



Embracing simplicity

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu shares that all she needs in a busy world is the quiet of a simple life

LEISURE | P2



Russia defends itself

Russia's aviation chief says Ukrainian drone attack was underway as the Azerbaijani airliner attempted to land

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Osamu Suzuki no more

Osamu Suzuki, former boss of Suzuki Motor Corp who helped turn the carmaker into a globally competitive company, dies at 94

BUSINESS | P11



Batting meltdown

A familiar collapse unfolds after Yashasvi Jaiswal's inexplicable run-out as India reach 164/5 against a menacing Australia

SPORTS | P12

Manoj Ahuja gets extension

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet Friday extended the service period of Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja for a period of one year from January 1, 2025, official sources said.

He assumed the role of Chief Secretary July 1, 2024, following the state government's swearing-in ceremony. Ahuja was brought back to Odisha from Central service at the request of the state government.

A 1990-batch IAS officer, Ahuja is the first Chief Secretary appointed by the BJP government in Odisha. He took over from Pradeep Kumar Jena, who had been serving an extended term until June 30.

Shah's Odisha visit postponed

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Union Home Minister Amit Shah's scheduled two-day visit to Odisha from Saturday has been postponed after the Centre declared a seven-day mourning in honour of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a BJP leader said here.

Shah was scheduled to attend a programme of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and hold a meeting with BJP MPs, MLAs and workers at an event in Kalinga Stadium here December 29 along with some other programmes.

"The visit of the Union Home Minister has been postponed due to the demise of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh," BJP's Jajpur MP Rabindra Narayan Behera said Friday.

The Central government has declared a seven-day mourning in memory of Singh, who died Thursday night.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



God knows when we'll see another leader who works more and talks less

Farmer dies of electrocution

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, Dec 27: A farmer was electrocuted after coming in contact with a live electric wire in Bhadrak district Friday, police said.

The deceased was identified as Pramod Das, a resident of Baligaon Narasinghpur village under the jurisdiction of the Chandbali police station.

A fire broke out after a spark as soon as Das came in contact with the live wire, which snapped and fell on a farmland, resulting in the death of the farmer and damage to crops spread over nearly two acres of land.

Fire department personnel went to the spot and extinguished the flames, a police officer said.



WHITE BLANKET: Buildings of the banking district come out of thick fog over Frankfurt, Germany, Friday

PICTURE: PTI

State forms law panel

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The state government Friday constituted a law commission under the chairmanship of retired judge Justice Biswanath Rath.

The commission would examine the existing laws and suggest ways to improve and modify them, official sources said.

"... The state government do hereby appoint Justice Biswanath Rath as the chairperson, Surya Prakash Mishra, senior advocate and Soura Chandra Mohapatra, senior advocate as members of the Odisha State Law Commission," a notification issued by Law department said.

Advocate General Pitambar Acharya and Law department Principal Secretary Manas Ranjan Barik were appointed ex-officio members of the panel.

The commission would also identify old acts and rules that have become obsolete and suggest ways to bring reforms, the sources added.

Notably, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had earlier stated that the state government has started the process to identify obsolete laws in a bid to repeal them.

Rupee's record fall

■ The rupee Friday fell the most in almost two years as month-end dollar demand by importers weighed on the currency amid a sustained foreign fund outflow. The rupee has been setting new record lows this month as the dollar's resurgence weighed on emerging-market currencies. The depreciation of the rupee puts considerable pressure on the already high import prices of crude oil and raw materials, paving the way for higher imported inflation and production costs besides higher retail inflation. India imports over 85 per cent of its oil requirements. The higher oil prices will, in turn, percolate down to a host of products, and things like vegetables, restaurant services, electronic items and many more will get expensive as the price of fuel rises. On the other hand, for students who wish to go abroad to study, a depreciation of the rupee would make them shell out more.



AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 27: The rupee fell the steepest in almost two years to hit its lifetime intraday low of 85.80 before a suspected central bank intervention helped recover some of its losses and settled 21 paise lower at a record low of 85.48 against the US dollar, Friday.

According to analysts, the Reserve Bank India's (RBI) stance to hold on to its dollar payments in short-term forward contracts added to the shortage of greenback, with

importers rushing to meet their month-end payment obligations.

Despite robust sentiment in domestic equity markets, the rupee was weighed down by sustained outflow of foreign funds and rising crude oil prices, they added.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 85.31 and plunged 53 paise to the lowest-ever intraday level of 85.80.

The unit finally ended the session at 85.48 against the greenback, losing 21 paise

from its previous closing level of 85.27.

The rupee's earlier sharpest one-day fall of 68 paise was recorded February 2, 2023.

The domestic unit has been hitting new lows almost every day in the past couple of weeks. It had plunged 12 paise to 85.27 against the dollar Thursday after declining 13 paise in the previous two sessions.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.04 per cent at 107.94, while the 10-year benchmark US Treasury yield rose 0.76 per cent, hitting its seven-month high level of 4.61 per cent.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.15 per cent to USD 73.37 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 226.59 points or 0.29 per cent higher at 78,699.07 points, while Nifty went up 63.20 points, or 0.27 per cent to close at 23,813.40 points.

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Rourkela, Dec 27: The highly anticipated return of the Hockey India League (HIL) 2024-25 is set to become a reality with a clash between Delhi SG Pipers and Gonasika Saturday, promising a spectacular showcase of world-class hockey and fierce competition.

The Birsra Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela will host the eight men's teams till the final February 1 while four women's teams will compete against each other from January 12 to 26 in Ranchi.

The Men's HIL will kick off in Rourkela, with Phase 1 spanning from December 28 to January 18, where all eight teams will play against each other once. Phase 2, beginning January 19, will see the teams divided into two pools -- Pool A (Delhi SG Pipers, Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Soorma Hockey Club, Vedanta Kalinga Lancers) and Pool B (Gonasika, Hyderabad Toofans, Tamil Nadu Dragons, UP Rudras). Each team will face others in their respective pool, with the top four teams advancing to

the semi final January 31.

Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Delhi SG Pipers, Soorma Hockey Club and Odisha Warriors are the four teams in the Women's HIL. Their matches will commence January 12 at Ranchi's Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro Turf Stadium, with each team playing against the others twice. After a competitive pool stage, the top two teams will meet in the final January 26. Both men's and women's teams will also play one of their matches at the alternate venue to bring the HIL excitement to fans in both locations.

"HIL is returning after seven years and everyone in the team is excited for the match against Delhi. We have a good understanding amongst each other in the team and a good mixture of youngsters, Indian seniors and foreigners. We will look to implement the things that we have trained on so far in the match tomorrow. We have also played with and against these players before, so we will look to play our game and do our best to minimise their goallscoring opportunities," Gonasika Captain Manpreet Singh shared.

NASA probe completes closest-ever approach to Sun

REUTERS

Washington, Dec 27: NASA said Friday that its Parker Solar Probe was 'safe' and operating normally after successfully completing the closest-ever approach to the Sun by any human-made object.

The spacecraft passed just 3.8 million miles (6.1 million km) from the solar surface December 24, flying into the Sun's outer atmosphere called the corona, on a mission to help scientists learn more about the Earth's closest star.

The agency said the operations team at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Maryland received the signal, a beacon tone, from the probe just before midnight Thursday.

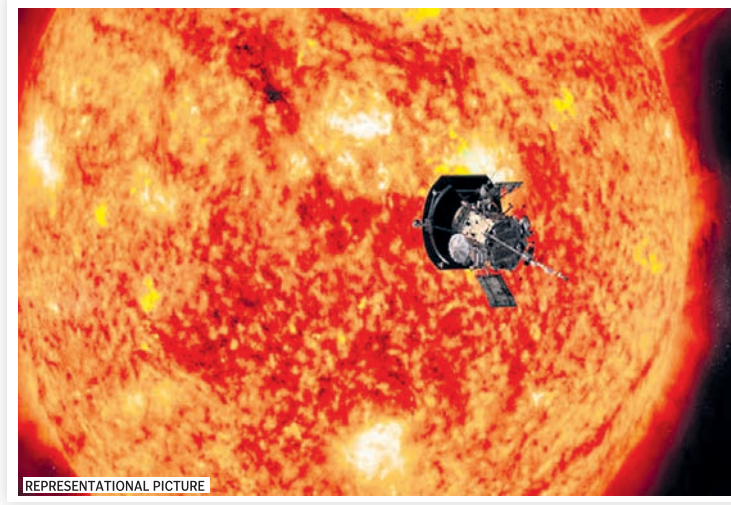
The spacecraft is expected to send detailed telemetry da-

ta about its status January 1, NASA added.

Moving at up to 430,000 mph (692,000 kph), the spacecraft endured temperatures of up to 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit (982 degrees Celsius), according to the NASA website.

"This close-up study of the Sun allows Parker Solar Probe to take measurements that help scientists better understand how material in this region gets heated to millions of degrees, trace the origin of the solar wind (a continuous flow of material escaping the Sun), and discover how energetic particles are accelerated to near light speed," the agency added.

Dr Nicola Fox, NASA's head of science, said: "It is 3.8m miles from the sun's surface. It is breaking all of these records and it's a just a total



REPRESENTATIONAL PICTURE

'Yay, we did it!' moment." The Parker Solar Probe was launched in 2018 and has been gradually circling closer towards the Sun, using flybys of Venus to gravi-

tationally pull it into a tighter orbit with the Sun. The probe, which is the size of a small car, has been designed to make observations of the Sun's upper atmosphere

THE SPACECRAFT PASSED JUST 3.8 MILLION MILES (6.1 MILLION KM) FROM THE SOLAR SURFACE, FLYING INTO THE SUN'S OUTER ATMOSPHERE CALLED THE CORONA

MOVING AT UP TO 430,000 MPH (692,000 KPH), THE SPACECRAFT ENDURED TEMPERATURES OF UP TO 1,800 DEGREES FAHRENHEIT (982 DEGREES CELSIUS)

and carries four instrument suites.

Solar wind has important implications for life on Earth: while it is typically deflected by Earth's magnetic field, the

particles can interact with atoms and molecules in the atmosphere to produce the phenomena of the northern and southern lights. However, large ejections of particles from the Sun can be problematic, interfering with the Earth's magnetic field and disrupting power grids and communication systems.

When the probe first passed into the solar atmosphere in 2021 it found new details about the boundaries of the Sun's atmosphere and collected close-up images of coronal streamers, cusp-like structures seen during solar eclipses.

One instrument aboard the spacecraft captured visible light from Venus, giving scientists a new way to see through the planet's thick clouds to the surface below, NASA said.

leisure



MILA KUNIS TOLD 'NEVER' TO TALK ABOUT HER JUDAISM

Opening up about her childhood, American actress Mila Kunis has revealed she was told "never" to talk about her Judaism. The actress, 41, married to fellow Hollywood star Ashton Kutcher, also 41, for nearly a decade, was born in Ukraine and immigrated to Los Angeles when she was eight years old.

BRITNEY SPEARS SETS INSTAGRAM ON FIRE

Pop icon Britney Spears, who recently reunited with her sons, spent Boxing Day dancing in her undergarments. The singer-songwriter declared it "the best Christmas" of her life as she spent some quality time with Jayden, 18, and his brother Sean Preston, 19, Wednesday after almost two years, reports *Mirror.co.uk*.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES

You will remain undecided today, which is quite unlike you, says Ganesha. This will lead to speculation, which is not a bad thing by itself, unless you put all your money into the bargain. Also, be careful not to take wild guesses in love and relationships.

TAURUS

People around you will be surprised to witness the considerate and compassionate side of you today, says Ganesha. Problems may come knocking but you, along with support from your loved ones, will handle them with brilliant tact. Enjoy the company of near and dear ones and let your presence be felt in social outings, suggests Ganesha.

GEMINI

Today, you are likely to focus on self-improvement, predicts Ganesha. Self-employed people may expect huge profits in their businesses. You may end up spending more time at work and less time with family. You need to strike a balance between work and family.

CANCER

What good is life if it doesn't involve great fun and merrymaking. Keeping this in mind, you will set about planning your day. There may be no stopping you as you go about your day having a blast at every possible moment. There will be no limit to your gregarious behaviour, says Ganesha.

LEO

Call it the momentary re-ignition of the spark of brilliance and energy, this day finds you at the peak of your dynamism. Ganesha predicts a fantastic day for all, especially those in the freelancing business, as your imagination and inspiration reach new heights and motivate others to excel. Recall the legendary Swami Vivekananda's words, "Arise, awake and stop not till your goal is reached."

VIRGO

Today is the day when you'll be like the Iron Man: heart of gold, nerves of steel - minus the shiny body armour, though. Tolerance, optimism and exceedingly artistic talents will rule the roost. Pursue academics in the arts, advises Ganesha. Your understanding of life will help you serve society better. Yes, like Iron Man.

LIBRA

You may not have been crowned 'Employee Of The Month', but do not let that distract you from the fact that today, you are the brightest star in office. Be prepared to get some special treatment at work, as your bosses shower praise on you. Apart from that, a lot of tangible and intangible benefits await you. Ganesha advises you against complacency of any sort if you want the key to the executive wash room.

SCORPIO

Ganesha warns you of a long, dreary day today. Though not completely at a loss, you may feel lost and desire to spend some time alone with yourself. The empty nest syndrome is likely to invade and hold your mental peace at ransom, says Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS

A balanced day is in store today. Find yourself as much at home as at your desk. You may engage in a time of fun and games with your buddies. But when it comes to family, something more practical, like re-arranging your house, is on the cards.

CAPRICORN

If you are a sports person, you will enjoy both good health and fame, while engineers will mull investing money in new business ventures, foresees Ganesha. But make sure you know what you are doing, a minor slip can cost you a fortune, and you would have realised by now that repenting won't undo anything. Your social standing may get stronger; people may develop a high opinion about, and your reputation may get a boost too.

AQUARIUS

Money matters are very important, and your family will demand your presence in all financial dealings. At work, things will be more comfortable. You may also get new projects. Ganesha predicts a trip in the offing.

PISCES

Your inherent dynamism and energy will sparkle forth today. Freelancers will be struck with inspiration, and will conjure masterpieces. Pleasant surprises await you in the evening, says Ganesha.

Sushmita shares her crush story

MUMBAI: Sushmita Sen, who first worked with Salman Khan in the 1999 hit *Biwi No 1*, recently shared a delightful anecdote about her teenage admiration for the superstar. Long before she shared screen space with him, Sushmita was a huge fan of Salman, thanks to his debut film *Maine Pyar Kiya*. In a conversation shared on Shipra Neeraj's YouTube channel, Sushmita revealed that as a teenager, she spent all her pocket money buying Salman's posters. "Whatever pocket money I got, I would buy Salman Khan posters from that, and in those days, *Maine Pyar Kiya* had released, so I even had the picture of the kabootar from that film because it was from a Salman Khan film," she said. Her love for Salman's posters was so intense that she made sure to complete her homework on time to keep them safe. "My parents always said that if the homework is not done on time, we will remove those posters, so I would always finish my homework on time because those posters were sacrosanct. I was in love with this man," she fondly recalled.



MANISHA ON CHANGING TIMES IN CINEMA

MUMBAI: Cinema has always mirrored the changing times, evolving alongside societal shifts. Over the years, the way films are made, consumed, and experienced has transformed drastically, with both positive and negative implications. Manisha Koirala, nostalgically reflected on what has been lost in modern cinema. She noted, "Music and poetry is missing," a sentiment many fans of older films might share. "Pehle achhe gaane hote the, thehraav hota tha, abhi woh missing hai". She added, "Everything is robotic now, we used to be relaxed earlier," pointing to the more mechanical, fast-paced nature of modern filmmaking. The rise of digital platforms and social media has also altered personal connections. Koirala emphasized, "We had human bondings earlier and today it's just the feedback through social media," illustrating the shift from real-world connections to online interactions. Despite these changes, Koirala said, "The pace is good now, I like it," and expressed, "I love the realism in the performance and takes nowadays." On the work front, the actress garnered rave reviews for her performance in Sanjay Leela Bhansali directorial *Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar*, a period drama web series.



SAMANTHA'S SIMPLICITY

MUMBAI: Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu recently shared that all she needs in a busy world is the quiet of a simple life. On Friday, the actress took to her Instagram handle to share a heartfelt glimpse into her holiday mood with a series of serene photos. Samantha paused to embrace the simple joys of life, reminding fans of the beauty in slowing down. Sharing the images, she wrote: "Maybe it's fine to just sit and stare. Maybe the hustle can wait for a while. Maybe all you need in a busy world is the quiet of a simple life. Maybe having no plan is part of the plan... To wander, to wonder, just because you can Happy Holidays." In the candid shots, the *Antava* star appears relaxed and at peace, embodying the spirit of the holidays—a time to step back, cherish the quiet, and find joy in the little things. Interestingly, fans were quick to applaud her mindful perspective, flooding the comments with heart emojis. Many shared how Samantha's words encouraged them to slow down and appreciate the present moment. One fan commented, "Sometimes it just feels like you are lagging, but you don't feel like doing anything. No one tells us it's fine to take time, but instead, we are constantly being told to rush. Thank you so much, Sam. Needed this. @samantharuthprabhuoffl." Another wrote, "Thank you, @samantharuthprabhuoffl, for showing us the importance of slowing down! Keeping calm and enjoying the present in this noisy world." AGENCIES



'Don't compare me to Allu Arjun'

MUMBAI: Allu Arjun's latest blockbuster, *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, is breaking numerous records at the box office. Recently, legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan expressed his admiration for Allu during an episode of his quiz show *Kaun Banega Crorepati 16*. When a contestant mentioned being a fan of both actors, Bachchan acknowledged Allu's incredible talent and success, while humbly requesting not to be compared to him. According to a report, Amitabh praised Allu, that the recognition he has received is well-deserved and encouraged viewers to watch *Pushpa 2*. The actor said, "Allu Arjun is an incredibly talented artist, and the recognition he has received is well-deserved. I'm also a huge fan of his. Recently, his movie was released, and if you haven't seen it yet, you should watch it. But don't compare me to him." Previously, Allu had referred to Bachchan as an



enigmatic inspiration in his life and career. In response to his admiration, the Sholay actor took to social media to express his gratitude, he wrote, "#AlluArjun ji... so humbled by your gracious words... you give me more than I deserve... we are all such huge fans of your work and talent... may you continue to inspire us all... my prayers and wishes for your continued success!" *Pushpa 2* has been a massive hit since its release, grossing over Rs 1,650 crore worldwide, making it one of the highest-grossing Indian films of all time. AGENCIES

PEANUTS



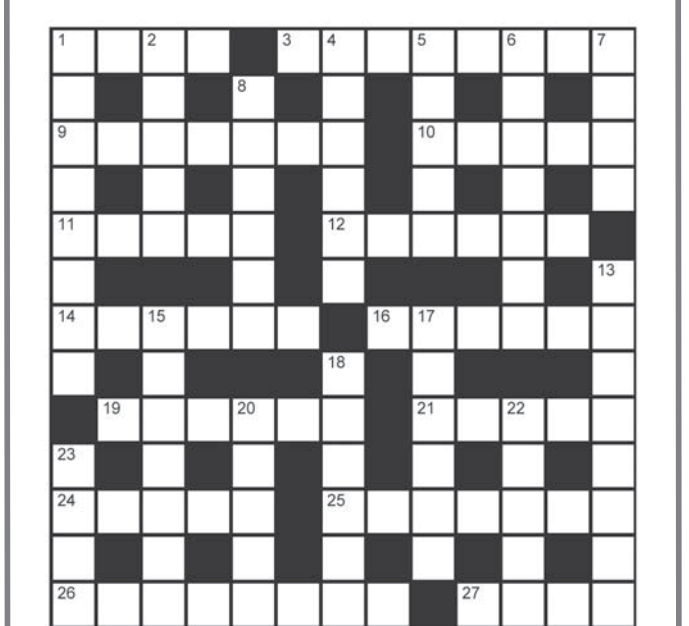
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



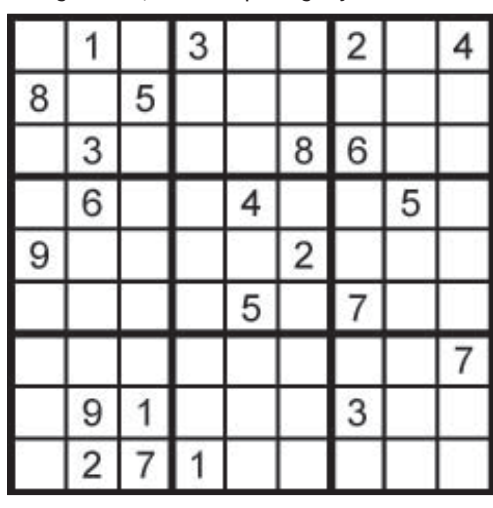
CROSSWORD



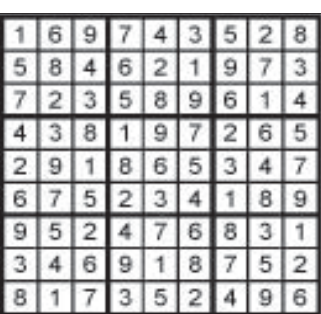
- Across**
- 1 Eyebrow shape
 - 3 Red table wine
 - 9 Claim
 - 10 Colorado ski resort
 - 11 Speak from a soapbox
 - 12 Slow Internet connection (4-2)
 - 14 Egg holder
 - 16 Park structure
 - 19 Type of phrase or title
 - 21 Venomous snake
 - 24 Upper echelon
 - 25 Circus swing
 - 26 Organ part
 - 27 Graven image
- Down**
- 1 Type of golf shot
 - 2 About that time
 - 4 Disheveled
 - 5 Exotic jelly flavour
 - 6 Poseidon's Roman counterpart
 - 7 Cravings
 - 8 Relinquish
 - 13 Something to answer
 - 15 Kind of TV show
 - 17 Noah's landfall
 - 18 Marine mollusk
 - 20 Any system of principles or beliefs
 - 22 Fear
 - 23 Pack of cards

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

Artistes perform on the occasion of Kala Samarpan Award 2024, organised by Tribhanga Kala Niketan at GKCM Odissi Research Centre in Bhubaneswar Friday



downtown

CM pays tribute to Manmohan Singh



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday paid tributes to former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, died at AIIMS Delhi Thursday night at the age of 92. He was the prime minister from 2004 to 2014.

Majhi, along with Forest, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singkhuntia and senior officials offered floral tributes to a photograph of Singh at state secretariat Lok Seva Bhawan here.

Later speaking to reporters, the chief minister said, "Singh was a great son of the country and was respected all over the world for his knowledge and skills in the field of economics."

"Due to his liberal economic policies, India started its journey as a major economy of the world. As the prime minister, he accelerated the development of the country in various fields. His wisdom, politeness and honesty have created a unique identity for him in the field of politics," CM added.

He expressed his condolences to the bereaved family of Singh. Congress leaders and workers paid tributes to Singh at Congress Bhawan. State Congress leaders expressed deep grief over the demise of the former prime minister and have

prayed to God for peace to the departed soul. "He has always thought about the upliftment of poor and middle-class people. He had a vision to strengthen the Indian economy and executed it. The MGNREGA scheme has proved to be a major milestone to eradicate unemployment," senior Congress leader Niranjana Patnaik said.

"India has lost a great economist and leader. When India's economy was in a sorry state, he took charge of the finance ministry and brought our country out of that situation," another Congress leader, Panchanan Kanungo, said.

The BJD leaders also paid tribute to the departed leader. "In his passing away, India has lost an illustrious leader whose humility, wisdom and compassion for the nation and its people will always be remembered. My deepest condolences to his family and loved ones. A glorious era of Indian leadership has ended with his passing away," BJD MP Sasmit Patra said on X.



National flag at half mast over Assembly during state mourning

EASTERN INDIA'S FIRST

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) here recently installed a state-of-the-art Xenon Chloride Fusion Cardiac Laser Machine - a first in eastern India - to treat complex heart diseases and reduce the use of stents.

The advanced laser system, inaugurated by KIIT and KISS founder Achyuta Samanta, will aid in performing coronary and peripheral atherectomy, lead management, and the removal of blockages that are

KIMS installs cardiac laser machine



otherwise untreatable by conventional angioplasty.

KIMS department of Cardiology associate professor Anupam Jena said, "Through

this laser machine, we can perform ultra-modern treatments that were previously unavailable in this region. This system allows us to offer internation-

al-standard cardiac care at KIMS. Patients with complex heart diseases, whether they have arterial blockages or require pacemaker lead removal, will greatly benefit from this technology."

"This machine allows us to dissolve blood clots and blockages that are resistant to standard procedures. It significantly improves the management of complex coronary diseases and enhances patient care by reducing the risks associated with stents," said department of Cardiology head Subashish Mishra.

Release crop loss aid soon, insurance cos told

Bhubaneswar: In the aftermath of crop loss due to unseasonal rain in state, Cooperation Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta Friday directed the insurance companies to conduct field survey to assess the crop damage and release compensation to farmers as soon as possible. Chairing a review meeting at the Conference Hall of the Cooperation department to this effect, the minister said, after getting the information from the farmers, he has directed the insurance companies to take necessary steps to conduct the field survey. The department's Commissioner-cum-Secretary Rajesh Prabhakar Patil, senior officers of Cooperation and Agriculture departments, and state-level officials of four insurance companies implementing crop insurance scheme in Odisha - Reliance General Insurance Company, SBI General Insurance Company, Future Generali, Agriculture Insurance Company of India (AIC) were present at the meeting. It is worth noting that altogether 22.48 lakh farmers have registered for crop insurance in the state under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) in the current Kharif season. In order to get compensation, registered farmers have been requested by the department to inform them within 72 hours of crop loss on Krishi Rakshak App or Help Line No. 14447.

Burglars sweep house in Dhauli as family sleeps

Bhubaneswar: Unidentified miscreants broke into a house at Gangotri Nagar Lane Number 1 in the wee hours of Friday and decamped with gold ornaments worth lakhs, along with ₹1 lakh in cash. The daring act of burglary reportedly occurred under Dhauli police station when the house owner Pradyumna Kumar Jena and his family members were fast asleep, said Dhauli police station's inspector in-charge (IIC) Pradipta Kishor Naik. The miscreants gained entry into the house by breaking the kitchen grill. They might have used a mechanical lever to break the wardrobe and loot the cash as well as gold ornaments from there. In his complaint, Jena said, "I woke up around 5am to see the articles rummaged in the bedroom. As I put on the lights, I observed that my entire house has been swept. Soon, I alerted my family members about the incident." The IIC said the miscreants made away with three gold necklaces, five pairs of earrings and anklets, and two gold chains. Acting on the complaint lodged by Jena, Dhauli police have registered a case under Sections 331 (4) and 305 of BNS. A scientific team has collected evidence from the crime scene as part of the investigation.

Advertisement for NBCC (India) Limited regarding the sale opening of balance commercial spaces at Tower I at NBCC Imperia, Gadakana, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar through E-auction. Includes details on application documents, registration dates, and contact information.

Large advertisement for the National Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) by the NSO, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation. It features a portrait of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government of India logo, and the NSO logo. The main headline is 'Unlocking the Potential of India's Unincorporated Sector'. Below this, it says 'Let us strengthen the National Statistical System'. The text explains that the NSO conducts the ASUSE to bring status and needs of unincorporated non-agricultural establishments in India to policy makers, researchers and public. It lists key outputs of ASUSE: Penetration of unincorporated enterprises in different industries, Job creation in small enterprises, Economic contribution of small enterprises, Needs of small enterprises, Loans provided to small enterprises, and Use of Information & Communication Technology by small enterprises. It requests all sample enterprises to co-operate with enumerators of the NSO. It also states that the identity of participating enterprises is kept confidential. At the bottom, it provides the website www.mospi.gov.in and a link to microdata.

Repeated damage to wearing coat of Joda flyover sparks fear



POST NEWS NETWORK

Joda, Dec 27: The wearing coat of the flyover bridge constructed here in Keonjhar district has been repeatedly getting damaged. The lack of uniformity in the structure's construction is reportedly the primary reason behind the recurring damage.

Despite ongoing repairs, the structural defects remain unresolved, raising serious safety concerns regarding the flyover's ability to handle heavy vehicle movement after the maintenance period ends. Keonjhar MP's nominee, Rabindra Das, alleged that the then BJD government pressured the consultancy agency to complete the works in haste and handover the flyover for inauguration ahead of the election with hopes of gaining votes.

Das emphasised the need to form a committee comprising the engineer involved in flyover construction to investigate the issues and carry out permanent repairs. He warned that failing to act could result in the collapse of the flyover, posing serious threat to lives and property.

Hindalco Industries gets Meenakshi coal mine



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Union government Friday said that it has issued allocation order for a coal mine in the state to Aditya Birla Group firm Hindalco Industries Ltd. The government issued the vesting order for the Meenakshi coal mine in Sundargarh that has a peak rating capacity of 12 million tonne per annum (MTPA).

ate an annual revenue of Rs 1,152.84 crore, based on its peak rated capacity, the coal ministry said in a statement. With an estimated capital investment of Rs 1,800 crore, the mine will significantly augment domestic coal production and contribute to strengthening energy security, it said.

POCSO court slaps 10 yrs RI on youth

PNN & AGENCIES

Balasure, Dec 27: Special Judge POCSO Ranjan Kumar Sutar Friday sentenced a 26-year-old youth to 10 years Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) along with Rs 1,500 penalty for kidnapping and raping a 15-year-old girl. The judge also ordered that the convict would further undergo another six-month jail term in default of the penalty.



SELFLESS SERVICE: Social outfit Helpmate organised a blood donation camp for Thalassemia patients at the Reliance outlet near Bhubaneswar railway station, Friday

Leopard enclosure now open for public in IG Park Zoo

POST NEWS NETWORK



Rourkela, Dec 27: The newly renovated leopard enclosure at Indira Gandhi Park Zoo in Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) was inaugurated Thursday by Atanu Bhowmick, Director In-Charge (DIC), following the arrival of two leopards. Senior RSP officials were present at the event.

Bhowmick also reviewed ongoing development works at the park. "I have been coming to IG Park since childhood, and I have always wished to make it more attractive, especially for children," he said. "I am

pleased to see several new features added and existing ones improved in recent times." Suresh Oram, a contractual employee recognised for his exceptional care of the leopards,

was honoured by the DIC. The renovated enclosure is now home to two leopards, a male and a female, relocated from the Rajiv Gandhi Zoological Park in Pune, Maharashtra, as part of a Central Zoo Authority-approved exchange programme.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Junagarh, dated 23.12.24, I, Abanti Meher, W/o Sudhir Meher, At/P.O.- Chichaiguda, P.S.- Junagarh, Dist.- Kalahandi, Pin-766014 (Odisha) declare that I have changed my name from Alish Meher to Abanti Meher. Henceforth I shall be known as Abanti Meher for purposes. Abanti Meher

Ancient Shaivite, Buddhist sculptures found in Bhadrak

The sculptures depict Shaivite deities like Shiva, Parvati, and Ganesh, and Buddhist icons such as Buddha, Tara, and Padmapani

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhadrak, Dec 27: Ancient sculptures, including remnants of Shaivite and Buddhist deities, have been found along the banks of the Baitarani river in Bhadrak district, researchers said. The sculptures were found near a village called Maninathpur in the Bhandaripokhari block of the district earlier this week.



The researchers found 18 ancient sculptures, including rare Shaivite and Buddhist deities, dating back to the 6th or 7th century Common Era (CE). These artefacts include intricately carved miniature temples and 'argha stupas',

they said. A local youth, Bibekananda, stumbled upon a statue during his morning walk and promptly informed the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Her-

itage (INTACH) members and young researcher Biswambhar Raut. Raut inspected the area and identified 18 ancient sculptures and small temples, scattered across the site. The sculptures depict Shaivite deities like Shiva, Parvati, and Ganesh, and Buddhist icons such as Buddha, Tara, and Padmapani.

Table with weather data for BBSR and CTC, including Max Temp, Min Temp, Humidity, Rainfall, and Forecast (Mainly clear sky).

Table with Market Watch data including SENSEX (78699.07), NIFTY (23813.40), DOLLAR (85.79), EURO (89.48), GOLD (₹76,500), and SILVER (₹89,140).

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Among the many surprises this year sprang up, the convincing victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the simultaneous elections by demolishing the 24-year-long BJD hegemony in the state, and nomination of Keonjhar MLA Mohan Charan Majhi as the first BJP Chief Minister, stand out. While the poll results upset many predictions, which repeatedly gave clear advantage to the Naveen-Patnaik-led party's well-oiled poll management strategy spearheaded by bureaucrat-turned politician VK Pandian in ensuring a safe comeback, Majhi gave political pundits a run for their money by his unexpected selection for the top post. Behind these dramatic political developments lay the overconfidence of the regional party and a failure of its leadership to gauge public sentiments which the BJP exploited to the fullest through shrewd campaign strategy. While the BJD had to be contended with just 51 MLAs, the BJP romped home with a simple majority by bagging 78 seats in the 147-member state Assembly. The Congress improved its tally from nine in the 2019 elections to 14. In the Lok Sabha elections, the regional party was completely routed even as the BJP swept the results by securing 20 of the 21 MP seats. The only surprise was Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka who kept hopes for the Congress alive by retaining the Koraput seat. Political experts said Modi wave, candidate selection, anti-incumbency and turncoats were among the advantages the BJP cashed in on to decimate BJD. Nevertheless, the year marked the rise of grassroots leaders and people's power over legacy and posturing



ASCENT OF MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI

June 11, 2024 will go down as a memorable day in Odisha's political history as it marked the ascent of grassroots leader Mohan Charan Majhi to the Chief Minister's office. In fact, Majhi's name was seldom discussed in political or journalistic circles for the top post following BJP's stunning victory in the polls until the party leadership announced the four-time Keonjhar MLA's name for the highest political assignment in the state.

With the announcement, the school teacher from the tribal-dominated district went on to become the head of the first BJP government in Odisha.

Raikala-born Majhi belongs to the Santhal community, same as President Droupadi Murmu. After a short stint in teaching, the young leader took the political plunge and got elected as a sarpanch in 1997. He made it to

the state Assembly for the first time in 2000 by winning from Keonjhar and retained his seat in 2004.

In subsequent period, Majhi's organisation skills saw his growth within the party as he was made the Deputy Chief Whip during the BJD-BJP coalition government from 2005 to 2009. Following his victory in 2019 elections, Majhi was made Opposition Chief Whip in the Assembly, and a prominent tribal face of BJP in state politics. A street fighter to the hilt, Majhi's resistance to the BJD government would often spill out of the Assembly arena and echo in the jungles of Keonjhar, enduring him two unsuccessful life attempts by a vengeful mining mafia. Unperturbed, Majhi continued his fight against corruption while cementing his grip on party cadres. It is said the reason behind his elevation to the top post was his uncompromising stance against corruption and misuse, the twin planks that set the corner stone for his government.

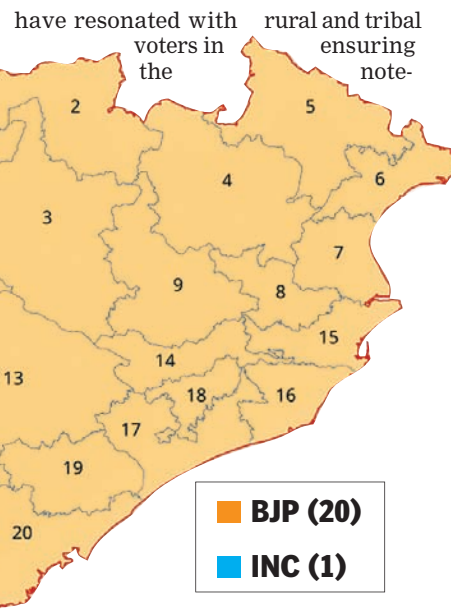
RISE OF BJP IN BJD BASTION

Once considered a peripheral force in the state dominated by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gained major grounds in the state over the past decade, culminating in the remarkable victory in the 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

The BJP's presence in the state was relatively modest for decades, with the party struggling to make significant inroads against the dominance of the BJD Congress. The influence was confined to select pockets, primarily in western Odisha, where issues such as tribal welfare and regional neglect resonated with its narrative.

However, the turning point in the party's fortunes came with the 2014 general elections when the 'Modi wave' swept across the country. The party, for the first time emerged as a strong contender to the BJD. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's repeated visits to the state, coupled with the party's focus on grassroots organisation began to bear fruits as in the 2019 general elections the party won 8 out of the 21 Lok Sabha seats, a sharp increase from just one seat in 2014.

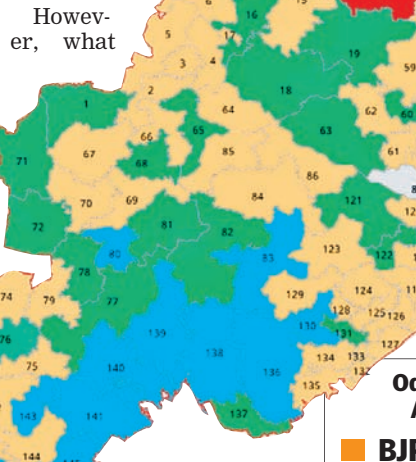
Among many factors, the Central government's welfare schemes like Ujjwala Yojana and Swachh Bharat were said to



What proved to be a deciding factor for BJP's unprecedented success in the 2024 Assembly and Lok Sabha polls was its local leadership's ability in exploiting the weaknesses of the BJD during the campaigns

issues with its broader national agenda. Most importantly, party leaders were able to project a vision of development that challenged the BJD's model. However, what

campaigns. The BJP was not only successful in building a narrative around the 'Odia Ashmita' plank - following talks of 'outsider' VK Pandian's possible anointment as Naveen Patnaik's successor - it also strategically deployed its Central leadership in all out campaigns to overwhelm the regional party. The end was there for everyone to see.



proved to be a deciding factor for BJP's unprecedented success in the 2024 Assembly and Lok Sabha polls, was its local leadership's ability in exploiting the weaknesses of the BJD during the

worthy gains by the party. In subsequent period, the BJP further consolidated its position by emerging as main Opposition in the state Assembly. It was also successful in aligning local

Sofia Firdous, daughter of former Cuttack-Barabati MLA Mohd Moqim, etched her name in record books when she defeated BJP's Purna Chandra Mahapatra by a margin of 8,001 votes, making her Odisha's first-ever woman Muslim legislator. The 32-year-old gave up her career as a real estate developer after the supporters of Moqim, who was entangled in a land scam, urged her to contest the high-stakes Barabati battle. Sofia faced a daunting challenge due to a short campaign period. However, she emerged victorious.



As if BJD's humiliating defeat in the Assembly polls and a wipeout in the Lok Sabha election were not enough, the biggest upset came from Kantabanji Assembly seat where BJD supreme Naveen Patnaik faced a shocking defeat at the hands of BJP's Laxman Bag by a margin of over 16,000 votes. Bag, once a daily wager and a truck driver, garnered huge public support by choosing labour migration, unemployment, poor healthcare and education as his major poll planks.



The BJD chose to field party organisational secretary Pranab Prakash (Bobby) Das from the high-stakes Sambalpur Lok Sabha constituency against BJP stalwart and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. BJD's gameplan somehow went wrong and Pradhan defeated Bobby by a substantial margin of 1,19,836 votes in what appeared like a one-sided contest. By winning the Sambalpur seat, Pradhan, on the other hand, cemented the BJP's grip in western Odisha.



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already picked Pravati Parida for the seat. Thereafter, BJD fielded BJP turncoat Dillip Kumar Nayak but was defeated by Parida.

The hopping game

This year's Lok Sabha and Assembly elections could well be remembered for intense party-switching by politicians, like never before. In most cases, last-minute hopping not only altered the political equations locally but it also left voters utterly confused, thereby impacting the poll outcomes. Tickets were up for grab for party hoppers, but lady luck didn't smile on all and sundry. Around 60 per cent party-hoppers tasted defeat in both Lok Sabha (LS) and Assembly elections. Turncoats like Bhruagu Baxipatra and Lekhasri Samantsinghar, who joined BJD after quitting the saffron camp, had to bite the dust in the Lok Sabha polls as they were defeated by Pradeep Kumar Panigrahy (Berhampur) and Pratap Chandra Sarangi (Balasore). However, Bhartruhari Mahtab switched to BJP and won from Cuttack LS seat. Former Kendrapara Congress MLA Anshuman Mohanty, who jumped to BJD camp, was trounced by BJP veteran Bajjayant Panda in LS polls. However, in Kendrapara Assembly segment, former senior Congress leader Ganeswar Behera, who decided to embrace the conch by deserting the grand-old party, emerged victorious by defeating BJP's Geetanjali Sethi. Some other party hoppers like Sidhant Mohapatra, Akash Dasnayak and Prasanta Jagadev won the Digapahandi, Korei and Khurda MLA seats, respectively. Arindam Roy got a ticket from BJP after quitting BJD for Salipur Assembly seat, but was defeated by BJD's Prasanta Behera with a margin of over 7,000 votes. An interesting scenario emerged in Nimapara Assembly constituency when three-time BJD MLA and minister Samir Ranjan Dash was denied a ticket. He joined BJP but failed to get a ticket as the party had



HOLDING CONG FORT



Two-time Congress MP from Koraput, Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, saved the party from a wipeout in the Lok Sabha polls when he defeated BJD's Kausalya Hikaka by a huge margin of 1,47,744 votes. Son of former Koraput MP Ramachandra Ulaka, Saptagiri was able to garner public support by raising issues like establishment of a High Court bench in Koraput. He was also instrumental in bringing air connectivity to his constituency. Saptagiri secured 4,69,295 votes while BJP's Kaliram Majhi with 2,30,792 remained a distant third.

FALL OF BJD

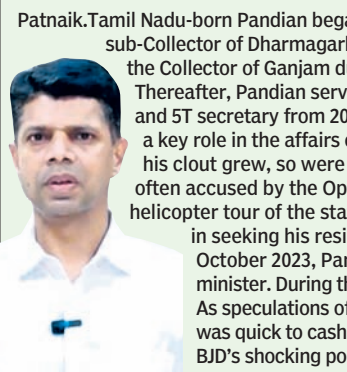
The year 2024 proved unlucky for the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) as it marked an end to the regional party's uninterrupted 24-year rule in the state. Though many had predicted Naveen Patnaik to make it into record books as the longest-serving Chief Minister albeit a thinner majority, no one had written him off in the way people chose to in the simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha polls fought under the blazing summer sun.

However, for a party with strong cadre presence and unrivalled mass appeal of Naveen Patnaik, the debacle didn't come overnight. Many say the leadership chose to oversight the cracks that had long appeared in the party until those resulted in the dramatic fall. Naveen chose to ignore the writings on the wall and the inevitable happened, they

say. While the BJD had to contend with just 51 Assembly seats, down from 113 in the 2019 elections, in the Lok Sabha polls it scored zero from 12 in 2019.

Analysis revealed that the defeat stemmed primarily out of administrative concerns as the growing influence of bureaucrat-turned politician VK Pandian in state affairs led to fears of bureaucratisation, causing unease among both the public and BJD members. In western

PANDIAN'S EXIT



2000-batch Odisha cadre IAS officer, VK Pandian rose to prominence as the close confidant of BJD supreme and former chief minister Naveen Patnaik. Tamil Nadu-born Pandian began his bureaucratic career in 2002 as the sub-Collector of Dharmagarh in Kalahandi. In 2007, he was appointed the Collector of Ganjam during which he became close to Naveen. Thereafter, Pandian served as Naveen's private secretary from 2011, and 5T secretary from 2019. Naveen's patronage saw Pandian playing a key role in the affairs of the state and the BJD in subsequent times. As his clout grew, so were the controversies surrounding his functioning. He was often accused by the Opposition of misusing his position for political gains. His whirlwind helicopter tour of the state after Covid-19 pandemic became a rallying point for Opposition in seeking his resignation. Hours after taking voluntary retirement and joining BJD in October 2023, Pandian was made 5T and Navin Odisha chairman in the rank of a Cabinet minister. During the election, Naveen and Pandian were at the forefront of the BJD's campaigning. As speculations of him being anointed as a successor by the BJD supreme started doing rounds, BJP was quick to cash in on his 'outsider' tag which ostensibly struck a chord with the electorates. Following BJD's shocking poll debacle, Pandian announced his sabbatical from active politics in June 2024.



Odisha, a traditional stronghold of BJP, the communal tensions, notably the 2023 riots in Sambalpur, heightened religious divides. The BJP capitalised on these sentiments to portray itself as a defender of majority interests. Another key factor was the speculations over Tam-

il-origin Pandian potentially becoming Chief Minister which sparked debates over Odia identity (Ashmita). The BJP leveraged this to question the BJD's commitment to regional pride. These elements, combined with anti-incumbency sentiments, eroded the BJD's support base, enabling the BJP to make significant inroads in Odisha's political landscape.



Katra ropeway project row boils

Shutdown against ropeway project enters third day, more people join hunger strike



The administration is indifferent to the plight of people, including women and children, holding peaceful protests. Our simple demand is to shelve the project, as it threatens the livelihood of Katra residents, most of whom rely on the pilgrimage economy

SPokesperson | SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI SANGHARSH SAMITI

Shopkeepers, pony operators and palanquin owners argue that the ropeway would destroy the livelihoods of local business owners and has demanded that the project be scrapped

owners and has demanded that the project be scrapped. With black flags displayed across the town, shops, restaurants, and other business establishments remained closed for the third day, and vehicular movement was at a standstill, following the Samiti's call for protest. The bandh has disrupted normal life in one of India's busiest pilgrimage hubs, which is visited daily by thousands of devotees seeking blessings at the cave shrine. "The bandh is part of our 72-hour-long shutdown against the ropeway project. It is going

on peacefully. The committee will decide on the next course of action soon," said a spokesperson for the Samiti. Criticising the administration for its lack of engagement, the spokesperson said, "The administration is indifferent to the plight of people, including women and children, holding peaceful protests. Our simple demand is to shelve the project, as it threatens the livelihood of Katra residents, most of whom rely on the pilgrimage economy." He further claimed that instead of initiating dialogue, the administration resorted

to force, including the detention of Samiti leaders during a peaceful protest. "They are creating an unnecessary crisis with their approach," he stated. Shiva, a participant in the hunger strike, had to be hospitalised after his condition deteriorated. "Our hunger strike will continue until the detained individuals are released. If someone falls ill, another person will replace them," said another participant in the hunger strike. Eighteen protesters, including Samiti leaders Bhupinder Singh and Sohan Chand, were

detained by police during Wednesday's march and taken away from the protest site. The proposed ₹250-crore ropeway project will connect Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat, leading to the cave shrine in Reasi district. In Jammu, the Shiv Sena Dogra Front (DFSS) extended its support to the pilgrims, who are facing hardships due to the bandh, and urged that the issue be resolved amicably. "We stand with the pilgrims and support better facilities. If needed, create two ropeways instead of one. Provide more amenities for accommodating pilgrims during the yatra," said DFSS President Ashok Gupta. Gupta added that the pilgrimage had significantly boosted Katra's economy, and the bandh was causing inconvenience to devotees. "Yatra, business, ponywalas are all dependent on pilgrims. They should not be put to inconvenience," he said. "For the past three days, pilgrims have faced immense difficulties. If the authorities fail to address this, we will use our vehicles to ferry pilgrims to the temple and provide them with food," he said. However, many pilgrims expressed dissatisfaction over the closure of eateries and the unavailability of local transport, which caused significant inconvenience during their journey to the cave shrine. To lessen the impact of the bandh, the Shrine Board has arranged boarding and lodging for pilgrims arriving in the town. Special langars at the Katra railway station, Banganga and Tarakote are providing tea and milk to ensure the yatra continues smoothly on both tracks.

Locals recall Manmohan's special bond with Amritsar

Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, passed away Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He was 92



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Amritsar, Dec 27: It has been a long time since Manmohan Singh lived in Amritsar. The family house is dilapidated and empty, the memories of many fading but the bond with the former prime minister is recollected with fondness and nostalgia. Born in 1932 at Gah in Punjab province which now falls in Pakistan's Chakwal district, the Singh family migrated to Amritsar after Partition in 1948 after a short stint in Haldwani. Singh completed his intermediate and graduation in economics from the Hindu College here before moving out of the city to pursue higher studies in Punjab University's Hoshiarpur campus. Singh's half-brother from his father's extended family, Surjit Singh Kohli, who ran a readymade garment business in Amritsar, said the former prime minister had deep affection for his grandmother who raised him following his mother's death when he was very young. "Manmohan Singh shared a deep attachment with Amritsar. He used to visit the Golden Temple every time he came to the holy city," Surjit Kohli said. After migrating, the Singh family settled at a small rented house in Amritsar till he graduated. Stating that economics was his favourite subject, retired professor of Hindu College, Rajinder Loomba, recalled that his wife Gursharan Kaur's parents also belonged to the holy city. A few years ago, Singh attended the convocation-cum-alumni meet of Hindu College as the chief guest and interacted with the college staff like an ordinary person, reminiscing old memories, Loomba said. Singh talked about the teachers who taught him at the college besides interacting and clicking photographs with the students and faculty members, he recalled. Raj Kumar (71), a local resident, told PTI Videos that Singh used to live in Petha Wala Bazaar near the Golden Temple. Recalling Singh as a very

Alma mater Panjab Univ pays homage

Chandigarh: Panjab University Friday organised a condolence meeting to pay homage to former prime minister and distinguished alumnus Dr Manmohan Singh. The gathering was attended by Vice Chancellor Prof Renu Vig, Registrar YP Verma and faculty and other staff. During the meeting, tributes were paid to Singh, as attendees reflected on his contributions to the nation and his association with the university. Another condolence meeting was also organised jointly by the Department of Economics and the Panjab University Alumni Association. Manmohan Singh did his Master's in Economics in 1954 from the university and came first in his class. He was a Senior Lecturer (1957-1959), Reader in Economics (1959-1963) and Professor of Economics (1963-1965) at PU. A Chair was established after him in the department. 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.

humble person, Kumar said, "Dr Singh used to live here. I was a child when his family shifted out. It was a very nice family." The house where the Singh family lived is in a dilapidated state now as no one stays there since they moved out a long time ago, Kumar said. Some other locals recalled Manmohan Singh as a man who always took special pain for Amritsar, saying the UPA government headed by him got several projects sanctioned for the holy city. Singh, the architect of India's economic reforms, passed away 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.

Kashmiri prodigy singer receives PM Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2024



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Srinagar, Dec 27: Twelve-year-old Ayaan Sajad from Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district was Thursday awarded the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2024 by President Droupadi Murmu for his extraordinary accomplishments in the fields of art and culture. The Bal Puraskar is the highest award given to children for extraordinary accomplishments in social service, innovation, sports, bravery, art and scholastic achievements.

Ayaan has been captivating audiences with his exceptional talent. His work reflects not only his individual brilliance but also the vibrant cultural heritage of Jammu and Kashmir. His commitment to craft and his ability to bring stories and traditions to life through his art have earned him widespread recognition and admiration. The award ceremony, held in New Delhi, was a proud moment for Ayaan, his family and the people of Jammu and Kashmir. In the presence of distinguished dignitaries and fellow awardees, Ayaan received the honour from the President of India, who praised the young achievers for their contribution to the nation's progress. The 12-year-old singer has already become an Internet sensation after his Kashmiri songs went viral on social media gaining him millions of views. His songs continue to trend in the valley.



A medical student holds a poster during a protest demanding rationalisation of reservation in Jammu and Kashmir, outside J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's residence in Srinagar

Dal Lake freezes after days of sub-zero temps

AGENCIES

Srinagar, Dec 26: As night temperatures continued to remain several notches below the freezing point in Kashmir, the famous Dal Lake has frozen solid at the top. Srinagar recorded a low of minus 7.3 degrees Celsius Thursday night, slightly down from the previous night's minus 7 degrees Celsius, the MeT department said. Gulmarg, a town known for skiing activities in north Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 6 degrees Celsius, the same as the previous night, the department added. Pahalgam, the base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra in south Kashmir, registered a minimum temperature of minus 8 degrees Celsius, slightly up from the previous night's minus 8.6 degrees Celsius. Qazigund, the gateway town to Kashmir, logged a minimum temperature of minus 6.9 degrees Celsius, while Konibal, a hamlet in the Pampore area, was the coldest recorded place in the Valley at minus 9.5 degrees Celsius. Kashmir Valley continued to remain in the grip of intense



cold as markets, streets and main roads remained almost deserted in the morning due to extreme chill and highly slippery road conditions. Boatmen virtually gave up fighting their way through half-frozen Dal Lake in Srinagar as the freeze set deeper and firmer on the lake's surface. At many places by the banks of river Jhelum, houseboats appeared to have been 'grounded' due to the surrounding frozen water. Long icicles and frost have become a common sight in

Srinagar city and the rest of the Valley. Water taps refuse to defreeze and many areas in the city have been complaining of a lack of potable water for the last four days. The Meteorological (MeT) department has forecast dry, cold weather to continue for the next 48 hours although any major change in weather is also ruled out till the first week of January. The 40-day-long period of extreme winter cold called the 'Chillai Kalan' started with full fury December 21 and will end

The 40-day-long period of extreme winter cold called the 'Chillai Kalan' started with full fury December 21 and will end January 30

January 30. Seeing a clear, cloudless sky is a luxury rarely seen during the days of the Chillai Kalan. The 40 days are followed by a 20-day 'Chillai-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day 'Chillai-Bachha' (baby cold). The overall winter gloom often becomes depressing for people as electricity plays hide and seek while locals have to depend on traditional firewood in the countryside to stand the bone-chilling cold. Despite Chief Minister Omar Abdullah camping in Srinagar, there is no improvement in the electric power supply. He went to local hospitals Wednesday to ensure that healthcare facilities remained alert to the challenges posed by the biting winter cold.

Trial run successful on India's first cable-stayed rail bridge



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 27: Indian Railways has successfully carried out a trial run of a tower wagon on the Anji Khad Bridge, the country's first cable-stayed rail bridge, located in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district. The achievement is a major step forward in enhancing railway connectivity in Jammu and Kashmir, with services expected to commence in January 2025. Railways Minister Ashwini

Vaishnav shared a video of the trial run on the social media platform X, highlighting the progress of the crucial project. "The trial run on the Anji Khad Bridge, a key component of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) project, has been successfully completed," according to the Ministry of Railways. Completed last month, the Anji Khad Bridge is an engineering marvel featuring a single pylon that rises 331 metres above the

riverbed. It is supported by 48 cables on its lateral and central spans and stretches 473.25 metres in total length. The viaduct measures 120 metres, while the central embankment spans 94.25 metres. This is the second-highest railway bridge in India after the Chenab Bridge, which is the highest in the world at a record 359 metres above the riverbed. Both bridges are part of the ambitious USBRL project aimed at increasing connectivity in Jammu and Kashmir. The Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) is a 272 km railway project that connects Jammu and Kashmir to the rest of India. It is considered one of the most challenging railway projects in the Indian subcontinent. The project will reduce travel time between Srinagar and Jammu from six hours to 3.5 hours. The railway projects have been constructed after overcoming natural challenges such as extreme temperatures, major earthquake zones, and inhospitable terrain.



This is the #4thConsecutiveFriday when I am being stopped from going to Jama Masjid, where people in large numbers eagerly await to participate in majlis e waz
MIRWAIZ UMAR FAROOQ | HURRIYAT CONFERENCE CHAIRMAN

HINDU STUDENTS IN OHIO TO GET HOLIDAY FOR DIWALI

Hindu students in Ohio will be getting a holiday for Diwali and two other Hindu holidays per school year, an Indian American State legislator has announced. A bill co-sponsored by Indian American Senator Niraj Antani that was passed by State Legislation has now been passed by Ohio Governor Mike Dewine



of the day note

PPAC imposed by the three discoms has been reduced by more than 50 percent, and resultant consumer bills will be reduced by 20-25 percent
VIRENDRA SACHDEVA | DELHI BJP PRESIDENT

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has demolished the deceit of communal polarisation with the commitment to all-embracing empowerment. Modi has strengthened the pride and prestige of Bharat even amid the turmoil across the world
MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI | BJP LEADER

If we can encourage even 15 percent of the pilgrims visiting Mata Vaishno Devi to explore other attractions in Jammu, we could see an influx of 15 lakh tourists — a figure comparable to Kashmir's peak tourism years
OMAR ABDULLAH | CM, JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Manmohan Singh preferred his Maruti 800 over BMW

Despite having a fleet of high-security vehicles, including a luxurious BMW for official travel, Manmohan Singh would often express his preference for the modest Maruti Suzuki 800 car, says UP Minister Asim Arun in a heartfelt social media memoir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Dec 27: Manmohan Singh preferred his modest Maruti Suzuki 800 over luxury BMWs even when holding the office of prime minister as it reaffirmed his connection with the middle class and commitment to work for the common man.

Singh's humility and grounded nature were highlighted in a heartfelt social media memoir by Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Social Welfare (Independent Charge) Asim Arun, a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who worked as Singh's chief bodyguard for almost three years.

He shared the note on social media shortly after the 92-year-old Singh passed away late Thursday at the All India

Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi.

Arun, who served as Singh's close protection officer for nearly three years during his tenure in the Special Protection Group (SPG), shared his experiences and insights into Singh's personality, emphasising his simple lifestyle and connection with the common man.

Recalling his role as head of the SPG's Close Protection Team (CPT) for the prime minister, Arun said, "As the AIG CPT, my responsibility was to stay with the prime minister at all times, like his shadow. If only one bodyguard could stay with him, it had to be me."

One anecdote Arun shared reflected Singh's simplicity — his attachment to his personal car, a modest Maruti Suzuki 800.

Despite having a fleet of

high-security vehicles, including a luxurious BMW, for official travel, Singh would often express his preference for the modest car.

Arun recalled Singh telling him, "Asim, I don't like travelling in this car (BMW). My car is the Maruti."

He said he would explain to Singh the security requirements of the high-tech BMW but the former prime minister's gaze would always turn to the Maruti Suzuki 800 as his motorcade passed by it.

"It was as if he was reaffirming his identity as a middle-class man and his commitment to caring for the common man. While the BMW might sym-

bolise the grandeur of the prime minister's position, in



his heart, he saw the Maruti as

Arun, who served as Singh's close protection officer for nearly three years during his tenure in the Special Protection Group (SPG), shared his experiences and insights into Singh's personality, emphasising his simple lifestyle and connection with the common man

his car," Arun added.

While talking to PTI Videos Arun recalled that Singh's car -- a constant emotional connection to his modest roots -- was maintained inside the compound of the prime minister's residence.

"Dr Singh couldn't drive his Maruti Suzuki 800 due to protocol and my responsibility included starting the car daily and running it briefly within the prime minister's residence," he revealed.

Reflecting on Singh's austere lifestyle, Arun remarked that he never let his high office distance him from his simple economic and social values.

"He was a man of principles, values and a thorough gentleman," the IPS officer-turned-BJP lawmaker told PTI.

SOLAR PANEL RECYCLING ISSUES

NGT issues notice to Centre, others



PV panels contain heavy metals like lead and cadmium, which could leach into soil and water, causing long-term environmental damage, says a Bench comprising of NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A Senthil Vel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The National Green Tribunal has sought a response from the Centre on the improper disposal and recycling of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels.

The green body was hearing a letter petition filed by a farmer in Uttar Pradesh claiming lack of proper disposal facilities for used solar panels.

In an order dated December 23, a bench of NGT chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A Senthil Vel said, "The case of the applicant is that solar panel is utilised for generating energy for irrigation in agricultural fields in his village under the Kusum Yojna since 2019, and he has highlighted the gap in the life cycle management of damaged solar panels."

The bench said as per the petition, these solar panels could not

be repaired and were required to be discarded as scrap, but there was a lack of "proper disposal infrastructure", requiring these panels to be buried or sent to landfills, which adversely affected soil quality.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) said the plea raised various issues, including the panels having limited scrap value, as scrap dealers only accepted the aluminium, copper and glass components of PV panels while the remaining substances, including polymers and silicon, were non-recyclable and needed to be sent to landfills.

It said the "PV panels contain heavy metals like lead and cadmium, which could leach into soil and water, causing long-term environmental damage", and that there was also no "established mechanism for safe disposal or recycling of damaged solar panels" in the region.

"The letter petition raises substantial issues relating to compliance of environmental norms, especially the implementation of the provisions of E-Waste (Management) Rules," the tribunal noted. The NGT impleaded the secretaries of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy as respondents or parties.

The member secretaries of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) along with the Lucknow region office of the MoEFCC were also impleaded.

Air India pilot suicide: Mumbai court grants bail to boyfriend

Mumbai: A court here Friday granted bail to Aditya Pandit, the jailed boyfriend of an Air India pilot who allegedly committed suicide last month. Pilot Srishti Tuli (25), who lived in a rented flat in the 'Kanakia Rain Forest' building in Marol area, was found dead in the early hours of November 25. A day later, police arrested Pandit (27), her boyfriend, and charged him with abetment of suicide under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) section 108. His bail application was allowed by Additional Sessions Judge (Dindoshi court) T T Aglawe. But the detailed order has not been made available yet. The complaint lodged by Tuli's father said the accused and his daughter were residing in the same room for five-six days prior to her suicide. However, on the day of the incident the accused left for Delhi. As per the complaint, the accused and the deceased had different food preferences and this was a matter of contention between them. Tuli was a non-vegetarian and the accused a vegetarian. Pandit constantly put pressure on Tuli to change her food habits may have led her to commit suicide, the complainant alleged. However, Pandit's lawyer, Aniket Nikam argued that a case of abetment of suicide was not made out.



Delhi records highest Dec rainfall in 15 years

New Delhi: Rain lashed Delhi-NCR throughout Friday with the city recording its highest December rainfall in the last 15 years and the mercury dropping sharply to 14.6 degree celsius, the weather department said. The rain began late Thursday around 2.30 am and continued throughout the day, it said. According to Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) data between in the last 24 hours till 8.30 am Friday, the city logged 9.1 mm of rainfall. The observatory at Safdarjung -- the national capital's primary weather station -- recorded an additional 30.2 mm of rainfall between from 8.30 am to 5.30 pm Friday, as per the data. The total rainfall for December stands at 42.8 mm, marking the highest rainfall this month in the last 15 years, based on data from 2009 to 2024 available on the weather department's website. Meanwhile, the all-time highest December rainfall was recorded in 1884, when the city received 134.4 mm of rain. The observatory at Palam registered 31.4 mm rainfall, 34.2 mm in Lodhi Road, 33.4 mm in Ridge, 39 mm in Delhi University and 35 mm in Pusa till 5:30 pm Friday.



8 killed, many injured in bus accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bathinda, Dec 27: Eight people died and many were injured Friday when a private bus crashed through the railing of a bridge here and plunged into a drain a few feet below, police said.

The bus had over 45 passengers and it fell in Lasara drain at Jeewan Singhwala village, officials said.

The accident occurred when the bus was enroute to Bathinda from Talwandi

Sabo. Locals rushed to the spot immediately to help the passengers, they said, adding that eight people lost their lives.

Police and district administration also launched a rescue operation and took the injured to a hospital. A team of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) also reached the spot to provide assistance, they added.

Expressing condolences, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on X "Sad-

dened by the loss of lives in the bus accident in Bathinda, Punjab. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon."

He also announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF) to the next of kin of each deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured.

According to officials the weather was in clement in the area however the exact cause of the accident is yet to be ascertained.

DGCA orders suspension of 2 directors of Akasa Air for training lapses

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 27: Aviation safety regulator DGCA Friday ordered the suspension of director of operations and director of training at Akasa Air for six months for alleged lapses in pilots' training.

The two senior executives of the airline, in which the Rakesh Jhunjhunwala family holds stakes, have "failed" to ensure "compliances" with the civil aviation requirements, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said in its two separate orders of December 27.

The suspension of the Akasa Air director of operations and director of training came after the DGCA found the replies to the show-cause notices issued to them October 15 and October 30, respectively, as "unsatisfactory". The Directorate General of Civil Aviation, in its orders, also advised the airline to nominate "suitable" candidates for the two positions.

Akasa Air in a statement said, "Akasa Air is in receipt of an order from the DGCA dated 27th December 2024. We will continue to work with the DGCA and comply accordingly. Safety is of utmost importance, and we continuously strive to pursue the highest standards of safety."

Endless incarceration without trial falls foul of Art 21: Delhi HC

The court said the law preferred bail over jail, aiming to balance the rights of the accused with the requirements of the criminal justice system, and though the offence was serious, long incarceration was a relevant factor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Endless incarceration without trial in near future falls foul of Article 21 of the Constitution, the Delhi High Court said recently and granted bail to a man held in a cheating case in 2022.

Justice Amit Mahajan said if an accused was suffering a prolonged incarceration without a timely trial in the case, courts

would ordinarily be obligated to release them on bail.

Article 21 of the Indian Constitution deals with the right of life and personal liberty.

In the case at hand, the judge said charges were yet to be framed, the prosecution had sought repeated adjournments to file a supplementary chargesheet and it had been a year since the accused's last bail plea was dismissed.



"The applicant has spent more than two years in custody. There is no likelihood of the trial being completed in near future. In such circumstances, incarceration of the applicant

for an endless period on account of non-examination of witnesses falls foul of Article 21 of the Constitution of India," the court said December 24.

The order therefore released

the man on a personal bond of Rs 50 lakh with two sureties.

The court said the law preferred bail over jail, aiming to balance the rights of the accused with the requirements of the criminal justice system, and though the offence was serious, long incarceration was a relevant factor.

The object of jail was to secure the appearance of the accused during the trial and the apprehension of the accused being a flight risk could be allayed by imposing appropriate conditions, it said.

The court said the prosecution could issue a look out circular against him.

Delhi Police arrested the man

for allegedly cheating a company of Rs 7 crore by issuing fake payment receipts after placing bulk orders for rice containers.

Police's Economic Offences Wing lodged a complaint alleging Sandeep Tilwani made 74 bookings for 640 rice containers with the company for transportation amounting to Rs 11.2 crore, police said.

Tilwani, represented by advocate Utkarsh Singh, argued he was framed in the case and the complainant lodged the FIR owing to financial losses.

The accused said he was only a middleman between importers and companies providing freight services, and his only role was to introduce parties to each other.



People should build a society where compassion is the norm, and mental health care is not a privilege but a right

JAISHANKAR MEETS NSA SULLIVAN AT WHITE HOUSE

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan at the White House during which both the leaders had a wide-ranging discussion on the progress of India-US strategic partnership.



Ensure medical aid to Dallewal: SC to Punjab

Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border since November 26 to press the Centre to accept the farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price for crops



US Embassy in India breaks record

The US Embassy and its consulate in India have issued over one million non-immigrant visas for the second year running



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The US mission in India Friday said it issued more than one million nonimmigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas, underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the US.

Washington is also working to formally establish a US-based to renew H-1B visas in that country in 2025 that is expected to benefit a significant number of Indians. In the past four years, visitor numbers from India have increased by five times, and more than two million Indians travelled to the US in the first

11 months of 2024, a 26 per cent increase over the same period in 2023, it said. Over five million Indians already have a nonimmigrant visa to visit the US and each day the mission issues thousands more, the embassy said.

"The US mission to India issued more than one million non-immigrant visas for the second year in a row, including a record number of visitor visas, underscoring the huge demand of Indians for travel to the United States for tourism, business, and education," it said in a readout. The embassy noted that the State Department completed a

successful pilot programme to renew H-1B visas in the US States this year. This allowed many specialty occupation workers from India to renew their visas without leaving the US. "This pilot program streamlined the renewal process for thousands of applicants, and the Department of State is working to formally establish a US-based renewal program in 2025," it said. The US mission to India issued tens of thousands of immigrant visas, facilitating legal family reunification and the migration of skilled professionals, according to the readout.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Supreme Court Friday expressed concern over the condition of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite hunger strike, and directed the Punjab government to ensure he was given medical assistance.

The apex court directed the state government to file a compliance report by December 28, when it would again hear the matter and ordered the Punjab chief secretary and the DGP to virtually remain present during the hearing.

Singh said the state government was "very earnestly" following up on the issue. When the bench wondered if the Centre could offer assistance to the state government, solicitor general Tushar Mehta said its interference might lead to complications.

A vacation bench of Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia issued a notice to the Punjab government on a contempt petition against its chief secretary and the director general of police (DGP) for non-compliance of an order directing medical aid to Dallewal. "If there is a law and order situation, you have to deal with it with iron hands. Somebody's life is at stake. You need to take it seriously. Medical aid has to be given and the impression is that you are not following it,"

During the hearing, Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh submitted a delegation of eight cabinet ministers along with the Punjab DGP visited the protest site to convince Dallewal to move to a hospital but the farmers resisted it. "We have provided everything on site. If there is physical jostling, we cannot take that risk," he added. The bench however responded, "We have serious doubts about those farmers, those who are not conscious and aware and concerned about his life."

"Few people cannot keep him (Dallewal) hostage. One man's life is in danger. The state government can take measures," said Mehta. The Punjab AG informed the bench when the ministers' delegation went to meet Dallewal on December 24, he gave a letter addressed to the Prime Minister. "He says, if some dialogue is opened up, only then he is willing to cooperate with medical assistance," Singh said. Mehta said Dallewal's admission in a hospital should be the top priority.

STUDENT SEXUAL ASSAULT CASE

TN BJP chief stages whiplash agitation



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

footwear till the ruling DMK government is dislodged. The former IPS officer had liberated the state police of deliberately disclosing the identity of the girl who was allegedly sexually assaulted. One person has been arrested in connection with the incident that happened inside the state's premier technical varsity, Anna University.

Coimbatore/Chennai, Dec 27: Tamil Nadu BJP chief K Annamalai staged a unique agitation Friday when he flogged himself condemning the ruling DMK and the state police over the handling of the case of sexual assault on a Chennai college student on Christmas eve. Clad in a green dhoti, a bare-chested Annamalai took a whip from his party worker and whipped himself repeatedly in front of his residence in Coimbatore, as the BJP members stood around him displaying placards condemning the police for the alleged leak of FIR pertaining to the woman's complaint.

annamalai has questioned the way the FIR was written and alleged that it was drafted as if the victim had committed a crime. Also, he commenced a 48-day 'Viratham' (spiritual vow) to worship Lord Muruga from today. He would offer prayers at all the six 'Aarupadai' temples in the state by February, 2025.

DMK organising secretary R S Bharathi took a dig at Annamalai's agitation and said his action has become a farce. "I doubt if the BJP will accept this whiplash agitation. Will anyone whip themselves? I have been in politics for 60 years. No leader has done such a thing," Bharathi told reporters in Chennai. Probably some astrologer would have asked Annamalai to take up this "remedy in order to get higher post in the BJP," he ridiculed.

Bharathi sought to know why Annamalai did not whip himself over the Manipur incidents or over the sexual assault case in Pollachi or with regard to the crimes that were a daily phenomenon in the BJP-ruled states.

Vacancy Circular No. 4(9)/2024-ABCD Government of India Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) Electronics Niketan, 6-CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110003 Subject:- Calling Applications for filling up the Post of Director General, Centre for Materials for Electronics Technology (C-MET), an autonomous body under MeitY.

REGIONAL STRESSED ASSET RECOVERY BRANCH, CUTTACK E-AUCTION SALE NOTICE SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTIES "APPENDIX - IV - A [See Proviso to Rule 6 (2) & 8 (6)]" E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 6(2), 8(6) & 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

SHORT TAKES

Family of 3 dies in road accident

Bijnor (UP): A couple, who had recently reconciled after a dispute, and their six-year-old daughter died in a road accident here, police said Friday. The incident took place Thursday evening when Ravindra (35), his wife Sheetal (30) and their daughter Ayushi were travelling on a motorcycle from Kiratpur to Bijnor.

Naxalite with ₹7L reward surrenders

Gondia: A Naxalite with a reward of ₹7 lakh on his head surrendered in Maharashtra's Gondia, a police official said Friday. Deva alias Arjun alias Rakesh Sumdo Mudam (27) was part of the Malajkhand 'dalam' and Pamed 'platoon' number 9 of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), the official said.

2 killed, 1 hurt in firing incident

Yamunanagar (Haryana): In a broad daylight killing, two men died and another got injured when four-five armed masked miscreants opened indiscriminate fire on them in a village here Thursday, police said. Police late in the night said two accused have been arrested in connection with the incident. As soon as the three men came out of a gym in Lakha Singh Kheri area and were about to sit in their vehicle, four-five masked armed assailants arrived there on motorcycle and opened several rounds of fire at them, they said.

SREI EQUIPMENT FINANCE LIMITED SREI PUBLIC NOTICE This is to inform the public in general and customers of Srei Equipment Finance Limited ("SEFL") in particular, that to optimise operational efficiency, the management has decided to merge Keonjhar Branch at 2nd Floor, Singh Market Complex, Keonjhar, Odisha - 758001 with Sambalpur Branch w.e.f. 01st April, 2025.

SREI PUBLIC NOTICE NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that our Client intends to acquire lands measuring approximately 28.51 Acres situated in Villages Digitari, Dhalipanga & Kiadingri, Tahsil: Erasama, District: Jagatsinghpur, more particularly described in the schedule below ("Land"), from its owners mentioned against each of the lands in the schedule below.

Table with columns: Khata No., Survey/Plot No., Area (Acres), Owners of the Land/Occupiers. Includes schedules for Digitari, Dhalipanga, and Kiadingri villages.

international



Israeli airstrikes on Sanaa International Airport, the Red Sea ports and power stations in Yemen are especially alarming

STORM ELENA STRIKES GREECE

Greece has been in the grip of a wet weather front named Elena since Christmas, causing traffic disruptions and flooding across the country, authorities said Thursday



of the day note

The international situation is extremely difficult at the moment, the American policy in its various aspects is extremely hostile to us today



SEIRGI RYABKOV | RUSSIAN DIPLOMAT

Good to meet US NSA @ Jake Sullivan in Washington DC this morning (Wednesday). A wide-ranging discussion on the progress of India-US strategic partnership



JAISHANKAR | EAM OF INDIA

US military spending has topped the world and keeps increasing every year



ZHANG XIAOGANG | CHINESE DEFENCE MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON

AZERBAIJANI PLANE CRASH

Ukrainian drone attack was underway before plane mishap: Russia

AGENCIES

Baku, Dec 27: Russia's aviation chief said Friday that a Ukrainian drone attack was underway in the region of Chechnya at the time an Azerbaijani airliner attempted to land before diverting to Kazakhstan and crashing there earlier this week.

Dmitry Yadrov, head of Russia's civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia, didn't comment on statements by an Azerbaijani lawmaker and many aviation experts who blamed Wednesday's crash on Russian air defence fire.

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, but it turned to Aktau in Kazakhstan across the Caspian Sea and crashed while making an attempt to land there. The crash killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured.

Authorities in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia were tight-lipped about a possible cause of the crash pending an official probe, but a member of Azerbaijan's parliament, Rasim Musabekov told the Azerbaijani news agency Turan on Thursday that the plane was fired on while in the skies over

Azerbaijan Airlines' Embraer 190 was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, but it turned to Aktau in Kazakhstan across the Caspian Sea and crashed while making an attempt to land there

The crash killed 38 people and left all 29 survivors injured

Grozny and urged Russia to offer an official apology.

Asked about Musabekov's statement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov declined to comment, saying that it will be up to investigators to determine the cause of the crash. "The air incident is being investigated and we don't believe we have the right to make any assessments until the conclusions are made as a result of the investigation," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters.

Yadrov, the Russian aviation chief, said that as the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog, Ukrainian drones were targeting Grozny, prompting authorities to close the area for air traffic. Yadrov said that after the captain made two unsuccessful attempts to land in Grozny, he was offered other airports as an alternative but decided to fly to Aktau across the Caspian Sea.



Members of the new armed forces, former rebels who overthrew Bashar Assad's government and now serve in the new Syrian government, arrive for a military parade in downtown Damascus

China defends Brahmaputra dam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 27: China Friday defended its plan to build the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet, saying the project will not "negatively affect" lower riparian states and that safety issues have been addressed through decades of studies.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning played down apprehensions about the massive project to dam the Brahmaputra River, which is called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet. The project estimated to cost around USD 137 billion is located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region, along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently.

China has always been responsible for the development of cross-border rivers, Mao told a media briefing here in response to a question on the concerns related to the dam. She said the hydropower development there



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning played down apprehensions about the massive project to dam the Brahmaputra River, which is called Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet

The project estimated to cost around \$137 billion is located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan region, along a tectonic plate boundary where earthquakes occur frequently

has been studied in depth for decades, and safeguard measures have been taken to ensure the project's security and ecological environment protection. "The project will not negatively affect the lower reaches," she said referring to the concerns in India and Bangladesh which are the lower riparian states.

She said China's hydropower development in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo

River aims to speed up the development of clean energy and respond to climate change and extreme hydrological disasters.

China Wednesday approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in India and Bangladesh. The hydropower project will

be built in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra River, an official statement here said.

The dam will be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra River makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh.

Mao said China's hydropower development in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River aims to speed up the development of clean energy and respond to climate change and extreme hydrological disasters.

The total investment in the dam could exceed one trillion yuan (USD 137 billion), which would dwarf any other single infrastructure project on the planet, including China's own Three Gorges Dam which is regarded as the largest in the world, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported Thursday.

China has already operationalised the \$1.5 billion Zam Hydropower Station, the largest in Tibet in 2015.

SHORT TAKES

Nearly 70 migrants die as boat sinks

Bamako: Nearly 70 migrants died when their boat sank as they tried to reach Spain earlier this month, Mali's Minister for Migrants Living Abroad said. In a press release Thursday, Mossa Ag Attaher announced that a migrant boat bound for Spain sank on December 19. The migrants in this boat "numbered 80 at the start, with only 11 survivors," according to the Ministry.

Two climbers found dead

Rome: The bodies of two Italian climbers have been found on Italy's Gran Sasso massif five days after they disappeared during an excursion, rescuers said. Rescue teams supported by a helicopter managed to reach the location on Friday where the two men went missing in the central Abruzzo region.

Bolivia to arrest Evo Morales

La Paz: The Bolivian government will arrest former President Evo Morales in due course, a senior official said. "We have to wait for the right moment. The action will be taken, and the arrest warrant will be complied with without putting the lives of innocent people at risk," Deputy Minister of Coordination and Government Management Gustavo Torrico said.

China sanctions seven companies

Beijing: The Chinese government placed sanctions on seven companies Friday in response to recent US announcements of military sales and aid to Taiwan, the self-governing island that China claims as part of its territory. The sanctions also come in response to the recent approval of the US government's annual defence spending bill, which a Chinese Foreign Ministry statement said "includes multiple negative sections on China."

Japan approves record Budget

Tokyo: The Japanese Cabinet Friday approved a record 8.7 trillion yen (\$55 billion) defence budget for 2025 as Japan accelerates building up its strike-back capability with long-range cruise missiles and starts deploying Tomahawks to fortify itself against growing threats from China, North Korea and Russia. The Cabinet-endorsed draft defence budget marks the third year of Japan's ongoing five-year military buildup under the national security strategy adopted in 2022.

SNIPPETS

Chinese man gets death rap for killing 35 people

Beijing: A court in China has sentenced a man to death for killing 35 people last month by driving into a crowd, in an attack that raised national concern about mass killings. Fan Weiqiu was venting his anger because he was unhappy with his divorce settlement, the court in the southern city of Zhuhai said as it handed down the sentence Friday. The victims were exercising at a sports centre. The court statement said Fan's "criminal motive was extremely despicable, the nature of the crime was extremely vile, the means of crime were particularly cruel, and the consequences of the crime were particularly severe, resulting in great social harm." The attack was one of several in China in late October and November and spurred Chinese leader Xi Jinping to order local governments to take steps to prevent future "extreme cases." The order prompted vows from local leaders to examine personal disputes that could trigger aggression, from marital troubles to disagreements over inheritance.

SK votes to impeach acting President Han

Seoul: South Korea's opposition-controlled National Assembly voted Friday to impeach acting President Han Duck-soo despite vehement protests by governing party lawmakers, further deepening the country's political crisis set off by President Yoon Suk Yeol's stunning imposition of martial law and ensuing impeachment. Han's impeachment means he will be stripped of the powers and duties of the president until the Constitutional Court decides whether to dismiss or reinstate him. The court is already reviewing whether to uphold Yoon's earlier impeachment. The impeachments of the country's top two officials worsen its political turmoil, deepen its economic uncertainty and hurt its international image. The single-chamber National Assembly passed Han's impeachment motion with a 192-0 vote. Lawmakers with the governing People Power Party boycotted the vote and gathered around the podium where assembly Speaker Woo Won Shik was seated and shouted that the vote was "invalid" and demanded Woo's resignation. No violence or injuries were reported.

Pak army accuses India of 25 LoC violations in 2024

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Dec 27: The Pakistan Army Friday accused India of 25 violations of the Line of Control (LoC) during the past year and threatened a quick response if Indian forces attack.

Army spokesman Lt Gen Ahmad Sharif Chaudhry levelled these accusations at an year-end press conference, while not offering details to substantiate the charges. The spokesman said security forces killed at least 925 terrorists in 2024 and lost 383 of its own men in nearly 60,000 operations. The Pakistan military is battling insurgency mostly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. The general



claimed that India committed 25 LoC violations and also carried out several 'false flag operations'.

The term usually refers to fake military action so that the blame falls on the other side. The spokesman claimed that such operations were always announced through fake social media accounts linked with RAW (Research and Analysis Wing), India's foreign intelligence agency.

Germany's President dissolves Parliament

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Frankfurt, Dec 27: German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier Friday ordered Parliament dissolved and set new elections for February 23 in the wake of the collapse of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's coalition, saying it was the only way to give the country a stable government capable of tackling its problems.

Scholz lost a confidence vote December 16 and leads a minority government after his unpopular and notoriously rancorous three-party coalition collapsed November 6 when he fired his finance minister in a dispute over how to revitalise Germany's stagnant economy.

Steinmeier said he made the decision because it was clear after consultation with party leaders that there was no agreement among Germany's political parties on a majority for a new government in the current parliament.

"Therefore I am convinced that for the good of our country new elections are the right way." Since the post-World War II constitution doesn't allow the Bundestag to dissolve itself, it was up to Steinmeier to decide whether to dissolve parliament and call an election. He had 21 days to make that decision. Once parliament is dissolved, the election must be held within 60 days.



UNDERWATER CABLE SABOTAGE

REUTERS

Helsinki, Dec 27: NATO said Friday it would boost its presence in the Baltic Sea after the suspected sabotage this week of an undersea power cable and four internet lines, while alliance member Estonia launched a naval operation to guard a parallel electricity link.

Finland Thursday seized a ship carrying Russian oil on suspicion the vessel had caused an outage of the Estlink 2 undersea power cable linking it with Estonia and fibre optic lines, and Friday said it had asked NATO for support.

Baltic Sea nations are on high alert for acts of sabotage after a string of outages of power cables, telecom links and gas pipelines since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, although sub-

NATO increases Baltic Sea patrols

sea equipment is also subject to malfunction and accidents.

"We have agreed with Estonia, and we have also communicated to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, that our wish is to have a stronger NATO presence," Finnish President Alexander Stubb told a news conference.

Rutte said he had discussed with Stubb the Finnish-led investigation, expressing his support. A NATO official declined to provide detail on specific deployments.

Sweden's coastguard said in a statement it had ramped up surveillance of ship traffic to protect critical undersea installations, deploying aircraft and vessels while coordinating with the Swedish navy and with other nations.



Estonia navy moves to protect remaining power cable

Finland seized ship suspected of damaging power cable

NATO to enhance Baltic Sea presence

Baltic Sea nations on alert for sabotage

The Kremlin said on Friday Finland's seizure of the ship carrying Russian oil was of little concern for Moscow. In the past, Russia has denied involvement in any of the Baltic

infrastructure incidents. Estonia said its navy had deployed to guard the still operational Estlink 1 subsea cable. Tsahkna said Thursday damage to subsea installations in

the region had now become so frequent that it was difficult to believe they were all caused by accidents or poor seamanship.

The incidents highlight the need to update centuries-old maritime law to explicitly outlaw damage to undersea infrastructure, Estonia's justice minister told Reuters Friday.

The 658 megawatt (MW) Estlink 2 outage began at midday local time Wednesday, leaving only the 358 MW Estlink 1 linking Finland and Estonia, the countries' electricity grid operators said.

Finnish investigators believe the seized ship - a Cook Island-registered vessel named as the Eagle S - may have caused the damage by dragging its anchor along the seabed, one of several such incidents in recent years.

