

Urvashi trolled

Actor Urvashi Rautela gets brutally trolled on internet for her insensitive comments on Saif Ali Khan stabbing case

LEISURE | P2

Population decline

China's population falls for the third straight year, pointing to further demographic challenges for the country

INTERNATIONAL | P10

Shares snap rally

Key benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slip into negative territory after a three-day rally

BUSINESS | P11

Sports icons honoured

President Droupadi Murmu bestows the National Sports Awards in a regal ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan

SPORTS | P12



BOOST TO TIES: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam exchange pleasantries in Bhubaneswar, Friday. The state government signed eight MoUs with Singaporean entities for collaboration in various fields

CM: Huge potential for Odisha, Singapore ties

Bhubaneswar, Jan 17: On the first day of his two-day visit to Odisha Friday, President of Singapore, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, visited the World Skill Center in Bhubaneswar, marking a significant milestone in the growing partnership between Singapore and Odisha. He was warmly welcomed by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi. "There is tremendous potential for collaboration between Singapore and Odisha," Majhi said. On the occasion, eight MoUs were exchanged between the state government and various Singaporean entities to strengthen collaboration in key sectors. The first MoU was signed between the Skill Development and Technical Education (SD&TE) department of Odisha government and ITE Education Services (ITEES), Singapore, to extend cooperation in the field of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to further enhance skill development ecosystem in Odisha, officials said. Another MoU was signed between the SD&TE department and ITEES to extend cooperation in the field of TVET. The third agreement was signed between Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar, GRIDCO Limited and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) of Singapore to advance research and development in renewable energy, hydrogen production, energy storage systems and microgrids. The fourth MoU was signed between Industrial Promotion and Investment Corporation of Odisha Limited (IPICOL) and Sembcorp Green Hydrogen India Private Limited (SGHIPL) of Singapore to explore the development of a production facility for green hydrogen and its derivatives, they said. The fifth pact between Singa-

pore-based Sembcorp Development (SCD) and Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO) was signed to undertake a feasibility study for the establishment of an industrial park within the established industrial belts of Odisha. Similarly, the Electronics & IT department of Odisha signed an MoU with the Singapore-based Global Finance & Technology Network (GFTN) for setting up an InsureTech Hub Global Capabilities Centre in the state. Further, IDCO collaborated with Surbana Jurong of Singapore to provide consultancy services to the state of Odisha for strategic positioning and planning for Odisha Petro Chemical and Petroleum Investment Region. The last MoU was signed between Bhubaneswar Development Authority and Surbana Jurong to get consultancy services for preparing a new city development plan near Bhubaneswar. **MORE P3**

STATE HIKES SALARY OF JUNIOR TEACHERS

Bhubaneswar, Jan 17: The state government Friday hiked the monthly remuneration of junior teachers from ₹11,000 to ₹16,000, the CMO said in a statement. This hike will benefit around 13,740 teachers across the state, it said, adding that Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved the proposal, which will result in an additional expenditure of ₹89.15 crore to the state's exchequer. This apart, the government also raised the contribution to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF). The state will now contribute ₹1,950 per month towards EPF for each junior teacher, up from the previous amount of ₹1,443. Stating that the decision is part of the government's efforts to improve the socio-economic condition of teachers in the state, Majhi said his government is committed to enhancing the welfare of teachers.

Kota: NEET aspirant from state hangs self

It has been 17 days since the beginning of 2025, and the coaching hub of Kota has already seen three student suicides. The latest victim is an 18-year-old from Mayurbhanj, Odisha who aspired to become a doctor. Last year, the Rajasthan city had reported 17 cases of student suicides, while the previous year the figure was 26. The pressure to excel in education at any cost, thanks to unrealistic expectations from parents and society at large amid tough competition in the job market, has been taking a heavy toll on aspirants.

Kota, Jan 17: An 18-year-old NEET aspirant from Odisha allegedly hanged himself in his hostel room here -- the third such case in Kota this year --, police said Friday. Officials said that no suicide note was recovered from the room. The incident occurred in Ambedkar Colony, Vigyan Nagar area Thursday night. According to police, Abhijeet Giri, hailing from Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, had been preparing for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) at a coaching institute since April, 2024. The incident came to light when around 8 pm a mess worker went to deliver food to Abhijeet's room, a police officer said. Upon receiving no response, the mess worker along with a few hostellers forcibly opened the door and found him hanging from the ceiling fan, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Lal Singh Tanwar said. A police team reached the spot and sent the body for post-mortem, which will be conducted after his family arrives. They have been informed about the incident, the ASI added. He said that no suicide note was recovered from the room and the reason behind the suicide is yet to be ascertained.

Kuki-Zo apex body seeks separate admin

New Delhi, Jan 17: A four-member team of the apex body and political platform for all Kuki-Zo people in Manipur Friday placed its demand before the Centre for a separate administration for the community and the initiation of a political dialogue to resolve its issues. The demands were placed by a delegation, led by Henlianthang Thanglet, chairman, Kuki-Zo Council, before a two-member team of the Centre's representatives, led by interlocutor AK Mishra. "We placed our demand for a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo people of Manipur and the initiation of a political dialogue," Kuki-Zo Council spokesperson Ginza Vualzong told PTI over the phone. The Kuki-Zo community has been seeking a dialogue with the Centre to expedite a political solution over its demand for a Union Territory with a legislature under Article 239(A) of the Constitution for the community people living in the hill areas of Manipur. To prevent future confrontations between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, the council has been seeking complete adherence of the buffer zone by the Meiteis. The dialogue between the Kuki-Zo Council and the Centre's representatives was held days after the council met newly-appointed Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla in Chura-chandpur, seeking restoration of peace in the ethnic strife-torn northeastern state and solutions to the issues being faced by the community. Bhalla sought their cooperation in maintaining peace in Manipur and finding a solution. The Centre had, in October 2024, called the MLAs belonging to both the Kuki and Meitei communities to Delhi for a joint meeting. But the Kuki-Zo MLAs refused to sit together with their Meitei counterparts. Both groups of MLAs met the Centre's representatives separately. Organisations representing the Meiteis are opposed to the Kuki-Zo community's demand for a separate administration. The Meitei groups have also been seeking abrogation of the Suspension of Operation agreements with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups.

Justice Sinha acting CJ of Orissa High Court



Bhubaneswar, Jan 17: President Droupadi Murmu Friday appointed Justice Arindam Sinha, the senior-most puisne Judge of Orissa High Court, as its acting Chief Justice with effect from January 20. The move comes as incumbent Chief Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh is set to retire January 19. "President is pleased to appoint Justice Arindam Sinha, Judge of the Orissa High Court, to perform the duties of the office of the Chief Justice of that High Court with effect from 20.01.2025 consequent upon retirement of Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh, Chief Justice, Orissa High Court on 19.01.2025," said the notification issued by the Law Ministry. On Thursday, Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi bade farewell to Chief Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh at Lok Seva Bhawan Convention Centre.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



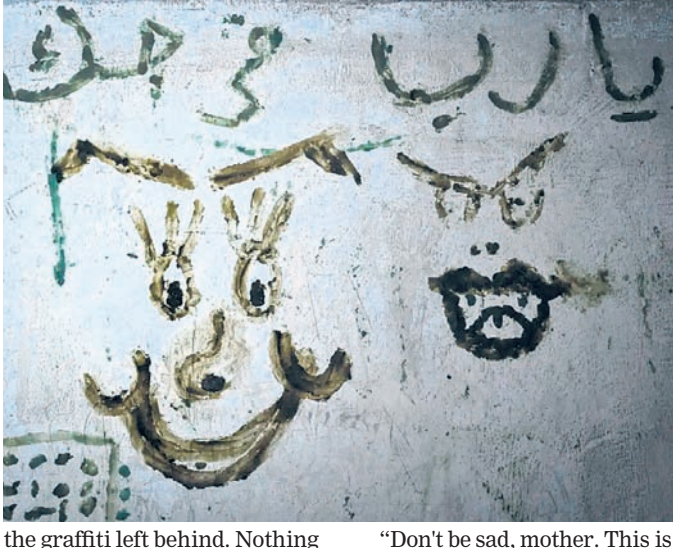
I used to be a pollster. Then I switched to something politicians are keen to back - podcasting!

Budget Session of Parl from Jan 31

New Delhi: Parliament's Budget Session will be held from January 31 to April 4, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to table her eighth straight Budget February 1. In line with the convention, the session will start with President Droupadi Murmu's address to a joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha January 31 followed by tabling of economic survey. "The Hon'ble President will address the joint sitting of both Houses on 31st January 2025 at 11:00 Hrs in the Lok Sabha Chamber. Union Budget 2025-26 to be presented on 1st February, 2025 in the Lok Sabha," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a post on X.

Prison graffiti express fear, love of tormented Syrians

Damascus, Jan 17: Languishing in a dungeon cell of Syria's then-ruler Bashar Assad, an unknown prisoner scrawled a verse of Arabic poetry on his cell wall - an expression of pain and love amid his torment. "My country, even if it oppresses me, is dear. My people, even if uncharitable to me, are generous," he wrote. It's a well-known verse, composed 800 years ago by a poet defying a tyrannical caliph. As you walk through the cold, dark cells of Assad's prisons, the graffiti on the walls cry out. They plead to God and yearn for loved ones. Often mysterious, they preserve fragments of what anonymous men were thinking as they faced torture and death. "Trust no one, not even your brother," someone darkly warns on a cell wall in Damascus' notorious Palestine Branch detention facility. "Oh Lord, bring relief," groans another. Since 2011, tens of thousands of Syrians vanished inside the network of prisons and detention facilities run by Assad's security forces as they tried to crush his opposition. Inmates went for years without contact with the outside world, living in overcrowded, windowless cells where their cellmates died around them. Torture and beatings were inflicted daily. Mass executions were frequent. Most inmates would have fully expected to die. They had no reason to believe anyone would ever see the messages they scratched into the walls except future prisoners. One wrote a single word in Arabic, "ashtaqtalak" - "I miss you" - a love letter that could never be sent to a beloved whose name only the writer need know. More than a month after the prisons were opened by insurgents who ousted Assad in December, The Associated Press toured several facilities to view



the graffiti left behind. Nothing can be known about the men who drew and wrote them. Only a few bear names, and few are dated. It's impossible to know who of them lived or died. Some walls have layers of graffiti on top of each other, marking generations of suffering. "Don't be sad, mother. This is my fate," reads one, dated Jan 1, 2024. Underneath it are traces of an older text, so faded that only a few words are legible: "... except for you" - a hint of longing for a loved one. Many of the writings and drawings are cries to parents or loved ones. Someone drew

a heart broken in two, with "mother" written in one side, "father" in the other. Some quote poetry. "When you wage your wars, think of those who ask for peace," reads one, slightly misremembering a verse by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Many kept calendars, filling walls with grids of numbers. "A year passed," was one prisoner's terse summary above a field of 365 dots arranged in rows. Some drawings are even playful, like googly-eye cartoon faces or a joint of hashish. Others are flights of fancy whose meaning, if any, was known only to the prisoner. One scene shows a landscape of rolling hills and forests of bare trees, where a pack of wolves howls at the sky and a bird of prey grips a hissing snake in its talons. Darkness and fear hang over most, along with attempts to endure. "Patience is beautiful, and God the one from whom we seek help," one wrote. **14-yr jail term for Imran Khan** **Islamabad, Jan 17:** A Pakistan court Friday sentenced former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi to 14 and seven years in prison respectively after finding them guilty of corruption in the 190 million pounds al-Qadir Trust case. Judge Nasir Javed Rana of the anti-corruption court announced the verdict that had been deferred thrice due to different reasons. The judge announced the verdict in a makeshift court set up in Adila jail. Besides jail sentences, Khan was fined ₹1 million and Bushra Bibi half a million rupees. Failure to pay the fine will entail an additional six months of imprisonment for Khan and three months for Bibi. The court also ordered the confiscation of the land of Al-Qadir University set up by them.



CHRIS MARTIN SEEN EXPLORING MUMBAI AT MARINE DRIVE

Chris Martin, the frontman of the British rock band, *Coldplay*, was spotted exploring the entertainment capital of India at the iconic Marine Drive. The singer and his partner Dakota Johnson arrived in the city Thursday evening along with the band.

PALTROW DISTRIBUTING MEALS TO WILDFIRE VICTIMS

Hollywood actress Gwyneth Paltrow has confirmed her wellness company Goop has committed to more than \$2M worth of donations to charities. She is helping the victims of the California wildfires and organised the delivery of meals and care packages.



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ARIES
You are likely to give in to the demands of your children today. Ganesha says it is for times like this that you labour so hard. You will finish the tasks that you have been postponing for a long time. It is a good day for people in the medical field and in the public sector.

TAURUS
Today, you will be as creative and competent as you can get. Your work style, the deft way you handle things will awe and amaze your colleagues and superiors. Your subordinates will be highly impressed and motivated. They will be eager and compliant and will support and assist you to the utmost. The project you are working will progress speedily.

GEMINI
You will listen to your heart over your head, swept away as you will be in a flood of emotions today. This could mean that you will be unable to distinguish between good and bad. However, looking back upon your day in the evening, you are unlikely to regret any of the decisions you made, says Ganesha.

CANCER
You will begin the day with a definite plan for a bright future. You will resolutely implement plans that you have made thoughtfully. Such methodical decisions will save you a lot of time in the future. Ganesha says that you will succeed in every endeavour today.

LEO
Your natural self-confidence and capability will help you attain a position of strength today. As a result, all your tasks will be completed easily and you will reap rewards greater than your expectations, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
Ganesha says you realise the importance of family matters today. You have great skills when it comes to negotiations, and you will use them in settling disputes amicably. Ganesha says you have learned the lessons of life on staying level-headed, and that you keenly believe that opposition eventually leads to progress.

LIBRA
Ganesha says you will have a good time with your family members and will have fun with them. You will also be able to organize a picnic or a party for your family members and enjoy the day with them.

SCORPIO
Try to take a chill pill as you may be worried about petty issues today. Do not let them hinder your happiness and take a toll on your health. However, the day looks promising towards the end.

SAGITTARIUS
Suddenly, you become ambidextrous and plan to multi task today, says Ganesha. Your instincts will guide you today; trust them and move ahead. You may come across few challenges.

CAPRICORN
Actions speak louder than words. Your sincere efforts and honest intentions will motivate others also to put in their best, feels Ganesha. You'll be like a friend, philosopher and guide to them. People will follow you, but it has a darker side to as many will even over take you. It is certainly not a pleasant sight to see opportunities pass by!

AQUARIUS
You are disappointed and you seek solace in spirituality. Don't run away from the problems; rather face them with strength and confidence, advises Ganesha, to bring your life back on track. With patience and belief in the Almighty, you will be sail through the storm. Understand that challenges are a part of everyone's life.

PISCES
You are striving hard to influence your destiny. You are not going to kneel down without a fight against heavy odds. With persistent efforts you will succeed in achieving your goals. While victory is a given, hard work will be necessary. In brief, today will be a challenging day for you, says Ganesha.

Sobhita on cloud nine

Mumbai: Actress Sobhita Dhulipala is over-the-moon as her film *Monkey Man* got a BAFTA nod and tops Rotten Tomatoes Best Reviewed movie. The actress shared on social media that her film *Monkey Man* has entered the race for the BAFTAs, with Dev Patel receiving a nomination for Outstanding Debut by a British Director or Producer. The film won in the Best Action and Adventure Movies category. It was nominated alongside *Deadpool & Wolverine*, *The Fall Guy*, *Rebel Ridge* and *Twisters*. Sharing the news on her Instagram, she wrote, "AM I DREAMIN OR WHAT HOLY - A Bafta nomination. - Rotten tomatoes best reviewed action and adventure film 2024. #IndieForLife." *Monkey Man*, directed by Dev Patel, is an action-packed thriller about an ex-convict seeking redemption in a corrupt, chaotic world. The action thriller film is also produced by Patel. Apart from Dev who plays the title character, Sikandar Kher, Sharlto Copley, Pitobash, and Vipin Sharma play key roles in the movie. **IANS**



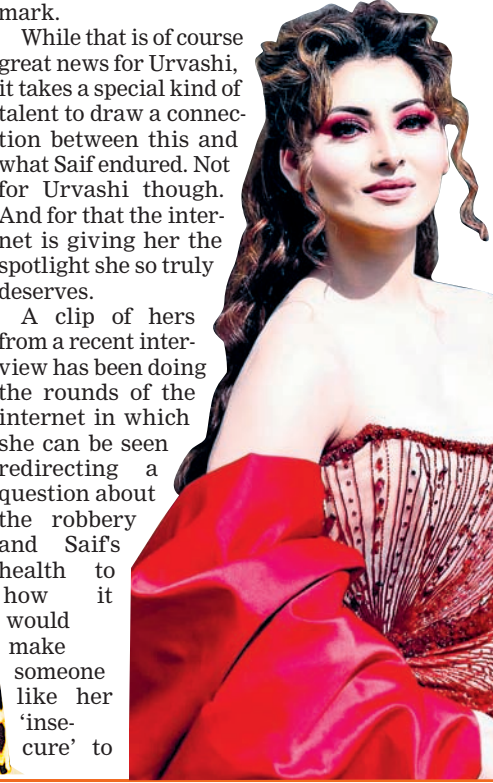
SAIF ALI KHAN STABBING CASE

Urvashi at receiving end

Mumbai: The unfortunate and thoroughly alarming incident that left Saif Ali Khan severely injured in the wee hours of Thursday morning has left the country shocked. Now Urvashi Rautela is anything but the layman. Her take on the situation is...well something only she could have come up with. For context, the actor starred in the Nandamuri Balakrishna starrer *Daaku Maharaaj* which has managed to cross the ₹105 crore mark. While that is of course great news for Urvashi, it takes a special kind of talent to draw a connection between this and what Saif endured. Not for Urvashi though. And for that the internet is giving her the spotlight she so truly deserves. A clip of hers from a recent interview has been doing the rounds of the internet in which she can be seen redirecting a question about the robbery and Saif's health to how it would make someone like her 'insecure' to

SRK connection

Mumbai: A new connection between the attack on actor Saif Ali Khan, and Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan has come to light. Earlier, a man was seen trying to look inside SRK's swanky bungalow, Mannat in the Bandstand area of Mumbai. The intruder tried to see inside SRK's house using a 6 to 8 feet long iron ladder. The cops even searched SRK's house to ensure his safety. What's more intriguing is that the person, who tried to look inside SRK's house appears to be similar, in terms of height and frame, to the culprit who attacked Saif on Thursday. Not only this, according to the information received by the Mumbai Police, the police suspect that the person cannot be alone because the iron ladder that was used to conduct the recce is not possible to lift a person alone, at least two to three people will be needed to lift it. Although no complaint has been filed by Shah Rukh Khan in this regard, but police are taking this matter seriously and are trying to find out whether the ladder that was used has any report of theft. step out in all her finery. The actor goes onto drop the '₹105 crore' tag her film has attained adding how the diamond-studded rolex from her mother and the emerald ring watch from her father, are sadly gifts she'll have to think twice about flaunting, now that something of this sort has happened. The internet is of course here for the aftermath of this morbid pop culture moment. "Plz keep her brain in museum", read a comment to which another replied, "N lock the museum". Other comments rallied on reading, "Kim kardashian from Temu", "Coming from urvashi .. it's kinda expected .. something off with this chick" and "A man almost died- look at my jewellery." **IANS**



All we imagine as Maha(n)!



It was a *Maha (big)* moment for us sometime back, when Kapadia's low-budget, independent film *All We Imagine as Light* got nominated for the Golden Globes in two distinct categories. Many such stories now regularly define India's moment in the sun. Come 2025 and a *Maha(n)* moment is being defined; grabbing world attention as the planet's largest cultural and religious gathering - the Maha Kumbh gets underway at Prayagraj. There is vigorous arrange-

ment in place to manage the purported 40 crore visitors, pets and pilgrims that will congregate at the Kumbhas also IIT Kanpur spearheads crowd management by digital monitoring of the colossal event. Brand IIT making quite a potful or *kumbh-ful* of news as an ex-IITian baba's holy presence grabs eye-balls! Embodying the doctrines of colossal ideas congregate and create quite a stir in the pot. Suffice to say lack of proper monitoring system in the frontal lobe of brain may be causing mis-management and vigorous spill-over from the kumbh into eye-ball grabbing statements made "on land." Given the tedious trip to the holy Triveni Sangam, could a dip in nearby Canal de Panamá afford to grant some form of atonement or its fresh water cleanse the mind and salvage a few holy thoughts? Madame Kapadia may want to make note of a possible theme for a future script that embodies all that is indeed maha(n) and all that is imagined as maha(n) in someone's mind to *make something great again*. The flick might just qualify in the run for Oscars. **DR RACHNA RATH**

Manana's foundation day drama fest concludes



Rangasala theatre troupe from Puri performed Odia play *Ardhamatra* on the fifth and final day of the event at Rabindra Mandap, Bhubaneswar, Friday. Written by Shankar Tripathy, the play was directed by Bikram Kumar Sahu. **PICT: BIKASH NAYAK**

PEANUTS



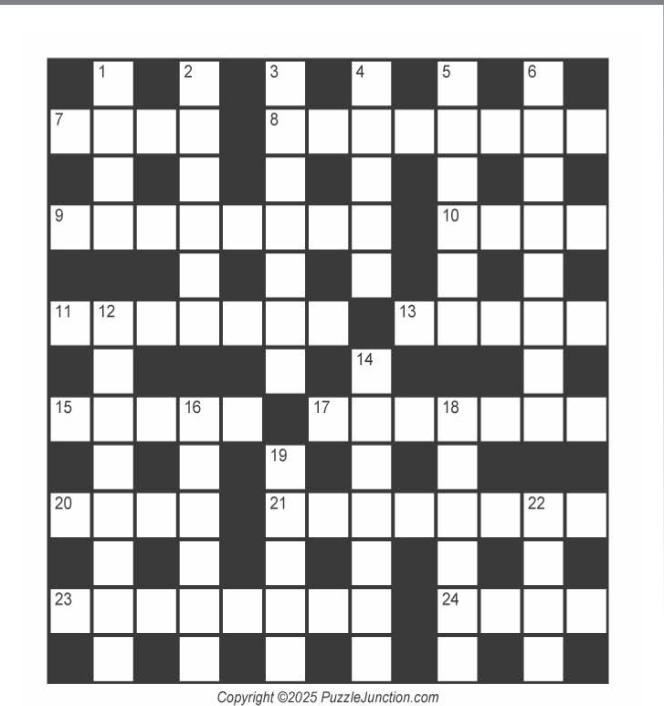
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Across**
7 Hitching place
8 Type of town or carriage (3-5)
9 Small S.A. monkey
10 Bypass
11 Disrespectful laugh
13 Acquired relative (2-3)
15 Kind of layer
17 Contagious viral disease
20 Gumption
21 Movie genre
23 Tea making step
24 Pay attention to
Down
1 Resting place
2 Before clock or number
3 Support and strengthen
4 Brawny
5 Murder
6 Guess
12 Israeli town
14 E-mail, for one
16 Eggnog topper
18 Get hot under the collar
19 Jellied garnish
22 It's for the birds

SUDOKU

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

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

SOLUTIONS



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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Odisha Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy waters a plant during the inaugural occasion of the '7th International Conference on Agriculture for Food Security & Nutrition' at OUAT in Bhubaneswar, Friday



downtown

CM flags off spl pilgrimage train

First batch of 800 senior citizens leave for holy places in Maharashtra

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 17: The first batch of 800 senior citizens from Khurda, Puri, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara and Dhenkanal districts began their pilgrimage to places in Maharashtra, such as Shirdi and Nashik, as Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi flagged off a special train to mark the launch of 'Senior Citizens' Pilgrimage Scheme' at Bhubaneswar railway station, Friday.

According to Chief Minister's Office (CMO) sources, this marks the start of the state government's ambitious initiative to send as many as 8,000 senior citizens on pilgrimage to places such as Shirdi, Nashik, Kolkata, Kamakhya, Ayodhya and Varanasi in 10 phases this year.

The pilgrimage train will operate in two phases from Bhubaneswar, Berhampur, Sambalpur, Rayagada and Balasore stations, they said.

The state government launched the 'Senior Citizens' Pilgrimage Scheme' to fulfil the spiritual and religious aspirations of economically-disadvantaged and below poverty line senior citizens in the state.

Majhi said temples were central to cultural exchanges in the past. "Temples were places where heritage, art, culture, literature, and economy were integrated. Every Indian aspires to visit pilgrimage sites and temples," he said.

He highlighted that special officers, guides, and medical teams have been arranged to accompany the pilgrims throughout the journey to ensure a safe and convenient travel.

The state government has al-



so facilitated the movement of all pilgrims from their villages to respective railway stations where the journey begins, the CM said.

Additionally, arrangements have been made for their accommodation, food, and drinking water during the trip, as well as transportation from the railway stations to the pilgrimage sites, he added.

Majhi appealed to the pilgrims to remain cautious during their journey and follow the instruction of the officers and guides deployed for their assistance.

Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida said that the 'Senior Citizens' Pilgrimage Scheme' is a unique programme to promote cultural tourism in the state.



Industries and Skill Development & Technical Education Minister Sampad Chandra Swain, Khurda MLA Prasanta Jagadev, Jagatsinghpur MLA Amarendra Das, Brahmagiri MLA Upasna Mohapatra, Puri

MLA Sunil Kumar Mohanty, Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh and Tourism department Special Secretary Balamukunda Bhuyan were present at the flagging off ceremony.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: Sembcorp Industries Friday signed two non-binding memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with the government of Odisha to explore setting up of green hydrogen production facility in the state.

Sembcorp's wholly-owned subsidiaries Sembcorp Green Hydrogen India Pvt Ltd (SGHIPL) and Sembcorp Development Ltd signed the MOUs in the presence of Singapore's Minister for Transport and Second Minister for Finance Chee Hong Tat and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, the company said in a statement.

"Under the MOU signed with Industrial Promotion & Investment Corporation of Odisha Limited, SGHIPL will explore the development of a production facility for green hydrogen and its derivatives, with an anticipated production capacity of 720,000 tonnes per annum. The facility, to be strategically located in Odisha, is expected to generate over 2,000 employment opportunities during its operational phase," it said.

Sembcorp Development Ltd has also signed a non-binding MOU with Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation to assess the potential for the development of an industrial park in the state.

"These MOUs build upon the framework outlined by the Governments of Singapore and India to enhance bilateral collaboration, with a focus on six key pillars, including sustainability. With abundant resources and investor-friendly

BJP govt usurping credit for Naveen's projects: Lenin

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 17: The Opposition BJP Friday accused the BJP dispensation, led by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, of taking mileage from the developmental works done by the previous government in showcasing the state's infrastructural growth before visiting Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

BJD spokesperson Lenin Mohanty said both the World Skill Center (WSC) and Bharat Biotech plant, where the CM accompanied the Singapore President, were built during the Naveen Patnaik government in the state.

He claimed that the BJP government has no contribution towards the development of the WSC or vaccine manufacturing plant set up in Odisha.

"The WSC was built by the previous BJP government at an expenditure of Rs 1,200 crore," Mohanty said. "The BJP government has given half the information in the advertisement put out for the Singapore President's visit to the state. The advertisement would have been complete if it mentioned Naveen Patnaik's work in building the WSC and vaccine manufacturing unit by Bharat Biotech," Mohanty said. He claimed that during the last 24 years, the BJP government had strengthened the information technology and infrastructure in the state. "The credit for this goes only to former CM Naveen Patnaik. The BJP government is standing on the foundation laid by the Naveen government," he said.

"CM Mohan Charan Majhi is now showing the infrastructure built by Patnaik to the visiting Singapore President," the BJD spokesperson said.

The Singapore President is on a two-day visit to Odisha.

Sembcorp to set up green hydrogen facility in state

Pradhan discusses Indian education system with S'pore President



AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 17: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan discussed the positive changes taking place in the Indian education system and the National Education Policy in the evolving educational landscape with visiting Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam here, Friday.

Earlier in the day, Pradhan, along with Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, welcomed Shanmugaratnam, who arrived on a two-day Odisha visit, at the airport here. Later, in a bilateral meeting, Pradhan held fruitful discussions on strengthening cooperation between India and Singapore in the fields of education, research, and innovation, and building a stronger knowledge bridge.

polices, Odisha is pivotal to India's transition to a low-carbon future. Sembcorp continues to explore opportunities to deepen its presence in India, with the support of partners

In a separate meeting, a pact was inked between Odisha and Singapore in various sectors in the presence of Majhi, Pradhan, the Singapore President and the accompanying delegation. Pradhan stated that several MoUs signed between Singapore and Odisha mark a new chapter in international cooperation between the two countries.

These agreements, he added, will further enhance Odisha's human capital through the state's skill development ecosystem, foster 21st-century skills, and strengthen the industrial sector, and research and innovation. "This is a welcome agreement in preparing Odisha for the future, as it will bolster the state's skill ecosystem and accelerate its industrial and socio-economic growth," the Union Minister remarked.

like Enterprise Singapore," it said.

The MOUs exchange took place on the sidelines of the visit of Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam.

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Hon'ble Prime Minister

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Inauguration

18 JANUARY 2025 | 05:30 PM

Venue : P.H.D. Ground, Ainthapali, Sambalpur

Chief Guest

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan
Hon'ble Education Minister, Government of India

In the august presence of

Shri Rabi Narayan Naik
Hon'ble Minister of Rural Development, Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water, Government of Odisha

ATTRACTIONS

Children's Activities | Literary Sessions | Cultural Evenings

P.H.D. Ground, Ainthapali, Sambalpur

राष्ट्रीय परीक्षा एजेंसी
National Testing Agency

(उच्चतर शिक्षा विभाग, शिक्षा मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार के तहत एक स्वायत्त संगठन)
(An Autonomous Organization under the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Gol)

Announcement for Inviting Online Application for National Council for Hotel Management (NCHM JEE)-2025

National Testing Agency is going to conduct NCHM JEE 2025 on behalf of National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology (Under Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India) for admission in Bachelor of Science in Hospitality and Hotel Administration in the NCHMCT affiliated Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs).

Date of submission of online application form	16.12.2024 to 15.02.2025 Upto (05:00 P.M)
Date of exam	27.04.2025 (Sunday)

Information Brochure with all other necessary details with regard to the registration for examination will be made available on the Official Website(s) of the National Testing Agency on <https://exams.nta.ac.in/NCHM/and/or/NCHMCT> website on <https://nchm.gov.in/>

Interested candidates are advised to apply before the last date and regularly visit above Official websites for latest updates.

In case any candidate faces difficulty in applying for NCHM JEE2025, she/he may contact on 011 - 40759000 / 011 - 69227700 or e-mail at nchm@nta.ac.in

Sd/-
(Director)

राष्ट्रीय परीक्षा एजेंसी
National Testing Agency

(उच्चतर शिक्षा विभाग, शिक्षा मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार के तहत एक स्वायत्त संगठन)
(An Autonomous Organization under the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Gol)

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR INVITING ONLINE APPLICATION FOR ALL INDIA SAINIK SCHOOLS ENTRANCE EXAM (AISSEE-2025)

National Testing Agency is going to conduct AISSEE-2025 on behalf of Sainik Schools Society (Under Ministry of defence, Govt. of India) for admission to Class VI and Class IX in Sainik School/ New Sainik Schools across the country, for the academic year 2025-26.

Submission of online Application Form	24.12.2024 to 23.01.2025	
Date of exam	Will be announced on the NTA website later	
Mode of exam	Pen Paper mode (OMR)	
Paper pattern	Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)	
Exam fee	Category	Fee Payable
	General/Wards of Defence personnel and ex-servicemen/OBC (NCL) as per central list	Rs. 800/-
	Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes	Rs. 650/-

Information Brochure with all other necessary details with regard to the registration for examination will be made available on the Official Website(s) of the National Testing Agency on www.nta.ac.in; <https://exams.nta.ac.in/AISSEE/>.

Interested candidates are advised to apply before the last date and regularly visit above Official websites for latest updates.

In case any candidate faces difficulty in applying for AISSEE 2025, she/he may contact on 011 - 40759000 / 011 - 69227700 or e-mail at aisssee@nta.ac.in

Sd/-
(Director)

NITR brings new cathode tech to drive India's EV, RE growth



POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Jan 17: Researchers at the National Institute of Technology, Rourkela have developed a new class of cathode materials for lithium-ion batteries, offering a promising alternative to cobalt-based designs, according to officials. The innovative research, funded by the Department of Science and Technology's Nanomission programme and conducted in collaboration with the Department of Physics and Astronomy at the premier institute, will address challenges associated with the high cost, scarcity, and environmental concerns of cobalt, a key component in conventional lithium-ion batteries, they added. The research team led by Partha Saha, Associate Professor, Ceramic Engineering at NIT Rourkela includes Associate Professor Sanjoy Dutta, Research Graduate Soumyasree Jena and Research Scholar Abhishek Kumar, developed magnesium-based cathode

materials as a sustainable and cost-effective alternative to cobalt without compromising performance. Lead researcher Saha said lithium-ion batteries, which power devices like smartphones, laptops, and electric vehicles (EVs), predominantly use cobalt-based cathodes. However, cobalt presents several challenges, including its high cost and price volatility, limited availability, with major sources in countries like Cuba, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea, and significant environmental and ethical concerns associated with its extraction. These issues are becoming increasingly critical as the demand for EVs and lithium-ion batteries continues to grow. Projections indicate that by 2050, the global supply of cobalt may not meet the rising demand, underscoring the urgent need to develop alternative materials, he said. Magnesium offers several advantages -- it is affordable,

abundant, and widely available in India, with significant deposits in Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhnad, and Karnataka. Additionally, magnesium is environmentally friendly, helping to reduce the ecological impact of battery production. "Our research shows that the new cathode retains 74.3 per cent of its original capacity after 100 charge-discharge cycles, a significant improvement over the rapid capacity loss observed in traditional cobalt-based cathodes," he said. Additionally, the new cathode minimises the cationic disorder of nickel in lithium sites -- a common issue in traditional NMC-based cathodes that leads to capacity and voltage fade, he said. Saha explained that this breakthrough has wide-ranging implications and applications and paves the way to produce affordable, high-performance batteries for electric vehicles, contributing significantly to the growing EV industry. Additionally, it supports India's renewable energy goals by enabling cost-effective energy storage solutions essential for sustainable development. By reducing dependency on imported materials, this innovation also enhances India's self-reliance in battery production, strengthening the country's position in the global energy market, he said.



STALK TO SUGAR: Sugarcane crushing commenced after a ceremony was held at the factory of Aska Cooperative Sugar Industries Limited at Aska in Ganjam district, Friday

Mid-winter bird census today in water bodies across Odisha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, Jan 17: The mid-winter bird census in major water bodies across the state, including Chilika lagoon, the biggest waterfowl habitat in the country, will be conducted Saturday. A training programme for the enumerators was held at the Wetland Training and Research Centre (WTRC) near Chilika Friday, where bird enthusiasts from different organisations took part. State's Forest and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia inaugurated the training programme. The bird census will be held in the major water bodies in 58 forest divisions in the state simultaneously from 6am to 11am Saturday, Singh Khuntia said. Bird experts and ornithologists of various organisations have imparted training to the participants on the scientific method of counting birds, he said. "I thank the reputed organisations like Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) for participating in the census activities in the Chilika Lake," the minister said. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Wildlife, Prem Kumar Jha, also attended

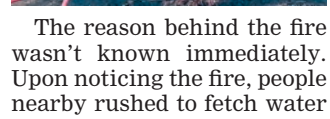


the inaugural session of the training. The staff of Chilika Wildlife Division, the experts of Chilika Development Authority (CDA), students of the state-owned Odisha University of Agriculture and Training (OUAT) and activists of various organisations will participate in the census. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Chilika Wildlife Division, Amlan Nayak, said a total of 21 groups have been formed. Each group consists of at least five to six people for the enumeration of the birds across the lake. "We have requested the boat operators not to operate their vessels for bird count," he said. Last winter, a total of 11,37,759 birds of 187 different species were counted in the 1,100 sq km blue lagoon, official sources said. The winged guests from far-off places visit the lake every winter to escape the severe cold in their natives. They start their homeward journey with the onset of summer.

1,500 qtls paddy destroyed in fire

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rayagada, Jan 17: A sudden fire broke out in a paddy heap at Patabandh village under Kalyansinghpur block in Rayagada district, reducing it to ashes Friday afternoon. Approximately 1,500 quintals of paddy stacked in the granary of eight people has been destroyed in the fire. Farmers had harvested the paddy and stored it in the granary and were planning to sell it at the market Friday. The reason behind the fire wasn't known immediately. Upon noticing the fire, people nearby rushed to fetch water from their homes and nearby canals but were unable to extinguish the flames in time. They also contacted the fire department. Fire tenders arrived at the scene and managed to control the fire. After the incident, Revenue Inspectors Ramachandra Acharya and Namita Rani Gamang arrived at the location and compiled a list of the people who had suffered losses.



Rescue efforts on at Dalmia cement factory

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Jan 17: Rescue operations were ongoing Friday at the Dalmia Bharat Cement Ltd. (DBCL) plant in Rajgangpur, where three workers were trapped under a collapsed coal hopper. The incident occurred Thursday evening at around 6pm in the boiler area of the plant's captive power unit, and the workers' whereabouts remained unknown at the time of reporting. Authorities expected the operation to continue for a few more hours.

According to a company press release, the coal hopper, operated by a third-party vendor, fell suddenly, resulting in three workers being buried under the rubble. "We are saddened to report an accident due to collapse of a coal hopper in the boiler areas of the captive power plant, located at Rajgangpur," the release said. Injured workers were receiving medical care, and emergency protocols had been activated,



including securing the site. The plant's operational team, in coordination with district administration officials, has been leading the rescue efforts. "Safety remains our top priority, and we are fully committed to ensuring secure working conditions," the company added. ADM, Sundargarh Abhimanyu Majhi confirmed that approximately 50-60 rescue personnel, including 24 from the Odisha Disaster Rapid Action

Force (ODRAF), were at the scene. "The rescue operation is complicated. The coal hopper must be cut open to reach the trapped workers, but we have to be cautious not to generate excessive heat, which could cause the coal to ignite," Majhi explained. He also dismissed media reports claiming that a mob had forced its way into the plant, stating that while tensions were running high, the situation was under control. The accident is expected

to severely impact the plant, which had already been undergoing a major shutdown for maintenance, affecting production. Authorities were reportedly alerted about the structural weaknesses of the coal hopper prior to the collapse. Following the incident, the plant halted power supply for over 30 minutes. This is the second significant accident at the plant in recent months, following a conveyor belt collapse that occurred a few months ago, though no injuries were reported at the time

EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No.: ETC-M-CD-BBS-DEO-19-25, Dtd.: 08.01.2025
Name of Work: OUTSOURCING OF THE WORK OF DATA ENTRY OPERATORS FOR MANAGING STATISTICS AND DATA MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY OF COACHING DEPOT, BHUBANESWAR FOR A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS.
Advertised Value: ₹98,12,179.17
EMD: Rs. 1,96,300/-, Tender Doc. Cost: Rs. 5,900/-
Completion Period: 36 Months, Bidding Start Date: 15.01.2025
Tender closing Date & Time: At 1530 hrs. on 29.01.2025
The tender documents & complete details are available at www.ireps.gov.in
Coaching Depot Officer Bhubaneswar
PR-888/P/24-25

Indian Railways expands rail connectivity in western Odisha

Bargarh Road-Nawapara Road Special Rly Project makes substantial progress



Bhubaneswar/Bargarh, Jan 17: The Indian Railways has achieved significant progress in constructing the 138.32-km new railway line connecting Bargarh Road to Nawapara Road. This Special Railway Project is expected to revolutionise the transportation landscape in western Odisha by providing a new, shorter, and more efficient route for both passenger and freight services. The Bargarh Road-Nawapara Road line, with a total cost of Rs 2,621.92 crore, was approved by the Railway Board September 10, 2024. The Odisha government has played a pivotal role in supporting this ambitious project by offering land free of cost and

providing a grant of Rs 300 crore to ensure its smooth execution. A crucial component of the project is the acquisition of 924.64 hectares of land, with an estimated cost of Rs 364 crore. This includes 752.524 hectares of private land, 123.233 hectares of government land, and 48.913 hectares of forest land. The new railway line will be an electrified broad gauge (BG) main line, offering a more efficient alternative to the congested Jharsuguda-Bilasapur-Raipur corridor. The new route will reduce travel by 53 km compared to the Sambalpur-Jharsuguda-Raipur route and by 87 km compared to the Sambalpur-Titlagarh-Raipur route, thereby improving

transit times for passengers and freight. The project will boost freight capacity between Odisha and Chhattisgarh, benefiting industries such as steel plants, coal transportation, and iron ore shipping to key locations like Raipur. The line will support the transportation of finished steel from steel plants, coal from Angul, and iron ore from Daitari and Gandhamardhan, significantly reducing logistics costs and enhancing trade efficiency. According to East Coast Railway (ECOR) sources, the route will improve access to major industrial hubs such as JSW Steel in Lapanga, Vedanta Aluminium Ltd. in Jharsuguda, and ACC Bargarh Cement Works in Bargarh. In addition to enhancing passenger transportation, the project will serve as a critical enabler for regional economic growth. It will benefit a wide range of industries, including steel, cement, food grains, and coal, thus fostering economic development in the region.

Minor victim consumes poison on court premises during hearing of 'rape' case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kendrapara, Jan 17: A 16-year-old girl, who was allegedly raped in June last year, attempted to kill herself by consuming poison on court premises in Kendrapara Friday, police said. She was first taken to the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack and then to the Government District Headquarters Hospital in Kendrapara, they said. Her condition is "stated to be serious" and an investigation is underway, said

Inspector in-Charge of Kendrapara Town police station, Dilip Sahoo. The minor attempted to end her life by consuming poison in the washroom of Kendrapara Additional District Judge-cum-Special Judge Court (POCSO) here when the hearing was underway, the officer said. The girl was allegedly sexually assaulted June 6 last year. Police had later arrested a 21-year-old accused in the case. The court proceedings were suspended following the incident, sources said.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON (SEE SECTION 82 (2) (ii) Cr.P.C.)
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) Sushil Kumar Mohanty Proprietor of M/s Sarada Enterprises Village Mukund Prasad Plot No. 182/3577 PS Khurda Distt. Khurda Bhubaneswar Road Mukunda Prasad 752057 Odisha has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Case Ct. No. 3125/2020, U/s 138 NI Act, PS Model Town, Delhi and it has been returned to a Warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) Sushil Kumar Mohanty can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) Sushil Kumar Mohanty has absconded (or is concealing herself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person(s) Sushil Kumar Mohanty of Case Ct. No. 3125/2020, U/s 138 NI Act, PS Model Town, Delhi is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before dated 21.03.2025 at 10:00 AM. By Order Sh. Himanshu Seltho Metropolitan Magistrate-03 Court No. 213 (North), Rohini Courts, Delhi
DP/692/NW/2025 (Court Matter)

Youth meet on decency held

Jajpur: The eradication of indecency and the establishment of peace and nonviolence are essential steps towards building a harmonious society, said Jajpur MP Ravi Narayan Behera during the inauguration of an event at the Shovaniya Shikshashram campus in Udayagiri under the Barchana block in Jajpur district. He added that promoting the teachings of Lord Buddha and avoiding conflict could pave the way for societal progress, which was the main goal of Kumar Bhai, the founder of International Indecency Prevention Movement. The event, an international youth assembly on harmony, was held Thursday under the chairmanship of the movement's director Arundhati Devi, Monday. Barchana MLA Amar Kumar Nayak attended the programme as the chief guest and dedicated the assembly to the mission of the eminent Buddhist guru Padmasambhava. Distinguished speakers included Buddhist researcher Harish Chandra Prusti, Professors Prabir Kumar Pattanayak, Balakrishna Mahapatra, London-based youth delegate Bhagyashree Singh, Trilochan Nayak, and Anita Sabat. Scholars from Vietnam, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Bangalore University, along with Ajay Sharma from Uttarakhnad and Paramjit Singh from Ramadevi University, presented their research papers at the assembly. Students from various districts of Odisha, residing and studying at the Shovaniya Shikshashram, performed cultural programmes inspired by the works of Kumar Bhai. The event was supported by Barada Mohanty, Mamata Pradhan and Minati Devi.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA E-Mail: rw_sundargarh@yahoo.co.in
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, SUNDARGARH
E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
BID IDENTIFICATION NO.ONLINE-SESG-26 OF 2024-25
No.O-1270: Name of the Work: Road Works, 2. Total No. of Works: 1 No. Road, 3. Estimated Cost: Rs.4.19 Lakhs to Rs.38.02 Lakhs (Approximately). 4. E.M.D.: Please refer DTCN. 5. Cost of Tender Document: As per annexure. 6. Class of Contractor: 'Only B'. 7. Period of Completion: 01 Calendar Month. 8. Type of Tender: Double Cover. 7. Other details:
Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in
OIPR-25046/11/0037/2425

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding	
		From	To
1	2	3	4
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division, Sundargarh	Online-SESG-26 of 2024-25	20.01.2025 at 10.00 P.M.	27.01.2025 05.00 P.M.

Sd./- Superintending Engineer Rural Works Division, Sundargarh

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA E-Mail: eerwkesinga@yahoo.com
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS DIVISION, KESINGA
E-Procurement Notice
BID IDENTIFICATION NO.RWKSNG-online-05/2024-25
No.O-1278: 1. Name of Works: Building Works (As per annexure). 2. Total No. of Work: 8 Nos. 3. Estimated Cost: Rs.4.19 Lakhs to Rs.38.02 Lakhs (Approximately). 4. E.M.D.: Please refer DTCN. 5. Cost of Tender Document: As per annexure. 6. Class of Contractor: 'D, C & B' Class. 7. Period of Completion: As per annexure. 8. Other Details: As per DTCN.
Further details can be seen from the Website i.e. www.tenderodisha.gov.in
OIPR-25153/11/0007/2425

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender on-line for bidding		Last date and time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender
		From	To		
Additional Chief Engineer, Rural Works Division, Kesinga	RWKSNG-online-05/24-25	20.01.2025 at 14.00 P.M.	30.01.2025 upto 17.00 P.M.	27.01.2025 upto 11.00 A.M.	31.01.2025 at 11.00 P.M.

Sd./- Additional Chief Engineer Rural Works Division, Kesinga

To listen to some devout people, one would imagine that God never laughs.

SRI AUROBINDO



Strategic Snub

Chandigarh, the city that wears two hats as the shared capital of Punjab and Haryana, is back in the spotlight—but not for its architectural charm or serene lake. Two recent decisions by the Centre have stirred a cocktail of political uproar and administrative change, leaving Punjab fuming and bureaucratic systems reshuffled. First, the Ministry of Personnel dropped a bombshell by abolishing the post of Adviser to the Chandigarh Administrator, replacing it with the post of Chief Secretary of the Union Territory. While the notification might seem like routine tinkering, its political implications hit like a thunderclap. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Congress, and Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD)—otherwise rivals—found common ground in slamming the BJP-led Centre. The ruling sentiment? This isn't just about a title swap; it's a perceived blow to Punjab's dignity and rights over the UT. Meanwhile, another Centre-driven decision shook the Chandigarh Police structure. The force now has sanctioned posts for an Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) and Deputy Inspector General (DIG), replacing the earlier practice of IGP-led hierarchy. While this reordering won't displace the current leadership—ADGP Surender Singh Yadav already heads the police—it signals a formal shift towards aligning Chandigarh's policing framework with other Union Territories.

The timing of these announcements is striking. For Punjab, which has long viewed Chandigarh as its rightful territory, these moves feel like a strategic snub. For the Centre, it's perhaps an attempt to streamline administration. Either way, this twin development underscores the need for a broader conversation on Chandigarh's governance. The city deserves better than being in a perennial tug-of-war.

Decoding the Centre's mid-Budget shuffle

True to its reputation for springing surprises, the Centre has reshuffled key administrative positions, swapping Revenue Secretary Arunish Chawla (IAS: 1992: BH) with DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey (IAS: 1987: OD). Pandey, now Revenue Secretary, steps into this crucial role while Chawla takes over as the Secretary of DIPAM. The move, coming right in the middle of the Union Budget season, has certainly raised eyebrows.



BABUDOM BYTES
Dilip Cheria

The reshuffle relieves Pandey of his additional responsibilities with the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE), allowing him to focus exclusively on his Ministry of Finance role just months before his retirement on July 31. Meanwhile, Chawla inherits the dual burdens of the Culture Ministry and DPE, on top of his new role in DIPAM. With service tenure until 2028, Chawla seems to have a longer runway to navigate these responsibilities.

Both Pandey and Chawla are trusted hands within the corridors of power in New Delhi. However, the timing and nature of this reshuffle have fueled speculation. The Revenue Department, especially ahead of the Union Budget, is an intense portfolio requiring constant attention. While some argue that Chawla's additional workload—especially with major events like Republic Day and Maha Kumbh—might have influenced the decision, others point out that such factors were likely considered when he was appointed Revenue Secretary just weeks ago.

Skeptics view the reshuffle as a reflection of the government's preference for experience, with Pandey's familiarity with budgetary matters giving him an edge. Even so, the abruptness of the move has left many officials puzzled, though the government's prerogative in such matters leaves little room for debate.

Empowering citizens or policing narratives?

The Uttar Pradesh police's initiative to enlist social media influencers and students as "digital warriors" has sparked interest and debate. The plan is ambitious: counter fake news, spread cybercrime awareness and highlight police achievements. While this effort builds on an earlier "digital volunteers" programme, its expanded scope raises questions about its real intent.

Previously, the police relied on volunteers like teachers, lawyers, and retired soldiers, connected via WhatsApp, to report crimes and debunk rumours. Now, with the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 underway, they're targeting tech-savvy students and influencers to operate across platforms like Instagram and X (formerly Twitter). The strategy includes workshops, cyber-awareness training, and creating cyber clubs in schools to foster critical thinking and digital literacy.

On the surface, this appears to be well-structured. It's voluntary and aims to empower youth to tackle online misinformation. Influencers see it as a way to contribute positively to society. However, the campaign coincides with the government's New Digital Media Policy, 2024, which incentivises influencers to promote state achievements with rewards of up to ₹8 lakh a month while threatening legal action against "objectionable" or "anti-national" content.

This overlap blurs the lines between combating fake news and controlling the narrative. While training students to analyze and verify information is commendable, the risk of turning digital warriors into unpaid propagandists is real. Programmes like this should prioritize public interest over public relations, ensuring they don't become tools to stifle dissent or overly glorify the state.

Empowering citizens to fight misinformation is critical in today's digital age. But the balance between fostering genuine engagement and serving political agendas is delicate. If the focus remains on public empowerment and transparency, "digital warriors" could be a transformative initiative. Otherwise, it risks being dismissed as yet another PR exercise.

Share a habu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

WISDOM CORNER

It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of nonviolence to cover impotence.

MAHATMA GANDHI

Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear

NELSON MANDELA

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1871:** The German Empire was founded by Otto von Bismarck in the aftermath of three successful wars by the state of Prussia.
- 1911:** The first aircraft landing on a ship's flight deck was performed by American pilot Eugene Ely on the battleship Pennsylvania in San Francisco Bay.
- 1943:** To save on the costs of labour and equipment, the United States banned the sale of presliced bread during World War II.

FOCUS SINGAPORE PREZ IN ODISHA

RESONATING PARA-DIPLOMACY

Three events in quick succession in Odisha within less than six months highlight Odisha's increasing profile in para-diplomacy, which means states as stakeholders in outreach with foreign countries in a federal setup like India. First it was the Bali Jatra in Cuttack in November last year, which witnessed the gracious presence of foreign diplomats, particularly from Southeast Asian countries. The congregation showcased Odisha's civilizational link with South-east Asia and maritime trade with the region. Much before the late Prime Minister Narasinha Rao initiated India's 'look-east' policy, which was scaled up to the 'act east' policy by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, Odisha shared a robust cultural and civilisational connect with Southeast Asia. Yet another instance of Odisha's connection with Indonesia was Odisha's iconic figure, the late Biju Pattanaik, and the ace pilot who was entrusted by the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to fly the top Indonesian leaders, including Sultan Sjahrir, from the colonial Dutch encirclement to New Delhi to participate in the historic Asian Relations Conference, which India organised in April 1947, ahead of the country's independence on 15th August, 1947.

The second event was the holding of the biannual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD). The flagship programme of the Ministry of External Affairs was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the 9th of this month and was also addressed by President Draupadi Murmu in the valedictory session. The session was also addressed by the President of Trinidad and Tobago virtually. The event was



Much before the late Prime Minister Narasinha Rao initiated India's 'look-east' policy, which was scaled up to 'act east' policy by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, Odisha shared a robust cultural and civilisational connect with Southeast Asia



Rup Narayan Das

THE ODIA COMMUNITY IN SINGAPORE, WHILE MAINTAINING IT CULTURAL IDENTITY, HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWTH OF SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY IN VARIOUS SECTORS

participated by influential and high-profile Indian diaspora, including those from Odisha. The successful conclusion of the 18th edition of PBD was also addressed by S. Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister. PBD provided a platform and a meeting ground to the Indian diaspora and entrepreneurs and industrialists from Odisha, with the state government offering avenues of cooperation and collaboration. The Ministry of External Affairs has a dedicated States Division to facilitate interaction between the states and foreign countries for investment and collaboration.

It is against this backdrop that the President of Singapore, Tharman Shanmugratnam, who arrived in India on the 15th, is concluding his tour with a visit to Odisha. During his stay in the state, Shanmugratnam visited a vaccine manufacturing unit of Bharat Biotech and also the World Skill Centre supported by Singapore's Institute of Technical Education Services and signed

a number of important MoUs with the state government pertaining to skill development, new energy, and development of new cities. The visit of Singapore President also has traction in the sense that a sizeable Odia diaspora lives in Singapore. The Odia community in Singapore, while maintaining their cultural identity, have contributed to the growth of Singapore's economy in various sectors including ICT.

In terms of historical connection, it is noteworthy to mention that during World War II, when Japan occupied Singapore from 1942 to 1945, Indian nationalists joined hands with Japan to bring an end to the British dominance in the East. It was against this backdrop that Singapore became the base from which efforts by the overseas Indians to jettison British rule in India were envisaged. The swift surrender of British forces in February 1942 created a temporary power vacuum that facilitated new actors to emerge on the political stage. At that

time, one of the main parties was the Indian Independent League, which was established under the Japanese auspices. The legendary Subhas Chandra Bose, who was born and grew up in Odisha, gave the clarion call of 'Delhi Chalo' in Singapore in 1943. The Indian community in Singapore on the eve of World War II was a fragmented one. It was Bose who fostered a sense of pan-Indian nationalism in Singapore. For a short time in 1943, Singapore served as the seat of the Provisional Government of free India under Bose.

In the demographic profile of Singapore, the Indian community has been assimilated in the mosaic of the island nation. In Singapore, Tamil is one of the four official languages. Besides Tamil, the study of other Indian languages, namely Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu have also been incorporated into Singapore's school curriculum signifying the multiculturalism of the city state.

Prime Minister Modi has been a great admirer of Singapore and its model of governance and in particular of Lee Kuan Yew, the architect of modern Singapore. The PM visited Singapore in September last year. Earlier he flew to Singapore in March 2015 to pay tribute to the legendary leader. He also paid tribute to the great visionary of Singapore on his 100th birth anniversary in April 2023. The visit of Singapore President to India ahead of Indonesian President's visit as the Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade underscores India's commitment to Indo-Pacific architecture and India's 'act east' policy.

The writer is a resource person with the Institute for Constitution and Parliamentary Studies, New Delhi.

SPECTRUM FARM DISTRESS

Make agriculture remunerative

The farmers' problem remains quite complex, with the Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal, and other opposition leaders alleging that the condition of farmers was never as bad as it is under the BJP regime.

Though many experts believe that the government should announce something in the coming budget, it appears that the situation may not be easily resolved. However, the New Year started with some good news for the sector with the Centre coming out with a draft national policy framework on agriculture marketing suggesting states move towards a unified national market for agriculture produce through a single licensing/registration system and a single fee.

The other significant news is the extension of the crop insurance scheme by the government by a year, enhancing its outlay for five years to ₹69,515 crore while also approving the ₹825 crore Fund for Innovation and Technology (FIAT).

Officials said that the enhanced allocation for crop insurance will help take care of risk coverage of crops from

non-preventable natural calamities across the country till 2025-26 through the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and the Restructured Weather-Based Crop Insurance Scheme. Added to this, FIAT is expected to be used for large-scale technology infusion in the implementation of the schemes.

In spite of these positive developments, almost all states are facing a shortage of subsidised fertilisers like NPK according to their requirements. It is understood that the Union government has gradually reduced the allotment of this fertiliser in the past few years as the Centre has been giving handsome subsidies to this particular fertiliser. As a farmer is required to have 4 bags of fertiliser to grow crops on each bigha, he/she would have to spend ₹5880 on NPK. The expenditure would go up to ₹6960 for a bigha if he uses any alternative to this fertiliser, which may be a burden on small farmers.

Delving into the past, it may be said that neoliberalism created a lot of problems for the peasantry. It curtailed subsi-

dies in agriculture, it opened up agriculture to world market fluctuations, it curtailed institutional credit to agriculture, it wound up public extension services, it increased the cost of fertilisers and chemicals, and other inputs marketed by MNCs, etc. Thus, neoliberalism not only split the class alliance and caused a hiatus between the urban middle class and the peasantry but also actually pitted them against one another.

Recently, another favourable development is the forecast that the agricultural sector may recover strongly with growth accelerating to 3.8 percent in the current fiscal year from 1.4 percent in the previous year, supported by favourable monsoon and improved rural demand. One cannot deny that a little more attention can improve the conditions of the farming community and bring a turnaround in their earnings.

But what is necessary at this juncture is that the government must give more attention to the needs of small and marginal farmers. The hiking of the farmers' dole that is being talked about by around

₹3000 or ₹6000 annually due to rising input costs and strong inflationary pressures could stabilise rural incomes and support consumption growth, which is increasingly being driven by rural demand.

Renewed efforts are necessary to make agriculture remunerative by promoting cash crops, setting up peasant cooperatives, and agro-based industries. This will help reduce distress in the rural economy. It cannot be denied that the prospects of agri-exports, as also the role of agriculture, are helping in improving the conditions of the rural mass, but the ruling dispensation has, over the years, not taken any significant step in transforming agriculture.

There is a need to critically examine the problem of farm distress and trying to make agriculture remunerative.

The healthy growth of the sector can become a reality in the coming years, but only if the government is serious and engages with the farmers to improve their lot. Urgent intervention is critical.

©INFA



Dhurjati Mukherjee

THE HEALTHY GROWTH OF THE FARM SECTOR CAN BECOME A REALITY IF THE GOVERNMENT ENGAGES WITH THE FARMERS TO IMPROVE THEIR LOT

A budding star

Sir, As if hunger drives her to the top, the 12-year-old tribal girl Sushila Meena from the remotest part of the state of Rajasthan stole the heart of the master blaster Sachin Tendulkar after she made him wonder by her bowling action, which was in the mould of the former cricketer Zaheer Khan. After Sachin shared her bowling action on social media, the accolades for Sushila started pouring in. Her rhythm of running and the swing of her arm appear to be a natural gift and talent in her needs to be fine-tuned by extending her all the support by the state financially and mentally to nurture this god-sent talent. She couldn't even identify who Sachin is, showing the amount of innocence and poverty her family is facing needs all the encouragement. There's no doubt that this girl will become a heart-throb of millions by her on-field brilliance.

Give peace a chance

Sir, Not only Israel and Hamas, but the world heaves a sigh of relief as the two warring sides, locked in a deadly embrace for over a year, prepare to step into a zone of cautious optimism if not total peace. Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches, goes an old adage. So, while it is easy for the rest of the world to give the two sides sermons on peace and its ramifications, only Israel and Hamas, who have borne the brunt of real war, know when to sign on the dotted line that will cease hostilities, even if for the time being. Near at home, the clash of India and Pakistan on the cricket field can be a high voltage drama, as war-like tension mounts on both sides. But Israel and Hamas have been engaged in a bloody struggle that has claimed thousands of lives over a fifteen month period. Therefore, it is nothing short of a miracle that they have at least come to the table to give peace a chance. To settle for even a fleeting form or version of peace would be a better bargain than to continue with war, because, as Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "War settles nothing". Israel and Hamas are only a hair's breadth away from peace. The moot point is- Will each cross the Rubicon?

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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

AP Thiruvadi, CHENNAI

Avinash Godbole, DEWAS (MP)



'Emergency' not screened in Punjab

The SGPC, an apex gurdwara body, and several Sikh organisations held demonstrations against the movie outside cinemas, multiplexes and malls across the state

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Jan 17: Kangana Ranaut's "Emergency" was not screened at cinemas in Punjab Friday following state-wide protests by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and Sikh organisations against the movie with many politicians calling for a ban, which the actor termed as "harassment".



This is complete harassment of art and the artist, from Punjab many cities are reporting that these people are not allowing Emergency to be screened

taken any step to stop the film till now. SGPC member Bhagwant Singh Sialka said no "anti-Sikh" act will be tolerated and said it is a responsibility of the governments to respect the interests and sentiments of every religion.

THE FILM, WHICH SEES RANAUT PLAYING THE ROLE OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI, FOCUSES ON 21 MONTHS OF EMERGENCY FROM 1975 TO 1977

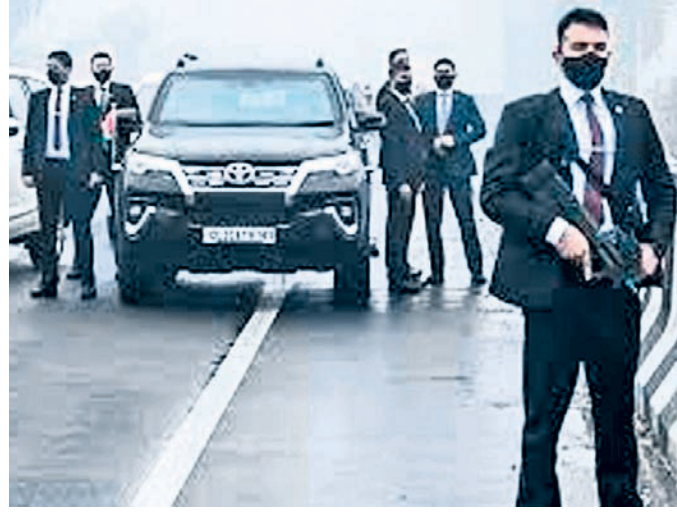
THE MOVIE, IN CONTROVERSY OVER ITS CENSOR CERTIFICATE AND ALLEGATIONS THAT IT MISREPRESENTS THE SIKH COMMUNITY, WAS RELEASED ACROSS THE COUNTRY FRIDAY AFTER SEVERAL DELAYS

ARREST WARRANTS AGAINST 25 FARMERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ferozepur (Punjab), Jan 17: The Bharti Kisan Union (Krantikari) Thursday slammed the Punjab government for the arrest warrants issued against 25 farmers and insertion of an attempt to murder charge in the FIR in connection with the 2022 prime minister security breach matter in the state.

2022 PM SECURITY BREACH



Prime Minister Narendra Modi was scheduled to lay the foundation stones of development projects January 5, 2022, worth over Rs 42,750 crore, including the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra expressway and a PGIMER satellite centre

minister's cavalcade was at a distance of around one km from the protesting site during which no protesters went there. "The police had earlier booked unidentified people under section 283 of IPC, but later due to some kind of pressure, they added serious sections like 307 of IPC in that FIR," he said.

Leaders of the farmers' body said they came to know about the insertion of Section 307 (attempt to murder charge) of the Indian Penal Code in the FIR after the bail plea of one of the protesting farmers was rejected by a court in Ferozepur.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's convoy was stranded on a flyover January 5, 2022 due to a blockade by protesters in Punjab's Ferozepur after which he returned from the state without attending any event, including a rally.

Later, the Supreme Court appointed a five-member committee, headed by former apex court judge Indu Malhotra to probe the security breach incident.

Police had then lodged an FIR in the matter. Initially, police had registered an FIR against 150 unidentified people at Kulgarhi police station under Section 283 (danger or obstruction in public way) of the IPC.

Farmers said following a probe by a three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), additional charges -- Sections 307 (attempt to murder), 353 (assault on a public servant), 186 (obstruction of duty), 149 (unlawful assembly), 341 (wrongful restraint) and Section 8-B of the National Highway Act -- were inserted in the FIR by the police.

Police have pressed these charges against 25 farmers by name. Bharti Kisan Union (Krantikari) president Baldev Singh Zira said the bail plea of one of the protesters Kanwaljit Singh was rejected by Sessions Court Tuesday.

"The state government is

When his convoy reached close to the Piereana village on the Ferozepur-Moga road, around 30 km from the National Martyrs Memorial in Hussainiwala, some protesters blocked the road following which the cavalcade was halted for almost 15-20 minutes

The PM had returned without dedicating developmental projects and addressing a rally

apparently working under the pressure of the Union government. It has been three years since the incident. The farmers were actually going towards the district administrative complex to hold a protest, however, the police blocked their way near the bridge," he claimed.

Zira claimed the farmers had no idea that the prime minister was coming via the same road.

"Since the farmers were not allowed to move forward, they squatted there, and started a protest near the bridge," Zira said, adding the prime

12K 'LAKHPATI DIDIS' EMPOWERED IN J&K

Omar hopes number will grow significantly

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Jan 17: Jammu and Kashmir, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Thursday expressed satisfaction over the empowerment of more than 12,000 'Lakhpati Didis' in the Union territory and expressed hope that this number would grow significantly.



under the initiative. "This programme (Umeed Programme), which began during my first tenure as chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, has exceeded expectations. Who would have thought that this initiative would lead to the emergence of 'Lakhpati Didis' in Jammu and Kashmir?"

"And yet, here we are, witnessing incredible stories of success, perseverance, and achievement," Abdullah said. Abdullah highlighted the program's evolution, noting that many women have not only achieved self-reliance but are also creating job opportunities for others. "You are no longer just beneficiaries of this programme, you are its leaders and torchbearers," he remarked.

Acknowledging the potential of the Umeed Programme to serve as a national model, he urged the replication of its success stories in other states.

required funds, and simplify procedures to ensure its continued growth and success.

"As I stand here today, my heart is filled with pride. I want to assure all of you -- our daughters, sisters, and mothers -- that the government is fully committed to supporting this programme. We will take every necessary step to ensure its continued growth, and ensure the required funds, and simplify procedures to empower more women," he said.

Highlighting the programme's impact, the chief minister expressed satisfaction that over 12,000 'Lakhpati Didis' have been empowered

Govt doctors to go on strike again

Around 2,500 doctors of the Punjab Civil Medical Services (PCMS) are set to resume their agitation from January 20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hoshiarpur (Punjab), Jan 17: The Punjab Civil Medical Services Association Thursday announced the resumption of its suspension of services starting January 20 over not fulfilling their long pending demands by the state government.

According to an official statement released by PCMSA, they were dissatisfied with the lack of progress on written, time-bound assurances given by the Punjab government.

Around 2,500 doctors of the Punjab Civil Medical Services (PCMS) are set to resume their agitation from January 20, said PCMS president Akhil Sarin. The PCMS Association (PCMSA) aims to push the government to fulfil its commitments to improve working conditions and resolve long-pending issues, including better security arrangements and recruitments.

In a statement, Sarin revealed that detailed proposals, prepared by the Health department to address issues such as high attrition, low retention and re-



ruitment challenges, have been submitted to the Finance department. These proposals focus on key concerns including inadequate security arrangements, stalled career progressions and increased workload due to a shortage of doctors. However, despite repeated efforts, no notification has been issued so far.

While appreciating the Health department's efforts to recruit 304 medical officers and revise the postgraduate policy to attract young doctors to the PCMS cadre, the PCMSA expressed its disappointment over the lack of progress on core demands.

It has urged the government to promptly issue notifications addressing the reinstatement of dynamic assured career progression (DACP) and improving security measures for doctors, said Sarin. PCMSA announced plans to unveil the detailed agitation programme at a state level press conference scheduled to be held in Moga January 19, he said.

Cross-country cycle expedition flagged off from Kashmir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Jan 17: A 4,000km cycle expedition from Kashmir to Kanyakumari began from here Thursday to promote a pollution-free India.



cling is a good initiative. We want to send a message to the country that if the pollution continues to spread, then the country and the world cannot be saved. We went to Dal Lake, which was considered clean and beautiful once. It still is beautiful, but not clean. We have to spread that awareness," he said.

Speaking to reporters, DIG Pande said he became a part of the rally to motivate the public.

"When I heard about two senior citizens participating in the cycle expedition, I thought it is prudent to encourage them to spread this message across the country. We are here to motivate and encourage the citizens to take this initiative," the officer said. He emphasised the importance of fitness in combating various issues afflicting the youth.

good health. "I plan to ride my cycle for 100 years, and today, I begin this journey to Kanyakumari. I encourage everyone to take an interest in nature," he said. An-

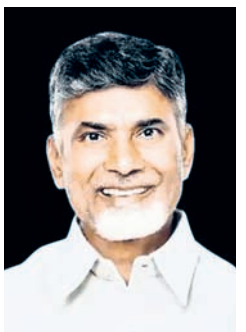
other cyclist, Bhanusali, 64, said the aim behind the expedition is to save the earth.

"For that, we have to make it pollution-free, and for that cy-

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL WORKS DIVISION, KUCHINDA

DISTRICT EXCISE OFFICE, KANDHAMAL, PHULBANI

ODISHA POLICE RECRUITMENT BOARD, BHUBANESWAR



I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his unwavering support to the steel plant, which I assure will contribute to the PM's vision of nation-building as part of Viksit Bharat-Viksit Andhra (developed India and Andhra Pradesh)

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | AP CM

SC RAPS MCD OVER 3K TONE UNTREATED SOLID WASTE DAILY

This is blatant in the national capital, the Supreme Court Friday said as it came down heavily on the MCD over 3,000 tonne of solid waste remaining untreated everyday.



Jallikattu events leave 7 dead in Tamil Nadu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chennai, Jan 17: Seven persons, mostly spectators and a bull owner, died in the jallikattu and manjuvirattu events held across Tamil Nadu on Kaanum Pongal day, police said Friday.

Two bulls too died in separate incidents. While one bull died during the event in Pudukkottai, a bull owner and his bull died at Siravayal manjuvirattu in Sivaganga, the police said.

At the manjuvirattu in Siravayal in Sivaganga district, Thaneesh Raja of Naduvikottai Keela Aavandhipatti village, who brought his bull to take part in the event died along with his bull after the animal fell into a farm well at Kambanur while running away from the arena.

Both Raja and his bull drowned when he jumped into the well to get hold of the animal. About 130 people were injured in the manjuvirattu in which 150 baiters and 250 bulls participated. A spectator Subbaiah of Devakottai was gored by a bull and he died on the way to hospital.

Two spectators were gored to death and 148 persons including bull owners, and tamers were injured in four separate jallikattu events in Tiruchirappalli, Karur, and Pudukkottai districts.

A 60-year-old spectator, Kulanthavelu, from Samuthram near Kuzhumani in Karur district, was gored to death at the jallikattu events in RT Malai Police said a 70-year-old spectator identified as C Perumal of Odugampatti near Keeranur was gored to death in the Mahadeva Patti jallikattu in Pudukkottai district where 607 bulls and 300 tamers participated.

Ten persons including tamers and spectators were injured. About 19 persons were injured in the Vanniyan Viduthi jallikattu in Pudukkottai district.

A 30-year-old man died in an 'eruthu vidum vizha' event, a kind of bull race conducted at Basthalapalli in Krishnagiri district, while a 45-year-old man died after being attacked by a bull in the Senthapatti in Salem district, police said.

CRACKDOWN ON FRAUD COMMUNICATIONS

DoT launches Sanchar Saathi mobile app

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: The telecom department Friday launched the Sanchar Saathi mobile app to make it easier to report any suspected fraud communications by allowing the public to flag such incidents directly from their mobile phone call logs.

Announcing this, telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also launched two other initiatives of the DoT -- Vision for National Broadband Mission 2.0 and Intra circle roaming at 'Digital Bharat Nidhi' funded 4G mobile sites.

ensuring a secure environment for subscribers.

Unveiling the initiatives, Scindia said the Sanchar Saathi initiative provides "a safe and secure environment where privacy and security of each customer are safeguarded".

The new app - available for Android and iOS platforms - allows users to report suspected calls and SMS directly from phone logs. Users will also be able to identify and manage all mobile connections issued in their name, so there is no unauthorised usage.

SAIF ATTACK CASE

Minister rules out underworld link

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



The attacker's face was clearly captured in CCTV footage which surfaced Thursday

The video showed the assailant, wearing a red scarf and carrying a backpack, scurrying down the stairs from the sixth floor of the 'Sarguru Sharan' building, where Khan lives, at around 2.30 am

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 17: The intruder who stabbed Hindi film industry actor Saif Ali Khan at his home in Mumbai still remains at large despite more than 30 teams on the lookout for him Friday, while a Maharashtra minister ruled out underworld link to the brutal attack.

The attacker was not working for any criminal gang and probably was not even aware whose house he had entered in, said police, citing their investigation carried out so far.

Police picked up a carpenter in connection with the attack on Khan (54) at his apartment in the wee hours of Thursday as he resembled the intruder, and brought him to the Bandra police station for questioning on Friday morning, but released him later. A senior police official clarified the man was not related to the attack on Khan and no one has been arrested so far.

leged intruder was not working for any gang as per prima facie investigation. He probably was not even aware whose house he had entered in," he added.

He said more than 30 teams have been formed to track down and nab the attacker, who stabbed Khan in his 12th floor apartment during a robbery attempt.

The attacker's face was captured in CCTV footage. The video showed the assailant, wearing a red scarf and carrying a backpack, scurrying down the stairs from the sixth floor of the 'Sarguru Sharan' building, where Khan lives, at around 2.30 am.

Maharashtra Minister of State for Home (Urban) Yogesh Kadam said robbery was the motive behind the incident and clarified no underworld gang was involved in the knife attack.

The filmstar is recovering well at Lilavati Hospital, where he was taken after the brutal attack by an intruder in the early hours of Thursday that left him with multiple wounds, and is expected to be discharged in two to three days, doctors treating him said.

SC asks UP, Haryana to impose ban on firecrackers

The apex court had earlier directed the NCR states to consider complete ban on firecrackers use throughout the year and place on record before it their decisions in this regard, saying imposing ban on firecrackers is required not only to curb air pollution but also noise pollution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: Terming the rising air pollution a "drastic" problem, the Supreme Court Friday said the measures that are needed to deal with it should also be "drastic" and asked the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers in their areas falling under the National Capital Region.

A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan took note of the fact that like in Delhi, the Rajasthan government has also imposed a perpetual and complete ban on the sale and bursting of firecrackers in the NCR areas of the state and asked Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to follow suit.

The bench said till the time these two states pass the orders, its earlier direction banning firecrackers would be



extended till the next date of hearing in the matter, which is March 24.

"The environmental problems are drastic ones and so drastic measures are needed," the bench said, adding that the court has to act and pass harsher orders as the other arms of

the government are not bothered. The bench said it will also hear the pleas against the ban of firms involved in the manufacture and sale of firecrackers on the next date.

When a lawyer requested the court to lift the complete ban as it also pertains to the manufac-

urers' fundamental rights, the bench said the environmental problems come ahead of their issues. The lawyer then requested the court to at least allow green crackers.

It also asked the Centre to respond to the pleas of the firecracker-manufacturing firms. Earlier also, the court had directed the Uttar Pradesh and Haryana governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers until further orders.

The bench had noted that the Delhi government had enforced a complete ban on the manufacture, storage and sale, including delivery, of firecrackers through online marketing round the year with immediate effect.

only when other states forming part of the NCR impose similar measures. Even the state of Rajasthan has imposed a similar ban in that part of the state of Rajasthan which falls in the NCR. For the time being, we direct the states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to impose a similar ban, which is imposed by the state of Delhi," the bench had said.

Expressing serious concerns over the high pollution levels in Delhi during Diwali, the apex court previously took exception to the violation of court orders and said its directives on the firecracker ban were "hardly implemented".

The court was hearing a plea filed by M C Mehta in 1985 seeking directions to curb air pollution in the national capital and adjoining areas.

Victim's parents claim investigation half-done

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 17: A day before a court in Kolkata is set to deliver its verdict in the RG Kar hospital rape-murder case, the parents of the victim doctor alleged that the investigation is half-done as others involved in the crime are roaming free.

Her parents said they will continue to fight until justice is delivered to their daughter whose body was found in the seminar room of the state-run hospital August 9 last year, sparking nationwide outrage and prolonged protests.

Sanjay Roy, who was a civic volunteer with the Kolkata Police, was charged with committing the crime and was arrested August 10.

Additional district and sessions judge of Sealdah court, where the trial of the case concluded January 9, is scheduled to pass its judgement Saturday. "Sanjay (Roy) is guilty, and tomorrow's verdict will be against him. But what about other criminals who are still not caught? I can see them roaming freely. I have seen them loitering in the hospital. So, the investigation is half-done," she told PTI.

RG KAR MURDER



Speculations were rife that the junior doctor was killed because she came to know of some secrets that the authorities wanted to remain hidden

idence proved Roy guilty, but she believed that the administration has been shielding several others involved in the crime.

"All the evidence were either lost or erased. A large number of people were present when (the then) Police Commissioner Vineet Goel visited the crime scene. It was looking like a fish market. Those seen at the crime scene must be punished," she said. Purported photographs showing presence of a large number of people in the seminar room after the body was found had gone viral.



People take boat rides, during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 at Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

of the day note

We are asking him a straight question. Didn't you (Naidu) know that the state was under ₹10 lakh crore debt while giving Super Six promises during polls? Didn't you know that Super Six requires ₹2 lakh crore per year?

Y S SHARMILA | ANDHRA CONGRESS COMMITTEE PRESIDENT

The Election Commission should take cognizance of the appointment of pro-BJP government officials in Milkipur and ensure the healthy tradition of its impartial functioning by conducting the election under strict monitoring

AKHILESH YADAV | SP PRESIDENT

India Meteorological Department, established in 1875, has completed 150 years today ... it is a matter of satisfaction that our weather forecast and disaster preparedness capabilities are comparable or better than any other country as we are sharing information with other countries also

JITENDER SINGH | UNION MINISTER

SHORT TAKES

Revanth Reddy in Singapore

Hyderabad: A delegation led by Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy began its two-nation tour with Singapore as the first destination seeking investments and various ties up in the state.

Three found dead in different parts of Noida

Noida (UP): The bodies of three people, including a 19-year-old girl, were found in different areas of Noida, police said Friday. In the first case, a woman's body was found in a burnt state near the Dabra roundabout of Ajaibpur Thursday, said Arvind Kumar, Inspector-in-charge of Dadri Police Station.

GRAP 3 curbs revoked in Delhi

New Delhi: The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality Friday revoked curbs under stage 3 of the GRAP amid a dip in pollution due to favourable meteorological conditions, according to an official order.

5 killed as vehicle falls into gorge

Gangtok: Five people were killed after a car skidded off the road and fell into a gorge in Sikkim's Gyalshing district, police said Friday. The car with five people on board rolled down the hill at Ratomatey Cliff and crashed into the gorge 500 feet below Thursday night.



national



GOVT EASES LCOs REGISTRATION RULES
The government Friday eased the rules governing cable television networks by making the process of registration of Local Cable Operators (LCOs) entirely online with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as the registering authority

GOVT EASES LCOs REGISTRATION RULES

The government Friday eased the rules governing cable television networks by making the process of registration of Local Cable Operators (LCOs) entirely online with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as the registering authority



of the day quote

The Congress has always stood with every section of the society. When the BJP brought three central farm laws, (AAP supremo and former Delhi chief minister) Arvind Kejriwal was the first to give his nod to those

VINESH PHOGAT | WRESTLER-TURNED POLITICIAN

If we look at the Congress or other parties, first it will be analysed whose 'blessing' they have or to which 'family' they belong before someone can reach the top position

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CHIEF MINISTER

The law and order of the state has completely collapsed and unemployment and inflation are at their peak

BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA | FORMER HARYANA CM

16 Indians serving with Russian military missing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: India Friday said 12 Indian nationals have been killed while serving with the Russian military and another 16 listed by Russia as missing.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said a total of 126 Indians were serving with the Russian military and 96 of them have so far been discharged.

"Twelve Indian nationals have died in the (Russia-Ukraine) conflict, who were serving in the Russian Army," Jaiswal said, responding to a question at his weekly media briefing.

"Out of the 126 known cases of Indian nationals serving in the Russian armed forces, 96 individuals have already returned. They have been discharged from the Russian armed forces," he said. Of the remaining 18 Indian nationals in the Russian armed forces, the whereabouts of 16 individuals are currently not known, he added.

"The Russian side has categorised them as missing," Jaiswal said. The MEA is in touch with the families of all the 16 Indians categorised as missing by Russian authorities.

"We remain engaged with the Russian authorities to ascertain the whereabouts of the missing Indian nationals and for an early release and repatriation of those who remain," he said. This week, the MEA confirmed the death of an Indian from Kerala.

The death of Binil TB, who hailed from Thrissur, was first



Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said a total of 126 Indians were serving with the Russian military and 96 of them have so far been discharged

Following Binil's death, India pressed Russia to release all the Indians recruited by its military. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had strongly raised the issue of early discharge of the Indian nationals working in the Russian Army during his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in July last year. In October last year, Indian officials said 85 Indian nationals have been discharged from the Russian military and efforts are on to secure the release of 20 more. In August last year, the Russian embassy said Moscow and New Delhi are working in close coordination for an early "identification and discharge" of the Indian nationals who voluntarily joined contractual work in the military service and now want to return home. Since April last year, the ministry of defence of the Russian Federation has stopped recruiting citizens of a number of foreign countries, including India, into the military service, it had said.

POST OF THE DAY

Cash Freebies Promised in Delhi Elections
• AAP : 2100 Per Month
• BJP : 2500 Per Month

• Congress : 2500 Per Month
Women in Delhi Can Get 30,000 Free Every Year If Any of These Parties Win Elections
What a Sad State of Affairs For Taxpayers

@Ravisutanjani

SHORT TAKES

SC denies bail to Abubacker

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Friday refused to grant bail on medical grounds to former chairman of the outlawed Popular Front of India (PFI) E Abubacker in a case registered against him under anti-terror law UAPA. Abubacker, who was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) during a massive crackdown on the organisation in 2022, had approached the high court after the trial court rejected his bail application. A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal said it was not inclined to release Abubacker at this stage after looking at the medical report.

Robbers loot Mangaluru bank

Mangaluru: A gang of armed robbers looted valuables estimated between ₹10 and 12 crore from the Sahakari Sangh Bank in Kotekar, Mangaluru, Friday, police said. This comes close on the heels of two unidentified armed robbers on a bike shooting dead two security guards and fleeing with Rs 93 lakh in cash meant for filling an ATM in Bidar, the northernmost district headquarters of the state, Thursday.

India welcomes US decision

New Delhi: India Friday welcomed the US lifting restrictions on three Indian nuclear entities and said the move will open up new avenues for collaboration in the civil-nuclear field. The US Wednesday removed restrictions on Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR) and the Indian Rare Earths (IRE). The decision came over a week after NSA Jake Sullivan announced that Washington was finalising steps to "remove" hurdles for civil nuclear partnership between Indian and American firms.

MUDA scam: ED attaches assets worth ₹300 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: The Enforcement Directorate Friday said it has attached more than 140 units of immovable assets worth about ₹300 crore in a MUDA-linked money laundering case involving Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others.

The attachment is part of a money laundering probe into alleged irregularities in land allotment by Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA). The attached properties are registered in the name of various individuals who are working as real-estate businessmen and agents, the federal agency said in a statement.

"It is alleged that Siddaramaiah (a Congress leader) used his political influence to get compensation for 14 sites in the name of his wife Smt. BM Parvathi in lieu of 3 acres 16 guntas of land acquired by MUDA." "The land was originally acquired by MUDA for ₹3,24,700. The compensation in the form of 14 sites at posh locality is worth ₹56 crore," the agency said. The Chief Minister, who has been questioned by the Karnataka Lokayukta in this case, has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing by him or his family, saying the Opposition was "scared" of him and that these were politically motivated charges. The role of ex-MUDA commissioner D B Natesh has emerged as "instrumental" in the illegal allotment of compensation sites to Parvathi, the agency said.

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Artistes perform on the occasion of 'Gustor' festival, at Dorje Drak Monastery in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh PFI PHOTO

Nine dead after car crashes into ST bus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pune, Jan 17: At least nine people were killed, including a five-year-old child, and eight others were injured after a tempo collided with their minivan, forcing it to ram into a stationary bus on the Pune-Nashik Highway Friday, a police official said.

The incident took place near Narayangaon at 9:30am, he added. The tempo struck the minivan from behind, causing it to ram into an empty ST bus parked on the side of the road, the official said.

"The impact of the collision was so severe that nine persons died on the spot," said Pankaj Deshmukh, Superintendent of Police, Pune Rural. Police identified the deceased as Debubai Takalkar (65), driver Vinod Rokade (50), Yuvraj Vavhal (23), Chandrakant Gunjal (50), Geeta Gaware (45), Bhau Bade (65), Najma Hanif Shaikh (35), Vashifa Inamdar (5), and Manisha Pacharne (56).

"Eight others sustained minor to moderate injuries and are undergoing treatment. Following the crash, the tempo driver fled the scene. We have registered a case against the unidentified driver of the tempo and bus driver Bhausaheb Jaybhay under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Motor Vehicles Act," a Narayangaon police station official said.

The ST bus driver has been booked since he had parked the vehicle in a dangerous manner, the official said.

Efforts are on to nab the driver of the tempo, the official added. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis called the incident unfortunate and announced compensation of ₹5 lakh each to the kin of the deceased.

Vikram Bhor, sarpanch of Junnar tehsil's Kandali village, from where five of the deceased hailed, said everyone was shocked after hearing about the accident. Parishad school teacher. Yuvraj Vavhal, a 23 year old youth from a neighbouring village, was preparing for civil services exams," Bhor said. The distance between Kandali and Narayangaon is 10 kilometres and people use such private vehicles on the route.

PRISONERS' RIGHTS

Jail administration needs reform: Top court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: Jail administration needs reformation for a better environment and prison culture to ensure prisoners enjoy their right to a dignified life under the Constitution, the Supreme Court Friday said.

Interestingly, a bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan quoted Fyodor Dostoevsk's famous lines as saying, "The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by entering its prisons", and underlined the importance of treating prisoners as human beings with rights to dignity and humane conditions.

The observations came in a judgement that set aside the Jharkhand High Court verdict quashing the transfer of one Vikash Tiwary, a convicted gangster, from one prison to another in the state. The bench restored the order of the inspector general of prisons, citing the necessity of ensuring prison safety and preventing potential gang violence.



The verdict underscored systemic deficiencies in India's prison administration and stressed on the need for reforms to ensure a dignified life for inmates. The top court called for a periodic monitoring of prison conditions and adherence to constitutional principles in the treatment of inmates and said while prisoners lost their liberty, they did not lose their humanity. The bench asked the Jharkhand government to expedite the formulation and

to continuously monitor the physical conditions prevailing in the prison, compliance with basic and fundamental rights of the prisoners, etc.," the judgement said.

This court has repeatedly recommended an overhaul of prison administration by suggesting reforms in treatment of prisoners and management of prisons, it said. As far as Jharkhand was concerned, the court said there was no clear-cut picture regarding prison administration and the facilities available to the prisoners in the prisons. Tiwary, a life-term convict and member of the "Pandey gang" was transferred from Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Central Jail in Hazaribagh to Central Jail in Dumka. The

transfer was ordered by the Jharkhand prisons authority May 17, 2023, citing administrative grounds and the imminent threat of a gang war in Hazaribagh jail due to the presence of rival factions.

Tiwary challenged the transfer in the Jharkhand High Court, which quashed the order August 21, 2023, deeming it unjustified. The Jharkhand government appealed the high court's decision in the Supreme Court.

Justice Mahadevan, authoring the judgement, said the transfer was a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of inmates and maintain prison discipline. The bench said the prison authorities were tasked with maintaining order and security within correctional facilities, and such transfers should not be treated as routine but necessary responses to extraordinary circumstances.

The inspector general's duty, it outlined, was to act in the larger interest of prison security and dismissed allegations of arbitrariness in the transfer order.

THE OBSERVATIONS CAME IN A JUDGEMENT THAT SET ASIDE THE JHARKHAND HIGH COURT VERDICT QUASHING THE TRANSFER OF ONE VIKASH TIWARY, A CONVICTED GANGSTER, FROM ONE PRISON TO ANOTHER IN THE STATE

THE BENCH RESTORED THE ORDER OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF PRISONS, CITING THE NECESSITY OF ENSURING PRISON SAFETY AND PREVENTING POTENTIAL GANG VIOLENCE

international



Israel must withdraw from Lebanese territories and stop conducting military operations inside Lebanon that violate the UN Security Council resolution halting the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war
ANTONIO GUTERRES | UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL

TRUMP, XI SPEAK ON PHONE

Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President-elect Donald Trump spoke over the phone Friday ahead of Trump's swearing-in and agreed to establish strategic communication channels and maintain regular contact on major issues of common concern



of the day quote

There have been a lot of narratives out there about how capable, how weak our military is. You've just got to look at the things we have done, that we continue to do, at a moment's notice

MIKE PENCE | FORMER VICE PRESIDENT, US

Smaller Asian nations concerned about Chinese aggression would no longer be confident of American deterrence. American security commitments would be viewed as empty promises, destabilising not only this region, but the wider world

GUSTAVO PETRO | PRESIDENT, COLOMBIA

The dialogue process with this group is suspended, the ELN has no will for peace

GUSTAVO PETRO | PRESIDENT, COLOMBIA

Gaza truce goes for final sign-off

Jerusalem/Cairo, Jan 17: The Israeli security cabinet has recommended approving the Gaza ceasefire and hostage return deal, ahead of a full cabinet meeting expected later Friday, a statement from the prime minister's office said.

Cabinet is expected to meet at 3.30 pm (1330 GMT) to give final ratification to the agreement, which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said is expected to take effect Sunday, with the release of the first hostages.

If successful, the ceasefire would halt fighting between Hamas and Israeli forces that has razed much of heavily urbanised Gaza, killed more than 46,000 people, and displaced most of the enclave's pre-war population of 2.3 million several times over, according to local authorities.

It could also ease hostilities in the Middle East, where the Gaza war spread to include Iran and its proxies - Lebanon's Hezbollah, Yemen's Houthis and armed groups in Iraq as well as the occupied West Bank.

In Gaza itself Friday, Israeli warplanes kept up heavy strikes, and the Civil Emergency Service said that at least 101 Palestinians, including 58 women and children, had been killed since the deal was announced Wednesday.

Under the six-week first phase of the three-stage deal, Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages, including all women (soldiers and civilians), children, and men over 50.

Israel will release all Palestinian women and children under 19 detained in Israeli jails by the end of the first phase. The total number of Palestinians released will depend on hostages released, and could be between 990 and 1,650 Palestinians, including men, women and children.

Hamas said in a statement Friday that obstacles that arose in relation to the terms of the



- Full Israeli cabinet meeting expected later on Friday
- First hostages expected to be released by Hamas on Sunday, Israeli PM's office says
- Release follows a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas
- Israeli security cabinet meeting on Friday to vote on the accord

Netanyahu was informed by the negotiating team that agreements have been reached on a deal to release the hostages," his office said in a statement.

Underlining the potential obstacles facing a final ceasefire, hardliners in Netanyahu's coalition have opposed the deal as a capitulation to Hamas, which had controlled Gaza. National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir threatened to resign if it was approved. However, he said he would not bring down the government.

His fellow hardliner, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, has also threatened to quit the government if it does not go back to war to defeat Hamas after the first six-week phase of the ceasefire was completed.

Nevertheless, a majority of ministers were expected to back the agreement.

In Gaza, the airstrikes continued. In the aftermath of one strike on tents housing displaced people, a boy picked through damaged items on the floor that was littered with canned food and coffee pots.

HOSTAGE FAMILIES WANT SWIFT ACTION

Israel says 98 hostages are still being held in Gaza. About half are believed to be alive. They include Israelis and non-Israelis. Of the total, 94 were seized in the Oct 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on Israel and four have been held in Gaza since 2014.

SHORT TAKES

Visionary filmmaker David Lynch dies at 78

Los Angeles: David Lynch, the filmmaker celebrated for his uniquely dark and dreamlike vision in such movies as "Blue Velvet" and "Mulholland Drive" and the TV series "Twin Peaks", has died just days before his 79th birthday. His family announced the death in a Facebook post Thursday. "There's a big hole in the world now that he's no longer with us. But, as he would say, Keep your eye on the donut and not on the hole," the family's post read. "It's a beautiful day with golden sunshine and blue skies all the way." The cause of death and location was not immediately available. Last summer, Lynch had revealed to SIGHT and SOUND that he was diagnosed with emphysema and would not be leaving his home because of fears of contracting the coronavirus or "even a cold". "I've gotten emphysema from smoking for so long and so I'm homebound whether I like it or not," Lynch said, adding he didn't expect to make another film.

Ex-FM running to replace Trudeau

Ottawa: Former Canadian finance minister Christia Freeland Friday announced that she would take part in the contest to replace Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as leader of the ruling Liberal Party. Freeland, who was one of Trudeau's closest political allies for a decade, quit last month after resisting his demands for more spending and wrote a letter denouncing his governing style. Her unexpected departure prompted an uproar from Liberal legislators already unhappy about the party's miserable showing in the polls after nine years in power and widespread voter unhappiness about high prices and a housing crisis.

ICC chief prosecutor meets Syrian leader

The Hague: The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor Karim Khan made an unannounced visit to Damascus Friday, meeting with the leader of Syria's de facto government. Khan's office says he visited on the invitation of Syria's transitional government to offer support in ensuring accountability for alleged crimes committed in the country. Khan met with the country's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa and the foreign minister to discuss options for justice in the Hague for the victims of the conflict, which has left more than half a million dead and more than six million people displaced.

US SC upholds law banning TikTok

imminent and, although experts have said the app will not disappear from existing users' phones once the law takes effect January 19, new users won't be able to download it and updates won't be available.

That will eventually render the app unworkable, the Justice Department has said in court filings. The decision came against the backdrop of unusual political agitation by President-elect Donald Trump.

Putin, President of Iran meet to sign partnership treaty

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian signed a broad cooperation pact Friday as the countries deepened their partnership in the face of stinging Western sanctions. Russian and Iranian officials say the "comprehensive strategic partnership treaty" covers all areas - from trade and military cooperation to science, education and culture. Pezeshkian's visit comes ahead of Monday's inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to broker peace in Ukraine and take a tougher stance on Iran, which is grappling with growing economic problems and other challenges, including military setbacks in its sphere of influence across the Middle East. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed any link with Trump's inauguration, saying the signing had been planned long ago. Welcoming Pezeshkian as they sat down for talks, Putin said the new treaty will "give an additional impulse to practically all areas of our cooperation."

Child sexual abuse: UK orders 'rapid audit'

London: The UK government has ordered a "rapid audit" of the scale and nature of grooming gangs based child sexual exploitation, including an examination of ethnicity data to determine "cultural and societal drivers" behind the crimes. UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper laid out the plans in a statement in the House of Commons Thursday, also noting that many major investigations into the issue have involved "Pakistani heritage gangs". Amid growing demands for a national inquiry into the scandal since Tesla CEO Elon Musk attacked the UK's handling of the historic scandal on his X platform, the minister told Parliament that the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce will immediately expand the ethnicity data it collects and publishes. "Many major investigations have involved Pakistani heritage gangs and the police taskforce evidence also shows exploitation and abuse taking place across many different communities and ethnicities. But the data on ethnicity of both perpetrators and victims is still inadequate," Yvette Cooper told MPs. "In order to go much further, I have asked Baroness Louise Casey to oversee a rapid audit of the current scale and nature of gang-based exploitation across the country and to make recommendations on the further work that is needed."

China's population falls for third straight year

China's population stood at 1.408 billion at the end of 2024, a decline of 1.39 million from the previous year

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Taipei (Taiwan), Jan 17: China's population fell last year for the third straight year, its government said Friday, pointing to further demographic challenges for the world's second most populous nation, which is now facing both an ageing population and an emerging shortage of working age people.

China's population stood at 1.408 billion at the end of 2024, a decline of 1.39 million from the previous year.

The figures announced by the government in Beijing follow trends worldwide, but especially in East Asia, where Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and other nations have seen their birth rates plummet. China three years ago joined Japan and most of Eastern Europe among other nations whose population is falling.

The reasons are in many cases similar: Rising costs of living are causing young people to put off or rule out marriage and child birth while pursuing higher education and careers. While

people are living longer, that's not enough to keep up with rate of new births.

Countries such as China that allow very little immigration are especially at risk.

China has long been among the world's most populous nations, enduring invasions, floods and other natural disasters to sustain a population that thrived on rice in the south and wheat in the north. Following the end of World War II and the Communist Party's rise to power in 1949, large families re-emerged and the population doubled in just three decades, even after tens of millions died in the Great Leap Forward that sought to revolutionize agriculture and industry and the Cultural Revolution that followed a few years later.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution and leader Mao Zedong's death, Communist bureaucrats began to worry the country's population was outstripping its ability to feed itself and began implementing a draconian "one child policy." Though it was never law,



women had to apply for permission to have a child and violators could face forced late-term abortions and birth control procedures, massive fines and the prospect of their child being deprived an identification number, effectively making them non-citizens.

Rural China, where the preference for male offspring was especially strong and two children were still ostensibly allowed, became the focus of government efforts, with women forced to present

evidence they were menstruating and buildings emblazoned with slogans such as "have fewer children, have better children."

The government sought to stamp out selective abortion of female children, but with abortions legal and readily available, those operating illicit sonogram machines enjoyed a thriving business.

That has been the biggest factor in China's lopsided sex ratio, with as many as millions more boys born for every 100 girls, raising the possibility of social instability among China's army of bachelors. Friday's report gave the sex imbalance as 104.34 men to every 100 women, though independent groups give the imbalance as considerably higher.

More disturbing for the government was the drastically falling birthrate, with China's total population dropping for the first time in decades in 2023 and China being narrowly overtaken by India as the world's most populous nation in the same year. A rapidly

aging population, declining workforce, lack of consumer markets and migration abroad are putting the system under severe pressure.

While spending on the military and flashy infrastructure projects continues to rise, China's already frail social security system is teetering, with increasing numbers of Chinese refusing to pay into the underfunded pension system.

Already, more than one-fifth of the population is aged 60 or over, with the official figure given as 310.3 million or 22% of the total population. By 2035, this number is forecast to exceed 30%, sparking discussion of changes to the official retirement age, which one of the lowest in the world. With fewer students, some vacant schools and kindergartens are meanwhile being transformed into care facilities for older people.

Such developments are giving some credence to the aphorism that China, now the world's second largest economy but facing major headwinds, will "grow old before it grows rich."

A rapidly aging population, declining workforce, lack of consumer markets and migration abroad are putting the system under severe pressure

SpaceX's Starship blasts in flight test



Washington, Jan 17: A SpaceX Starship rocket broke up in space minutes after launching from Texas Thursday, forcing airline flights over the Gulf of Mexico to alter course to avoid falling debris and setting back Elon Musk's flagship rocket program.

SpaceX mission control lost contact with the newly upgraded Starship, carrying its first test payload of mock satellites but no crew, eight minutes after liftoff from its South Texas rocket facilities at 5:38 pm EST (2238 GMT).

Video shot by Reuters showed orange balls of light streaking across the sky over the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince, leaving trails of smoke behind.

"We did lose all communications with the ship - that is essentially telling us we had an anomaly with the upper stage," SpaceX Communications Manager Dan Huot said, confirming minutes later that the ship was lost.

The last time a Starship upper stage failed was in March last year, as it was reentering Earth's atmosphere over the Indian Ocean, but rarely has a SpaceX mishap caused widespread disruptions to air traffic.

Dozens of commercial flights diverted to other airports or altered course to avoid potential debris, according to flight tracking website FlightRadar24. Departures from air-

- Starship prototype fails after launch from Texas, forces airlines to alter course
- Upper stage anomaly leads to loss of Starship
- Super Heavy booster Successfully returns to launchpad
- Starship had multiple upgrades, poised to deploy mock satellites

ports in Miami and Fort Lauderdale, Florida, were also delayed by about 45 minutes, it added.

The Federal Aviation Administration, which regulates private launch activities, said it had briefly slowed and diverted planes around the area where space debris was falling, but normal operations had since resumed.

The FAA regularly closes airspace for space launches and reentries, but it can create a "debris response area" to prevent aircraft from entering if the space vehicle experiences an anomaly outside the ordinarily closed zone.

SpaceX CEO Musk posted a video on X showing the debris field and said, "Success is uncertain, but entertainment is guaranteed!"

The failure came a day after Blue Origin, billionaire Amazon (AMZN.O), opens new tab founder Jeff Bezos' space company, successfully launched its giant New Glenn rocket into orbit for the first time.

Business

of the day **Quote**

Yesterday's cabinet, we have approved reforming of 687 Mhz. Which means this takes us from 900 Mhz to 1,587 Mhz. 320 (MHz) will be released immediately, some by the end of next year and some by the end of 2028-29 which makes us ready for 2030

India achieved an unprecedented feat in 2024 by securing the top position globally in terms of IPO volume. With 335 IPOs, India successfully surpassed both the US and Europe, with more than the number of IPOs listed compared to the US and Europe

This flagship maritime initiative aligns with Maritime India Vision 2030, supporting over 300 initiatives for transforming India's maritime landscape

Q3 RESULTS

Aether profit up 2X
New Delhi: Specialty chemical manufacturer Aether Industries posted a more than two-fold jump in consolidated net profit at ₹43.3 crore for the third quarter of the 2024-25 fiscal year on strong sales, the company said Friday.

SBI Life profit zooms
New Delhi: SBI Life Insurance Friday reported a 71 per cent rise in net profit at ₹551 crore for the third quarter ended December. The life insurance company promoted by SBI had earned a profit of ₹322 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal.

Wipro profit jumps
New Delhi: IT services company Wipro Friday reported a 24.4 per cent year-on-year rise in its consolidated net profit for the just-ended December quarter at about ₹3,354 crore.

Growth in India slowed more than expected: IMF

In 2023, India's growth rate was 8.2%, which dropped to 6.5% in 2024 and is expected to remain the same in 2025, 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Washington, Jan 17: Led by a sharper-than-expected deceleration in industrial activity, economic growth in India slowed more than anticipated and is projected to remain at 6.5 per cent till 2026, the International Monetary Fund said Friday.

"Growth in India slowed more than expected, led by a sharper-than-expected deceleration in industrial activity," the IMF said in its latest update of the World Economic Outlook, according to which the global economy is holding steady. In 2023, India's growth rate was 8.2 per cent, which dropped to 6.5 per cent in 2024.

Time apposite to rekindle animal spirits through consumption boost: RBI Bulletin

Mumbai: Weeks before the presentation of the Union Budget, the Reserve Bank Bulletin made a strong case for providing consumption boost as the time is apposite to rekindle the animal spirits, create mass consumer demand and trigger a boom in investment.

In 2023, India's growth rate was 8.2 per cent, which dropped to 6.5 per cent in 2024. It is expected to remain the same in 2025 and 2026, it added. IMF's Chief Economist Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas said the decline in inflation to 4.2 per cent this year and 3.5 per cent next year will help draw to a close the global disruptions of recent years, including the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which precipitated the largest inflation surge in four decades.

Weaker rupee to push import bill, says GTRI

In last ten years, between January 2015 and 2025, rupee has weakened by 41.3% against the US dollar, falling from ₹61.4 to ₹86.7



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 17: The weaker rupee will push the country's import bill due to higher payments for crude oil, coal, vegetable oil, gold, diamonds, electronics, machinery, plastics, and chemicals, economic think tank GTRI said Friday.

Citing an example, it said the depreciating domestic currency will increase India's gold import bill, especially as global gold prices have jumped 31.25 per cent, rising from \$65,877 per kg in January 2024 to \$86,464 per kg in January 2025.

Since January 16, last year, the Indian Rupee (INR) has weakened by 4.71 per cent against the US dollar, falling from ₹82.8 to ₹86.7. In the last ten years, between January 2015 and 2025, the INR has weakened by 41.3 per cent against the US dollar, falling from ₹61.4 to ₹86.7, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said in its report.

Overall, weaker INR will inflate import bills, raise energy and input prices, leading to an overheated economy. Past ten-year export data says that weak INR does not help exports contrary to what economists say

AJAY SRIVASTAVA | FOUNDER, GTRI

data tells a different story: high-import sectors are thriving, while labour-intensive, low-import industries like textiles are floundering.

The think tank also said that for sectors relying heavily on imports, a depreciating rupee against the US dollar increases input costs, reducing competitiveness. In theory, sectors with low import dependence, like textiles, should gain the most from a weaker rupee, while high-import sectors like electronics should benefit the least.

"However, trade data from 2014 to 2024 tells a different story. During the 2014 to 2024 period, overall merchandise exports grew by 39 per cent, but high-import sectors like electronics, machinery, and computers saw much higher growth," he said adding electronics exports surged by 232.8 per cent, and machinery and computer exports grew by 152.4 per cent. Meanwhile, low-import sectors like textiles and clothing experienced negative growth, even though the weaker rupee should have made their goods more competitive globally, he added.

Indices snap 3-day winning run

On weekly front, the BSE benchmark tanked 759.58 points or 0.98%, and the Nifty declined 228.3 points or 0.97%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Table with 2 columns: Stock Name and Change. Includes ZOMATO (+2.79%), RELIANCE (+2.57%), NESTLE INDIA (+2.26%), TATA STEEL (+1.96%), ASIAN PAINTS (+1.95%), INFOSYS (-5.77%), AXIS BANK (-4.71%), KOTAK BANK (-2.58%), MUMBAI (-2.11%), TCS (-1.96%).

Mumbai, Jan 17: Key benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slipped into negative territory Friday after a three-day rally, dragged by intense selling pressure in IT, banking and financial stocks. Unabated foreign fund outflows and elevated crude prices in international markets also played spoilsport for the bourses.

The ongoing tussle between bulls and bears reflects mixed market sentiment, with select heavyweights supporting recovery hopes on a rotational basis. However, persistent FII selling and a mixed start to the earnings season are restricting upward momentum

AJIT MISHRA | SVP, RESEARCH, RELIGARE BROKING

"Markets remained under pressure throughout the trading session as rising US bond yields continue to create uncertainty amongst local investors. With FII fund outflows from domestic equities remaining strong, geo-political uncertainty and concerns over the slow pace in US rate cuts going ahead will keep investors on the edge," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

BHARAT MOBILITY GLOBAL EXPO 2025

Future of mobility belongs to India: PM

India saw unprecedented sale of 2.5cr vehicles a year, and attracted \$36 billion foreign direct investment in just four years



Addressing a gathering after inaugurating the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam here, the prime minister also emphasised that India stands as an outstanding destination for every investor looking to shape one's future in the mobility sector.

The five-day expo which is being held across three venues -- Bharat Mandapam and Yashobhoomi in the national capital and India Expo Center and Mart, Greater Noida -- is expected to witness over 100 new launches across automobiles, component products and technologies.

India's largest auto expo, scheduled from January 17-22, will bring the entire value chain of the mobility ecosystem -- from automobile manufacturers to components, electronics parts, tyre and energy storage makers, and automotive software firms and material recyclers -- under a single umbrella. "India is an excellent destination for every investor looking to see their future in mobility," he said while reassuring everyone that the government is fully supportive and encouraged everyone to continue advancing with the mantra of 'Make in India, Make for the World'.

Sliding ₹: Forex kitty dips to 10-month low

REUTERS

Mumbai, Jan 17: India's foreign exchange reserves extended their losing streak for a sixth straight week and stood at a 10-month low of \$625.87 billion as of January 10, data from the Reserve Bank of India showed Friday. The reserves declined by \$8.72 billion in the reported week, the fallen by two months. They have fallen by a cumulative \$23.5 billion in the prior five weeks, and are down by \$79 billion from their all-time high of \$704.89 billion hit in September. Changes in foreign currency assets are caused by the central bank's intervention in the forex market as well as the appreciation or depreciation of foreign assets held in the reserves.

BIZ BUZZ

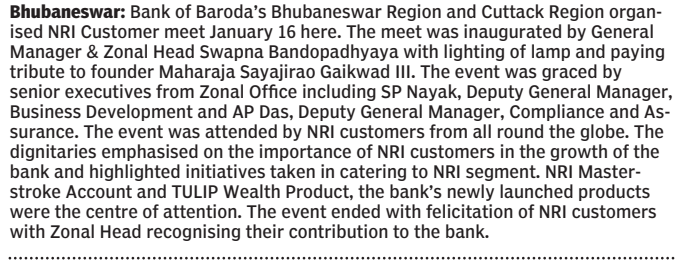
Naveen Jindal meets CM Majhi

Bhubaneswar: Third time Member of Parliament (Kurukshetra) & Chairman of Jindal Steel & Power Naveen Jindal called on Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi January 16. During the meeting held at the Lok Seva Bhawan, he discussed JSP's ongoing projects in the state, including significant capacity expansion of Angul steel plant. Jindal also met Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo and Minister for Law, Works & Excise Departments Prithiviraj Harichandan. JSP's Executive Director in charge (Angul) Pankaj Malhan and other senior officials accompanied Jindal during the visit.



BoB holds NRI customer meet

Bhubaneswar: Bank of Baroda's Bhubaneswar Region and Cuttack Region organised NRI Customer meet January 16 here. The meet was inaugurated by General Manager & Zonal Head Swapna Bandopadhyaya with lighting of lamp and paying tribute to founder Maharaja Sayajirao Gaikwad III. The event was graced by senior executives from Zonal Office including SP Nayak, Deputy General Manager, Business Development and AP Das, Deputy General Manager, Compliance and Assurance. The event was attended by NRI customers from all round the globe. The dignitaries emphasised on the importance of NRI customers in the growth of the bank and highlighted initiatives taken in catering to NRI segment. NRI Master-stroke Account and TULIP Wealth Product, the bank's newly launched products were the centre of attention. The event ended with felicitation of NRI customers with Zonal Head recognising their contribution to the bank.



Canara Bank organises SHG Credit Linkage, Financial Literacy Camp



Bhubaneswar: Canara Bank Regional Office Bhubaneswar observed Mega SHG Credit Linkage and Financial Literacy Camp at Balakati January 17. The programme was attended by Bhavendra Kumar, Executive Director, Canara Bank Head Office, Sumitra Pattanai, Additional Secretary, Mission Shakti, Jagdish Chander, GM, Circle Head Bhubaneswar, Netra Mohan Patra, DGM, Circle Office Bhubaneswar and Mahamaya Prasad Roy, AGM, RO Head, Bhubaneswar. In total ₹7 crore loan amount was sanctioned in the camp and 500 SHG members attended the programme. Financial literacy programmes were also arranged to create awareness about various government sponsored schemes like PMJBY, PMSBY, PMJDY, APY, SSY for better financial literacy and upliftment of rural economy.

