



## Shilpa's philosophy

Actor Shilpa Shetty says life is all about embracing extremes and coming out stronger

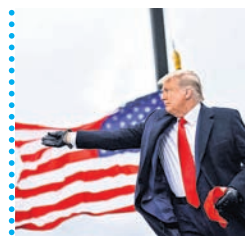
LEISURE | P2



## NHRC gets new chief

Former Supreme Court judge V Ramasubramanian has been appointed the new chairperson of NHRC

NATIONAL | P8



## Trump's new threat

President-elect Donald Trump threatens to reassert US control over Panama Canal

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Manipur beat Odisha

Manipur's monopoly continues as they defeat Odisha in Senior Women's National Football Championship final

SPORTS | P12

## CM Majhi meets PM Modi in Delhi

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 23:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Monday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and discussed various issues related to the state.

Majhi, who is on a five-day visit to Rajasthan and New Delhi, met the Prime Minister, on his way back to the state capital.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) posted on X saying: "Chief Minister of Odisha, Shri Mohan Charan Majhi, met Prime Minister @narendramodi."



Majhi in a post on X said: "Today, I met the Honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi and discussed various important issues. On behalf of the people of Odisha, I would like to express my gratitude for all the support he has given to the development of Odisha."

Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention in Bhubaneswar which will be held from January 8 to 10.

The PM will also visit Odisha to attend Utkarsh Odisha Make In Odisha Conclave, which is scheduled to take place in the Capital City January 27 and 28.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



The PM has a strong passion for the energy sector. He loves those who praise his energy levels!



UP IN FLAMES: An electronics godown in Satya Nagar area of Bhubaneswar catches fire Monday evening

OP PHOTO

# CLASS V & VIII NEW HURDLES

Five years after amending the Right To Education (RTE) Act, 2010, in 2019, the Union government has allowed the states and Union Territories to detain Classes V and VIII students, if they fail to clear the year-end examinations and a re-test two months after the results are out. This move marks a significant departure from the long-standing 'no-detention policy' which had been a cornerstone of India's educational framework since enactment of RTE Act in 2009. The notification will be applicable to over 3,000 schools run by the Centre including Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and Sainik Schools

PNN & AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 23:** The Centre has scrapped the 'no-detention policy' for Classes V and VIII in schools governed by it allowing them to fail students who do not clear the year-end exams, according to officials.

Following the amendment to the Right to Education Act

(RTE) in 2019, at least 16 states and two Union Territories (UTs) have already done away with the 'no-detention policy' for the two classes.

According to a gazette notification, after the conduct of regular examination, if a child fails to fulfil the promotion criteria, as notified from time to time, he shall be given additional instruction and opportunity for re-examination within a period of two months from the date of declaration of results.

"If the child appearing in the re-examination fails to fulfil the promotion criteria again, he shall be held back in fifth class or eighth class, as the case may be. During the holding back of the child, the class teacher shall guide the child as well as the parents of the child, if necessary, and provide specialised inputs after identifying the learning gaps at various stages of assessment," the notification said. However, the government has clarified that no child shall be expelled from any school till completion of elementary education.

Meanwhile, Odisha Parents' Federation (OPF) has criticised the Union government's decision saying that this is a violation of RTE Act.

"It will aggravate issues like dropout, child marriage, child labour and atrocities against children in India. This is an anti-parents and anti-students decision. It must be rolled back immediately," said Basudeb Bhatta, president of OPF.

According to senior Ministry of Education officials, the notification will be applicable to over 3,000 schools run by the central government including Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and Sainik Schools.

"Since school education is a state subject, states can make their decision in this regard. Already 16 states and 2 UTs including Delhi have done away with the no-detention policy for these two classes. "Haryana and Puducherry have not made any decision yet while remaining states and UTs have decided to continue with the policy," a senior official said.

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## State demands IMD regional centre in City

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 23:** The state government Monday urged the India Meteorological Department (IMD) to upgrade its existing office here to a regional meteorological centre as the state has been facing several natural calamities such as cyclones and floods.

State Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari placed the demand at a function on the occasion of the IMD's 150 years of service.

At present, IMD has six regional centres in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Nagpur, Kolkata and Guwahati.

He also said, "Odisha has become a permanent address for different types of disasters. Therefore, we urge the director general of the IMD to set up a regional office of the weather department here," the minister said.

IMD DG Mrutyunjaya Mohapatra said, "The IMD has weather monitoring stations in all 30 districts of Odisha and Doppler radars at Paradip and Gopalpur, while three more places - Balasore, Sambalpur and Bhubaneswar - will get the facility soon."

## It's official: B'desh wants Hasina back

AGENCIES

**Dhaka, Dec 23:** Bangladesh's interim government said Monday that it has sent a diplomatic note to India to send back deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Dhaka.

Hasina, 77, has been living in exile in India since August 5 when she fled the country amid the student-led protests that toppled her 16-year regime. Bangladesh-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

"We have sent a note verbale to the Indian government saying that Bangladesh wants her back here for the judicial process," Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain told reporters at his office. Earlier in the morning, Home Advisor Jahangir Alam said his office has sent a letter to the foreign ministry to facilitate the ousted premier's extradition from India.

"We have sent a letter to the foreign ministry regarding her



extradition. The process is currently underway," he told reporters in response to a query. Alam said an extradition treaty between Dhaka and New Delhi already exists and Hasina could be brought back to Bangladesh under it. Last month, in an address to the nation on the completion of 100 days of the interim government, Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said it will seek the extradition of Hasina.

"We must ensure justice in every killing... We will also ask India to send back fallen auto crat Sheikh Hasina," he said.

Yunus, who assumed office August 8, claimed that about 1,500 people, including students and workers, were killed while 19,931 others were wounded during the protest against the Hasina government.



## 'Sunny Leone' avails ₹1,000 a month government grant

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, Dec 23:** A new fraud in Chhattisgarh involving actress Sunny Leone has come to light. A person has been enjoying the benefits of the state's welfare scheme Mahatari Vandan Yojana using the actress name to get the ₹1,000 per month from the state government. As per media reports, the fraud was uncovered in Talur village, located in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region. A man used Sunny's name to receive the amount as the scheme only transfers the money to married women.

A case has been filed against the man behind the fraud named Virendra Joshi, according to reports. The man

also used the name of adult film actor Johnny Sins.

The fraud related to the scheme, which was introduced by the BJP government, came to light after an RTI filing which led to the scaming of Mahatari Vandan Yojana website thereby filtering out details of a beneficiary registered with the name Sunny Leone and her husband mentioned as Johnny Sins.

To become a beneficiary of the scheme, the documents from the fraudster were received at Anganwadi level in Bastar district. The file was "verified" by Anganwadi and another supervisor. It also stated that the person has received the beneficiary amount for 10 months - from March to December.

In a social media post, the state Congress president Deepak Baij accused the BJP

of favouring their supporters through the scheme. He wrote on X, formerly Twitter, "Mahatari Vandan money is going to BJP's favourites in the name of Sunny Leone".

Sunny Leone, however, is yet to comment on the matter.

Meanwhile, Sunny, who last hosted the dating reality show 'MTV Splitsville X5', renewed her wedding vows with her husband Daniel Weber after 13 years of their marriage. The couple renewed their vows in an intimate ceremony in the Maldives October 31, and was joined by their children Nisha, Noah, and Asher.

A source close to the couple had shared that the couple had wanted to renew their vows for quite some time but waited until their children were old enough to understand the significance of the occasion.

## Pioneer of parallel cinema Shyam Benegal dies at 90

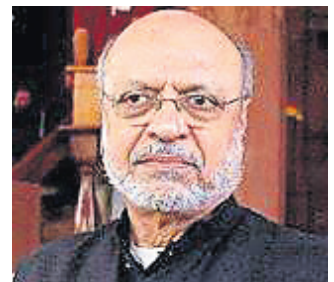
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 23:** Veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal, who heralded the Indian parallel cinema movement in the 1970s and 1980s with films such as "Ankur", "Nishant" and "Manthan", died Monday, his daughter Pia said. He was 90.

The filmmaker passed away at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital due to chronic kidney disease, Pia Benegal told PTI.

"He passed away at 6:38pm at Wockhardt Hospital Mumbai Central. He had been suffering from chronic kidney disease for several years but it had gotten very bad. That's the reason for his death," she said.

In his prolific career, Benegal made films on diverse issues, documentaries and television serials, including "Bharat Ek Khoj" and "Samvidhaan". Benegal is survived by his wife Nira Benegal and daughter. His films include "Bhumika", "Ju-



noon", "Mandi", "Suraj Ka Satvaan Ghoda", "Mammo" and "Sardari Begum", most counted as classics in Hindi cinema. The director's most recent work was the 2023 biographical "Mujib: The Making of a Nation".

Meanwhile, people from various walks of life, including President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Leader of Opposition in Odisha Assembly Naveen Patnaik, condoled Benegal's demise.

# leisure

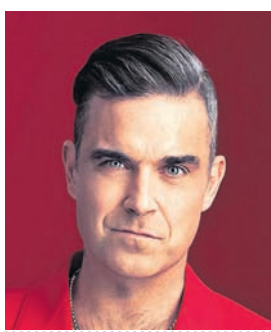


## ELLE FANNING ON HER SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

American actress Elle Fanning tries to keep her social media usage 'healthy' but she can't help falling down 'the rabbit hole' sometimes. The 26-year-old admits the only platform she uses is Instagram and she tries to make sure her feed remains a 'light place' but she regularly finds she can't resist comparing herself to others.

## ROBBIE WILLIAMS WANTS TO RETAKE SCHOOL EXAMS

Pop star Robbie Williams, 50, went out into the world with very few qualifications after failing or skipping most of his exams but he now wants to go back and re-sit the tests after spending years thinking he was a 'dumb-dumb' due to his learning disabilities.



## FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
You feel lost and thoroughly depressed today. This will make you turn towards spirituality, says Ganesha. You will devote more time to meditation and will pray a lot. Despite the adverse circumstances, Ganesha says you will make a good deal of material headway.

**TAURUS**  
Feel your imagination run wild as you star-gaze throughout the day wondering about the existence of the extra terrestrial. You will paint the workplace in your flavour of innovation, combined with a drive to work equally hard. Add some smooth talk to the equation and you will find a lot of people in awe of your charm, says Ganesha.

**GEMINI**  
A long and hectic day awaits you. You will be in the mood to finish off long-pending projects at work or at home. There is a chance that your personal life may get affected due to the extra attention you pay towards work. You need to guard against hurting the feelings of your family members, says Ganesha.

**CANCER**  
Ganesha advises you to be careful before signing any document. A hard time for share brokers and traders. So be on the guard during deals and transactions. Average time for business. Ganesha tells you to be self-confidence.

**LEO**  
You will pay serious attention to your work. You will feel that you have no option but to work hard. You will not be in the mood for socialising. This is only a temporary phase, hence there is no need to worry. You will be back to your usual gregarious self in no time at all, says Ganesha.

**VIRGO**  
Matters of religion and spirituality rise to the fore today. Throw yourself into a single-minded pursuit to be successful in your chosen field, and make the most of your skills and natural talent, says Ganesha. Matters of relationships will see you more critical and analytical than emotional.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says that today you shall be very careful in money matters. It is nothing to do with miserliness at all. When buying things you will be careful while spending money and will stick to your budget. On the other hand when you are out with your loved ones you will not think about holding back and will spend lavishly. Ganesha says to take the balanced approach in everything in life and things will go well for you.

**SCORPIO**  
It is likely that you shall learn an important lesson in life today. Remember that spite and envy beget enemies. Ganesha advises you to display some errors so as to make you seem more human and approachable.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
You wake up with a smile today. According to Ganesha, you have a knack of solving problems, which you may use it to the optimum. Be cautious of people around you, as their envious nature may affect your work. Ignore them and keep the optimism alive.

**CAPRICORN**  
Whether you're an artist, performer, professional or an entrepreneur, career issues will take the foreground today, while personal matters will wait in queue for your attention, says Ganesha. Your performance will be at its all-time high, and your efforts will be duly rewarded, but credit for this must go to your loved ones who will lend their unceasing support for all your endeavours.

**AQUARIUS**  
Listen to your inner voice, follow what your heart says and you will not need anyone else guiding you on your path. At work, you will have a smooth sailing today, as superiors will be supportive of your actions and decisions. Go on a romantic date in the evening, and mark a perfect ending to the day, feels Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
While you will need loads of moral support to keep your spirits up, you are also likely to be blessed with the company of a person who is equipped to provide just that. Positive results will come your way as long as you do not give up. Use your imagination and creativity to surge ahead of the competition, says Ganesha.

## 'Take the plunge into whatever life offers'

**MUMBAI:** Actress Shilpa Shetty, who was last seen in Indian Police Force, is embracing the extremes and coming out stronger.

Monday, the actress took to her Instagram, and shared a video of herself in which she could be seen in a jacuzzi. The actress said in the video, posted from Lapland in Finland, that the temperature outside the jacuzzi is -13 °C.

The actress then came out of the jacuzzi, and lay down on the snow with her back facing down. She screamed as she felt the temperature shock and sprinted back to the jacuzzi.

She wrote in the caption, "Life can throw you from hot to cold in a heartbeat, just like this. But it's all about embracing the extremes and coming out stronger. Stay balanced, stay motivated, and take the plunge into whatever life offers #NOGUTSNOGLORY #MondayMotivation #HotAndColdChallenge #Laplanddiaries".

Earlier, the actress and her husband, Raj Kundra's premises were raided by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Af-

ter this, Raj had issued a public statement about him fully complying with the authorities.

The searches were part of an ongoing investigation into an alleged money laundering case.

The businessman was arrested by the Mumbai Crime Branch in July 2021 in connection with the case, facing multiple charges under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Information Technology Act. He was later granted bail by a city court.



**MUMBAI:** Filmmaker Payal Kapadia, whose film *All We Imagine as Light* has been scooping critical acclaim, has shared her opinion on the representation of women in media.

The filmmaker said that the female representation in cinema and media is very one dimensional, and is often shaped by male gaze.

She said, "The representation of women in the media is so one-dimensional, often shaped by a male gaze. Even in something as simple as waxing ads, women are portrayed without hair, which speaks to the unrealistic standards set by society. In my film, we wanted to step away from that and just be ourselves, authentic and true to how we are in everyday life".

She further mentioned, "It's about whose gaze is at the center of the narrative. For instance, when you see Anu in the city, everything looks romantic and picturesque. But when it's Prabha, it's just normal, because the lens changes everything".

Payal Kapadia boasts of a Critics Choice Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film and the historic Golden Globe nominations for Best Director in Motion Picture, making her the first-ever Indian woman nominated in this category. The film also won Best Film Not in the English Language from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association.

**Payal: Representation of women in media one dimensional**



## POOJA'S NOTE ON ALCOHOLISM



**MUMBAI:** Actor-filmmaker Pooja Bhatt celebrated eight years of sobriety after quitting alcohol.

The actress took to social media to share her journey, expressing that the opposite of addiction is not just sobriety but connection.

Monday, Pooja posted a candid photo of herself with the caption, "8 years sober today. Gratitude. Gravititas. Grace. 'You're not alone, we love you' has to be at every level of how we respond to addicts socially, politically, and individually. For one hundred years now, we've been singing war songs about addicts. I think all along we should have been singing love songs to them... because the opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is connection." - Johann Hari #onestepatatime #onedayatime #sobrietyrocks #soberissexxy #soberliving #8yearssober #gratitude #gravititas #grace #johannhari #lostconnections #poojabhatt.

The 'Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahin' actress gave up alcohol around 2016. Pooja Bhatt, daughter of filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, has been candid about her struggles with alcohol. She had previously shared that she decided to quit drinking after realizing she had fallen into the 'trap of addiction' and understood that the only way to break free was to acknowledge it to herself.

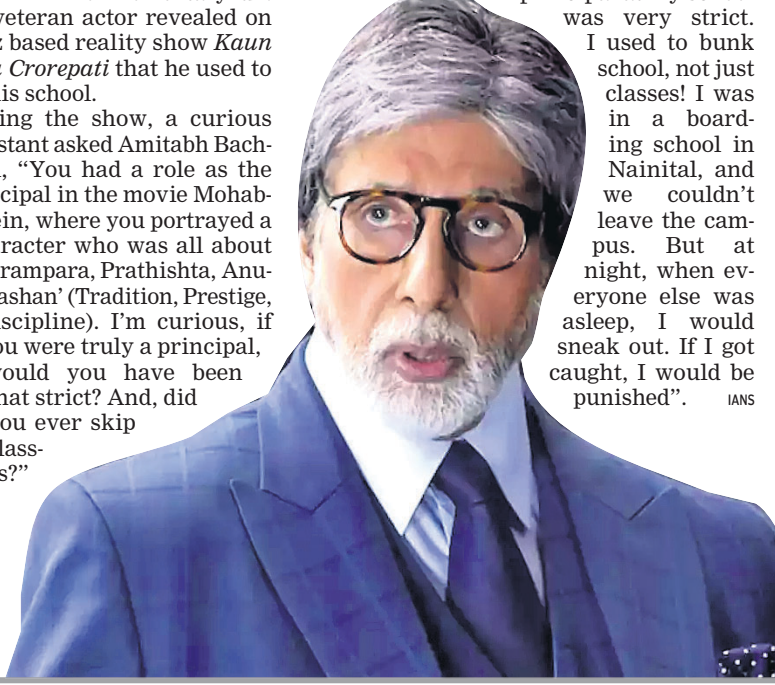
## Big B bunked classes

**MUMBAI:** Veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan is known for discipline on the sets, and his penchant for rehearsing the scenes. However, there was a time when Big B let go of the discipline in him for momentary fun.

The veteran actor revealed on the quiz based reality show *Kaun Banega Crorepati* that he used to bunk his school.

During the show, a curious contestant asked Amitabh Bachchan, "You had a role as the principal in the movie Mohabbatein, where you portrayed a character who was all about 'Parampara, Prathishta, Anushashan' (Tradition, Prestige, Discipline). I'm curious, if you were truly a principal, would you have been that strict? And, did you ever skip classes?"

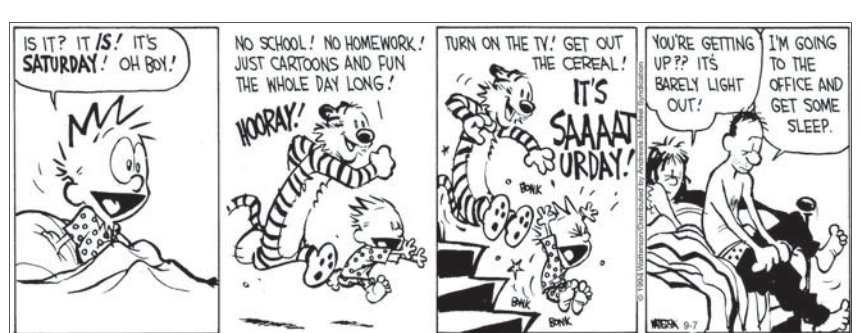
Responding to the same, Amitabh Bachchan said, "Where did you get the idea that I could have been a principal? Padhaai-likhaai mein zero the hum... so I could never have become a principal. But yes, the principal at my school was very strict. I used to bunk school, not just classes! I was in a boarding school in Nainital, and we couldn't leave the campus. But at night, when everyone else was asleep, I would sneak out. If I got caught, I would be punished".



## PEANUTS



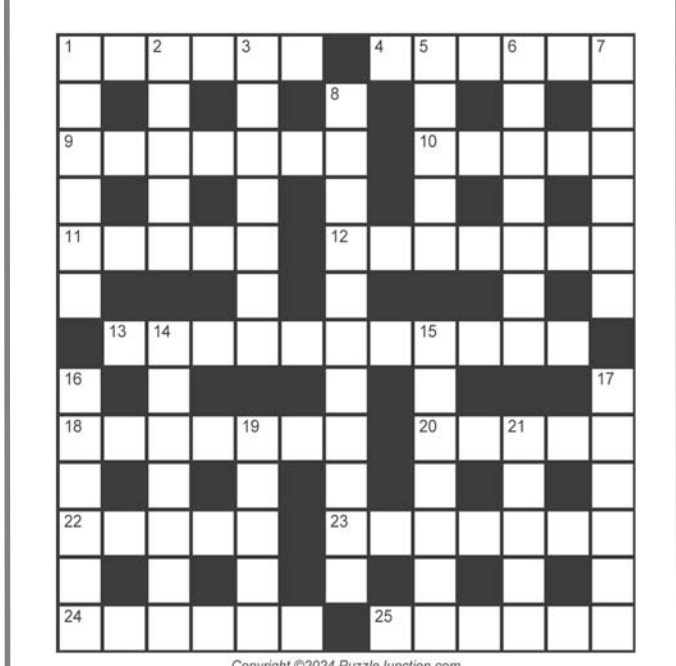
## CALVIN AND HOBBS



## BREVITY



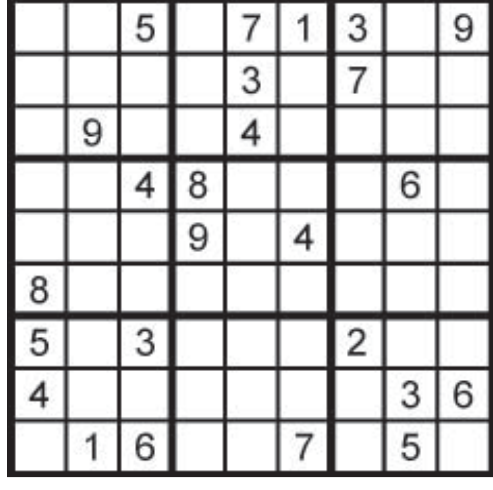
## CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 1 Like some humour
  - 4 Poem unit
  - 9 Plains beast
  - 10 Animal disease
  - 11 Entices
  - 12 Warning signal (3,4)
  - 13 Large steak
  - 18 Italian restaurant menu item
  - 20 Undisguised
  - 22 Berate
  - 23 Blunder
  - 24 Vacation destination
  - 25 Come into view
  - Down**
  - 1 Preserve, sort of
  - 2 Direct elsewhere
  - 3 Operator's gear
  - 5 Like a shrinking violet
  - 6 Bewilder
  - 7 Retaliate
  - 8 Wes Craven's output (6,5)
  - 14 Apparent
  - 15 Pouched mammal
  - 16 Mistake fixer
  - 17 Paper clip alternative
  - 19 Dictate
  - 21 Keyboard key

## SUDOKU

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



## SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW





Never grumble. All sorts of forces enter you when you grumble and they pull you down.

# Targeted Killings

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine is approaching its third year, the war between the two countries has assumed new proportions with targeted killing of top Russian commanders. It also speaks volumes for the guts and daring of Ukrainian spies to take the battle into the heart of the enemy country. Russia is furious over the assassination of one of their top commanders by Ukrainian spies in an explosion that shook a quiet Moscow neighbourhood. Lt Gen Kirillov, head of the Russian military's chemical, biological and radiological weapons unit, known as RKhBZ, was killed in a deadly scooter bomb attack. The scooter was parked outside a Moscow residential building and remotely detonated. The day before, the Ukraine secret service agency, the SBU, had charged the general in absentia, accusing him of the "mass use of banned chemical weapons." Ukraine claims over 2,000 of its troops have been hospitalised because of the use of choking agents and three have died. The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since Putin launched his full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Russia's security service (FSB) immediately swung into action and claimed to have detained a suspect 20 December for killing the senior general. The suspect was described as an Uzbek citizen who, the Russian agency said, had been recruited by Ukrainian intelligence services. The FSB said the suspect had been promised a reward of \$100,000 and permission to move to a European Union country in exchange for killing Kirillov. It said that acting on instructions from Ukraine, the suspect travelled to Moscow, where he picked up a homemade explosive device. He then placed the device on an electric scooter and parked it at the entrance of the residential building where Kirillov lived. The suspect then rented a car to monitor the location and set up a camera that live streamed video from the scene to his handlers in the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro. When Kirillov was seen leaving the building, the suspect detonated the bomb.

Justifying the killing, SBU told the media Kirillov, being "a war criminal" was "an absolutely legitimate target," since he gave orders to use prohibited chemical weapons against the Ukrainian military. In wartime rhetoric Ukraine even said such an inglorious end awaits everyone who kills Ukrainians and retribution for war crimes is inevitable. Kirillov himself and his military unit were sanctioned by several countries, including the US, Britain and Canada for alleged use of chemical weapons on the battlefields in Ukraine.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat. But, the war between the two countries has become so murky that even targeted killings are being justified invoking provisions from the UN Charter, Article 51, which states: "Nothing in the present charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations."

Clandestine killings in wartime represent a dark side of modern warfare. Last week, Ukraine's intelligence service claimed that it had assassinated Mikhail Shatsky, the deputy director of a Moscow-based ballistics engineering unit known for developing cruise missiles. If true, it only highlights Kyiv's increasingly bold efforts to disrupt Russia's war machine at its source. Russia, of course, terms such acts as terrorism though it may be painted with the same brush by Ukraine for its acts on the latter's soil.

But, the fact remains Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine is the victim of that aggression. Viewed in this light, the killings of civilians and army generals and military personnel in overt and covert operations are nothing but war against humanity. After all, as the Bard wrote, "everything is fair in love and war."

# PROGNOSIS FOR 2025

FOCUS YEAR AHEAD



The worry about how to increase foreign direct investment will remain. It has been falling for several years

We always begin the calendar year with a degree of optimism. To live with hope in the very nature of human existence. No matter how tough the challenges in the year ahead, the optimists outnumber the pessimists. No amount of gloom or doom prospects purveyed by dismal economists can deter the optimists. Their confidence in the future is undiminished. In that spirit here is a prognosis for the year 2025, full of tough challenges for the optimists to tackle and overcome.



Ajit Ranade

**THE INDIAN RUPEE IS EXPECTED TO DEPRECIATE DUE TO STRONG DOLLAR POLICIES OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION COMPOUNDED BY A WIDER TRADE DEFICIT IN INDIA**

The year ahead is full of uncertainty. Making an accurate prediction is foolish and is sure to fail. The sources of global uncertainty are economic and geopolitical. In the latter category are many factors. These include the outcome of the endless war in Ukraine, the escalation of the Israel-Hamas conflict and its spillover into the wider region of West Asia, and the ascendance of far-right parties in many countries, most prominently in Germany. One of the largest economies in the world, the German government lost the vote of confidence in Parliament this month, leading to mid-term elections which will be held early next year. The German economy will contract for a second year in a row, even as it grapples with a rising deficit, need for greater funding of the overseas wars, a shortage of skills and underfunded education. Then there is a rising anti-immigrant sentiment fuelled by far-right parties. Will Germany tilt closer to Russia or to NATO? How will it deal with Iran and its competitor China? Will its economy bounce back?

Beyond geopolitics is the economic uncertainty that will be heightened by America's new leader, Donald Trump who takes oath on 20 January. He has promised higher import tariffs, slashing government funding, stronger anti-immigrant policies and a withdrawal from most global climate treaties. His government will be more protectionist. He is likely

to engage in international diplomacy purely from an American transactional perspective. At the same time his government will have to fight inflation along with recessionary winds. Meanwhile, the American government debt has reached a new peak of \$35 trillion. Feeding this debt mountain are higher deficits and an insatiable appetite by the government for borrowing. The interest on the debt alone is about \$1 trillion. The borrowing appetite keeps the American dollar currency strong, causing other currencies like the Indian rupee to fall. Weaker currencies cause inflation to worsen.

Despite its economic woes, the American stock market clocked new highs during 2024 leading to the creation of more than 150 new billionaires. The twelve richest men in America are together worth \$2 trillion now. We thus have a cocktail mix of high inflation, high unemployment, a wild asset markets growth (stocks and real estate) and widening wealth and income inequality. The stock markets have a habit of an abrupt and sharp correction, when collective paranoia takes hold. That bubble burst could happen but is unpredictable. Not many saw the Lehman crash coming in 2008. China is also fighting a slowdown and a large debt with stress in its banking and real estate. It is also trying to transition into the new economy powered by renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and space tech-

nology. The other parts of East Asia and Japan are in relatively better shape and have better macroeconomic features.

Rising inequality is a global concern and its removal or reduction is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. The rise of populist leaders, higher welfare spending is a response to rising inequality. How to manage the fiscal burden of welfare spending is a new challenge. In India too, welfare spending has expanded hugely, both by the Union government and the states. A recent report by the Reserve Bank of India has cautioned against expanding subsidies and freebies indiscriminately. During 2024, 60 countries had national elections including India, and in most places rising inflation and inequality were big issues for voters. In many places, incumbents were thrown out (such as in America) mainly due to inflation and economic hardships. In India too, the state assembly elections to Jharkhand and Maharashtra were swayed by promises of generous subsidies especially targeted at women. We will have two other states, Delhi and Bihar, electing new legislatures, and there is already talk of income subsidies to the poor, women and other sections of society. Who will pay for all of these is not a matter of debate, at least for now.

On India's domestic front, there are many things to watch out. Two state assem-

bly elections have been mentioned. The much-delayed national census is likely to be kicked off. A revamp of the consumer price index and the index of industrial production is on the cards. Discussion will begin on the delimitation exercise of readjustment of Parliamentary seats. The deadline is 2026. The sixteenth Finance Commission will finalise its recommendation later this year. Will it assign assured funding to the third tier of government? In many states, election to local bodies like municipalities and panchayats have been long delayed, affecting local governance. The Indian rupee is expected to depreciate due to strong dollar policies of the Trump administration compounded by a wider trade deficit in India. The worry about how to increase foreign direct investment will remain. It has been falling for several years. The outflow of capital as well flight of rich people to other countries is also a matter of concern. Indians are expected to spend \$70 billion on the "import" of education, i.e. on students studying abroad. This is a major drain on the economy and reflects dissatisfaction with the quality of education in India, or of affordability and availability. On the technology front we will see the proliferation of electric vehicles, greater ethanol blending with petrol, and perhaps the initiation of pilot projects of small and modular nuclear reactors. One big economic development to watch for is the increase in private capital spending and the improvement in rural wages. The slowdown in urban consumption might call for a budgetary stimulus in the Union budget due to be presented in February. In summary, a year filled with uncertainty about investment and growth, widening inequalities, the growing influence of geopolitics and conflicts, and ever surging asset markets guided by a loose monetary policy.

The writer is a noted Pune-based economist. ©THE BILLION PRESS

## WISDOM CORNER

The marvelous richness of human experience would lose something of rewarding joy if there were no limitations to overcome. The hilltop hour would not be half so wonderful if there were no dark valleys to traverse.

HELEN KELLER

Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.

PABLO PICASSO

The willow which bends to the tempest, often escapes better than the oak which resists it; and so in great calamities, it sometimes happens that light and frivolous spirits recover their elasticity and presence of mind sooner than those of a loftier character.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1814: Treaty of Ghent. On this day in 1814, the United States and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent in Belgium, ending the War of 1812, marking a decline of American dependence on Europe, and stimulating a sense of U.S. nationalism.

1865: Ku Klux Klan created. The extremist white supremacist organization, also known as the Klan, was created in Pulaski, Tennessee by Confederate Army veterans.

1914: Christmas Truce begins. A much-studied event in war and peace studies, the Christmas Truce was a brief unofficial ceasefire between British and German troops along the Western Front of World War I. During the truce, soldiers from both sides sang carols, shared food, exchanged gifts and played football (soccer). Subsequent attempts to hold similar ceasefires around Christmas time failed.

1943: General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force during World War II.

1951: Idris I, head of the San siyyah (a Sufi Muslim brotherhood), was proclaimed king of an independent United Kingdom of Libya.

1955: NORAD's Santa tracking service begins. The event is now a Christmas tradition where the North American Aerospace Defense Command tracks Santa Claus as he travels around the world delivering presents to children. The event began after a printing error in a Sears catalog asking children to call Santa Claus. The number that was printed was the number of Colorado Springs' Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD) Center.

1979: The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to aid the Afghan communist government in its conflict with anti-communist Muslim guerrillas during the Afghan War.

## SPECTRUM SUSTAINABILITY

# Case for digital financial inclusion

A group of economists came together earlier this year to complete the largest analysis of hurricanes' economic effects on the United States to date. One of the most striking findings was that businesses with only a brick-and-mortar presence that were in a hurricane's path suffered a 56% drop in sales for roughly three weeks, whereas those with an online presence experienced a far shallower decline - just 23%.



Ellen Jackowski

The clear takeaway is that nearly every business - from a hardware store in North Carolina to a corner shop in Nairobi - can strengthen its resilience to climate change by joining in the digital economy.

The global effort to counteract climate change has expanded rapidly in recent years. The energy and automotive industries are overhauling supply chains to boost uptake of clean technologies. Governments are implementing policies to accelerate the green transition, from the European Union's Carbon Border Adjust-

ment Mechanism to the United States' Inflation Reduction Act.

But measures to promote digital and financial inclusion - the critical work of providing internet access to left-behind communities, bank accounts to workers, and digital tools to entrepreneurs - are often missing in the fight against global warming. More than one billion unbanked people live in the most climate-vulnerable countries, and improving their access to digital banking and payment services would make them and their communities more resilient to both economic and climate shocks. Following a natural disaster, households could more easily receive relief funds through digital money transfers, and businesses could continue selling to their customers online.

This represents a clear opportunity, especially for fintechs and nonprofits, to create more products and services at the intersection of climate resilience and digital inclusion. One good example is the social enterprise Abalobi, an Earthshot Prize finalist in

2023. Abalobi created an app that small-scale fishers can use to input catches, showing exactly where they are fishing.

The app addresses two problems. First, it provides invaluable data to governments and scientists about who is fishing sustainably and who is not. Second, small-scale fishers often sell through middlemen who pay low prices, which forces them to reel in as much as they can to make a living. But by using the app's digital marketplace, these fishers can connect directly with restaurants and other buyers, enabling them to sell their catch for higher prices. This allows them to fish more selectively, in turn reducing the strain on marine life.

Yo! Pay Agric, powered by Mastercard Community Pass, likewise enables smallholder farmers to connect with regional buyers through their farmer cooperative organisations, bypassing middlemen and earning them higher prices for their crops.

Digital and financial inclusion must become a core pillar

of future climate efforts, with a focus on reducing the number of unbanked individuals and building digital infrastructure in climate-vulnerable communities. To that end, private companies, governments, and nonprofits need to work together to create innovative solutions, including products like Abalobi and Yo! Pay. This approach would help local users improve their financial health while simultaneously promoting resilience.

Climate change and poverty are intertwined: we cannot effectively tackle one without addressing the other. Digital tools and access to financial services cannot stop climate-related disasters, but they can make it easier for people to recover from these shocks. Strengthening the financial resilience of the most climate-vulnerable households benefits local communities, while also benefiting the entire global economy.

The writer is Chief Sustainability Officer at Mastercard. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

## Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

### The eternal Rafi

Sir, The whole music world is all set to celebrate the birth centenary of the one and only Mohammed Rafi on 24 December. The eternal singer is truly a demigod for his worshippers in the temple of music. In fact Rafi saab lives through his infinite number of songs that span various genres. Perhaps no other singer would have synced so well when it comes to adapting the actors persona. Whether it is a sad number for Dilip Kumar, a rock and roll for Shammi Kapoor or a romantic number for Dev Anand, Rafi saab truly adapts the actor. He lives not only in his songs but also through kindness, dedication and love he had for all. Legendary music director Naushad Ali once said that Rafi is God's gift to the music world. His voice could create magic in whichever genre the song belonged to. Be it fast and peppy numbers, raga-based songs, soothing melodies, romantic songs, qawwalis, soul-stirring ghazals or soulful bhajans, his golden voice stirred and lilted the souls of listeners. No wonder why even in an age where songs are created by AI, music machines and cyber tools Mohammed Rafi's songs turn into a panacea ready to cure any broken heart and ailing soul.

M Pradyu, KANNUR

### Consumer is king

Sir, An unhappy consumer stands out like a sore thumb for the government. At the same time, an unhappy customer is a source of great learning for the latter, of course if it desires to improve upon its shortcomings. Nothing can be more important for the consumers than salient laws to protect them. The Consumer Protection Act (CPA), 1986 was a landmark legal weapon in the field of consumer protection, and it was passed in Parliament on 24 December, 1986. With right comes responsibility, and the Act moulded the consumer to the dual task. The gaps in the outdated 1968 law were bridged by the 1986 Act. The Act underwent significant changes in 1991, 1993, 2002; the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 was perceived to be a path-breaker. National Consumer Rights Day is observed on 24 December.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

PARCEL BOMB CASE

ADG Bothra testifies in Patnagarh court

Patnagarh, Dec 23: Former Crime Branch IG and current additional DG, IPS Arun Bothra, appeared before the Patnagarh court in Bolangir district in connection with the much-hyped Patnagarh wedding parcel bomb case, Monday.



Bothra testified in the Court of Additional District and Sessions Judge here for the second time as Witness No. 60 in the case. The parcel bomb case had rocked the state six years back.

Tension in Barbil after desecration of temple

POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar/Barbil, Dec 23: Tension ran high after miscreants desecrated a temple of Lord Hanuman and dumped the deity's idol outside after removing it from the shrine at Akhadashal in New Market area under Ward No-9 of Barbil in Keonjhar district, late Sunday night.



The untoward incident sparked widespread unrest in the locality. The idol was allegedly removed from the temple's sanctum sanctorum and thrown outside by unidentified miscreants. The act ignited public outrage as locals staged a road blockade at Madhusudan Square.

To maintain law and order, police deployed two platoons of force for more than five and a half hours. Acting swiftly, the police arrested one accused individual.

Following prolonged road blockades, Keonjhar Superintendent of Police (SP) arrived at the scene around 1pm and informed the agitated crowd about the arrest of the accused. After requesting the protesters to withdraw their agitation, normal vehicular movement resumed.

The accused, identified as Balbir Singh from the New Market area of Barbil, has been arrested. He has multiple cases, including complaints of theft from various temples, filed against him at the same police station.

Barbil SDPO said that a case (383/2024) has been registered at the Barbil police station. Further investigations are underway to identify additional suspects and uncover the motives behind the desecration.

NHRC seeks ATR on death of 3 in Jharsuguda accident

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, Dec 23: The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Monday called for an Action Taken Report (ATR) within four weeks from the Jharsuguda Superintendent of Police (SP) on the death of three persons in a road mishap in January.

The NHRC passed the order while adjudging the case filed by rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy.

In the complaint, Tripathy stated that three persons, aged 18, 19 and 26 years, died after they were hit by a heavy vehicle January 8, 2024 in Jharsuguda district of Odisha.

The complainant further mentioned that the police failed to take immediate action as no patrolling is reportedly being done by the police personnel on the highway.

No arrest has been made, he said and alleged that no immediate medical treatment was provided to the victims and the bodies of the deceased were also not dealt with dignity.

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



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Man sustains critical injury in bear attack

POST NEWS NETWORK

Boinda, Dec 23: A man was left critically injured after a bear attacked him near Hinjirida village in Kishorennagar block under Handapa forest range in Angul district Sunday.



The injured was identified as Kishore Chandra Pradhan, a resident of Hinjirida village. The incident occurred when Kishore had gone to the nearby forest. A bear came out of the bushes all of a sudden and attacked him. Kishore sustained a severe wound on the head and was admitted to the district headquarters hospital (DHH) for treatment after being rescued by his family members. Villagers demanded compensation for the victim.

Pradhan launches plastic bag manufacturing unit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Paradip, Dec 23: Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Monday inaugurated a plastic bag manufacturing unit at the Plastic Park here in Jagatsinghpur district.

Pradhan said the plastic bag manufacturing plant developed by Energon Polymatics has a processing capacity of 500 metric tonne per month. This automated plant will manufacture various types of plastic bags and provide employment to many people, the Union Education Minister said. "We have to connect the potential we have with the local people. Be it the proposed petrochemical complex in Paradip or the Bhadrak textile park or the plan to produce clean fuel hydrogen, all these areas will create a new identity for Odisha," he said.

Pradhan thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, for providing all necessary support and giving special priority to strengthening the industrial infrastructure of Odisha, especially in Paradip, under Mission Purvodaya.

He asserted that this support has enabled rapid progress in Odisha, with Paradip becoming a focal point for development. The minister also highlighted recent advancements, including the expansion of Paradip Port's capacity and the initiation of mega petrochemical projects, such as those led by IOCL.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

Man gets 7 yrs in jail for rape

Malkangiri: A court in Malkangiri district Monday sentenced a man to seven years of imprisonment for raping a 50-year-old woman in 2009. Senior Civil Judge (Women's Court)-cum-Assistant Sessions Judge, Malkangiri, Babita Dash also imposed a fine of ₹10,000 on the convict, Sk Suri, said Additional Public Prosecutor, Rabinarayan Patra. The verdict was pronounced Monday on the basis of statements of 14 witnesses and other evidence, Patra said. As per the prosecution, the woman had gone to a forest near her village in Khairpur block of the district February 1, 2009. Finding her alone, Suri raped her. The woman narrated the incident to her family. Her daughter lodged a complaint at Mudulipada police station the next day, Patra said.

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Sonapur, dt. 19.12.24, I, Anandini Sarangi, D/o-I, Dillip Kumar Ojha (51 yrs.), S/o-Late Kalandi Charan Ojha, Vill./P.O. - Sundarpur, P.S.- Dhusuri, Dist.-Bhadrak declare that my wife has an LIC Policy bearing No. 588872623. Where in her name mentioned Anima Ojha. But her actual name is Annapurna Ojha. Further I declare that Anima Ojha and Annapurna Ojha, W/o Dillip Kumar Ojha same and one person.

Bank of India E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE. Includes details of properties for auction, borrower information, and terms of sale.

EAST COAST RAILWAY e-Tender Notice No. ETELCONBST-359E, Dtd.: 17.12.2024. Details of electrical power line works tender.

INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL SERVICES CENTRES AUTHORITY (IFSCA) VACANCY NOTIFICATION. Details of job openings and application process.

PUBLIC NOTICE. Legal notices regarding property matters and affidavits.

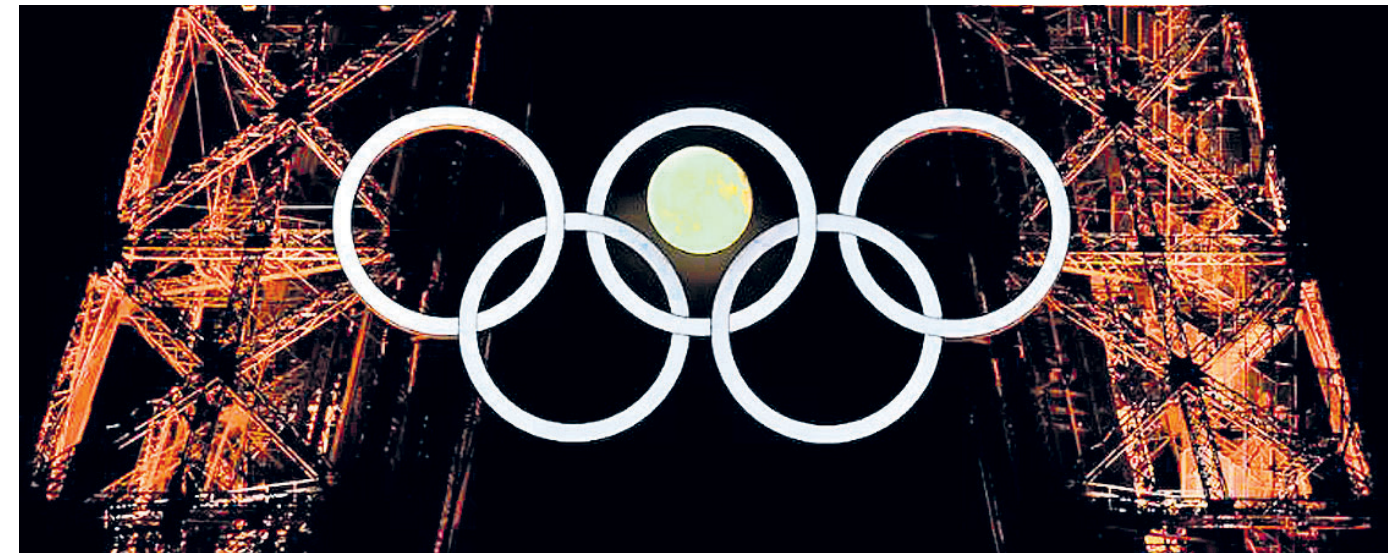
GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL WORKS DIVISION, KUCHINDA. Details of procurement notice for road and CD works.

# THE YEAR IN PICTURES

As 2024 draws to a close, we look back at a year shaped by moments of both crisis and transformation, each captured in powerful images that tell the story of a turbulent year and human resilience. Through the lens of photographers, these powerful images have chronicled the triumphs, challenges, and everyday moments that defined the year. From world-changing events to natural disasters, these photographs serve as a stark reminder of the events that have defined the year that has tested the limits of hope, unity, and endurance. **Orissa POST** presents a reflection on 2024, told through images that speak louder than words



Female Israeli soldiers pose for a photo in southern Israel, on the border of the Gaza Strip, February 19.



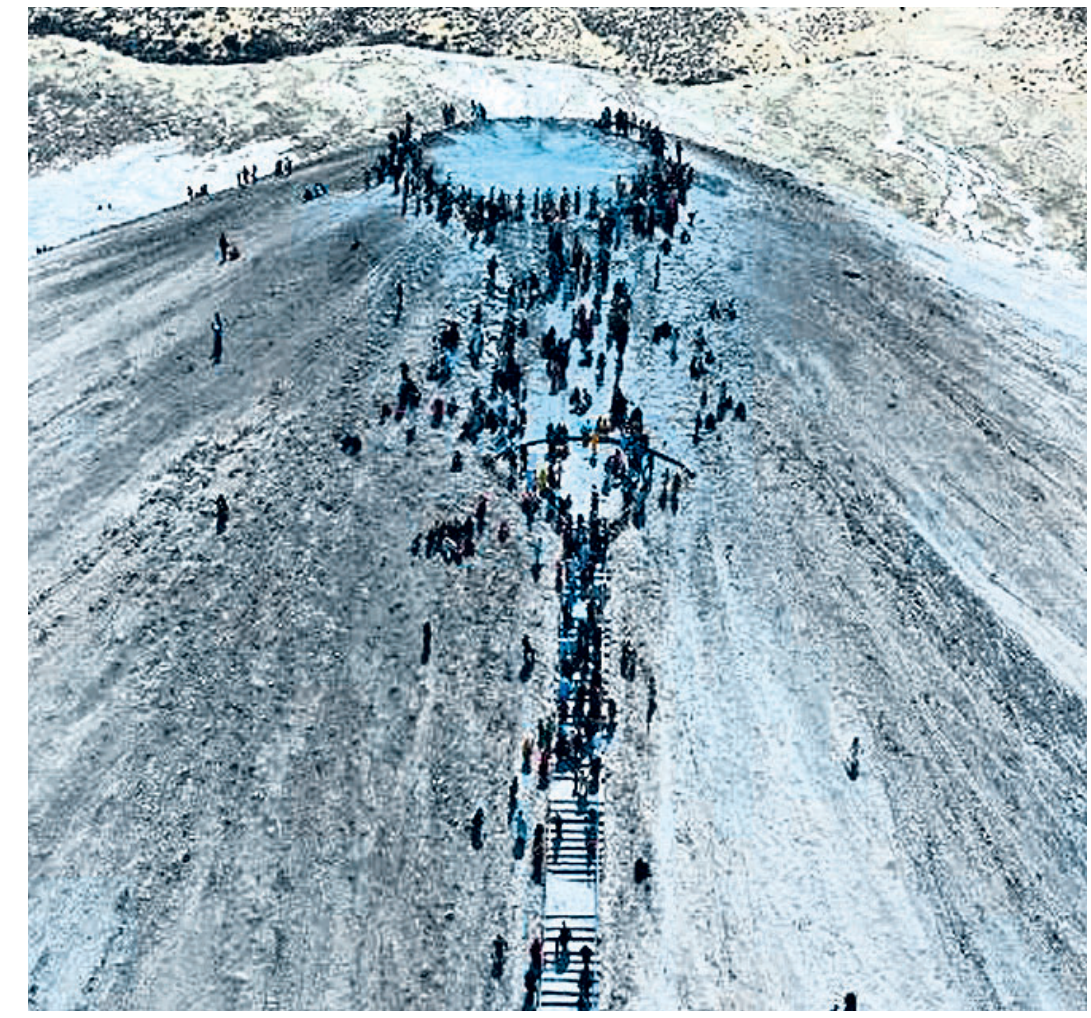
The moon is pictured with the Olympic rings on the Eiffel Tower ahead the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris, France, July 23.



A woman applies medication on the skin of her child who is under treatment against Mpox, at a health centre in North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, August 19.



An opposition fighter steps on a broken bust of the late Syrian President Hafez Assad in Damascus, Syria, after their lightning advance forced President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country, December 8.



Hindu devotees climb stairs to reach top of a mud volcano to start pilgrims' religious rituals for an annual festival in an ancient cave temple of Hinglaj Mata in Hinglaj in Lasbela district in Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province, April 26.



A drone view shows an airplane sitting on a flooded runway at the airport in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, May 17.



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump is surrounded by US Secret Service agents after an assassination attempt at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, US, July 13.



A woman with a rifle shops in a bakery in Tel Aviv, Israel.



Palestinians gather to receive food cooked by a charity kitchen, amid a hunger crisis, as the Israel-Gaza conflict continues, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, December 4.



A devotee carries a part of an idol of Lord Ganesha during immersion in Bay of Bengal in Chennai, India, September 15.



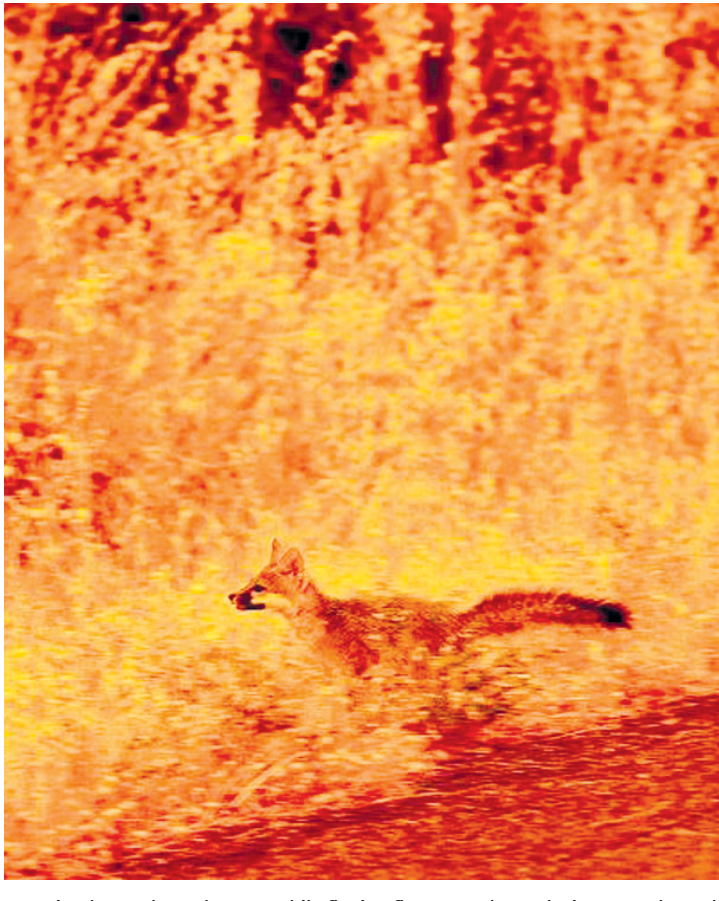
Debris surrounds a tilted building a day after a powerful earthquake struck in Hualien City, eastern Taiwan, April 4.



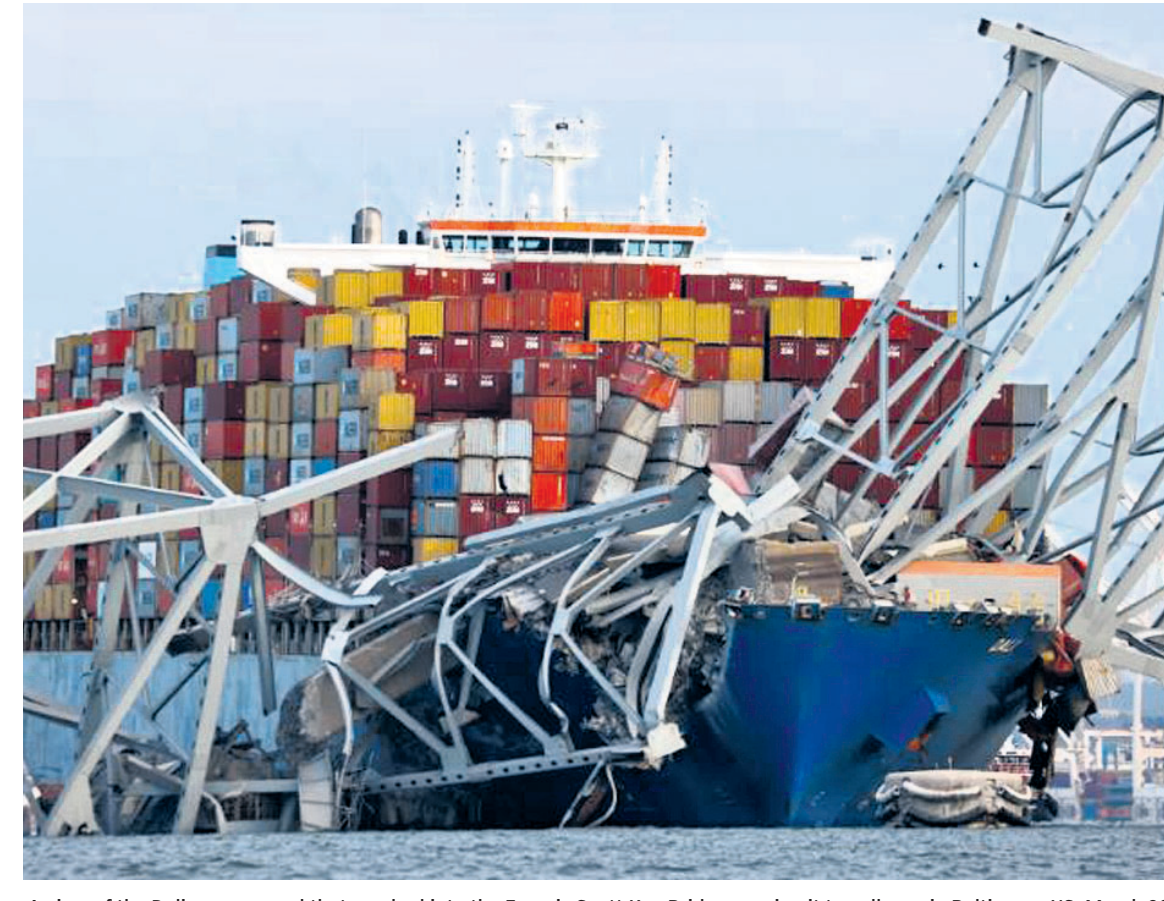
A drone view shows sand dunes partially covered by floodwaters, after rare rainfall in September, in Merzouga, Morocco, October 24.



A man transports an electronic voting machine on a pony as election officials walk to a polling booth in a remote mountain area on the eve of the first round of voting in the national election at Dessa village in Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir, India, April 18.



An animal runs through grass while fleeing flames as the Park Fire tears through the Cohasset community in Butte County, California, US, July 25.



A view of the Dali cargo vessel that crashed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge causing it to collapse in Baltimore, US, March 26.



A participant waves a national flag after climbing to the top of a greased-pole to retrieve prizes as part of Independence Day celebrations, in Jakarta, Indonesia, August 17.



Ultra-Orthodox Jews look at part of an intercepted ballistic missile that fell in the desert near the city of Arad, Israel, April 28.



Children shake hands before they play a chess game at the Soga Chess Club of the internally displaced persons camp in Kanyaruchinya, Democratic Republic of Congo, July 29.



G7 leaders watch a skydiving demonstration on the first day of the G7 summit, in Savelltri, Italy June 13.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un ride an Aurus car in Pyongyang, North Korea, June 20.



Protesters celebrate at the Parliament House premise after news of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 5.



Democracy is facing its gravest threat under the BJP-led Union Government with the reckless amendment of Section 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, to kill the transparency in election

JAISHANKAR KICKING OFF 6-DAY VISIT TO US

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will pay a six-day visit to the US from Tuesday, in the first high-level trip from India after Donald Trump won the US presidential election.



of the day quote

Today's Congress party is not the inheritors of the Congress party during Mahatma Gandhi's time. What is there now is a duplicate Congress and fake Gandhis (referring to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi)

They all (BJP) are hypocrites. They are standing behind a person who used a derogatory word against a woman in the House and are praising him. Has anyone condemned it or apologised? Instead, they are taking his procession from place to place

No political party appeared serious about the problems of rural India. Farmers should be allowed to protest in the Parliament premises regarding their demands

Police 'killed' Dalit man: Rahul

Chief Minister Fadnavis, who holds the home portfolio, hit out at Gandhi, said his visit to Parbhani was 'only for political reasons' and to 'create hatred'



and it was a 'cent per cent custodial death', Gandhi alleged after meeting his family members in Parbhani in the Marathwada region. The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, talking to reporters later, said Suryavanshi's family members showed him the post-mortem report, as well as some photographs and videos.

Parbhani witnessed violence after a glass-enclosed replica of the Constitution near Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's statue outside the city's railway station was vandalised December 10

Suryavanshi (35), a resident of Shankar Nagar, was among more than 50 persons arrested in connection with the violence, and later died at a state-run hospital after falling ill

The state government has ordered a judicial probe into the Parbhani violence. Gandhi said, "The youth was killed because he was a Dalit

SCUFFLE AMONG MPs IN PARLIAMENT

'NO LAPSE' ON OUR PART: CISF

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 23: The CISF Monday said there was "no lapse" on its part when asked about the scuffle that took place among MPs in Parliament complex during the recently concluded Winter Session and added it will choose to "keep quiet" when allegations are levelled by lawmakers.

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) is tasked to guard the Parliament House Complex. "There was no lapse (on part of the force)...by lapse if you mean some weapons were allowed inside, then I can tell you that no weapon was allowed..." CISF Deputy Inspector General (operations) Shrikant Kishore told the press during a conference here.

He said the force will choose to "keep quiet when the honourable members (MPs) make allegations." The officer was asked about the counter-allegations made by the parliamentarians on who pushed whom.

He added the CISF was not conducting any inquiry into the incident that took place at the 'Makar Dwar' of the Parliament



House Complex December 19. BJP MPs Pratap Chandra Sarangi and Mukesh Rajput had got injured during scuffle between the Opposition and ruling BJP MPs on the premises of Parliament. Delhi Police had filed an FIR against Leader of the Opposition (LoP) and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi following BJP's complaint against him. Kishore said MPs who enter Parliament "are not screened" (frisked) as per protocol. Asked about complaints against the force since it took charge of Parliament security in June this year, the officer said the MPs, employees working in the complex and visitors are "very satisfied and happy" with their work.

SHORT TAKES

3 killed as truck runs over footpath dwellers

Pune: Two toddlers and a man were killed and six other persons injured after a truck ran over people sleeping on a footpath in Maharashtra's Pune city in the wee hours of Monday, police said. The incident took place at 12.55 am on the footpath in Wagholi area where several persons were sleeping, they said. The victims comprised labourers and their family members hailing from Amravati. The labourers had come to Pune a couple of days back in search of jobs, the police said. The truck driver, identified as Gajanan Totre (26), was arrested after the incident.

5 killed in Bihar road accident

Purnea (Bihar): Five people, including two children, died and eight others were injured after a speeding pick-up vehicle ran over them in Dhamdaha area of Purnea district, police said Monday. The accident took place around 8 pm Sunday in Dhokwa village. "The driver fled along with the vehicle... While two people died on the spot, around 11 injured were taken to the nearest government hospital. Three more succumbed to their injuries during treatment," SDPO (Dhamdaha) Sandeep Goldy told PTI.

4 ZPM members of CADC join BJP

Aizawl: Four Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) members of the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in South Mizoram's Lawngtlai district have joined the BJP, a senior saffron party leader said Monday. Mizoram BJP president Vanlalhuaka said three ZPM members joined the BJP Saturday and one Monday raising the party's tally in the 20-member CADC from 9 to 13. Eleven seats are required to form the board or an executive body in the CADC created under the sixth schedule of the country's constitution in 1972 for Chakmas in Mizoram.

Tiger found dead in Ranthambore reserve

Jaipur: A three-year-old male tiger was found dead at the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (RTR) in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur district, an official said Monday. The big cat may have died in a territorial fight, Anoop KR, Chief Conservator of Forests and RTR Field Director, said.

COURT CORNER

Cal HC upholds single-bench order allowing doctors' protest in Esplanade

Kolkata: A division bench of the Calcutta High Court Monday upheld a December 20 order that allowed an organisation of doctors to hold a demonstration here during the Christmas season to press their demand for speedy justice for RG Kar hospital medic who was allegedly raped and murdered in August. During the course of the hearing, the bench observed that the RG Kar incident was "unprecedented, unimaginable and horrible". The state had moved the division bench, challenging the order of the single bench of Justice Tirthankar Ghosh, which had permitted the Joint Forum of Doctors to hold the sit-in 50 feet away from Dorina Crossing at Esplanade in central Kolkata from December 20-26. Such demonstrations on Christmas days would cause traffic snarls in the busy area and inconvenience revellers in the festive season, the state's counsel argued. The division bench of Justice Harish Tandon and Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharyya allowed the forum to continue its agitation at the same spot after the defence counsel assured that the number of protesters would be within the specified limit of 100.

HC notice to TMC MP Saket Gokhale on Lakshmi Puri's contempt plea

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court Monday sought a response from TMC leader Saket Gokhale on a plea by former diplomat Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri, the wife of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, seeking contempt action against him for allegedly failing to comply with a court direction to apologise and pay Rs 50 lakh damages to her. A separate bench of the high court also asked Gokhale to file an affidavit disclosing all his assets within four weeks, while it was hearing a plea by Lakshmi seeking execution of the July 1 judgment on the defamation lawsuit. Justice Manoj Kumar Ohri allowed the probe agency's application to serve the petition copy to the accused as well as their counsel through electronic mode. The court said in case any accused will seek a physical or legible copy, the request will be considered.

Delhi Excise Policy case: HC allows ED to e-serve plea to accused to save public money

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court Monday allowed the Enforcement Directorate to serve electronically to 35 accused its plea against a trial court order in the alleged money laundering case related to the 2021-22 excise policy as it will save public money. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) submitted that approximately Rs 3 lakh will be spent in serving the 1,500-page appeal paperbook to all the accused. Justice Manoj Kumar Ohri allowed the probe agency's application to serve the petition copy to the accused as well as their counsel through electronic mode. The court said in case any accused will seek a physical or legible copy, the request will be considered.



Children pose holding balloons as they run through a mustard field, ahead of the festive season, in Nadia, Monday

B'desh owes Tripura ₹200 cr in unpaid electricity bills

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Agartala, Dec 23: Bangladesh owes Tripura Rs 200 crore in electricity dues but no decision has been taken on halting power supply to the neighbouring country yet, Chief Minister Manik Saha said Monday.

Tripura supplies 60-70 megawatts of power to the neighbouring country according to an agreement signed by the Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited through the NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited with the Bangladesh Power Development Board.

« Tripura supplies 60-70 megawatts of power to the neighbouring country according to an agreement signed by the Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited

"Bangladesh has not paid us about Rs 200 crore for supplying electricity. The outstanding (amount) is increasing every day. We hope that they will clear their dues so that the power supply is not disrupted," Saha told PTI here in an interview.

Asked whether the Tripura government would stop the

supply of electricity if Dhaka fails to pay the dues, the chief minister said no decision has been taken on it yet.

He said several pieces of machinery at the power generation plant in Tripura were brought through either Bangladeshi territory or Chittagong port. Therefore, out of gratitude, the Tripura government started supplying power to the country following a pact.

"But I don't know how long we will be able to continue the supply of electricity to Bangladesh if they don't clear the dues," he said.

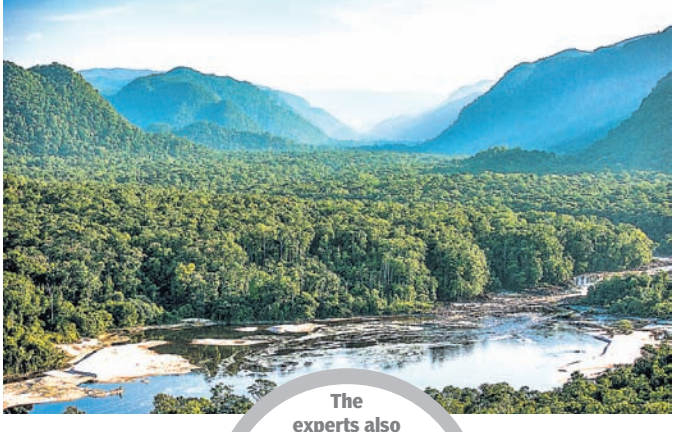
Experts claim latest govt data on India's forests 'inflated'

The 'India State of Forests Report 2023' released Saturday, after a delay of almost a year, said India's total forest and tree cover has increased by 1,445 sq km since 2021, reaching 25.17 per cent of the total geographical area in 2023

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 23: Several experts have claimed that the latest government data on India's forests is "inflated" as it includes bamboo plantations, coconut groves, and orchards among others as part of the forest cover. The 'India State of Forests Report 2023' released Saturday, after a delay of almost a year, said India's total forest and tree cover has increased by 1,445 sq km since 2021, reaching 25.17 per cent of the total geographical area in 2023. However, the forest cover

grew by just 156 sq km and most of the gain (149 sq km) occurred outside the Recorded Forest Area (RFA), which refers to areas designated as forests in government records. The overall results could have been stronger, especially since the government included bamboo and smaller trees (5-10 cm diameter at breast height) in the tree cover estimates for ISFR 2023. The assessment also expanded to 751 districts, up from 636 in 2021. Experts including Kerala's former principal chief conservator of forests Prakriti Srivastava, conservationist



researcher Krithika Sampath and former National Board for Wildlife member Prerna Singh Bindra claimed that the government counted bamboo plantations, coconut groves, and orchards among others as part of the for-

est cover and produced "another faulty report with inflated data". They argued that such areas do not offer any ecological value for biodiversity and wildlife conservation. The increase in tree cover

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

(1,289 sq km) is also mainly due to plantations of rubber, eucalyptus, acacia and mango, coconut, areca nut and shade trees in tea and coffee plantations. Forest cover refers to all land that has a tree canopy density of more than 10 per cent and spans over an area of one hectare or more, regardless of the type of ownership or legal status. It includes natural forests as well as man-made plantations, orchards and tree patches

in urban and rural areas that meet the size and canopy density criteria. Tree cover is defined as patches of trees and isolated trees outside RFA that are less than one hectare. "Mango contributes to 13.25 per cent of the tree cover," they pointed out. They said according to government data, 1,488 sq km of unclassified forests have been lost between 2021 and 2023 but "there is no explanation for it" in the ISFR 2023. "Unclassed forests" are non-notified forests under government ownership. The experts also said the report does not establish a correlation between forest area (areas designated as forests in government records) and forest cover. The report "clearly reflects that the data on both is not robust and therefore cannot be correlated", the experts said.



The BJP has repeatedly insulted the women of this country. BJP's very character is anti women, anti youth, anti farmer and anti dalit, tribes and backward classes. The way in which BJP leaders are using derogatory language against women leaders once again is deplorable

FIRST MEETING OF PARLIAMENTARY PANEL ON ONOE JANUARY 8

The first meeting of the 39-member parliamentary panel on 'one nation, one election' is set to be held January 8, setting the tone for nationwide deliberations on the key poll reform measure of the BJP-led NDA government



of the day uote

UP has become the number one in 'ease of doing crime'. Today's episode is Luc-know's Overseas Bank, where valuable things were stolen by breaking open the locker. Yesterday a bank was looted in Saharanpur

The recent events prove that neither the BJP nor the Congress is truly committed to protecting the interests of Ambedkar's followers. Their policies and principles lack sincerity

Authorities will face suspension if Nagpur airstrip recarpeting not completed in month

Record govt jobs provided in one and a half yrs: Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday said his government has provided nearly 10 lakh permanent government jobs to youths in the last one or one and a half years which, he asserted, is a record.



The young population is at the centre of his government's policies and programmes, he said, adding honesty and transparency have driven the recruitment process. The prime minister said 'Rozgar Melas' (recruitment drives) are empowering the youth

and unlocking their potential. "The youth of India today is full of new confidence, succeeding in every sector."

Noting that a large number of recruits are women, Modi said it is the endeavour of his government that they become self-dependent in every field.

The government's decision to grant 26-week maternity leave to women has helped them a lot in their careers, he said and underscored that women are the majority owners of the house con-

structed under the 'PM Awas Yojana'.

Women-led development is taking place in the country, he said.

Modi said making maximum use of the Indian youths' abilities and talent is a priority of his government, and that they are at the centre of a host of schemes, be it start-up India, digital India or reforms in space and defence sectors.

The National Education Policy has taken steps for the development of youngsters, he said, highlighting its empha-

sis on the use of mother tongues. His government has ensured that language is not a barrier by ensuring that youngsters can take recruitment exams in 13 Indian languages, he added.

Noting that former prime minister Charan Singh, whose birth anniversary is being observed Monday, stood for the development of rural India and for the country's progress, Modi said his government has followed this by creating job and self-employment opportunities in villages.

Attack on Allu Arjun's house: All 6 granted bail

Hyderabad: A Hyderabad court Monday granted bail to six people, who were arrested for allegedly vandalising the residence of Telugu actor Allu Arjun even as the police beefed up security at the actor's house here, a day after the incident. The incident also led to a fierce political slugfest with the BJP joining the BRS in attacking the Congress government, saying some of the attackers belonged to the Kodagallu Assembly constituency of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. Meanwhile, the top Telugu actor was issued notice to appear before police Tuesday as part of ongoing probe into the stampede during the screening of 'Pushpa-2' December 4, in which a woman was killed and her minor son injured, police sources said. The actor has been asked to appear at 11 AM December 24, they said.

PANCHAYAT SAMITI, SEMILIGUDA. MAIL ID:-ori-Semiliguda@nic.in; Phone No.-06853-225783. No. 5334/VII-47/2024. CORRIGENDUM. No. I-382:- In partial modification to this office Tender Call Notice No. 4985 dated:03.12.2024 published online at https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in and official website of Koraput https://koraput.odisha.gov.in that the last date of selling and submission of online tender is hereby reschedule to 31.12.2024 till 17:30 Hrs. Further, the opening of Online tender is rescheduled to 02.01.2025 at 11.30 Hrs. due to unavoidable circumstances in connection with this office Corrigendum No. 5292 date: 20.12.24. All other terms and condition in the tender call notice remain unaltered. OIPR-19056/11/0002/2425 Sd/- Block Development Officer, Semiliguda

GURDASPUR GRENADE ATTACK

3 Khalistan Zindabad Force members gunned down

The success comes after three blasts which took place in different districts of Punjab this month



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pilibhit/Chandigarh, Dec 23: Three suspected Khalistani terrorists allegedly involved in the grenade attack in Gurdaspur were killed in an encounter with police in Pilibhit early Monday, with Punjab's Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav terming it as a major breakthrough against a Pakistan-sponsored terror module.

The accused were identified as s Varinder Singh alias Ravi (23), Gurvinder Singh (25), and Jashanpreet Singh alias Partap Singh (18), all residents of Punjab's Gurdaspur

alias Partap Singh (18). They are residents of Kalanaur police station and are accused of hurling a hand grenade at the Bakshiwala police post in Kalanaur in Punjab's Gurdaspur district December 18, a Punjab police statement said Monday. No one was injured in the Bakshiwala incident.

Terrorist organisation KZF had later used social media platform to claim the responsibility for this act of terror.

Amitabh Yash, Additional Director General (Law and Order), Uttar Pradesh Police said the trio was involved in the grenade attack on a police checkpoint in Gurdaspur.

"The three sustained serious injuries in the encounter and were immediately rushed to CHC Puranpur for treatment," he said. The ADG told PTI that the three suspects later succumbed to their injuries.

Two AK-47 rifles, two Glock pistols and a huge cache of ammunition were seized from them, he said.

In a major breakthrough against Pakistan ISI-sponsored KZF terror module, a joint operation of Punjab Police and Uttar Pradesh Police led to an encounter with three module members involved in grenade attack at Police establishment in Gurdaspur, said DGP Yadav.

According to a Punjab police statement, the DGP said said preliminary investigation has revealed that this terror module is controlled by Pak-based Ranjeet Singh Nita, the chief of KZF, and operated by Greece-based Jaswinder Singh Mannu, a native of village Agwan village in Kalanaur.

Accused Varinder alias Ravi, who was leading the module, also belongs to Agwan village. He was being further controlled and masterminded by UK-based Jageet Singh and was using assumed identity of Fateh Singh Baghi to also claim the responsibility of the grenade attack, the DGP said, according to the statement.

CISF launches new transfer-posting policy



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 23: The CISF Monday said it has unveiled a new organisational transfer and posting policy in order to ensure a "better work-life balance" for its personnel who guard some of the most vital assets and infrastructure in the country.

The policy will "impact" over 98 per cent of the paramilitary force's about 1.70 lakh workforce with personnel to retire within two years being the first category to be given "choice or preference posting" followed by women staffers, working couples and the remaining falling in the fourth category.

The policy, to kick in from December 31, is meant for non-gazetted officials (NGOs) in the ranks from constable to inspector, as grievances related to this issue is "higher" in these ranks, officials said.

"The policy is aimed to satisfy the force members when it comes to their transfer and posting, and place of work... without compromising on the operational requirements of

the force," CISF Inspector General (Administration) K C Samantaray told reporters here.

The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has replaced the last such policy that was enacted in 2017.

"The policy has been made after conducting extensive consultations on the ground. We aim to make the CISF a future ready force to cope with emerging security challenges with training and building expertise in various security domains."

He said "more and more women" were joining the force and that "working couples" are increasing in the force and hence the policy is borne out after considering all such issues. The IG said special care will be taken to ensure that the education of the children of the force personnel does not suffer and transfer orders will be issued in such a time that the academic cycle of their wards does not get affected.

As per the CISF officials, personnel retiring within two years will be given the first preference while issuing posting orders followed by women personnel, then working couples and the rest will fall in the last category.

The IG said "domain experts and personnel who are highly talented" will also get preference in their choice posting due to their skills and demand nature of work.

CM ABDULLAH MEETS STUDENT DELEGATION

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Dec 23: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Monday assured a delegation of protesting students that the cabinet sub-committee formed to review the reservation policy in Jammu and Kashmir will submit its report within six months, according to student leaders.

The students are protesting against the reservation policy in Jammu and Kashmir implemented after the abrogation of Article 370.

National Conference leader and Lok Sabha member from Srinagar Aga Ruhullah Mehdi led a peaceful protest outside the residence of Abdullah to support the demand for "rationalization" of reservations in Jammu and Kashmir.

"We met the chief minister and held discussions on the reservation issue for about 30 minutes. The crux of the discussion was that the chief minister has asked for six months for the sub-committee to complete its work," one of the student leaders told reporters after meeting Abdullah at his residence.

Taking to social media, Abdullah said the channel of communication with the students will remain open without any intermediaries.

"Today I met the representatives of the Open Merit Students Association. The beauty of democracy is the right to be heard & dialogue in a spirit of mutual cooperation. I have made certain requests of them & given them a number of assurances. This channel of communication will remain open without any intermediaries or hangers-on," the chief minister posted on X.

Mehdi, a firebrand leader, had on Sunday announced that he would be joining the student protest.

POST OF THE DAY

In India, navigating daily life can feel like a gamble, you're really on your own out there. It's best not to voice too many inquiries, as it might get you into hot water, possibly even behind bars. But one thing is clear: you'll be paying taxes right up until your last day, GST on even shrouds.

@VijaySingh\_law

SHORT TAKES

Maot leader carrying ₹25L bounty held

Kanker: A senior Naxalite leader, carrying a reward of ₹25 lakh on his head, has been arrested by security forces in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district, a senior police official said Monday and termed it as a significant success in fight against Left-wing extremism. Prabhakar Rao alias Balmuri Narayan Rao, a Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee Member (DKSZCM) of the banned CPI (Maoist), was apprehended Sunday in the Antagarh police station area of the district, Bastar (Range) Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said.

Techie loses ₹11.8cr in 'digital arrest'

Bangalore: A 39-year-old software engineer became a victim to a "digital arrest" scam and lost ₹11.8 crore when fraudsters impersonating police officials claimed that his Aadhaar card was being misused to open bank accounts for money laundering, police said Monday. The fraud occurred between November 25 and December 12, they said. According to police, in his complaint, the victim alleged that November 11, he received a call from a person who claimed to be an officer of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). The alleged officer claimed that his SIM card, which was linked to the Aadhaar card, was used for illegal advertisements and harassment messages.

4 kids killed in brick kiln wall collapse

Hisar: Four children were killed when a wall of a brick kiln collapsed on them while they were asleep in Budana village of Haryana's Hisar district, police said Monday. A girl was critically injured in the incident that took place on Sunday night in the Narnaund police station area. According to sources, many families of labourers from Uttar Pradesh work at the kiln in Budana.

Union Bank of India GOLD AUCTION NOTICE. Regional Office : Sambalpur 1st Floor, Balaji Midtown, Budharaja, Sambalpur-768004, Dist.: Sambalpur, Odisha. This is to inform the public that in spite of repeated reminders the following gold loan borrowers have not repaid their loan. If they do not repay their outstanding debts before the auction, their gold ornaments we hold as collateral will be auctioned to the premises of our Concerned Branch on 31.12.2024 at 11.00 A.M. The Bank will not be liable for any inconvenience or loss to the borrowers and the Bank will take legal action against them if the Bank loses where necessary. Borrowers can take their Jewellery by repaying the outstanding debt before the auction take place.



# international



**We don't need a crystal ball to see that 21st Century challenges require problem-solving mechanisms that are more effective, networked and inclusive. We can't create a future fit for our grandchildren with systems built for our grandparents**  
ANTONIO GUTERRES | SECRETARY-GENERAL, UN

**DAY OF MOURNING FOR MAYOTTE**  
France is holding a national day of mourning for Mayotte, its Indian Ocean territory devastated by a deadly cyclone December 14, Monday. Cyclone Chido was the worst storm to hit the island in 90 years, and authorities have said that perhaps thousands of people may have been killed in its wake, though the government's death toll stands at 35



## of the day quote

**The deployment of the weapon by the Philippines would intensify geopolitical confrontation and an arms race. It is an extremely irresponsible choice for the history and people of itself and the whole of Southeast Asia, as well as for the security of the region**  
MAO NING | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA



**The ban on TikTok for one year in Albania is not a rushed reaction to a single incident, but a carefully considered decision made in consultation with parent communities in schools across the country**  
EDI RAMA | PM, ALBANIA



**We are aware that we are in the midst of a deep political crisis. It is also a crisis of trust, and this coalition aims to regain the trust of citizens, the trust of the people**  
MARCEL CIOACU | PM, ROMANIA



# Trump's Panama rhetoric draws flak

*The US President-elect is troubled over Beijing's growing influence right under US' tail - the Panama Canal - a bridge connecting the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean through strategically located Panama, the country which links North and South America*

REUTERS

**West Palm Beach, Dec 23:** President-elect Donald Trump threatened to reassert US control over the Panama Canal Sunday, accusing Panama of charging excessive rates to use the Central American passage and drawing a sharp rebuke from Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino.

Speaking to a crowd of supporters in Arizona, Trump also said he would not let the canal fall into the "wrong hands," warning of potential Chinese influence on the passage.

After the event, he posted an image on Truth Social of an American flag flying over a narrow body of water, with the comment: "Welcome to the United States Canal!"

"Has anyone ever heard of the Panama Canal?" Trump said at AmericaFest, an annual event organized by Turning Point, an allied conservative group. "Because we're being ripped off at the Panama Canal like we're being ripped off everywhere else."

Trump's comments were an exceedingly rare example of a US leader saying he could push a sovereign country to hand over territory. They also underlined an expected shift in US diplomacy under Trump, who has not historically shied away from threatening allies and using bellicose rhetoric when dealing with counterparts.

"It was given to Panama and the people of Panama, but it has provisions," Trump said of the canal, which was once owned by the United States but



Trump said he will not let the canal fall into the 'wrong hands' | TRUMP accused Panama of charging excessive fees to use the canal | Panama's President Mulino defends canal's independence and fees | US handed over control of the canal in 1999

was handed over to Panama decades ago.

"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, in full, quickly and without question."

In a recorded message released by Panama's President Mulino Sunday afternoon, the nation's leader said that Panama's independence was non-negotiable and that China had no influence on the canal's administration. He also defended the passage rates Panama charged, saying they were not set "on a whim".

China does not control or administer the canal, but a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison Holdings

has long managed two ports located on the canal's Caribbean and Pacific entrances.

The United States largely built the canal and administered territory surrounding the passage for decades. But the United States and Panama signed a pair of accords in 1977 that paved the way for the canal's return to full Panamanian control. The United States handed over control of the passage in 1999 after a period of joint administration.

"Every square meter of the Panama Canal and the surrounding area belongs to Panama and will continue belonging (to Panama)," Mulino said in his statement, which was released on X.

Trump then responded to Mulino: "We'll see about that!"

## Trump eyes Greenland, its leader says 'not for sale'

**Copenhagen:** Greenland is not for sale, its elected leader said Monday, responding to comments made by US President-elect Donald Trump regarding the "ownership and control" of the vast Arctic island that has been part of Denmark for over 600 years. "Greenland is ours. We are not for sale and will never be for sale. We must not lose our long struggle for freedom," the island's Prime Minister Mute Egede said in a written comment. Trump Sunday announced that he had picked Ken Howerly, a former envoy to Sweden, as his ambassador to Copenhagen, and commented on the status of Greenland, a semi-autonomous part of Denmark and host to a large US Air Force base. "For purposes of National Security and Freedom throughout the World, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity," Trump wrote on Truth Social. Trump, who takes office January 20, did not elaborate on the statement. During his previous term in office, Trump in 2019 expressed interest in buying Greenland, but the proposal was promptly rejected by Denmark as well as by the island's own authorities before any formal discussions could take place. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen at the time labelled Trump's offer as "absurd", leading him to term her dismissal of the idea as "nasty" and to subsequently cancel a visit to Copenhagen. Since 2009 Greenland has held the right to declare independence from Denmark. The island of some 56,000 inhabitants, which relies on significant budget transfers from Copenhagen each year, has so far refrained from doing so.



The waterway, which allows up to 14,000 ships to cross per year, accounts for 2.5% of global seaborne trade and is critical to US imports of autos and commercial goods by container ships from Asia, and for US exports of commodities, including liquefied natural gas.

It is not clear how Trump would seek to regain control

over the canal, and he would have no recourse under international law if he decided to make a play for the passage.

This is not the first time Trump has openly considered territorial expansion.

In recent weeks, he has repeatedly mused about turning Canada into a US state, though it is unclear how serious he is about the matter.

## Pak plans to acquire China's latest stealth fighter planes J-35

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Beijing, Dec 23:** Pakistan plans to procure 40 jets of advanced Chinese stealth fighter J-35, which, if materialised, will mark the first export of China's latest jet, according to a media report Monday.

The sale would mark Beijing's first export of fifth-generation jets to a foreign ally and is expected to recalibrate regional dynamics, particularly in relation to Pakistan's rival India, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

The Post quoted Pakistan media reports stating that the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) had approved the purchase of 40 aircraft, expected to be delivered within two years, to replace its ageing fleet of American F-16s and French Mirage fighters.

The acquisition of new aircraft was pursued despite the serious economic crisis faced by Pakistan.

There is no official confirmation in Beijing or mention of such a deal in the official media here, though speculation is rife since the J-35, primarily regarded as a jet fighter meant for Chinese aircraft carriers, was exhibited at the prestigious annual air show at Zhuhai city last month attended by top PAF officials.

The land-based version of J-35 was called J-31, according to previous reports. China is currently the only country in the region to have developed stealth aircraft.

PAF chief Air Marshal Zahoor Ahmed Baber Sidhu said in January that "the foundation for acquiring the J-31 stealth fighter aircraft has already been laid", according to the Post report.

## SHORT TAKES

### Terrorism charges against Luigi

**New York:** Luigi Mangione, the man suspected of fatally gunning down UnitedHealth Group chief executive Brian Thompson on a Manhattan street, is due to be arraigned Monday on state murder charges that charge him as a terrorist. At the hearing in New York state court in Manhattan, Mangione is expected to be asked to enter a plea to the 11-count indictment, which includes three murder charges, including murder as an act of terrorism. If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole. It will be the second court appearance in New York for Mangione, 26, since he was arrested at a fast food restaurant in Altoona, Pennsylvania, five days after the brazen, pre-dawn Dec. 4 killing of Thompson outside a hotel in midtown Manhattan where his company was gathering for an investor conference.

### Kremlin denies reports of Assad, wife divorce

**Moscow:** The Kremlin Monday rejected Turkish media reports which suggested that Asma al-Assad, the British-born wife of former Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, wanted a divorce and to leave Russia. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov also rejected Turkish media reports which suggested that Assad had been confined to Moscow and had his property assets frozen. Asked on a conference call if the reports corresponded to reality, Peskov said: "No they do not correspond to reality." Turkish and Arabic media reported Sunday that Asma al-Assad had filed for divorce in Russia, where the Assad family were granted asylum this month after rebels took control of Damascus following a lightning advance.

### Biden gives lifer to 37 death row inmates

**Washington:** President Joe Biden announced Monday that he is commuting the sentences of 37 of the 40 people on federal death row, converting their punishments to life imprisonment mere weeks before President-elect Donald Trump, an outspoken proponent of expanding capital punishment, takes office. The move spares the lives of people convicted in killings, including the slayings of police and military officers, people on federal land and those involved in deadly bank robberies or drug deals, as well as the killings of guards or prisoners in federal facilities.

## Trudeau faces more pressure to resign

REUTERS

**Ottawa, Dec 23:** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, whose party looks set to lose power early next year, is under increasing pressure from his own legislators to step down and let someone else take over.

The ruling Liberals face obliteration in the next election after more than nine years in office amid voter fatigue as well as anger over high prices and a housing crisis.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corp said more than 50 Liberal members of parliament from Ontario - the most populous of the 10 provinces and the party's main stronghold - held a call Saturday and agreed Trudeau had to step down.

"There is no alternative but to have the leadership change now," Liberal legislator Chandra Arya, traditionally a Trudeau loyalist, told the CBC



Sunday. As of last Friday, only 18 legislators had publicly demanded that Trudeau quit.

Last week, Trudeau suffered two major blows - then finance minister Chrystia Freeland quit amid a policy dispute over spending and all the opposition parties then said they would unite to bring down the minority Liberal government.

If he quit and the party had time to choose a new permanent leader, the contenders

Liberal MPs urge Trudeau to step down amid election fears

Trudeau faces internal pressure after Freeland's resignation

Opposition parties push for election amid US tariff threat

would potentially include Freeland, Foreign Minister Melanie Joly, Innovation Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne, and former central bank governor Mark Carney.

Trudeau though shows no intention of leaving soon. The Globe and Mail, citing a Liberal source, said he would spend Christmas with family before taking a skiing vacation in the Pacific province of British Columbia.

## CHRISTMAS APPROACHES

### Syria's Christians fearful of new Islamist leaders

REUTERS

**Damascus, Dec 23:** Syrian church leaders are advising Christians to scale back Christmas celebrations this year, despite assurances from the Islamists who have just taken power that they are free to practise their religion.

The self-imposed constraints highlight one of the main challenges for Syria's new Islamist rulers: establishing mutual trust among a myriad of minorities, all scarred by decades of brutal dictatorship and 13 years of pitiless civil war.

De facto ruler Ahmed al-Sharaa has told Christians and other groups that they will be safe in a Syria run by his Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a former al Qaeda affiliate.

Although himself a former leader of the Sunni Muslim Islamist group, which sees Christians as infidels, Sharaa has quickly shed his jihadist uniform for business suits.



And he has told the Western officials visiting him that HTS will neither seek revenge against the former regime of Bashar al-Assad, drawn mostly from the Alawite sect, nor repress any other religious minority.

But many Christians have yet to be convinced. On December 18, unidentified gunmen opened fire at a Greek Orthodox church in the city of

Hama, entering the compound and attempting to destroy a cross, and smashing headstones in a cemetery, the church said in a statement.

Reuters reporters saw several SUVs driving through Bab Touma, a predominantly Christian neighbourhood of Damascus, unnerving residents by pointedly blasting jihadist songs from their speakers.

And a photo has circulated



Tourists feed pigeons during heavy snowfall in downtown Sarajevo, Bosnia, Monday

## POLITICAL CRISES

### Pak govt, Khan's party hold maiden meet to resolve contentious issues

**Islamabad:** Pakistan government and the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party in their maiden meeting Monday agreed to continue talks to address contentious issues, including the release of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan. The long-anticipated talks between the committees representing the government and the PTI were chaired by the National Assembly (NA) Speaker Ayaz Sadiq, who had last week announced to facilitate the two sides in their effort to defuse the prevailing political tension. Those who attended from the government side include Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, PM's political aide Rana Sanaullah, Senator Irfan Siddiqui, former premier Raja Parvez Ashraf, former minister Naveed Qamar, lawmaker Farooq Sattar and Privatisation Minister Aleem Khan. PTI was represented by former speaker Asad Qaiser, Sahibzada Hamid Raza, and Senator Raja Nasir Abbas.



### After prez, SK Oppn threatens to impeach PM over martial law bid

**Seoul:** South Korea's main opposition party threatened Monday to impeach acting president Han Duck-soo if he failed to approve legislation to launch a special counsel investigation into President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed bid to impose martial law. Prime Minister Han has taken over from the suspended Yoon, who was impeached December 14 and faces a Constitutional Court review on whether to oust him. With a majority in parliament, the opposition Democratic Party (DP) passed a bill this month to appoint a special counsel to pursue charges of insurrection, among others, against the conservative Yoon and to investigate his wife over a luxury bag scandal and other allegations. The party, which has accused Han of aiding Yoon's martial law attempt and reported him to police, said it would "immediately initiate impeachment proceedings" against the acting president if the legislation was not promulgated by Tuesday.



# Business



While rural demand has been growing quarter on quarter, we expect a recovery in urban demand as the new year progresses

**MOHIT MALHOTRA** |  
DABUR INDIA CEO

## MARKETS ON BUDGET DAY

Stock markets will remain open for trading February 1, Saturday, when Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the Union Budget, bourses BSE and NSE said Monday. Stock markets are generally closed on Saturdays and Sundays, except for special circumstances.



### of the day quote

Innovation, affordability, and availability will be key drivers of growth going forward

**SAUGATA GUPTA** | MARICO MD & CEO

The upcoming budget should consider proactive measures aimed at stimulating consumption in the larger economy. A consumption boost will lead to a cycle of sustained economic growth in the long run

**AASIF MALBARI** |  
GODREJ CONSUMER PRODUCTS LTD CFO

With rural India witnessing a demand upturn, our well-connected traditional and modern retail ecosystem along with AI-powered tools like Coke Buddy are expanding accessibility and convenience

**SUNDEEP BAJORIA** | VP, INDIA, COCA-COLA

## Retail inflation for farm, rural workers eases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 23:** Retail inflation for farm workers and rural labourers dipped to 5.35 per cent and 5.47 per cent in November 2024, reaching levels of 1.320 and 1.331, respectively, a labour ministry statement said, in October this year.

The All-India Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labourers (CPI-AL) and Rural Labourers (CPI-RL) registered an increase of 5 points each in November 2024, reaching levels of 1,320 and 1,331, respectively, a labour ministry statement said.

The CPI-AL and CPI-RL were 1,315 points and 1,326 points, respectively, in October 2024. “The year-on-year inflation rates based on CPI-AL and CPI-RL for the month of November 2024 were recorded at 5.35 per cent and 5.47 per cent, respectively, compared to 7.37 per cent and 7.13 per cent in November 2023. The corresponding figures for October 2024 were 5.96 per cent for CPI-AL and 6.00 per cent for CPI-RL,” it stated.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.02 and touched the lowest level of 85.13 and settled for the day at 85.11 against the greenback, registering a loss of 7 paise over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee saw some recovery from its all-time low level and settled 9 paise higher at 85.04 against the US dollar.

Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said the rupee traded weak amid contin-

## How to tax popcorn? India’s formula sparks outrage

REUTERS

**New Delhi, Dec 23:** India’s move to tax popcorn differently based on its sugar or spice content has drawn criticism from the opposition and sparked social media outrage, with two former government economic advisers questioning the tax system introduced in 2017.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, chaired by the finance minister and including state representatives, announced Saturday that non-branded popcorn mixed with salt and spices would attract a 5% GST, pre-packaged and branded popcorn 12%, and caramel popcorn, categorised as a sugar confectionery, 18%.

The differential rates come into effect immediately, end-

# Honda, Nissan aim to merge

Deal would create No. 3 global auto group after Toyota, Volkswagen

REUTERS

**Tokyo, Dec 23:** Honda and Nissan are in talks to merge by 2026, they said Monday, a historic pivot for Japan’s auto industry that underlines the threat Chinese EV makers now pose to the world’s long-dominant legacy car makers.

The tie-up would create the world’s third-largest auto group by vehicle sales after Toyota and Volkswagen.

It would also give the two companies scale and a chance to share resources in the face of intense competition from Tesla and more nimble Chinese rivals, such as BYD.

The merger of Honda, Japan’s second-largest automaker, with Nissan, its No. 3, would be the biggest reshaping in the global auto industry since Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and PSA merged in 2021 to create Stellantis in a \$52-billion deal.

Smaller Mitsubishi Motors, in which Nissan is top shareholder, was also considering joining and would make a decision by the end of January, the companies said.

The chief executives of all three held a joint press conference in Tokyo.

“The rise of Chinese automakers and new players has changed the car industry quite a lot,” said Honda CEO Toshi-



hiro Mibe, citing technological trends of electrification and autonomous driving.

“We have to build up capabilities to fight with them by 2030, otherwise we’ll be beaten.”

The two companies would aim for combined sales of 30 trillion yen (\$191 billion) and operating profit of more than 3 trillion yen through the potential merger, they said.

They aimed to wrap up talks around June 2025 before setting up a holding company by August 2026, when shares of both companies would be delisted.

Honda, which has a market capitalisation of more than \$40 billion, roughly four times that of Nissan, will appoint the majority of the company’s board, they said.

Combining with Mitsubishi Motors would take the Japanese group’s global sales to more than 8 million cars. The current No. 3 is South Korea’s Hyundai and Kia.

Honda and Nissan have been exploring ways to bolster their

partnership, including a merger, Reuters reported last week.

In March, both said they were considering co-operation on electrification and software development. They widened the collaboration to Mitsubishi Motors in August.

Last month, Nissan announced a plan to cut 9,000 jobs and 20% of its global production capacity after sales plunged in the key China and U.S. markets.

Honda also reported worse-than-expected earnings due to a China sales slump, although solid motorcycle and hybrid car businesses helped it secure a relatively stable financial base.

“This is not a rescue of Nissan,” however, Honda’s Mibe said, adding that Nissan’s business turnaround was a “prerequisite” for the merger.

Like other foreign carmakers, Honda and Nissan have lost ground in the world’s biggest market China to BYD and other domestic makers of electric

## NTPC to set up green hydrogen infra in state

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 23:** State-run power giant NTPC Monday said it has signed an initial pact with GRIDCO and CRUT to set up green hydrogen infrastructure in Odisha.

NTPC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with GRIDCO, a Government of Odisha undertaking for Energy and Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT), the public transit agency of the state government, Monday, as per a statement.

The tripartite MoU intends to further green energy technologies in Odisha, especially green hydrogen mobility scheme.

As per the MoU, NTPC will set up a green hydrogen fuelling station in Bhubaneswar, along with hydrogen buses for short-haul and long-haul operations.

This will open an option of phasing out fossil fuel buses in favour clean and green fuels, bringing decarbonisation and energy security.

The Ministry of New & Renewable Energy has contributed partially for setting up of the project in Bhubaneswar.

The NTPC is operating the green hydrogen blending project in Surat for the last two years and has taken similar mobility initiatives in Leh, Greater Noida, and Gujarat’s Kandla.



**FESTIVE CHEER:** Nexus Esplanade Bhubaneswar is all set to present a perfect Christmas setup with captivating musical nights, shopping rewards, and a lot more starting December 25.

## Central Bank of India celebrates 114th Foundation Day

**Bhubaneswar:** Central Bank of India, Bhubaneswar Regional Office, celebrated the Bank’s 114th Foundation Day December 21 in presence of Pankaj Kumar, Regional Head, B K Swain, Chief Manager & M K Karn, Chief Manager & other senior Bank officials. Floral tributes were paid to the visionary founder, Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala, in remembrance of his extraordinary contributions in establishing the Bank. The 114th foundation day of the Bank serves as a reminder of the institution’s rich heritage, its ongoing transformation, and its commitment to serving the nation with excellence in banking.

taxed was in reply to a specific query on the issue. “It is normal when basic ingredients are same but finished products attract different GST rates,” he said, adding that GST has become a very efficient and effective ecosystem for enhanced and transparent tax compliance through a corruption-free and smooth process.

The GST system has run into similar controversies for its tax classifications in the past and faced questions although not on this scale.

Previous controversies have involved taxing chapatis or unleavened Indian flatbread differently from layered flatbreads, different rates for curd and yogurt, and cream bun versus bun and cream served separately.



minimally to tax revenues, but inconvenience citizens.

His predecessor, Arvind Subramanian, said “the folly is compounded because instead of at least moving in the direction

of simplicity we are veering to greater complexity, difficulty of enforcement and just irrationality.”

One widely circulated post on X showed an image of a branded

# Markets rebound after 5 days of fall

**BSE SENSEX** DECEMBER 23, 2024



TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
ITC	+2.07%	ZOMATO	-2.92%
TECH MAHINDRA	+1.68%	MARUTI	-0.89%
HDFC BANK	+1.63%	NESTLE INDIA	-0.55%
INDUSIND BANK	+1.58%	HCL TECH	-0.52%
RELIANCE	+1.33%	BAJAJ FINSERV	-0.32%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 23:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply Monday after five days of steep decline amid value buying at lower levels and a supportive trend in global markets.

Besides, bargain hunting in blue chip stocks like ITC, HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries added to the optimism in the equity market, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 498.58 points or 0.64 per cent to settle at 78,540.17. During the day, it soared 876.53 points or 1.12 per cent to 78,918.12.

The NSE Nifty surged 165.95 points or 0.70 per cent to 23,753.45.

“The Indian market demonstrated optimism following the recent sell-off. The lower-than-expected US PCE print bolstered investor sentiment

in interest rate-sensitive sectors. Broad-based buying was observed, with the metals sector notably benefiting from the anticipated increase in steel import taxes. Despite the positive market sentiment, the short-term outlook is expected to remain sideways due to a lack of new catalysts and the impact of the festive season and holidays,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30 blue-chip stocks, ITC, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, IndusInd Bank, Titan, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank were the biggest gainers.

New entrant Zomato, Maruti, Nestle, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finserv and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.10 per cent, while smallcap index declined 0.60 per cent.

## TRAI MANDATES TELCOS

# RECHARGE VOUCHER FOR ONLY VOICE, SMS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 23:** Telecom regulator Trai Monday amended tariff rules to mandate mobile service providers to issue a separate plan for voice calls and SMS for customers not using data.

The regulator removed the cap of 90 days on special recharge coupons and extended it to up to 365 days.

“...the service provider shall offer at least one Special Tariff Voucher exclusively for Voice and SMS with validity period not exceeding three hundred and sixty-five days,” the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) said in the Telecom Consumers Protection (Twelfth Amendment) Regulations, 2024.

The move will help consumers to pay for services which they generally use.

During the consultation process, Trai came across various views, including several senior citizens, families having broadband at homes etc may not need recharge plans bundled with data for their mobile phones.

In an explanatory note, Trai said that it is of the view that a separate STV for voice and SMS, in addition to existing data-only STV and bundled offers, shall be mandated.

“It is also observed that mandating Voice and SMS only STV will provide an option to subscribers who do not require data, and this in any way will not reverse the government initiative of data inclusion as service providers are at liberty to offer bundled offers and data only vouchers,” the note said.

The regulator has also allowed telecom operators to issue recharge vouchers of any value, but they should also issue a recharge coupon of at least ₹10. Earlier, the rule allowed telecom operators to issue top-up vouchers in denomination of ₹10 and multiples of 10.

“The Authority is of the view that reserving of denomination of 210 and multiple thereof only for top-up voucher be done away with and TSPs may be allowed to offer all the vouchers in any denomination of their choice while retaining mandate of at least one Top up voucher of denomination of ₹10,” the note said.

SENIOR WOMEN'S NATIONAL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

# Odisha miss crown again

Odisha once more had to stay content with the runners-up trophy as it was their sixth defeat in seven finals, all against the ultimate champions Manipur

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Narainpur, Dec 23: Manipur's near-monotonous monopoly over the Senior Women's National Football Championship remained uninterrupted after they defeated Odisha 1-0 in the final of the Rajmata Jijabai Trophy at the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama Ground Monday.

After a barren first half, defending champions Manipur made sure of taking home the trophy for the 23rd time out of the 29 editions played so far when striker Asem Roja Devi booted in the winner through a jungle of legs off a corner kick



in the 55th minute.

Odisha once more had to stay content with the runners-up trophy as it was their sixth defeat in seven finals, all against the ultimate champions Manipur.

Odisha could take pride in restricting the victory margin of the mighty Manipur side to

the bare minimum, but some amount of luck too played a role in the scoreline that projected a seesaw battle.

While there is no denying the fact the Odisha defence put up a gallant fight against the rampaging Manipur attack, Odisha were distinctly lucky not to concede at least two more goals. Manipur, who camped themselves in the Odisha half right from the kickoff, missed the opportunity to take the lead in the fifth minute when they wasted a spot kick.

A handball by Odisha defender Shibani Munda prompted the referee Ruva Devi G to call for a penalty award. Seasoned Ratanbala Devi displayed enough confidence in taking the kick, but it hit the post before coming back to play.

With the Manipur midfielders and forwards swarming all over the Odisha goal area like a unit of trained commandos, the supremacy of the north-eastern state was never in question. Odisha were reduced to playing

second fiddle from the beginning, and except for occasional forays, they had not much to say in the Manipur area.

Odisha skipper and livewire of attacks, Pyari Xaxa, was kept under constant check by the alert Manipur defenders thus ending any chance of Odisha even making a serious dent in the rival arena.

But, despite all their overwhelming presence, Manipur were left frustrated by an Odisha defence that firmly believed in promptly clearing the ball whenever faced with the slightest danger. And when they could not, Manipur themselves faltered and fumbled, like one missed by experienced Dangmei Grace from close range.

Finally, the goal came in the 55th minute, it was more of a result of a scramble in the goalmouth than a concrete move. That Roja Devi could put it right through the narrow gap made all the difference in the final.

# MANU MISSING FROM KHEL RATNA NOMINEES

In August, Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 23: Amid reports that double Olympic-medallist Manu Bhaker has been shockingly ignored for this year's Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award, a top sports ministry source has asserted that the names are yet to be finalised and she is likely to be there when the list is unveiled in a week's time.

In August, Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events. Reports of her omission from the national honours evoked shock with her family insisting that application was duly submitted.

"There is no final list of nominees at this point. Sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya will decide on the recommendations in a day or two and her name, in all likelihood, will be there in the final list," a ministry source said.

The award selection committee is a 12-member panel headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice V Ramasubramam. It includes former athletes like

women's hockey captain Rani Rampal among others.

The ministry norms allow athletes to self-nominate instead of relying on federations and other institutions for it. The selection committee is, however, allowed to consider names which may not be among the applicants.

While the ministry claimed that Bhaker did not apply for the award, her father Ram Kishan Bhaker, a chief engineer in Merchant Navy, said the youngster had followed the due process.

"There is no worth of playing Olympic sports in India because despite winning two medals in an Olympics, Manu has been ignored for the Khel Ratna award. There is no point in playing and winning rewards for your country and in turn beg for recognition," Ram Kishan told PTI.

"She had been applying for all awards, say Khel Ratna, Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan for the last 2-3 years continuously and I have proof of that. This time too, I am confident she would have applied but I can't show anything as I am at sea right now. But even if she hasn't, the committee should consider her looking at her achievements," he asserted. He blamed

bureaucracy for the mess-up. "We form a committee but it is the bureaucrats who call the shots. This is not how sports function," he said. It is learnt that the committee has recommended India hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh, who led the country to a second consecutive Olympic bronze medal, for the Khel Ratna.

Also nominated for the honour is para athlete Preveen Kumar, who won a gold in the men's high jump T64 class with an Asian record at Paris Paralympics.

The awards committee has recommended 30 athletes for Arjuna awards, including 17 from para disciplines.

Wrestler Aman Sehrawat, who won a bronze in the men's 57kg freestyle category, and shooter Swapnil Kusale, bronze medal-winner in the men's 50m rifle three position event, along with Bhaker's mixed team partner Sarabjot Singh have been recommended for the Arjuna award.

Members of the bronze medal-winning Indian hockey team, Jarnanpreet Singh, Sanjay, Rajkumar Pal, Abhishek and one more player have been also recommended for the Arjuna award.

SHORT TAKES

Kambli hospitalised

Mumbai: Former India cricketer Vinod Kambli has been admitted to a hospital here due to deterioration in his health. The 52-year-old was brought to the hospital by one of his fans who also owns the hospital in Bhiwandi's Kalher area in Thane district and his condition is said to be stable, even though the exact reasons for his hospitalisation could not be ascertained. Kambli was admitted to the hospital Saturday. Kambli, who played 17 Tests and 104 ODIs for India between 1993-2000, had recently attended the inauguration of legendary coach Ramakant Achrekar's memorial at the Shivaji Park here. The former India cricketer, who has been struggling with health-related issues for quite some time, appeared frail in the function which was also attended by his long-time friend Sachin Tendulkar.

Pak dominate Proteas

Johannesburg: Pakistan completed a 3-0 sweep of its ODI series against South Africa, winning the third match by 36 runs under the DLS method. Opener Saim Ayub hit 101 runs in 94 balls as Pakistan scored 308-9 at the Wanderers in a game reduced to 47 overs by rain. South Africa was all out for 271 in 42 overs in pursuit of a winning target of 308. Pakistan batted first after losing the toss and was 1-1 when it lost Abdullah Shafique in the first over. The innings took off with Ayub involved in two key stands — 114 runs for the second wicket with Babar Azam (52 in 71), and 93 runs for the third with captain Mohammad Rizwan (53 in 52). The 22-year-old Ayub, who scored 109 in the first ODI, was caught behind against debutant Corbin Bosch.

Purcell suspended

Melbourne: Two-time Grand Slam winning doubles player Max Purcell has entered a voluntary provisional suspension under tennis' anti-doping rules. The International Tennis Integrity Agency announced the sanction in a statement on Monday after the 26-year-old Australian admitted to violating Article 2.2 of the Tennis Anti-Doping Program "relating to the use of a Prohibited Method". The ITIA said the suspension came into effect 12 December, and time served under provisional suspension will be credited against any future sanction. The length of time of the voluntary suspension was not specified by the ITIA.

Rugby Premier League set to start next year

New Delhi: Rugby India, the sport's national governing body, is all set to launch the Rugby Premier League (RPL) next year. The tournament, the world's first franchise-based rugby league, featuring six city-based teams, will be a part of a 10-year strategic partnership between Rugby India and GMR Sports. The RPL will be a platform for top players from elite rugby nations around the world to showcase their talent and skills. "The Rugby Premier League is a game-changer for rugby in India. With World Rugby's support and GMR Sports' expertise, we are set to deliver a league that showcases the finest talent and professionalism," Rahul Bose, president of Rugby India, said in a release. "Fans can expect nothing less than world-class rugby action that will inspire the next generation of athletes in our country." "The Rugby Premier League is not just a league — it is a movement to bring world-class rugby to India while fostering grassroots development," Kiran Kumar Grandhi, chairman of GMR Sports, said.



Participation for Kho Kho World Cup rises



New Delhi: A total of 21 men's teams and 20 women outfits will compete in next month's Kho Kho World Cup with the sport's governing body increasing the number of participating teams due to an

overwhelming interest. India will host the inaugural edition of the event at the IGI Stadium from January 13 to 19. Initially, 16 men's and 16 women's teams were scheduled to participate. Teams from six continents -- Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Oceania -- will feature in the much-anticipated tournament. "We are keeping the facilities with the foreign delegates in mind. We have devised meals and diet plan for our guests as per their dietary requirements and we are also providing entire logistics, stay, and transport facilities for them, so that they do not face any issues during their stay here," KKF President Sudhanshu Mittal said in a release. "We have also made provisions for all countries to stay till the end of the tournament, irrespective of the results."

# Kotian replaces Ashwin in India's squad

It is understood that the 26 year old Kotian, who was part of India A's tour of Australia, has also been added as a cover for Washington Sundar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

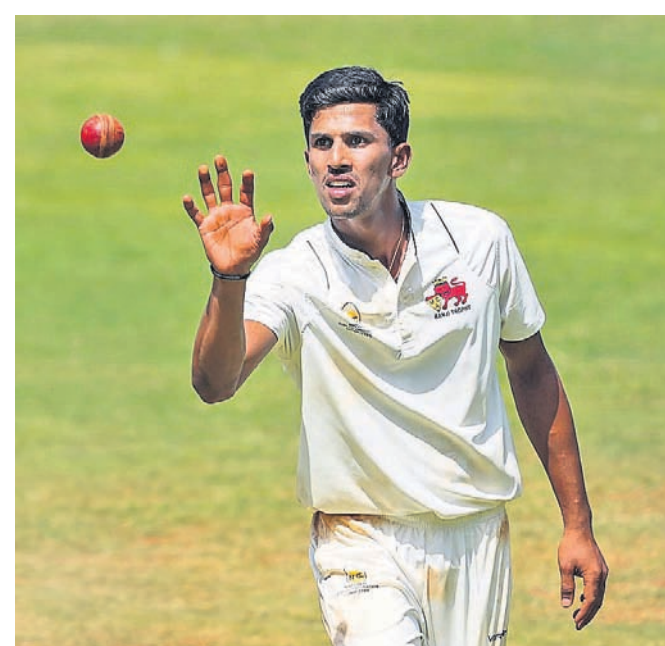
Melbourne, Dec 23: Mumbai off-spinner Tanush Kotian is set to join the India squad in Australia as a replacement for the recently retired Ravichandran Ashwin.

"Kotian has been added as a safety net and also to keep the squad number intact for the last two games. He only comes into the picture if either among Washy or Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja) gets injured," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Kotian, who is currently in Ahmedabad for Vijay Hazare Trophy, is expected to leave Mumbai Tuesday and will reach Melbourne before the start of Boxing Day Test.

The bowling all-rounder picked two wickets and scored an unbeaten 39 for Mumbai in their Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Hyderabad Monday.

Kotian has fond memories of the Melbourne Cricket Ground where he scored 44 batting at No 8 for India A and looked the part. He already has 101 wickets to his name and 1525 runs



with two centuries in 33 first-class games.

Originally, Axar Patel was supposed to be summoned to Australia but as per sources, the left arm spinner had sought a break after first two matches of Vijay Hazare Trophy due to a family commitment.

Kotian has been added to the squad following Ashwin's surprise retirement from international cricket following the draw Test in Brisbane. The 38-year-old ended his glorious career as the second highest wicket taker for India behind Anil Kumble.

Shami not fully fit yet

India pacer Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of the last two Tests against Australia as he is yet to regain full fitness, the BCCI said Monday. Shami, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final in November, 2023, made a comeback from his right heel surgery during Bengal's Ranji Trophy match against Madhya Pradesh last month. His fitness has been a subject of intense debate and speculation, so much so that India skipper Rohit Sharma had asked the physios at the National Cricket Academy to provide clarity on the matter following the Brisbane Test. Shami had developed swelling in his knees while playing the SMAT, and the clarification in that regard finally came Monday. "Based on the current medical assessment, the BCCI Medical Team has determined that his knee requires more time for controlled exposure to bowling loads. Consequently, he has not been deemed fit for consideration for the remaining two Tests of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy," said the BCCI in a release.



# Shuttler Sindhu gets hitched

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Udaipur, Dec 23: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu embarked on a new journey in life as she tied the knot with entrepreneur Venkata Datta Sai in a private ceremony here.

The 29-year-old shuttler from Hyderabad, who won a bronze at the 2016 Rio Olympics and a silver at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago, married Datta, an executive director at Posidex Technologies, Sunday in a traditional ceremony attended by close family and friends.

Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, shared the first photograph of the wedding on 'X' Monday.

"Pleased to have attended the wedding ceremony of our Badminton Champion Olympian PV Sindhu with Venkata Datta Sai in Udaipur last evening and conveyed my wishes & blessings to the couple for their new life



ahead," Shekhawat tweeted.

The celebrations commenced with a lively Sangeet ceremony December 20, featuring music and dance as the two families came together. This was followed by traditional rituals such as Haldi, Pellikuthuru, Mehendi, and other customs December 21.

Sindhu's wedding news came close on the heels of her victory at the Syed Modi International in Lucknow earlier this month,

ending a long title drought. With five medals, including a gold, at the BWF World Championships, and two Olympic medals, Sindhu is widely regarded as one of India's greatest athletes.

The couple has invited some of the top celebrities of the country for the wedding reception, including the likes of Sachin Tendulkar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Ulhas KS becomes first Indian to play in Serbian National Basketball League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 23: Talented hoopster Ulhas KS has become the first Indian to compete in the Serbian National Basketball League Division 1, Kosarkaska Liga Srbije (KLS).

Playing for Novi Pazar, the 26-year-old Ulhas debuted in a match against BKK Radnicki Sunday night, marking a significant milestone in his career. "It is an incredible honour to represent India in the Serbian National Basketball League," Ulhas said.



Odisha IDC Under-19 team felicitated



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 23: The Odisha team emerged victorious in the IDCA Under-19 National Cricket Tournament for the hearing impaired, showcasing exceptional sporting skills and resilience despite numerous challenges last month.

Niyati Pattnaik, Director of the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, extended her heartfelt congratulations to the team and felicitated the players for their remarkable success Monday.

The team's achievement brought immense pride to the state, as they secured the championship trophy with outstanding performances.

Adding to the state's pride, two players — Sagar Kant Senapati, serving as the team manager, and Santosh Kumar Mahapatra, an all-rounder — represented the international team. Santosh delivered an extraordinary performance, amassing 325 runs across five matches against Sri Lanka and earning the title of best batsman of the series.