assam Police have arrested more than 430 people and registered 345 cases in its third special drive against child marriage, a top officer said Sunday.

He added that some more arrests are likely to be made. Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) MP Gupta. addressing a press conference here, said, "The third special drive was conducted across the state last night, in which 431 accused were apprehended and 345 cases registered."

"Among those arrested are men who had married underage girls, family members and also two kazis, one each in Sonitpur and South Salmara districts," he added.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in a post on X Sunday morning, said, "Assam continues its fight against child marriage. In Phase 3 operations launched on the night of Dec 21-22, 416 arrests were made and 335 cases registered. The arrested individuals will be produced in court today. We will continue to take bold steps



to end this social evil." The number of arrests and cases has increased since the post was made. Gupta said that in the first special drive against the social evil in February 2023, 3,425 arrests were made

and 4,387 cases registered. In the second crackdown in Oc tober 2023, 913 accused were

held and 682 cases registered. "A total of 5,348 cases have been registered and 5,842 peo ple arrested in three special drives and regular instances of child marriages being reported since last year,"the ADGP added. In the latest drive, Dhubri district regis tered the highest number of cases at 59 and also the most arrests at 68. The highest number of cases was regis tered in Dhubri during the first two drives as well.

AI tool to predict IVF outcomes in men with infertility

In nearly 50 per cent of couples experiencing infertility, the problem is with the male partner, said Dr Deepak Modi, senior scientist at ICMR's

National Institute for Research in Reproductive and Child Health and the lead author of the study

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in collaboration with Amity University has developed an artificial intelligence-based tool to detect the type of 'Y' chromosome microdeletion -- a genetic cause of male infertility -- and predict IVF outcomes.

The study regarding the AI tool was published in the Journal of Assisted Reproduction and Genetics last week.

In nearly 50 per cent of couples experiencing infertility, the problem is with the male partner, said Dr Deepak Modi. senior scientist at ICMR's National Institute for Research in Reproductive and Child Health (NIRRCH) and the lead author of the study "In them there could be prob-

lems with sperm production. One of the leading causes, Y chromosome microdeletion (YCMD) is observed in one in every 10 men with infertility. Because of this genetic defect, the testes are unable to make

enough sperm leading to infertility," Dr Modi said.

Men with YCMD cannot benefit from medical treatment for improving the sperm count. To become fathers, such men require assisted reproductive techniques such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF) for parenthood, he said. The based

tool -

'Fer-

tility

laboration with Amity University. Noida can predict trieval rates

by the ICMR-NIRRCH in col-

success rates of assisted reproductive technology (ART) in men having this genetic problem.

It also predicts the rate of fertilisation, clinical pregnancy and live birth rates based on the type of Y chromosome microdeletion, Dr Modi said. This helps the couples make informed decisions, he said in a statement. However, Dr Modi cau-

tioned that the male babies born through IVF from men with YCMD will inherit the same defect and will be infertile as it is 100 per cent transmitted from fathers to their sons.

Developing this tool took about two years by collating data of more than 500 men having After applying an artificial intelligence algorithm based on machine learning on this data, the tool could predict the outcomes. This was then vali dated on another sub-set and it was found to have accuracy of about 80 per cent, Dr Stacy Colaco, a scientist at NIRRCH and the first author of the study, said. "Fertility Predictor also

provides a numerical output for chance of clinical pregnancy and live birth in men with YCMD. The valida tion studies indicated its ro bustness and high accuracy in predicting both these parameters solely based on the type of YCMD," said Dr Abhishek Sengupta University, Noida.

international



The fees being charged by Panama are ridiculous, especially knowing the extraordinary generosity that has been bestowed to Panama by the US. If the principles, both moral and legal, of this magnanimous gesture of giving are not followed, then we will demand that the **Panama Canal be returned to us**

DONALD TRUMP | PRESIDENT-ELECT, US

ALBANIA TO BAN TIKTOK FOR A YEAR

Albania's prime minister said Saturday the government will shut down the video service TikTok for one year, blaming it for inciting violence and bullying, especially among children



today and I am optimistic that I will be in a position to designate a prime minister

after parliament votes the leaders of its two chambers KLAUS IOHANNIS | PRESIDENT, ROMANIA

We're dealing with an extraordinary regime that for over a decade quite frankly, has had all sorts of

incursions in our country through national security, intellectual prop erty, right down to cyber activity PRITI PATEL | SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE

FOR FOREIGN, UK



do? He should stand with strong will against those who designed and those who implemented the insecurity AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI

IRANIAN SUPREME LEADER, IRAN

SHORT TAKES

38 people die in road mishap

Sao Paulo: A crash between a passenger bus and a truck early Saturday killed 38 people on a highway in Minas Gerais, a state in southeastern Brazil, officials said. The Minas Gerais Fire department, which responded to the scene, said 13 others were taken to hospitals near the city of Teofilo Otoni. The bus had reportedly departed from Sao Paulo and was carrying 45 passengers. **Authorities said Saturday** afternoon that all victims had been removed from the site and an investigation would determine the cause of the accident. Witnesses told rescue teams that the bus blew a tire, causing the driver to lose control and collide with a truck. Others said that a granite block hit the bus, the Fire department added. A car with three passengers also collided with the bus, but all three survived.

At least 10 killed in plane crash

Brasilia: A small plane with 10 people aboard crashed into shops in the center of the tourist city of Gramado in southern Brazil Sunday, civil defense officials said, and initial reports indicated that there were no survivors. Unfortunately, initial reports indicate that the aircraft's occupants did not survive, Governor Eduardo Leite said in a post on social media platform X. According to the public security office of Rio Grande do Sul state, at least 15 people were taken to the city's hospital, most of them suffering from smoke inhalation caused by the fire triggered by the crash. The plane reportedly first struck the chimney of a building, then the second floor of a house, before crashing into a furniture store, authorities said. Debris also reached a nearby inn.

4 dead in Turkish helicopter crash

Mugla (Turkiye): An ambulance helicopter crashed Sunday morning in southwestern Turkiye, killing all four people on board. Two pilots, one doctor and one health care worker were taking off from the city of Mugla on their way to pick up a patient in the neighbouring province of Antalya. The helicopter hit the hospital building from where it was taking off and crashed into a nearby field. Mugla Gov Idris Akbiyik noted that there was heavy fog at the time of takeoff and that authorities were investigating the incident.

China slams Pentagon report

The comprehensive Pentagon report spanning over 165 pages dealt with a host of issues, including Chinese military modernisation, and pointed out that corruption is impacting China's modernisation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 22: The Chinese military has denounced a recent Pentagon report alleging corruption is denting PLA's modernisation, saying the report "desperately slandered" the Chinese military and "exaggerated" the military threat posed by China

Reacting to the Pentagon's report to the US Congress titled 'Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" released recently, the Chinese Defence Ministry accused Washington of "fabricating false narratives" against the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

The report "misinterpreted China's defence policies, speculated about China's military capacity development, flagrantly



We urge the US to stop fabricating false narratives,

rectify the erroneous per-

tion of China, and push for the

healthy, stable development

of bilateral and military rela-

The 'war-addicted' United

States has become the biggest

destroyer of international order

and the greatest threat to global

On China's development of

nuclear weapons, Zhang said

that the intention is to safeguard

security," Zhang said.

EFENCE SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

tions," he said

interfered in China's domestic affairs, desperately slandered the Chinese military and exaggerated the so-called military threat posed by China," Defence spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said Saturday.

China "strongly deplores and firmly opposes" all these statements, Zhang was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency. Zhang said that for over 20 years, the US has been publishing such deceptive and hypocritical reports year after year, only seeking excuses for the development of its own military capacity and misleading public opinion.

"We urge the US to stop fabricating false narratives, rectify the erroneous percepest and most advanced nuclear arsenal in the world, sticks stubbornly to the policy of first use of nuclear weapons, undermining international and regional peace and stability, he added.

He also expressed the hope that the US would adopt a more positive, rational attitude toward China and the development of the Chinese military and create bonds between the Chinese and US militaries that do not involve conflict or confrontation but champion openness, pragmatism and cooperation, and gradually accumulate mutual trust.

the country's strategic security

But the US, which has the larg-

The comprehensive Pentagon report spanning over 165 pages dealt with a host of issues, including Chinese military modernisation, and pointed out that corruption is impacting China's modernisation.

'In 2023, a new wave of cor ruption-related investigations and removals of senior leaders may have disrupted the PLA's progress toward stated 2027 modernization goals,' the report said. Between July and December 2023, at least 15 high-ranking military officers and defence industry executives were removed from their

downs 52 Russian drones

Ukraine's air defence

Kyiv, Dec 22: Ukraine's air defences downed 52 of the 103 Russian drones launched overnight, the Ukrainian military said Sunday. The military said on Tele-

gram that it had lost track of 44 drones, and another had left the territory of Ukraine to Belarus. The military gave no infor-

mation on the fate of the remaining drones. However, they said that in

Kherson, Mykolaiv, Chernihiv, Sumv. Zhvtomvr and Kviv regions, private businesses and apartment buildings have been damaged by the Russian attack.

"Tentatively, without casualties," the military added.

Local authorities said that debris from one of the downed drones fell on the roof of a

Ukraine says Russian forces executed 5 POWs

Russian forces executed five Ukrainian prisoners of war, Ukraine's Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights, Dmytro Lubinets, said Sunday. Lubinets said on the Telegram messenger app that Russian troops shot the five unarmed soldiers after capturing them. He gave no details, but will report this fact to the UN. "Russian war criminals who shoot Ukrainian prisoners of war should be brought before an international tribunal and punished with the most severe punishment provided for by law," Lubinets said. Russia did not immediately comment on the incident, but has previous denied committing war crimes.

multi-storey building in the Kyiv region, causing a fire.

Syria's de facto ruler

reassures minorities,

Damascus, Dec 22: Syria's de

facto ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa

hosted Lebanese Druze lead

er Walid Jumblatt Sunday in

another effort to reassure mi

norities they will be protected

meets Lebanese

Druze leader

REUTERS

SNIPPETS

Pak forms panel to negotiate with jailed ex-PM Khan's party



Islamabad: The Shehbaz Sharif-

to a government statement, the committee includes Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, the prime minister's political aide Rana Sanaullah, Education Minister Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Minister for Privatisation Aleem Khan, Minister for Religious Affairs Chaudhry Salik Hussain and Senator Irfan Siddiqui among others. The PTI welcomed the formation of the government committee for negotiations, calling it a "positive step". "We consider the committee's formation a constructive step. Meaningful dialogue based on positive intentions should be held," PTI chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said. He stressed that the potential talks should have a defined timeframe, adding that the dialogue must progress positively considering the sensitivity of the situation.

Stampedes in Nigeria leave at least 32 dead

Abuja: The death toll from stampedes during two Christmas charity events in Nigeria has increased from 13 to

before gift items were to be shared.



GERMAN CHRISTMAS MARKET ATTACK



Far-right demonstrators, Magdeburg, December 21

Suspect held on murder charges

Far-right protest in Magdeburg reflects tensions

REUTERS

Magdeburg, Germany, Dec 22: A man suspected of ploughing a car through crowds at a German Christmas market in an attack that killed five people and injured scores faces multiple charges of murder and attempted murder, police said Sunday.

Friday evening's attack in the central city of Magdeburg shocked the country and urday night in Magdeburg, stirred up tensions over the charged issue of immi-

The suspect, who was in custody, is a 50-year-old psychiatrist from Saudi Arabia with a history of anti-Islamic rhetoric who has lived in Germany for almost two decades. The motive for the attack remained

unclear. There were scuffles and some 'minor disturbances" at a farright demonstration attended

by around 2,100 people Sat-

police said. They added that criminal proceedings would follow, but did **Attack** not give details.

stirs political debate on security and immigration

ner with the word "remigration", a term popular with supporters of the far right who seek the mass deportation of immigrants and

Protesters, some

wearing black

balaclavas, held

up a large ban-

people deemed not ethnically German. Other residents gathered to pay their respects to the dead.

after Islamist rebels led the ouster of Bashar al-Assad two weeks ago. Sharaa said no sects would be excluded in Syria in what

he described as a new era far removed from sectarianism.

Sharaa heads the Islamist Havat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) the main group that forced Assad out Dec 8. Some Syri ans and foreign powers have worried he may impose strict Islamic governance on a coun try with numerous minority groups such as Druze, Kurds Christians and Alawites.

We take pride in our culture, our religion and our Islam. Being part of the Islamic environment does not mean the exclusion of other sects. On the contrary, it is our duty to protect them, he said during the meeting with Jumblatt, in comments broad cast by Lebanese broadcaster Al Jadeed.



ISRAEL ORDERS HOSPITAL EVACUATION

Gaza medics struggle to rescue patients

REUTERS

Cairo, Dec 22: Israel ordered the closure and evacuation Sunday of one of the last hospitals still partly functioning in a besieged area on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip, forcing medics to search for a way to bring hundreds of patients and staff to safety.

The head of the Kamal Adwan hospital in Beit Lahiya, Husam Abu Safiva, told Reuters via text message that obeying the order to shut down was "next to impossible" because there were not enough ambulances to get patients out.

'We currently have nearly 400 civilians inside the hospital, including babies in the neonatal unit, whose lives depend on oxygen and incubators. We cannot evacuate these patients safely without assistance, equipment,

and time," said Abu Safiya. "We are sending this message

under heavy bombardment and direct targeting of the fuel tanks, which if hit will cause a large explosion and mass casualties of the civilians inside,

The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment on Abu Safiya's remarks. It said Friday that it had sent fuel and food supplies to the hospital and helped evacuate more than 100 patients and caregivers to other Gaza hospitals, some in coordination with the Red Cross, for their own safety.

The hospital is one of the only ones still partially functioning in the once crowded northern edge of Gaza, an area under intense Israeli military pressure for nearly three months in one of the most punishing operations of the 14-month-old war.

Abu Safiya said the military had ordered patients and staff to be evacuated to another hospital where conditions are



even worse. Photos from inside the hospital showed patients on beds crammed into corridors to keep them away from windows. Reuters could not immediately verify those images.

Israel says its operation around three communities on the northern edge of the Gaza Strip - Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and Jabalia - is targeting Hamas

Israel of seeking to permanently depopulate the area to create a buffer zone, which Israel denies.

Elsewhere, Israeli military strikes across the Gaza Strip killed at least 24 Palestinians, eight of them, including some children, at a school sheltering displaced families in Gaza City. medics said.

■ Israeli military says it targeted Hamas militants in school

 Military orders evacuation of Kamal Adwan Hospital

Hospital staff say this is impossible due to lack of ambulances

 Mediators struggle to secure ceasefire

The Israeli military said in a statement that strike targeted Hamas militants operating from a command centre embedded inside the school. It said fighters used the place to plan and execute attacks against Israeli forces. Hamas denies its forces operate among civilians.

Medics said four Palestinians were killed when an airstrike hit a car elsewhere in Gaza City. An Israeli security official said troops had "struck a Hamas terrorist in a vehicle".

Jumblatt, a veteran poli tician and prominent Druze leader, said at the meeting that Assad's ouster should usher in new constructive relations between Lebanon and Syria. Druze are an Arab minority who practice an offshoot of Islam.

Sharaa, dressed in a suit and tie rather than the military fatigues he favoured in his rebel days, also said he would send a government del egation to the southwestern Druze city of Sweida, pledging to provide services to its community and highlighting Syria's rich diversity of sects.

Seeking to allay worries about the future of Syria, Sharaa has hosted numer ous foreign visitors in recent days, and has vowed to prioritise rebuilding Syria, devastated by 13 years of civil war.

Business



sustainable, low-carbon-intensity ethanol as a promising feedstock to propel **India's aviation sector**

HEMANT MISTRY | DIRECTOR (NET

DAVOS MEET NEXT MONTH

At least three chief ministers --Devendra Fadnavis, Chandrababu Naidu and Revant Reddy -- will join over 100 CEOs and other leaders from India in Davos next month for the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025





chip manufacturers are eyeing India as a new manufacturing place. We are

discussing with all those chip manufacturers to give our product and service

TOSHIAKI NOMURA INDIA PRESIDENT AND CEO, CANON

The sudden change in FII strategy from buying to selling has impacted markets



India aims to become the third-largest economy by

2047, and the hospitality sector is set to play a pivotal role in achieving this goal. The sector's multiplier effect on the economy surpasses that of manufacturing and

KB KACHRU | PRESIDENT, HAI

agriculture

SHORT **TAKES**

IOC investigates allegation of US

New Delhi: State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has begun a probe into allegations of a US speciality chemicals firm bribing its officials 15 years back to obtain contracts to supply catalysts, according to a company's regulatory filing. Albemarle Corporation, a global speciality chemicals supplier that develops and sells catalysts used in the operation of oil refineries. allegedly "paid approximately \$1.14 million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately \$11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011. according to a US SEC order dated September 28, 2023. Albemarle was caught for bribery by the US authorities in 2017 and then settled the case in September 2023 by paving a hefty fine of more than \$198 million to avoid prosecution.

■ TN achieves feat with 10K startups

Chennai: Tamil Nadu has achieved a milestone by registering over 10,000 startups with the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry. the state government said Sunday. StartupTN has played a crucial role in nurturing the ecosystem by implementing various schemes and initiatives like funding programmes, mentorship opportunities and incubation support, StartupTN Mission Director and CEO Shivaraja Ramanathan said. The state's startup ecosystem has been 'thriving' with 9 regional hubs and a metro hub in Chennai, providing a robust infrastructure for budding entrepreneurs to grow, he said.

Mcap of top-10 firms slumps ₹4.95 lakh cr

New Delhi: The combined market valuation of all the top-10 most valued firms plunged ₹4.95.061 crore last week, in line with a bearish trend in equities, where Tata Consultancy Services and Reliance Industries faced the sharpest erosion. Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 4,091.53 points or 4.98 per cent. In the ranking of the top-10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the most valued firm title followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, State Bank of India, ITC, LIC and Hindustan Unilever.

IPO boom: Record ₹1.6L-cr raised

This exceptional year not only reflected the confidence of issuers but also highlighted investors' eagerness to seize listing-day gains or back companies with strong long-term growth potential

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: Fundraising via IPOs in India hit another landmark as economic growth, favourable market conditions and improvements in the regulatory framework helped companies raise a record ₹1.6 lakh crore in 2024, while the pipeline for the next year holds out bigger promise.

The year was marked by Hyundai Motor India's historic IPO, the largest in the country's history, which raised

Companies of varying market capitalisations -- large, mid, and small -- tapped into the IPO route in 2024, with the average issue size rising significantly from ₹867 crore in 2023 to over ₹1,700 crore in 2024. The exceptional vibrancy of

the IPO market was evident, with December alone seeing at least 15 launches.

"Rising retail participation, strong domestic inflows and active participation by FPIs (even though they have been net sellers in the secondary market). private capex increase and the government's strategic focus on infrastructure and key sectors have collectively laid a strong foundation for the fundraising momentum in India," V Prashant Rao, Director & Head - ECM, Investment Banking at Anand Rathi Advisors, said.



About ₹1.6 lakh crore raised in 2024 far **exceeded ₹49,436** crore garnered by 57 firms through **IPOs in 2023**

environment, policy continuity at the central government level combined with broad-based growth have encouraged companies and investors to raise funds PRANJAL SRIVASTAVA | PARTNER-INVESTMENT BANKING, CENTRUM CAPITAL

Stable economic

Fundraising momentum is expected to accelerate further in the New Year, potentially surpassing 2024's record figures, market analysts said.

"Based on the 75 IPO documents, which are at various stages of approval/ marketing and the deal pipelines, we expect issuance activity in 2025 to cross ₹2.5 lakh crore." Munish Aggarwal, Managing Director and Head of Equity Capital Markets at Equirus, said.

The IPO pipeline for the next

year is set to feature major offerings, including HDB Financial Services' proposed ₹12,500 crore issue, LG Electronics India's ₹15,000 crore public float, and Hexaware Technologies ₹9,950 crore offering.

According to data available with the exchanges, 90 maiden public issues were launched in 2024, collectively raising ₹1.6 lakh crore. This includes eight IPOs scheduled to conclude December 23-24. Besides, the ₹500-crore IPO of Unimech

Aerospace and Manufacturing is slated to open December 23. Additionally, Vodafone Idea

raised ₹18,000 crore through a follow-on public offer (FPO). About ₹1.6 lakh crore raised

in 2024 far exceeded ₹49,436 crore garnered by 57 firms through IPOs in 2023. By comparison, 2021 saw 63 companies raising

₹1.2 lakh crore, marking best IPO year in two decades, driven by abundant liquidity, increased retail investor participation,

raised ₹27,870cr and sustained euphoria in the primary market. The resurgence in activity also extended to the SME segment, where a record 238 small and medium enterprises

raised ₹8,700 crore, nearly dou-

bling the ₹4,686 crore raised in

2023, according to the data provided by primedatabase.com. This growth reflects increasing interest in SME public offerings, although it comes with heightened risks for retail investors.

In response, Sebi decided to introduce stricter regulatory frameworks, including profitability requirements, a cap on the offer-for-sale (OFS) component and a "draw of lots" system for non-institutional investors (NIIs) to safeguard smaller investors

Experts attributed this year's robust IPO activity to a stable economic environment, policy continuity at the central government level, and broadbased economic growth.

maiden public

raising ₹1.6L-cr

Among the year's largest mainboard IPOs, issues were launched Hyundai Motor India led the in 2024, collectively pack, raising ₹27,870 crore, followed by Hyundai Motor India's Swiggy (Rs historic IPO, largest in 11,327 crore), NTPC Green the country's history,

> Energy 10,000 crore), Bajaj Housing Finance (Rs 6,560 crore), and Ola Electric Mobility (Rs 6,145 crore).

In contrast, Vibhor Steel Tubes launched the smallest IPO, raising just ₹72 crore, indicating the diversity of companies accessing the capital markets.

Meanwhile, India's equity markets also saw record-breaking performances, with the NSE Nifty 50 reaching an all-time high of 26,216 points September 27 and the BSE Sensex peaking at 85,836 points September 26, supported by the country's robust economic growth outlook.

FRONT-RUNNING CASE

Sebi bans 9 entities, impounds illegal gains of over ₹21cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: Markets regulator Sebi has uncovered a front-running scheme in volving PNB MetLife India Insurance Company equity dealer Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities, who generated illegal gains of ₹21.16 crore.

The front-running by these entities continued for more than three years.

Sebi, through an interim order, prohibited Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities from the securities market and impounded the unlawful gains made by them.

In a statement Sunday, PNB MetLife stated that it has fully cooperated with Sebi in the investigation and taken disciplinary action against the individual involved.

"In line with our internal processes, we have taken disciplinary action. PNB MetLife is committed to upholding the highest standards of corporate governance, transparency, and integrity," the statement noted Sebi had conducted an ex-

amination into the suspected front running of the trades undertaken by the Big Client PNB Metlife India Insurance, by certain entities.

The investigation period has been taken from January 1, 2021, to July 19, 2024. In its investigation, Ssbi found that most of the trading decisions in PNB Metlife were delegated to Sachin Dagli for execution.

CAUTIOUS **APPROACH**

FPIs take U-turn, selling again

After starting the month on a positive note, foreign investors pull out equities worth ₹976cr this week amid rising dollar, bond yields

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: After two weeks of buying, FPIs turned net sellers in Indian equities this week, with a net withdrawal of ₹976 crore amid a strengthening US dollar and steady rise in US 10-year bond yields, impacting investor sentiment.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) began the week on a positive note, investing ₹3,126 crore in equities during the first two trading sessions (December 16-20).

However, the trend reversed in the latter half of the week, with FPIs offloading equities worth over ₹4.102 crore in the subsequent three sessions. This resulted in an overall net outflow of ₹976 crore during the week, data from National



Securities Depository Limited showed.

FPIs adopted a cautious approach due to the US Fed meeting and uncertainty about its outcome and future policy direction," said Himanshu Srivastava. Associate Director. Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India.

While the Fed cut interest rates by 25 bps for the third time this year, it signalled fewer rate cuts in the future, dampening investor sentiment and triggering global market sell-offs, he added.

Additionally, factors like high valuations, weak corporate earnings for the September quarter, expectations of subdued results for December, rising inflation, slower GDF growth, and a depreciating rupee have further weighed on investor confidence, he noted.

"Rising US dollar (dollar index above 108) and steady increase in the US 10-year bond yields to 4.5 per cent contributed to the FPIs selling. India-specific issues like slowing growth concerns and flat corporate earnings in Q2 also contributed to the FPIs selling. The strength of the US economy, good corporate earnings growth, and strong dollar are factors favouring the US," VK Vijavakumar, Chief Investment

VOLATILITY IN INVESTMENT TRENDS

- Despite this short-term reversal, the broader Dec trend remains positive. FPIs have infused ₹21.789cr into Indian equities so far this month
- Earlier in Nov, FPIs pulled out net ₹21.612cr and massive ₹94,017cr in October, the worst monthly outflow on record
- Interestingly, Sept had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of
- So far in 2024, FPI investment has reached ₹6,770cr

Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

FPI selling has brought down the prices of certain large-cap segments, such as banking, making valuations more attractive. Investors can take advantage of this market downturn to invest in quality large caps.

Sectors like pharma, IT, and digital platform companies are expected to remain resilient and defy the downtrend.

Govt to infuse ₹500cr in IFCI to improve financial health With the infusion, the

government of India's holding in the company is expected to further increase from *existing 71.72%*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 22: The government has decided to infuse ₹500 crore capital in state-owned IFCI to

improve its financial health ahead of the company's proposed restructuring consolidation into a The capital infusion

plan for IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in Lok Sabha last week.

The Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25

made an allocation for an additional amount of ₹499.99 crore for 'Subscription to the Share Capital' of Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI).



remaining amount of

The Industrial ₹449.92 crore will be Finance met from surrender of savings available **Corporation** in the capital section of India was of Demand No.30-DEA set up by the and it will not entail government any additional cash July 1, 1948 outgo," the Suppleas the first mentary Demand for **Development** Grants said.

Earlier this year, **Financial** IFCI had raised ₹500 **Institution in** crore capital through the country the issuance of equity shares to the gov

ernment.

In the second quarter ended September 2024, IFCI had booked a loss of ₹22 crore and in the first half of FY24, a loss to the tune of ₹170 crore.

After another status quo year, all eyes on new RBI Guv at helm

RBI under Shaktikanta Das kept interest rates unchanged for almost two years even when economic growth slipped to a seven-quarter low in July-Sept quarter of the current fiscal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 22: The RBI under former governor Shaktikanta Das resisted pressures to cut interest rates through 2024 as it kept its 'Arjuna's eye' trained on inflation, but the central bank under a new detail-oriented head will soon have to take a call if it can continue sacrificing growth.

Das, a career bureaucrat who in 2016 oversaw Prime Minister Narendra Modi's highly disruptive demonetisation move, left a lasting legacy as he demitted office towards the end of 2024 after expertly navigating monetary policy for six years, the highlight of which was steering India's recovery through the pandemic.

Sanjay Malhotra, another civil servant, was named as Das' successor barely 24-hour before the latter's second threeyear term came to an end. With the new governor at

helm, and a growing dissent within the rate-setting panel in favour of a rate cut, all eyes are now at the next review of the RBI's monetary policy in February, and specifically the decision on rates. After his appointment ear-

lier this month, some analysts opined that Malhotra's arrival cements the possibility of a February rate cut, but some events, especially the US Fed's shift to make the rate cuts more shallow and its fallout on rupee, are leading many to question if the



Some watchers also question if a shallow rate cut of 0.50 per cent -- as widely expected given the inflation projections -- will be of any use for economic activity, beyond the optics. Das, who had joined the cen-

tral bank after a long career as a bureaucrat where he played a

key role in executing Narendra Modi government's demoneti zation as well, has said that he acted as per the provisions of the statutes which stipulate focusing on inflation while being cognizant of growth. In October 2024, the six-mem-

ber Monetary Policy Committee unanimously decided to change the stance of the policy to "neutral" from "withdrawal of accommodation" earlier, but a rate cut continued to be

At his last policy announcement, Das said that the growth-inflation dynamic has 'unsettled", referring to the below expectations of 5.4 per cent GDP expansion and price rise shooting beyond 6 per cent threshold in October.

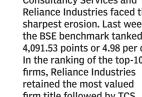
In central banking, there is no scope for a "knee-jerk" reaction, Das said at his last press conference after the publishing of the official GDP growth data. and also added that the "credibility" of the flexible inflation targeting framework will have

to be protected going forward. The RBI has kept the key rates unchanged for the 11th consecutive bi-monthly policy

Prior to the announcement of the monetary policy, Union ministers, including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, had expressed their disappointment at keeping the rates elevated, and publicly pitched for a rate cut by RBI.

Another aspect which the RBI has been very busy with has been volatilities in the cur rency market. The year was a mixed one, wherein the focus shifted swiftly from how to manage additional flows, which will come in through India's bond index inclusion, to mea sures to contain volatilities in the face of FPIs' selling in India through moves like increasing the caps on interest that can be paid to diaspora's foreign cur rency deposits. These interventions by the

RBI have had an impact on the country's forex reserves. which hit an all-time high of \$704.885 billion in September and declined sharply to \$654.857 billion in early-December. The rupee has tumbled to an all time lows and breached the ₹85 per dollar level December 19, presenting another formidable challenge before Malhotra.



India thrash West Indies by 211 runs in opening Women's ODI, biggest win over the visitors

Mandhana, Renuka blow away WI

Vadodara, Dec 22: Stylish opener Smriti Mandhana extended her purple patch with a classy knock before pacer Renuka Thakur excelled with the new ball as India outplayed a self-destructing West Indies by a record 211 runs in the first Women's ODI here Sunday.

India posted 314 for nine after Mandhana made a fine 91 off 102 balls.

The launch pad was provided by the left-handed opener for the middle-order to go big and that is what the likes of Harmanpreet Kaur (34 off 23), Harleen Deol (44 off 50), Richa Ghosh (26 off 12) and Jemimah Rodrigues (31 off 19) did to take India past 300.

The West Indies were ordinary to say the least in their response as some of their batters gifted wickets to the dominating hosts.

They were eventually all out for 103 in 26.2 overs with Renuka picking her maiden five-wicket haul in ODIs. It was India's biggest win over the West Indies in terms of runs.

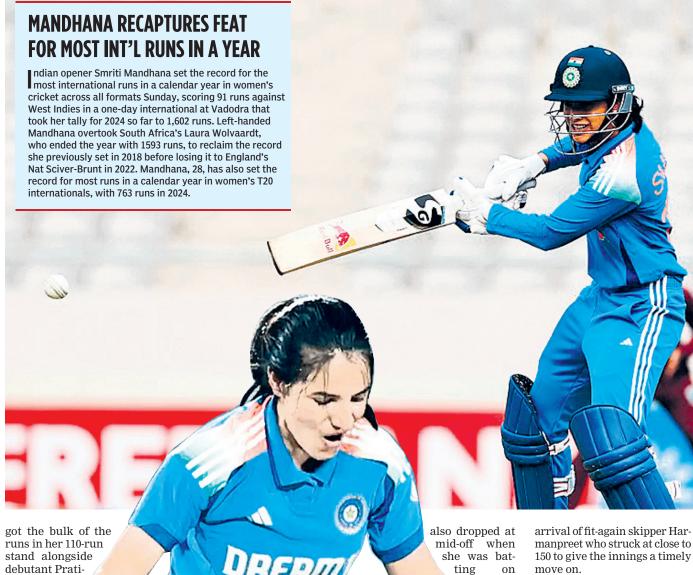
The second ODI of the threematch series will be played here Tuesday.

Qiana Joseph was run out on the first ball of the run chase as she inexplicably struggled to complete a regulation single from the non-striker's end, leaving skipper Hayley Mathews in disbelief. Mathews too departed 12

balls later, nicking a wide delivery from Renuka who got the in-swing going in her first spell. When young pacer Titas Sadhu castled Rashad Williams, the West Indies slipped to 11 for four and the game was as good

Renuka's fourth wicket reduced the visitors to 34 for six as Shabika Gajnabi could not connect a full in-swinging ball.

Earlier, Mandhana, who recorded a 50-plus score for the fifth time in as many innings,



over.

Her

four

boundaries

came on the leg-

sweep multiple times.

cover drive and pull.

side as she employed the

Mandhana, at the other end.

entertained the crowd with her

trademark shots including a

India changed gears after the

The momentum was carried by Richa and Rodrigues who has been in top form of

For the West Indies, the pick of the bowlers was left-arm spinner Zaida James who took five wickets for 45 runs in eight overs.

India could have got a lot more in the death overs but the last three overs only yielded 20 runs with James picking three

India win inaugural U19 Women's Asia Cup title

Eves beat Bangladesh by 41 runs

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kuala Lumpur, Dec 22: G Trisha stood tall to hit a fine 52 while spinners took seven wickets collectively as India beat Bangladesh by 41 runs to become first-ever winners of the inaugural U19 Women's Asia Cup at the Bayuemas Cricket Oval Sunday.

Trisha, who was a member of the Indian team winning the first-ever U19 Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa in 2023, hit five fours and two sixes in her 47-ball knock on a challenging pitch as the side made 117/7.

In reply, left-arm spinner Aayushi Shukla picked 3-17 and became the leading wicket-taker of the competition, while fellow left-arm spin bowlers Parunika Sisodia and Sonam Yadav took wickets each to dry the run flow of Bangladesh after the power play and dismiss them for 76 in 18.3 overs to win

Pushed into batting first, Trisha became the key for leading India's charge once G Kamalini and Sanika Chalke fell early. She struck a balance between playing elegant shots and rebuilding India's innings through a 41-run stand with captain Niki Prasad (12).

After the duo and Ishwari Awsare fell, a calm Mithila Vinod stepped up to hit a cameo of 17 and take India past the 110-mark, with Bangladesh's Farjana Easmin taking 4-30 In defence of the modest total Joshitha VJ and Sonam Yadav struck to leave Bangladesh two down in the power play.

Fahomida Choya and Juairiya Ferdous tried to get Bangladesh's chase on track with 18 and 22, respectively. But with Indian spinners stemming the run flow by bowling more dot balls and the required run rate rising, the duo couldn't break free from the shackles of pres sure and gave their wickets to

From 64/5 in 14.2 overs, Bangladesh eventually slumped to 76 all out, giving India an emphatic win. Trisha was rightfully named Player of the Fi nal and also took Player of the Tournament award, as India will be pleased with how they emerged triumphant in the all-Asian event ahead of their defence of the U19 Women's T20 World Cup, whose second edition begins next month in Malaysia.

Brief Scores:

India 117/7 (G Trisha 52; Farjana Easmin 4-30) beat Bangladesh 76 in 18.3 overs (Juairiya Ferdous 22; Aayushi Shukla 3-17) by 41 runs



SHORT **TAKES**

Man City crisis deepens after another loss

Manchester: Manchester City's stunning slump deepened after losing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League. Goals from Jhon Duran and Morgan Rogers at Villa Park consigned the four-time defending champion to a ninth defeat in 12 games in a season that is unravelling. Pep Guardiola's team has won just once during that run. "We don't have a defense for the results. They are not good, Guardiola said. Third-placed Arsenal closed the gap on league leader Liverpool to three points with a 5-1 win at Crystal Palace, but has played two games more.

Defending champion Kharb suffers defeat

Bangalore: Defending champion Anmol Kharb along with five other seeded women's singles players bowed out of the Senior National **Badminton Championships** after suffering defeats at the pre-quarterfinals here Sunday. Anmol, who recently reached the finals of the Guwahati Masters Super 100 tournament, lost 12-21 15-21 to 12th seed Shriyanshi Valishetty, while 16th seed Tasnim Mir packed-off top seed Aakarshi Kashyap 21-19, 21-17 in another match. On the other courts, 15th seed Shreya Lele continued her impressive run as she came from a game down to beat former champion and second seed Anupama Upadhyaya 13-21, 21-18, 21-14 in a thrilling match.

Women footballers held over racial slur

Sao Paulo: Four River Plate women's players were arrested by Sao Paulo police and accused of making a racial slur, Sao Paulo's public security secretariat told The Associated Press. On Friday, a Brazil Ladies Cup football semifinal between Argentina's River Plate and Brazilian team Grêmio was stopped in the first half after River Plate's Candela Díaz was accused of making monkey gestures to a ball boy, according to broadcast footage and local media reports. Díaz was detained along with teammates Juana Cangaro Milagros Naiquen Diaz, and Camila Ayelen Duarte, the players' lawyer, Thais Sankari, told The AP. They remained in custody Saturday.

No place for Stokes as Root returns to England's ODI squad for India tour, CT



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ka Rawal (40

off 69).

After

dropping

hard-hitting

Shafali Ver-

ma, India have

tried multiple batters to

open alongside Mandha-

na and on Sunday it was

the turn of Delhi crick-

eter Pratika, who batted

at a strike rate of 57.97.

London, Dec 22: Veteran batter Joe Root's return to 50-over format after more than a year headlined England's squad announcement for the ODI tour to India and the Champions Trophy.

Root's previous assignment in the format was the 50-over World Cup held in India in 2023.

All-rounder and Test skipper Ben Stokes was not considered for selection as he has been recovering from a left hamstring injury sustained during the third Test against New Zealand earlier this month.

Seasoned batter Jos Buttler will lead the side, and the Lancashire man will also captain England in the T20I series against India, which precedes the ODIs. England will play five T20Is and three ODIs during the white ball tour to India.

Leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed, who made his Test debut against India earlier this year, was included in the T20I squad.

INDIA VS ENGLAND SCHEDULE:

1st T201: January 22, Eden Gardens, Kolkata. 2nd T201: January 25, MA Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai. 3rd T201: January 28. Niranian Shah Stadium, Raikot, 4th T201: January 31, MCA

Stadium, Pune.

Stadium, Mumbai.

ODIs: 1st ODI: February 6, VCA Stadium, Nagpur. 2nd ODI: February 9, Barabati Stadium, Cuttack. 3rd ODI: February 12, Narendra

Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad.

5th T201: February 2, Wankhede

In-form Harry Brook will get another chance to play international bilateral cricket in India after pulling out of the Test series earlier this year due to personal reasons.

Dubai to host India's matches in CT

Karachi: Dubai has been locked in as the neutral venue to host India's matches in the Champions Trophy with a semi-final and the final also to be staged in the UAE if Rohit Sharma and Co qualify for the knockouts. A reliable source in the Pakistan Cricket Board confirmed that Dubai was chosen as the neutral venue after a meeting between PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi and his UAE counterpart Sheikh Nahyan Al Mubarak Saturday night. On Thursday, the deadlock over the hosting of Champions Trophy finally ended when the ICC announced that India will play their matches of the 50-over event at a neutral venue instead of host country Pakistan, which will get a similar arrangement for tournaments to be held in India till 2027. The ICC is now expected to announce the final schedule of the event with Pakistan expected to host 9 to 10 matches. The final will be in Lahore If India doesn't qualify for the final, the source said.

WESTERN INDIA SQUASH SLAM

three in

Anahat, Ameeshenraj emerge champions

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Mumbai, Dec 22: Defending champion and India's firm favourite Anahat Singh asserted her dominance to tame top-seeded compatriot Akanksha Salunkhe to win the Western India Slam 2024, a \$9,000 Professional prize-money Squash Association (PSA) Challenger event, women's singles title at the Cricket Club of India courts in Mumbai Sunday.

The second seed Anahat outclassed Akanksha 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-8) in just 25 minutes. With the win, the 16-year-old picked up her ninth PSA Challenger title of the year after securing her first win over Akanksha Salunkhe, world No 70, in a PSA event.

In the men's singles final, second seed Malaysian Ameeshenraj Chandaran defeated the number one seed Viktor Byrtus of the Czech Republic 3-1 (15-13, 6-11, 11-5, and 11-3) in a gruelling 60-minute encounter.

Atletico upset Barca to go top of La Liga

Madrid, Dec 22: Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone ran down the touchline in joy while Barcelona players sunk to the turf in dismay.

Super sub Alexander Sørloth struck again deep in stoppage time to hand Atletico a 2-1 comeback win at Barcelona and ensure Atletico will spend La Liga's short winter break on top of the table.

Atletico's 12th straight win in all competitions lifted it three points above Barcelona.

Barcelona has only two wins in its last nine games and could find itself third Sunday if Real Madrid beats Sevilla.

Simeone, coaching Atletico since 2011, celebrated winning at Barcelona for the first time.

"We finally did it, Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. 'We are playing well, we started poorly but we knew our chances would come. And in the last minute Sørloth came through. Thanks to him we finally won here. He is the striker we needed.'

It was a much more impressive performance from Barcelona, which dominated for long periods and took a deserved lead in the 30th minute.

Pedri started and ended the move, playing a one-two with Gavi, and firing an angled shot into the bottom right corner.

Raphinha almost doubled Barcelona's lead in stunning fashion in the 57th when he lobbed the goalkeeper but the ball came off the crossbar. Robert Lewandowski got to the rebound but sent it onto the head of Axel Witsel, who needed treatment.

Barcelona was made to rue its missed opportunities when Atletico levelled just three minutes later, partly thanks to a defensive blunder.

Barcelona midfielder Marc Casadó tried to clear Julián Alvarez's cross but passed it straight to Rodrigo De Paul, who fired into the bottom right corner. Casadó put his hands to his head and dropped to his knees in dismay.

Worse was to come for Barcelona as, in the sixth minute of stoppage time, Nahuel Molina made a fantastic run to latch onto a through ball and cross in for Sørloth to fire into the back of the net. It was Sørloth's eighth goal of the season, five of them after he's come off the bench.

JADEJA PRESS CONFERENCE ROW ESCALATES

India boycott media match with Australia

Spinner Ravindra Jadeja was slammed for speaking **Hindi in Australia by** media outlet

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Melbourne, Dec 22: The scheduled press match between the Indian and Australian media was cancelled after the Indian media reportedly boycotted a pre-arranged game, following a press conference row involving allrounder Ravindra Jadeja.

The T20 game scheduled for Sunday at Junction Oval in Melbourne was cancelled after the Indian team's media manager decided not to participate.

This decision prompted several members of the travelling media contingent to withdraw as well, making it impossible to organise a formal match, a report in The Age quoted multiple sources.

This incident was followed Saturday by a press conference involving Jadeja, where the spinner answered questions in Hindi.

After a half-hour delay in the scheduled media appearance after India completed a training session at the ground. Jadeja began taking questions from Indian journalists. Following nine minutes of discussion in Hindi, the presser was ended as the team bus had to depart. Hence, the player couldn't stay any longer, according to India's media manager.



However, some Australian media are claiming that Jadeja has refused to answer questions in English. "The Australian media were bemused and confused when the star allrounder refused to answer questions in English. It was obviously

an annoying situation for the journalists who made the effort to turn up," Channel 7 said in its report.

In reality, Jadeja never refused to answer questions in English. He responded primarily in Hindi because the Indian reporters posed their questions exclusively in that language.

Relations between the Indi an team and local media took a downturn when the squad began to arrive in Melbourne Thursday. Star batter Virat Kohli was engaged in a heated exchange with a journalist, as he appeared to be upset by the presence of cameras directed at

The fourth Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series begins Thursday at the MCG. with the series levelled at 1-1.

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