Actress Sharvari punches her last working day of 2024 by shooting for her

upcoming movie Alpha

LEISURE | P2



Russia's N-scare

Russia will scrap a moratorium on deployment of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles

INTERNATIONAL | P10



High attrition

Employee attrition in private sector banks witnesses an increase to about 25 per

BUSINESS | P11



Grandmaster Koneru Humpy defeats Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE

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BHUBANESWAR | MONDAY | DECEMBER 30, 2024

Jet shot down by Russia: Azerbaijan

AGENCIES

Baku, Dec 29: Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev Sunday said that the Azerbaijani airliner that crashed last week was shot down by Russia, albeit unintentionally, and criticised Moscow for trying to "hush up" the issue for days.

'We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia. (...) We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done," he told Azerbaijani state televi-

Aliyev said that the airliner, which crashed Wednesday in Kazakhstan, was hit by fire from the ground over Russia and "rendered uncontrollable by electronic warfare." Aliyev accused Russia of trying to "hush up" the issue for several days, saying he was "upset and surprised" by versions of events put forward by Russian

"Unfortunately, for the first three days we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions," he said.

The crash killed 38 of 67 people on board. The Kremlin said that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where the plane attempted to land, to deflect a Ukrainian drone strike.

Aliyev said Azerbaijan made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

"First, the Russian side must apologise to Azerbaijan. Second, it must admit its guilt. Third, punish the guilty, bring them to criminal responsibility and pay compensation to the Azerbaijani state, the injured passengers and crew members," he said.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Building memorials for honest people? That's political hara-kiri for us! As the year draws to an end

Seoul, Dec 29: A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in



cent, an RBI report says



New chess crown

World Rapid Chess champion

SPORTS | P12

12 PAGE | ₹5.00

179 killed as Boeing blows up

and the world gears up to ring in the New Year with gusto and enthusiasm, two back-to-back major air tragedies have created a scare among fliers. Barely four days after an Azerbaijan Airlines jet crash-landed near Aktau in Kazakhstan, killing 38 of the 67 passengers, a Boeing 737-800 burst into flames at Muan airport in South Korea, Sunday, killing 179 of the 181 people on board. Billed as the worst plane mishap for any South Korean airline since an accident in 1997 at Guam that killed more than 200 people, Sunday's incident appears to be horrifying as the visuals of the plane erupting into a fireball went viral on social media. Meanwhile, reports also suggest that an Air Canada flight had a rough landing at Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province, though there has been no report of any injury or casualty in that incident

one of the country's worst avi-



The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 km south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-yearold Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 am.

A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't imme-

diately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean,

as well as two Thai nationals. Thailand's Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Seoul received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry.

Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility.

Air Canada flight catches fire

Ottawa: An Air Canada flight coming from St John's city on Newfoundland Island had a rough landing at the Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province that saw the aircraft skid down the runway and part of it catching fire. A statement issued by the airport said the incident involved Air Canada Flight 2259, which was operated by PAL Airlines, CBC News reported. The incident occurred around 9:30pm local time.

triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames. Transport Ministry officials said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird-hit warning shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said. Workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box.

Release crop loss aid soon: CM to Collectors

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday visited Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati districts to take stock of the crop damage due to the recent unseasonal rains and directed the District Collectors to release the compensation soon. Majhi, along with Speaker

Surama Padhy and Revenue & Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, first visited a few rain-hit paddy fields under Ranpur block in Nayagarh district and reviewed the situation. He directed the Navagarh Collector to hold discussions with the farmers affected by the unseasonal rains and take necessary steps to provide com-



pensation as soon as possible. Majhi and Pujari also checked the damaged paddy crops in the block.

The CM directed the farmers, who have registered for insurance, to report the crop loss by dialing toll-free no- '14447', from their registered mobile number.

He later visited Lingipur and Gurandi villages of Uppalada gram panchavat under Goshani block in Gajapati district and discussed with the farmers the losses arising out of the recent unseasonal rains. He assured the farmers that the compensation will be released soon.

4 MKCG docs fired on assault charge

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Dec 29: Authorities of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati (MKCG) Medical College and Hospital here Sunday terminated four doctors, including an assistant professor and three senior residents from their services, and debarred a second-vear postgraduate (PG) resident from the hostel for six months for allegedly assaulting a student December 20, an official said Sunday.

Purushottam Swain, assistant professor of Orthopedics department, Aryan Kumar Mohanty, Chinmay Pradhan, senior residents engaged as contractual doctors in Paediatric department, and Yashwant Veera, a PG senior resident in General Surgery department, have been terminated, while Priyajeet Sahoo, a second-year PG resident in Orthopedics department, has been debarred from the hostel for six months.

Tigress Zeenat finally captured in Bengal



the official added.

The action was taken after a decision in the college council meeting December 23 and was directed by the Director of Medical Education and Training (DMET) for disciplinary reasons, said Suchitra Dash, Dean and Principal of the state government-run medical college.

Police have registered a case in the matter after the victim PG student lodged an FIR in Baidyanathpur police station. The victim alleged that he was physically assaulted by his senior on the hostel premises around 12:30am December 20.

SHORT TAKES

4 killed as bus overturns

Koraput: Four people were killed and 40 others injured after their bus overturned in hilly Koraput district early Sunday morning, police said. The mishap occurred around 5:30am at Dokrighat near Gupteswar in Boipariguda police station area, they said. The bus was on its way to Gupteswar temple with around 50 devotees from Niali in Cuttack, they added.

9-day-old 'sold' baby rescued

Balasore: Parents of a newborn child who was traced by the police from a Mayurbhani couple Saturday, claimed that they had 'donated' the nine-day-old infant amid reports of child sale in the district. Based on a complaint, a joint investigation was initiated by the police and the Child Welfare Committee. The baby born to Dharmu Behera and his wife Shantilata was traced to Mayurbhanj's childless couple. P5

ISRO's mission for space docking today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to launch two satellites Monday night from Sriharikota spaceport to demonstrate docking and undocking of spacecraft in orbit, which will make India the fourth country in the world to achieve the feat.

ISRO's warhorse rocket Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) will place the two satellites -- SDX01 and SDX02 -- in a 476-km circular orbit and attempt the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDEx) in the first week of January, the space agency officials said.

"This mission will mark India's entry into the exclusive league of nations capable of mastering space docking,' Union Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said. The SpaDEx mission is expected to be a stepping stone for India's future endeavours in space exploration which include getting rocks and soil from the moon on Earth, the proposed Bharatiya Antariksha Station and landing an astronaut on the lunar surface. Only the US, Russia and China have mastered space docking technologies.

"The primary objective of SpaDeX mission is to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for rendezvous, docking, and undocking of two small spacecraft (SDX01, which is the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target) in a low-Earth circular orbit," an ISRO official said.

The secondary objective of the mission includes demonstration of the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, which is essential for future applications such as in-space robotics; composite spacecraft control and others.

PNN & AGENCIES

Kolkata, Dec 29: Elusive tigress Zeenat, which had strayed from Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Odisha to Bankura in West Bengal, and had kept wildlife officials of both the states on edge for over a week, was finally spotted, tranquilised and captured Sunday afternoon.

According to chief wildlife warden Debal Roy, "The tigress was tranquillised with a single dart shot at 4:09pm, after previous attempts to sedate her had failed. The animal's vital parameters would be examined before deciding her temporary accommodation, he said.

"Zeenat could not be sedated during a previous attempt despite tranquillisers being used early Sunday morning. The operation resumed in the afternoon after veterinarians gave their approval," he said.

gress had been in Gopalpur forest in Bankura district, where she was surrounded by double

Since Saturday night, the ti-



netting, he added. "At 1:20am on Sunday, the

tigress was first tranquillised. but despite repeated doses, she

The tigress was tranguillised with a single dart shot at 4:09pm, after previous attempts to sedate her, post-midnight, failed

could not be sedated," Roy said. The operation was paused at 4:30am due to the upper limit on tranquilliser doses. After the tigress had rested and calmed down, the operation resumed, and she was successfully sedated in the afternoon, Roy said.

Zeenat had been relocated from Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) to Similipal last month to introduce new gene pool to the tiger population.

After leaving Similipal, Zeenat ventured through forests in Manbazar and Bandwan before crossing into West Bengal, covering over 120 km

across the borders of West Ben gal, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

Despite efforts, the tigress avoided baits in trap-door cages and instead killed domestic goats that strayed into the forest Surveillance using drones was also conducted, but the dense forests made monitoring challenging.

Officials said Zeenat had been traveling shorter distances in recent days, suggesting she may be

settling in the area. Apprehending that the marauding tigress 'Zeenat' may stray into Rahamada village, flanked by Raikia and Bharadi hills, the West Bengal Forest department had December 25 set up nylon nets on three sides of the village. They had also erected the fences around the houses close to forests.

The nylon net over a 1-sqkm-area was put up to prevent the tigress from entering nearby human settlements. The department had informed local villagers about its presence at the current location for their safety.

Isure



BALDONI TO FILE COUNTERSUIT AGAINST BLAKE'S ALLEGATION

Actor and director Justin Baldoni is preparing to file a countersuit against Blake Lively following her recent legal complaint alleging sexual harassment and a smear campaign by him during the production of

JAMES GUNN DEFENDS DELAY IN RELEASE OF THE BATMAN 2

DC Studios head James Gunn has spoken out in defense of the five-year delay between installments of The Batman movie franchise. Gunn argues that lengthy gaps between blockbuster film sequels are not uncommon. The film is now slated to release October 1, 2027.



accuracy • reliability • trust

Today, you feel free and liberated! And in that spirit, you want to travel or do things you loved doing as a child. A good time for a family outing, says Ganesha, Keeping in mind your mood, you may even make plans for the future for your near and dear.

TAURUS

You are likely to stick to basics instead of letting your imagination run wild today, says Ganesha. At work, you may feel some pressure from your peers to do things differently. Think things out and be certain before you take any decision, advises Ganesha.

You have a certain degree of equanimity when it comes to reacting to praise and criticism. Today, however, you will be emotional, and it won't be too bad. You will get appreciated at work and your liberal show of emotions will only make others like you more. Your colleagues will say three cheers for you. But avoid an emotional outburst as it may turn cheers into jeers.

heart. You will be trembling with pain virtually do shooting practice at you. You can do nothing but tell your love interest how badly you have been hit.

sometimes; but if one were to ask you today, you would be will become almost a part and parcel of is that you make a great display of your

You will start the day by scribbling down things to do. But don't just jot them down; instead, set realistic goals and prioritise them. Items you mark highest will de-

nious mood that grips you bother you too much.

you will find yourself in a tricky situation today, says lonely and empty but yet, at the same time, you will have some responsibility that will prevent your from showing cheer up later in the day.

Stay stern, says Ganesha, as it might be necessary to exercise your grit to get the desired results today. Your presence may be dominating at the workplace, but your subordinates will find your manner pleasing as you hold them in awe of you Do not get carried away by your success or the tables may turn, suggests Ganesha.

CAPRICORN

You will prioritise your needs, and the most critical would be the need to manage finances to save for the future. Also, the company you choose to keep will reflect the kind of person you are. So, beware of who you befriend, warns Ganesha.

AQUARIUS

Today, you will have a lot of fun with your siblings! Though generally well-organ ised and methodical, you will enjoy going with the flow of what your siblings and friends plan for you. Sometimes, spontaneity is a good thing, says Ganesha.

There are indications you will be in hot pursuit of leisure today, says Ganesha. This will probably be in the form of a short trip to recharge your batteries, and is probably fuelled by your satisfaction in the realisation that the role you play within your organisation is consequential, satisfying



Mumbai: Actress Sharvari, who rose to prom-

inence with Munjya, punched her last working

day of 2024 on the sets of her upcoming movie

Sunday, the actress took to the Stories sec-

tion of her Instagram, and shared a picture

She wrote on the picture, "Harness-ing

of her harness from the sets of the movie.

my last working day of 2024 energy

#Alpha. Grateful for each work-

ing day of 24, A year that has

particularly been a testing

one.. Going to work has

been my biggest blessing.

has kept me motivated &

Alpha is produced by Aditya Chopra, and is a part of the YRF spy-uni-

verse. It is directed by Shiv

Rawail, who is known for

the streaming series The

Railway Men which was

It is the first female-led

film from the spy-universe,

and also stars Alia Bhatt and

Anil Kapoor. The film's title

was unveiled in a special

The YRF spy includes

blockbusters like E*k Tha*

Tiger, Tiger Zinda Hai, War, Pathaan and Tiger 3.

The films lined up for the

spy-universe include War

2 with Hrithik Roshan and

NTR Jr in the lead, *Pathaan*

2, and Tiger vs Pathaan. IANS

video by the makers.

also produced by YRF.

It Ends With Us.

Varun talks about coping after heartbreak

Mumbai: Actor Varun Dhawan, who can be seen in the recently released movie Baby John, feels that heartbreak is a difficult phase for any man

The actor recently appeared Shubhankar Mishra's YouTube channel and spoke about men trying to make sense of heartbreak and coping with it. said,

"When a man's heart breaks, the society doesn't think much about what happens to him. They go through a very bad time. You have to work and do a lot of things"

He further mentioned, 'You can't even show it to them. You get shattered from within. You can't show that pain. You have to keep a face and move forward because people expect you to be strong, you can't cry being a boy

Earlier, Varun spoke about what needs to change in the Hindi film industry. The actor said that Bollywood currently is dominated by people whose thinking is not pan-India but carelatively easy to be influthe entertainment capital may come from the Mumbai based perspective, Varun feels it's

important for from across India to join Bollywood to render a certain depth in storytelling.

ters to Mumbai. While it's enced by the city given it is of India and all decisions of producers and directors voices





CANCER arrow right through your the sweet pain of lust and love. But the overzealous Cupid may not stop at just that. Just to be completely sure, it will

It is good to be impulsive all for a meticulously planned approach to life. So much so that from now on, planning your life, predicts Ganesha. So, it is expected that you plan everything to perfection today, although the execution of your plans may be a different story. But you can't do everything, can you? At least the good thing organisational capabilities, says Ganesha.

mand quick actions, cautions Ganesha.

It's a spiritual and harmotoday, feels Ganesha. You may want to focus on meditation, as you essentially seek peace. This may have something to do with the fact that at work, your subordinates may attempt to throw around their weight to force you to make drastic changes. But do not let it

SCORPIO

It is more than likely that Ganesha. You may start the day feeling it. Try to keep your mind off negative thoughts. Work and friends will help you

SAGITTARIUS

PISCES as well as rewarding.

bliss mannaah Bhatia is spreading festive cheer this December with her boyfriend, Vijay Varma,

Tamannaah's

December

close friend Kajal Aggarwal. The trio is capturing the essence of the season, sharing joyful moments together as they celebrate the end of the year. From fun-filled gatherings to candid snapshots, Tamannaah, Vijay and Kajal are making this De-

Mum-

Actress Ta-

Sunday, the Baahubali actress took to her Instagram stories to give a sneak peek into her fun-filled time with Vijay and close friends, including In the first image, Tamannaah is seen striking a pose with Vijay, Kajal,

Nishka Lulla Mehra and others. In the next photo, the Lust Stories 2 actress is seen smiling as Kajal hugs her from behind. Sharing the image, Bhatia wrote in the caption, "Love you @kajalaggarwal."

Tamannaah, an avid social media user, also posted a video of her peaceful moments, captioning it, "2024, you were kind."

Tamannaah and Vijay recently returned from their romantic getaway in Goa. The actress took to Instagram to share photos and videos from the trip. In one of the clips, the couple is seen playing a video game with their friends. Sharing the post, the Rebel actress cap-

tioned it, "Goa getaway

Nyrraa reveals her New Year plans

Mumbai: Television actress Nyrraa M Banerji is all set to welcome the New Year by spending quality time with her family and friends. The actress is excited to celebrate New Year's Eve with her loved

ones, ushering in 2025 with positivity. Reflecting on the past year and her plans for the upcoming celebration, she shared, "God has been kind, and 2024 has been a great year for me professionally. I only have gratitude to offer to my family, friends,

throughout.' Nyrraa added, "My famhave played a pivotal role and that's why I would year by spending qualthem. Here's wishing Happy New Year as we lot is on the plate now Please continue and support." Work-wise, Nyrraa

last seen in the popular reality show "Bigg Boss 18." Referring to her exit as "unfair," the actor stated that it was only in the third week she

the game. She was working on her strategies but couldn't understand why she was given so little screen time.



SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, fill in the boxes in such a

manner that every row, column and 3x3 box contains

2

8

6 1

3

2

3

4

the digits 1 to 9, without repeating any.

1

5

4

2 6

3

8 5

2

SOLUTIONS

6

7

5

PEANUTS









CALVIN AND HOBBES

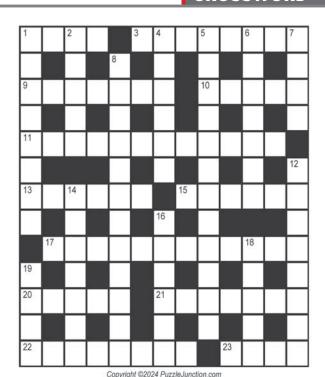


BREVITY



DOST

CROSSWORD



Across

- 1 Food grain
- 3 Work force
- 9 Spitz family member 10 Museum piece
- 11 Lacking adequate food
- 13 Aristocrats
- 15 Rock dove

- 17 Favourites (5-7)

Down

 South Dakota monument 2 Caravan beast

20 Stench

21 Flooring

22 Slaughter

23 Basilica area

- 4 Common vipers

- 5 The flock
- liqueur

19 Lens type

12 Liquorice-

flavoured

6 Blue pike

7 Full-bodied

8 Cause of many

doctor visits

- 14 Jumping rodents 16 Appropriate 18 Outfit
- 8 1 2 4 7 6 3 5 9 2 7 6 9 4 5 1 8 3 9 2 5 1 8 4 3 6 7 8 6 7 2 5 3

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

SHOWCASING TALENT

Young artistes perform at Kalaniali Folk Festival organised by Kalaniali Artistry Trust at Utkal Mandap in Bhubaneswar,



owntown

'Odisha leads in climate-resilient agriculture'

Principal Secretary, Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Arabinda K Padhee sheds light on the state's vision to transform agriculture into a sustainable and equitable growth driver

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Odisha is emerging as a leader in sustainable agricultural practices with a focus on inclusivity, diversification, and climate resilience, according to Arabinda K

Padhee is the Principal Secretary of the department of Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment of the Government

In an interview with PTI, Padhee shed light on the state's comprehensive vision to transform agriculture into a sustainable and equitable growth

"Agriculture contributes 22 per cent to Odisha's Gross Value Added (GVA) and sustains 55-60 per cent of its population, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Yet, with 45-50 per cent of the farmland dependent on rainfall, the state is prioritising region-specific strategies to address these vulnerabilities," he

Collaborative efforts with global research organisations, such as the International Food Policy Research Institute (IF-PRI), are central to this transformation, he added.

On the crop pattern of the state, he said that while paddy remains dominant, the state is actively promoting high-value crops such as vegetables, pulses, oilseeds, and millets, and initiatives like Agri-Production Clusters are fostering diversi-



management ensures improved soil fertility and increased farmer incomes by introducing pulses and oilseeds in fallow lands.

As Odisha encounters frequent natural calamities like floods and cyclones. Padhee said that the climate is indeed a significant challenge for us. as between 1972 and 2022, only three years have been free from extreme weather events, including floods, droughts, and cyclones.

"We are focusing on making our agricultural practices climate-resilient. Odisha has introduced submergence-tolerant rice varieties like Swana-Sub1, which can survive up to 12 days of flooding, drought-resistant crops, and salt-tolerant strains," he told PTI.

A dedicated Climate Resilience Cell integrates sustainability into every new project, neer in adaptive agriculture,

he added.

When asked about the state's smallholder farmers, the principal secretary said that with smallholders making up over 92 per cent of Odisha's farmers, collective bargaining through Farmers' Producer Organisations (FPOs) is enhancing market access.

"Digital tools provide crop-specific advice, while initiatives like Mukhyamantri Krushi Udvog Yojana foster rural entrepreneurship. Women farmers are at the forefront, benefitting from higher subsidies, skill development programs, and decision-making roles," he told PTI.

Highlighting the state's traditional crops, Padhee said that Odisha has gained national recognition for reviving traditional crops like millets, known for their resilience and nutritional

Odisha has gained national recognition for reviving traditional crops like millets, known for their resilience and nutritional value

"We are trying to bring out our forgotten foods of the state. Forgotten foods are those that were hitherto used to be cultivated, but they have gone out of the fields of the farmers. So we are trying to bring such crops into the fold," he said.

Odisha already has a Forgotten Food Policy, and we recently held an international symposium on forgotten foods that highlighted the importance of underutilised crops in addressing food security and environmental sustainability, he added

"In conclusion, our vision is rooted in inclusivity, sustainability, and resilience," said Padhee. "By leveraging technology, climate-smart practices, and evidence-based policies, we aim to enhance productivity while ensuring equitable growth for smallholders, women, and tribal communities."

Padhee added that Odisha is setting an example for sustainable agricultural development across India with its focus on organic farming, agrobiodiversity, and climate-smart practices.

POLITICKLE By MANJUL



Locals block City road over refusal to hold cricket match

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Agitated over the cancellation of a cricket match, angry locals staged a blockade near Laxmisagar area Sunday afternoon, leaving scores of commuters stranded on the Rasulgarh-Kalpana road for over three hours.

Tourists travelling to Puri and Biju Patnaik International affected due to the chaos as the



ify the crowd.

A source in Laxmisagar police station said trouble started early Sunday morning after the headmaster of Laxmisagar high school denied access to some locals for a cricket match. As the deadlock persisted for a longer duration, the agitated locals blocked the busy Rasulgarh-Kalpana road. Some agitating locals claimed that the controversy erupted after they objected to the invitation of a BJP leader to the match.

One of the protestors said, "We have been conducting cricket matches at the location for over a decade now. The

said a protester school administration's decision to deny permission over flimsy reasons is unjustified. Left with no option, we were forced to hit the streets". An other protestor claimed that the Laxmisagar police had given

them permission for the tourna-

ment against a written applica-

tion for the same, "Politicising

such events over petty reasons is distasteful," he added.

cricket matches at the location

for over a decade now. The school administration's deci-

sion to deny permission over flimsy reasons is unjustified,

After the Laxmisagar police failed to pacify the agitators, two-platoons of police force were called in to clear off the road. Traffic was restored to normalcy around 2:30 pm.

BMC to expand parking for PBD

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Ahead of the upcoming 18th Pravasi Bharativa Divas (PBD), the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) is taking significant steps to address the City's parking challenges with a comprehensive framework for the operation, management, and regulation of parking spaces. The initiative is aimed at improving urban mobility and promoting sustainable practices.

The newly-developed parking areas include a 400-meter stretch from the "Old BMC Office to Mausi Maaa Road" in the South East Zone, a 700-meter stretch from the Fire Station to Patas Chhak in the South West Zone, and a 650-meter stretch from Stewart School to Jaleswar Temple, also in the South West Zone. Once completed, these spaces will be regulated under the City's parking rules, offering citizens hassle-free parking and smoother city traffic flow.

 $BMC\ is\ also\ coordinating\ efforts$ to relocate street vendors from these areas. Mayor Sulochana Das is personally overseeing the progress, while Commissioner Rajesh Prabhakar Patil has instructed day-wise updates from officers to ensure timely completion.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ministration.

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: In

an effort to get international

recognition for the annual

Dhanu Jatra in Bargarh, the

state government Sunday said

several measures, including

allocation of an additional Rs

50 lakh, were taken by the ad-

nu Jatra 2025 will be held in

Bargarh district from January

3 to January 13, showcasing

Odisha's rich cultural heri-

tage and tradition," state cul-

ture minister Surjyabanshi

government is taking steps

to ensure that the festival

gets international recogni-

tion, the minister said, "The

Asserting that the state

Suraj told reporters here.

"The much-celebrated Dha-

State govt under fire over Kalinga Stadium parking



₹50L more funds for Dhanu Jatra

In a first for the festival, Dhanu Jatra will be live-streamed at prominent locations

across Odisha, including Bhubaneswar, using LED screens

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: The BJP dispensation in the state came under severe criticism after two government vehicles were found parked on the running track of Kalinga Stadium here with the Opposition BJD dubbing it a "shameful" activity.

fied that the two four-wheelers were parked on the athletics track due to "unavoidable circumstances" The clarification was given by

The state government clari-

Odisha's Sports Minister Suryabanshi Suraj who stated that two vehicles had to enter the racetrack because of an "emergency" situation.

He was responding to the

government has already allo-

allegation made by BJD leader and former sports minister TK Behera.

Taking to X, the BJD leader Saturday claimed, "Athletic track in Kalinga Stadium: During @Naveen_Odisha's Era, it was a running track of international athletes. Now, it is running track of vehicles belonging to the ruling party leaders. It is outrageously disappointing for all sportspersons and shameful for Odisha. @sports_odisha @

the stadium.

bid odisha.'

that Behera has been vocal and active as the BJD lost power af-

Behera also tagged a picture of two government cars being

parked on the running track of The sports minister alleged

"The two vehicles had to be parked on the sports track due to an emergency," Suraj said.

He also said that all visitors including political leaders and VIPs, normally park their vehicles at the designated area and enter the complex on foot.

"The present incident was due to an emergency," he

Suraj also said that the cars were parked on the track when it was raining heavily.

"The cars were parked as an emergency arose due to medical requirements," the minister said, adding that he always parks his car at a distance when he enters the area where running tracks are laid.

"I would like to thank the former sports minister (Behera) for having so much interest even after being discharged from the responsibility of the department," Suraj said.

Behera rejected the minister's clarification and said that the people have the right to know the reason for allowing cars to be parked on the athletics track.

Activist advocates indigenous coastal conservation in Odisha

Environmentalist Soumya Ranjan Biswal

emphasises the need to restore Odisha's coastal ecosystems and protect indigenous species for long-term ecological resilience

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Environmentalist Soumya Ranjan Biswal has called on Forest, Environment, and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia to adopt an ecosystem-based approach to coastal conservation in the state. In a social media post ad-

dressed to the minister, Biswal criticised the focus on exotic species like Casuarina in coastal plantation drives, which he said harms biodiversity, causes water scarcity, and disrupts ecosystems such as dunes, mudflats, and marshlands. "These practices, pursued in the name of green cover, weaken the resilience of coastal ecology,' Biswal stated.

He stressed the need to move beyond increasing forest cover and large flora and fauna, urging a more comprehensive strategy to restore Odisha's unique coastal ecosystems.

A native of Puri district, Biswal is a prominent conservationist. He recently received the prestigious International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) Impact Award from the U.S. Department of State and the Meridian International Center. The award recognizes his project, 'Community-led biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions education for climate resilience at Devi river mouth in India," which aims to foster lasting local impact.

Selected for its innovation and scalability, the project earned Biswal a USD 5,000 grant. He plans to use the funding to strengthen community-driven efforts for biodiversity conservation.

Since founding the Odisha Paryavaran Sanrakshan Abhiyan in 2014, Biswal has worked tirelessly on marine turtle and mangrove conservation. His dedication underscores the urgency of adopting sustainable practices to protect Odisha's vulnerable coastal ecosystems.

steps down POST NEWS NETWORK

OCA president

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Senior BJD leader Pranab Prakash Das has stepped down as the president of the Odisha Cricket Association (OCA) Sunday.

Das, a former MLA from Jajpur district was elected unopposed to the position October 28, 2022. His term, scheduled to end October 2025, has now come to an early conclusion.

Speaking at a press conference Sunday, OCA general secretary Sanjay Behera an nounced that vice-president Pankaj Mohanty will serve as the interim president until elections are held within 45 days.

Behera mentioned that Das has resigned citing personal reasons. "The election for the position would take place after the upcoming international cricket match, Behera added.



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REQUIREMENT OF PREMISES Bank of India requires suitable premises preferably on ground floor with appropriate frontage and sufficient parking space on lease basis for opening of New Branch in Phulnakhara. The premises should be in an approved building confirming to the conditions by the Govt. Authorities for commercial use. Detailed notification inviting offers for new premises

s available in our website www.bankofindia.co.in. Prescribed forma for submission of offer may be obtained upto 3PM of 07.01.2025 from our office at above address. Alternatively, the format can be downloaded rom our website. Last date for submission of offer is upto 5PM or 07.01.2025 at Zonal Office, Bhubaneswar.

Zonal Manager, Bhubaneswar Zone



other associated expenses." For the first time, arrangements have been made to live-stream the festival in major locations in the state. including the Capital city, using LED screens, the minister

receive a token honorarium of Rs 10,000 each. Additionally, the National School of Drama will produce a documentary on Dhanu Jatra to showcase its cultural significance," the min-

> 'A dedicated comwill mittee formed work to-

ister added.

wards obtaining UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status for Dhanu Jatra. The government is also launching a dedicated website that will provide comprehensive information about the festival, including its history, venues, and real-time GPS-enabled navigation for visitors,' he said.

During Dhanu Jatra, Bargarh town transforms into the mythical cities of Mathura and Gopapur, vividly reenacting episodes from Indian mythology, he said.

"The live broadcasting of the festival is timed with Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which will enable a global audience to witness it and understand its cultural essence," the minister added.



To love is not to possess, but to give oneself

THE MOTHER



MAGA Meltdown

rift has emerged among the supporters of US President-elect Donald Trump over the contentious issue of immigration. The faction spearheaded by billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy contrasts sharply with Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) base, which firmly endorses his stringent anti-immigration policies. At the centre of the heated debate that has been raging online over the last few days is Sriram Krishnan, an Indian-born entrepreneur chosen by Trump to be his adviser on artificial intelligence (AI). Krishnan favours getting more skilled immigrants into the US

The matter escalated when Ramaswamy, appointed by Trump to reduce government spending, asserted that American culture is responsible for US companies opting to hire skilled foreign workers, often through H-1B temporary worker visas. "Our American culture has venerated mediocrity over excellence," Ramaswamy wrote on X. "A culture that celebrates the prom queen over the math olympiad champ, or the jock over the valedictorian-the top student in a class, will not produce the best engineers." Undoubtedly the prom queen is very attractive yet this post invited sharp reactions from Trump's MAGA supporters who are against any sort of immigration. The backlash apparently subdued Ramaswamy who, subsequently, clarified his stand saying that "the H-1B system is badly broken & should be replaced." But it was too late. Many MAGA supporters resorted to outright racist slurs and termed Indians as "invaders" stealing their jobs. It is pertinent to note here that persons of Indian origin (PIOs) in most white collar jobs in the US compete directly with white Americans, unlike other immigrants who mostly get into low-paying blue collar jobs. As a result of this, the unfortunate PIOs often find themselves at the receiving end of backlash from

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that enables US companies to hire foreign workers for specialised roles that require advanced skills. Technology firms rely heavily on this visa to recruit tens of thousands of employees annually from countries such as India and China. The tech sector has consistently advocated for an increase in H-1B visa quota to draw in the best skilled talent to the US. However, during Trump's first term in 2020, the programme faced restrictions, with the administration contending that it permits companies to substitute American workers with lower-paid foreign labour.

Musk, born in Pretoria, South Africa, is the world's wealthiest man and a close ally of the President-elect. He vehemently supports H-1B visa and has vowed to "go to war" to defend the programme. Musk was once an H-1B visa holder himself and has advocated for the industry's necessity to recruit international talent. "The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX. Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B," Musk wrote on X (formerly Twitter), the social media platform he owns. He then added, "Take a big step back and F*** YOURSELF in the face. I will go to war on this issue the likes of which you cannot possibly comprehend." However, critics contend that these visas undermine opportunities for American citizens who could fill those positions. Some conservative voices have called for the programme to be abolished all together.

Amid the simmering row, the President-elect seems to be aligning with Musk and other supporters in the tech industry over the immigration visa issue. In a Saturday interview with the New York Post, Trump expressed his approval of using visas to attract skilled foreign workers to the US. "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," he told the newspaper. However, Trump, known for his fickle nature, has in the past criticised the H-1B visas, calling them "very bad" and "unfair" for US workers. His stringent immigration policies, including a commitment to mass deportation, were pivotal to his successful presidential campaign. While he has concentrated on undocumented immigrants entering the US, he has also advocated for restrictions on legal immigration, such as family-based visas. During his 2024 presidential campaign, where immigration became a key issue, Trump stated that undocumented immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country" and vowed to execute the largest deportation operation in US history. However, in a notable shift from his typical alarmist stance on immigration, Trump stated in a podcast this year that he supports granting automatic green cards to foreign students who graduate from US colleges. These remarks coincided with the emergence of his growing relationship with figures in the tech industry, including Musk and Ramaswamy.

No matter what the outcome of this spat, fact remains that America, the land of opportunities, has always been the land of immigrants. Those who claim to be "natives" of the country themselves have foreign roots. It is meritocracy that has thrived in that country over the centuries and that has made America the world's most powerful nation by attracting top talents in many fields from across the globe. However much people may claim that the next century belongs to China or some other country, fact is behind all modern day tech innovations and inventions have all been the products greatly attributable to the 'American Dream'. That dream will keep the United States of America as the land of opportunities for a long time to come. That is what will attract the best brains from across the world to sail the oceans to reach the shores of America and create new ideas and innovations that the world will need to use.

WISDOM CORNER

If you are vigilant and make a stern effort to reject every thought when it rises, you will soon find that you are going deeper and deeper into your own inner self, where there is no need for your effort to reject the thoughts

Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked, in which vou can walk with love and reverence

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception

ALDOUS HUXLEY

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1803: The Maratha chief Daulat Rao Sindhia and the British signed the Treaty of Surji-Arjungaon during the Maratha Wars in India.
- 1902: A new southing record was set by Robert Falcon Scott, in company with Ernest Henry Shackleton and E.A. Wilson, as they reached the Ross Ice Shelf at the head of the Ross Sea in Antarctica.
- 1916: Grigori Rasputin was murdered by Russian conservatives—who reportedly poisoned, shot, and then drowned the Siberian mystic-in an effort to halt his influence over Empress Alexandra and the royal family.



HEALTH

THE HALF PROMISE

weight-loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy have understandably generated a lot of excitement. bringing hope to the hundreds of millions of people grappling with obesity. When combined with a healthier diet and exercise, these drugs, which work by suppressing appetite, deliver an average 10% reduction in body weight that can be sustained for years.

With more than two-thirds of adults in the United Kingdom and nearly three-quarters in the United States classified as overweight or obese - a health crisis that costs national economies billions of dollars annually - physicians and policymakers could be forgiven for embracing these drugs as a panacea. US President Joe Biden's administration, for example, recently proposed requiring Medicare and Medicaid to cover the costs of weightloss drugs, offering access to millions of Americans. But addressing obesity requires much more than a technological fix.

To be clear, I am not suggesting these drugs are unnecessary or that medical professionals should avoid prescribing them. But they do not address the problem fueling the global obesity crisis (and contributing to the climate crisis as well): our broken food system. The alarming rise in obesity over the past 30 years is not simply a byproduct of higher living standards or more sedentary lifestyles, though these factors play a pivotal role. The primary factor appears to be the transformation of our food environment. which has fundamentally altered both the types of food we consume and our eating habits.

In recent years, scientists and health experts have increasingly focused on the highfat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) foods driving unhealthy dietary habits. This trend can be attributed to companies



Efforts to expand access to anti-obesity drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy could be a lifesaver for millions of people around the world. But we must not confuse symptoms for the underlying pathology: a dysfunctional food system that is endangering both our health and the planet

reshaping the food system to produce ultra-processed, hyper-palatable, and highly profitable foods. Consequently, people are snacking more, eating larger portions, and preparing fewer meals themselves. In the UK, for example, the snack market has boomed while the time spent preparing meals has sharply declined.

These changes haven't just fueled the rapid increase in HFSS food consumption. They have also led to a surge in meat consumption, especially in Europe and North America, where meat-heavy diets have become all too common.

Beyond the heightened risk of heart disease and related health conditions, excessive meat consumption has had devastating effects on the climate and biodiversity. Research shows that animal-based foods generate twice the greenhouse-gas emissions of plant-based alternatives. Just as health experts urge us to reduce our HFSS intake, climate scientists consistently emphasise the importance of cutting meat and dairy consumption to keep global warming within safe limits.

In an effort to prevent a lasting change in people's eating habits, the meat industry is seeking techno-fixes to cut GHG emissions. For example, funding for research on cutting farm emissions - such as feed additives designed to reduce methane levels in cows' burps has increased markedly.

Such solutions are particularly attractive to governments reluctant to introduce measures that influence consumer behaviour. Fearful of opposition from the Big Food lobby and wary of accusations of overreach, policies like sugar taxes or meat taxes are deemed political hot potatoes to be avoided at all costs.

But the overlapping crises our broken food system is fueling - from the billions of dollars spent each year on diet-related health problems to the environmental degradation pushing our planet to its limits - cannot be wished away or fixed with technological bandaids. Instead, what is needed is a major shift in dietary habits toward foods that nourish both people and the environment. To this end, the EAT-Lancet Commission - comprised of the world's leading nutrition and sustainability experts advocates a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins while reducing consumption of animal proteins, dairy, and sugars. Taken together, these recommendations offer a clear blueprint for ensuring health and sustainability.

Admittedly, it is unrealistic to expect consumers - conditioned by food environments designed for profit rather than human or environmental health – to drive this transition on their own. With unhealthy foods widely available and aggressively marketed, many consumers often struggle to moderate their food intake and, in some cases, develop addictive behaviours.

Governments and food manufacturers must take proactive measures to reshape these environments, such as expanding initiatives aimed at reducing the consumption of HFSS foods to include meat, thereby encouraging people to eat more plant-based whole foods and meat alternatives.

Another potential solution would be to extend bans on promotional deals for unhealthy foods to cover meat products. Requiring food companies to report on the types of food they sell, including HFSS foods and the ratio of plant-based to animal proteins, would also help. These measures would incentivize businesses to prioritise healthier, more sustainable options over less nutritious ones.

For those trapped in a cycle of poor health, Ozempic and Wegovy could even save lives, and efforts to make these treatments widely available are a welcome step. But it is essential that we recognise that this approach treats the symptoms rather than the underlying pathology. Defusing the time bombs of ill health and environmental catastrophe requires fast, decisive action to remake our dysfunctional food system.

The writer is Interim Executive Director of Madre Brava.

SPECTRUM ECONOMY

Emily Armistead

UNHEALTHY

FOODS WIDELY

AVAILABLE AND

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THEIR FOOD

INTAKE AND, IN

SOME CASES,

DEVELOP

ADDICTIVE

BEHAVIOURS

MANY

OFTEN

WITH

Dilemma between growth & inflation



Dillip Kumar Muduli

INDIA CAN ACHIEVE SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH ROBUST PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND CONSUMPTION DEMAND

TO THE EDITOR

are most welcome to contribute letters

requested to send their contact

address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and

suggestions, preferably by email, to:

OrissaPOST

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(100 words), articles and

words). Contributors are

numbers and full postal

columns (between 600-1000

n 6 December, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept its policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent for the eleventh consecutive time. In addition, the central bank has cut cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4% from 4.5% in a bid to boost liquidity in the financial system. This move will enable commercial banks to lend more loans and advances to investors, which is expected to spur economic growth.

The rationale behind keeping the policy repo rate unchanged is high headline CPI inflation especially food inflation. Headline CPI inflation surged above the upper tolerance level to 6.2% in October from 5.5% in September. The MPC believes food inflation pressure is likely to continue in Q3 of FY25. High inflation reduces the purchasing power of both rural and urban consumers and may adversely

impact private consumption. The Indian economy has been no exception to the tumultuous global economic conditions marked by rising debt levels, climate shocks, geopolitical

risk, and policy uncertainty, particularly with regard to trade policies. There have been turnaround changes in the capital markets of India after a historic win by Donald Trump in US. There has been massive capital outflow as foreign investors pull out their money from Indian stock market. Further the RBI has sold dollars to prevent steep depreciation of rupee. On growth front, real GDP

showed a lower than expected growth of 5.4% in Q2 of FY25 as private consumption and investment decelerated even while government spending recovered from a contraction in the previous quarter. On the supply side, the growth in GVA during Q2 was aided by resilient services and improving agriculture sector, but weakness in industrial activity - manufacturing, electricity and mining tempered overall growth.

Looking ahead, robust kharif foodgrain production and good rabi prospects, coupled with an expected pickup in industrial activity and sustained buoyancy in services augur well for private consumption. Investment activity is expected to pick up. Resilient world

support to external demand and exports. Headwinds from geopolitical uncertainties, volatility in international commodity prices, and geo-economic fragmentation continue to pose risks to the outlook. Taking all these factors into consideration, the RBI revised its growth projection for the current year to 6.6%, down from the previously projected 7.2%. The MPC also revised its GDP growth estimates for Q3 and Q4 of FY25, reducing the growth forecast to 6.8% from 7.4% for Q3, and to 7.2% from 7.4% for Q4. The projection for Q1 of FY26 has also been revised downward to 6.9% from 7.3%. The MPC noted that the

trade prospects should provide

near-term inflation and growth outcomes in India have turned somewhat adverse since the October policy. Going forward, however, economic activity is set to improve along with rising business and consumer sentiments, as reflected in the RBI's surveys. The recent spike in inflation highlights the continuing risks of multiple and overlapping shocks to the inflation outlook and expectations. Heightened geopolitical uncertainties and financial market volatility add further upside risks to inflation.

Inflation and economic growth are like two sides of the same coin. They are contrary to each other. A developing country like India could not afford low economic growth rate as it is very optimistic to achieve \$5 trillion economy in next 3 years. At the same time, India will not want to linger the current inflation as this would strongly affect the poor and middle income class through high food prices. Furthermore, India's private final consumption expenditure accounted for 60.4% of its nominal GDP in June 2024. If the recent inflation persists for a couple of months, then it would decline the purchasing power of consumers and their consumption demand. India can achieve sustained economic growth through robust private investment and consumption demand. And, consumption demand can only be secured by long-term price stability.

> The writer is Lecturer in Economics, SVM Autonomous College. Jagatsinghpur.

Surprising move

Sir, India Post's sudden decision to discontinue with the existing book-post mode of despatching books and printed materials has surprised many. The most affected are among the senders who prefer this postal system for sending the articles at an affordable rate as fixed by the department. The tariffs in this category are much less compared to the slab rates being charged by private courier companies. The department should reconsider scrapping of the popular postal despatch system and restore it in the larger interests of common man..

Sanjib Kumar Das, CUTTACK

Neuroscience breakthrough

Sir, IIT Madras has etched its name in the annals of scientific excellence by unveiling the most intricate 3D high-resolution images of the human fetal brain. Orchestrated by the illustrious Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre, this groundbreaking endeavor harnessed state-of-the-art brain mapping technology to meticulously capture 5,132 brain sections at a cellular resolution. The culmination of this monumental effort is the dataset christened DHARANI, a digital treasure trove that now stands as the largest publicly accessible repository of the human fetal brain, heralding a new dawn in neuroscience research. The DHARANI dataset is a marvel of scientific ingenuity, offering gigapixel images of unparalleled precision, with each pixel delineating a neuron in exquisite detail. This unparalleled dataset is freely accessible to researchers across the globe, fostering an unprecedented spirit of collaboration and innovation in the realm of neuroscience. The initiative drew upon the expertise of a multidisciplinary consortium, uniting luminaries from India and esteemed collaborators from Australia, the USA, Romania, and South Africa. With its medical foundation fortified by partnerships with Chennai-based Mediscan Systems and Saveetha Medical College Hospital, this extraordinary undertaking was accomplished at a fraction of the cost incurred by similar ventures in Western nations, an achievement both laudable and inspiring. The DHARANI dataset represents a profound leap forward in the domain of neuroscience, serving as a celestial atlas of the human fetal brain.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

GEC, Keonjhar battles plethora of challenges

Demand for autonomous status, M.Tech study facilities gains momentum

fessors. However, only 20 of

these positions are filled, leav-

ing 44 vacancies unaddressed.

Similarly, out of 33 approved

non-teaching staff positions,

only nine employees have been

called for the institution to be

granted autonomous status for

M.Tech programmes, which

they believe could improve its

infrastructure and academic

standards. Due to the absence

of M.Tech programs, many

students are being deprived of

Outsourced employees are

temporarily deployed to fill

vacant positions, but they lack

the sense of responsibility that

permanent employees have. As

a result, the quality of educa-

faculties has affected the prop-

er functioning of the college

and hit the college on many

fronts. Students face challeng-

es as question papers are pre-

pared, and answer scripts are

evaluated by an autonomous

engineering college in Rourke-

la. Consequently, this creates

difficulties for students of this

degree engineering college.

Lack of adequate number of

higher education.

tion is declining.

The college community has

appointed.



Keonihar, Dec 29: The Government Engineering College (GEC) at Jamunalia in Keonjhar district, affiliated with BPUT, is grappling with a host of significant challenges.

With a severe shortage of permanent staff, more than half of the faculty positions remain vacant, adversely affecting the quality of education. Students are facing disruptions in studies due to inadequate teaching resources. Additionally, the lack of proper road infrastructure is causing difficulties in commuting to the institution.

This college, which began with diploma programmes, is nearing its 30th anniversary. Over the years, student enrolment has steadily increased with over 1,500 students currently studying at the institution, and approximately 400 graduating each year. However, due to various shortcomings, the college struggles to meet students' expectations and remains an unattractive choice

Currently, the institution has 64 sanctioned faculty positions except the post of principal, including professors, associate

Moreover, absence of sports facilities has forced students to travel to Sankarpur or the OSME playground for physical activities. Although both state and Central government exams are conducted here, the engi neglected by the authorities.

The road connecting the college to the Keonjhar town is out of shape, filled with potholes and exposed metal rods at several places. The bridge on this route further restricts the passage of large vehicles to the college.

Construction work within the campus progresses at a slow pace, hindering the beautification of the college. Furthermore, poor communication infrastructure discourages private companies from participating in campus placements.

Shailabala Parida, the general secretary of a voluntary outfit Youth and Labour Development Forum, has demanded immediate staff appointments. construction of a good road from the district headquarters to the college, and the introduction of M.Tech programmes in this engineering college.

She made these demands in a memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister. Vivekananda Mohanta, a nominee of the Chief Minister and coordinator of the BJP of Keonihar Sadar constituency committee, stated that the new state government would prioritise resolving these issues swiftly. Subrata Mohanty, the MP's representative, said that the MP has been informed of various problems plaguing the college and will take appropriate steps for their



BOOK RELEASE: Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan (middle) unveiling a book titled 'The Saga of Kudopali - The Unsung Story of 1857' at Tapaswini Auditorium in Sambalpur, Sunday. RDC (North) Sachin Ramachandra Jadhav, Himanshu Kumar Lal, IG, Sambalpur, MLA Jayanarayan Mishra are seen to his right while IIM, Sambalpur Director Mahadeo Jaiswal and Sambalpur University VC Bidhu Bhushan Mishra; Yuvaraj Malik, National Director, National Book Trust of India and Sambalour SP Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo are seen to his left

ENGINEER DIES IN BEE ATTACK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Baripada, Dec 29: A 32-yearold man died Sunday after a swarm of bees attacked him outside his residence in Mayurbhanj district, police said.

Biswanath Murmu, employed with the Rural Development department as junior engineer, breathed his last on way to hospital, they said.

"He was attacked by a swarm of bees in front of his residence in Mahuldiha area Sunday morning following which he fainted. He died on the way to the nearest government hospital," said Suchindra Mahalik, the Inspector In-Charge of Rairangpur Town police station. The bees came in large numbers from a nearby hive and attacked him without any provocation, the officer said.

The police have registered a case of unnatural death and sent the body for

Murder convict lifer flees jail

Keonihar, Dec 29: A convict in a murder case who was serving life sentence escaped from Keonjhar jail Saturday.

The runaway prisoner was identified as Paresh Munda, 36, of Raigoda village under Sadar Police limits in Keonjhar district. He fled after giving a slip to guards while performing cow care duties inside the jail premises. Town police registered a case and launched an investigation over a written complaint lodged by the jail officials.

According to jail authorities, Munda took advantage of the situation and managed to escape.

Jail officials said Munda was initially imprisoned in 2014 as an undertrial in connection with his wife's murder. In 2018, the District and Sessions Judge in Keonjhar found him guilty based on witness testimonies and the



and sentenced him to life

Paresh was assigned tasks such as cow care and gardening within the jail premises He was previously released on parole in August to visit his home but had returned without any incident. He was carrying out his usual duties and seized the opportunity to

escape Saturday afternoon. Jail police launched a man hunt to track him down but failed to trace him despite visiting his home at night Police suspect that he might have fled into a nearby for est. Jailor Manaswini Nayak confirmed that Munda was imprisoned as an undertrial in 2014 and was serving life imprisonment after being convicted in the murder case

Town Police IIC Srikant Sa hu stated that a case (251/24) has been registered based on the complaint by the jail au thorities, and the investigation is ongoing. He assured that the convict would be apprehended

Jumbo carcass found with wound marks

POST NEWS NETWORK

Angul, Dec 29: Forest officials discovered the carcass of a 20-year-old elephant in the Pupunda area of Angul Forest Division Sunday.

The elephant was seen roaming the area Saturday but was found dead by Forest staff the following morning. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) was promptly notified about

Initial reports indicated three visible wounds on the elephant's carcass. The cause of death will be determined once the post-mortem results are available, according to the Angul DFO.



Balasore parents sell newborn to issueless couple due to 'poverty'



Balasore, Dec 29: A couple in Balasore district allegedly sold their newborn boy to a childless couple in neighbouring Mayurbhanj district, police said Sunday.

Sundargarh, Dec 29: Two

people were killed and three

others were seriously in-

iured in a crash on National

Highway-143 in Sundargarh

near the Chandiposh police

station when a speeding

truck (Hyva) collided with

The accident occurred

district Sunday.

The matter came to light when locals could not find the nine-day-old baby in the home of Dharmu Behera and his wife Shantilata in Hadamouda village under the Basta police station limits, an officer said.

Shantilata gave birth to a baby boy at Pandit Raghunath Murmu Medical College and Hospital at Baripada December 19 and she was discharged three

When villagers did not find the newborn in their home, they suspected that the couple sold the baby through a middleman due to poverty,

Truck collides with SUV on NH-143; 2 dead

an SUV (Scorpio), killing

two people on the spot. The

the officer said.

Based on a complaint, a joint investigation was initiated by the police and the Child Welfare Committee, Mayurbhanj.

The baby was rescued Saturday from the possession of a childless couple in Manicha village under Sainkola block in Mayurbhani district, he said.

Both Shantilata and the family from which the baby was rescued denied the allegation of any sale or purchase of the newborn.

Shantilata and Dharmu claimed to have donated the baby to the childless couple.

SUV was mangled due to the

impact, and one of the vic-

tims died after being trapped

Rescue teams from the fire

services, along with police,

were dispatched to the scene.

The injured were transport-

ed to Rourkela Government

Hospital. Authorities are in-

vestigating the cause of the

inside the vehicle.

4 people killed, 40 injured as bus overturns in Koraput



Koraput, Dec 29: Four people were killed and 40 others injured after their bus overturned in the hilly Koraput district early in the morning Sunday, police said.

The accident happened around 5.30am at Dokrighat near Gupteswar in Boipariguda police station area, they said.

The bus was on its way to the Gupteswar temple with around 50 devotees from Niali in Cut-

tack, they added. BSF and police rescued the injured passengers and admitted them to the Boipariguda hospital, an official said.

It is suspected that the driver

of the vehicle lost control while navigating sharp turns on the hilly road, he said.

Among those dead was a

12-year-old boy, officials said. Conditions of several injured people were stated to be critical with many losing their arms and legs, they said. Among the injured are several women and children, they added. Chief Minister Mohan Cha-

ran Majhi expressed grief over the loss of lives and announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh for the families of the deceased

He also directed officers to ensure treatment of critically injured persons at the district headquarters hospital.

NIT Rourkela wins prestigious TGC award

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 29: A team from the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela won the prestigious Tomato Grand Challenge (TGC) at the 'National Consumer Day 2024 event, held at Vigyan Bhawan New Delhi, December 24. The event was organised by the Department of Consumer Affairs in collaboration with the Edu cation Ministry's Innovation Cell. The NIT Rourkela team won for its innovative solution addressing challenges in tomato storage and transportation: a Low-Cost, Mobile Zero Energy Cooling Chamber.

BL Verma, Minister of State, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, presented the winning team with a cash prize of ₹3 lakh and citations in the presence of Pralhad Joshi, Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, Govern ment of India.



PM praises Kalahandi farmers for 'vegetable revolution'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday lauded the farmers of Golamunda block in Kalahandi district for the vegetable revolution in the area.

Speaking in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast, Modi hailed them for establishing a farmer producer organisation (FPO) and using modern technology to bring a 'vegetable revolution' in Kalahandi district, which was once known for its grim tales of poverty and people's migration

"Where once farmers were forced to migrate, today Golamunda block of Kalahandi has become a vegetable hub. How did this change come about, he asked.

It started with a small group of just 10 farmers. This group together established an FPO (farmer producer organisation)- 'Kisan Utpad Sangh', started using modern technology in farming, and today their FPO is doing business worth crores of rupees, the PM said, adding that now more than 200 farmers are associated with this FPO, including 45 women Together, these people are

cultivating tomatoes in 200 acres and bitter gourd in 150 acres. Now the annual turnover of this FPO has also risen to more than ₹1.5 crore, Modi said in his speech, adding that vegetables from Kalahandi are reaching not only various districts of Odisha, but also

other states, and the farmers



there are now learning new techniques of potato and onion

He said that this success of Kalahandi teaches what can be done with determination and collective effort. "I urge all of you to encourage FPO in your area and join farmer producer organisations and strengthen them," Modi said.

He said, "Remember - big changes are possible even through small beginnings. We just need determination and team spirit."

Krushna Nag, who was working as a truck driver some years ago is now cultivating vegetables over 15 acres of land and is able to sustain his family without remaining out of the house for months together. "I am really happy and would thank the PM for recognising our efforts," Nag said.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi in a post on X said, 'Golamunda in Kalahandi district of Odisha has today become a 'Vegetable Hub'. Farmers are now joining hands through Farmer Production Organisations and using modern farming methods. More than 200 farmers have joined this, including 45 women farmers. Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi #MaanKiBaat."

Odisha's Agriculture and

Farmers Empowerment department secretary Arabinda Padhee in a post on X said, "Proud to see our Agriculture Production Centre (APC) initiative featured in Hon Prime Minister's #MannKiBaat today! The FPO in Golamunda, Kalahandi is a shining example of its success. I've had the privilege of visiting the village and witnessing the transformative firsthand.'

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Sujeet Kumar who hails from Kalahandi district thanked the PM for highlighting vegetable revolution in the district.

"Thank you, Hon'ble PM @ narendramodi Ji, for highlighting the remarkable story of Kalahandi's 'Vegetable Revolution' in #MannKiBaat,' he posted on X.

The team from NIT Rourkela consisted of team lead Prof Madhuresh Dwivedi, Prof Ra ma Chandra Pradhan, PhD scholars Chingakham Ngotomba Singh and Thota Niranjan (all from the Department of Food Process Engineering NITR), Prof. Rajeev Kumar Panda (School of Manage ment, NITR), and Somnath Das (Senior Technician, Department of Mechanical En gineering, NITR). Designed for the efficient

storage and transportation of tomatoes, the 'Low-Cost Mobile, Zero Energy Cooling Chamber' can hold 750-1,000 kg of produce with a precise temperature range of 16-18°C.

It operates without an external energy supply, using an evaporative cooling technique combined with a low-cost insulation layer.

BHARATPUR: BLOT ON KHAKI

A road rage incident under the jurisdiction of Bharatpur police station in the City in September this year snowballed into a major controversy, and triggered unprecedented public outcry over the conduct of the police with the public. The uproar hastened a string of human rights watchdogs demand nunishment to the roque cops, while the Orissa High Court stepped in seeking explanation from the state government. It all happened when an Army Major from the Sikh regiment, posted in Kolkata, and his female friend, a lawyer by profession, went to the police station September 15 mic night to file a complaint against a group of men who 'misbehaved with and assaulted them' following a tiff over overtaking. At the police station, the woman was allegedly assaulted and molested by the Inspector-in-Charge (IIC), while the Army officer was also beaten up. Following their allegations, five police officers, including and the Odisha Crime

the IIC, were suspended Branch initiated a prob against the 'assaulters' The state government later set up a commission of inquiry under a retired high court judge to find the veracity of the allegations and role of the accused

police personnel. While the commission's probe is presently on, the accused cops have undergone polygraph tests. The HC, meanwhile directed the state government to ensure functional CCTV cameras at all police stations and outposts by March 31, 2025, Side by side. the state government released a SOP on etiquettes for cops while dealing with uniformed personnel at police stations.

DELHI SHAME SHOOK ODISHA

The gang-rape of a 34-year-old mentally-ill woman from Puri in Delhi October 10 was among the crimes against women that shook many to the core. Three men, including an auto-rickshaw driver, found the lonely woman near Old Delhi railway station, and later took turns to rape her at a desolate place. Thereafter, they dumped her in Sarai Kale Khan area before fleeing the scene. The next day, passersby who spotted the woman bleeding and writhing in pain alerted the police who rushed her to AIIMS-Delhi. As the woman, who worked as a researcher for over eight years, was unable to reveal the gruesome episode, it was a tough task for the police to identify the perpetrators. As many as 10 police teams scanned around 700 CCTVs near the crime scene and checked over 150 auto-rickshaws to track down the prime culprit, an auto-rickshaw driver - October 30. Subsequently, two others were arrested November 2 and 4.

5 KILLED IN SUNDARGARH CLASHES

The sleepy Sundargarh district headquarters township was shaken

by an incident of multiple homicides when armed clashes between two rival groups of nomadic tribes from Maharashtra and Bihar left a trail of five deaths, including three women, October 29 night, Five more persons were kidnapped by the mob during the bloody clashes that took place near Karamdihi village over a suspected extra marital affair. The police managed to secure arrest of seven of the accused from Maharashtra and Karnataka 22 days after the violence. **END OF ROAD FOR SERIAL WOMAN ABUSER**

The investigation into a complaint of sexual harassment and extortion lodged by a widow against her male partner in September this year led the Crime Branch unearth the sleazy details of a serial woman abuser and con artist who had duped over 300 vomen from across the country by playing on their vulnerabilities Police said Angul-resident Biranchi Narayan Nath, 43, had made an enterprise out of his 'skills' by trapping middle-aged divorcees and widows on matrimonial websites with promises of marriage. After winning their trust, he would secretly tape intimate moments with them and thereafter coerce them into succumbing to his ransom lemands by threatening to make those public.

Beginning on a spiritual note with the inauguration of a series of development projects at religious sites across the state, including Srimandir, in January-February, the year 2024 saw the dethroning of the 24-year-old BID regime and dawn of BIP on the state's political landscape in June. The year also saw momentous events like the reopening of Ratna Bhandar after a gap of 46 years, and Odisha tableau bagging first prize at Republic Day parade. While the state continued to make strides on the economic front, incidents like fugitive Khalistani terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun's threats during the DGP/IGP meet in Bhubaneswar, spate of crimes and alleged police highhandedness raised concerns over the law and order situation. The state's wildlife continued to remain under stress with poaching, vanishing of forests, destruction of wetlands and dearth of feeding grounds taking a toll on those already struggling to survive

of medical expertise, a team of AIIMS Bhubaneswar doctors resurrected a 24-year-old man whose breathing had stopped for over two hours

dio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (eCPR) procedure. Nayagarh residenrt Subhakant Sahu ika and Dhamara in Kenwho had suffered cardiac arrest did not revive even after administration of CPR. The drapara and Bhadrak disdedicated AIIMS team decided to perform the rare procedure by refusing to declare him tricts, damaging over 180,000 / clinically dead and achieved the feat.

ACTOR HELD FOR EATING

LIVE PIG ON STAGE

Ramayana was arrested after he ripped the stom-

ach of a live pig on stage and ate its meat in Gan-

jam district, an incident that sparked state-wide

outrage and condemnation in the Assembly. Along

with Gouda, one of the organisers of the play that

took place in Ralab village in Hinjili police station

area November 24 was also arrested for cruelty to

animals and violation of the Wildlife Protection Act.

December 2, Bimbadhar Gouda, a 45-year-old

theatre actor playing the role of a demon in



LEOPARD MEAT

™wo poachers from Nuapada . district breached all norms of human behaviour when they were found feasting on the meat of a leopard that got accidentally trapped in the electric snare they had laid for hunting wild boars. Pustam Chinda, 58, and Hrusikesh Chinda, 40, of Deodhar village were later arrested by the Forest life Susanta Nanda called for

'ASHRAM' IN SOUP ⚠ by proclaiming the latter an incarnation of Lord Vishnu's 'Kalki Avatar' landed Kashinath Mishra of Shree Baikuntha Dhaam Ashram near Khandagiri Bhubaneswar in a soup following a police complaint by department as PCCF, Wild- : the Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights. Though a High Court stay saved the Ashram from bulldozer action, Mishra's venture met an abrupt end.

Normer CM Naveen Patnaik January 1 laid foundation stone for the state's first metro $oldsymbol{\Gamma}$ rail project that would link the state capital, Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. The Rs 6,225.94 crore Bhubaneswar Metro Rail project will connect Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) in Bhubaneswar with Trisulia Square near Cuttack in the first phase,

Nevere cyclonic storm Dana Omade landfall in the earv hours of October 25 with wind a velocity of 100-110 hectares of standing crop. Cyclone-induced floods impacted Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Kendrapara and Bhadrak districts due to prolonge heavy rains. Nearly 3.62 lakh people were shifted to 7.285 cv clone shelters from vulnerable villages in 14 districts. Due to the prompt and timely measures initiated by authorities the danger passed off withou

causing any loss of life

ASHA worker Sibani Mandal evacuting an elderly woman to nearest cyclone shelter amid heavy rains

30 SUNSTROKE DEATHS

n June this year, the government confirmed the death of a total of 30 persons due to heat-related ailments during summer season. The deaths were among the 147 cases of suspected sunstroke deaths caused by the heat wave conditions. Most of the casualties were reported from Bolangir, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda ttempts to make an enterprise out of his minor son. Sambalpur and Keonjhar districts.







Conference that was attended by PM Narendra Modi, HM Amit Shah, and NSA Ajit Doval and the key participants. Pannun appealed his Khalistani supporters and sympathisers to take over the temples and hotels in Bhubaneswar to disrupt the conference. Again, November 30, he issued another threat mail to a City-based journalist that contained alarming warnings, including a disruption of the conference.

JUMBOS IN PERIL

for wildlife, especially ele

phants as 67 jumbos died

by December 2, while the

toll for the last 11 years

stood at 857. This was

stated by Forest, Environ-

ment and Climate Change

Minister Ganesh Ram

Singh Khuntia in the

Assembly. Electrocu-

tion was key cause of

unnatural death of the

gentle giants, he had said.

nilarly, 66 elephants died

in Odisha during 2023-24.

Diseases, accidents, poach-

ing and electrocution and

other issues contributed

to elephant deaths during

the period. As per

statistics furnished

by the minister, 149 elephants were elec-

rocuted to death be

tween 2014-15 and 2024

25 (till December 2).

the highest num-ber

elephants (305), while 229 ele-

phant deaths were attributed

to natural reasons. Similarly

29 elephants were killed after

being hit by trains while seven

others died in road accidents

and two by poisoning. How

ever, the Forest department

could not ascertain any reason

behind the death of 90 jumbos

while, 16 elephants died due to

while poachers

killed 30 ele-

phants. Dis-

the lives of

eases claimed

Khajuri Guda - Gajapati, 2- Kala Jeera Rice - Koraput, 3- Kanteimundi Brinjal - Nayagarh, 4- Kapdaganda Shawl - Kandhamal, 5- Similipal Kai Chutney - Mayurbhanj, 6- Lanjia Saura ainting – Rayagada and 7- Magji – Dhenkanal

Subhadra Yojana launched eeping its poll promise, the BJP govern Keeping its poin profition, and ___

Yojana, aiming on empowering women aged 21 to 60 years by providing direct financial assistance of Rs 50.000 over a period of five years.

34 leopard, 3 RBT deaths

In December, the government told the Assembly that 34 leopards and three Royal Bengal Tigers (RBTs) had died in ne wild between 2019-20 and 2024-25 (till November 26, 2024) from poaching, electrocution and other



1- Gopinath Swain (Krishna Leela performer), 2- Binod Maharana (Pattachitra artist), 3-Binod Kumar Pasayat (Lyricist, playwright

Mango kernel tragedy

and poet) and 4- Bhagabat Padhan (Sabda Nrutya folk dance)

The ghost of Rayagada's Kashipur mango kernel deaths in 2001 made a comeback in the outgoing year, and this time, it was Mandipanka village of Kandhamal where three (initially two and later one) women died after consuming mango kernel gruel November 1, 2024. Though the state government promptly ordered a probe into the incident, the Opposition alleged

that the deaths occurred due to delay in supply of ration to poor tribals. The state government ordered a RDC-level inquiry into the incident, while the Opposition demanded the resignation of Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra. Southern RDC Roopa Roshan Sahoo November 6 began



aran Majhi as the Chief Minister of the igger. In fact, the ascent of the four-time





CHIEF JUSTICE CS SINGH

as the Chief Justice of Orissa High Court retirement of Justice Subhasis Talapatra Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi was serving as



ANGUL BOY SHINES IN UPSO

July 6, 2021 to become the first Telugu-speakin person from divided Andhra Pradesh to be ap-

pointed as Governor of the northeast state

Animesh Pradhan of Angul secured AIR-2 in UPS Civil Services Examination, 2023, the results of which were declared April this year. Pradhan, oorn in a small town of Talcher, completed Clas XII from DAV Public School, MCL, Kalinga area, Talcher, Later, he joined NIT, Rourkela and

SWETASHREE TOPS OCSE

ation 2022 in her first attempt. She has a BTech degree in electronics and tel-



Unfazed by the 'outsider' barb of his oppoents, then CM Naveen Patnaik's trusted aide VK Pandian was in news when he said he was the 'natural successor' to all the great values of Patnaik. In a no-holds-barred attack on BJP Pandian had also said it is the ruling party at the for promoting the language, art and culture of the state.

SAMBIT'S GAFFE

A purported video clip of BJP LS candidate from Puri Sambit Patra during his campaigning in May where he said 'Lord Modi' created a flutter. Later, Patra endered an apology and claimed it wa



Special Secretary to former CM Naveen Patnaik

DS Kutey faced the ire of the Election Commis sion May 28 for 'interfering in the poll process' Commissioner's Office in New Delhi. In July, he

EC AXE FALLS ON SINGH

2004-batch IPS officer Ashish Kumar Singh was removed from his posting as IG (Central Range) by the EC for 'interfering in the



election process' and reposted as IG (CM



atna Bhandar, the revered treasury Nof Srimandir, was reopened in July after 46 years for an inventory of valuables and the repair of its structure. The members of a committee set up by the state government entered the temple and the vault was reopened after the conduct of rituals. The reopening of Ratna Bhandar had become a major political issue during the Assembly elections. Targeting the then ruling BJD over its missing keys, the BJP had promised that it would make efforts to reopen Ratna Bhandar, if it wins the

polls. Three keys of the outer chamber were available was with the Gajapati Maharaj, another one was with the SJTA and the third one was with a servitor. Three locks of the inner chamber were broken as none could be opened with the key available with the district administration. All ornaments and valuables kept in outer chamber of Ratna Bhandar were shifted to the temporary strong room inside the shrine. In November, a technical team of ASI did a laser scanning of the outer walls of Ratna Bhandar.

n an unusual turn of events **⊥**during this year's Bahuda Yatra, Lord Balabhadra's idol fell from Caladhwaja chariot, evoking a mix of surprise, devotion, and concern among thousands of devotees gathered outside the Gundicha Temple. Reports indicated that the incident occurred when the chariot made a sudden halt due to uneven movement on the path. Eyewitnesses

said the incident caused a brief moment of shock but was soon followed by chants of 'Jai Jagannath' and 'Haribol' from the devotees, who believed it to be a 'divine act'. The servitors quickly sprang into action to safely restore the idol to its rightful position on the chariot. They performed immediate rituals to ensure the sanctity of the deity was maintained. The administration confirmed that no damage occurred to the idol and the procession resumed without further interruption. The incident sparked spiritual interpretations among devotees. Many view it as a divine message urging humanity to remain

Heritage Corridor project was inaugurated January 17 in the presence of seers and holy men who converged from across the globe. The project includes parking areas, a new bridge and a road to ease pilgrim movement, a pilgrimage centre, restroom facilities, cloakrooms, toilets and other

itate people's participation in the grand ceremony.

ma Prakalpa or Jagannath Temple amenities for devotees in and around Srimandir. The state government announced a public holiday to facil-

L tious Rs

800-crore Sri-

mandir Parikra-

lani was held at Janata Maidan, Bhubaneswar, from February 3 to 5. Renowned Odia author and linguist Debi Prasanna Pattanayak was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his contributions to Odia linguistics, while Jnanpith awardees Pratibha Ray and Sitakant Mahapatra were felicitated. The event, planned to be held every five years, saw participation from international delegates, language experts, and 20 Odia associations.

The maiden

Biswa Odia

Bhasa Sammi-

Parikrama proj ect, the revamped precincts of Maa Samaleswari Temple in Sambalpur was thrown open to devotees

January 27. More than 39 acres peripheral area of the 16th-century monument on the banks of the Mahanadi underwent a transformation under the ₹200-crore project.

Odisha's tableau rolled down the Kartavy Path during the 75th Republic Day celebration is Delhi. It was a proud momer for the state, when the colourful tableau highlighting

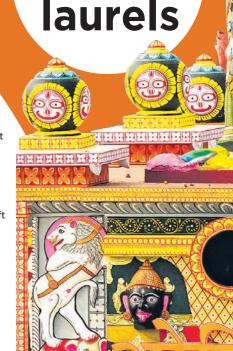
women empowerment and the state's rich handicraft and handloom sector was adjudged the best among states and won the first prize. The 45-ft long, 14-ft wide and 16-ft high intricately designed tableau depicted 'Krishna Leela' showcasing the exquisite pattachitra art painted on the body of Kandarpa Hati with Lord Krishna sitting on the top. A hut of the heritage crafts village of Raghuraipur was in the rear portion of the tableau with a woman holding a mobile phone. It symbolised the grit, determination and talent of women artists who took the crafts village to the world

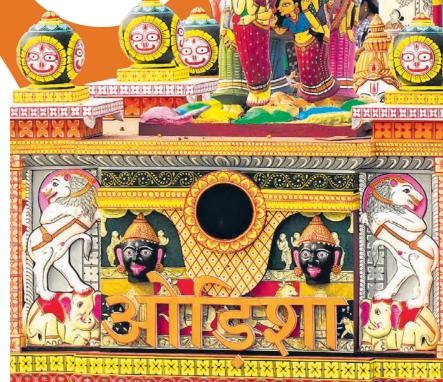
stage and highlighted their

entrepreneurial skills in

selling the handicrafts

online through UPI.

















humble and connected to their faith.







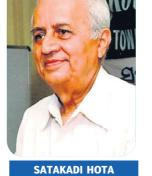




























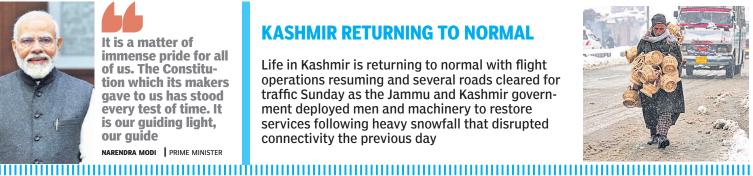
national



It is a matter of immense pride for all of us. The Constitution which its makers gave to us has stood every test of time. It is our guiding light, our guide

KASHMIR RETURNING TO NORMAL

Life in Kashmir is returning to normal with flight operations resuming and several roads cleared for traffic Sunday as the Jammu and Kashmir government deployed men and machinery to restore services following heavy snowfall that disrupted connectivity the previous day



conducts elec tions using ballot India, elections

are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests AKHILESH YADAV | SP PRESIDENT

Taking the security sce nario into account, Bharat is not a very lucky country because our northern border and western border continuously face challenges RAINATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

Dr Manmohan Singh, a statesman of unparalleled dignity and in-

both in life and in death. It is deeply disheartening to witness the Congress Party attempting to stir controversy around his final journey, diminishing the solemnity it truly deserved

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

SHORT **TAKES**

Satishchandra Pradhan dead

Thane: Former Shiv Sena MP and first mayor of Thane, Satishchandra Pradhan, passed away Sunday at a hospital here due to age-related health issues, his family members said. Pradhan's funeral procession will leave his house Monday morning. The former Rajya Sabha member played a key role in forming the Shiv Sena alongside Bal Thackeray in

Boat sinks; none hurt

Mumbai: A fishing boat sank off the coast of Madh Koliwada in Mumbai's Malad area in the early hours of Sunday after it was hit by a cargo ship before being retrieved, though there were no reports of injuries to anyone, a police official said. The boat was retrieved by a group of eight other vessels in the area and brought to the shore, the official added.

3.2 magnitude tremor hits Kutch

Ahmedabad: A tremor of 3.2 magnitude jolted Gujarat's Kutch district Sunday morning, the Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) said. There was no report of any casualty or damage to property, the district administration said. The tremor was recorded at 10.06 am with its epicentre located 18 kilometres northnorth east of Bhachau, the Gandhinagar-based ISR said.

Police bust terror module

Chandigarh: In a major breakthrough, Punjab Police has busted another Pakistan's ISI-backed terror module being operated by Babbar Khalsa International (BKI). The module was helmed by foreign-based Harpreet Singh, alias Happy Passia, and Shamsher, alias Honey, with the arrest of its five members, including mastermind Abhijot Singh, involved in lobbing hand-grenade at two police establishments, said Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav here Sunday.

Drugs worth ₹15cr seized

Guwahati: In a major drug haul. Yaba tablets worth around Rs 15 crore were seized in Cachar district of Assam and two persons have been arrested. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Sunday.

DELHI POLLS

Kejriwal accuses BJP of manipulating electoral roll

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal Sunday accused the BJP of trying to manipulate voter list in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections.

Speaking at a conference press alongside Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Kejriwal claimed the BJP was trying to win elections through "unfair means" after failing to present strong candidates or issues. "BJP has already lost the

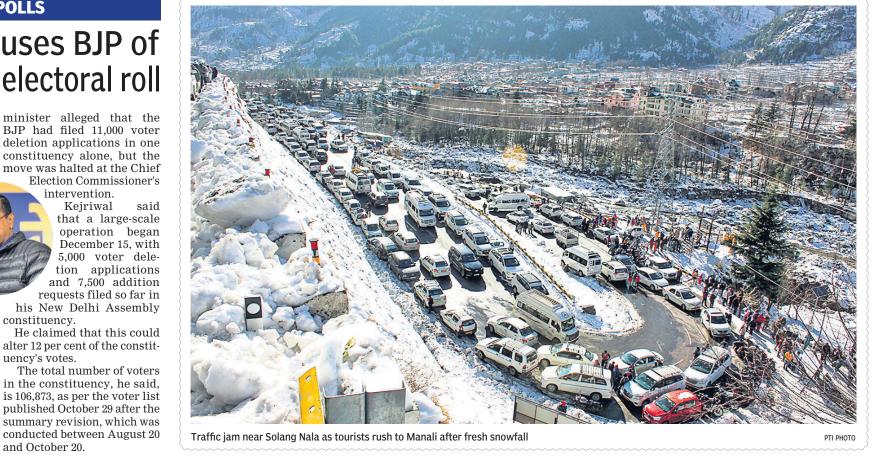
elections. They don't have a chief ministerial face or even proper candidates. They only aim to win through manipulation, but we won't let them succeed," he said in a statement. The former Delhi chief

minister alleged that the BJP had filed 11,000 voter deletion applications in one constituency alone, but the move was halted at the Chief **Election Commissioner's**

Kejriwal that a large-scale operation began December 15, with 5,000 voter deletion applications and 7,500 addition requests filed so far in his New Delhi Assembly

constituency He claimed that this could alter 12 per cent of the constit-

uency's votes. The total number of voters in the constituency, he said, is 106,873, as per the voter list published October 29 after the summary revision, which was



UP: Can rising temple-mosque disputes shape polls in 2027

Lucknow, Dec 29: Although the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls are due only in 2027, political experts suggest that the increasing number of temple-mosque disputes in the state and the resultant polarisation have started to set the political narrative. Analysts point to the recent

bypolls in the state where slogans like "Batenge to Katenge' (divided we perish) played a key role in ensuring Hindu unity. And it is in this backdrop that the experts feel that the intensifying temple-mosque polarisation pitch has its own implications "During the bypolls, Chief

Minister Yogi Adityanath's 'Batenge to Katenge' slogan was seen as a response to the Samajwadi Party's (SP) attempt to create caste-based mobilisation using the PDA (Backwards, Dalits, Minorities) move. The outcome (of the bypolls) was clearly in favour of the BJP," political analyst Rajeev Ranjan

Of the nine Assembly seats that went to bypolls in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won seven, while the main Opposition SP secured the two remaining seats.

"Recent developments indicate that the process of polarisation may intensify further as 2027 approaches," Ranjan added. Such expert opinions are fuelled by a recent spate of claims --? from the existence



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of a Shivling in Varanasi's Gyanvapi mosque to similar assertions in Sambhal, Badaun, Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar and Bulandshahr.

In the latest case, a petition was filed in Badaun earlier this month, claiming that a Neelkanth Mahadev temple existed where the Jama Masjid now stands. A local court will hear the maintainability of the plea in January

Meanwhile, violence erupted in November during a court-ordered survey of Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid, leaving four people dead. Hindu groups have

claimed that a Hariharanath temple previously existed where the Mughal-era mosque stands. Political observers feel that such claims may gain currency in the run-up to 2027 polls, impacting the political climate in Uttar Pradesh

Former vice-chancellor of the Lucknow University and social activist Professor Roop Rekha Verma accused the Bharatiya Janata Party-led state government of promoting communal polarisation.

Verma argued that after the Opposition's relatively strong performance in the Lok Sabha polls held earlier in the year. the ruling party has intensified its efforts to regain politi-

In the general election, the BJP secured 33 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, while its allies Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and Apna Dal (S) won two seats and one seat respectively. The SP captured 37 seats, while the Congress won six and one seat went to the Azad Samaj Party.

India to host WAVES Summit in Feb: Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation.

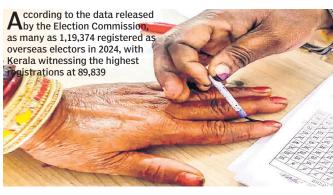
Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke extensively about the WAVES Summit in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' Radio address Sunday. Comparing the WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos. Modi said the leaders from the media and entertainment in dustry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather in Delhi for the Summit being held from February 5-9.

"This Summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation," he said. The prime minister emphasised the pivotal role of young creators in the preparations for WAVES reflecting the dynamic spirit of India's creative community.

He expressed pride in the enthusiasm of the country's youth and their contribution to the burgeoning creator economy, a key driver as India advances toward becoming a five trillion dollar economy. "Whether you are a young creator or an established artist, associated with hindi film industry or regional cinema, a professional from the TV industry, an expert in animation, gaming, or an innovator in entertainment technology, I encourage you to be a part of the WAVES Summit." Modi said. He urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES.

LS POLLS 2024

Poor electoral participation of overseas Indian voters: EC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi. Dec 29: Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling in the voter list, but a minuscule turned up to exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha elections this year.

According to the data released by the Election Commission, as many as 1,19,374 registered as overseas electors in 2024, with Kerala witnessing the highest registrations at 89,839. In 2019, as many as 99,844 had registered as overseas electors.

The poll authority said only 2.958 overseas electors flew down to India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world. Of these, an overwhelming 2,670 were from Kerala alone. Several large states such as Karnataka. Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu saw zero turnout of overseas electors. Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, saw only two out of 885 overseas electors casting their

votes in the Lok Sabha elections. The same was the story in Maharashtra, where only 17 of the 5,097 NRI electors voted

Despite an increase of little over 19,500 registered overseas electors since the 2019 general election, their participation in the latest polls was poor. While NRI voters is a gener-

ic term, the EC describes them as overseas electors -- Indians living abroad for a variety of reasons and eligible to vote in the Lok Sabha, Assembly and other direct elections. According to the existing

electoral law, registered NRI voters have to come to their respective Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies to cast a vote. They have to show their original passport as proof of their identity. Data show that while there were 7,927 registered NRI electors in Andhra Pradesh, only 195 flew down to vote. According to EC, while eligible Indian citizens who en rol in electoral rolls are called electors, those who actually exercise their franchise are described as voters.

KOTA STORY REMAINS GRIM

Year of political setbacks and comebacks in Rajasthan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Dec 29: First came the setback and then the comeback. That in a nutshell was the BJP story in Rajasthan in 2024. The Congress story could also be told in two halves -- triumphs and then tribulations. Another story that domi-

nated the news cycle in 2024 was students' suicide in Kota. And sadly there was no backto-life narrative to add in that. The recurring incidents of suicide dealt a body blow to the country's "coaching hub", bringing its economy down from a whopping revenue of Rs 6,500-7000 crore annually to Rs 3,000-3,500 crore.

The year began on an uncertain note for Rajasthan -- apprehensions about a first-time MLA-chief minister in Bhajan Lal Sharma; about a fluid political landscape after assembly polls gearing up to face Lok Sabha polls; about the students'

Kota; and about Model Code of Conduct for LS polls halting development work. Many questioned if the BJP relying on far-less experienced Sharma and moving on from veteran Vasundhara Raje would cost the party, and also the state.

There were questions about the Congress too, with murmurs that infighting within the party led to its defeat in the Assembly polls and could harm it in the Lok Sabha elections too. But by the time year ended,

most of these questions were answered. Chief Minister Sharma took one decision after the other with conviction and backing of the party high command.

Under his leadership, the party won five of the seven seats that voted in bypolls. His government took tough action in paper leak case.

In the year's last Cabinet meeting held December 28, the Sharma government decided to dissolve nine districts formed by the previous Congress dis-

pensation, saying they were neither "practical" nor in "public interest". Three new divisions were also dissolved. The state will now only have seven divisions and 41 districts.

Sharma consolidated his position with the organisation of the Rising Rajasthan Summit in December, where an investment of Rs 35 lakh-crore was pledged to the state.

The Congress, defeated in the Assembly polls in November 2023, made a comeback in the Lok Sabha polls, winning eight of the 25 seats, and putting a halt on talks of infighting. This was first instance of the Congress winning a Lok Sabah seat in the state since 2014.

The BJP went into the elections with confidence but it was restricted to just 14 seats.

Its 2019 LS poll ally RLP went with the Congress under the IN-DIA bloc. The state also copped some fatal accidents and tragedies in 2024, the deadliest coming the last month.

An LPG tanker collided with a truck in the chilling morning of December 20 on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway, sparking a massive fireball that killed 17 people died and destroyed 39 vehicles. The nation was in mourning.

People in nearly 20 villages of the Lake city Udaipur remained terrified due to unabated leopard attacks in October. Ten people were killed in leopard attacks in Gogunda and nearby areas. The forest department had to carry out an intense search operation and also take the help of a private shooter to eliminate the leopard. One leopard was shot dead and one was beaten to death by villagers.

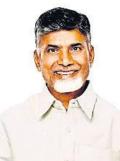
Other significant incidents included the death of a fiveyear-old boy after falling into a borewell in Dausa, a collision between a security vehicle of the CM's cavalcade and a tax car, leaving its driver and an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) dead. On the legislative front the Bhajanlal government ap proved the "Rajasthan Prohibi tion of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill 2024"

The world famous Sufi saint Moinuddin Chisti dargah was in the news in November when a court in Aimer admitted a pe tition claiming it was built over a Shiva temple, and issued no tices to the Ajmer dargah com mittee, the Ministry of Minori ty Affairs and the Archaeology Survey of India.

The Lok Sabha polls setback in May-June triggered a mini rebellion in the BJP, with cab inet Minister Kirodi Lal Meena embarrassing the party and the government. He submitted his resignation, but Chief Minister did not accept the resignation.



national



Congratulations to Koneru Humpy on winning the **FIDE Women's World Rapid** Chess Championship 2024. Her incredible triumph caps off a phenomenal year for **Indian chess!**

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | ANDHRA CM

AVALANCHE WARNING ISSUED FOR CHAMOLI

The Defence Geoinformatics Research Establishment (DGRE), a laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Sunday issued an orange alert for an avalanche at an altitude of over 3,000 metres in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district over the next 24 hours





Himachal Pradesh is a relatively small state with fewer criminal cases, with most cases being related

to services and civil matters. I will work collaboratively to resolve cases as quickly as possible

SUKHVINDER SINGH SUKHU |

HIMACHAL PRADESH CM

Despite our ideological and political differences with former prime minister Manmo han Singh, he is

the most respectful person. Union Home Minister Amit Shah following the wish of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken all possible initiatives to accord full state honour to Singh's funeral

PRALHAD JOSHI | UNION MINISTER

The SUMP. with an estimated installed capacity of 11,000 mw, is not just about generat-

ing power, but also about maintaining the natural flow of the Siang river and mitigating potential flood risks from water releases by China

PEMA KHANDU | ARUNACHAL CM



5 Major Countries with GST: Australia Canada New Zealand Singapore GST on Health Insurance;

Australia: 0% Canada: 0% New Zealand: 0% Singapore: 0% India: 18%

Who should be blamed? Nehru? @AAPforNewIndia

SHORT TAKES

Retired IPS officer **Acharya Kishore dies**

Patna: Retired IPS officer Acharya Kishore Kunal died of cardiac arrest in Patna Sunday, his family said. An IPS officer of the 1972 batch, he was the chief of the Bihar State Board of Religious Trust (BSBRT) and founder secretary of Patna's Mahavir Mandir Trust, which runs several hospitals in the state. Kunal, 74, suffered cardiac arrest in the early hours and was immediately taken to a hospital where he passed away around 8 am, his family said.

Malayalam actor found dead

Thiruvananthapuram: Well-known film and television actor Dileep Shankar, known for his varied roles in serials. was found dead in a hotel room here, police said Sunday. The 50-year-old actor had checked into the hotel. located in the heart of the

city, December 19 for a serial

shooting project, police added.

Over 100 booked

Muzaffarnagar (UP): More than 100 people, including a village, have been booked for an alleged attack on Hindu activists who were protesting against the neglect and poor condition of a cow shelter in the village, police said Sunday. Station House Officer (SHO) Jasvir Singh said that a case has been registered against village head of Badhai Kala, Dharmendra, and over other 100 others. He said the FIR has been lodged under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 191 (rioting), 190 (member of unlawful assembly), 131 (assault or criminal force), 115 (voluntarily causing hurt), 352 (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace).

MANMOHAN SINGH FUNERAL HIMANTA, CONG TRADE BARBS Dallewal's strike: Farmer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 29: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Sunday accused the Congress of attempting to stir a controversy over the cremation of former prime minister Manmohan Singh, despite the Centre announcing a "fitting memorial" to honour his legacy.

The opposition party hit back at the CM, claiming that Assam government programmes were hosted even when Singh's funeral was underway in New Delhi Saturday, in violation of the seven-day state mourning. Sarma said it was not the

first time that the Congress has "shown such disregard – be it towards the legacy of Narasimha Rao or Pranab Mukherjee, the party has, unfortunately, treated its own with indifference". The CM's remarks came after the Congress accused the Centre of insulting Singh, the country's first Sikh prime minister, by performing his last rites at Nigambodh Ghat

MP: Boy brought

out of borewell

after rescue ops

Bhopal, Dec 29: A 10-year-

old boy, who fell into a 140-feet

borewell in Madhya Pradesh's

Guna district, was brought

out Sunday after a 16-hour

rescue operation and rushed to

The boy, Sumit Meena,

slipped into the open shaft of

the borewell at around 5 pm

Saturday in Pipliya village

under Raghogarh assembly

segment, located 50 km from

the Guna district headquarters. He was brought out at

around 9.30 am Sunday, the

officials said. The boy was

rushed to a hospital in Rag-

hogarh on life support system,

Guna Superintendent of Police

Asked whether the child was responsive, the official

said doctors would be able to

provide information about it. Rescuers worked through the

night and dug a parallel pit to

reach the boy via a passage

between the pit and borewell,

Raghogarh Congress MLA Jai-

vardhan Singh told PTI ove

The boy was trapped at a

depth of 39 feet in the borewell,

which is around 140-feet deep,

Guna Collector Satendra Singh

said Saturday. The borewell did

not strike water, and hence no

casing had been put on it, he

said. The NDRF team reached

there from Bhopal late Satur-

day evening and helped in the

operation. The family members

of the boy panicked Saturday

evening when they did not see

him for a long time. A search

was carried out and then they realised he had fallen into the

borewell, a local person said.

phone from the spot.

Sanjeev Sinha told PTI.

hospital, officials said.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

ASHES IMMERSED IN YAMUNA

he ashes of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh were immersed in the Yamuna river near the Majnu ka Tila Gurdwara by members of his family following Sikh rituals. The ashes were collected from the Nigambodh Ghat Sunday morning by Singh's family members and later taken to the 'Asth Ghat' on the Yamuna river bank near the gurdwara.

instead of a designated spot that could be turned into his memorial. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had said the BJP-led Centre had "totally insulted" Singh by performing his last rites at Nigambodh Ghat.

The BJP maintained that the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi had allocated space for Singh's memori-

al and also informed his family about it, and accused the Congress of indulging in "cheap politics" over the former PM's cremation. "Dr Manmohan Singh, a statesman of unparalleled dignity and intellect, deserved much better, both in life and in death. It is deeply disheartening to witness the Congress Party attempting to stir controversy around his final journey, diminishing the solemnity it truly deserved," Sarma said in a post on X. The BJP leader said the people of India have bid Singh, who was a Rajya Sabha MP from Assam for over two decades, including during his tenure as PM, a respectful and heartfelt farewell recognising his invaluable contributions to the nation.

"Prime Minister @narendra modi Ji has already announced a fitting memorial to honour his legacy, reflecting the nation's gratitude. Yet, the actions of some, who seek to turn this moment of mourning into an opportunity for political gain, are deeply painful," Sarma said.

Police file case against Priyank Kharge aide

Kalaburagi (Karnataka), Dec 29: A case has been registered against the close aide of Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge, Raju Kapanur and five others in connection with hatching a conspiracy to kill BJP MLA Basavaraj Mattimadu and other leaders, police said Sunday.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

The case was registered based on a suicide note by a civil contractor, Sachin Panchal, who had mentioned that the Congress leaders had connived to kill Mattimadu, Siddalinga Swami of Andola

CONTRACTOR DEATH

Math, BJP leaders Manikanth Rathod and Chandu Patil. Panchal, a contractor from Bidar, allegedly ended his life by lying down in front of an approaching train Thursday. In his suicide note, he had accused Kapanur and his aides of making death threats. Meanwhile, the Bidar District-In Charge Minister, Eshwar Khandre, who holds the forest portfolio, visited Panchal's residence in Bhalki Taluk. As soon as the officials visited the house, the angry family members shouted

at them to go away as they held them responsible for Panchal's death. Khandre consoled and assured them that action would be taken against the accused persons involved in the death.

"The government will ensure that justice is done, and the accused persons are punished. Government is with you," the minister told the inconsolable family members. "I spoke to the family members who complained to me that the police re fused to register a case. I have spoken to senior police officials. Action has been taken against a few policemen," he added.

leader calls for action



Chandigarh, Dec 29: With Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike entering its 34th day Sunday, farmer leaders at Khanauri said they have been following the Gandhian way to continue their protest and it is up to the government to decide whether it wants to use force to evict their senior leader.

Their statement comes amid the Supreme Court's strong criticism of the Punjab government for not shifting Dallewal to a hospital. The farmers have been protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border to press the Centre for several demands, including a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

Recently, a high-level team of Punjab government officials met Dallewal requesting him to accept medical treatment even if he wishes to continue with his fast. Dallewal has so far refused medical treatment.

Farmer leader Sunday Abhimanyu Kohar at the Khanauri border protest said, "We want to make it clear that the Centre, right from day one, has been trying to defame and suppress our agitation." A narrative is being built that farmers are stubborn, whereas it is the Centre that is adopting such an attitude by not paying any attention to the farmers demands, he said.

"We are continuing our ag itation by adopting Gandhian principles. Our agitations have proven, that despite enduring so much due to the government's oppression, we have continued to protest in a Gandhian manner," he added.

"We are following these principles. Now, it is up to the government and constitutional bodies to decide whether they want to use force to evict Dallewal ji," Kohar said.

He further said the farmers wanted to make it clear that whatever situation arises the responsibility will lie with the Centre and the constitutional bodies. "We also want to appeal to the people of the country that the agitation seeking a guarantee for MSP has reached a decisive stage. We are on the threshold of victory... We must take a strong stand. Dallewal has put his life at stake," he said

4 workers die after inhaling toxic gas at chemical unit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bharuch (Gujarat), Dec 29: Four workers died Sunday after inhaling toxic fumes following gas leakage at a chemical plant at Dahej in Gujarat's Bharuch district, police said.

The victims fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic fumes leaking from a pipe at a production unit of the Gujarat Fluorochemicals Limited (GFL) at around 10 pm Saturday, Dahej police station inspector BM Patidar said. They were rushed to a private hospital in Bharuch Three of them died at around 3 am Sunday, while another one suc cumbed at 6 am, the official said.

"The incident occurred at around 10 pm when the four workers fell unconscious due to gas leakage from the pipe pass ing through the ground floor of the company's CMS plant. They were rushed to a private hospi tal where all four of them died. he said. The bodies were sent for postmortem and further probe into the incident was underway, the official said.

The deceased have been identified as Raiesh Kumar (hailing from Gujarat), Mudrika Yaday (belonging to Jharkhand), Sushit Prasad and Mahesh Nand lal (both from Uttar Pradesh), police said. GFL, Dahej, Deputy General Manager Jignesh Parmar told reporters that they will investigate the matter and a compensation of Rs 25 lakh would be paid to the kin of each of the deceased workers.

Sub Divisional Magistrate. Bharuch, Manisha Manani said three of the deceased were from other states.

"Four persons died due to gas leakage at the GFL plant near Ambeta village. The bodies have been sent to the civil hospital in Bharuch for post-mortem and an investigation is underway," Manani said.





Devotees show their skills during a 'Ngar Keertan' as part of 'Prakash Parv' (birth anniversary) of Guru Govind Singh in Lucknow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: 2024 is set to end as the hottest year on record and the first with a global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

It will also be remembered as the year developed nations had their last big chance to prevent the world from permanently crossing this critical threshold by funding climate action in the Global South -- and they blew it.

Relentless warming fuelled record-breaking heatwaves, deadly storms, and floods that devastated lives and homes by the thousands in 2024. Millions were displaced, and all eyes turned to the UN climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, hoping for a climate finance package capable of ramping up action in the Global South.

A study published in 2023 estimated that developed countries owe around \$170 trillion for their excessive emissions, having consumed 70-90 per cent



of the total carbon budget since the industrial era.

Instead, developed countries -- mandated under the UN climate regime to finance climate action in developing countries -- offered a paltry \$300 billion by 2035, a mere fraction of the trillions needed annually from 2025.

Developing countries faced a difficult choice: return to negotiations next year or accept the

weak deal on the table. Fearing an even worse outcome in 2025 with the return of "climate denier" Donald Trump and a US exit from the Paris Agreement. the Global South reluctantly accepted the offer

While political will remains fragmented, science continues to remind the world that it's an emergency.

In 2015, countries came together to limit global warm-

ing to "well below 2 degrees Celsius", aiming for 1.5 degrees

Fast forward, the world has already heated up by 1.3 degrees Celsius since **RELENTLESS** the pre-industri-WARMING FUELLED al era, largely RECORD-BREAKING due to burn-**HEATWAVES, DEADLY** ing fossil fu-STORMS, AND FLOODS THAT els. To limit **DEVASTATED LIVES AND HOMES** warming to BY THE THOUSANDS IN 2024 1.5 degrees ILLIONS WERE DISPLACED, AND AL Celsius, EYES TURNED TO THE UN CLIMATE

UN's the ONFERENCE IN BAKU, AZERBAIJAN climate sci-**IOPING FOR A CLIMATE FINANCE** ence body. IPCC. says **RAMPING UP ACTION** emissions IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH must peak by 2025 and drop 43 per cent by 2030 and 57 per cent by 2035.

Yet, current policies point to a hotter future -- around 3 degrees Celsius warming by 2100. Even if every country fulfils its climate promises or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), emissions would only shrink by a weak 5.9 per cent by

2030, far below what's needed. Developed the biggest historical polluters, are pushing developing countries to do more to meet the

Paris Agreement goals. Yet, these same nations often fall short of what is required to keep warming below degrees Celsius. On the other hand, devel-

oping countries argue their emissions are far smaller, and they are already grappling with poverty and growing climate disasters. They insist they need financial and technological help to transition to clean energy without compro-

mising their development. And the COP29 outcomes did little to inspire developing nations to raise their climate ambitions for the 2030-35 period.

2024 missed the climate moment but all's not lost

international



many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great

ELON MUSK

CHINA UNVEILS WORLD'S FASTEST TRAIN PROTOTYPE

China Sunday unveiled an updated model of its high-speed bullet train which its manufacturer claims reached speeds of 450 kmph during the test runs, making it the world's fastest high-speed train





2025 will be an important regarding Iran's ABBAS ARAOCHI



Holding elections in Syria could take up to four years

DE FACTO LEADER, SYRIA

Investigations revealed that they (Ro hingya refugees) had deliberately landed here and we consider them







FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SRI LANKA

SHORT TAKES

Belarus leader frees 20 more prisoners

Tallinn: Belarus' authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko pardoned 20 more people that rights activists describe as political prisoners, a statement on the president's website said Saturday. The announcement came amid persistent oppression in the run-up to presidential elections next month that are likely to extend Lukashenko's decades-long rule. Belarusian officials did not provide the names of those released, but the statement posted on the website of the president said that all of them had been convicted of "crimes of an extremist nature". Saturday's announcement marks the eighth such pardon by Lukashenko since the summer of 2024. In all, 207 political prisoners have been freed, according to Belarus' oldest and most established

Netanyahu getting prostate removed

human rights group, Viasna.

Tel Aviv: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is having his prostate removed Sunday, his office said, a procedure that comes as he manages multiple crises at once, including the ongoing war in Gaza and his own trial for alleged corruption. Netanyahu, 75, is among a cohort of older world leaders, including US President Joe Biden, 82, and Presidentelect Donald Trump, 78, whose health and physical fitness are under deep scrutiny both at home and abroad because of their advanced age and the effect that could have on their leadership. Netanyahu, who has had a string of health issues in recent years, has gone to great lengths to bolster a public image of himself as a fully healthy, energetic leader. During his trial this month he boasted about working 18hour days, even if those long hours are accompanied by a cigar. But as Israel's longestserving leader, such a gruelling workload over a total of 17 years in power could also take a toll on his well-being.

WORST AVIATION DISASTER AMID POLITICAL CRISIS

Deadliest airline crash in South Korea's history tests acting president two days into the job

Seoul, Dec 29: When South Korea's acting President Choi Sangmok arrived at the scene of the deadliest air disaster on the country's soil Sunday, he had been on the job for less than 48 hours.

Choi, the country's finance minister, became acting leader Friday night after the impeachment of Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, who had been acting president since President Yoon Suk Yeol was impeached and suspended from power December 14 following his short-lived attempt to impose martial law.

The bewildering turnover at the top of Asia's fourth-largest economy and one of its most vibrant democracies left the government scrambling when Jeju Air flight 7C2216 slammed into a wall at Muan International Airport Sunday, killing 179 of the 181 people on board.

Choi visited the site a few hours after the crash and declared it a special disaster zone.

"The government would like to offer its sincere condolences to the bereaved families and will do its best to recover from this accident and prevent a recurrence," he said.

Behind the scenes, government offices were still figuring out the chain of command and how press statements would be released, a ministry spokesperson and four other officials told Reuters. All spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive planning.

"Today Choi went to Muan with land ministry officials, not finance ministry officials, a spokesperson said. "A team of transportation ministry officials and safety ministry officials will report directly to Choi regarding the Muan plane crash for next few weeks. As for how we will distribute press releases on all his schedules - still undecided.

Each ministry involved in foreign policy, administrative issues or safety has teams reporting to Choi, but Yoon's presidential staff does not, and Choi is operating from a government complex in Seoul rather than any official residence, one offi-

A senior finance ministry official said it is still undecided who, if anyone, from Yoon's and Han's offices would report to Choi. Some of Choi's duties as finance minister have been delegated to the vice minister, the ministry official added.

"The central disaster control team meetings are minister-level meetings, so the land minister and safety minister report directly to Choi," this official said.

Choi is leading that centralised disaster control team instead of the prime minister, who would typically be in charge based on a manual prepared after the 2014 sinking of the ferry Sewol, which killed 304 people, and the Itaewon Halloween crowd crush that killed

Jeju Air apologises

Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" ove the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the

Kim E-bae, Jeju Air's president, bowed deeply with other sen-

ior company officials as he apologized to bereaved families

and said he feels "full responsibility" for the incident. Kim



Firefighters carry out extinguishing operations on an aircraft which drove off runaway at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea



lences to the bereave families and will do its best to recover from this accident and prevent a recurrence CHOI SANG-MOK ACTING PRESIDENT, SOUTH KOREA

159 people in 2022, a fourth official said. The political upheaval in South Korea was sparked

said the company hadn't identified any mechanical problems with the aircraft following regular checkups and that

he would wait for the results of government investigations into the cause of the incident. Family members wailed as

in contact with Jeju Air and is ready to support the company in dealing with the crash, "We extend our deepest con-

dolences to the families who lost loved ones, and our thoughts remain with the passengers and crew," Boeing said.

officials announced the names of some victims at a lounge in the Muan airport. Boeing said in a statement on X it was

when Yoon unexpectedly declared martial law December 3, only to rescind the order within hours after parliament defied military and police cordons to vote against Yoon.

The opposition-led parliament accused him of insurrection and abuse of power and impeached him, and later Han.

The uncertainty comes as South Korea tries to manage volatile foreign exchange markets and faces the task of preparing for the administration of President-elect Donald Trump in the United States, which is Seoul's main ally.

Uncertainties cloud cause of crash

Uncertainties surround the deadliest crash on South Korean soil, experts said Sunday, questioning initial suggestions that a bird strike might have brought down Jeju Air flight 7C2216. The apparent absence of landing gear, the timing of the twin-engine Boeing 737-800's belly-landing at Muan International Airport and the reports of a possible bird strike all raised questions that could not yet be answered. The single-aisle aircraft was seen in video broadcast on local media skidding down the runway with no visible landing gear before slamming into a wall in an explosion of flame and debris. "Why didn't fire ten ders lay foam on the runway? Why weren't they in attendance when the plane touched down? And why did the aircraft touch down so far down the runway? And why was there a brick wall at the end of the runway?" said Airline News editor Geoffrey Thomas. South Korean officials said they were investigating the cause of the crash, including a possible bird strike. The flight data recorde was found at 11:30 am (02:30 GMT), about two and a half hours after the crash, and the cockpit voice recorder was found at 2:24 pm, according to South Korea's transport ministry. "That gives you all the parameters of all the systems

of the plane. The heartbeat of the airplane is on the flight data recorder," Thomas said. "The voice recorder will probably provide the most interesting analysis of what went on this tragic " Within a few minutes, the control tower issued a bird strike warning, pilots declared mayday and then attempted to land, officials said, although it was not clear whether the aircraft had hit any birds. Experts said it seemed unlikely a bird strike would have caused the landing gear to malfunction "A bird strike is not unusual, problems with an undercarriage are not unusual. Bird strikes happen far more often, but typically they don't cause the loss of an airplane by themselves

CONTROVERSIAL POLLS

Kavelashvili named as Georgia's prez in blow to EU aspirations

Georgia's outgoing president and pro-Western parties have boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demand a rerun of the ballot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Tbilisi, Dec 29: Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili was formally inaugurated as president of Georgia Sunday. cementing the ruling party's grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

Outgoing pro-Western Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili said Sunday morning that she would vacate her residence at the Orbeliani Palace in Tbilisi, but insisted she was still the legitimate office holder.

"I will come out of here, come out to you and be with you. ... This presidential residence



was a symbol as long as there was a president here who was legitimate. I bring legitimacy with me," Zourabichvili told a crowd of supporters outside the palace. She called Kavelashvi-

li's inauguration a "parody." In his speech Sunday, Kavelashvili promised to be "everyone's president, regardless of whether they like me or not." He called for the nation to unite behind him around "shared values, the principles of mutual respect, and the future we should build together."

Russia to scrap INF moratorium Russia's move, long signalled, will kill off all that remains from one of the most significant arms control treaties of the

Cold War, amid fears that the world's two biggest nuclear powers could be entering a new arms race together with China

REUTERS

Moscow, Dec 29: Russia will scrap a moratorium on the deployment of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles because the United States has deployed such weapons in various regions around the world, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Sunday.

Russia and the United States. who both admit their relations are worse than at any time since the depths of the Cold War, have both expressed regret about the disintegration of the tangle of arms control treaties which sought to slow the arms race and reduce the risk of nuclear war.



Asked by state news agency RIA if Russia could withdraw from the New START treaty before its expiry in February 2026. Layroy said that there were currently "no conditions" for a strategic dialogue with Washington.

Today it is clear that, for example, our moratorium on the deployment of short- and intermediate-range missiles is no longer practically viable and will have to be abandoned," Lavrov said.

Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, signed by Mikhail Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan in 1987. marked the first time the superpowers had agreed to re-

The US has arrogantly ignored the warnings of Russia and China and in practice has moved on to the deployment of weapons of this class in various regions of the world

SERGEI LAVROV | FOREIGN MINISTER, RUSSIA

duce their nuclear arsenals and eliminated a whole category of nuclear weapons.

The United States under former President Donald Trump formally withdrew from the INF Treaty in 2019 after saving that Moscow was violating the accord, an accusation the Kremlin repeatedly denied and of Russian violations and his concerns about China's intermediate-range missile arsenal The United States publicly

Russia then imposed a mora-

torium on its own development

of missiles previously banned

by the INF treaty - ground-based

ballistic and cruise missiles

with ranges of 500 km to 5,500

to terminate the INF Treaty be

cause of what he said were years

Trump in 2018 said he wanted

km (310 miles to 3,417 miles).

blamed Russia's development of the 9M729 ground-launched cruise missile, known in NATC as the SSC-8, as the reason for it leaving the INF Treaty.

In his moratorium proposal Putin suggested Russia could agree not to deploy the missiles in its Baltic coast exclave of Kaliningrad. Since leaving the pact, the United States has tested

missiles with a similar profile. Russia fired a new intermedi ate-range hypersonic ballistic

missile known as "Oreshnik" or Hazel Tree, at Ukraine No vember 21 in what Putin said was a direct response to strikes on Russia by Ukrainian forces with US and British missiles.

Gaza captors tortured hostages, including minors

The Israeli report is based on interviews with the medical and welfare teams which treated over 100 Israeli and foreign hostages

Jerusalem, Dec 29: Hostages held in Gaza were subjected to torture, including sexual and psychological abuse, starvation, burns and medical neglect, according to a new report by the Israeli Health Ministry that will be submitted to the United Na-

tions this week The report is based on interviews with the medical and welfare teams which treated more than 100 Israeli and foreign hostages, most of whom were released in late November 2023. in a brief truce between Israel and Hamas. Eight hostages were rescued by the Israeli military. The hostages include more than 30 children and teenagers, a few of whom were found

to have been bound, beaten or branded with a heated object, according to the report addressed to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and published late Saturday.

Women reported sexual assault by the captors, including at gunpoint. Men were beaten, starved, branded, held bound in isolation and denied access to a bathroom, the report said. Some were denied treatment for injuries and medical conditions.

The report did not identify

■ Women reported sexual assaul ■ 100 hostages still held in Gaza any of the hostages by name

tages and staff that treated them

in interviews with Reuters and

other media and a UN report.

or age, to protect their privacy, but some of the descriptions matched those provided by hos-

Hamas has repeatedly denied abuse of the 251 hostages abducted from Israel during its October 7, 2023 assault, About half of the 100 hostages still held in Gaza are believed by Israeli authorities to still be alive.

A fresh bid to secure a Gaza ceasefire including a hostage deal has gained momentum in recent weeks, although no breakthrough has been reported as yet.

TEST FOR TRUMP

NK's Kim vows toughest anti-US policy

The reclusive state has sharply increased the pace of its weapons testing activities to build more reliable nuclear missiles targeting the US and its allies

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seoul, Dec 29: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he will implement the "toughest" anti-US policy, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as US president, the country's state media reported Sunday.

Trump's return to the White House raises prospects for



high-profile diplomacy with North Korea. During his first term. Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear programme.

Many experts however say a quick resumption of Kim-Trump summitry is unlikely as Trump would first focus on conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. North Korea's supUkraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy experts say. During a five-day plenary

port for Russia's war against

meeting of the ruling Workers Party that ended Friday, Kim called the US "the most read tionary state that regards an ti-communism as its invariable state policy." Kim said that the US-South Korea-Japan security partnership is expanding into "a nuclear military bloc for ag gression.'

"This reality clearly shows to which direction we should ad vance and what we should do and how." Kim said, according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

Business



towards a future where AI is integrated seamlessly into everyday operations beyond the honeymoon period and into a mature phase

EXPORTS TO AUSTRALIA UP 64.4% IN NOV

India's exports to its trade agreement partner Australia rose 64.4 per cent year-on-year to USD 643.7 million in November on account of healthy growth in sectors such as textiles, chemicals and agricultural products, according to the commerce ministry data.





global AI market valued at approximately USD 235 billion and projected to

grow to over USD 631 billion by 2028, AI is redefining industries and economies. The possibilities seem endless. from predictive analytics in

agriculture to personalised

healthcare solutions ATUL SONEJA | TECH MAHINDRA COO

2024 has been a mixed bag for the Indian housing sector. **Apart from the** dampening ef-



fect of general and assembly elections, project approvals slowed down markedly; this inevitably impacted new housing supply

ANUJ PURI | ANAROCK CHAIRMAN

With significant strides in renewable energy integration, grid modernisation.



and an unwavering commitment to carbon reduction, the sector has taken a giant leap towards meeting both domestic and global energy

25 yrs of Reliance's

Jamnagar refinery

New Delhi: Twenty-five years

launched its first refinery at

ago, December 28, 1999, Reliance

Jamnagar, Gujarat. The refinery

overnight turned India from a

sufficient one and later into a

gasoil to Europe and the US.

Today, Jamnagar has become

the world's refining hub - an

Ltd, India's most valuable company, first spoke of building

engineering marvel that is India's

pride. When Reliance Industries

an oil refinery to process and

convert crude oil pumped out of

into fuels like petrol (gasoline)

and diesel (gasoil), majority

of the experts had said that it

company to set up the world's

largest grassroots refinery in

Bank guarantee

waiver for VIL

New Delhi: The telecom

auctions held prior to the

reform package, telecom

Saturday, adding that the latest "relief" will boost 4G and 5G investments in India, Prior

department has waived the

requirement of bank guarantee

to be submitted for spectrum

operator Vodafone Idea said

to this reform, bank guarantees aggregating to about Rs 24,800 crore were required to be provided by VIL against

each spectrum instalment, 13

months prior to the instalment

auctions, the company said in a

falling due for the above

ESC for incentives

to promote R&D

New Delhi: Electronics and

Computer Software Export

Promotion Council (ESC) has

batted for further calibration of

scheme to make it more broad-

The industry body has made a

strong pitch for incentives to

Design Linked Incentive (DLI)

based and impact-oriented.

BSE filing.

would be impossible for an Indian

surplus, exporting gasoline and

fuel deficit nation to a self-

SHORT **TAKES**

RBI report flags high attrition in pvt banks

The total number of employees of private banks surpassed that of public sector banks during 2023-24, but their attrition has increased sharply over the last three years, with average attrition rate of around 25%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: Employee attrition in private sector banks has witnessed an increase to about 25 per cent and this high turnover rate poses significant operational risk, according to the latest Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24

Employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks and small finance banks (SFBs), the report, which was released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said.

The total number of employees of private banks surpassed that of public sector banks (PSBs) during 2023-24, but their attrition has increased sharply over the last three years, with average attrition rate of around 25 per cent, it said.

"High attrition and employee turnover rate pose significant operational risks, including disruption in customer services, besides leading to loss of institutional knowledge and increased recruitment costs. In various interactions with banks, the Reserve Bank has stressed that reducing attrition is not just a human resource function but a strategic imperative," it said.

Banks need to implement



strategies like improved onboarding processes, providing extensive training and career development opportunities, programmes, competitive benefits, and a supportive workplace culture to build long-term employee engagement, it said.

In view of several irregularities observed in grant of loans against gold ornaments and jewellery, including top-up loans, the Reserve Bank advised supervised entities to comprehensively review their policies. processes and practices on gold loans to identify gaps and initiate appropriate remedial measures in a time-bound manner.

Supervised entities were advised to closely monitor

their gold loan portfolios and ensure adequate controls over outsourced activities and third-party service providers,

The report said climate change risks are envisaged to impact profitability of financial institutions, growth prospects, and inflation dynamics and, thus, impinge upon financial stability and price stability.

To foster assessment of these concerns by regulated entities, regulatory and supervisory frameworks need to be strengthened with enhanced risk management guidelines, disclosure requirements, periodic stress testing, and stipulating reasonable verification and assurance functions, it added.

Mcap of 6 of top-10 most valued firms climbs ₹86,847.88cr

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: Six of the top-10 most valued firms together added Rs 86,847.88 crore in market valuation last week, with HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainers in line with an overall optimistic trend in equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 657.48 points or 0.84 per cent, and the Nifty rose 225.9 points or 0.95 per cent.

While Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were the winners, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) suffered erosion from their market valuation.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of HDFC Bank surged by Rs 20,235.95 crore to Rs 13,74,945.30 crore.

Reliance Industries added Rs 20,230.9 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 16,52,235.07 crore.

The valuation of ITC jumped Rs 17,933.49 crore to Rs 5,99,185.81 crore, and that of ICICI Bank climbed Rs 15,254.01 crore to Rs 9,22,703.05 crore. The market cap of Bharti Air-

tel soared Rs 11.948.24 crore to Rs 9,10,735.22 crore, and Hindustan Unilever rallied Rs 1,245.29 crore to Rs 5,49,863.10 crore. owever, the valuation of State Bank of India tumbled by Rs

11,557.39 crore to Rs 7,13,567.99 The valuation of LIC declined by Rs 8,412.24 crore to Rs 5,61,406.80 crore, and that of Infosys dropped by Rs 2,283.75

crore to Rs 7.95.803.15 crore.

Govt cancels auction of 11 critical mineral blocks

New Delhi, Dec 29: The government has cancelled the auction of 11 critical mineral blocks in the fourth round due to poor response.

While no bids were received for four blocks, the remaining seven mines got less than three technically qualified bidders, according to the annulment The four blocks which in-

clude tungsten and glauconite, are located in the states of Chhattisgarh and Arunachal Pradesh.

"Since there were nil bids received....the auction process for four mineral blocks stands annulled," the notice said.

Critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play crucial roles in the production of clean energy technologies, ranging from wind turbines to electric vehicles

"Since there were less than three technically qualified bidders...the auction process of these seven mineral blocks stands annulled," the notice said. The government had earlier cancelled the auction of three critical mineral blocks in the third round, 14 blocks in the second round, and 14 in the first tranche of critical minerals as the response was lukewarm.

The government had earlier said that 24 critical and strategic mineral blocks have been sold in four rounds of auction.

"Out of 48 blocks put to e-auction, 24 have been successfully auctioned, including four min-

ing lease (ML) and 20 composite licenses (CL) blocks," the mines ministry had said. India is all set to launch a

Critical Mineral Mission in the upcoming year to secure vital resources for green energy and technology. The initiative in volves government, industry and research collaboration, fo cusing on acquiring overseas assets like lithium and cobalt, particularly in Australia, and boost ing domestic mining through auctions and roadshows.

With a series of high-profile roadshows abroad along with plans to acquire critical mineral assets in Australia, India is set to woo international investors and make its mark on the global mining map.

The countries are now racing in a bid to secure these vital re sources, which include lithium and cobalt, through a complex web of policies and alliances. realising that critical minerals are the new lifeblood of the 21st-century economy. According to an estimate

by the World Bank, by 2050, the production of minerals including lithium and cobalt, will need to increase by nearly 500 per cent in a bid to meet the growing demand for clean energy technologies.

CII calls for cut in excise duty on fuel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: Industry body CII in its budget suggestions for 2025-26 has recommended lowering the excise duty on fuel to boost consumption. especially at the lower income level, arguing that fuel prices significantly drive inflation. The budget could also consid-

er reducing marginal tax rates for personal income up to Rs 20 lakh per annum. This would help trigger the virtuous cycle of consumption, higher growth and higher tax revenue, said CII.

Asserting that the gap between the highest marginal rate for individuals at 42.74 per cent and the normal Corporate Tax Rate at 25.17 per cent, is high, it said, inflation has reduced the buying power of lower and middle-income earners.

"The central excise duty alone accounts for approximately 21 per cent of the retail price for petrol and 18 per cent for diesel. Since May 2022, these duties have not been adjusted in line with the approximately 40 per cent decrease in global crude prices. Lowering excise duty on fuel would help reduce overall inflation and increase

disposable incomes," the industry body said. Chandrajit Banerjee, Direc-

tor General, CII, said domestic consumption has been critical to India's growth story, but inflationary pressures have somewhat eroded the purchasing power of consumers. "Government interventions

could focus on enhancing disposable incomes and stimulating spending to sustain economic momentum. Persistent food inflationary pressures particularly impinge upon low-income rural households who allocate larger share to food in their consumption basket," he added.

According to him, while recent quarters have shown promising signs of recovery in rural consumption, targeted government interventions. such as increasing per unit benefit under its key schemes like MGNREGS, PM-KISAN and PMAY, and providing consumption vouchers to low-income households, can further enhance the rural recovery.

In its pre-budget proposals, CII has also recommended an increase in the daily minimum wage under the MGNREGS from Rs 267 to Rs 375.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: Macroeconomic data announcements. trading activity of foreign investors and global trends will guide equity market movement this week, which would also mark the beginning of the new calendar year and month, analysts said

Movement of rupee, which registered the steepest fall in almost two years to hit its lifetime intraday low Friday, will also be tracked by investors.

Persistent FIIs (Foreign Institutional Investors) selling has been a source of pressure on Indian markets, and their stance in the new year could shape near-term trends. Meanwhile, monthly auto sales data will also be closely watched. As the Q3 earnings season approaches, corporate quarterly updates will begin trickling in, setting the stage for market expectations," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

On the international front, key economic indicators like manufacturing PMI data from China and the US, along with



US jobless claims, will play a crucial role, Meena said.

However, the dollar index and US bond vields remain the most critical factors influencing the direction of global markets, he added

Auto stocks will also remain in the limelight this week amid monthly sales data announcement.

"As we step into the new calendar year and month, auto sales data will be closely monitored for initial market cues. In the absence of any significant events, attention is likely to

shift toward FII flows and currency movement, especially as the rupee continues to weaken against the US dollar. These factors could play a crucial role in shaping market direction in the near term," Ajit Mishra -- SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 657.48 points, or 0.84 per cent, and the Nifty went up 225.9 points, or 0.95 per cent.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, "Looking ahead, is expected for the upcoming Q3 results, which will play a crucial role in shaping market trajectory. Investors are likely to align their portfolios based on pre-Budget expectations Additionally, key data points such as the PMI data for India, the US, and China, as well as US jobless claims, will influence in vestor sentiment.'

significant market attention

The past week was marked by consolidation with bouts of intra-day volatility, an analyst said, adding that FIIs exhibited thin volumes due to the Christ mas and New Year holidays continuing as net sellers.

'The outlook for the market will be guided by major domestic and global economic data such as India's infrastructure output manufacturing PMI of India UK S&P global manufacturing PMI, US initial jobless claims, Puneet Singhania, Director at Master Trust Group, said.

"With no significant triggers in the near term, markets are likely to remain range-bound,' Siddhartha Khemka, Head -- Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd -- said.

Rupee tumbles 3 pc in 2024; turbulence to ebb in slow motion

The action-packed 2024 continued to impact the rupee's exchange rate against major currencies throughout, with a series of geopolitical events and elections across major economies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 29: The Indian rupee tumbled 3 per cent in 2024 as concerns over slower economic growth and the green buck's global strength weighed, but it was among the least volatile currencies in the world and the headwinds may be less intense in the coming year.

Rupee settled at new lows as the year closed as dollar's resurgence weighed on emerging-market currencies.

The action-packed 2024 continued to impact the rupee's exchange rate against major currencies throughout. with a series of geopolitical events ranging from the Russia-Ukraine war and crisis in the Middle East to trade disruptions in the Red Sea and elections across several major

Global factors, including measures taken by major central banks, have hit not only the rupee-dollar dynamics but also disrupted the exchange rates of currencies across all emerging economies. In fact, the rupee's fall with

respect to the dollar has been less than its depreciation in terms of other currencies. And it has ended up with gains compared to euro and the Japanese

Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) ex-governor Shaktikanta Das also said in the central bank's December bi-monthly monetary policy that the Indian rupee has remained less volatile compared to its peers in emerg-

ing markets Yet, the RBI has been more



active in its efforts towards stabilising the rupee-dollar rate, thanks to increased demand for the greenback due to India's dependence on oil imports and the widening trade deficit.

"RBI was also seen intervening actively in NDF (non-deliverable forward) markets to prevent sharp depreciation of the rupee," said Naveen Mathur, Director - Commodities & Currencies. Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers

This was evident in foreign

exchange reserves, which declined from the record high of USD 704.89 billion in late Sep tember to USD to USD 644.39 billion as of December 20, 2024, the lowest level in nearly six months.

The foreign currency assets also include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

India's external challenges intensified as China's GDP growth slowed to 4.8 per cent, reducing demand for Indian exports. Besides, supply chain disruptions due to tensions in the Middle East and escalated crisis in the Red Sea hit the trade balance of several countries, including India.

The RBI's log of the daily exchange rate movement of rupee versus major currencies showed the domestic unit has depreciated against the greenback by almost 3 per cent from 83.19 level on January 1 to 85.59 on December 27 this year, with a record decline of Re 2 in the past two months.

It breached the crucial 84 level on October 10, surpassed Rs 85-a-dollar mark on December 19 and even touched the life-time low of 85.80 during intra-day on December 27, recording the steepest single-day fall in nearly two years.

However, the local unit has witnessed a gain of 8.7 per cent against yen rising from the rate of Rs 58.99 per 100 yen on January 1 to Rs 54.26 on December 27. And the gain was even increased to almost 9 per cent since September 17, when the rate hit the peak of Rs 59.63 per 100 units of the Japanese cur

Similarly, in terms of euro, the rupee registered a gain of over 5 per cent since its lowest level of Rs 93.75 a euro on August 27 to Rs 89.11 on December

Experts attributed the trend to the unprecedented rise in dollar strength due to improved macroeconomic factors in the US, which prompted the Federal Reserve to move slower to wards easing monetary policy and the outcome of the Presi dential election in the world's largest economy.

Donald President-elect Trump's declared intention to raise tariffs on Chinese imports spooked currency traders worldwide, triggering an unabated chase for the greenback leading to the mass exodus of foreign capital from Indian eq uity markets.

promote R&D and innovation in capital-intensive electronics hardware sector during a recent interaction with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, a release said Sunday. ESC has also sought additional income tax reduction for Indian corporates spending over 3 per cent of their turnover to advance R&D and filing patents/designs in India.

Humpy brings Oz tail wags after Bumrah magic more chess glory

Grandmaster Koneru Humpy pulled off a memorable win in New York to be crowned FIDE Women's World Rapid Champion. Her achievement laced a sensational year for the chess fraternity after D Gukesh

emerged World Champion

New York, Dec 29: Grandmaster Koneru Humpy capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess champion here Sunday.

Humpy had won the event back in 2019 at Georgia and the Indian No 1 is only the second player after China's Ju Wenjun to clinch the title more than once.

In September, India had also won its first-ever gold medals in Open and Women's categories in the Chess Olympiad in Budapest.

The Indian, who started the tournament here with a firstround defeat, was the lone winner in the 11th and final round. helping her to top the tables with 8.5 points, half a point clear of six others including compatriot D Harika.

"I'm very excited and happy. In fact, I expected it to be a very tough day, like some sort of tiebreak. But when I finished the game, the arbitrator told me (about winning), and it was a tense moment for me," said Humpy, who began with black pieces, after her victory.

"So, this is quite unexpected because the whole year I have

for India. We also have **Gukesh as world** champion and now I got the second world title in the rapid event. So, I think this will motivate a lot of voungsters to

KONERU HUMPY | GRANDMASTER

been struggling and I had very bad tournaments where I just ended up in last place. So, this came as a surprise," she added

take up chess professionally

Ju Wenjun of China finished second as the tie-break was resolved while Kateryna Lagno of Russia ended third. Harika, who had eight points, had to be content with a fifth-place

Humpy credited her family for the success. "I think it was possible because of the support from my family. My husband and my parents...they support me a lot. My parents look after my daughter when I travel."

"It's not easy to become a World Champion at 37. It's quite difficult when you get older to keep that motivation and stay sharp when required. I'm glad that I made it," she said.

The seasoned player said she was motivated to do well after her first round defeat, which saw her eventually slipping to 2.5 points after four rounds.

Meanwhile in the open section, young 18-year-old Russian Grandmaster Volodar Murzin won the gold medal ahead of a star studded field showing tremendous nerves.

Arjun Erigaisi scored 9 points and tied for the fourth spot with five others while Praggnanandhaa ended on 8.5 points. Among other Indians. Aravindh Chithambaram was the next best performer on 8 points.

PM APPLAUDS HUMPY'S FEAT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday hailed Grandmaster Koneru Humpy's feat of winning the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess championship title twice in her career. Humpy capped a wonderful year for Indian chess, defeating Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge champion in New York Sunday. "Congratulations to @humpy_koneru on winning the 2024 FIDE Women's World Rapid Championship! Her grit and brilliance continues to inspire millions," wrote Modi on 'X'. "This victory is even more historic because it is her second world rapid championship title, thereby making her the only Indian to achieve

Melbourne, Dec 29: Jasprit Bumrah left the hosts in a daze with a dream spell but the courageous Australian lower order steered the side to a commanding 333-run lead Sunday, setting up the Boxing Day Test for an intriguing lastday finish.

Australia finished the fourth day at 228 for nine, leaving India skipper Rohit Sharma a bit irritated as the home team was in a spot at 156 for 8 at one stage.

Australia's number 8, 10 and 11 batters saw off nearly 35 overs and it could prove decisive if India doesn't bat exceedingly well on a track which has remained true in all four days.

Bumrah (4/53 in 17 overs)was an artist at work in the first two sessions and found his ally in Mohammed Siraj (3/66 in 22 overs) as momentum suddenly swung in India's favour.

Bumrah was unplayable for the better part of the second innings and completed 200 Test wickets on the day at an incredible average of 19.56.

But as luck would have it, he couldn't complete his fivefor as he overstepped when he had Nathan Lyon caught in the slips by KL Rahul. Insult to the injury was the last-ball boundary hit by Lyon.

With immaculate length, awkward bounce and late movement, Bumrah had the Australian line-up in complete tangle but India let slip the advantageous position in the final session.

Pat Cummins (41 off 90 balls), Lyon (41 batting, 54 balls) and Scott Boland (10 batting, 65 balls) beefed up the second innings total, leaving a jittery Indian top-order with a mountain to climb on the final day.



Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah Sunday became the second fastest Indian along with Ravindra Jadeja to complete 200 Test wickets and the first bowler ever to reach that milestone with a sub-20 average during the fourth day's play of the fourth Test against Australia here. Bumrah dismissed Travis Head (1) for his 200th victim in the post-lunch session, joining Jadeja in the list of bowlers who are fastest to 200 wickets in Tests. He is also the fastest Indian pace bowler to achieve the feat, going past legendary Kapil Dev who went past the mark in 50 matches. Both Bumrah and Jadeja achieved the feat in their 44th Test, and overall he is 12th Indiar bowler in the format to complete the landmark. The recently retired Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin was the quickest among Indians to have taken 200 wickets, a feat that he achieved in his 37th Test. Among all bowlers who have crossed the 200-wickets mark in Test cricket, Bumrah is the only bowler with an average of un-der 20 which includes some of the fearsome fast bowlers from the West Indies such as Malcolm Marshall (376 wickets at 20.94), Joel Garner (259 wickets at 20), Curtly Ambrose (405 wickets at 20.99) as well as England's James Anderson (704 wickets at 26.45) and even Glenn McGrath (563 wickets at 21.64).

A victory isn't impossible but for it to happen India would need something freakish from Rishabh Pant and at least a couple of senior batters need to shrug off the rust.

DRERM!

The pitch has no demons but Indian batters need to clear the cobwebs in their minds.

For the first time since the Perth Test, Bumrah had meaningful support from the other end as Australia lost three wickets in a space of 10 deliv-

The pacer's effort helped India regain a good bit of control despite conceding a 105-run

first innings lead even after Nitish Reddy's brilliant 114.

Steve Smith (13) edged while trying to drive Siraj while Bumrah had Travis Head (1) who flicked uppishly to manof-the-moment Nitish Reddy at square leg.

Bumrah had ended Shaun Marsh's Test career during the 2018-19 series, and this time his younger brother Mitchell Marsh (0) had no answers to the star Indian pacer's probing *questions*

In the first session when Bumrah's perfect nip-backer sent debutant Sam Konstas (8) packing before Siraj jettisoned Usman Khawaja with a peach of delivery.

The Indian bowlers came out with renewed vigour in the second innings and the decision to give the new ball to Akash was

a prudent one.

SHORT **TAKES**

Arshdeep, Mandhana named for ICC awards

Dubai: Indian pacer Arshdeep Singh has been nominated for the ICC Men's T20I Cricketer of the Year award following a stellar season in which he emerged as the joint highest wicket-taker and played a pivotal role in India's T20 World Cup triumph. The 25-yearold will compete for the prestigious honour alongside Pakistan's Babar Azam, Australia's Travis Head, and Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza, all of whom are among the standout performers this year. Stylish Indian opener Smriti Mandhana too will be vying for an ICC award after being nominated for ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year for her standout performance in international cricket. Laura Wolvaardt (South Africa), Chamari Athapaththu (Sri Lanka) and Annabel Sutherland (Australia) are the other experienced cricketers competing for the award.

Squad for Maldives friendlies announced

Bangalore: Indian women's football team coach Joakim Alexandersson said Sunday selected a mix of senior and U20 players in the 23-member squad for the two international friendlies against Maldives here December 30 and January 2. The matches will be played at the Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence. "We have some senior women's players joining us in the Bengaluru camp so we'll have a mix of U20 and senior players for this match. We're going to try and implement some things in tomorrow's game. It's nice to see and train the best in the country," said the Swede, who was named chief coach of India's women's U20 and U17 national teams earlier this month.

Bengal storm into Santosh Trophy final

Hyderabad: West Bengal edged past defending champions Services 4-2 to enter the final of the 78th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy here Sunday. The winners led 3-0 at half time. The win marked West Bengal's 47th appearance in the tournament's final, which they have won a record 32 times. The match saw West Bengal asserting their authority early on. Manotos Maji and Naro Hari Shrestha each scored a goal, while Robi Hansda, the tournament's leading scorer with 11 goals, added a brace to his tally to bag the Player-of-the-Match award.

Coach Altenburg eyes unique 'playing style and identity' for Kalinga Lancers

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Rourkela, Dec 29: With an impressive mix of players in their line-up, the Kalinga Lancers start among the favourites for the Hockey India League 2024-25, currently underway, and German coach Valentin Altenburg wants to create a unique 'playing style and identity' for the team.

Defending champions of the last HIL held seven years ago, the Lancers open the new season in the eight-team competition against UP Rudras at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium Monday in their spiritual home of Odisha.

Experienced Australian midfielder Aran Zalewski will captain the side that features the likes of Dutch star Thierry Brinkman, gold medallist at the 2024 Paris Olympics, and Belgium's world-class drag-flicker Alexander Hendrickx, alongside rising Indian talents such as goalkeeper Krishan Pathak, midfielder Rosan Kujur, and

defender Sanjay to name a few. "Yeah, very excited, very excited because it's the best challenge that a coach can have, bringing together so many great players from so many different backgrounds to create



something new. So we want to create a Vedanta Kalinga Lancers playing style and identity. And there's nothing I can think of that would make more joy for myself than doing it," Altenburg said. "So it will be very important to have a good connection on pitch with a great crowd and hopefully we can also make the people a home crowd. Everybody is already looking forward and I think the first goal that we're going to score will be very special," he added.

On the rationale behind appointing Zalewski as captain, the German said: "He has a huge impact since he knows Kalinga Lancers, he knows India, he knows hockey. He has a great personality and he's also interested in building a unique Kalinga Lancers culture. So his impact will be huge on both the coaching staff as well as the

'Frustrated' Djoko opens up on doping breaches

International Tennis Integrity Agency charged both men's world number 1 Sinner and former women's world number 1 Iga Swiatek with anti-doping breaches earlier in the year

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Brisbane, Dec 29: Serbian tennis great Novak Djokovic, who is chasing his record 25th Grand Slam title at the 2025 Australian Open, admitted to being frustrated after players were kept out of the loop regarding the doping case against men's world number 1

Jannik Sinner. The World Anti-Doning Agency (WADA) confirmed that it lodged an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) against Sinner, who was found by an independent tribunal of the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) to bear no fault or negligence having twice tested positive for clostebol, a prohibited substance,



"I'm not questioning wheth-

er (Sinner) took the banned substance intentionally or not. We've had plenty of players in the past and are currently under suspension for not even testing positive for banned substances. Some players with lower rankings have been waiting for their case to be resolved for over a year. I've been really frustrated... to see we've been kept in the dark for at least five months (on the Sinner case).'

Meanwhile, Poland's Iga Swiatek, who was the women's world number one at the time, served a one-month suspension after testing positive for Trimetazidine (TMZ), a banned heart medication.

The ITIA accepted that her positive test resulted from con-

The ATP hasn't really it. Why have they kept that case away from the public? We see Simona Halep's case on the WTA Tour, now Iga Swiatek's case

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

tamination in her melatonin supplements, ending her ban December 4.

"It's not a good image for our sport. I'm just questioning the way the system works and why certain players aren't treated the same as others. Maybe some ranking reasons are behind it, or some players have more financial backing and stronger legal teams to tackle these cases," he added.

SA seal place in World **Test Championship final**

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Centurion, Dec 29: South Africa tailenders Kagiso Rabada and Marco Jansen hung in against relentless fast bowler Mohammad Abbas for a tense two-wicket win in the first test Sunday and sealed the Proteas place in next year's World Test Championship final.

Jansen (16 not out) overshad owed Abbas' brilliant figures of 6-54 with a square driven boundary against the fast bowler as South Africa reached 150-8 iust after lunch on Day 4 and escaped with a close win in the two-match series.

Abbas, making a comeback after more than three years in the test wilderness, had knocked back South Africa's tricky chase of 148 runs in a marathon 13-over spell before lunch on Day 4 as the home team limped to 99-8 losing four wickets for three runs. However, Rabada changed gears in an unbroken 51-run stand with Jansen and made an unbeaten 31 off 26 balls with five fours to seal a memorable victory and denied Pakistan its first test win in South Africa in almost 18 years.

India, Australia and Sri Lanka are the other teams still in contention for next June's WTC final against South Africa at Lord's.

'LightningR1' cements spot in Indian motorsports

MUDDAPPA BAGS 15TH NATIONAL TITLE IN MOTORCYCLE DRAG RACING

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Dec 29: Indian rider Hemanth Muddappa of Mantra Racing Sunday bagged his 15th National title at the fourth and final round of the MMSC FMS-CI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship 2024 here.

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The Bangalore rider sealed his 13th title, even before stepping on the track, as he garnered an unbeatable lead of 29 points in the 4-stroke 1051 to

1650cc Super Sport class. On Sunday, he achieved an unparalleled milestone taking part in three more classes and won two of them to claim a triple crown in the 2024 Nationals, an unprecedented 15 career National titles. He bagged second in the other class.

"The past eight years have been an incredible journey with my team Mantra Racing and all the amazing mechanics who made this possible. This



longs to my family, friends. To become the first and everyone who supported athlete in Indian motorsports to achieve 15 National titles fills me with immense pride and joy. It feels like being the Neil Armstrong of Indian motorsports breaking new ground and

> inspiring others to dream big HEMANTH MUDDAPPA

Neil Armstrong of Indian motorsports - breaking new ground and inspiring others to dream big.

Aptly nicknamed as 'LightningR1', for his brute speed, Sunday's feats on the superbike sets him apart as the only individual to win 15 FMSCI National titles in any discipline of Indian motorsports.

Lakshya finishes third at King Cup International

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Shenzhen, Dec 29: India's Lakshya Sen delivered a dominant performance, outplaying rising French star Alex Lanier in straight games to finish third at the inaugural King Cup International Badminton Open here Sunday.

The 23-year-old from Almora defeated Lanier 21-17 21-11, securing a handsome prize purse of around Rs. 36 lakh.

Lakshya had earlier lost in the semifinals to reigning world iunior champion Hu Zhe'an of China, going down 19-21 19-21 in a closely contested match

In the third place play-off, Lakshya started strong, taking a 6-1 lead, but Lanier fought back to level the score at 10-10,



eventually gaining a one-point advantage at the interval.

However, Lakshya regained control to move ahead 18-15 and grabbed three game points before sealing the opening game when Lanier went wide.

After the break, Lakshya continued with the momentum establishing an 8-6 lead and quickly extending it to 15-8. He gained nine match points and wrapped up the victory when Lanier sent a shot long.

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