

5 jawans dead in J&K road mishap



AGENCIES

Mendhar/Jammu, Dec 24: Five soldiers were killed and as many others injured when an Army vehicle skidded off the road and rolled down a 300-foot deep gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district Tuesday evening, officials said, while ruling out any terror angle.

A Defence spokesperson said the cause of the accident is being ascertained but possibly the driver lost control at the turn of the road. The accident occurred in the Gharoa area when a convoy of six vehicles was on its way to Banoi in the district.

The officials quoted above said rescue teams have recovered five bodies from the gorge. The injured soldiers have been shifted to the field hospital in Poonch, he said, adding one of them is in critical condition. "One 2.5 Ton vehicle, part of a convoy of six vehicles, while moving on the operational track near Poonch, went off the road into a nallah. Operational track is on the home side of the LoC fence," the Defence spokesperson said.

He said five soldiers died in the incident and as many are injured. The Army, meanwhile, ruled out terrorism angle to the incident. "A terrorist initiated incident positively ruled out after confirming from ground sources. Own post approximately 130m from the incident site and back-up vehicle was barely 40 metres away," he said.

IOCL's ₹61K crore naphtha cracker project in Paradip

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: State-owned Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL) will invest ₹61,000 crore to set up a naphtha cracker project at Paradip in Odisha, a statement said Tuesday.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for this will be signed between the Odisha government and the IOCL in January during the 'Utkarsh Odisha - Make in Odisha 2025' summit, it said. The foundation stone of the IOC's upcoming ₹4,352 crore yarn project at Bhadrak will also be laid at that time, it added. The decisions were taken at a meeting between Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and IOCL Chairman AS Sahney here.

"The Naphtha Project in Paradeep has received in principle approval and IOCL will invest over ₹61,000 crore for the project. It is likely to be one of the largest projects in the sector in the country. The State Government is an equity holder of this project, and will earn dividends in addition to taxes," said the statement issued by the CMO. "It was also decided that, the foundation for the upcoming Yarn project of IOCL at Bhadrak will also be laid in January. ₹4,352 crore will be



invested for this project. It was informed that once the project is completed, various large scale garments manufacturing units will come up in the area. Both the projects will create huge employment opportunities for the youth (sic)," it added.

Meanwhile, the ongoing Px-PTA (Para-xylene Purified Terephthalic Acid) project will be commissioned by June, it was informed in the meeting.

The CM also discussed with the IOCL's top brass the proposed floating solar project and ethanol project in the state.

Industries Minister Sampad Chandra Swain, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja, Additional Chief Secretary Nikunja Bihari Dhal and Industries Principal Secretary Hemant Sharma were present at the meeting.

Champions Trophy: India-Pak clash Feb 23

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, Dec 24: India will play all their matches of the Champions Trophy in Dubai with the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan scheduled February 23, the ICC said Tuesday.

As has been the case with ICC events, India and Pakistan have been clubbed in the same group which also has New Zealand and Bangladesh. Group B comprises South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan and England.

The tournament opener will be played in Karachi February 19 when hosts Pakistan face New Zealand and the final is scheduled for March 9. The premier 50-over event, last played in 2017, will have 15 matches with at least 10 games scheduled in Pakistan.

"Lahore will also host the final March 9, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and the final will have reserve days," the ICC said.

BACK PAGE



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Global hunger crisis deepens

REUTERS

United Nations, Dec 24: It's a simple but brutal equation: The number of people going hungry or otherwise struggling around the world is rising, while the amount of money the world's wealthiest nations are contributing toward helping them is dropping.

The result: The United Nations says that, at best, it will be able to raise enough money to help about 60% of the 307 million people it predicts will need humanitarian aid next year. That means at least 117 million people won't get food or other assistance in 2025.

The UN also will end 2024 having raised about 46% of the \$49.6 billion it sought for humanitarian aid across the globe, its own data shows. It's the second year in a row the world body has raised less than half of what it sought. The shortfall has forced humanitarian agencies to make agonizing decisions, such as slashing rations for the hungry and cutting the number of people eligible for aid.

The consequences are being felt in places like Syria, where the World Food Program (WFP), the UN's main food distributor, used to feed 6 million people. Eyeing its projections for aid donations earlier this year, the WFP cut the number it hoped to help there to about 1 million people, said Rania Dagash-Kamara, the organization's assistant executive director for partnerships and resource mobilization.

UN officials see few reasons for optimism at a time of widespread conflict, political unrest and extreme weather, all factors that stoke famine.

The country's cabinet has recommended another \$1 billion reduction in humanitarian aid for



■ Global hunger is rising, but total humanitarian aid from wealthy nations to UN is shrinking

■ UN projects at least 117 million will go without aid in 2025

■ Germany, a top UN humanitarian donor, is reducing aid funding

■ Relief agencies fear possible cuts from top donor US after Trump takes office

■ China and India, among the world's top five economies, contribute less than 1% of UN humanitarian aid

2025. A new parliament will decide next year's spending plan after the federal election in February. Humanitarian organizations also are watching to see what US President-elect Donald Trump proposes after he begins his second term in January.

Trump advisers have not said how he will approach humanitarian aid, but he sought to slash US funding in his first term. And he has hired advisers who say there is room for cuts in foreign aid.

The US plays the leading role in preventing and combating starva-

tion across the world. It provided \$64.5 billion in humanitarian aid over the last five years. That was at least 38% of the total such contributions recorded by the UN

SHARING THE WEALTH

The majority of humanitarian funding comes from just three wealthy donors: the US, Germany and the European Commission. They provided 58% of the \$170 billion recorded by the UN in response to crises from 2020 to 2024.

Three other powers – China, Russia and India – collectively contributed less than 1% of UN-tracked humanitarian funding over the same period, according to a Reuters review of UN contributions data.

The inability to close the funding gap is one of the major reasons the global system for tackling hunger and preventing famine is under enormous strain. The lack of adequate funding – coupled with the logistical hurdles of assessing need and delivering food aid in conflict zones, where many of the worst hunger crises exist – is taxing efforts to get enough aid to the starving. Almost 282 million people in 59 countries and territories were facing high levels of acute food insecurity in 2023.

NUCLEAR POWER PLANT CASE

B'desh launches \$5 billion graft probe against Hasina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 24: An anti-graft panel in Bangladesh has launched an investigation against former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her family in connection with the allegations of embezzling \$5 billion in the Rooppur nuclear power plant, according to a media report.

Indian companies are participating in constructing the Rooppur nuclear power plant which is being built by Rosatom, Russia's state-run corporation, in Bangladesh.

The first Bangladeshi nuclear power plant, the Russian-designed Rooppur, is being built 160 km west of the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka. Rosatom has refuted the "provocative statements" in the media about the Rooppur NPP project.

Along with Hasina, her son, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, and Tulip Siddiq, her niece and the UK's Treasury minister, were also questioned, BDNews reported Sunday.

There are accusations of embezzling \$5 billion in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project, the report added.

The development came two days after the High Court issued a rule asking why the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) inaction over an alleged transfer of \$5 billion



Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime

from the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project to a Malaysian bank by Hasina, Joy, and Tulip should not be declared illegal, the report added.

According to ACC documents, the allegations of corruption in the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project were brought to light by Bobby Hajjaj, chairman of the National Democratic Movement (NDM).

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime. Her sister Rehana accompanied her.

Court jails Russia-born US citizen for 'espionage'

Moscow: A Russian-born US citizen already imprisoned in Russia on a bribery conviction has been handed a second 15-year jail term for espionage, Russian news agencies reported Tuesday. A Moscow court brought espionage charges against Gene Spector in August 2023, although details surrounding the case were not made public. Spector, formerly an executive at a medical equipment company in Russia, was previously sentenced to 3.5 years in prison in September 2022 for enabling bribes to an aide of former Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich.

Biden signs defence Bill despite objections

Washington: President Joe Biden Monday signed into law a defence bill that authorises significant pay raises for junior enlisted service members, aims to counter China's growing power and boosts overall military spending to \$895 billion despite his objections to language stripping coverage of transgender medical treatments for children in military families.



A Russian cargo ship called Ursa Major sank in the Mediterranean Sea overnight after an explosion ripped through its engine room and two of its crew are still missing, the Russian Foreign Ministry said Tuesday

'Famine spreading in war-torn Sudan'

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cairo, Dec 24: Famine is spreading in Sudan due to a war between the military and a notorious paramilitary group that has devastated the country and created the world's largest displacement crisis, a global hunger-monitoring group said Tuesday.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, said it detected famine in five areas, including in Sudan's largest displacement camp, Zamzam, in North Darfur province, where famine was found for the first time in August.

It added that in areas of high conflict, hostilities can severely disrupt farming activities, resulting in farmers abandoning their crops, looting, and stock destruction.

As well as in the Zamzam camp, which hosts more than 400,000 people, famine was also detected in two other camps for displaced people,



Abu Shouk and al-Salam in North Darfur, and the Western Nuba Mountains, IPC's report said.

Five other areas in North Darfur are projected "with reasonable evidence" to experience famine in the next six months, including el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur, it said. Seventeen areas in the Nuba Mountains and the northern and southern areas of Darfur are at risk of famine, it added.

The report said some areas in

Khartoum and the east-central province of Gezira "may be experiencing" famine-like conditions. It said experts were unable to confirm whether famine threshold has been surpassed due to lack of data. Ahead of the IPC's report, Sudan's government said it had suspended its participation in the global system, according to a senior United Nations official with knowledge of the move. In a letter dated December 23, Agriculture Minister Abu Baker al-Beshri accused the IPC of "issuing unreliable reports that undermine Sudan's sovereignty and dignity," said the UN official, who spoke in condition of anonymity.

Sudan has been roiled by a 20-month war that has killed more than 24,000 people and driven over 14 million people — about 30% of the population — from their homes, according to the United Nations.

Kambhampati new Governor



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: Mizoram Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati has been appointed as the Governor of Odisha replacing Raghubar Das whose resignation was accepted by the President of India Tuesday. Kambhampati was made Governor of Mizoram July 6, 2021 to become the first Telugu-speaking person from divided Andhra Pradesh to be appointed as Governor of the northeast state. He was elected as a Member of Parliament in the 16th Lok Sabha elections from Visakhapatnam constituency in Andhra Pradesh on a BJP ticket. Meanwhile, the abrupt replacement of Das, who was appointed as Governor in October 2023, created flutters in the state's political circles as he was still to complete his five year tenure in office. Das found himself in the centre of a controversy over the alleged assault by his son on an ASO at Puri Raj Bhavan before the elections. **P4**



MERRY CHRISTMAS: A church near Cuttack Chandi Temple decked up with colourful lights on the eve of Christmas, Tuesday

Cong seeks Shah's scalp

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: The Congress Tuesday organised 'Ambedkar Saman March' across the state in protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged remarks against BR Ambedkar. Carrying posters and pictures of Ambedkar, Congress leaders and supporters held demonstrations in Bhubaneswar, Koraput, Dhenkanal and Malkangiri. They raised slogans against the BJP and accused Shah of insulting Ambedkar during the debate on the Con-

stitution in the Rajya Sabha last week. A delegation of Congress leaders later submitted a memorandum to President Droupadi Murmu through the ADM, Bhubaneswar, demanding Shah's apology and resignation. Former state Congress president Niranjan Patnaik said, "BJP leader and Home Minister Amit Shah has insulted Ambedkar and the Constitution, which is unfortunate and shameful. We are deeply hurt by his words." He further added that Shah should apologise to the

people of the country and step down from his position. Senior Congress leader Mohammed Moquim added, "Shah's remark has hurt every citizen, including dalits, minorities, and backward communities. The entire country demands the home minister's resignation." Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi accused former Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of "insulting" BR Ambedkar and asked the Congress to tender an unconditional apology to the people of India.

Chit fund duped Majhi

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Tuesday claimed that he was also a victim of chit fund scams and urged people to be aware of the activities of ponzi firms to save their hard-earned money. Majhi said this while addressing a function to observe the State Level National Consumers Day here. "I was also a victim of chit fund scams. Two firms had duped me in 1990 and 2002," the chief minister said, adding that he could not get back his money as the process of recovering the money was too cumbersome and too lengthy. Claiming that he lost the investment in two ponzi firms, the chief minister

said he was influenced by the sweet talks made by the firm agents and arranged money to deposit in certain schemes. "However, when the maturity period came, I could not find the companies where money was deposited," he said. The chief minister said there has been a lot of change now as the Centre has formulated and strengthened regulations to stop cheating and duping of consumers. The CM praised the BJP-led Central government for amending the Chit Funds Act, 1982, in 2019, to ensure transparency in chit fund schemes. He mentioned that the amended legislation addressed the loopholes in the previous Act. In Odisha, around 70 lakh



people were allegedly duped by ponzi firms. Following a Supreme Court order in May 2014, the CBI investigated at least 44 companies, including Kolkata-based Saradha Group and Odisha-based Seashore and Artha Tatwa groups. These ponzi firms reportedly collected around ₹4,600 crore from people in the state over four years. Before the 2014 general elections, the then BJD gov-

ernment led by Naveen Patnaik formed a commission and set up a ₹300 crore corpus fund to refund the duped small depositors. The commission, headed by Justice MM Das, identified around 1 lakh small depositors who lost ₹10,000 or less. In response to a written question in the Assembly, Majhi informed that around 2 lakh small investors had already received their money back. Jayant Das, convenor of the Odisha Khyatigraha Jammakari Milita Manch, criticised the state government for not taking measures to refund money to depositors duped by different ponzi firms, despite the ruling BJP's election promise to refund the chit fund-affected people within 18 months.

Kid dies in road mishap

Rourkela, Dec 24: A three-year-old boy was killed after being hit by a speeding truck in Sundargarh district Tuesday, police said. The accident took place on NH-143, which runs through Biramitrapur town in the district. Police said the kid and his family were riding a scooter when a speeding bike coming from the opposite direction collided with them. The colli-

sion threw the child into the path of an oncoming truck. The driver fled the scene, police added. Following the accident, locals staged a road blockade for nearly two hours, demanding the arrest of the truck driver. Police arrived at the scene and assured the protestors that efforts would be made to arrest the driver, said Sushant Das, sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) of Biramitrapur.

Man falls to death in Puri open drain

Puri: A 53-year-old man died after falling into an open drain in Gajapati Nagar area here Tuesday. The deceased was identified as Pradipta Choudhury. The incident occurred around 9 am when Choudhury was attending a nature's call near the open drain at Sanikata in Gajapati Nagar. Locals informed the Kumbharpada police and Fire Services personnel who reached the spot and rescued Choudhury. He was rushed to a nearby healthcare facility where doctors pronounced him dead.



Homage to the Great Soul

Renewed Commitment to Governance

On this

Good Governance Day

the people of Odisha pay heartfelt tribute to

Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee,

former Prime Minister
and the Architect of Administrative Excellence

Under the visionary leadership of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Odisha scaled new heights. The establishment of AIIMS Bhubaneswar, the oil refinery at Paradip with an annual capacity of 15 million tons, the creation of the East Coast Railway Division and its headquarters in Bhubaneswar, the construction of 400 km of high-quality highways in Odisha in Golden Quadrilateral Connectivity Scheme, and laying of a road network of more than 18,000 kms (PMGSY) to connect the unconnected stand testament to the eponym "Vikas Purush".

Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Odisha

FOCUS SERVICE SECTOR

NEW ROAD TO DEVELOPMENT



Developing countries would do far better to put services in the lead role, with manufacturing and agriculture serving as the supporting cast

for higher-skilled workers. Close to 40 per cent of formal workers in digital services in East Asia today have a university degree or higher. That's double the rate for workers in other sectors. And the same trend is unlocking greater economic opportunities for women, because the ratio of female to male workers tends to be higher in the services sector than in manufacturing, and the proportion of women in the workforce grows as the level of economic development increases.

These are all essential ingredients for long-term growth. But because the trajectory of services is so closely tied to the spread of digital technologies, developing economies have not benefited equally. The countries with the fastest growth in services tend to be upper-middle-income economies – especially in East Asia. In such economies, services have gone from a 40 per cent share of GDP in 1970 to about 50 per cent today. In low-income countries, however, services as a share of GDP are still about 40 per cent, pretty much the same as in 1970.

Yet even in the poorest countries, services represent a promising path to future prosperity. They can help all countries move from low- to middle- to high-income status. But first, we must reject the false choice between supporting services and supporting manufacturing. Policymakers should do both, while maximising the potential of the services sector to deliver growth and jobs.

Indermit Gill is Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Development Economics at the World Bank. Aaditya Mattoo is Chief Economist of the East Asia and Pacific Region at the World Bank.

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For developing countries around the world – especially the poorest – the economic terrain has seldom been so slippery. Low-income countries have already suffered a lost decade, with virtually zero per capita income growth since 2010. Many middle-income countries are coming to terms with a demographic shift that puts them at risk of growing old before they grow rich. And many high-income countries risk stagnation because of sky-high debt and anemic productivity growth.

Such conditions are not conducive to international comity, at least not of the kind that fueled so much progress after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Developing economies will need to get better at fending for themselves, and while some are already preparing to do so, they are operating with an antiquated policy framework.

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, does it really make sense for developing countries to place an all-or-nothing bet on manufacturing? New research from the World Bank shows clearly that it does not. Developing countries would do far better to put services in the lead role, with manufacturing and agriculture serving as the supporting cast.

Services include a wide range of activities – finance, health, tourism, logistics – and the benefits they generate spill over to other sectors. Yet relative to manufacturing, they continue to get a bad rap. Supposedly, they are notoriously slow to innovate, hard to trade, and difficult to free from regulatory restrictions. Yet services now account for more than two-thirds of global GDP and half of global trade (once you factor in services that are

used in manufacturing and agriculture).

Among those seizing the opportunities offered by trade in services, the most striking examples come from the home of the “Asian miracle.” While the textbook manufacturing-led model of economic growth once worked wonders in East Asia, these countries’ circumstances and needs have changed. Their populations are aging quickly, the global economy is becoming more fragmented, and they are adapting. Over the past decade, our research shows, the share of services grew from 44 per cent of economic activity in China to 53 per cent, and from 44 per cent to 48 per cent in other economies across East Asia. These sectors now account for nearly 50 per cent of employment in the region, up from 42 per cent a decade ago.

This shift reflects the rapid rise of digital technologies – nearly three-quarters of people in East Asia and the Pacific now have access to the internet, a sevenfold increase from 2000 – as well as modest trade liberalisation for services. The result is an Asian economic renaissance. Opening services to

competition has fueled higher labour productivity even in manufacturing and agriculture, where firms can check prices, deliver goods, and receive payments much more efficiently.

Across all major economies in East Asia and the Pacific, services now contribute more than manufacturing to overall labour-productivity growth, an essential condition for higher wages. In Vietnam, for example, labour productivity climbed by 2.9 per cent after the government eased restrictions on foreign entry and ownership in several services sectors between 2008 and 2016 – reform commitments that were part of Vietnam’s accession to the World Trade Organization. Moreover, manufacturing firms that use these liberalised services registered a 3.1 per cent annual increase in labour productivity, and the biggest beneficiaries were small and medium-sized private enterprises.

The rise of services in East Asia has yielded other important benefits. It is powering foreign direct investment, with the growth rate of FDI in services exceeding that of manufacturing by a factor of five. It is also driving demand



Indermit Gill & Aaditya Mattoo

ACROSS ALL MAJOR ECONOMIES IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, SERVICES NOW CONTRIBUTE MORE THAN MANUFACTURING TO OVERALL LABOUR-PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH, AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION FOR HIGHER WAGES

“Suffering makes us capable of the full force of the Master of Delight; it makes us capable also to bear the utter play of the Master of Power. Pain is the key that opens the gates of strength; it is the high-road that leads to the city of beatitude”



SRI AUROBINDO

Statesman Who Shaped India

Today, 25th December is a very special day for all of us. Our nation marks the 100th Jayanti of our beloved former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji. He stands tall as a statesman who continues to inspire countless people.

Our nation will always be grateful to Atal Ji for being the architect of India’s transition into the 21st century. When he took oath as PM in 1998 our nation had passed through a period of political instability. In about 9 years, we had seen 4 Lok Sabha elections. The people of India were getting impatient and also sceptical about governments being able to deliver. It was Atal Ji who turned this tide by providing stable and effective governance. Coming from humble roots, he realised the struggles of the common citizen and the transformative power of effective governance.

One can see the long-term impact of Atal Ji’s leadership in so many sectors around us. His era marked a gigantic leap in the world of Information Technology, telecom and communications. This was particularly important for a nation like ours, which is also blessed with a very dynamic Yuva Shakti. The NDA Government under Atal Ji made the first serious attempt to make technology accessible to the common citizens. At the same time, there was foresight in connecting India. Even today, most people recall the Golden Quadrilateral Project, which connected the length and breadth of India. Equally notable were the Vajpayee Government’s efforts to enhance local connectivity as well through initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Similarly, his Government gave a push to metro connectivity by doing extensive work for Delhi Metro, which stands out as a world-class infrastructure project. Thus, the Vajpayee Government not only boosted economic growth but also brought distant regions closer, fostering unity and integration.

When it comes to the social sector, an initiative like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan highlights how Atal Ji dreamt of building an India where modern education is accessible to people across the nation, particularly for the poor and marginalised sections. At the same time, his government presided over many economic reforms which set the stage for India’s economic surge after several decades of following an economic philosophy which encouraged cronyism and stagnation.

A wonderful example of Vajpayee Ji’s leadership can be seen in the summer of 1998. His Government had just assumed office and on 11th May, India conducted the Pokhran tests, known as Operation Shakti. These tests exemplified the prowess of India’s scientific community. The world was stunned that India had done the tests and expressed their anger in no uncertain terms. Any ordinary leader would have buckled, but Atal Ji was made differently. And what happened? India stood firm and resolute with the government calling for another set of tests two days later, on 13th May! If the tests of the 11th showed scientific skill, the ones on 13th showed true leadership. It was a message to the world that gone were the days when India would buckle under threats or pressure. Despite facing international sanctions, the then NDA government of Vajpayee Ji stood firm, articulating India’s right to safeguard its sovereignty while simultaneously being the strongest proponent of world peace.

Atal Ji understood Indian democracy and also the need to make it stronger. Atal Ji presided over the creation of the NDA, which redefined coalitions in Indian politics. He brought people together and made NDA a force for development, national progress and regional ambitions. His Parliamentary brilliance was seen throughout his political journey. He belonged to a party with a handful of MPs but his words were enough to rattle the might of the all-powerful Congress party that time. As Prime Minister, he blunted the criticisms of the Opposition with style and substance. His was a career spent largely in the Opposition benches but never carried any trace of bitterness against anyone, even though the Congress stooped to new lows by going to the extent of calling him a traitor!

He was also not one to cling on to power through opportunistic means. He preferred to resign in 1996 instead of following the path of horse-trading and dirty politics. In 1999, his Government was defeated by 1 vote. A lot of people told him to challenge the immoral politics happening then but he preferred to go by the rules. Eventually, he came back with another resounding mandate from the people.

When it comes to commitment to protecting our Constitution too, Atal Ji stands tall. He was deeply impacted by the martyrdom of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Years later, he was a pillar of the anti-Emergency movement. In the run-up to the 1977 elections after the Emergency, he agreed to merger of his own Party (Jan Sangh) into the Janata Party. I am sure it would have been a painful decision for him and the others, but safeguarding the Constitution was all that mattered to him.

It is also noteworthy how deeply rooted Atal Ji was in Indian culture. Upon becoming India’s External Affairs Minister, he became the first Indian leader to speak in Hindi at the United Nations. This one gesture showcased his immense pride in India’s heritage and identity, leaving an indelible mark on the global stage.

Atal Ji’s persona was magnetic and his life was enriched by his love for literature and expression. A prolific writer and poet, he used words to inspire, provoke thought, and even offer solace. His poetry, often reflective of his inner struggles and hopes for the nation, continues to resonate with people across age groups.

For so many Bharatiya Janata Party Karyakartas like me, it is our privilege that we were able to learn and interact with a person like Atal Ji. His contribution to the BJP was foundational. In those days to spearhead an alternative narrative to the dominant Congress showed his greatness. Alongside stalwarts like Shri L.K. Advani Ji and Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi Ji he nurtured the party from its formative years, guiding it through challenges, setbacks and triumphs. Whenever the choice came between ideology and power, he always chose the former. He was able to convince the nation that an alternative world view from the Congress was possible and such a world view could deliver.

On his 100th Jayanti, let us rededicate ourselves to realising his ideals and fulfilling his vision for India. Let us strive to build an India that embodies his principles of good governance, unity, and progress. Atal Ji’s unwavering belief in the potential of our nation continues to inspire us to aim higher and work harder.

The writer is the Prime Minister of India



Narendra Modi

OUR NATION WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL TO ATAL JI FOR BEING THE ARCHITECT OF INDIA’S TRANSITION INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

IN JEST THIS

Coming to terms with baldness isn’t easy



Melvin Durai

ANYONE WHO TELLS A BALDING MAN THAT HE MUST GO COMPLETELY BALD DOES NOT UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT HAIR IS TO A MAN’S SELF-ESTEEM

I have some news that will not shock anyone who has been around me the last few years: I’m going bald.

I’ve had a bald spot near the back of my head for more than a decade, but now the hair near the front of my head is calling it quits, disappearing faster than my dreams of ever working for Air India.

Air India, as you may recall, instituted some strict rules on grooming and attire about two years ago. The grooming guidelines included the following instructions for male employees: “Men must maintain neat short haircut with side parting (without volume). Use of hair gel is mandatory. Male crew with deep receding hairlines and male balding patches must keep a clean shaved head or bald look. The head must be shaved daily. A crew cut is not permitted. Grey hair is not permitted. Grey hair must be regularly coloured in a natural shade.”

I would fail all of these

instructions. First, I do not have a side parting. I have a center parting caused by baldness. Second, I do not wear hair gel. Third, I do not shave my head. Fourth, I do not color my grey hair.

I wouldn’t qualify for an Air India job anyway, but the idea that a man with a receding hairline or balding patches must shave his head seems inhumane to me. This is like telling an employee with one missing finger that he needs to cut off his remaining fingers.

Perhaps that’s not a good analogy. After all, fingers don’t grow back, while hair usually does. But as far as I’m concerned, there’s no guarantee, if I shave my head, that my hair will reappear. What if it doesn’t? Would I be able to sue Air India?

Anyone who tells a balding man that he must go completely bald does not understand how important hair is to a man’s self-esteem. Not every man, of course. Men like

Michael Jordan and Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson have made baldness part of their appeal. But men like me are somewhat insecure about our baldness. Not only do I never shave my head, I try to get a haircut as infrequently as possible.

When my hair grows long, it covers my bald spot slightly, and I fool myself into thinking that my hair follicles have produced new strands of hair. This delusion disappears the moment I get a haircut and the hairdresser does the unkindest thing anyone can do: put a mirror behind my head to give me a rear view. The only thing I see, of course, is a map of the Sahara Desert.

I’ve tried my best to come to terms with my balding. It helps to know other bald men with whom I can commiserate. That’s why I joined a baldness support group. We get together once a month to share our stories of hair loss. There’s Al and Bruce and

Pedro and Salman and a few other guys. We have varying degrees of baldness. For example, Bruce has a bachelor’s degree, I have a master’s, and Salman has a PhD (prominent hair deficiency).

Our last meeting began, as it usually does, with a little sharing. We sat in a circle and shared a bottle of wine. It always helps the guys open up. Salman took a sip and said, “I like to focus on the positives of balding. For example, you can’t die from balding. There are no health risks.”

“That’s not true,” Bruce said. “If a coconut falls on your head, you are a goner. You have no protective layer of hair.”

Pedro pointed at his hat. “That’s why I like to wear this,” he said. “You have to protect your coconut.”

I nodded. But I knew that my head could not be compared to a coconut. I’ve seen coconuts in the store and all of them have more hair than I do.

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

End of an era

Sir, The passing of veteran filmmaker and a pioneer of parallel cinema Shyam Benegal marks the end of an era in Indian filmmaking. His work in both mainstream and art films earned him widespread acclaim for their realism, depth, and storytelling excellence. However, among his many achievements, one of the most celebrated is not a feature film but a television series that chronicles India’s history. The 53-episode historical drama *Bharat Ek Khoj* was based on the book *The Discovery of India* (1946), penned by India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. It was an ambitious project that familiarised the audience with India’s 5,000-year history, myths and ethos through an engaging narrative. With 18 national awards, Benegal was renowned for his realistic storytelling and insightful social commentary, which set his work apart from mainstream cinema. He pioneered the parallel cinema movement in India, along with stalwarts such as Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak. His noted films include *Ankur*, *Nishant*, *Manthan*, *Bhumika*, *Junoon*, *Kalyug* and *Mandi*. His late career output brimmed with biopics and satire: *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* and *Well Done Abba*. In March 2014, Rajya Sabha TV started telecasting *Samvidhaan*, a 10-part series directed by Benegal that focused on the making of the Constitution. In 2023, after a significant break, he released *Mujib: The Making of a Nation*, a biopic of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Abhijit Roy, JAMSHEDPUR

Illogical protest

Sir, This refers to “Cal HC upholds single bench order allowing doctors’ protest in Esplanade,” *Orissa POST*, December 24. I would like to point out that when the issue is pending in court inter alia to address the alleged delay in the CBI probe there seems to be no logic to continue to hold a sit-in demonstration near Esplanade whether or not it creates a traffic congestion. Doctors are responsible citizens and should not do anything to cause inconveniences to the public. The problem lies with doctors that they are neither reposing faith in the CBI probe nor the judiciary. They probably want the CBI to probe the case as per their terms and conditions.

Arun Gupta, KOLKATA

Cong, Nehru insulted Ambedkar: CM

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Tuesday accused former Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru of "insulting" BR Ambedkar and asked the Congress to tender an unconditional apology to the people of India.



In a hastily convened press briefing here, Majhi said, "The Congress and its leaders have insulted Ambedkar and even campaigned against him in the 1952 and 1954 elections. People of India know who insulted Ambedkar and those who respect." Majhi alleged that earlier Congress governments prioritised quotas for Muslims while ignoring the interests of STs and SCs.

"Ambedkar strongly opposed this, leading to differences with Nehru, which eventually resulted in his resignation," Majhi claimed.

Ambedkar, who was the Union law minister in the first Nehru ministry, resigned in 1951. A major row erupted last week over the alleged remarks of Union Home Minister Amit Shah during Constitution debate in Parliament following which the Congress launched an all-out attack on the BJP and has been repeatedly demanding

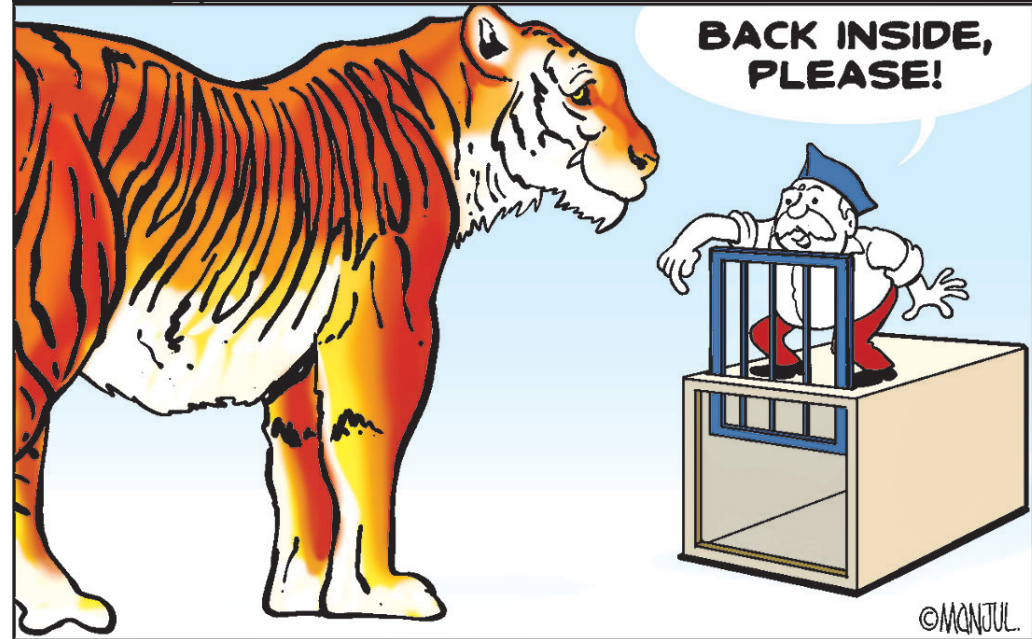
Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi alleged that earlier Congress governments prioritised quotas for Muslims while ignoring the interests of STs and SCs

He also alleged that in 1970, the Congress government conferred a Padma award to Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar, who had defeated Ambedkar in elections

Shah's resignation. Majhi mentioned that Nehru, in a letter to Dr. BC Ray, had said Ambedkar's resignation would not affect the Congress. "Nehru even campaigned against Ambedkar in elections," Majhi added, emphasising that BJP leadership has always respected him.

"Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee established a memorial for Ambedkar at his birthplace in Madhya Pradesh. Similarly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened an Ambedkar Centre in Delhi," Majhi said, highlighting the BJP's consistent respect for great personalities of the country. Majhi also alleged that in 1970, the Congress government conferred a Padma award to Narayan Sadoba Kajrolkar, who had defeated Ambedkar in elections. "This is a strange situation where Congress criticises and accuses others of insulting Ambedkar while Nehru himself disrespected him," Majhi said, accusing the grand old party of hatching a political conspiracy and misrepresenting Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent remarks. "I ask Congress to stop engaging in such politics," Majhi added.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	25.1°	23.4°
Min Temp	19.4°	18.0°
Humidity	85%	94%
Rainfall	0.1mm	11.4mm

FORECAST
Cloudy Sky with light rain

MARKET WATCH

INDEX	VALUE	CHG	PREV
SENSEX	78472.87	↓	67.30
NIFTY	23727.65	↓	25.80
DOLLAR	85.21	↑	0.04
EURO	88.55	↓	0.05
GOLD	₹76,102	↓	₹42
SILVER	₹89,060	↓	₹58

CM unveils statues of Vajpayee, Biswanath Kar

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Tuesday unveiled statues of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Cuttack and eminent scholar Bagmi Biswanath Kar in Bhubaneswar as part of the state's initiative to honour 21 renowned personalities in 2024.



Vajpayee's 10-foot bronze statue was placed at Belview Chhak in Cuttack, while Kar's statue was installed on the Assembly premises. Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Sports Minister Suryabanshi Suraj attended both the events. Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy was present at the unveiling of Biswanath Kar's statue in Bhubaneswar. "I had the privilege of unveiling the statue of our for-

mer PM, our guide, and 'Bharat Ratna' Atal Bihari Vajpayee at Belview Chhak in Cuttack. It is a matter of great pride and honour for all of us. His role in the development of Odisha and the entire country will be remembered forever," Majhi

said in a post on X. A simple function was held on the Assembly premises for the unveiling of Kar's statue. Majhi said, "I paid tribute to the great social reformer Bagmi Biswanath Kar by unveiling his statue at the Assembly premises."

Stray dogs kill 6-year-old girl

Borigumma: A six-year-old girl was mauled to death by a pack of stray dogs at Pupugaon village under this police limits in Koraput district Tuesday. The deceased child was identified as Chandini Harijan in the village. The girl was playing with her brother near her house when five dogs surrounded and attacked them. She suffered grievous injuries in most of her body parts and head. However, her brother managed to escape and informed the villagers, who rushed to the spot and rescued the child from a pool of blood.

Missing boy's body found stuffed in sack



Champua, Dec 24: The body of a nine-year-old boy, who was missing since Monday evening, was found stuffed in a sack at Gopinathpur village under this police station in Keonjhar district Tuesday morning. The deceased was identified as Pabana Munda, son of late Rahas Munda of the village. According to sources, villagers spotted the big sack near the house of one Gouranga Patra of the village Tuesday morning. On opening the sack, the villagers found the body of Pabana and informed the police. Champua police station OIC Debaki Nayak, along with SDPO Bijay

Mallick, reached the spot for investigation. A scientific team and a dog squad also rushed the spot and after collecting samples from the spot launched an investigation with the help of the sniffer dog. Meanwhile, Budhuni Munda, mother of the deceased, Tuesday morning lodged a written complaint alleging murder of her son, who, she said, had gone missing since Monday morning. Acting on the complaint, police seized the body and registered a case (327/24). They also sent the body to Champua hospital for post-mortem. An investigation into the incident is underway.

सत्यमेव जयते

'ପବିତ୍ର ବଡ଼ଦିନ' ଅବସରରେ ମାନ୍ୟବର ରାଜ୍ୟପାଳଙ୍କ ବାର୍ତ୍ତା

ପବିତ୍ର ବଡ଼ଦିନ ପର୍ବ ହେଉଛି ଶାନ୍ତି, ମୈତ୍ରୀ ଓ ମାନବତାବାଦର ପର୍ବ । ଏ ଅବସରରେ ମୁଁ ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କୁ ବିଶେଷତଃ ଖ୍ରୀଷ୍ଟିଆନ୍ ଭାଇଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ହାର୍ଦ୍ଦିକ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା ଓ ଆନ୍ତରିକ ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ ଜଣାଇବା ସହ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କର ଶ୍ରୀ, ଶାନ୍ତି ଓ ସମୃଦ୍ଧି କାମନା କରୁଛି ।

(ରଘୁବର ଦାସ)

ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

ବଡ଼ଦିନ ଉପଲକ୍ଷେ ମାନ୍ୟବର ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା

ପବିତ୍ର ବଡ଼ଦିନ ଉପଲକ୍ଷେ ରାଜ୍ୟବାସୀ ବିଶେଷ କରି ଖ୍ରୀଷ୍ଟଧର୍ମାବଲମ୍ବୀ ଭାଇ ଓ ଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ମୋର ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା ଓ ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ ଜଣାଉଛି । ଏକ ବିକଶିତ ଓଡ଼ିଶା ଗଠନରେ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କ ସହଯୋଗ କାମନା କରୁଛି ।

ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀ
ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

MIDDLE EAST REMAINS ON BOIL



year into the Gaza war, the Middle East sits on the brink of what could be the biggest regional conflagration in decades. Alongside its grinding campaign in Gaza, launched after Hamas attacked southern Israeli towns October 7, 2023, Israel has staged a ground invasion of Lebanon, preceded by a first-of-its-kind attack

gets in support of Hamas and the Palestinian cause more broadly. In October 2023, the Houthis in Yemen entered the fray, beginning a series of attacks on Israeli and Israeli-linked ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, which has expanded to include vessels suspected of being headed to Israeli ports. Despite the escalating tit-for-tat across the region, until now, a large conflict involving Iran and the US has been avoided, not least because neither side wants it. Tehran does not want to be dragged into an unwinnable war while it grapples with mounting domestic discontent and the looming succession to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Islamic Republic's supreme leader, while Washington would still like to reduce its footprint in the Middle East, not enlarge it. But the opening of new fronts and direct exchanges of fire between Iran and Israel made containing the conflict more difficult, especially as the pro-

pects for a ceasefire in Gaza faded and Israel expanded its offensive in Lebanon. The conflicts have thrown the entire world into crisis, with the economic consequences mounting and a high risk of open warfare. A further broadening of the conflicts would severely impact the global economy, potentially triggering a worldwide recession.

HAMAS LEADER KILLED



Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' top political leader, was killed July 31 by a pre-dawn Israeli airstrike in Tehran, Iran's capital. The strike came just after Haniyeh had attended the inauguration of Iran's new president — and hours after Israel targeted a top commander in Iran's ally Hezbollah in the Lebanese capital, Beirut. The shock assassination brought Iran to the fold as the country's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei vowed revenge against Israel. Israel had pledged to kill Ismail Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders over the group's attack on southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza.

90% OF GAZANS LEAVE HOMES

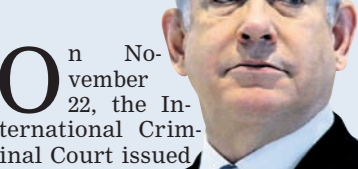
At least 19 million people across the Gaza Strip are displaced. Many have been displaced repeatedly, some 10 times or more

During the Israel-Hamas war, the Israeli military ordered mass evacuations in Gaza, resulting in one of the largest displacements of Palestinians since 1948. According to the United Nations, 2.9 million people were displaced in Gaza as of October 2024 out of a population of 2.2 million people. Just one week after Hamas' attack on Israel, Netanyahu's government ordered 1.1 million Gazans north of the Wadi Gaza, including those in Gaza City, to evacuate within 24 hours. This evacuation triggered a humanitarian crisis, with Palestinians calling it the "second Nakba," in reference to the mass displacement of 1948. By early November 2024, around 1 million Gazans had relocated to



the southern part of the Strip, while 352,000 to 400,000 remained in the north. Evacuees described the perilous journey as filled with fear and insecurity, citing attacks by the Israeli military and the sight of corpses along the evacuation routes. Even after reaching the south, evacuees

ICJ ARREST WARRANT



On November 22, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and a senior Hamas official, accusing them of war crimes during and after the October 7 attacks on Israel last year. In a statement, the Netherlands-based court said it found "reasonable grounds" to believe that Netanyahu bears criminal responsibility for war crimes including "starvation as a method of warfare" and "the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts." The warrants mark a historic first, making Netanyahu the first Israeli leader summoned by an international court for alleged actions against Palestinians in the 76-year conflict.



GRIM FIGURES FROM 2024'S DEADLIEST WAR

As of 3 December 2024, over 46,000 people (and counting) have been reported killed in the Israel-Hamas war. In Gaza, deaths include 13,319 children, 7,215 women, 5,447 elderly, and 16,735 men. Among the child fatalities, 786 children are under one year of age, representing about six per cent of killed children

At least 281 aid workers have been killed across 19 countries, surpassing the previous record of 280 aid workers killed in 2023. Nearly two-thirds (178) of humanitarian workers killed were in Palestine. Since October 7, 2023, at least 333 humanitarian workers in Gaza have been killed in Israeli attacks

Due to the Gaza war, Israel's ranking fell to an all-time low of 155th, the largest deterioration in peacefulness in the 2024 Global Peace Index. However, over the past decade Palestine has witnessed the largest deterioration, slipping to 145th

"generals' plan" to clear northern Gaza of Palestinians. These forced evacuations have drawn severe criticism globally, with legal experts, human rights organizations, and diplomats condemning them as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Militarisation recorded its largest yearly deterioration since the inception of the GPI, with 108 countries becoming more militarised. 110 million people are either refugees or internally displaced due to violent conflict, with 16 nations now hosting more than half a million refugees. As conflicts become more widespread and more internationalised, increasing complexity reduces the likelihood of achieving lasting solutions. As the year draws to close, Orissa POST presents a few snapshots from the warzones which could serve as a preview of what's to come



Largest cohort of child amputees

GAZA IS NOW HOME TO LARGEST NUMBER OF AMPUTEE CHILDREN IN MODERN HISTORY

Gaza has the highest number of child amputees per capita in the world, after more than a year of Israel's war on the Palestinian enclave, the United Nations said. "Gaza now has the highest number of children amputees per capita anywhere in the world — many losing limbs and undergoing surgeries without even anaesthesia," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said. Calling the situation in war-torn Gaza "appalling and apocalyptic", the UN chief warned that conditions faced by Palestinians in the territory may amount to the "gravest international crimes". Guterres highlighted the devastating toll of the conflict and the urgent need for international action. "Malnutrition is rampant. Famine is imminent. Meanwhile, the health system has collapsed," he said. The secretary-general also criticised the severe restrictions on aid delivery, calling the current levels "grossly insufficient".



Hezbollah leadership decimated On October 17, 2024, Israel announced the death of Yahya Sinwar, a chief architect of Hamas' attack on Israel October 7, 2023, that sparked the Israel-Hamas war. This

The world is currently experiencing a record number of conflicts and crises since the end of World War II. It is gripped by fire and fury, as conflicts erupt across continents, leaving devastation in their wake. There are currently 56 conflicts and have become more international with 92 countries involved in conflicts outside their borders, the most since the Global Peace Index's inception. In Eastern Europe, Russia's relentless invasion of Ukraine rages on, reducing cities to rubble while defiant Ukrainians, backed by the West, refuse to bow. In Gaza, a surprise strike by Hamas in October 2023 ignited an inferno of war with Israel, trapping civilians in an unending nightmare. The global economic impact of violence increased to \$9.1 trillion in 2023, representing 13.5% of global GDP. Militarisation recorded its largest yearly deterioration since the inception of the GPI, with 108 countries becoming more militarised. 110 million people are either refugees or internally displaced due to violent conflict, with 16 nations now hosting more than half a million refugees. As conflicts become more widespread and more internationalised, increasing complexity reduces the likelihood of achieving lasting solutions. As the year draws to close, Orissa POST presents a few snapshots from the warzones which could serve as a preview of what's to come

Netanyahu's war spills to Lebanon

Israel has killed at least 2,720 people in Lebanon, mostly civilians

On 1 October 2024, Israel invaded Southern Lebanon, marking the fifth Israeli invasion of Lebanon since 1978. The invasion took place after nearly 12 months of Israeli-Hezbollah conflict. On 26 November, Israel and Lebanon signed a ceasefire agreement, though some attacks continued. Israel has reported 56 of its soldiers killed in the invasion, while the Lebanese government has reported Israel killing 2,720 people in Lebanon, mostly civilians. Shortly after the onset of the Israel-Hamas war in October 2023, Hezbollah joined the conflict, citing solidarity with Palestinians, which quickly escalated into regular cross-border military exchanges impacting areas in or around northern Israel, southern Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights of Syria. Pagers turn bombs On September 17, in a ghastly surprise attack, thousands of explosions took place across Lebanon in pagers and the next day in walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah group's members. The blast killed at least 37 people and injured more than 3,000 individuals, according to the Lebanese health ministry. The pagers and walkie-talkies detonated two consecutive days in Lebanon in September and sent shockwaves about how it was implemented and who was likely behind it. Two months after the incident, the Israeli administration acknowledged that they carried out the pager and walkie-talkie attacks in Lebanon which were used by the Hezbollah militant group. In the aftermath, various media outlets reported that the attack was a highly sophisticated Israeli intelligence operation years in the making in which Hezbollah was fooled into purchasing the compromised devices.

BEHIND THE SCENES DRAGON'S DISGUISED ARMS AID

There is no question that the Chinese and Russian presidents get on well. Since Vladimir Putin attacked Ukraine, their relationship has only improved. Putin's visit to meet his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in May 2024 showed this once again. China has supplied Russia with hardly any Chinese-made weapons or ammunition since the start of the war in 2022 but it has surged sales of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow in turn is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine. In 2023 about 90 per cent of Russia's microelectronics came from China, which Russia has used to make missiles, tanks and aircraft. Nearly 70 per cent of Russia's approximately \$900 million in machine tool imports in the last quarter of 2023 came from China. Russia's growing economic and diplomatic isolation has made it increasingly reliant on China, its former rival for leadership of the Communist bloc during the Cold War.

FROM ISOLATION TO BATTLEFIELD

In November, Ukraine reported its troops had engaged in combat with North Korean troops in the Kursk region of Russia. The secretive state may have one of the world's largest militaries, with 1.28 million active soldiers, but - unlike Russia's military - the Korean People's Army (KPA) has no recent experience of combat operations. The arrival of North Korean troops was cited by US officials as a reason for President Biden giving the green light for Ukraine to use long-range ATACMS missiles to strike inside Russia. Even the number being deployed - originally put at around 11,000 by the Pentagon - has been debated, reports highlight Pyongyang may actually deploy as many as 100,000 troops. Moscow has been recruiting at least 20,000 new soldiers a month to help bolster its war effort, with more than 1,000 Russian soldiers killed or wounded on average daily, according to NATO and military officials in the West.



1,000 DAYS OF RESILIENCE

Russia's war has killed over 11,700 Ukrainian civilians and injured close to 27,000

At least 6.7 million people have fled Ukraine and millions more have been displaced

saw the largest strikes in months, with Russian attacks in Kyiv, Odesa, Kryvyi Rih, Sumy, and other cities, targeting civilian infrastructure and killing civilians. Russia's attacks on Ukraine's energy grid caused country-wide blackouts, leaving millions without electricity, water, and heat. In areas of Ukraine that they occupy, Russian forces have also committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. These include torture and killings of civilians, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, and forcible transfers and unlawful deportations of Ukrainians.



BRAZEN STRATEGIES

Wars have rules, yet Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine shows a blatant disregard for these principles. The deliberate targeting of critical infrastructure like schools and hospitals are only a few examples of Russia's violations of International Humanitarian Law in Ukraine. One of Russia's cruelest strategies is the "double-tap strikes", where the

first strike is followed by a second, deliberately targeting the rescuers arriving at the site to assist the ones injured in the first strike. Since the start of the full-scale war, there have been 38 double-tap strikes at sites where first responders from the State Emergency Service of Ukraine have carried out their duties, resulting in 110 injuries and 34 deaths of the rescue workers. It is estimated that 44% of Ukrainian children show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the EU has stepped in to provide substantial support to Ukrainian children, focusing on initiatives like rebuilding schools, constructing bomb shelters, organising catch-up classes, and offering psychological support. The children of Ukraine will never get their childhoods back.

STOLEN CHILDHOOD

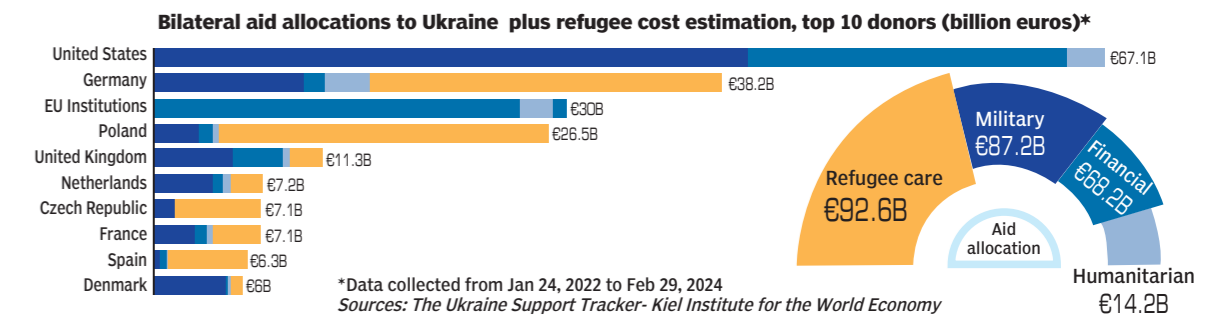
With Russia's attacks on civilian infrastructure like schools and hospitals, nearly 600 Ukrainian children have lost their lives, and more than 1,600 have been injured. They are among the most vulnerable in this war, facing not only the risk of physical harm but also being threatened by forced deportations to Russia. It

PUTIN FLAUNTS NEW MISSILE 'STRONGER' THAN NUKES

Russian President Vladimir Putin speaks up to Mach 11 — more than ten times the speed of sound. According to General Sergei Karakayev, head of Russia's Strategic Missile Forces, it has a range sufficient to hit any target in Europe. The missile's multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) configuration allows it to carry six warheads, each releasing six submunitions. This setup gives it the capacity to target multiple sites simultaneously with devastating precision. The Kremlin described the Dnipro attack as a "warning" to the West after the United States and the United Kingdom permitted Ukraine to fire missiles into Russian territory.



THE WAR IN UKRAINE: TWO YEARS OF GLOBAL SUPPORT



*Data collected from Jan 24, 2022 to Feb 29, 2024. Sources: The Ukraine Support Tracker - Kiel Institute for the World Economy

BLOOD MONEY

Merchants of death reap it in from Gaza, Ukraine

Revenues at the world's top 100 global arms and military services producing companies totalled \$522 billion in 2023, a 4.2% increase over the prior year, according to new data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The largest increases were tied to ongoing conflicts, including a 40% increase in revenues for Russian companies involved in supplying Moscow's war on Ukraine and record sales for Israeli firms producing weapons used in that nation's brutal war on Gaza. The United States remains the world's dominant arms producing nation, with \$318 billion in revenues flowing to American firms in the world's top 100 for 2023, more than half of the global total. And the five highest revenue earners globally were all based in the United States — Lockheed Martin, Raytheon (now RTX), Northrop Grumman, Boeing, and General Dynamics.

China ranked second to US in arms industry revenues, with nine firms accounting for 16% of the revenue received by companies in the global top 100. The increases in domestic and export spending tied to specific events highlight the dire humanitarian circumstances that underlie the growing revenues of top arms companies, most notably Israel's unconscionable attacks on Gaza, which have killed over 40,000 people directly and many more through indirect causes, including over 62,000 who have died from starvation.

MAJOR IMPACT OF THE REVENUE SURGE FOR TOP ARMS MAKERS IS THE DIVERSION OF FUNDING AND TALENT FROM ADDRESSING URGENT GLOBAL PROBLEMS, FROM CLIMATE CHANGE TO POVERTY TO OUTBREAKS OF DISEASE, AND THE MORE COMPANIES AND COUNTRIES BECOME DEPENDENT ON THE PROFITS OF WAR, THE HARDER IT WILL BE TO SHIFT FUNDING TOWARDS OTHER URGENT PRIORITIES



Garlic was once ₹40, today it is ₹400! Rising inflation has spoiled the budget of the common person's kitchen - the government is sleeping like Kumbhakaran!
RAHUL GANDHI | LEADER OF OPPOSITION

DGCA IMPOSES ₹10L FINE ON AKASA AIR

Aviation regulator DGCA has slapped a ₹10 lakh penalty on Akasa Air for failing to provide compensation on time to some passengers who were denied boarding at the Bangalore airport in September, according to a source



of the day **QUOTE**

Periyar's history is being taken to today's younger generation. We have globalised Periyar and made him a common property of the world. Periyar fought for unity and self-respect



MK STALIN | CHIEF MINISTER, TAMIL NADU

Today, some malicious communal forces are attempting to weaken this tradition and turn religious beliefs into causes of hatred



PINARAYI VIJAYAN | CHIEF MINISTER, KERALA

Dr B R Ambedkar played a monumental role during India's freedom movement, the drafting of the Constitution and the early years of independent India. Despite facing numerous social hurdles, he earned the highest degrees in law, finance and economics



YOGI ADITYANATH | CHIEF MINISTER, UTTAR PRADESH

Delhi HC decries non-advocates in consumer cases

The judge in an order passed December 23 directed all consumer courts in Delhi to ensure the parties were represented by advocates or by the agents/representatives/non-advocates strictly in terms of the regulations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: The Delhi High Court has taken strong exception to the practice of non-advocates and agents appearing for litigants before consumer courts on the basis of authorisation letters.

Justice Sanjeev Narula said such a practice not only diluted the legal and ethical responsibilities that defined the role of an advocate but also undermined the concept of a "vakalatnama", raising serious concerns about professional privilege and confidentiality, as such persons were not bound by the Advocates Act, 1961.

"This is fundamentally inconsistent with the Advocates Act, 1961, which exclusively vests these functions in enrolled advocates. Such a practice not only dilutes the legal and ethical responsibilities that define the role of an advocate but also undermines the concept of a Vakalatnama," said the court, referring to one such authorisation letter.

The high court said in the given case the advocate had effectively delegated core professional responsibilities, such as signing documents, receiving



communications, and arguing cases before the commission, to a non-advocate.

The judge in an order passed December 23 directed all consumer courts in Delhi to ensure the parties were represented by advocates or by the agents/representatives or social organisations.

The petitioners said a growing trend of non-advocates appearing before consumer courts without proper authorisation had emerged which was in violation of the framework of Consumer Protection (Procedure for Regulation of Allowing Appearance of Agents or Representatives or Non-Advocates or Voluntary Organisations before the Consumer Forum), Regulations, 2014.

The high court issued notice

to the Lieutenant Governor, Delhi government, Bar Council of India and Bar Council of Delhi and asked them to respond to the plea. The Lieutenant Governor and Delhi government were represented by additional standing counsel Anuj Aggarwal while the Bar Council of Delhi was represented by advocate T Singhdev.

The court directed the state consumer commission and the district consumer fora to give details of pending cases in which non-advocates were representing parties.

The Bar Council of India and Bar Council of Delhi were directed to submit their replies on the issue by filing counter affidavits.

The court posted the hearing March 18, 2025.

COURT CORNER

Delhi court refuses to pass order on J&K MP Rashid Engineer's regular bail plea

New Delhi: A Delhi court Tuesday refused to pass order on Jammu and Kashmir MP Rashid Engineer's regular bail application in a terror-funding case. Additional sessions judge (ASJ) Chander Jit Singh dismissed the application filed by the accused seeking to pronounce order on the bail application. The judge said at the present stage he could only decide the miscellaneous application and not the regular bail plea. The district judge sent the case back to the court hearing the matter December 19. The ASJ court had requested the district judge to transfer the case to a court designated to try lawmakers observing Rashid was now an MP.

Mosque survey report almost complete, will be filed in Jan: Sambhal court commissioner

Sambhal (UP): The survey report of the Shahi Jama Masjid is almost complete and will be submitted in the court in January, 2025, the court-appointed commissioner recently said. Advocate Ramesh Singh Raghav, who was appointed as the court commissioner in the matter, December 23 said the report would be either filed January 2 or January 3. "The survey report of Shahi Jama Masjid is almost in the final stage and complete. There are some technical issues, which will be adjusted today. As it is the last working day of the court after which it will close. As far as the survey report is concerned, it will be filed January 2 or 3. There is a stay order of the Supreme Court to the trial court not to take any action till January 6 hence the survey report will be filed before this date," Raghav told media persons.

Bareilly court summons AIMIM chief Owaisi over pro-Palestine slogan in Parl

Bareilly (UP): A local court has directed AIMIM supremo Asaduddin Owaisi to appear before it over a plea that claimed he had violated the Constitution by raising a slogan hailing Palestine in Parliament. Lawyer Virendra Gupta filed a petition against Owaisi over the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) leader voicing support for Palestine during his oath-taking ceremony in Parliament. Gupta said in his plea that the five-time MP had violated constitutional and legal beliefs. He told reporters Tuesday that a petition was filed in the MP/MLA court July 12 but it was rejected. Gupta then filed a revision petition in the court of the district judge. District Judge Sudhir allowed the petition and issued a notice to Owaisi on Saturday, asking him to appear before the court January 7.

SHORT TAKES

NIA chargesheets two for terror conspiracy

Chennai: The NIA has chargesheeted two men for allegedly conspiring to establish an Islamic caliphate in India, besides spreading terror in Tamil Nadu and neighbouring states, it said in a statement. According to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) investigation, the accused were actively involved in recruiting "Daris/students" to "secret classes" of the Hizb ut Tahrir (HuT) terror organisation. In its chargesheet filed before the special NIA court, Poonamallee, Chennai, Abdul Rehman alias Abdul Rahman and Mujibur Rehman alias Mujibur Rahman Altham Sahib have been charged under sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for conspiring and preparing to undertake terrorist acts to promote the HuT ideology in Tamil Nadu and other places.

2 held for vandalising Ambedkar statue

Ahmedabad: The Ahmedabad Crime Branch Tuesday arrested two persons for allegedly vandalising a statue of Dr BR Ambedkar in Khokhra locality of the city. Members of the Dalit community had staged protests after the incident came to light Monday morning. Protesters forced shops in the area to down the shutters Tuesday. The crime branch zeroed in on Mehul Thakor and Bholo Thakor, two of the five suspects, after scanning footage of around 500 CCTV cameras and using inputs from its informants, said an official. Thakor, a history-sheeter with a case under Prohibition Act registered against him in 2020, confessed to vandalising the statue, said Joint Commissioner of Police Sharad Singhal.

177 roads blocked due to snowfall in HP

Shimla: At least 177 roads, including three national highways, were closed in Himachal Pradesh following snowfall in several districts, officials said Tuesday. Snowfall was recorded in the Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti and the higher reaches of Shimla, Kullu, Mandi, Chamba and Sirmaur districts. Shimla Hotel and Tourism Stakeholders' Association president MK Seth told PTI that hotel occupancy in Shimla was at more than 70 per cent. The snowfall led to a 30-percentage point increase in room bookings, he added. According to reports, four people died in accidents during the past 24 hours and several suffered injuries due to vehicles skidding at some places.

Prez appoints new governors

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has been appointed as Bihar governor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: Former Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla was Tuesday appointed the governor of strife-torn Manipur which has been witnessing periodic ethnic clashes between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

Former army chief Vijay Kumar Singh, who was also a minister in the last two terms of the Modi government, has been named the new Mizoram

governor while Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has been shifted to Bihar, where Assembly elections are due next year.

Vishwanath Arlekar has been named the new governor of Kerala, according to the gubernatorial appointments to the Rashtrapati Bhavan Tuesday.

Bhalla, who has the rare distinction of being the longest-serving Union Home Secretary, completed his five-year tenure in August this year. He is a 1984-batch retired Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre.

President Droupadi Murmu appointed Bhalla the governor of Manipur, a statement

issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan said. Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya was holding the additional charge of Manipur.

General (ret'd) Vijay Kumar Singh has been appointed Mizoram governor. Singh retired as Army chief in 2012 after a long-drawn battle with the government over his age issue and joined the BJP ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha election, which he successfully contested from Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh.

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has been appointed as Bihar governor, the statement said.

These appointments will take effect from the dates they will assume charge of their respective offices, it added.

Borewell mishaps indicate gaps in enforcing 2010 SC guidelines

The issue has come to the forefront again following the spate of such accidents leading to desperate and dramatic rescue operations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: After over 14 years the Supreme Court framed guidelines to prevent accidents involving abandoned borewells, the frequent spate of such incidents highlight the gaps in enforcement and creating awareness of the top court's order.

The issue has come to the forefront again following the spate of such accidents lead-

ing to desperate and dramatic rescue operations.

Most recently, a minor, Chetna, aged around three years fell into a borewell in the Kotputli-Behror district of Rajasthan, and the NDRF and SDRF were deployed to rescue her from the 150-foot-deep borewell with efforts still underway at the time of filing this report.

Aryan, 5, fell into a 150-foot-deep borewell December 9 in Rajasthan's Dausa while playing and after a 55-hour rescue operation, he was pulled out unconscious and was declared dead on arrival in a hospital.

These instances occurred despite the top court's comprehensive guidelines issued February 11, 2010, aimed to prevent such tragedies.

The guidelines were issued after the bench led by former Chief Justice of India KG Bal-



akrishnan, took a suo motu (on its own) cognisance of a letter petition bringing to its notice a spate of such accidents in the country February 13, 2009.

The guidelines included setting up barbed-wire fencing around the well during construction, using a steel plate cover fixed with bolts over the well assembly and filling up of

THEATRE STAMPEDE CASE

Police grill actor Allu Arjun for over 3 hrs



Investigating officers grilled Allu Arjun in his lawyer's presence, over the theatre stampede that killed a woman and injured her son during a premier show of 'Pushpa 2' at Hyderabad's Sandhya theatre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Dec 24: The Telangana police Tuesday asked top Telugu actor Allu Arjun if he was aware that authorities had denied permission for his visit to a theatre that screened 'Pushpa-2' and also if he knew about the tragic death of a woman in the stampede December 4 during the premiere.

Arjun, who reached the Chikadpally police station accompanied by his father Allu Aravind and lawyers a little after 11 AM, was questioned by a police

team led by Central Zone DCP Akshansh Yadav for over three hours. The actor left the police station at around 2.45 pm.

According to sources, during the interrogation, the actor was also asked about the sequence of events, and his private security, with the police alleging that bouncers allegedly pushed his fans leading to the stampede.

"He cooperated with the police fully. If required, they said they'd call him again. They (the police) wanted to question him and he cooperated. They treated him very well," Arjun's advocate Ashok Reddy told PTI.

The interrogation was focused on Allu Arjun's entry into the theatre, exit and role of bouncers in crowd control near the star, sources close to the development said. "The police have recorded Allu Arjun's statement about the case," sources told PTI.

After the questioning, Allu Arjun returned to his home at posh Jubilee Hills in the city. The actor held a press conference December 21, describing the stampede incident as purely accidental and denied the allegations made by Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on the "roadshow" before the film screening.

Hours after Reddy slammed the actor for holding a roadshow and waving to the crowds at the theatre, without referring to anyone, the 'Pushpa 2' star refuted the allegations, saying it was not a procession or a roadshow.

ED takes possession of flat in case against Dawood's brother Iqbal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 24: The Enforcement Directorate has taken possession of a flat worth Rs 55 lakh in Maharashtra's Thane, held in the name of an alleged associate of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim's brother Iqbal Kaskar, as part of a money laundering probe.

Sources in the federal probe agency said Tuesday that the residential dwelling in Neopolis Building located in Thane West was attached as part of a provisional order issued under the PMLA in 2022 against its owner Mumtaz Ezaz Shaikh.

The adjudicating authority of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) had approved this provisional attachment order paving way for the ED to take its possession. The procedure for taking possession of the flat was completed recently, the sources said.

The ED had earlier alleged in a statement that this flat was extorted by Kaskar and others from a Thane-based real estate developer Suresh Devichand Mehta.



The guidelines included setting up barbed-wire fencing around the well during construction, using a steel plate cover fixed with bolts over the well assembly and filling up of borewells from the bottom to the ground level among others

Further, the owner of the land or the premises, before taking any steps to construct borewells or tube wells, was directed to authorities concerned -- district collector or district magistrate or sarpanch -- or department officials of ground water or public health or municipal corporations at least 15 days in advance

-- district collector or district magistrate or sarpanch -- or department officials of ground water or public health or mu-

nicipal corporations at least 15 days in advance.

It was directed that registration of all drilling agencies, government, semi-government or private, should be mandatory.

The top court also directed the barbed-wire fencing or any other suitable barrier be erected around the well during construction, a cement or concrete platform measuring 0.5x0.5x0.6 metre (0.30 metre above ground level and 0.30 metre below ground) built around the well casing and the well assembly capped using welded steel plates or a similar cover fixed with bolts.

It had said in case of a pump repair, the tube well should not be left uncovered and mud pits and channels should be filled after completion of the work.



When we send kids to school, we tell them to work hard and achieve their goals with their intelligence. Today, there is no value in hard work and intelligence. Merit has become the biggest casualty at this point in time

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP CHIEF

RAJNATH SINGH, YOGI JOINTLY INAUGURATE ATAL HEALTH FAIR

To commemorate the birth centenary of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the two-day Atal Health Fair at Dilkusha Lawn in Lucknow Tuesday. They also inaugurated and laid the foundation for 181 projects worth Rs 662 crore on the occasion



of the day quote

The sun that rose on the political horizon of India on 25th December 1924 has not set even today. I feel so. Not only India but the whole world is familiar with the personality and deeds of revered Atalji

The whole country, the Congress party and the INDI alliance are together demanding that Amit Shah has no right to continue as the home minister of the country because the person who sits on the chair of the home minister has to safeguard the Constitution

We have to win this battle. This battle will be won only if the whole country fights unitedly

POST OF THE DAY

In 1988, Indian television audiences witnessed a monumental achievement by Shyam Benegal- Bharat ek khoj, a series based on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's seminal work, 'The Discovery of India'. This ambitious project aimed to capture Nehru's perspective on India's rich heritage and culture, making it accessible to a broad audience. What's remarkable is that Benegal didn't simply adapt Nehru's work; instead, he added depth by incorporating critiques and alternative viewpoints.

This nuanced approach might be challenging to replicate in today's era, making Benegal's accomplishment all the more impressive, even 36 years later.

SHORT TAKES

Over 60 NCC cadets hospitalised

Kochi: As many as 60 NCC cadets were hospitalised following a suspected case of food poisoning at a camp held at a college in Kerala, creating an anxious situation, officials said. The incident was reported Monday during the 10-day Combined Annual Training Camp (CATC) organized by the 21 Kerala Battalion NCC at a college in Thrikkakara, starting December 21. The students who complained of food poisoning were taken to various hospitals and were discharged by Monday night, according to officials.

Over 150 booked in 94 NDPS cases

Srinagar: Police in Jammu and Kashmir's Srinagar district has registered 94 cases under the NDPS Act against 156 persons as part of its crackdown against drug trafficking in the city. "Srinagar Police has launched a relentless crackdown against drug trafficking in the city with the aim to curb the menace of drugs and dismantle the infrastructure supporting drug trafficking," a police spokesperson said.

Illegal immigration: 11 Bangladeshis held

New Delhi: With the arrest of 11 people, Delhi Police Tuesday claimed to have unearthed a gang involved in illegal immigration of Bangladeshi nationals. Among those arrested, four are Bangladeshi citizens and the rest were allegedly involved in making forged documents, an official said.

HINDENBURG VS SEBI CHIEF

Lokpal calls Sebi chief, Moitra for oral hearing

The Lokpal had earlier said that Mahua Moitra's complaint, alleging impropriety and conflict of interest by Sebi chief Madhabi Puri Buch, 'falls short' of persuading it to order any probe



as the case may be," according to the December 19 order signed by Lokpal chairperson Justice AM Khanwilkar and five other members.

New Delhi, Dec 24: Anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal has called SEBI chief Madhabi Puri Buch and also complainants, including TMC MP Mahua Moitra, for "oral hearing" next month in connection with corruption complaints being heard by it, alleging impropriety and conflict of interest on the basis of a Hindenburg Research report, according to an official order.

The Lokpal had November 8 sought Buch's "explanation" on the complaints filed by Moitra, a Lok Sabha member, and two others. Buch, the chairperson of capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), was asked to submit her response within four weeks.

Hearing the case, the Lokpal said the named RPS (respondent public servant) "has filed her response by way of affidavit sworn 07.12.2024 in time, raising preliminary issues as well as giving explanation allegation-wise".

"Further, we deem it appropriate that the RPS as well as the complainants can be given opportunity of oral hearing to clarify their positions taken in the complaints or the affidavit,

Accordingly, the Lokpal has asked the registry to issue notices to the RPS as well as the complainant(s) to avail of the opportunity of oral hearing January 28.

"It will be open to the RPS as well as the complainant to authorise an advocate to espouse their cause, if they so desire at the time of oral hearing," the order said.

The Lokpal said "it is appropriate and in the interest of justice that the complainants are provided a copy of the affidavit and documents filed by the RPS by way of response to the respective complainants and the supplementary affidavits".

The anti-graft ombudsman asked its registry to forward a copy of Buch's affidavit and its accompaniments to the complainants in respective complaints. "The complainants, however, shall ensure that confidentiality of the process and the contents of the affidavit is maintained," the order said.

SEBI chief Buch and the complainants, "if (they) wish to rely on any reported decisions must file compilation(s) of such decisions duly paginated, well in advance and not later than 18.01.2025", it said.

Kejriwal launches 24-hr water supply in Delhi

New Delhi, Dec 24: Ahead of the Assembly elections in Delhi, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal Tuesday launched round-the-clock water supply at Pandav Nagar DDA flats in the Rajinder Nagar area.

"When we came to power 10 years ago, around 50-60 per cent of water was supplied by tankers in Delhi. I am happy to say that today, after 10 years, 97 per cent of Delhi gets piped water,"

the former chief minister said after launching the scheme.

"Today is a very important day. It has been a dream for all of us that Delhi should receive clean water directly from taps, 24x7, whether on the third or fourth floors, without the need for pumps. Today, this monumental dream begins in Delhi, starting with DDA flats in Pandav Nagar under the Rajender Nagar Assembly constituency. Clean water has started flowing here 24x7," Kejriwal said.

MAHARASHTRA ASSEMBLY POLLS

No arbitrary addition, deletion in voters list: EC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: The Election Commission Tuesday asserted that there were no arbitrary additions or deletions of voters in Maharashtra where Assembly polls were held recently.

In its response to the Congress, the poll authority also said it would not be correct to compare 5 PM voter turnout data with final polling data.

The Congress had approached the poll panel in November flagging various concerns related to the Maharashtra Assembly polls.

Coming out with a detailed note and frequently asked questions (FAQs), the poll authority told the Congress that increase in voter turnout from 5 PM to 11:45 PM was normal, being part of the process of aggregation of voter turnout.

It said there can be bona fide but inconsequential differences in votes polled and votes counted.

The EC asserted that it is impossible to change actual voter turnout as statutory Form 17C giving details of voter turnout is available with authorised agents of candidates at the time of close of poll at the polling station itself.

It said rule-based process was followed with transparency in Maharashtra electoral roll preparation and there were no irregular pattern in voter deletions in the state.

It told the Congress that due process was followed, including participation of Congress representatives in preparation of electoral rolls.

The commission told the party that its complaint of an average addition of 50,000 electors between July and November in 50 Assembly seats, out of which 47 have been won by the Mahayuti, is factually incorrect and misleading.

It said the fact is that only six Assembly constituencies had total additions of over 50,000 electors during the period. Hence the question of winning in 47 seats on this basis does not arise.

While detailing the well laid out mechanism with sufficient checks and balances and disclosures, the EC emphasised that the watertight statutory scheme ensures that deletion and addition of voters is done strictly according to rules with fullest involvement of political parties at every stage.

Women job applicants up by 25%



'India at Work 2024', conducted by job platform Apna.co, highlights how India's employment landscape is witnessing a historic shift, with women leading the charge in workforce participation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: Women accounted for an impressive 2.8 crore job applications, out of a total of seven crore in 2024, marking a 20 per cent increase from 2023, revealed a new report.

"India at Work 2024", conducted by job platform Apna.co, highlights how India's employment landscape is wit-

nessing a historic shift, with women leading the charge in workforce participation.

The total of seven crore job applications, which itself is a "25 per cent year-on-year surge", according to the report, is primarily driven by heightened workforce participation among women and youth.

"Women contributed 2.8 crore job applications out

of a total seven crore. Tier 1 cities like Delhi-NCR, Bangalore, and Mumbai led this surge with 1.52 crore applications, while Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities like Jaipur, Lucknow, and Bhopal contributed 1.28 crore, marking a significant rise in opportunities beyond metro hubs," reads the report.

It also observed a "28 per cent increase" in median salaries of women in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Women, as per the report, are excelling across sectors like healthcare, hospitality, retail, and e-commerce, and are even embracing unconventional roles such as field sales, logistics, and security services.

"Applications for senior and managerial roles surged by 32 per cent, signaling women's growing influence in shaping India's new-age workforce," it added.

Besides witnessing high growth in women's job applications, the report also saw a rise in job applications from freshers, with a "27 per cent year-on-year increase", totalling over two crore applications. Urban hubs like Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad contributed 60 lakh applications, while regions like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar added 82 lakh, showcasing a balanced regional contribution.

Notice for my removal was a rusted knife: Dhankhar

Dhankhar warns against systematic attempts to undermine national institutions and emphasizes media's role in holding public representatives accountable

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



New Delhi, Dec 24: Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar Tuesday said one should not use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery and asserted that the notice for his removal from the post was actually a "rusted" tool.

In his first reaction on the notice submitted by the Opposition INDIA bloc, Dhankhar said, "Just look at the notice against the vice president. Just look at the six links they have given."

"You'll be shocked. Chandra Shekhar ji once said, 'Never use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery'. The notice wasn't even a vegetable-cutting knife; it was rusted. There was haste."

The notice was rejected by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chair Harivansh.

"When I read it, I was astounded. But what surprised me more was that none of you read it. If you had, you

We are not in a position to settle scores. Because for the success of democracy, two things are inalienable: expression and dialogue

JAGDEEP DHANKHAR | VICE PRESIDENT

wouldn't have been able to sleep for days," he told a group of women journalists.

Dhankhar said any constitutional position has to be vindicated by commitment to sublimity, sterling qualities and constitutionalism.

"We are not in a position to settle scores. Because for the success of democracy, two things are inalienable: expression and dialogue," he said, according to an official statement.

Cautioning against orchestrated efforts to harm nation-

al interests, the vice president said these are fuel led in an orchestrated manner by forces that are determined to be inimical to the interest of the country.

"Their objective is to destroy, brick by brick, our constitutional institutions, slur the presidency, and mind you, who is the president? The first tribal woman to become president of this country," he remarked.

Referring to parliamentary debates, Dhankhar said the two Houses are in the news for the wrong reasons.

"Accountability must be enforced by media, the only conveyance to the people at large. Media can strike a chord with the people and generate pressure on public representatives," he said.

Obituary notice for Prof. (Dr.) Baishnab Charan Singh (1947-2024), Kataramalla, Pattamundai, Kendrapara, Odisha. Mentions his contributions to science and as a guiding mentor.

EAST COAST RAILWAY PUBLIC NOTICE FOR CLOSURE OF MANNED LEVEL CROSSING BETWEEN RAIKAKHOL & BAMUR STATIONS. Includes table with route, stations, LC No., Railway Km. of LC, and Manned/Unmanned status.

TENDER NOTICE from IREL, OSCOM for extension of MRSS existing facility by supply, installation, testing and commissioning of one 12.5 MVA transformer.

EAST COAST RAILWAY Letter No. ST-OT-CABLEROUTEMARKER-KUR-443, Dt. 13.12.2024. Name of the Work: PROVISION OF CABLE ROUTE MARKER FOR SIGNAL & TELECOM CABLE OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (A Govt. of India Enterprise) REQUIRED RESIDENTIAL FLATS ON LEASE IN BARGARH. Details of the lease and contact information.

GOVT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, PATNAGARH e-Procurement Notice IFB IDENTIFICATION NO.EEPTNG-Online-08/2024-25. Includes table with work details and procurement information.

leisure



JODIE ACCUSES JOSHUA OF FAILING TO PAY CHILD SUPPORT

British actress Jodie Turner-Smith has claimed she hasn't received any child support from Joshua Jackson. The actress split from Joshua in 2023. She claimed he has failed to give her any of the \$8,543 monthly payments for their four-year-old daughter Juno, or her \$28,641 a month in spousal support.

NOLAN'S NEXT IS BASED ON GREEK EPIC THE ODYSSEY

The details about the legendary filmmaker Christopher Nolan's star-studded next project at Universal have finally been revealed. According to a new X post from Universal Pictures, the film brings Homer's foundational saga *The Odyssey* to IMAX film screens for the first time and opens in theaters everywhere on July 17, 2026, reports *Variety*.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES
Someone new in your life is going to make you smile; remember, however, that it doesn't always have to be fur and diamonds. A song sung straight from the heart makes a greater impact, says Ganesha. Today's the right time to go out and do things which will make you proud later.

TAURUS
This day you will be inclined to act tough and pick up a fight with everyone whom you are likely to encounter, warns Ganesha. Those who know you well will be at a loss to make anything out of your belligerent attitude and may not be able to keep up with you for too long. You'll simply be making a lot of enemies, alienating a lot of good friends.

GEMINI
You will feel the need to pursue your passions today. You will give more time to your family and will spend as much time as possible with your children and will bestow your love and affection on them. You will be in an imaginative and romantic mood today.

CANCER
It is likely that you will reach an important milestone in life today. Keep in mind that your success may be a cause of envy for a few people, some of whom may want to harm you. You are left with two choices: either try to help them out of their troubles and miseries, or prepare for a battle.

LEO
It is a good day to renew old acquaintances and make new relationships. Your friends and relatives will probably visit you today. A jovial feeling will pervade your home. You may throw a grand party for your guests, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
Logic as well as emotions will hold sway in your relationships today. Emotionally you will feel a little confused and will swing between your feelings and what is actually expected of you. However, finally you will pay more heed to your inner voice rather than depending on the views of others. Ganesha says your gut feelings are very strong.

LIBRA
Ganesha advises you not to take stress about small issues or matters. To avoid tension and to gain mental peace it is advised you perform yoga or meditation. There will be pressure put on you regarding certain matters at the work-front. You should take decisions regarding critical matters only after carefully weighing the pros and cons.

SCORPIO
Retail therapy with your loved ones is a perfect recipe to have a good time! You will be more than willing to buy things of their choice. Hagglng will be a trait you have closeted today as you go about being lavish in your expenses, says Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS
Tedious day in store for you as hectic work is likely to keep you one toes; this is not-so-good-news. And well, it's time for some good news now. You will do so much running around for your work, that you will actually shed a few kilos of weight. Celebrate by treating your taste-buds, but with low-cal food!

CAPRICORN
Normally, others, especially colleagues get jealous of one's success, but yours is a different case. They will not only motivate you, but also guide you while you take up new projects and assignments. Not everyone is blessed with such cooperative colleagues, says Ganesha. Those of you who wish to change their current job, better wait for a while as times are not favouring you, today.

AQUARIUS
God helps those who help themselves. You have experienced this plenty of times as your efforts have been paid off. While your colleagues at work may pass negative comments at your work, your boss will not have any complaints with you. For investments purposes, real estate and construction seem to be a wise option, suggests Ganesha.

PISCES
You will be able to come up trumps against the competition today. You should be wary of hidden enemies, for they might be involved in slandering you. It is best to reach out to others and make friends before they take it upon themselves to hinder your progress.



Shreya's biggest reward

Mumbai: Actress Shreya Chaudhry, who is one of the leads in *Bandish Bandits Season 2*, said that veteran star Naseeruddin Shah's feedback and praise for her performance is her 'biggest reward'. Talking about her bond with the veteran actor, who played Panditji, Shreya said: "Naseeruddin Sir is my biggest source of inspiration. I learnt a lot from him in season one, and was lucky enough to observe him and workshop with him."

She went on to add, "So to receive a message from Sir after he watched season 2 is an honour of the highest order. His feedback and praise for the performance is my biggest reward. It's very gratifying and reassuring, and gives me a sense that I am growing as an actor."

A musical drama, *Bandish Bandits* features debutants Ritwik Bhowmik as Radhe Rathod, a Hindustani Classical musician and Shreya Chaudhry as Tamanna Sharma, a pop singer, who hail from different worlds of music.

Exploring the debate of music being a discipline versus a means of liberation, the series also features Arjun Rampal, Sheeba Chaddha and Atul Kulkarni among many other names. **IANS**

Sharvari values fans' recommendations

Mumbai: Actress Sharvari is currently spending her holiday time reading romantic books suggested by her fans. Sharvari took to her Instagram stories, where she shared a picture of the book she is reading currently. She revealed that she is reading *The Love Hypothesis* by Ali Hazelwood, which follows a Ph.D. candidate and a professor at Stanford University who

pretend to be in a relationship. "Thank you for your romantic novel recommendations I've made a list of all the book titles y'all Dm'd me. Most of y'all suggested - The Love Hypothesis.. So here goes! Excited to read it," she wrote as the caption. Sharvari, who is gearing up for her next *Alpha*, had recently shared that being the youngest spy is beyond a

dream come true for her. She expresses, "Honestly, I didn't even realise this fact until recently when I was doing success interviews for *Munhya's* Rs 100 crore feat and it was pointed out to me! Being the youngest spy of YRF Spy Universe is beyond a dream come true. She said that it is a responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity rolled into one. **IANS**



Bigul 2, Anubhav's birthday present



Bhubaneswar: After the success of *Bigul*, director Ajaya Padhi announced to have its sequel by unveiling its poster, Tuesday, the birthday of the movie's main lead, Anubhav Mohanty. Releasing the first look and title, *Bigul 2: The War Cry* Padhi said, "We value our commitments. Happy Birthday, Anubhav Mohanty. Good pieces of art take time to nurture #Bigul_2 10x grand. The shooting of the trilingual—Odia, Hindi, and Telugu—will begin in November 2025 and release during Dusshera of next year, added Padhi. Sai Darbar Films presented the first part starring Deva, Supriya, Prasanjit, Chittaranjan Tripathi, and others, while Anubhav had a special appearance in the movie, produced by Debananda Behera. The movie delved into religious fanaticism, unchecked ambitions, and community resilience. **PNN**

Tis the season of slogan-toting bags for Christ's sake!

Come the festive season of Yule tidings; in the spirit of giving and gifting, texts and slogans giving support to various *hoomanitarian* causes borne out of a gifted egalitarian spirit seem to be flying high. Correction! They seem to be hanging low on tote-bags, perhaps next flashing on *Santa's* red sack. Akin to a centuries old tradition of *stirring* the Christmas pudding in the east to west direction by every family member to honour the journey made by the *Magi*

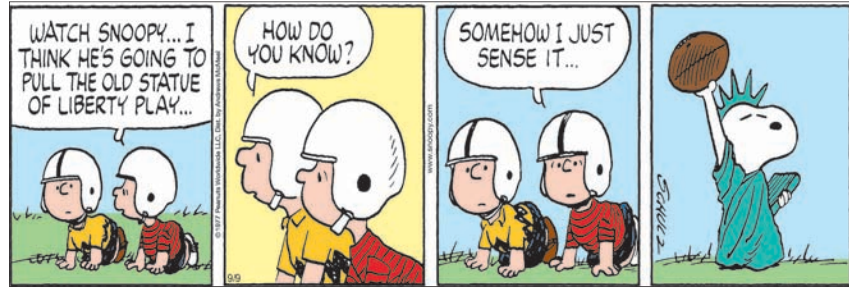


and fetch luck in the forthcoming year, the slogan-toting bag fest has taken the form of a *savoury pud* being stirred-up by certain Member Personnel with in-pourings from the east to the west (bank) with a dash from the past. If only the dangling of bags or angling for attention could shine good luck on the cause of the repressed and end human suffering. Here's hoping (sic)! Tiptoeing around the margins of few warped slogans as if they were wrapped Christ-

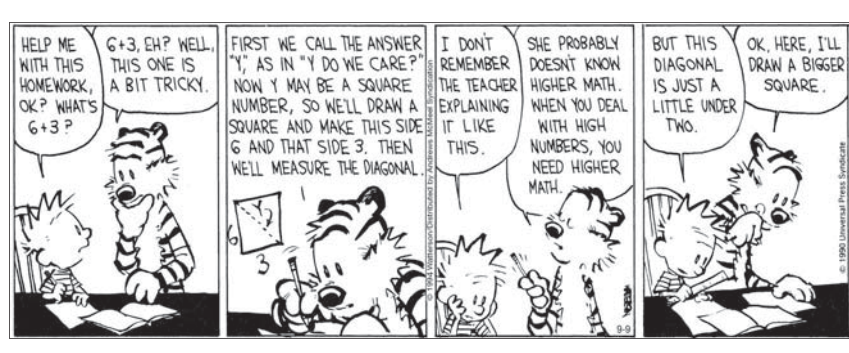
mas presents sprawled around the Christmas tree, I did come up with a few tote-bag mottos for someone closer home, our 3-year-old tigress *Zeenat*, *ahem!* much farther from home now. Would her jesty slogan be like "Lose the tranquilizers humans for I am already in tranquil, lost in the lushness offered by three dense states"? or a confession that says "Passing on genes can wait, passing up this adventure of a lifetime cannot!" or info that reads "Once I finish my

500k nature roam, I might just let the Kumki elephants guide me back home." Well, I need to immediately go cold turkey to break the addiction to this slogan-fest; turning festive attention to the upcoming roast turkey dinner at neighbour's Christmas gala and put my money where my mouth is or was a while back...err... a silver sixpence in the Christmas pudding, precisely. Good luck and Merry Christmas! **DR RACHNA RATH**

PEANUTS



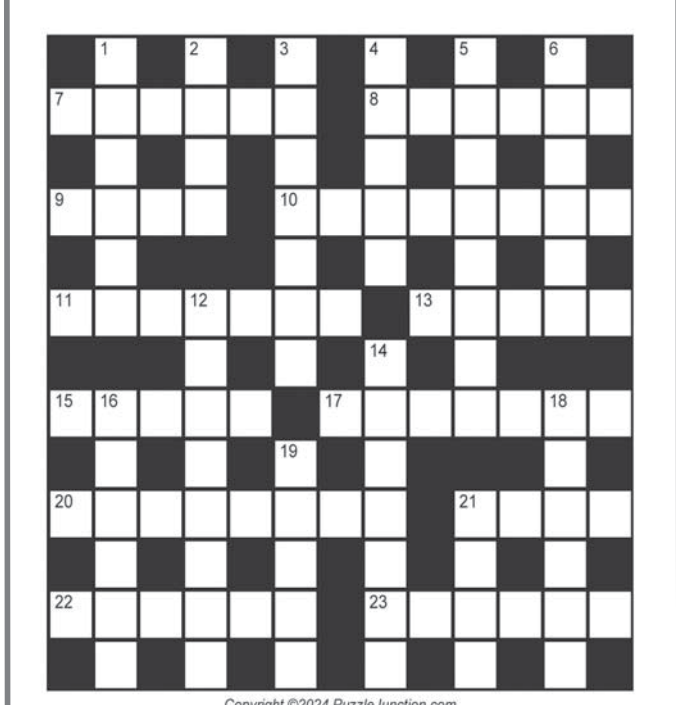
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



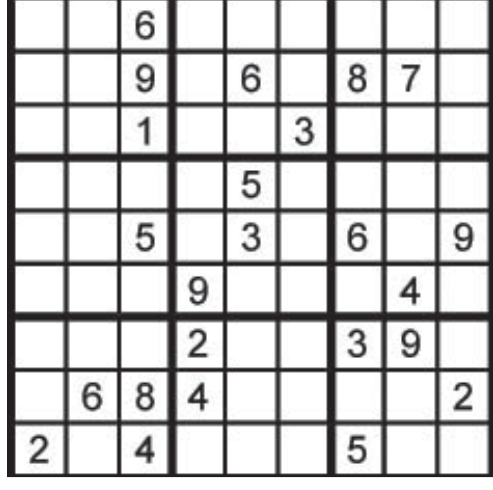
FUN post CROSSWORD



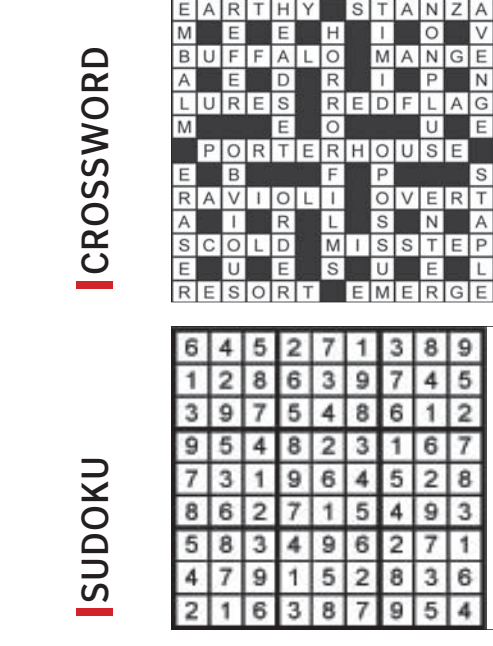
- Across**
- 7 Type of military marksman
 - 8 Brain-teaser
 - 9 Croquet area
 - 10 Shareholder
 - 11 Latticework
 - 13 Squallid
 - 15 Divers device
 - 17 Abandon
 - 20 Adjust the pitch, musically
 - 21 Scintilla
 - 22 The Louvre, e.g.
 - 23 American songbird
- Down**
- 1 Marked by injustice
 - 2 Gyrate
 - 3 Grassland
 - 4 Sauce
 - 5 Famous mythical Greek hero
 - 6 Shade of brown
 - 12 Stevedore, e.g.
 - 14 Ennui
 - 16 Early spring bloomer
 - 18 Tea starter
 - 19 Mild, as weather
 - 21 Horned goddess

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



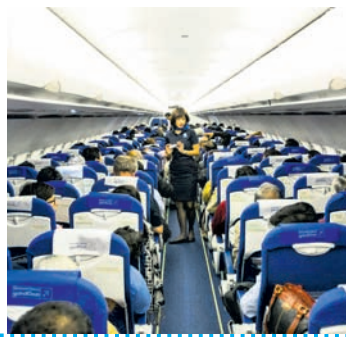
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



India is now achieving a global scale. We see immense potential in the long-term growth of the Indian automobile industry
HISASHI TAKEUCHI | MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA MD & CEO

INDIAN CARRIERS FLEW 12% MORE PASSENGERS IN NOV

Indian airlines carried 1.42 crore passengers on domestic routes in November, nearly 12 per cent more compared to the year-ago period, amid rising air traffic demand. In terms of domestic market share, IndiGo topped the list with a 63.6 per cent pie, followed by Air India (24.4 per cent), Akasa Air (4.7 per cent) and SpiceJet (3.1 per cent), according to the latest data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).



Sensex, Nifty settle almost flat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 24: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note in a volatile trade Tuesday, as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines awaiting further triggers amid persistent foreign fund outflows. After gyrating between highs and lows, the 30-share index declined 67.30 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 78,472.87. During the day, it dropped 142.38 points or 0.18 per cent to 78,397.79. The NSE Nifty dipped 25.80 points or 0.11 per cent to 23,727.65. As many as 2,019 stocks declined, while 1,977 advanced and 96 remained unchanged on the BSE. From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Power Grid, State Bank of India, Titan, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports and Infosys were among the laggards.

Small businesses drive jobs growth

Wage gains curbed by inflation

REUTERS

New Delhi, Dec 24: India's small businesses spanning the manufacturing, trade and services sectors added about 11 million jobs in the year to the end of September, with total employment rising to 120.6 million from 109.6 million the previous year, though wage growth was limited by high inflation. Job creation remains a major challenge for Prime Minister Narendra Modi despite the economy growing at an average annual rate of more than 7% over the last decade, and unemployment among young people remains persistently high.



The number of small manufacturing businesses, mainly family-owned units such as garment makers, auto component makers and food processing enterprises, grew to 20.15 million in the 2023/24 year from 17.83 million the previous year, the government report released Tuesday showed. Meanwhile, the total number

of small businesses across manufacturing, trade and services grew to 73.4 million from 65 million a year earlier. The survey covers the period from October 2023 to the end of September this year. "The unincorporated non-agricultural sector, comprising small manufacturing, trade and other services, plays a

crucial role in the economy... contributing significantly to employment," said Saurabh Garg, secretary at the Ministry of Statistics, while releasing the finding of the annual report. During the survey period, the number of small businesses grew by 12.84%, while employment showed robust growth of more than 10%, Garg added. However, wages were affected by inflation. The average annual wage in nominal terms per hired worker rose 13% in 2023/24 to 141,071 rupees (\$1,656), reflecting a modest increase compared with annual retail inflation of about 5.5%. Wages at small businesses, often located in rural areas and urban slums, remain much lower than the national average per-capita income of about \$2,800.

Rupee hits fresh record low of 85.20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 24: The rupee extended the slide for the second straight session and depreciated 9 paise to settle at a fresh all-time low of 85.20 (provisional) against the US dollar Tuesday, dragged by a strong greenback against major crosses overseas and subdued domestic equities. According to analysts, increased demand of dollar due to month-end payment obligation and the fear of an aggressive import tariff by the Donald Trump administration in the US strengthened the greenback. Besides, surging crude oil prices pushed the rupee down further, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.10 and touched the lowest ever level of 85.21 against the greenback during intra-day. The unit finally ended the session at a fresh all-time low of 85.20 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 9 paise from its previous close. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee fell to a fresh all-time low on weak domestic markets and a strong US dollar due to increased demand from importers and surging crude oil prices. He said a hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve and an improved US economy may further support the dollar.

Economy recovering from Q2 slowdown: RBI bulletin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 24: The Indian economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum witnessed in the September quarter, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand, according to a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bulletin released Tuesday. An article on the 'State of the Economy' in the December bulletin noted that the global economy continues to exhibit resilience with steady growth and moderating inflation.

"High frequency indicators (HFIs) for the third quarter of 2024-25 indicate that the Indian economy is recovering from the slowdown in momentum witnessed in Q2, driven by strong festive activity and a sustained upswing in rural demand," it said. The article further said the growth trajectory is poised to lift in the second half of 2024-25, driven mainly by resilient domestic private consumption demand. "Supported by record level foodgrains production, rural demand, in particular,

is gaining momentum. Sustained government spending on infrastructure is expected to further stimulate economic activity and investment," the authors said. Global headwinds, however, pose risks to the evolving outlook for growth and inflation, said the article authored by a team led by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra. India's GDP growth slowed to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent during the July-September period of the current fiscal year.

BIZ BUZZ

Top award for Panchtatva advertising agency
New Delhi: Panchtatva Advertising was awarded the Advertising Agency of the Year award at Outlook Business Spotlight - Achievers Awards 2024 held December 21 in Delhi. This honour was received by Sanjay Narayan Singh, owner of Panchtatva. BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala and Outlook Business Editor Neeraj Thakur, who were present as chief guests at the event, gave this honour to Singh. Earlier, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself had honoured Panchtatva for the excellent logo of International Yoga Day. It may be noted that Panchtatva had taken the responsibility of Modi government's Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra, in which the Prime Minister himself had participated in Varanasi. This agency has implemented ambitious programmes like Saurashtra Tamil Sangamam, whose theme song was tweeted by the Prime Minister himself. Panchtatva, which is responsible for advertising of various ministries of the Government of India, also does big brand campaigns of many big industrial houses. An eminent panel of judges of Outlook Business Spotlight - Achievers Awards 2024 carefully evaluated each nominee, ensuring a fair and transparent selection process.

Bank of Maharashtra opens 56th branch in Odisha
Bhubaneswar: Bank of Maharashtra, one of the premiere public sector banks, has opened a new branch at Gopalpur, Cuttack. Now, Bank of Maharashtra has five branches in Cuttack city and 56 branches in Odisha and 2531 branches in India. The bank also announced its plans to further strengthen its presence and customer reach in Bhubaneswar Zone. The new branch was inaugurated by Dr. Pragyanmita Sahoo, IES, Director, Institutional Finance, Govt. of Odisha, in presence of Zonal Manager Alok Kumar Mishra and Branch Manager Somya Ranjan Bindhani. Commenting on the recent branch expansion in Bhubaneswar, Mishra said: "We are happy to inaugurate one more branch in Cuttack, a rapidly growing and strategically important in the State of Odisha. This would be a step ahead to support our commitment to provide banking services to customers through a fast-expanding network of branches and other channels."

DADLS-69

PIONEERING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ODISHA THROUGH PEOPLE-FRIENDLY INITIATIVES

Under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, the Odisha Government has implemented groundbreaking initiatives and administrative reforms to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency, setting the benchmarks of good governance and people-centric administration.

Good Governance Practices Government of Odisha

Right to Public Service and Public Grievance Redressal

- 428 Public Services of 32 Departments under Right to Services Act
- Periodic public grievance hearing by Hon'ble Chief Minister
- Unified "Janasunani" portal for registration, monitoring and redressal of public grievances
- Dedicated Chief Minister's Grievance Cell (CMGC) for monitoring of grievance redressal
- 68% public grievances have been disposed during last six months

Capacity Building and Competence Mapping

- Mission Karmayogi implemented in the State
- More than 3.13 lakh State Government employees on-boarded in iGOT
- Enrollment of about 3.2 lakh for online courses
- About 2.10 lakh courses completed

e-Governance Services across the ULBs in the State for:

- Building Permission Approval
- Trade License & Property Tax
- Water supply & Sewerage system
- Marriage Registration

Employee Service Automation

- Paperless Pension processing and sanction (Online Pension)
- Online Personnel Management System (OPMS) for automation of HR management of employees other than State Government
- Quarter Management System (QMS-2.0)

Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)

- DBT for major social security scheme
- ₹ 4,180 Crore transferred to more than 80 lakh beneficiaries under "Subhadra Yojana"
- ₹ 12,120 Crore DBT transfer to more than 3.92 Crore beneficiary accounts during last six months.
- Dedicated DBT Odisha portal linked to DBT Bharat Portal to monitor DBT.

Department of General Administration & Public Grievance Government of Odisha

OIPR-1500/1/13/0327/2425

Khel Ratna furore: Manu admits nomination lapse

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: Paris Olympics' double bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker Tuesday admitted that "there has been a lapse may be on my part" while filing nominations for this year's National Sports Awards amid a raging controversy over her exclusion from the list of Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna awardees.

A day after the sports ministry had to do damage control by insisting that the list of awardees is yet to be finalised, the 22-year-old pistol ace took to social media to clarify her position on not being among those recommended for the country's highest sporting honour.

"With regards to ongoing issue for my nomination for the most prestigious Khel Ratna award -- I would like to state that as an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country. I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination which is being corrected," Bhaker wrote on X.

The Haryana shooter said her aim is to perform for the country and it would not change whether she gets an award or not.

This was after her father Ramkishan Bhaker and personal coach Jaspal Rana stated that the snub had affected her morale and drive to perform for the country.

"Awards and recognition keeps me motivated but are not my goal," she asserted.

"Irrespective of the award I shall remain motivated to win more medals for my country. It is a request to everyone, please do not speculate on this," she said.

Rana and Ramkishan lambasted the sports ministry and



With regards to ongoing issue for my nomination for the most prestigious Khel Ratna award -- I would like to state that as an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country. I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination which is being corrected

MANU BHAKER

the selection committee for overlooking her despite her monumental achievements.

However, the list is yet to be finalised as per the sports ministry, which said she is likely to be there when the names are finally revealed in a few days' time.

It is reliably learnt that men's hockey captain Harmanpreet

Singh and Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar have been short-listed for the Khel Ratna along with 30 Arjuna awardees, 17 of them from para disciplines.

The awards selection committee is headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice V Ramasubramanian and also includes former women's hockey captain Rani Rampal, boxer Vijender Singh, and cricket great Anil Kumble among others.

The committee is mandated to consider those who file their applications but if required, it is also empowered to discuss names which do not feature in that list.

Manu's exclusion was a shock due to the fact that her historic Olympic performance came just a few months back and is still fresh in public memory.

India-Pak clash Feb 23 in Dubai

CHAMPIONS TROPHY



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Dubai, Dec 24: India will take on defending champions and arch-rivals Pakistan in Dubai February 23 in the Champions Trophy 2025 as the International Cricket Council (ICC) Tuesday announced the schedule for the marquee tournament, set to begin February 19.

In the tournament opener, hosts Pakistan will take on New Zealand in Karachi with the final scheduled for March 9. The eight-team tournament will feature 15 matches, played across venues in Pakistan and Dubai. The teams are divided into two groups: Group A of the tournament features current Champions Trophy holders and hosts

Pakistan, along with India, New Zealand and Bangladesh, while Group B features Cricket World Cup 2023 champions Australia, alongside Afghanistan, England and South Africa.

Pakistan will host most of the matches, but all of India's group games and the first semi-final will be played in Dubai.

In Pakistan, Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi will be the three venues to play host to the tournament. Each Pakistan venue will feature three group games apiece, with Lahore hosting the second semi-final.

If India qualifies for the final, it will also be moved to Dubai; otherwise, Lahore will host the championship match. Reserve days are scheduled for both

FIXTURES	
Feb 19:	Pakistan v New Zealand, Karachi, Pakistan
Feb 20:	Bangladesh v India, Dubai
Feb 21:	Afghanistan v South Africa, Karachi, Pakistan
Feb 22:	Australia v England, Lahore, Pakistan
Feb 23:	Pakistan v India, Dubai
Feb 24:	Bangladesh v New Zealand, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
Feb 25:	Australia v South Africa, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
Feb 26:	Afghanistan v England, Lahore, Pakistan
Feb 27:	Pakistan v Bangladesh, Rawalpindi, Pakistan
Feb 28:	Afghanistan v Australia, Lahore, Pakistan
March 1:	South Africa v England, Karachi, Pakistan
March 2:	New Zealand v India, Dubai
March 4:	Semi-final 1, Dubai
March 5:	Semi-final 2, Lahore, Pakistan
March 9:	Final, Lahore (unless India qualify, when it will be played in Dubai)
March 10:	Reserve day

Groups:
Group A - Pakistan, India, New Zealand, Bangladesh
Group B - South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan, England

semi-finals and the final.

The Dubai leg begins February 20 with India taking on Bangladesh. Group B campaign begins February 21, with Afghanistan squaring up against South

Africa in Karachi.

A big weekend then kicks off with rivals England and Australia set to clash in Lahore February 22, with the much-anticipated Pakistan-India clash set for the day later.

M Raghu, Devika clinch men's, women's singles title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, Dec 24: Karnataka's M Raghu and Haryana's Devika Sihag secured their maiden senior national badminton titles, emerging champions in the men's and women's sections respectively at the 86th edition of the tournament here Tuesday.

Raghu, who won the Egypt international this year, saved three match points in the decider to beat former champion Mithun Manjunath 14-21, 21-14, 24-22 in the final that clocked

just under an hour.

For Devika, it was a befitting end to a successful season as



she ended the giant killing run of Shriyanshi Valishetty 21-15, 21-16 in the women's singles summit clash.

The 19-year-old from Haryana had claimed Swedish Open and Portugal International, besides reaching final at Estonian and Dutch International.

Junior National Champions Arsh Mohammad and Sanskar Saraswat added the senior nationals title to their trophy cabinet as they upset top seeds Naveen P and Lokesh V 12-21, 21-12, 19-21 in the men's doubles final.

India beat WI, clinch three-ODI series

Vadodara: A superlative batting display helped India seal the three-game ODI series with a massive 115-run win over West Indies in the second match here Tuesday. Opting to bat, India produced a solid batting show with Harleen Deol (115) hitting a century and Smriti Mandhana (53), Pratika Rawal (76) and Jemimah Rodrigues (52) scoring fifties to take India to 358 for five. In reply, WI folded for 243 in 46.2 overs with Hayley Matthews making a 109-ball 106 at the top.

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