



## Shruti's revelation

Actor Shruti Haasan shares how the separation of her parents taught her a very important lesson

LEISURE | P2



## Crackdown in Syria

Syria's new authorities launch a security crackdown in a coastal region where 14 cops were killed a day before

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Frauds surge

Bank frauds witness a significant rise in the first half of the current fiscal

BUSINESS | P11



## Kohli penalised

Virat Kohli to lose 20% match fee as he indulges in a physical altercation with Australia's Sam Konstas

SPORTS | P12

## 'Russian air defence system downed Azerbaijan plane'

REUTERS

**Baku, Dec 26:** An Azerbaijan Airlines flight that crashed in Kazakhstan Wednesday killing 38 people was downed by a Russian air defence system, four sources in Azerbaijan with knowledge of the probe told Reuters.

Azerbaijan Airlines flight J2-8243 came down near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from an area of Russia in which Moscow has used air defence systems against Ukrainian drone strikes in recent months. The Embraer passenger jet had flown hundreds of miles off its scheduled route from Azerbaijan's Baku to Grozny, in Russia's southern Chechnya region. It crashed on the opposite shore of the Caspian Sea after what Russia's aviation watchdog said was an emergency that may have been caused by a bird strike.

Officials did not explain why it had crossed the sea, but the crash happened after Ukrainian drone strikes this month hit Chechnya. The nearest Russian airport on the plane's flight path was closed Wednesday morning.

One of the Azerbaijani sources familiar with the Azerbaijani investigation into the crash told Reuters that preliminary results showed the plane was struck by a Russian Pantsir-S air defence system, and its communications were paralysed by electronic warfare systems on the approach into Grozny.

The source said, "No one claims that it was done on purpose. However, taking into account the established facts, Baku expects the Russian side to confess to the shooting down of the Azerbaijani aircraft."

Meanwhile, NATO called for a full probe into the cause of an Azerbaijan Airlines plane crash. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and victims of Azerbaijan Airlines flight J28243," NATO spokesperson Farah Dakhllallah said in a post on X.



**BATTLING BLAZE:** Civil Defence members put out a fire in a broadcast van following an Israeli strike that killed five journalists of Al-Quds Al-Youm television channel, according to medics with the Gaza health authorities, in the vicinity of Al-Awda hospital in Nuseirat in central Gaza Thursday

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Campus elections from next yr: CM

AGENCIES

**Cuttack, Dec 26:** Elections to student unions in colleges and universities, which were put on hold since 2018, will be held from next academic year, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said Thursday.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating the 49th session of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Majhi said, "Student union elections in colleges and universities have not been conducted in the state for many years. I am still at a loss as to why the previous government had stopped it."

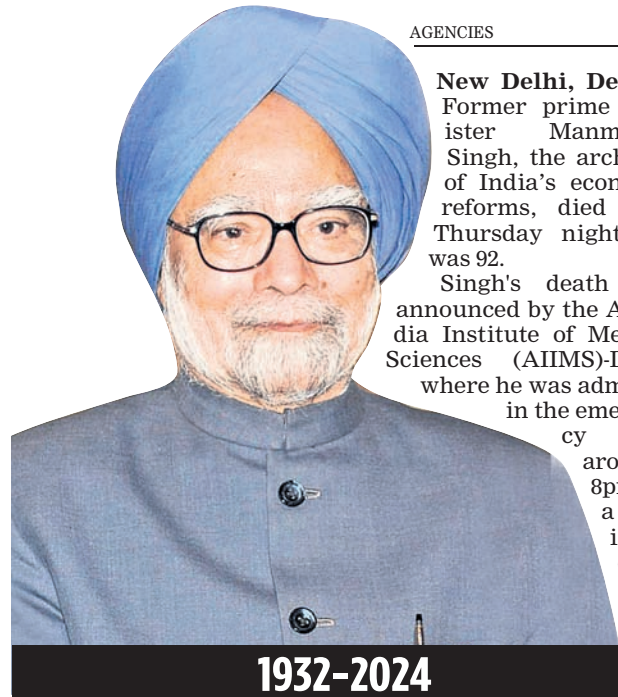
Majhi said his government is actively considering conducting student union elections in the next academic year and it will be held definitely.

The previous BJD government had stopped holding college elections since 2018 due to various reasons, including violence on campuses and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The ABVP, student wing of BJP, had filed a PIL in the Orissa High Court in September 2023 seeking direction for conducting student union elections in the state universities and colleges.

## Manmohan Singh no more

AGENCIES



1932-2024

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died here Thursday night. He was 92.

Singh's death was announced by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS)-Delhi, where he was admitted in the emergency ward around 8pm in a critical condition.

An AIIMS bulletin said he was treated for age-related medical conditions and had sudden loss of consciousness at home December 26.

"Resuscitative measures were started immediately at home. He was brought to medical emergency at AIIMS-Delhi at 8.06 pm. Despite all efforts, he could not be revived and was declared dead at 9.51pm," said the bulletin.

Singh, who was prime minister for two terms in the Congress-led UPA government from 2004 to 2014, had been in poor health for the last few months.

He is survived by wife Gursharan Kaur and three daughters.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and her mother Sonia Gandhi reached the hospital as soon as the news of his hospitalisation became

known. Singh, who was finance minister under the then prime minister PV Narasimha Rao, was the architect of economic reforms in 1991 that pulled India from the brink of bankruptcy and ushered in an era of economic liberalisation that is widely believed to have changed the course of India's economic trajectory.

Singh died as the Congress concluded its working committee meeting at Belagavi in Karnataka, where all top party leaders were present.

The Union government declared a seven-day mourning in honour of Singh, officials said.

They said the Cabinet will meet at 11am Friday to pay tributes to him. Singh's last rites will be conducted with full state honours, the officials added. **MORE P8**

## JITTERS AS CHINA APPROVES DAM

REUTERS

**Beijing, Dec 26:** China has approved the construction of what will be the world's largest hydropower dam, kicking off an ambitious project on the eastern rim of the Tibetan plateau that could affect millions downstream in India and Bangladesh.

The dam, which will be located in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, could produce 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually, according to an estimate provided by the Power Construction Corp of China in 2020.

That would more than triple the 88.2 billion kWh designed capacity of the Three Gorges Dam, currently the world's largest, in central China.

The project will play a major role in meeting China's carbon peaking and carbon neutrality goals, stimulate related industries such as engineering, and create jobs in Tibet, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

A section of the Yarlung Zangbo falls a dramatic 2,000 metres (6,561 feet) within a short span of 50 km (31 miles), offering huge hydropower po-

tential as well as unique engineering challenges.

The outlay for building the dam, including engineering costs, is also expected to eclipse the Three Gorges dam, which cost 254.2 billion yuan (\$34.83 billion). This included the resettling of the 1.4 million people it displaced and was more than four times the initial estimate of 57 billion yuan.

India and Bangladesh have nevertheless raised concerns about the dam, with the project potentially altering not only the local ecology but also the flow and course of the river downstream.

The Yarlung Zangbo becomes the Brahmaputra River as it leaves Tibet and flows south into India's Arunachal Pradesh and Assam and finally into Bangladesh.

Concerns arose in India as the dam besides empowering China to control the water flow, the size and scale of it could also enable Beijing to release large amounts of water flooding border areas in times of hostilities.

India too is building a dam over Brahmaputra in Arunachal Pradesh.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



This year's Christmas was no fun—I managed to disrupt only one celebration

India mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished leaders, Dr. Manmohan Singh ji. Rising from humble origins, he rose to become a respected economist... As our Prime Minister, he made extensive efforts to improve people's lives... In this hour of grief, my thoughts are with the family of Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji, his friends and countless admirers. Om Shanti

NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

Undoubtedly, history shall judge you kindly, Dr. Manmohan Singh ji! With the passing of the Former Prime Minister, India has lost a visionary statesman, a leader of unimpeachable integrity, and an economist of unparalleled stature... His enduring legacy of ushering in India's growth, welfare, and policies of inclusivity will forever be cherished. May his soul rest in eternal peace

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE | CONG PRESIDENT

Deeply saddened by the passing of former Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji. His dedication, integrity, and calm leadership will always be remembered. May Mahaprabhu Jagannath bless his soul and grant him eternal peace. Om Shanti

MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI | ODISHA CM

## CROP LOSS CLAIMS LIVES OF 2 FARMERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kendrapara/Berhampur, Dec 26:** Two farmers died in the state as they were allegedly upset over Kharif crop loss due to the recent unseasonal rainfall.

One farmer allegedly died by suicide in Ganjam district, while the second suffered a heart attack in Kendrapara, their family members claimed. In the first incident, a 64-year-old farmer allegedly died by suicide after unseasonal rainfall damaged his crops in Barang under Ganjam district's Chhatrapur police limits Thursday.

The deceased was identified as Banamali Penthei. He allegedly ended his life after returning from his field, where the near-to-harvest paddy crops were submerged due to the untimely rainfall, his

family members claimed.

In the second incident, Gourahari Mallick, 52, a resident of Santhapura in Derabish block of Kendrapara district, suffered a cardiac arrest after finding out his crop was damaged due to the unseasonal downpour.

He was rushed to Kendrapara district headquarters hospital, where doctors declared him dead Wednesday. Mallick had reportedly borrowed ₹60,000 for agrarian work and had hoped to repay the loan after the Kharif yield, said Gayadhar Dhal, the president of the district Krusaka Sabha, a CPM-affiliated outfit.

Meanwhile, Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari said insurance companies have been asked to assist the insured farmers without delay.

## LS polls: Women outnumber men in exercising franchise

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** As many as 64.64 crore voters exercised their franchise in the Lok Sabha polls held earlier this year with women voters outnumbering men, according to statistical data released by the Election Commission, Thursday.

The female voter turnout stood at 65.78 per cent as compared to 65.55 per cent for male electors, the EC said.

EC functionaries asserted that such granular data is not shared by any of the election management bodies in democracies across the world.

The data on Lok Sabha polls 2024 and four Assembly elections -- Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh -- held alongside parliamentary polls comes against the backdrop of allegations of

non-disclosure by the EC.

Referring to women participation in the polls, EC said the number of female candidates was 800 compared to 726 in 2019.

Maharashtra had the highest number of women candidates with 111 in the fray, followed by 80 in Uttar Pradesh and 77 in Tamil Nadu.

But at the same time, out of the total 543 Lok Sabha constituencies, 152 had no women candidates. A total of over 97.97 crore citizens had registered themselves as electors as compared to over 91.19 crore in 2019 -- an increase of 7.43 per cent.

Out of these registered electors, 64.64 crore had cast votes in 2024, compared to 61.4 crore in 2019, the EC said. According to the poll panel, any Indian citizen who registers in the electoral roll is defined as an elector. The elector who even-



tually votes is called voter.

Total votes polled -- using EVM and postal ballot option -- stood at 64,64,20,869. Votes polled on EVMs alone stood at 64,21,39,275, with 32,93,61,948 male voters and 31,27,64,269 female voters.

A little over 13,000 registered third gender voters exercised their franchise (27.09 per cent), according to the data.

Nearly 43 lakh electors used the postal ballot option to vote.

The Dhubri parliamentary constituency in Assam registered the highest turnout of 92.3 per cent, while Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir registered the lowest turnout of 38.7 per cent, compared to 14.4 per cent in 2019. According to the data issued by the EC, as many as 11

## 86% candidates lost deposit: EC

About 86 per cent of the over 8,300 candidates who contested the Lok Sabha elections earlier this year lost their deposits. According to the EC, a total of 12,459 nominations were filed in 2024, compared to 11,692 in 2019. Out of the over 12,000 who filed nominations, 8,360 qualified as contesting candidates after rejection of nominations and withdrawals across the country. The number of contesting candidates in 2019 Lok Sabha elections was 8,054. According to the data, 7,190 of the candidates lost their deposits, which comes to 86 per cent. In 2019 Lok Sabha polls, 6923 candidates had lost deposit.

parliamentary constituencies saw voting percentage of less than 50 per cent. Repolls, the EC pointed out, were held in 40 polling stations or 0.0038 per cent of the total 10.52 lakh polling stations as compared to 540 in 2019.



# leisure

## MORE TROUBLE FOR JUSTIN BALDONI

Things are getting intense for Justin Baldoni. After Blake Lively accuses her *It Ends With Us* co-star of sexual harassment and smear campaign, his former publicist, Stephanie Jones sued him over contract breach.

## BABY DRIVER ACTOR MEEK DIES AT 16

Hudson Joseph Meek, the 16-year-old actor famed for his role in *Baby Driver*, sadly passed away after falling from a moving vehicle. His family shared tributes, highlighting his talent and impact. Hudson's career included roles in *MacGyver* and *Legacies*.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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#### ARIES

Ganesha predicts success if you're involved with the media. Here's a golden chance to showcase your talent, as all eyes are on you. Your skills and talent will be acknowledged, and short-term goals will see fulfillment.

#### TAURUS

You are likely to succeed in everything you start today, predicts Ganesha. Financial transactions will be both satisfying and profitable in the afternoon. The day may not turn out to be as exciting as you may have expected. A thrilling evening will compensate for a rather tiring day, expects Ganesha.

#### GEMINI

Today, you will meet someone special, who will stay in your life for good, predicts Ganesha. Your kind and considerate nature will be at its magnanimous best in the afternoon. At the workplace, you will have a fabulous time if you are into marketing and advertising.

#### CANCER

Enough of waiting on the sidelines, watching others take credit for all your hard work. Today, you will stake your claim to what is rightfully yours, the due credit for your work. Surprisingly for you, your peers and superiors will not only appreciate your work without any fuss, but also share with you the big plans they have in store for you.

#### LEO

Ganesha foresees that today, you will be gripped by the desire to shop till you drop, even if it means having to spend a small fortune from your hard-earned savings! You have no problem with that, especially if all the money-spending is being undertaken to please your sweetheart.

#### VIRGO

All you have to do is start what you intend to do, and its success will automatically fall in. Such is the day today for you, says Ganesha. Financial transactions will be rewarding. However, the day may not be as exciting as you expect. But then again, don't expect - just go with the flow, says Ganesha.

#### LIBRA

You are at your best when communicating with others, and your silver-tongued speech will charm many. Your day will be spent in negotiating, meetings, and in interacting with people to get things done. At work, you may be put in charge of some investigative task.

#### SCORPIO

Take the lonely road today in business ventures, advises Ganesha. Professionally, you are capable of managing massive missions. Be set to administer your department all by yourself. You shall stake a claim as a great team leader today, says Ganesha.

#### SAGITTARIUS

A curious blend of good and bad, foresees Ganesha. While at home, you will receive good support to renovate your home. But, it may end up being more than a bit too heavy on your pocket. A long day's slog will earn you much praise at work.

#### CAPRICORN

Where there is a will there is a way. True, but even if it's an action driven by a strong will, a dying man cannot wage a war. You will have to be extra careful about your health today, says Ganesha. This besides, you are likely to strike a profitable deal with your clients, which may turn out to be a big achievement for your company. This will also be the right time to indulge in entertaining pursuits.

#### AQUARIUS

You have been bitten by the explorer's bug. Today, you could be pouring over an encyclopedia, a National Geographic magazine, or even tour your town, discovering little eateries and joints hitherto unknown. Ganesha says that if you include friends, it will be so much more fun!

#### PISCES

You have been ruminating on your past performance for quite some time now, and today will be the day when you attempt to better it, says Ganesha. Your peers may try to outwit you, but you will manage to pre-empt them with consummate skill. Meditative techniques will help you remain calm.

## Shruti's lesson from parents' separation

**Hyderabad:** Shruti Haasan is known for not just her acting but also known to inspire many as she's been quite honest about her feelings and spread awareness regarding one's mental health. In a recent interview, the actress has spoken about how the separation of her parents affected her and taught her a very important lesson, which is to be independent as a woman.

Shruti said during a podcast with *Pinkvilla*, "For me, when they were together and happy, they were the most beautiful couple I have ever seen because they used to work together, go the sets together, mumma would do her costumes... The whole family was into movies... I was also in the costume department, my sister (Akshara) was in the AD (assistant director) department, she also worked in the art department. So we were all a family of film people."

She further added, "But I have seen the other side of it as well. When my parents split up, everything changed. That's when I realised the value of financial independence, personality dependent independence. Especially being a daughter and seeing that mumma walked out of a marriage, it taught me an important lesson on why it is important for a woman to be independent."

Shruti emphasised that a woman's independence needs to be celebrated.



## Arjun falls victim to online scam

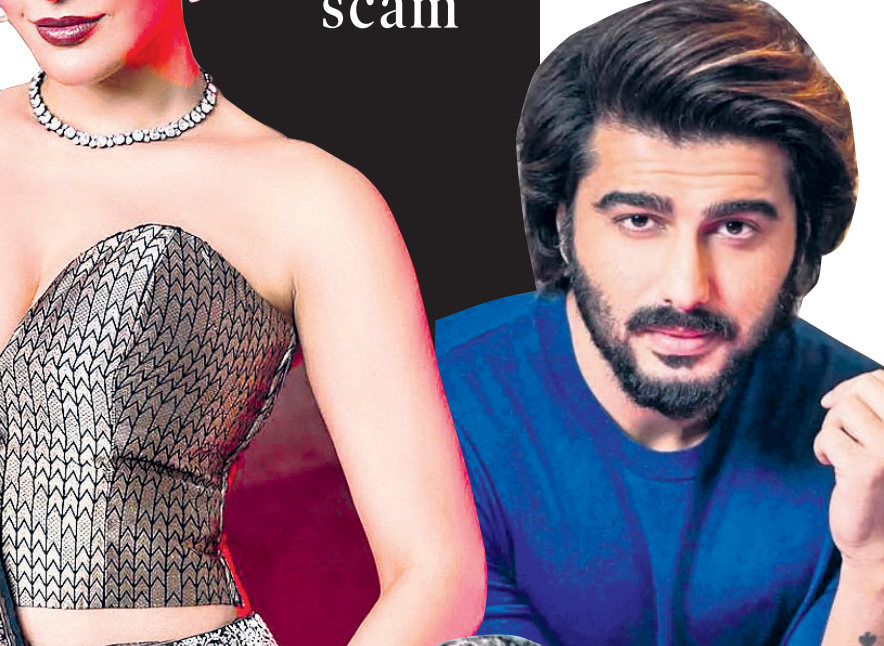
**Mumbai:** Actor Arjun Kapoor recently took to his social media to warn his fans about an online scam involving someone impersonating his manager.

The actor shared a post on Instagram, cautioning his followers about a fake account that had been reaching out to people, claiming to offer

opportunities to connect with him. The scammer had been targeting unsuspecting fans, using the actor's name to build credibility and trick people into sharing personal information or clicking on malicious links.

Arjun shared a post that read, "It's come to my attention that a random account is reaching out to people claiming to be my manager and offering opportunities to connect with me. Please know that these messages are not legitimate, and I have no association with them. I would never allow anyone to click on links or share personal details through such means. Please don't fall for these scams-stay safe and alert. If you come across such messages. Kindly report the account immediately. Have a safe and merry Christmas."

Work-wise, Arjun Kapoor was recently seen portraying the modern-day version of Raavan, Danger Lanka, in Rohit Shetty's *Singham Again*. The film also features an ensemble cast including Ajay Devgn, Tiger Shroff, Ranveer Singh, Akshay Kumar, and Kareena Kapoor Khan.



## Salman's special gift for ex Sangeeta

goodies. In the post, she tagged the *Tiger 3* actor. The video was set to Andy Williams' classic song, "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

In a follow-up post, Sangeeta wrote, "It's that time of the year again! Salman Khan's birthday or as his fans would say #bhaikabuday. The man who inspires millions across the globe. Join in making his birthday unforgettable!"

Sangeeta and Salman reportedly began dating in 1986, sharing a serious relationship that lasted eight years. Their bond was so strong that they even made plans to marry, with wedding invitations reportedly printed.

However, their love

story took an unexpected turn when the wedding was called off just a month before the big day.



## Mrunal takes trip down memory lane

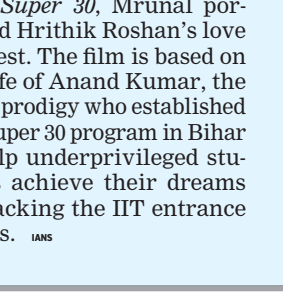
**Mumbai:** Actress Mrunal Thakur recently took her fans on a nostalgic journey by sharing her audition clip for the 2019 film *Super 30*.

Directed by Vikas Bahl, the biographical drama starred Hrithik Roshan as Anand Kumar, the mathematician who founded the acclaimed *Super 30* program for underprivileged students.

Thursday, Mrunal posted a throwback video on her Instagram Stories, showcasing her audition for the film. In the clip, director Vikas Bahl is seen praising the actress, stating she consistently stood out during the selection process.

In the video, Vikas can be heard telling casting director Mukesh Chhabra, "I was struck. At some point in the beginning, I realized she was the one. Even though we tested her three or four times and there were other girls, she was always ahead."

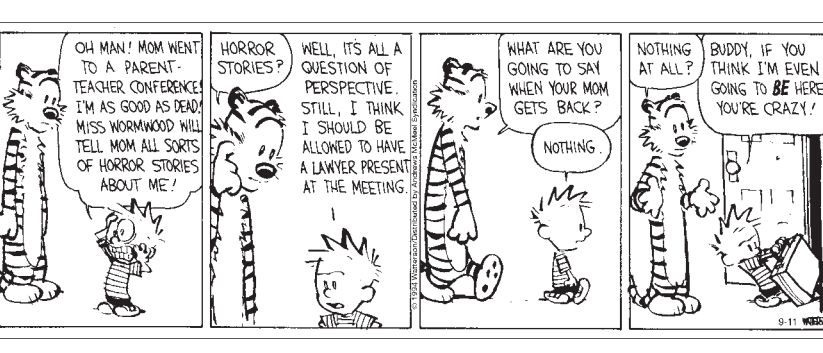
In *Super 30*, Mrunal portrayed Hrithik Roshan's love interest. The film is based on the life of Anand Kumar, the math prodigy who established the Super 30 program in Bihar to help underprivileged students achieve their dreams of cracking the IIT entrance exams.



### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

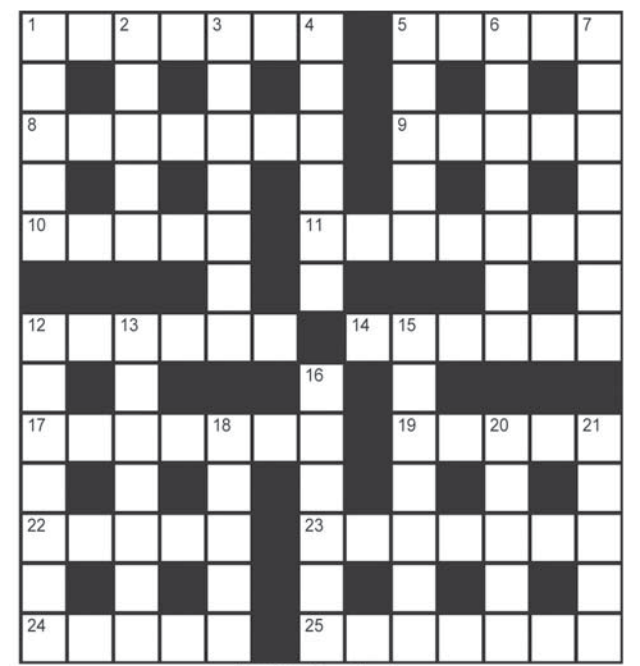


### BREVITY



### FUN POST

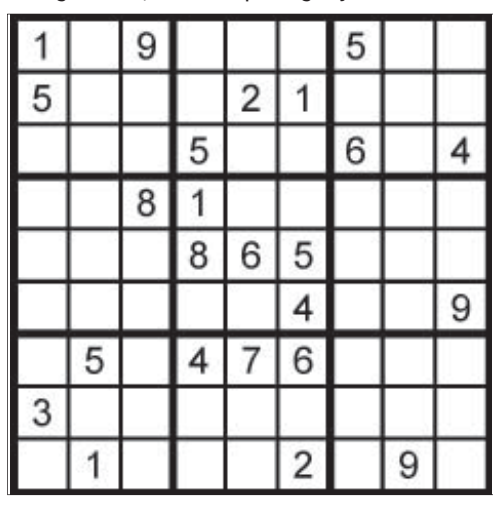
### CROSSWORD



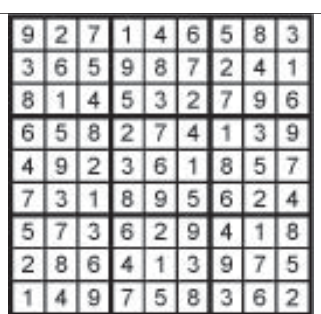
- Across**
- 1 Seafood choice
  - 5 Mantles
  - 8 Tizzy fit
  - 9 Nickel, e.g.
  - 10 Japanese restaurant offering
  - 11 Concise
  - 12 Gaucho, e.g.
  - 14 Worthy principles
  - 17 Soft Italian cheese
  - 19 Barely beats
  - 22 Thunderstorm product
  - 23 A place for gun control?
  - 24 Swamp plants
  - 25 Patio
  - Down**
  - 1 Egyptian water lily
  - 2 Music makers
  - 3 Lhasa apso, e.g.
  - 4 The sound of thunder
  - 5 Funnyman
  - 6 Porky's love
  - 7 Pieces together
  - 12 Port of call
  - 13 Bug
  - 15 Don Quixote was one
  - 16 Empty
  - 18 Low cards
  - 20 Dutch export
  - 21 Fashion

### 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



Artiste Srishti Mohapatra performs on the concluding day of Biswa Odissi Utsav 2024 at Bhanja Kala Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Thursday



downtown

We failed to counter BJP's lies: Naveen

ABOUT HIS SUCCESSOR, THE FORMER CM SAYS HE IS YET TO THINK ABOUT THIS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 26: Asserting that the BJP stormed to power in Odisha by lying to people, BJD chief Naveen Patnaik Thursday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah's alleged remarks on BR Ambedkar were "very unfortunate".



any wrong." Asked about his successor, Patnaik said, "Well, I'm here for a long time. I have not thought about this."

On BJD's defeat, Patnaik said, "I understand that many people have questions about how we lost the last election. I will address those questions today. I want to emphasise that we did not lose the trust of people. The BJP came to power by spreading falsehoods, making empty promises, and misleading the public."

He asserted that even after telling so many lies, BJP got fewer votes than the BJD. "People of Odisha have come to know that the BJP came to power by telling lies," he stated.

Patnaik said BJD will continue to serve the people of Odisha for the next hundred years. He promised that the party would continue its fight against the Centre's alleged atrocities and protect the interests of Odisha as a strong regional party.

"I admit that the BJD could not successfully counter their lies,

their negative campaign and false narratives on social media. Now, the people are realising that they came to power by making false promises," he added.

On the six-month-old Mohan Charan Majhi government, Patnaik said, "In the last six months, the biggest burden on the people has been the rising prices. From pulses and rice to oil and vegetables, the costs of all essential items have skyrocketed. Today, every family is struggling due to these price hikes; farmers are suffering because of the lack of sincerity in paddy procurement; and the women of the Mission Shakti groups are in distress. After so much hardship for the citizens, when will this government awaken from its complacency?"

Responding to Patnaik's claims, Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said, "Naveen Babu was in power for 24 years, but people of his native district could not get enough drinking water. There are taps, but no water. What can we say about this?" Pradhan asked.

Shah on two-day visit to Odisha from Dec 28

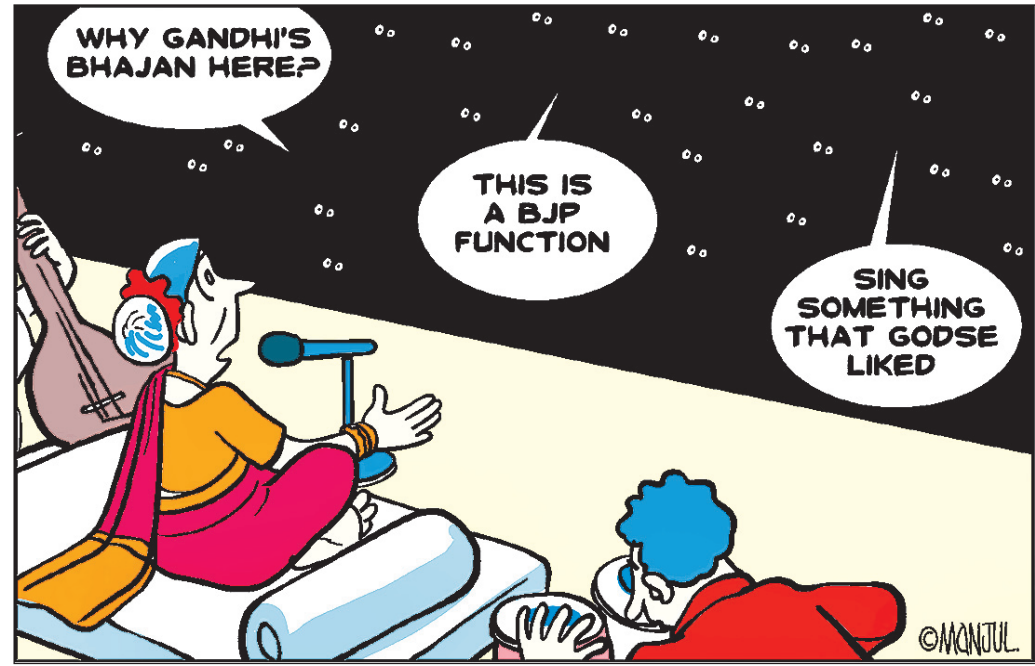
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 26: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will embark on a two-day visit to Odisha from December 28, during which he will hold an interactive meeting with BJP leaders and workers and attend several other events, a senior party leader said Thursday.

BJP's Odisha in-charge Vijaypal Singh Tomar said that Shah will arrive in Bhubaneswar on December 28 night and stay till the evening of December 29.

December 29, Shah will attend a programme of ITBP, and interact with BJP MPs, MLAs and workers at an event in Kalinga Stadium. Shah will also virtually attend an important meeting of BJP state unit presidents, organisational secretaries, in-charges, deputy-in-charges, and national office bearers.

POLITICKLE by MANJUL



Dy CMs, ministers assigned district roles

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 26: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday assigned responsibilities of taking care of development activities in various districts to deputy CMs and ministers.

According to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo has been given the responsibilities of Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur districts while another Deputy CM Pravati Parida will look after Balasore and Bhadrak.

Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari has been entrusted with the responsibility for Sundargarh and Deogarh, and Panchayati



Raj and Drinking Water Minister Rabi Narayan Naik for Subarnapur and Bolangir districts.

The responsibility of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts has been given to School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond, while Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra

Patra will look after Angul and Sambalpur.

Law, Works and Excise Minister Prithviraj Harichandan has been asked to take responsibility for Gajapati and Ganjam, Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling for Jharsuguda and Bargarh, and Bibhuti Bhusan Jena for Nabarangpur and Rayagada.

Among others, Housing and Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mahapatra has been designated as 'Prabhari Mantri' for Kandhamal and Boudh districts, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia for Kalahandi and Nuapada, Sports and Youth Services Minister Suryabanshi Suraj for Kendrapara and Jajpur, Co-operation Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta for Nayagarh and Khurda, Fisheries and Animal Resources Development Minister Gokulananda Mallik for Malkangiri and Koraput and Industries, Skill Development and Technical Education Minister Sampad Chandra Swain for Puri and Dhenkanal.

CM Majhi unveils Lord Jagannath's calendars



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 26: Ahead of New Year, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday unveiled the desktop and wall-hanging calendars for 2025, published by the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA).

The release ceremony, held at a simple function in Bhubaneswar, was attended by Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan, Chief Secretary Manoj Aguja, SJTA Chief Administrator Arabinda Padhee, and

other dignitaries.

The desktop calendar showcases stunning photographs and sand art created by local artists, highlighting the cultural richness of the state. Meanwhile, the seven-page wall calendar, featuring images of Lord Jagannath on the chariot, will be available for purchase at temple information centers in Puri and Bhubaneswar starting January 1, 2025.

This annual release aims to offer devotees a tangible connection to Lord Jagannath's divine presence throughout the coming year.

OUTR's nat'l conference from tomorrow in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 26: The 38th annual conference of the Orissa Chemical Society (OCS) and the national conference on Advancements in Materials Chemistry (AMC) will be held from December 28 to 30 under the auspices of the School of Basic Sciences and Humanities at the Odisha University of Technology and Research (OUTR) here.

Distinguished delegates representing prestigious institutions, including IITs, NITs, NISER, BARC and other prominent academic centres across the country will converge to contribute to the scholarly gathering. Sessions includes keynote addresses, technical presentations, and discussions on cutting-edge developments in materials chemistry, highlighting the synergy between academia and industry.

"It seeks to provide a leading platform for advancing material research and facilitating collaboration among academia and industry professionals," said conference convener and School of Basic Sciences and Humanities head BR Das.

The conference underscores OUTR's commitment to promoting excellence in education and research, positioning the Capital city as a hub for scientific innovation and discourse.

State to get three tigers from MP

Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav has directed for translocation of 15 tigers from the state to Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Odisha



PNN & AGENCIES

Bhopal/Bhubaneswar, Dec 26: Even as the forest officials of Odisha are having a harrowing time to track and tranquilize tigress 'Zeenat', which was brought from Maharashtra, and is roaming in Jharkhand and West Bengal bordering areas, the Madhya Pradesh government has directed for translocation of three big cats to Odisha.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has directed for translocation of 15 tigers from Madhya Pradesh to Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, an official said Thursday.

As per the order, 12 tigresses and three tigers will be handed over to the three states after taking permission from the Central government, he said. No time period has been specified for the process of shifting the felines.

Under the process, the big cats will be translocated from Bandhavgarh, Pench and Kanha tiger

reserves in MP, the official said.

Six tigresses and two tigers will be translocated to Chhattisgarh, while Rajasthan will get four tigresses. Besides, a tiger and two tigresses will be sent to Odisha, he said.

CM Yadav has directed that the translocation process should be carried out under the supervision of an authorised veterinarian and to ensure the felines remain out of danger during the shifting procedure.

The states receiving the tigers will bear the entire cost of translocation, the official said.

As per the 'Status of Tigers: Co-predators & Prey in India-2022' report released by the National Ti-

ger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Wildlife Institute of India, MP accounted for the highest number of 785 striped animals in the country, followed by Karnataka (563) and Uttarakhnad (560).

The MP government recently notified Ratapani forest as the eighth tiger reserve of the state.

The NTCA has given approval to nine tiger reserves in the state. The state government is yet to notify Madhav National Park as a tiger reserve. The other tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh are Kanha, Satpura, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Sanjay Dubri, Panna and Veerangana Durgavati.

Advertisement for RBI KYC activation. It features a man holding a smartphone displaying 'KYC DONE' and text asking 'Has your bank account become inoperative?'. It includes contact information for the Reserve Bank of India and a QR code.



FOCUS AGRICULTURE POLICY

# KNOW THY FARMER



**Farming needs support for two oft-repeated but compelling reasons: food and employment securities in the country**

family income at ₹10,695. Of this, crop production provides ₹5,298 and the rest is coming from allied activities. What is imperative is increasing farmers' income and increasing it sufficiently from all these sources to retain the farmers in farming for social purpose. Farming needs support for two oft-repeated but compelling reasons: food and employment securities in the country. If Indian farmer doesn't feed above 1,400 million people, who can? The FAO estimates 2,841 million tons of cereals production in 2024, 0.6% less than its earlier expectation. More importantly, the entire food produced in a year sometimes is almost consumed in the same year.

If the huge labour force is displaced from agriculture because the sector is not able to provide quality employment and decent incomes there is no other sector in the country that can absorb it; 45.76% of the workforce is in agriculture as per 2022-23 data.

The new commissions including the one that has already started functioning in Telangana will do well to understand the basics and prepare metadata of studies and recommendations of all previous commissions. The Andhra government should thoroughly review the commission it appointed in 2014, the Radhakrishna Commission's report, and move ahead from that base. The urgent concern of not only the new commissions but of the agriculture departments of the states and the Centre should be to thoroughly scrutinise the earlier studies and recommendations and know the farm basics in terms of the need to support farming and farmers. We can again say what Pandit Nehru said long back: "Everything can wait, but not agriculture!"

*The writer is a development economist and a commentator on economic and social affairs.*

and person with rich experience in farming and related issues.

If this present commission in Telangana or any other commission that may come up in the country in the future does not want to produce just another report but is serious about its task, should begin its work with a clear understanding of what the farmer actually needs; should begin by telling the farmer and other stakeholders what the committee desires to do to meet their aspirations.

Specifically, these commissions must first ponder over three basic questions: 1) Who is a farmer? 2) What is farming? And 3) Why should the government support farming?

Who are the farmers? The producers, the food givers to the nation, and the actual tillers of the soil are farmers. In other words, the small, marginal and tenant farmers are the real farmers who need support. The average size of 146.45 million operational holdings in India was 1.08 hectares as per the agriculture census 2015-16. It has come down to 0.74 (NABARD's All India Financial Inclusion Survey 2021-22). The small (17.62) and marginal farmers' (68.54%) share together in total holdings was 86.07 which is estimated to be 92% by 2021-22. Besides this, the tenants constitute about 35 to 40% of farming activity although their accurate number is not available for no records of them are maintained. Another noteworthy thing for

the commission is that the number of agricultural labourers has been steeply increasing over the years while the cultivators' number is coming down drastically. The share of labourers in total agricultural workers has increased from 28.1% in 1951 to 54.9% in 2011 as per the Agriculture Ministry's statistics (2023) whereas the cultivators' share has come down from 71.9% to 45.1% over the same period. Does it mean farmers are losing whatever land they have and becoming farm labourers? Why? These are also the questions the commissions should study and tell us while prescribing the remedies to correct the course.

Now what is farming? It comprises several things, not only crop production. Assessing the relative significance of all these components of farming should be among the priority concerns of commissions. Agriculture and allied sectors contributed 17.4%, in current prices, to the GVA in 2023-24; that is 0.8% less than the preceding year's 18.2% share. The share of crop production in this was only 10.1% of GDP. The rest was provided by livestock (5.5%); fishing (1.3%) and forestry (1.3%). So, about 50% of income is accruing from livestock, fishing, and forestry. These activities need their due attention and support.

Whatever may be the composition of farming, the farmers' incomes are pitifully low. The NSS Survey 2019 puts the monthly average of farmers'

To be fair to them, post-independent governments, both Central and state, have undertaken innumerable studies, arranged agencies, and set up commissions to develop farming and support farmers' incomes. The real problem is that the recommendations of these commissions and studies are not taken seriously nor implemented fully in their true spirit, but, newer studies are commissioned to continue to do good for the farm sector. A glaring example is the Central government's non-implementation of the MSP recommendation of M.S. Swaminathan's National Commission on Farmers (2004) while continually advocating for raising farm incomes.

Alleviating the farm crisis and ensuring farmers' welfare has been the stated priority of the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana governments; both at the time when they were together as one state and thereafter after 2014. While the united Andhra government during YS Rajasekhara Reddy's time constituted a Farmers' Welfare Commission under the chairmanship of Jayathi Ghosh, N.Chandrababu Naidu's government of the bifurcated Andhra in 2014 appointed a commission for the inclusive and sustainable development of Andhra under the chairmanship of R.Radhakrishna. This panel submitted its report in 2016 which seems to have been never seriously examined by the government let alone the implementation of its recommendations. This author being a member of its subcommittee on Agriculture Investment, Credit Flow and Farmers' Indebtedness is a witness to the painstaking work of that commission and its comprehensiveness.

Now, the Telangana government has appointed another body, Telangana Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Commission for a two-year term under the chairmanship of M.Kodanda Reddy a senior Congress leader



PSM Rao

**AGRICULTURE AND ALLIED SECTORS CONTRIBUTED 17.4% TO THE GROSS VALUE ADDED IN 2023-24**



SRI AUROBINDO

Material things are not to be despised - without them there can be no manifestation in the material world

## Systemic Discrimination

Convinced that their interpretation of Islam is the only legitimate one, Afghanistan's Taliban leaders continue to issue decrees that strip the country's women and girls of their rights and freedoms. Their latest edict bans Afghan women - already prohibited from speaking in public - from praying aloud or reciting the Quran in the presence of other women. "When women are not permitted to call takbir [Allahu akbar] or athan [the Islamic call to prayer], they certainly cannot sing songs or music," declared Mohammad Khalid Hanafi, the minister for the propagation of virtue and prevention of vice.

Just months ago, there was some hope that the Taliban might ease its restrictions on women and girls' education. Instead, the regime seems intent on entrenching its gender apartheid system. In response, Richard Bennett, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan - who remains barred from entering the country - has launched a review of the Taliban's repressive policies, calling its latest decree a "pivotal moment."

Meanwhile, the UN's Sixth Committee (Legal) recently approved a draft global treaty targeting crimes against humanity. As many human-rights groups, including Amnesty International, have argued, this treaty, which will be the subject of further discussion in January 2026, must recognise and codify gender apartheid as a crime under international law. Such a designation would represent a historic step toward ending the systemic discrimination, oppression, and subjugation of women and girls in Afghanistan, Iran, and beyond.

The Taliban's gender apartheid underscores the urgent need to confront this profound moral failure. Over the past three years, the regime has denied Afghan girls and young women access to schools and universities, barred women from most forms of employment, prohibited them from traveling without a male chaperone, and excluded them from most public spaces. It also enforces a draconian dress code requiring women to wear burqas that cover them from head to toe.

In August, the Taliban intensified its efforts to silence women, banning them from singing, reciting, and speaking in public. During multilateral negotiations in Doha earlier this year, Afghan women and women's groups were excluded, while the regime refused even to acknowledge their plight.

Despite these restrictions, Afghan girls - many of whom were already in school when the Taliban returned to power in 2021 - continue to dream of becoming doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and entrepreneurs. At great risk to themselves and their families, some attend underground schools, participate in local home-schooling initiatives, or pursue remote learning. A few have managed to leave the country to study abroad. But these efforts fall far short of bridging the gap between the number of girls entitled to an education under international law and those who receive one.

The oppression of Afghan women has had far-reaching - and devastating - consequences. According to a recent UN Women report, child marriage has increased by 25%, owing partly to girls' exclusion from secondary education. Mental distress, depression, and suicide attempts have also soared, and the risk of maternal mortality has surged by at least 50%, fueled by a rise in childbirth deaths among young girls.

Encouragingly, the international community has made progress in mobilising a legal response to the Taliban's oppressive policies. In March 2023, prominent Afghan jurists and women's rights advocates launched the End Gender Apartheid campaign, calling for its recognition as an international crime. Building on this momentum, the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls recommended including gender apartheid in the draft treaty on crimes against humanity. And during the April 2024 session of the UN's legal committee on draft articles, several member states expressed support for its inclusion.

The discussions in January 2026 will consider the proposed definition of gender apartheid as "inhumane acts committed within the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic discrimination, oppression, and domination by one group over another or others, based on gender, and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." This definition encompasses violations of fundamental human rights, such as access to education, health care, and employment, as well as freedom of expression, assembly, and participation in political, social, economic, and cultural life.

But the question remains: Can the proposed treaty deliver justice to victims of systemic discrimination? While it obligates signatories to prosecute crimes against humanity, its enforcement mechanisms remain limited. Member states would be required to cooperate and provide legal assistance on matters like extradition, but the current draft lacks a firm commitment to suppress crimes - a key provision of the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Moreover, the draft treaty focuses on the criminal responsibility of individuals, overlooking the role of institutions and organizations in establishing and sustaining gender apartheid.

The international community must make it clear that it will not normalise relations with the Taliban until the regime ends its war on women, and predominantly Muslim countries could play a critical role. Notably, Qatar - which has long acted as a mediator between the Taliban and the West - has condemned the Taliban's policies, as has Saudi Arabia. The United Arab Emirates has gone further, denouncing Afghanistan's ban on girls' education as a violation of "the teachings of Islam" that "must be swiftly reversed."

Now, Muslim-majority countries should lead the effort to bring a case against Afghanistan before the International Court of Justice for violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Doing so would send a clear message: there will be no creeping reintegration or de facto recognition of the Taliban regime as long as it maintains its oppressive policies.

Importantly, such a move would also deliver a message of solidarity and hope to Afghan girls and young women that their suffering has not been overlooked and that their oppressors will be held accountable. The world cannot afford another year of inaction while these egregious human-rights violations persist.

*The writer, a former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, is UN Special Envoy for Global Education.*

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## WISDOM CORNER

**We cannot be more sensitive to pleasure without being more sensitive to pain**

ALAN WATTS

**Waiting is painful. Forgetting is painful. But not knowing which to do is the worse kind of suffering**

PAULO COELHO

**Our life always expresses the result of our dominant thoughts**

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

## SPECTRUM SOCIETY

# The evils of perception

Perceptions continue to play a significant role in shaping personal, political, economic, and cultural debates and discussions in the age of technological revolutions. Evidence-based arguments and evaluations often take a back seat in areas ranging from policy formulation and implementation to the assessment of personal conduct and individual behaviour. However, the environment based on perception is against the foundations of truth. Perceptions breed different forms of prejudice. Therefore, both ruling and non-ruling elites dedicate significant effort to shaping public perceptions of politics, products, services, and ideas. In this exercise of perception management, evidence rooted in human experiences and empirical facts frequently holds limited significance whereas bias takes priority.

Social, political, cultural, economic, and religious perceptions play a central role in creating bias and sustaining the concept of "otherness" within society. Biased narratives shaped by these perceptions lay the groundwork for

racism, sexism, class divisions, and other forms of discrimination. In various spheres of life, evidence-based analyses, objective evaluations, and rational arguments are often overshadowed by subjective motives, personal interpretations, and emotional appeals.

The ruling classes and corporates not only leverage perceptions but actively manufacture them by dedicating significant time and resources to shaping public opinion. Their strategy focuses on influencing how people perceive individuals, political ideologies, products, services, and broader societal, cultural, and economic narratives. In this process of constructing and manipulating perceptions, empirical evidence and experiential truths are often sidelined. Instead, the emphasis shifts to crafting emotionally resonant narratives or reinforcing pre-conceived biases, irrespective of factual accuracy.

Social and economic parasites, along with cultural and political reactionaries, thrive in environments dominated by perception-based narratives, which provide fertile ground for their parasitic survival.

Such environments also serve the interests of feudal, patriarchal, and capitalist classes, enabling them to maintain systems that lack accountability. By cultivating the perception of a successful and efficient system, they employ strategies that perpetuate self-sustaining, unaccountable structures rooted in manipulation, ultimately aiming to delegitimise evidence and objective analysis.

Evidence rooted in everyday reality poses a significant threat to the survival of social, cultural, religious, and economic parasites. Similarly, environments devoid of evidence and accountability create fertile ground for reactionary individuals, families, and groups to sustain their parasitic existence, exploiting the inherent weaknesses of perception-driven systems. By disseminating the perception of fictitious, successful, and efficient systems, they effectively shield themselves from accountability. This carefully constructed illusion serves as a strategic tool, enabling these ruling and corporate classes to maintain self-sustaining, unaccountable systems that thrive on manipu-

lation and misrepresentation. The strategy of delegitimising evidence and reasoned critique serves as a powerful tool for these actors. By misrepresenting and undermining the credibility of facts and empirical evaluations, they entrench their manipulative survival while neutralising challenges to their existence. In this context, perception becomes not merely a means of control but a weapon against truth, systematically eroding the foundation for equitable society and transparent governance.

Perception often creates a fictitious image of oneself and others. While it may serve as a strategy for immediate success, in the long run, it promotes self-deception and leads to defeatist individuals and societies. In contrast, an evidence-based culture promotes the development of a scientifically minded society and individuals guided by reason and critical thinking, rooted in reflections on the realities of everyday life, with its joys and challenges.

*The writer teaches at the London Metropolitan University.*



Bhabani Shankar Nayak

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARASITES, ALONG WITH CULTURAL AND POLITICAL REACTIONARIES, THRIVE IN ENVIRONMENTS DOMINATED BY PERCEPTION-BASED NARRATIVES**

## One nation, one popcorn

Sir, In an era when leaders are talking about minimum government and maximum governance which Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised in 2014 and which US President elect Donald Trump is advocating for his country, taxing popcorn differently, based on the ingredients and the packing will not only result in complexities but will also prove to be a penny wise and pound foolish act. The total sale of popcorn in the country is estimated at ₹1700 crore per annum and assuming a uniform rate of 18 per cent (maximum contemplated rate) GST, it works out to ₹300cr which when compared to a total collection of GST as a whole works out to only 0.13 per cent. This certainly doesn't deserve the time on debate of bureaucrats monitoring the policies. The differential rate of GST envisaged on popcorn reminds us of the point raise by a restaurateur in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu a few months back on bun-butter-jam sold by him. I appeal to the GST Council to make GST a "Good and Simple Tax" and not a complex one.

Gopalaswamy J, CHENNAI

## Dwindling camels

Sir, The year 2024 is the "International year of camelids" as per the United Nations. Llamas, alpacas and camels are prominent members belonging to the camelids community. Non-bovine (camel) dairy value, specifically its nutritional and therapeutic benefits, is a field that remains largely unexplored in India. Camel rearers are predominantly found in two states of India: Rajasthan and Gujarat. Age, climate, grass quality, milking frequency and methods, and watering periodicity are a few factors that determine the quality of camel milk. Unfortunately, even as camel milk consumption is not a common phenomenon, the dwindling population of the animal in India is worrying. Boosting sustainable growth and promoting livelihood of camel herding communities in India are areas that need special focus. Furthermore, a uniform procurement and pricing policy for camel milk cannot be stressed more.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

## 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, Rasulgari Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010



# Dismal cotton procurement in mandis as rain plays spoilsport

Farmers, sceptical about getting fair price in mandis, are waiting for outside traders to arrive and offer better deals



cotton is set at ₹7,521 per quintal, many farmers have been forced to sell their produce to middlemen at lower prices, avoiding reliance on the mandi system. This has given rise to distress sale of the fibre in the district.

The Rayagada branch of Cotton Corporation of India Ltd. has reported that Gopal Organic and Dadaguru Agro India Pvt. Ltd. procured cotton from the Karlapada centre. On the other hand, companies like Natural Organic, Savitri Cotton India, and Bansal Agrotech have made purchases from the Kesinga centre.

However, the farmers are hesitant to sell their produce in mandis this year despite the facilities being operational since November 29. It is crucial for the administration to understand this hesitation. Reports said that middlemen intercept farmers at their doorsteps and offer to buy cotton for ₹6,500 per quintal even before it reaches the mandi.

Additionally, there is no measure in place to stop the illegal transportation of cotton from the district, as government gate systems are no longer operational. Cotton cultivated on Kalahandi's black soil has high demand not only in international markets but also in states like Maharashtra and Gujarat. In fact, Kalah-

andi farmers have successfully exported cotton to countries like Thailand and Bangladesh earlier.

Chatters are abuzz that the District Collector is directly monitoring the opening of mandis this year but the volume of cotton arriving at the mandi remains unsatisfactory. This year, mandis have been opened in areas like Karlapada under Bhanwanipatna block, Utkela under Kesinga block, and Uchala under Golamunda block. Depending on the quality, cotton with 8-11 per cent impurity levels is eligible to be sold at the MSP fixed by the government.

Farmers are sceptical about receiving a fair price given the biting cold prevailing in the region. They have failed in properly drying their cotton bundles and transporting the harvest to the mandis in this weather condition. Many are waiting for outside traders to arrive and offer better deals.

On the other hand, middlemen and agents from neighboring districts and Andhra Pradesh are allegedly luring the farmers to sell their produce illegally. Reports suggest that 8 to 10 locations in the district see illegal trading of up to 2 lakh quintals of cotton annually. Despite this, the administration is yet to take any step to curb such practices.

# Villagers tie up 3 to trees over 'conversion' bid

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Nilgiri, Dec 26:** Tension prevailed after villagers caught three persons and tied them to trees over alleged bid to proselytise the local tribals at Gobardhanpur village in Kepingakhara panchayat of this block in Balasore district, Thursday. Accusing the three individuals of attempting to convert tribal families, villagers and members of a local outfit, Debasena, assaulted and tied them to trees before handing them

over to Nilgiri police. Sources said Gobind Singh of Chhanakhanapur village, Subasini Singh of Mitrapur Makhapada village, and Sukanti Singh of Remuna Mukhura in Mukhura panchayat and Remuna police limits reportedly approached three tribal families in Gobardhanpur village and allegedly persuaded them to adopt Christianity. On being informed, villagers and Badal Kumar Panda, the president of the Nilgiri branch of Debasena, rushed to the spot.



They discovered arrangements

for a meal at Gobind Singh's residence, which included meat and rice. A cake decorated with the phrase "Merry Christmas" was also found, raising suspicion that a conversion ceremony was underway. Suspecting that the accused were attempting to convert the families, the villagers tied them to trees and assaulted them.

On being informed, police arrived at the scene and took the three individuals into custody for questioning. Further investigation is underway.

## Man awarded 20-year RI for raping minor girl

PNN & AGENCIES

**Phulbani, Dec 26:** A local court in Kandhamal district Thursday sentenced a man to 20 years of Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) after finding him guilty of raping a minor girl.

Rajesh Kumar Das, the Additional District Court-cum-POCSO Court Judge, Phulbani, sentenced Mahasek Muthamajhi to 20 years RI and imposed a penalty of ₹45,000. In case the convict failed to pay the penalty, he would have to undergo another 11 months of imprisonment, the judge ordered.

The court also directed the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Kandhamal to pay ₹5 lakh to the girl's family as compensation, Asim Kumar Praharaj, Special Public Prosecutor of the court, said.

According to the prosecution, the accused had lured the girl from her sister's home at Bondaguda under Kotagarh police station in May 2018 when she had gone there to spend her holidays, and raped her.

The victim's family lodged a missing complaint with Kotagarh police, leading to the arrest of Mahasek under various sections of the POCSO Act.

## Fourth Odisha Research Conclave begins at FMU



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Balasore, Dec 26:** The fourth Odisha Research Conclave (ORC) commenced Thursday at the new campus of Fakir Mohan University (FMU) here, with an inaugural session themed "Unveiling the Future: A Showcase of Cutting-Edge Research and Innovation".

The inaugural session was attended by Prof. Kshiti Bhusan Das, Vice Chancellor of the Central University of Jharkhand, as the Guest of Honour; Prof. Santosh Kumar Tripathy, Vice Chancellor of FMU, who presided over the session; and Prof. Bhaskar Behera, Chairman of the Post Graduate Council of the varsity.

Tripathy, in his address, referred to the conclave as a "Gabeshana Mahakumbha", or

a holy gathering of researchers, and expressed gratitude to the state government for selecting FMU to host the event. He emphasised the importance of qualitative education and region-specific research, citing examples such as "Dhana-Pana-Meena".

As Guest of Honour, Prof. Das stressed the significance of interdisciplinary research in addressing modern challenges. He also shared his vision for a 'Vikshit Bharat' and 'Vikshit Odisha' as key to achieving true development.

Prof. Behera highlighted the crucial role universities play in fostering a vibrant research environment. The gathering observed a minute of silence in honour of Prof. Sanjay Kumar Satpathy, Vice Chancellor of Maa Manikeshwari University, Kalahandi, who recently passed away.

The first technical session focused on "Research and Innovation in State Universities of Odisha" and was chaired by Prof. Tripathy, with Vice Chancellors from six state public universities serving as panelists.

## Police ASI found hanging

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Tentulikhunti, Dec 26:** An Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Tentulikhunti police station in Nabarangpur police district was found hanging from a tree at the tourist site of Raisinghodi, Thursday afternoon.

The deceased identified as ASI Renupasad Pattnaik was missing since December 23. His colleagues called him repeatedly over phone but the calls went unanswered. They suspected that he might have gone home as his family members were staying outside.



On being informed, Tentulikhunti IIC Gopal Krushna Agupatra reached the spot and recovered the body from the tree with the help of other police personnel. The body was sent for post-mortem and a case registered in this connection.

## No headway in Rourkela Christmas night burglary

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Rourkela, Dec 26:** Police have made no headway in investigation into a series of burglaries on Christmas night which has left five families in Rourkela's Phiringi Para area reeling after thieves made off with over 500 grams of gold and more than ₹1 lakh in cash.

The thefts occurred between 9:30pm and 12:30am while the families were at Christmas prayers. Upon returning home, the victims discovered their houses had been broken into using gas cutters. One resident noted seeing three people on a bike in front of her house before she left for church, possibly scouting the area to confirm the families were away.

"I found my gold ornaments - bangles, necklace, mangalsutra, earrings, and rings - missing, along with ₹50,000 cash," one woman said. Police registered the case late December 25 night, after conducting a spot inquiry. While police have not publicly commented on the case, sources from the Town police station indicated that sniffer dogs were used to track down potential leads. This latest string of thefts follows similar incidents in the Bonai police jurisdiction months back, with no suspects apprehended thus far.

## Elephant tramples 55-year-old woman to death in Sambalpur

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, Dec 26:** In another tragic case of man-animal conflict, an elderly woman was killed by an elephant in Jamuguri area of Sambalpur district Thursday evening.

Reports said that 55-year-old Pari Lugun, a resident of Jamuguri in Godloisingh panchayat, Jujumura block, had gone to a nearby forest to gather dry leaves for fuel.

During this, she encountered an elephant and attempted to flee. Unfortunately, she was unable to escape

in time, and the elephant trampled her to death.

Locals later discovered her body and alerted the Forest department and police.

The authorities seized the body and sent it for post-mortem examination. The incident has left residents of Jamuguri shaken.

This attack comes close on the heels of two similar incidents last month in the same area, and this month alone, five people have already lost their lives due to elephant attacks.

## RSP trains 40 local youths in refractory masonry

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Rourkela, Dec 26:** Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) is sponsoring 40 local youths from industrial slums and peripheral areas in a training programme for the post "Assistant Mason for Refractories" as part of its CSR employability enhancement initiative.

The 30-day programme, which began December 20, is being held at the Livelihood Business Incubation Centre in Sector 15, Rourkela.



The centre was established under a tripartite MoU between NSIC, NSTFDC, and SAIL. RSP. BK Swain, CGM in-charge (TA & CSR), presided over the inaugural ceremony, which was attended by several senior officers, including D Nayak, Chief Manager, LBI-NSIC, and KK Tanty, Senior Manager (Refractories).

The programme, which has a budget of ₹10 lakh, aims to enhance the skill sets of local youth and provide them with valuable employment opportunities, contributing to the capabilities of local industries. The training will equip participants with specialised skills in refractories, focusing on the use of tools, handling refractory materials, and understanding the operations of a steel plant.

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PNN & AGENCIES

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The victim's family lodged a missing complaint with Kotagarh police, leading to the arrest of Mahasek under various sections of the POCSO Act.

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
E-AUCTION OF CATERING STALL  
Sl. No. 1: Station & Location - Bhubaneswar, Platform-4&5 (Towards Cuttack end), Sl. No. 2: Station & Location - Brahmapur, Platform-1 (Towards Visakhapatnam end), Sl. No. 3: Station & Location - Brahmapur, Platform-2&3 (Towards Visakhapatnam end), Sl. No. 4: Station & Location - Palasa, Platform-2&3 (Middle).  
Category of Reservation: SMU-SC (Women) (for Sl. No. 1), SMU (Minorities) (for Sl. No. 2), SMU (PH) (for Sl. No. 3) & SMU (BPL) (for Sl. No. 4).  
Auction Start Date & Time: 02.01.2025 from 11:00 hrs. to 12:00 hrs. (for Sl. No. 1 to 4).  
Note: Prospective bidders are advised to visit the website www.ireps.gov.in and check all the details regarding eligibility criteria, detail of site and any other information.  
Divisional Commercial Manager-II, PR-832/P/24-25, Khurda Road

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION-I, KEONJHAR**  
No.O-970  
"e" Procurement Notice for Road Works  
Identification No. Online NCB-08/2024-25  
Tel. 06766-258094 (O), Mail: eerw1\_kjr@yahoo.com  
1. Name of the Work : 05 Nos. Road Work. 2. Total Number of Work : 05 Nos. 3. Estimated Cost: Rs.10.17 Lakhs to Rs.25.43 Lakhs. 4. Class of Contractor: D, C & B Class. 5. Period of Completion: As per annexure of e-Procurement Notice No.08 of 2024-25. 6. Other details:  
Further details can be seen from the Website www.tendersorissa.gov.in  
OIPR-25110/11/0009/2425 Sd./- Additional Chief Engineer, R.W.Division-I, Keonjhar

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding		Last date and time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender
		From	To		
1	Additional Chief Engineer, Rural Works Division-I, Keonjhar	Road Online NCB No.08	Di.26.12.2024 at 11.00 A.M.	Di.03.01.2025 upto 5.00 P.M.	Di.02.01.2025 upto 5.00 P.M.
6					Di.04.01.2025 at 11.00 A.M.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION-II, MALKANGIRI**  
No.O-937  
E-mail : ruralworksdivisioniimalkangiri@yahoo.in  
INVITATION FOR BIDS  
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING  
Bid Identification No. : RWDSE\_MKG\_II\_ONLINE\_11/2024-25  
The Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Malkangiri on behalf of Government of Odisha invites from bidders of eligible class registered with the State Government and bidders of equivalent Grade / Class registered with Central Government / MES / Railways according to the norm of "e" Procurement system in online mode for the works detailed in the table below on turnkey basis.  
1. Name of the Work : Road works 2. No. of Works : 02 Nos. 3. Estimated Cost : Rs. 8.40 lakhs to Rs. 13.45 Lakhs  
Tender Paper Cost : Rs. 4,000/- & 6,000/- 5. Class of Contractor :  
6. Period of Completion : 01 (One) calendar months  
7. Critical dates :  
Further details can be seen in the bidding documents, which is available in the e-procurement portal https://www.tendersorissa.gov.in  
Sd./- Superintending Engineer Rural Works Division-II, Malkangiri  
OIPR-25079/11/0013/2425

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender Online for Bidding	Last Date of Seeking tender Clarification	Date of opening of Technical Bid
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Malkangiri	RWDSE_MKG_II_ONLINE_11 of 2024-25	26.12.2024 at 11.00 A.M.	04.01.2025 upto 05.30 P.M.	06.01.2025 At 11.00 A.M.

भारत सरकार  
कारपोरेट कार्य मंत्रालय  
त्वरित कॉर्पोरेट समापन प्रसंस्करण केंद्र (सी-पेस),  
आई.आई.सी.ए. बिल्डिंग, 7वीं मंजिल,  
प्लॉट P-6, 7, 8, से.-5,  
आई.एम.टी. मानेसर,  
गुडगांव, हरियाणा - 122050  
Email: roc.pace@mca.gov.in  
Government of India  
Ministry of Corporate Affairs  
Centre for Processing Accelerated  
Corporate Exit (C-PACE),  
IICA Building, 7th Floor,  
Plot P- 6, 7, 8, Sector-5,  
IMT Manesar,  
Gurgaon, Haryana - 122050  
Email: roc.pace@mca.gov.in  
Form No. STK - 6  
PUBLIC NOTICE  
(Pursuant to sub-section (2) and sub-section (4) of section 248 of the Companies Act, 2013 and rule 7 of the Companies (Removal of Names of Companies from the Register of Companies) Rules, 2016)  
Public Notice: ROC/C-PACE/STK-2/248(2)/2024-25/1421 Date: 09/12/2024  
Reference: (1) In the matter of striking off or removal of names of (3) companies in the state of Odisha under section 248 of the Companies Act, 2013 in respect of:  
S. No. Work Item CIN Company Name  
1 AB1979730 U72200OR2022PTC039110 TRIBOHERMES TECHNOLOGIES PRIVATE LIMITED  
2 AB1975308 U74999OR2021PTC038305 SKYWALL FINISERVE PRIVATE LIMITED  
3 AB1619741 U72900OR2019PTC030386 CYBERFOLKS TECHNOLOGIES PRIVATE LIMITED  
(2) Notice is hereby given that the Registrar of Companies had received applications from the above-mentioned companies under section 248(2) of the Companies Act, 2013 for removal of its/their name(s) from the register of companies either on the ground that they have failed to commence business within one year of their incorporation or on the ground that the company(ies) is/are not carrying on any business or operation for a period of two immediately preceding financial years and has/have not made any application(s) within such period for obtaining the status of a dormant company under section 455 of the Companies Act, 2013 or the company(ies) have obtained the status of dormant company/subscribers to the memorandum have not paid the subscription which they had undertaken to pay at the time of incorporation of a company and a declaration to this effect has not been filed within one hundred and eighty days of its incorporation under sub-section (1) of section 10A/have not been carrying on any business or operations, as revealed after the physical verification carried out under sub-section (9) of section 12, but it/they do not wish to continue its/their registration as companies and have, therefore, requested for removal/strike off of its/their names from the register of companies.  
(3) Accordingly, the Registrar of Companies proposes to remove or strike off the names of the above-mentioned companies from the Register of Companies.  
(4) Any Person objecting to the proposed removal or striking off name of the companies from the register of companies may send his or her objection to the office address mentioned here above within thirty days from the date of publication of this notice.  
Irfan Tirkay  
Assistant Registrar  
Centre for Processing Accelerated Corporate Exit  
CBC 07123/11/0650/2425

**WEATHER**  
BBSR CTC  
Max Temp 27.7° 26.5°  
Min Temp 18.4° 16.6°  
Humidity 94% 98%  
Rainfall 28.3 26.6  
FORECAST  
Fog/Mist in the morning and partly cloudy sky later

**MARKET WATCH**  
INDEX VARIATION  
SENSEX 78472.48 ↓ 0.39  
NIFTY 23750.20 ↑ 22.55  
DOLLAR 85.27 ↑ 0.12  
EURO 88.65 ↑ 0.10  
GOLD ₹76,946 ↑ ₹676  
SILVER ₹89,969 ↑ ₹643

**यूको बैंक UCO BANK**  
(भारत सरकार का उपक्रम) (A Govt. of India Undertaking)  
सम्मान आपके विश्वास का Honours Your Trust  
RECOVERY DEPARTMENT  
Zonal Office, UCO Bank Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, C-2, Ashok Nagar, Bhubaneswar-751009  
EMPANELMENT OF REAL ESTATE AGENT/PROPERTY BROKERS(S)  
Applications from eligible Individuals / Institutions/ Agencies /LLP/ Companies etc. for "Empanelment of Real Estate Agent/ Property Brokers(s)" are invited at UCO Bank, Zonal Office, UCO Bank Building, 2nd Floor, C-2, Ashok Nagar, Bhubaneswar-751009 latest by 05.00 PM on 31.12.2024. For eligibility and other details, visit our nearest Branches/Offices or please drop a mail at zobbsr.rec@ucobank.co.in. Zonal Manager  
Date: 26.12.2024 Zonal Office, Bhubaneswar

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, KUCHINDA**  
E-Mail : eerw\_kuchinda@yahoo.com  
Corrigendum to Bid identification No. Tender online 07/RWD/ Kuchinda / 2024-25  
No.O-1021 : Due to unavoidable circumstances, the following changes have been made in this office Bid identification no. tender online 07/RWD/ Kuchinda / 2024-25  
The availability of tender for online bidding has been extended from 26.12.2024 at (11.00 A.M.) to 05.01.2025 up to (5.00 P.M.)  
Last date & Time of seeking tender Clarification : 04.01.2025  
Date & Time of opening tender : 06.01.2025  
All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.  
Sd./- Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division, Kuchinda  
OIPR-25151/11/0013/2425

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION-II, NAYAGARH**  
No.O-1016  
"e" Procurement Notice for Building & Road Works  
Identification No. Online Tender/ 05/RWD-II/2024-25  
E-Mail: nayagarh\_rw2@yahoo.in  
1. Name of the Work: Building & Road Works. 2. Total Number of Works: 32 Nos. 3. Approx. Estimated Cost: Rs.1.26 Lakh to Rs.21.00 Lakhs. 4. Class of Contractor: D, C & B Class of Contractor. 5. Period of Completion: 1 Month. 6. Other details:  
Procurement Officer Bid Identification No. Availability of tender online for bidding Last date and time of seeking tender clarification Date and Time of Opening of Tender  
1 2 3 4 5 6  
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Nayagarh 05/RWD-II/2024-25 Dt.27.12.2024 at 11.00 A.M. Dt.03.01.2025 upto 5.00 P.M. Dt.03.01.2025 upto 1.00 P.M. Dt.04.01.2025 at 11.00 A.M.  
Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in  
OIPR-25144/11/0005/2425 Sd./- Superintending Engineer, R.W.Division-II, Nayagarh







# Adieu Dr. Manmohan Singh



## FAMOUS LINES

Every day, the Prime Minister is a 24-hour servant of the people of India.

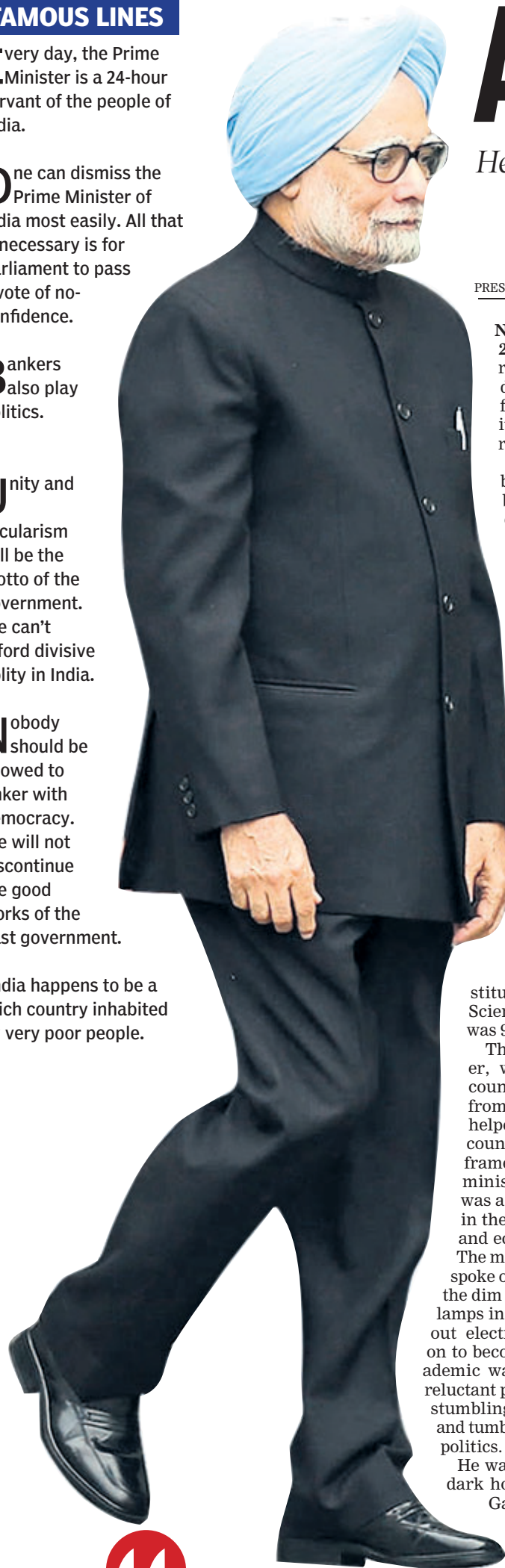
One can dismiss the Prime Minister of India most easily. All that is necessary is for Parliament to pass a vote of no-confidence.

Bankers also play politics.

Unity and secularism will be the motto of the government. We can't afford divisive polity in India.

Nobody should be allowed to tinker with democracy. We will not discontinue the good works of the past government.

India happens to be a rich country inhabited by very poor people.



# A GENTLEMAN POLITICIAN

He drew the roadmap of India's economic reform, unshackled it from the licence raj and pulled it back from the brink when even all its gold reserve was pledged. Former prime minister Manmohan Singh was the scholar and architect of the India of today who evolved into a resolute statesman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** He drew the roadmap of India's economic reform, unshackled it from the licence raj

and pulled it back from the brink when even all its gold reserve was pledged. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the scholar and architect of the India of today who evolved into a stubbornly resolute politician.

Unassuming, erudite, soft-spoken and a consensus builder, Manmohan Singh died Thursday night at Delhi's

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He was 92.

The Congress leader, who steered the country for 10 years from 2004-2014 and helped set up the country's economic framework as finance minister before that, was a renowned name in the global financial and economic sectors. The man who famously spoke of studying under the dim light of kerosene lamps in his village without electricity and went on to become a storied academic was the copybook reluctant politician, almost stumbling into the rough and tumble of mainstream politics.

He was the proverbial dark horse when Sonia Gandhi stepped back from taking the Prime Minister's

### TIMELINE

- 1954: Completed Master's in Economics from Panjab University
- 1957: Economic Tripos (3-year degree prog) from Cambridge University
- 1962: D.Phil in Economics from Oxford University
- 1971: Joins Government of India as Economic Advisor in Commerce Ministry
- 1972: Appointed Chief Economic Advisor in Finance Ministry
- 1980-82: Member, Planning Commission
- 1982-1985: Governor of the Reserve Bank of India
- 1985-87: Served as Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission
- 1987-90: Secretary General of South Commission in Geneva
- 1990: Appointed Advisor to Prime Minister on Economic Affairs
- March 1991: Appointed chairman of University Grants Commission
- 1991: Elected to Rajya Sabha from Assam, and re-elected in 1995, 2001, 2007 and 2013
- 1991-96: Finance Minister under P V Narasimha Rao government
- 1998-2004: Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha
- 2004-2014: Prime Minister of India

post, ignoring the clamour from her party, and chose him instead. And so Manmohan Singh the academic bureaucrat became the 14th prime minister of India in 2004.

Their was a partnership that lasted 10 years, the equation between Sonia Gandhi and Singh often cited for its equanimity and an example of how a working relationship should really be. Notwithstanding the inevitable tensions. Singh also had to balance the interests of the United Progressive Alliance's coalition partners.

NN Vohra, a former Jammu and Kashmir governor, said Singh always "stood firm as a rock in pursuing the ethical path even if he got into trouble with the political party he represented".

In 2014, the UPA was voted out in a

cloud of corruption scams, establishing BJP's unbroken rule since then. Hailed for putting India on the road to liberalisation and privatisation in the early 1990s, Singh was criticised for turning a blind eye to charges of corruption. The going often got tough. During his first tenure as prime minister, the coalition began to unravel when India signed a civil nuclear deal with the US. It almost cost his government with the Left parties pulling out of the UPA coalition. However, his government survived.

The UPA faced its first confidence vote in the Lok Sabha July 22, 2008 after the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led Left Front withdrew support over India approaching the IAEA for Indo-US nuclear deal. The UPA won the confidence vote with 275 votes to the Opposition's 256, with a record thin 19-vote victory after 10 MPs abstained.

During the fag end of his tenure as prime minister, when he was seen defending his government's record and the Congress' positions on controversial issues such as the 2G scam, Singh spoke up and declared he was not weak.

"I honestly hope history would be kinder to me than the contemporary media, or for that matter, the opposition parties in Parliament," he had said famously in January 2004.

Singh, always seen in a powder blue turban, was appointed India's finance minister in 1991 in the Narasimha Rao government. His role in ushering in a comprehensive policy of economic reforms is now recognised worldwide. Manmohan Singh soon steered the economy well and was quick to repurchase it months later. Among the many governmental positions that he occupied were secretary in the Finance ministry, deputy chairperson of the Planning Commission, governor of the Reserve Bank of India, advisor of the prime minister, and chairperson of the University Grants Commission. His political career started as a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1991, where he was leader of the Opposition between 1998 and 2004. Interestingly, the two-time prime minister had a 33-year parliamentary innings but only as a Rajya Sabha member. He never contested a Lok Sabha election. Singh was often accused by the BJP of running a government that was marred by corruption. The party called him "MaunMohan Singh" alleging that he did not speak out against corrupt leaders in his cabinet.



## THE MAN WHO OFTEN SPOKE OF COMMUNAL HARMONY



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Born in a village in undivided Punjab, now in Pakistan, Singh was a noted economist and a respected figure in India and abroad.

According to his profile on the website -- pmindia.gov, "Dr Singh completed his matriculation examinations from the Punjab University in 1948. His academic career took him from Punjab to the University of Cambridge, UK, where he earned a First Class Honours degree in Economics

in Pakistan. Singh was a noted economist and a respected figure in India and abroad.

According to his profile on the website -- pmindia.gov, "Dr Singh completed his matriculation examinations from the Punjab University in 1948. His academic career took him from Punjab to the University of Cambridge, UK, where he earned a First Class Honours degree in Economics

in 1957."

Singh followed this with a D.Phil in Economics from Nuffield College at Oxford University in 1962. His book, 'India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth' was an "early critique of India's inward-oriented trade policy", the profile reads.

He served two terms as India's prime minister from 2004 to 2014. A man of few words, but immense wisdom, he often spoke of communal harmony and democratic values that are at the core of India as a nation.

At an event in Amritsar in 2004 marking the 400th anniversary of the installation of Guru Granth Sahib, he had recalled his roots. "The Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, touched an emotional cord while addressing a mammoth gathering in Amritsar, recalling his roots and paying tributes to the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib," reads a September 2004 statement carried on the website -- archivepmo.nic.in.

In his speech, then then prime minister had underlined that there could be "no better way" to honour the holy text than to abide in practice by its teachings of "living in peace with one another".

"In celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Adi Granth's installation, we pay homage and tribute to these values as much as to the scholarly and devout men and women who have helped preserve this sacred text, and have disseminated its tenets to generations of people.

Former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh Ji was one of those rare politicians who also straddled the worlds of academia and administration with equal ease. In his various roles in public offices, he made critical contributions to reforming Indian economy

**DROUPADI MURMU | PRESIDENT**  
Few people in politics inspire the kind of respect that Sardar Manmohan Singh ji did. His honesty will always be an inspiration for us and he will forever stand tall among those who truly love this country as someone who remained steadfast in his commitment to serve the nation despite being subjected to unfair and deeply personal attacks by his opponents

**PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA | CONG GENERAL SECRETARY**  
From being the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India to the Finance Minister of the country and as the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh played an important role in the governance of the country

**AMIT SHAH | UNION HOME MINISTER**  
An extremely full and extraordinarily distinguished life has ended. Chief Economic Adviser, Finance Secretary, Governor RBI, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission, Finance Minister, and Prime Minister of India. An alumnus of both Oxford and Cambridge. Winner of the prestigious Adam Smith Prize at Cambridge in 1956

**JAIRAM RAMESH | CONG GENERAL SECY**  
Manmohan Singh Ji led India with immense wisdom and integrity. His humility and deep understanding of economics inspired the nation. My heartfelt condolences to Mrs. Kaur and the family

**RAHUL GANDHI | LOP IN LOK SABHA**  
Deeply saddened to learn about the passing away of former Prime Minister #ManmohanSingh. He has served the country illustriously in different capacities. The erudite and humble leader will be remembered as the architect of economic reforms which provided the foundation for the new India and brought positive changes in the lives of people. My thoughts and prayers are with the family, friends and followers. Om Shanti

**NAVEEN PATNAIK | BJD PRESIDENT**



# national

## of the day quote

Today the Congress leaders have gathered in Belagavi in the name of Gandhi to commemorate the centenary celebrations of the Indian National Congress session that was presided over by him

Kashmiri shawli sellers in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur District are facing harassment, assault, and threats from right-wing groups. Despite proper documents, they're being barred from doing business and evicted

The ideals of the Sikh Gurus provide us with the energy to move forward. Their blessings serve as our inspiration

# RSS magazine contradicts Bhagwat on Sambhal dispute

RSS chief Bhagwat expressed concern last week over the resurgence of several temple-mosque disputes in the country and asserted that certain individuals, after the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, seem to believe that they can become "leaders of the Hindus" by raking up such issues



tion to survey the Shri Harihar Mandir, "now structured" as the Jama Masjid in the "historic town" of Uttar Pradesh, is opening up a new debate about various constitutional rights given to individuals and communities. "Instead of limiting the debate to the Hindu-Muslim question from the pseudo-secularist prism, we need a sane and inclusive debate on the quest for civilisational justice based on truthful Itihasa, involving all sections of the society," the editorial penned by Prafulla Ketkar, the editor of 'Organiser', noted. "From Somnath to Sambhal and beyond, this battle for knowing the historical truth is not about religious supremacy. It is against the Hindu ethos. It is about reaffirming our national identity and seeking civilisational justice," it said. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Bhagwat

expressed concern last week over the resurgence of several temple-mosque disputes in the country and asserted that certain individuals, after the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, seem to believe that they can become "leaders of the Hindus" by raking up such issues. Delivering a lecture on 'India - The Vishwaguru' at the Sahjeevan Vyakhyannamala (lecture series) in Pune Thursday, Bhagwat pitched for an inclusive society and said the world needs to be shown that India can live in harmony. "We have been living in harmony for long. If we want to provide this harmony to the world, we need to create a model of it. After the construction of the Ram mandir, some people think that they can become leaders of the Hindus by raking up similar issues at new places. This is not acceptable," the RSS chief said.

New Delhi, Dec 26: Days after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat frowned at the resurgence of temple-mosque disputes in the country, the latest issue of a Sangh-linked magazine has said from Somnath to Sambhal and beyond, it is a battle for knowing historical truth and seeking "civilisational justice". Amid a cacophony over who has insulted B R Ambedkar, even though historical records "clearly indicate" how the Congress treated the chairman of the Constitution's Drafting Committee, recent developments in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal have struck "a chord with the masses", the editorial published in the latest issue of 'Organiser' noted. It said the dispute that started with a pe-

## COURT ISSUES NOTICE TO SAURABH BHARDWAJ

A Delhi court has issued notice to AAP leader Saurabh Bhardwaj in a criminal defamation case filed by a BJP worker. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Neha Mittal issued a notice to Bhardwaj in an order passed December 23, directing him to respond to a complaint filed by Suraj Bhan Chauhan by January 9, 2025



# CM Mamata to visit Sandeshkhali Dec 30

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Dec 26: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Thursday said she would visit Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district December 30 to chair a public distribution programme.



This would be her first visit to the island, situated on the borders of the Sundarbans, since the area witnessed large-scale protests earlier this year over alleged land-grabbing and sexual harassment of women by local TMC leaders. "I will visit Sandeshkhali December 30 to chair a public distribution programme. People had asked me before the elections whether I would visit Sandeshkhali or not. I had told them that I would be going later," the CM told reporters at state secretariat Nabanna. "This will be a government programme. We have completed several pending programmes under 'Lakshmir Bhandar', 'Banglar Bari' and other schemes. Around 20,000 beneficiaries of the area will be benefitted from various state-run schemes. I hope to hand over certificates of various schemes to around 100 people from the stage," she added. Banerjee said she would hold an administrative review meeting at Nabanna on January 2 next year and she would leave for Sagar Island January 6 to review the preparations there for the annual Ganga Sagar Mela. Upon her return, she would inaugurate an 'e-vessel' of the state transport department in Babughat area of Kolkata

## Ground breaking educational symposium concludes in Haridwar

POST NEWS NETWORK

Haridwar, Dec 26: Bhartiya Shiksha Board (BSB) here organised a two day educational symposium on 'Transforming School Education: Integrating Indian Ethos for Rising India' at University of Patanjali.

The event gathered a diverse group of leading educational institutions and organizations to discuss innovative ways of harmonizing cultural insights and blending modern educational methodologies into the curriculum. Renowned institutions such



as Vidya Bharti, Akhil Bhartiya Shikshan Sansthan, Bhartiya Shikshan Mandal, Isha Yoga Foundation, Ramkrishna Mission Educational and Research Institute, Agastya International Foundation, Chinna Jeeyar Swami's Organization, Swaminarayan Gurukul Sansthan, Vivekanand Kendra, Shri Aurbindo Society, Bhikkhu Sangh Sena, Jain Education Trust, Dev Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Sanatan Dharm Pratindhi Sabha and many others came together to present groundbreaking educational perspectives. The symposium was inaugurated by Swami Ramdev who inspired the participants to join the new movement for creating indigenous education system for transforming our young generation into world leaders with Bharatiya values and perspectives.

## POST OF THE DAY

Why to disturb and spoil anyone festival by doing these insecure activities??? This video is from Lucknow, just 50 meters away from a Church where Christmas was being celebrated. This is so cheap and uncivil @dhruvrahtee

## Student assault: TN oppn hits streets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Dec 26: The sexual assault on a varsity student triggered strong protest by opposition parties, with the AIADMK and BJP hitting the streets Thursday, and the Saffron party alleged that the accused was a DMK office-bearer, which was denied by the ruling party. The Saffron party's state unit chief K Annamalai said he would not wear sandals and walk barefoot until the DMK regime is dislodged and would lash himself with a whip. Annamalai, showing photographs of the accused with DMK leaders, alleged that he was a ruling party's student wing office-bearer. The BJP leader alleged that the accused committed the crime emboldened by his affiliation to the ruling party.

## Row over 'incorrect Indian map' during Congress session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Belagavi (Karnataka), Dec 26: A controversy has erupted over the alleged misrepresentation of the India map on the posters displayed by the Congress to commemorate the centenary of 1924 Congress session in Karnataka's Belagavi, with the BJP dubbing it as "vote bank" politics by the national party. The ruling Congress has put up these posters throughout Belagavi town as part of celebrations for the centenary event. According to BJP and its ally JD(S) in Karnataka, the Indian map featured on the posters omits the Gilgit region of Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir as

well as the Aksai Chin region, currently under the Chinese administration, which are integral parts of Jammu and Kashmir. Reacting to the controversy, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also the Congress Karnataka unit president, said the posters would be removed if there is any mistake. "Some leaders might have made some mistake, we are removing everything. Don't try to pick a small stone in the curd... We have done according to Indian tradition and values of those days... BJP is there to attack us, they can't digest. There is no medicine for jealousy. Let them do what they want..." he told reporters in Belagavi. The national unit of BJP strongly criticised the Congress. In a post on 'X' it said, "RaGa's Mohabbat ki Dukaan is always open for China! They would break the nation. They've done it once. They'll do it again."

# Assets, liabilities of public servants not exempt under RTI Act: Madras HC

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 26: The Madras High Court has ruled that details of public servants' assets and liabilities cannot be classified as private information, thus not entirely exempt under Section 8 of the Right to Information (RTI) Act. In a judgment dated December 20, Justice CV Karthikeyan clarified that while service registers may contain some personal information, public authorities cannot withhold all data under the guise of privacy. The Court observed that public servants operate under public scrutiny and cannot deny citizens access to their service records, which include details such as joining dates, transfers, earned leave, increments, and even assets and liabilities. "Details such as the date of joining, date of superannua-



tion, and assets and liabilities are certainly not private information. However, if punishments have been imposed due to specific circumstances, those might carry a stigma and could be considered private. Still, public servants, having voluntarily entered public service, must acknowledge that their records are subject to public scrutiny," the Court stated.

The judgment was delivered in response to a petition by Thamilselvan, who challenged a decision by the Revenue Divisional Officer, Chennai, which rejected his second appeal under the RTI Act. The petitioner had sought details of the assets and liabilities of an assistant engineer in the Water Reservoir Project Sub-Division, Krishnagiri Taluk.

The district collector's office denied the information, citing Section 8 of the RTI Act, which exempts personal information from disclosure. However, the High Court found this interpretation untenable, stating that such details are not entirely private. "The refusal, citing Section 8 of the RTI Act as it pertains to personal information, cannot be accepted," Justice Karthikeyan held. The Court directed the district collector to re-examine the matter and decide afresh, adhering to RTI Act provisions. The petitioner was represented by Advocate R Thirumoorthy, while Senior Advocate C Vigneshwaran and Government Advocate SJ Mohamed Sathik appeared for the district authorities. Advocate J Ramkumar represented the assistant engineer.

## CLASSIFIED

## AFFIDAVIT

I, Lipsa Pattanaik, about the age of 42 years, Wife/o-Sibabrata Pattanaik, resident of P201, Trident Galaxy, Kalinga Nagar, Bhubaneswar, Dist. - Khorda, Pin - 751019 Odisha declare by this affidavit No. Vol-III, SL. No.-1062 dtd 26.12.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as LIPSA MOHANTY for all future purposes.

# AAP-Delhi Cong tiff puts INDIA on shaky ground

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 26: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Thursday said it will push for the Congress' expulsion from the INDIA bloc if it fails to take any disciplinary action against its senior leaders within 24 hours. Launched a scathing attack on the Congress, AAP accusing it of colluding with the BJP for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls to harm the prospects of the Arvind Kejriwal-led party. Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and Rajya Sabha AAP MP Sanjay Singh alleged at a press con-



ference here that the actions of the Congress are damaging the unity of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc. He said sincere efforts were made by AAP during the Haryana elections to form an

alliance with the Congress. "We made every effort to join forces and fight together but the Congress was not willing to do so. Even when we contested the elections independently — with many senior AAP leaders including Arvind Kejriwal, Atishi and Manish Sisodia campaigning — we refrained from making any offensive or critical remarks against the Congress or its leaders," Singh said. He said yet the Congress seems to be reading out from the BJP's script. "Its list of candidates looks as if it was finalised at the BJP office,"

he added. Singh accused Congress leaders Ajay Maken and Sandeep Dixit of targeting AAP instead of focusing on the BJP. "Ajay Maken has crossed all limits by calling Arvind Kejriwal anti-national. Despite campaigning for the Congress in the past elections, Kejriwal now faces an FIR while the Congress had never filed a single FIR against any BJP leader," Singh said. Atishi echoed similar sentiments, claiming that the Congress is actively undermining the AAP.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT**  
**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (AGRI.)**  
**DHENKANAL DIVISION, DHENKANAL**  
 No. 934 Date: 23.12.2024

**INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)**  
**e procurement notice**

Bid identification number / Tender call notice no. - E E (A) D/D-04 of 2024-25 No.L-122 : The Executive Engineer (Agril.), Dhenkanal Division, Dhenkanal who has been authorized as the procuring officer for the projects of Dhenkanal Division, Dhenkanal is directed to invite percentage rate bid on behalf of the Governor of Odisha for the Civil construction works under Dhenkanal Division. The costs of the project approximately from 30.00 lakhs to 40.00 lakh. Bid document consisting of detailed tender call notice, the schedule of quantities and the set of terms and conditions of the contract and other necessary documents can be downloaded from [www.tendersorissa.gov.in](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in) from 27.12.2024 at 10.00 hours to 03.01.2025 at 11.59 P.M. The bid will be opened on 06.01.2025 at 11.00 A.M. in the O/o Executive Engineer (Agril.), Dhenkanal Division, Dhenkanal. All other details regarding term and conditions, corrigendum from time to time if any, DTCN etc. can be seen and downloaded from [www.tendersorissa.gov.in](http://www.tendersorissa.gov.in).  
 Email ID: -eeagri.dhenkanal@gmail.com

Sd/- Executive Engineer (Agril.)  
 Dhenkanal Division, Dhenkanal

OIPR-01446/11/0004/2425

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# international



Despite holidays, many people in Estonia and Finland have been working for the last two days to identify the problem for the Estlink-2 disconnection

**POPE OPENS 'HOLY DOOR' AT ROME PRISON**  
Pope Francis inaugurated his Holy Year at Rome's main prison Thursday, bringing a message of hope to inmates and involving them in the Catholic Church's once-every-quarter century celebration that is expected to bring some 32 million pilgrims to Rome



## of the day quote

Listening to these once-young service men and women touched us deeply as they spoke of their comrades, drawn from across the Commonwealth, who never returned and who now rest peacefully where they made the ultimate sacrifice

Lebanon hopes for the best neighbourly relations with the new government in Syria

I went up to the site of our temple this morning to pray for the peace of our soldiers, the swift return of all hostages and a total victory, God willing

# Azerbaijan plane 'downed by Russian air defence'

Azerbaijan Airlines flight J2-8243 came down near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from an area of Russia in which Moscow has used air defence systems against Ukrainian drone strikes in recent months



REUTERS

**In Brussels, NATO called for a full investigation into the cause of the crash**

**Baku, Dec 26:** An Azerbaijan Airlines flight that crashed in Kazakhstan Wednesday killing 38 people was downed by a Russian air defence system, four sources in Azerbaijan with knowledge of the investigation told Reuters.

Azerbaijan Airlines flight J2-8243 came down near the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan after diverting from an area of Russia in which Moscow has used air defence systems against Ukrainian drone strikes in recent months. The Embraer (EMBR3.SA), opens new tab passenger jet had flown hundreds of miles off its scheduled route from Azerbaijan's Baku to Grozny, in Russia's southern Chechnya region. It crashed on the opposite shore of the Caspian Sea after what Russia's aviation watchdog said was an emergency that may have been caused by a bird strike. Officials did not explain why it had crossed the sea, but the crash happened after Ukrainian drone strikes this

month hit Chechnya. The nearest Russian airport on the plane's flight path was closed Wednesday morning. One of the Azerbaijani sources familiar with the Azerbaijani investigation into the crash told Reuters that preliminary results showed the plane was struck by a Russian Pantsir-S air defence system, and its communications were paralysed by electronic warfare systems on the approach into Grozny. The source said, "No one claims that it was done on purpose. However, taking into account the established facts, Baku expects the Russian side to confess to the shooting down of the Azerbaijani aircraft."

**WRECKAGE**  
Aviation security firm Osprey Flight Solutions said in an alert to airlines Wednesday that footage of the wreckage and the circumstances around the air space in southwest Russia indicated the possibility that the airliner was hit by some form of anti-aircraft fire. Russia's Dagestan and Chechnya regions have been targeted by Ukrainian weaponised military drones this month, with Russian air defences activated in response, Osprey said. Earlier Wednesday, the Russian defence ministry had reported the downing of 59 Ukrainian drones over several regions, it said. Some were reportedly downed in closed air space over regions bordering Ukraine, including the Sea of Azov. Flight operations were reportedly temporarily suspended at Russia's Kazan Airport due to the activity. In addition, publicly available ADS-B flight tracking data shows that the aircraft experienced GPS jamming throughout its flight over southwest Russia, the alert said. In Brussels, NATO called for a full investigation into the cause of the crash.

## Pak confirms airstrikes targeting militants' hideouts in Afghanistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Islamabad, Dec 26:** Pakistan Thursday confirmed that it carried out strikes targeting militants' hideouts in Afghanistan, amid strong protest from the Afghan leadership, which condemned it as a "brutal act" and said such arbitrary actions are not a solution to any problem.

According to the Afghan officials, at least 46 people, including women and children, were killed and several others injured in airstrikes by Pakistani fighter jets on parts of the Barmal district in Paktika province Tuesday night that also damaged several homes. "The intelligence-based operation was conducted by Pakistani security forces in the border areas of Afghanistan," Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in response to a query about the Tuesday night strikes at the weekly press briefing here. She added that the operation was carried out "based on threats to the security of Pakistani citizens".

The spokesperson, however, emphasised that Pakistan had "always prioritised dialogue in matters relating to ties with Afghanistan". "We respect Afghanistan's integrity and sovereignty." She also said that Pakistan's security forces and law enforcement agencies routinely conduct operations "against terrorist groups in the border areas".

"Preparations for these operations are made in an extremely careful manner," she said, adding that protecting its citizens was Pakistan's top priority. The spokesperson reiterated that there were threats posed by terrorist elements to Pakistan and its citizens. "Pakistan is committed to the security of its public," she said. The Afghan Taliban regime lodged a strong protest with Islamabad over the airstrikes, warning to give a response to the attack.

## TENSIONS FLARE IN COASTAL AREA

# Syria's new rulers declare crackdown



REUTERS

**Damascus, Dec 26:** Syria's new authorities Thursday launched a security crackdown in a coastal region where 14 policemen were killed a day before, vowing to pursue "remnants" of the ousted Bashar al-Assad government accused of the attack, state media reported.

The violence in Tartous province, part of the coastal region that is home to many members of Assad's Alawite sect, has marked the deadliest challenge yet to the Sunni Islamist-led authorities which swept him from power Dec 8. The new administration's security forces launched the operation to "control security, stability, and civil peace, and to pursue the remnants of Assad's militias in the woods and hills" in Tartous' rural areas, state news agency SANA reported. Members of the Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam, wielded huge sway in Assad-led Syria, dominating security forces he used against his opponents during the 13-year-long civil war, and to crush dis-

sent during decades of bloody oppression by his police state. Reflecting tensions with a sectarian edge, protesters chanted "Oh Ali!" during a rally outside local government headquarters in Tartous, images posted on social media Wednesday showed. The chant was a reference to Ali ibn Abi Talib, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed who is revered by Muslims but held in especially high regard by Alawites and Shi'ites, who believe Ali and his descendants should have led the Islamic community.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the former al Qaeda affiliate which led the rebel campaign that toppled Assad, has repeatedly vowed to protect minority religious groups, who fear the new rulers could seek to impose a conservative form of Islamist government. SANA reported that Mohammed Othman, the newly appointed governor of the coastal Latakia region that adjoins the Tartous area, met Alawite sheikhs to "encourage community cohesion and civil peace on the Syrian coast".

SECURITY FORCES LAUNCH OPERATION IN TARTOUS, ERSTWHILE STRONGHOLD OF FALLEN ASSAD GOVERNMENT. MOVE FOLLOWS ATTACK IN WHICH 14 POLICEMEN WERE KILLED. FOOTAGE SHOWS PROTEST IN TARTOUS CITY. NEW AUTHORITIES BAN NEWS COVERAGE WITH 'SECTARIAN TONE'

## SHORT TAKES

### Pak May 9 riots: Court sentences 60 more

**Islamabad:** Pakistan's military courts have convicted and sentenced another 60 civilians to prison terms ranging from two to 10 years for their involvement in attacks on army installations during violence May 9 last year, the army said Thursday. The announcement by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) - the media wing of the military - came a week after the army announced the conviction of 25 individuals for involvement in attacks on military facilities when supporters of Imran Khan resorted to vandalism and violence during a protest against his arrest. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supporters allegedly attacked several military installations May 9, 2023, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi and the ISI building in Faisalabad, to vent their anger against the arrest of their party founder in a corruption case.

### Fire breaks out at B'desh Secretariat

**Dhaka:** A massive fire broke out at a major building of the Bangladesh Secretariat in Dhaka Thursday, damaging official documents that prompted authorities to form a high-powered investigation committee amid suspicions that it could be an act of sabotage. The fire broke out in Building 7 of the Bangladesh Secretariat and it was brought under control after nearly six hours of firefighting efforts. According to officials, the fire broke out Thursday early morning in the nine-storey building housing seven ministries inside the high-security complex. However, no casualties were reported.

### Dead body found in wheel well of plane

**Kahului (Hawaii):** Maui police are investigating the discovery of a dead body in the wheel well of a United Airlines plane after it landed in Maui, the airline and police department said in statements Wednesday. The body was found in the wheel well of one of the main landing gears on flight 202, which arrived at Kahului Airport from Chicago Tuesday, United said in an emailed statement. The airline said the wheel well of the Boeing 787-10 was only accessible from the outside of the aircraft, and that it was unclear how or when the person accessed it. In an emailed statement, the Maui Police Department said it was "actively investigating" the discovery of the dead body.

## SNIPPETS

### Taiwan President Office holds first China 'expansion' simulation

**TAIPEI:** Taiwan's Presidential Office held its first "tabletop" exercise involving government agencies beyond the armed forces Thursday, simulating a military escalation with China amid renewed threats from Beijing, officials said. Dozens of Central and local government agencies as well as civil groups participated in the three-hour exercise, the sources said, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter. China has in recent years stepped up military threats, including the large massing of naval forces this month and daily military activities close to democratically governed Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own over Taipei's rejection. The war game held inside the Presidential Office in Taipei was led by Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim and National Security Council Secretary-general Joseph Wu, the officials familiar with the meeting told Reuters. It was part of the Taiwan government's ongoing effort to build up its capacity to cope with emergencies from disaster to military conflict for government offices and civil society.

### Japan Airlines hit by cyberattack

**TOKYO:** Japan Airlines said it was hit by a cyber-attack Thursday, causing delays to more than 20 domestic flights but the carrier said it was able to stop the onslaught and restore its systems hours later. There was no impact on flight safety, it said. JAL said the problem started Thursday morning when the company's network connecting internal and external systems began malfunctioning. The airline said it was able to identify the cause as an attack intended to overwhelm the network system with massive transmissions of data. Such attacks flood a system or network with traffic until the target cannot respond or crashes. The attack did not involve a virus or cause any customer data leaks, JAL said. It said that as of late morning, the cyberattack had delayed 24 domestic flights for more than 30 minutes. Experts have repeatedly raised concerns about the vulnerability of Japan's cybersecurity.

# SK Oppn plans vote to impeach acting Prez Han

REUTERS

**Seoul, Dec 26:** South Korea's main Opposition party introduced a bill to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo Thursday, a day before it plans to seek a vote on the move, which could deepen a constitutional crisis triggered by a short-lived martial law.

The Opposition Democratic Party had threatened to impeach Han if he did not immediately appoint three justices to fill the vacancies at the Constitutional Court. Parliament backed three nominees Thursday, but Han has yet to formally appoint them. The court is trying the impeachment of President Yoon Suk Yeol over his Dec 3 declaration of martial law. "It has become clear that Prime Minister and acting President Han Duck-soo does



not have the qualification or the will to safeguard the Constitution," Democratic Party floor leader Park Chan-dae said in a statement. The impeachment motion, which must be voted on within 24 to 72 hours, cited a range of actions by Han as grounds for his impeachment, includ-

ing his veto of a special prosecutor bill to investigate alleged wrongdoings by the first lady. If Han is impeached, the finance minister will assume the acting presidency.

OPPOSITION SAYS HAN UNQUALIFIED TO PROTECT CONSTITUTION. HAN SAYS AGREEMENT IS NEEDED ON COURT APPOINTMENTS. YOON TO FACE FIRST IMPEACHMENT TRIAL HEARING FRIDAY

# 20 years on, Sri Lanka remembers Tsunami tragedy

SRI LANKA MARKS DECEMBER 26 AS THE 'NATIONAL SAFETY DAY' AND THE MAIN MEMORIAL CEREMONY WAS HELD AT PERALIYE, ABOUT 90 KM FROM COLOMBO IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE, WHERE OVER 3,000 PEOPLE DIED IN THE WORLD'S WORST TRAIN TRAGEDY CAUSED DUE TO TSUNAMI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Colombo, Dec 26:** With a two minutes silence observed nationally, Sri Lanka Thursday marked the 20th anniversary of the South Asian Tsunami that had killed over 30,000 in the island nation. Sri Lanka marks December 26 as the 'National Safety Day' and the main memorial ceremony was held at Peraliye, about 90 km from Colombo in the southern province, where over 3,000 people died in the world's worst train tragedy caused due to Tsunami. The 9.1 magnitude earthquake induced Tsunami was first felt in the island's eastern coast before moving

south resulting in devastation beyond belief. At 9.25 am December 26, 2004, the train from Colombo to the southern town of Matara was hit by the raging Tsunami waves and within no time, the train and its tracks became a mangled heap killing all on board. Some villagers who had got onto the train thinking they would be safe too perished. "This was the world's biggest train tragedy with over 3,000 dying," said Paraliye Wimala, who heads the local Buddhist temple and is now in-charge of the board that maintains the monument to commemorate the victims. The Reverend Wimala said over 3,000 Tsunami victims



from the village had been buried in the three mass graves located on either side of the monument. He said the need to preserve the grave site was important as two of the graves have already

been covered with mangroves and shrubs. At 9.25 am Thursday, the train came to a halt at the same place where it was hit with the Tsunami waves 20 years ago. Relatives of some

of the victims were seen carrying flowers to pay tribute at the nearby monument. Twenty years on, Peraliye is a site for many museums and abandoned plots of land as their owners disappeared without a trace. "I don't want to talk about it - it hurts so much even after 20 years," Thushanthi Jayani, who lost her father-in-law and her six year old niece in the tragedy, said. The powerful undersea megathrust earthquake, which registered a magnitude of 9.1, struck off the coast of Sumatra Island, Indonesia December 26, 2004 prompting a series of turbulent Tsunami waves that ravaged the coasts of Indonesia, Sri

Lanka, India, including Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Thailand, Maldives, and Myanmar. "Sri Lanka was one of the hardest-hit countries with over 40,000 fatalities and property damage worth several million rupees. Thousands were left homeless as waves pushed debris several kilometres inland, pounding buildings into rubble," news portal Adaderana.lk said. Since 2005, December 26 has been declared as 'National Safety Day' and commemoration events are held in remembrance of all those who lost their lives in the country due to the various natural disasters, including the Tsunami disaster, the portal added.



# Business



**2024 has been a mixed bag for the Indian housing sector. Apart from the dampening effect of general and assembly elections, project approvals slowed down markedly; this inevitably impacted new housing supply**  
ANU PURI | CHAIRMAN, ANAROCK

## RBI PANEL ON ETHICAL USE OF AI

The Reserve Bank Thursday announced the setting up of an eight-member committee to develop a framework for responsible and ethical enablement of artificial intelligence (FREE-AI) in the financial sector. Headed by IIT Bombay professor Pushpak Bhattacharyya (Department of Computer Science and Engineering), the panel will assess the current level of adoption of AI in financial services, globally as well as in India



### of the day quote

**A marketing scheme to focus on the US with a corpus of ₹250 crore per year (Rs 750 crore overall) for three years may be launched to generate additional exports of \$25 billion**  
ASHWANI KUMAR | PRESIDENT, FIEO

**The Indian pharma market is expected to move up to \$120-130 billion by 2030 from the current size of \$58 billion. Initiatives in terms of quality, innovation and wider global reach will help the Indian pharma sector to realise the potential**  
SUDARSHAN JAIN | SECRETARY GENERAL, IPA

**As gold prices continue to soar, Indian jewellers are seeing a shift in consumer behaviour, particularly in the wedding sector. This year saw customers gravitating towards lightweight, versatile designs and value-driven alternatives like lab-grown diamonds and gemstone jewellery**  
SHEETIKA TANDON | FOUNDER, AMALTAS JEWELS

# Frauds on the rise in first half

**Banking frauds rise in H1FY25, amount involved jumps 8-time, says RBI report**  
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



**Mumbai, Dec 26:** The number of bank frauds witnessed a significant on-year increase in the first half of the current fiscal to 18,461 cases and the amount involved jumped more than eight-fold to ₹21,367 crore, according to RBI data released Thursday. The Reserve Bank of India has released the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24 which presents the performance of the banking sector, including commercial banks, co-operative banks and non-banking financial institutions, during 2023-24 and 2024-25 so far. The report said the number of frauds during April-September stood at 18,461 involving ₹21,367 crore compared to 14,480 cases involving ₹2,623 crore in the comparative period of the last financial year, based on the date of fraud reporting. It further said frauds present multiple challenges for the financial system in the form of reputational risk, operational risk, business risk and erosion of customer confidence with financial stability implications. Regarding 2023-24 fiscal as a whole, the RBI said that based on date of reporting by banks, the amount involved in frauds

was the lowest in a decade, while the average value was the lowest in 16 years. Based on the date of occurrence of frauds, in 2023-24, the share of internet and card frauds in the total stood at 44.7 per cent in terms of amount and 85.3 per cent in terms of number of cases. In 2023-24, the number of fraud cases reported by private sector banks (PVBs) accounted for 67.1 per cent of the total. In terms of amount involved, however, public sector banks (PSBs) had the highest share of card and internet frauds was highest for all bank groups in 2023-24. **Penalty on REs surge** Instances of penalty imposed on regulated entities (REs) increased during 2023-24 across all bank groups, except foreign banks and small finance banks. The total penalty amount

## NPAs AT 13-YEAR LOW

**Banks' profitability improves for 6th year in row in FY24**

Profitability of banks improved for the sixth consecutive year in 2023-24 and their gross bad debts or NPAs declined to a 13-year low of 2.7 per cent, according to the RBI data released Thursday. India's strong macroeconomic fundamentals have boosted the performance and soundness of the domestic banking and nonbanking financial sectors. "Banks' profitability rose for the sixth consecutive year in 2023-24 and continued to rise in H1:2024-25 with the return on assets (RoA) at 1.4 per cent and return on equity (ROE) at 14.6 per cent," said the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24. Asset quality improved, with the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) ratio falling to its lowest in 13 years at 2.7 per cent at end-March 2024 and 2.5 per cent at end-September 2024, it said. Banks' capital position remained satisfactory, as reflected in key parameters like leverage ratio and capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR). Further, strong credit expansion by NBFCs was accompanied by further strengthening of their balance sheets, improvement in credit quality and profitability, and satisfactory capital buffers. Net profit of the scheduled commercial banks increased by 32.8 per cent to ₹3,49,603 crore during the last fiscal. At end-March 2024, India's commercial banking sector consisted of 12 public sector banks (PSBs), 21 private sector banks (PVBs), 45 foreign banks (FBs), 12 SFBs, six PBs, 43 RRBs, and two LABs.

ued presence of unscrupulous players in the digital lending space, who falsely claim association with REs. To aid the customers in verifying the claims of a Digital Lending App's (DLA) association with an RE, the Reserve Bank is in the process of creating a public repository of DLAs deployed by REs. While many cases of digital fraud result from social engineering attacks on customers, there is also a rapid increase in the use of mule bank accounts to perpetrate such frauds, RBI said. The Reserve Bank further said it is working with banks



## STRONG DOLLAR ₹ plunges 12 paise to close at new low

**RUPEE ₹ VS DOLLAR \$**  
1 USD = 85.27 INR\*  
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 26:** The rupee stayed weak for the third straight session and fell 12 paise to settle at a fresh all-time low of 85.27 against the US dollar Thursday, amid a strong greenback and rising crude oil prices. Forex traders said, increased month-end as well as year-end dollar demand from importers and fear of an aggressive import tariff by the Donald Trump administration lifted the American currency. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 85.23 and touched the lowest-ever level of 85.28 against the greenback during intraday trade. The unit finally ended the session at its lifetime low closing level of 85.27 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 12 paise from its previous close. The rupee fell 4 paise to settle at 85.15 against the US dollar Tuesday, a day after losing 9 paise Monday. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally lower by 0.09 per cent but remained elevated at 107.93, amid soaring US Treasury yields (4.61 per cent) and the fear of delayed interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve.

### SHORT TAKES

**CCPA penalises 3 coaching institutes**  
New Delhi: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed penalties totalling ₹15 lakh on three coaching institutes for making misleading advertisements about their success rates in civil services examinations, the government said Thursday. Vajirao & Reddy Institute and StudyIQ IAS were each fined ₹700,000, while Edge IAS was penalised ₹100,000 for deceptive claims regarding their results in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examinations of 2022 and 2023, an official said.

### UNABATED FOREIGN FUND OUTFLOWS

**Mumbai, Dec 26:** Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended flat in listless trading Thursday amid a lack of near-term triggers and unabated foreign fund outflows. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 0.39 points to settle at 78,472.48 in a muted trade. During the morning trade, it had jumped 425.5 points or 0.54 per cent to 78,898.37. The NSE Nifty eked out gains of 22.55 points or 0.1 per cent to 23,750.20 on the monthly expiry day. From the 30 blue-chip stocks, Titan, Asian Paints, Nestle, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Zomato, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finserv were among the laggards. Adani Ports, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti, Sun Pharma, Bharti Airtel and Tata Motors were among the gainers. "On the last expiry day of the year, the domestic market remained flat throughout the day amidst holidays in peer markets and a lack of major domestic or global triggers. Auto shares saw gains from recent corrections," Vinod Nair, Head

# Stock markets close flat



**Concerns over FI outflows and the depreciating rupee persist, given the strengthening US dollar index and worries about potential adverse tariffs and concerns over rate cuts in 2025, held the muted market trend**  
VINOD NAIR | HEAD OF RESEARCH, GEOJIT FINANCIAL SERVICES

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Seoul ended lower. US markets were closed on Wednesday for Christmas. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities

## Govt to impose 6-month import cap on met coke

The move aims to protect domestic producers from rising imports, which have surged by over 61% in the past four years



**New Delhi, Dec 26:** India will impose restrictions on the import of low-ash metallurgical coke, a key steelmaking ingredient, for six months starting January 1, 2025, a government order said Thursday. The move aims to protect domestic producers from rising imports, which have surged by over 61% in the past four years, according to data from the federal trade ministry. The order sets country-specific quotas, limiting imports to 713,583 tonne for each of the first two quarters of 2025. Most imports allowed under the restriction will come from Poland and Colombia. Import of metallurgical coke with ash content above 18% - generally considered poor quality for steelmaking - remains unrestricted.

This decision follows an April, opens new tab proposal by the Directorate General of Trade Remedies, an arm of the federal trade ministry, to limit annual imports to 2.85 million metric tonne for one year. However, leading steelmakers, including JSW Steel and ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel, opposed the move, arguing it could hinder steel production in India, the world's second-largest crude steel producer. The government has been consulting the steelmaking industry ahead of the restrictions, Reuters reported in August.

## India starts anti-dumping probe into LNG fuel tanks from China

The country has already imposed anti-dumping duty on several products to tackle cheap imports from various countries, including China



**New Delhi, Dec 26:** India has initiated a probe into alleged dumping of LNG fuel tanks from China following a complaint by a domestic player, according to a commerce ministry notification. The commerce ministry's investigation arm, Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), is probing the dumping of liquefied natural gas (LNG) fuel tanks as imports are

allegedly hurting the margins of the domestic industry. Inox India Ltd has filed an application seeking the imposition of anti-dumping duty, stating that the cheap imports are causing material injury to the domestic industry. The tanks are used to contain and carry methane gas in large vehicles such as trucks. "On the basis of the duly substantiated written application submitted by the domestic industry and having reached

satisfaction based on the prima facie evidence submitted by domestic industry about dumping of subject goods...the Authority, hereby, initiates an anti-dumping investigation," the DGTR has said in a notification. If it is established that the dumping has caused material injury to domestic players, the DGTR would recommend the imposition of anti-dumping duty on these imports. The finance ministry takes the final decision to impose duties. Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in cheap imports. Imports of these tanks stood at \$93.6 million in 2023-24. It was \$42.7 million during April-October this fiscal and it was \$84.7 million in 2022-23.

## GLOBAL UNCERTAINTIES LOOM LARGE

# Economy to grow at 6.5% in FY25: FinMin

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** India's economy is expected to grow at around 6.5% in fiscal year 2024/25, closer to the lower end of its 6.5%-7% projection, as global uncertainties pose a dampening threat, the government said Thursday. The growth outlook for October to December appears bright, with rural demand remaining resilient and urban demand picking up in the first two months of the quarter, according to the finance ministry's monthly economic report for November. Growth slowed more than expected in July to September, hampered by weaker expansion in manufacturing and consumption. India has maintained that its economy will grow at a world-beating pace of



6.5%-7% despite a challenging environment. The outlook is expected to be better in October-to-March than in the first six months of the financial year, it said.

"The combination of monetary policy stance and macroprudential measures by the central bank may have contributed to the demand slowdown," the report said.

India's central bank has kept interest rates unchanged for 11 straight policy meetings, despite calls for rate cuts to support growth amid high inflation. For the next financial year starting April 1, 2026, the report said, newer risks have emerged, such as uncertain global trade growth and a stronger US dollar. US President-elect Donald Trump has threatened many nations, including India, with higher tariffs on imports, raising risks of a global trade war after he takes office January 20. Trump's election victory has also fuelled a run-up in the dollar and US yields. However, India's growth outlook in 2025/26 and coming years is bright in terms of domestic economic fundamentals, the finance ministry's report said.



# BUMRAH KEEPS BATTLE ALIVE

## Australia score 311/6 after impressive Konstas debut

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Melbourne, Dec 26:** Jasprit Bumrah's knack of coming up with magic deliveries in crunch situations kept India alive after Australia's top-order, headlined by teen debutant Sam Konstas' stroke-filled half-century, guided the hosts to 311 for 6 on the opening day of the fourth Test here Thursday.

If Konstas' audacious 60 off 65 balls enthralled the near sell-out crowd of over 80,000 at the MCG during a humid morning session, Bumrah's (3/75 in 21 overs) deception of length to dismiss Travis Head (0) also had its takers as chants of 'Boom, Boom, Boooooom-raaaaaah' reverberated through the stands.

Coming into the Test with back-to-back hundreds, Head couldn't judge the length of a Bumrah delivery that was pitched slightly fuller than what the batter expected. He shouldered his arms trusting the bounce but the 66.2 overs old Kookaburra nipped back to clip the off-ball.

In the next over, he removed an out-of-form Mitchell Marsh (4), having got Usman Khawaja (57 off 121 balls) with the half-tracker in the post-lunch session.

The first two sessions, however, belonged to Australia with senior players Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne (72 off 145 balls) and Steve Smith (68 batting, 111 balls) scoring half-centuries.

The final session was all about Bumrah magic. The Indian spearhead didn't let the hosts completely walk away with the game which they threatened to do at one stage.

He now has 24 wickets in the series. With Mohammed Siraj (0/69 in 15 overs) off-colour, Bumrah didn't have much support save off-spinner Washington Sundar (1/37 in 12 overs), who bowled a containing line.

Akash Deep (1/59 in 19 overs) though got Alex Carey with the second new ball at the age end

of the day. Even Ravindra Jadeja (1/54 in 14 overs) leaked runs despite getting Konstas out and Nitish Reddy, the batting all-rounder, was only used before the second new ball was taken.

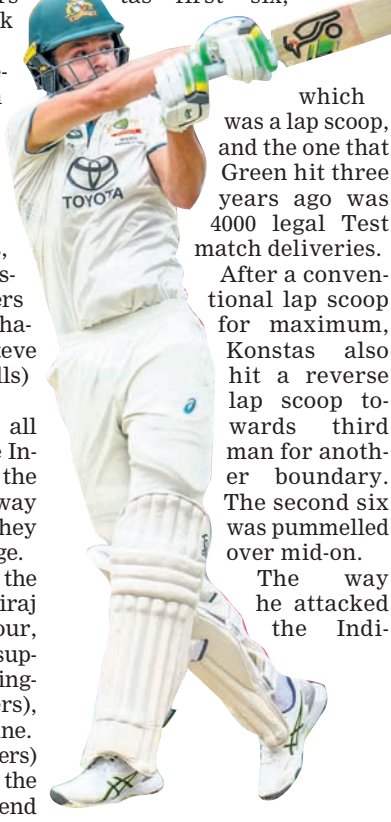
### SPECTACULAR SAM

The morning was owned by the precocious 19-year-old from New South Wales. Konstas didn't show any nerves during his scintillating knock, which comprised of two sixes off Bumrah.

He also didn't mind a good scrap with India's superstar Virat Kohli, whose shoulder brush with the 19-year-old led to a brief confrontation.

In fact, Bumrah was hit for a six for the first time in a Test since Cameron Green hit him for one back in 2021.

The gap between Konstas' first six,



an bowling with gusto gave his veteran opening partner Khawaja a chance to get back to form with a patient half-century. But Khawaja would be really annoyed with himself as he couldn't time a pull shot off a Bumrah half-tracker, which went straight into

KL Rahul's hands in the post-lunch session.

The duo added 89 runs in such quick time that Labuschagne and last match's centurion Smith didn't need to show any urgency.

For Konstas, it all began with a few play and misses off Bumrah's opening over but as soon as the teenager got his first couple of runs, things changed dramatically.

The fearlessness of youth stood out on the big stage as Konstas pulled off the lap-scoop against Bumrah before smashing him over mid-on for another maximum.

The fans and experts alike were forced to think the last time Bumrah (1/50 in 15 overs) was hit for two sixes in his first spell of a Test match. They couldn't because it never happened in a first spell.

The stump mic caught Bumrah saying "Beginner's Luck" but Konstas seemed to have enough wares to answer his probing queries. And it was laced with a lot of spunk as he got into a verbal duel with Kohli after their shoulders brushed while crossing each other.

He often shuffled towards the leg-stump to make room and on one occasion, crunched Bumrah past cover. Mohammed Siraj was welcomed into



### FACE OFF WITH KONSTAS

## Kohli fined, handed demerit point

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Melbourne, Dec 26:** Virat Kohli and Australian youngster Sam Konstas were Thursday involved in a physical altercation because of which the Indian superstar was fined 20 per cent of his match fee and handed a demerit point even though it was

played down as an accidental bump by the 19-year-old debutant. The brief showdown took place after the 10th over of the Australian innings on the opening day of the fourth Test here when the players were crossing over. Kohli and Konstas bumped shoulders while moving across the pitch in the face off that was initiated by the travelling star.

Kohli was eventually charged with breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct by on-field umpires Joel Wilson and Michael Gough, third umpire Sharfuddinoula Ibne Shahid and fourth umpire Shawn Craig.

He accepted the sanctions proposed by match referee Andy Pycroft at the end of day's play.

"Virat Kohli has been fined 20 percent of his match fee and awarded one demerit point for breaching Level 1 of the ICC Code of Conduct," the ICC said in a statement.

"No formal hearing was needed as Kohli accepted the sanctions prosed by Match Referee Andy Pycroft," it added.

After the physical contact, both players quickly turned around to glance at each other and engage in a heated exchange of words before Konstas' teammate Usman Khawaja stepped in to separate them. The on-field umpires also had a word with the two and things cooled down rather quickly.



I was just doing my gloves and I think he accidentally bumped me. I think that's just cricket and can happen with tension. I think the emotions got to both of us

SAM KONSTAS | DEBUTANT, AUSTRALIA

Speaking to reporters after stumps, Konstas said Kohli bumped into him but it wasn't deliberate.

The ICC's Code of Conduct states that "any form of inappropriate physical contact is prohibited in cricket. Without limitation, players will breach this regulation if they deliberately, recklessly and/or negligently walk or run into or shoulder another player or umpire".

Konstas, who was batting on 27 at the time, went on to hit Jasprit Bumrah for two boundaries and a six in the next over.

India assistant coach Abhishek Nayar, who addressed the media in the end-of-day press conference, also brushed aside the incident as nothing big.

"When you play a game, there will be emotions but it is not as big as it seems. I wasn't aware of what happened and don't know what was said," he said in response to queries.

### Kohli criticised for his actions

Konstas might have dismissed it as routine but former Australian skipper Ricky Ponting blamed Kohli for instigating the exchange. He went to the extent of saying that Kohli could face disciplinary action

for it. "Have a look where Virat walks. Virat's walked one whole pitch over to his right and instigated that confrontation. No doubt in my mind whatsoever," Ponting said on Channel 7 while watching the replay of the incident.

"I have no doubt that the umpires and the referee will have a good look at that. Fielders should be nowhere near the batsman at that stage. It looked to me that Konstas looked up really late, wouldn't even know anyone is in front of him. That man on-screen there (Kohli) might have a few questions to answer," Ponting added.

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who was at the helm during Kohli's captaincy, said the run-in was unnecessary.

"There is a line and you don't want to overstep that line. That's unnecessary, totally unnecessary. You don't want to see that. You know Virat is a senior player, he has been captain of the side," he said on 'Fox Sports'.

"He will have his own explanations for this but it's something you don't want to see. One person who would be watching, his eyes locked into the proceedings is Andy Pycroft," he added.

### NATIONAL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

## Bengal down Odisha to make Santosh Trophy semifinals

West Bengal enter the semifinals for the 52nd time



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Hyderabad, Dec 26:** West Bengal edged out Odisha 3-1 to qualify for the semifinals of the 78th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy 2024-25 at the Deccan Arena Thursday.

Odisha had a bright start to the game as Rakesh Oram put them in the lead in the 25th minute. Bengal found the equaliser at the stroke of half time through Narohari Shrestha and struck twice more via Robi Hansda (70') and substitute Manotos Maji (90+2') to enter the semifinals for the 52nd time.

Hansda's ninth goal of the campaign saw him pull further away in the goal scoring charts.

For record champions West Bengal, tackling adversity was the one challenge they did not expect from this game, against a team that had qualified for the knockouts by the skin of their teeth.

Yet, the underdogs became the second team to breach the Bengal defence in the Santosh Trophy this season, Rakesh Oram scoring the first goal of the day in the 25th minute to give them a shock lead through a header off a corner by Bikash Kumar Sahoo.

It wasn't just a shocker but also an eye-opener when Sanjoy Sen's side had been controlling the game; even when the goal rang in, and to their credit they rolled on in the same way after.

Odishas luck finally gave out in the final minute of the first half when seasoned forward Shrestha drew them level with a firm right-footer.

The leveller was expected to change the mood of the game, and yet Odisha would not go away, carving out half chances aplenty early in the second half.

West Bengal for their part were profligate with the ball, and especially in the final third. It took the best out of their main man Hansda to give them the lead. The forward added his ninth goal to a brilliant Santosh Trophy campaign in the 77th minute. It was a measured left-footed half volley from top of the box after Shrestha headed it down for him. A deflated Odisha tried their best to get back in the game, but by now West Bengal had settled and held them an arm's length away.

A third goal by Maji deep in injury time off a counter-attack sealed the win, and ensured that West Bengal's quest for the thirty-third title rolls on.

## OFC signs Brazilian forward Dori

Dori's arrival is seen as a major boost for Odisha FC as they aim to fortify their push in ISL

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Rourkela, Dec 26:** Odisha FC have bolstered their attacking lineup in the Indian Super League (ISL) with the signing of seasoned Brazilian forward Dorielton Gomes Nascimento, popularly known as Dori.

The 33-year-old joins the Kalinga Warriors on a contract valid until the end of the current season, with an option to extend for another year.

Dori's illustrious career began with Fluminense FC in Brazil, where he was part of the squad that reached the final of the Copa Libertadores in 2008. Over the years, he expanded his horizons by playing in multiple leagues across Asia, where he established himself as a proven goal-scorer.

The forward gained significant recognition in Bangladesh, playing pivotal roles for Dhaka Abahani and Bashundhara Kings. With Dhaka Abahani, Dori clinched the Federation Cup and Independence Cup in the 2021-22 season while



also leading the team to a Bangladesh Premier League runner-up finish.

His time with Bashundhara Kings was equally fruitful, as he spearheaded the team to back-to-back Bangladesh Premier League titles in 2022-23 and 2023-24. Additionally, he contributed to consecutive Independence Cup triumphs and a third-place finish in the Federation Cup during the 2022-23 season.

Dori has previously faced Odisha FC in the AFC Cup 2023-24 while playing for Bashundhara Kings. In that encounter, the Brazilian show-

cased his scoring prowess, netting twice in a thrilling 3-2 victory in Dhaka. Dori's ability to find the back of the net is widely acknowledged.

He recently clinched the Golden Boot in the Super League Kerala 2024, scoring an impressive eight goals in 11 matches. His knack for delivering crucial goals at decisive moments makes him a valuable addition to Odisha's lineup.

Head coach Sergio Lobera expressed his confidence in Dori's capabilities, highlighting the forward's extensive experience and goal-scoring record. "A player we know well from facing him in the AFC Cup, he is a goalscorer, and he has scored many goals in all the teams he has been in. He has a lot of experience, and he is a player who I think can help us a lot," Lobera said in a statement released by the club Thursday.

Dori has already joined Odisha FC's first-team training under Sergio Lobera and is set to debut in the ISL starting January 1, 2025.

### SNIPPETS

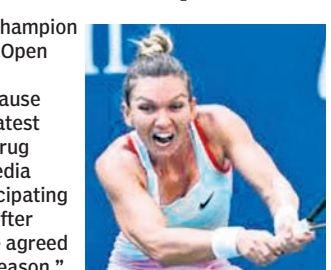
#### Vijayveer wins battle of Olympians

**NEW DELHI:** Punjab's Vijayveer Sidhu beat fellow Olympian Gurpreet Singh of Army Marksmanship Unit to clinch his maiden men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) title at the on-going 67th National Shooting Championship Competitions (NSCC) for pistol events here Thursday. Taking aim at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range (DKSSR) Finals Hall, Paris Olympian Vijayveer got the better of Rio Olympian Gurpreet 28-25 in the title round. Air Force's Shivam Shukla finished third with a score of 23. Vijayveer shot 581 in the qualifications to make it to the six-man eight series of five rapid-fire shots final round in second position, behind Uttar Pradesh's Ankur Goel, who shot 585. Gurpreet, who announced after the finals that this would be his last nationals as he was turning to coaching, only managed to clinch the sixth and last spot with a score of 575.



#### Halep withdraws from Australian Open

**MELBOURNE:** Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep pulled out of Australian Open qualifying and a tuneup tournament in Auckland, New Zealand, Thursday because of pain in her knee and shoulder, the latest interruption of her comeback from a drug suspension. Halep posted on social media that she was feeling poorly after participating in an exhibition event in Abu Dhabi. "After discussing with my team at length, we agreed it is sensible to delay the start of my season," Halep wrote. "It's not what I wanted." The 33-year-old Romanian said she is planning to next enter the Transylvania Open in her home country, where play begins February 3.



## 'Looking forward to contributing to Soorma's success'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Rourkela, Dec 26:** Indian men's hockey team captain and star drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh has expressed his excitement as he prepares to lead Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming Hockey India League (HIL) season, set to commence December 28.

Harmanpreet became the most expensive player in HIL history after being acquired by Soorma Hockey Club for Rs 78 lakh during the auction and is eager to bring his experience and drag-flicking prowess to the franchise.

"I'm thrilled to begin this new chapter of Indian hockey as a Soorma Hockey Club player and compete in the Hockey India League. The league pro-



vides a fantastic platform for players to showcase their skills, and I'm looking forward to con-

tributing to the team's success this season," he commented. The HIL, returning after a

hiatus, promises to deliver high-octane action and showcase top-tier talent from around

bing shoulders with players you look up to and competing with and against them on a daily basis improved us more than we could imagine. With the Women's HIL also commencing this time, I am certain that it will propel the Indian women's hockey team to greater heights as well in the future," he added.

The Soorma Hockey Club is coached by Jeroen Baart, with Indian hockey legend Sardar Singh serving as a mentor. Harmanpreet's impressive track record includes scoring 205 goals in 234 appearances for the national senior side and he will aim to replicate the same in the HIL, along with world-class teammates like Vivek Sagar Prasad, Gurjant Singh, Victor Wegnez, and Jeremy Hayward.