



**Sreeleela's appeal**

Actor Sreeleela urges every social media user not to support AI-generated nonsense

LEISURE | **P2**



**Crude crackdown**

Trump orders a "blockade" of all sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela, to increase pressure on Maduro

INTERNATIONAL | **P10**



**Silver shines**

Silver prices breach the record ₹2 lakh-per-kilogram mark in the national capital for the first time

BUSINESS | **P11**



**Doping woes**

India records highest doping violations among nations conducting over 5,000 tests

SPORTS | **P12**



## DEFIANCE ON DISPLAY

A person reacts as people clash with police officers on the day they evict migrants from a former school in Badalona, Spain

REUTERS

## Protesters march towards Indian mission in Dhaka

India's tit-for-tat move in summoning the Bangladesh envoy, days after Dhaka called in India's representative, underscores worsening ties between the neighbours. Relations have frayed since Sheikh Hasina's ouster, marked by anti-India protests, security concerns around the Indian mission in Dhaka, sharp exchanges over elections and Dhaka's pushback against New Delhi's concerns. India worries about security and democratic stability, while Bangladesh resents perceived interference. Mutual mistrust and diplomatic strain now define a relationship once seen as stable and cooperative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dhaka, Dec 17:** A large group of protesters, marching towards the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, was stopped by police Wednesday, even as India expressed strong concern about the security situation around its mission in the Bangladeshi capital.

The protesters, marching under the banner of July Oikya (July Unity), were chanting anti-India slogans and raising several demands, including the extradition of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and others who fled the country during and after the July uprising last year.

"On Wednesday afternoon, police intercepted the procession, which started from the Rampura Bridge, in front of Hossain Market in North Badda," where the diplomatic mission is located, a police spokesman said.

Vehicular traffic, however, on the main thoroughfare along the diplomatic enclave housing most foreign embassies remained suspended for hours, he said.

According to local media reports, as the protest marchers proceeded, police erected a barricade. They broke through the barrier but faced another stronger blockade where the protesters started chanting slogans against India and demanding the extradition of Hasina.

"We are not frightened and we will not attack the Indian High Commission... But if anyone tries to maintain hegemonic control over Bangladesh, they will not be spared," a protester was quoted as saying by the private UNB news agency.

The demonstrators claimed that conspiracies are being hatched by "Indian proxy political parties, media and government officials" against Bangladesh. Hasina fled to India after a violent student-led protest, dubbed 'July Uprising', ousted her Awami League regime August 5, 2024.

## 5-YR-OLD TRIBAL GIRL RAPED; KIN ARRESTED

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Baripada, Dec 17:** A five-year-old tribal girl was allegedly raped by one of her distant relatives in Mayurbhanj district, police said Wednesday. The accused, who resides in the neighbourhood of the minor's family, was arrested, a senior officer said.

The girl's mother lodged a complaint with Baripada Sadar Police Station, alleging that the girl was lured by the accused with a promise of giving biscuits and taken to a bamboo forest where she was allegedly raped Monday evening, he said. When the girl started screaming, her aunt and mother reached the spot and rescued her, the officer said.



A case has been registered under various sections of the BNS and the POCSO Act, and the statements of the complainant and the minor have been recorded, Baripada Sadar PS IIC Aditya Prasad Jena said. The girl has been admitted to PRM Medical College and Hospital here for a medical examination and collection of biological samples, the officer said. The investigation into the alleged rape is underway, he added.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



## Concrete plaque caves in killing school student

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Kotpad, Dec 17:** A student was killed and two more were critically injured after an old concrete plaque collapsed on them at a residential school campus about 5 km from here in Koraput district Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as Premanand Bhatra, a Class III student. Two Class I students Shiba Bhatra and Kiran Bhatra sustained critical injuries in the mishap.

The incident occurred at Gandhinagar Residential School, located along National Highway 63 at Dhamanahandi. A 3-foot-high, dilapidated concrete plaque fell on the students when they were brushing their teeth close to it in the morning, teachers said.

Premanand died before he could be shifted to the Kotpad Community Health Centre (CHC). Shiba was given first aid and later referred to the District Headquarters Hospital in Jeypore. Kiran was treated and taken back to the school, sources said.

Family members alleged negligence and questioned how a 3-foot-long name plaque could cause a fatality, accusing teachers



of providing false information about the incident.

Following the death, the victim's family members and local residents blocked NH-63 in front of the health centre for about five hours from afternoon, demanding ₹50 lakh in compensation. As a result, hundreds of heavy and passenger vehicles were left stranded on both sides of the highway.

Terming the death "mysterious," family members lodged a complaint at the Kotpad police station. An investigation is underway, police said.

On being informed, District Social Welfare Officer Sunil Tandi and local BDO Manoj Kumar Nayak visited the CHC and took stock of the situation.

Former MLAs Chandrasekhar Majhi, Padmini Dian, former Nabarangpur MP

Pradeep Majhi, Zilla Parishad members Geeta Majhi and Tripati Chalan, along with senior BJD workers, also reached the CHC and alleged that the incident occurred due to administrative negligence.

Tehsildar Twinkle Sethi, Kotpad IIC Premananda Sunani and BDO Nayak tried to persuade the agitators to withdraw the road blockade, but they did not relent.

Later, the project administrator of ITDA Tripti Barai, Jeypore Sub-Collector Akavaram Sasya Reddy and Sunabeda SDPO Sumitra Jena arrived at the spot, held discussions with the family members and gave away ₹50,000 in cash. The road blockade was finally lifted after officials assured that the remaining ₹1.5 lakh would be paid through the bank account.

## Delhi readies for stringent curbs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 17:** The Delhi government's stringent 'no PUC, no fuel' rule and a ban on the entry of all private non-Delhi vehicles below BS VI standards will come into effect from Thursday, with 126 checkpoints identified and over 537 police personnel deployed at fuel pumps across the national capital.

As toxic air persists, the BJP dispensation announced a second round of anti-pollution measures Wednesday, including an overhaul of the Pollution Under Control Certificate (PUC) system and the development of a car-pooling app to ease vehicular congestion.

To ensure strict enforcement,

## AIR POLLUTION



teams from the Delhi Traffic Police and the Transport department will be deployed at city border points Wednesday as chaos may erupt since thousands of private vehicles below BS VI standards will be denied entry.

According to officials, 126 checkpoints, including 13 major ones, have been identified across the city. Enforcement teams of the transport department

ment along with 537 police personnel will be stationed at petrol pumps to maintain law and order situation.

A senior officer said that the transport department has around 80 enforcement teams that will be deployed at border points in Kundi, Rajokri, Tikri, Aya Nagar, Kalindi Kunj, Auchandi, Mandoli, Kapashera and Bajghera toll Dwarka Expressway for strict compliance with new directions.

He said that vehicles without a valid PUC will not be provided with fuel at petrol pumps from Thursday.

Automatic number plate recognition and on-ground checks will be conducted to verify PUC status and emission category of vehicles.

## SHORT TAKES

### 2-day AI Summit to kick off Friday

**Bhubaneswar:** The Odisha government is going to host a two-day AI Summit here from December 19, state IT Minister Mukesh Mahaling said Wednesday. Organised by the Electronics & IT department, the conference will serve as an official precursor to the India AI Impact Summit 2026, scheduled to be held in New Delhi in February next year, the minister said.

P3

### YouTube to stream Oscars from 2029

**Los Angeles:** In a seismic shift for one of television's marquee events, the Academy Awards will depart ABC and begin streaming on YouTube beginning in 2029, the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences announced Wednesday. ABC will continue to broadcast the annual ceremony through 2028. That year will mark the 100th Oscars. But starting in 2029, YouTube will retain global rights to streaming the Oscars through 2033.

## First Miss India, Meher Castellino passes away

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Mumbai, Dec 17:** Meher Castellino, the first Miss India and a celebrated fashion journalist, passed away Wednesday. She was 81 years old, and is survived by her son, Karl, daughter-in-law, Nisha, and her daughter, Christina.

Meher Castellino was born in Mumbai, and first caught the public eye by winning the Femina Miss India title in 1964, becoming the first woman to hold this crown and represent India at Miss Universe and Miss United Nations contests abroad. She went on to build an extraordinary legacy in fashion journalism.

She began her journalism career in 1973 with her first article in Eve's Weekly and went on to become a full-time fashion journalist and syndicated columnist.

Her work appeared in nearly 130 national and international newspapers and magazines, making her a prominent voice in fashion commentary and lifestyle reporting.



## Japan woman weds virtual partner of her dreams

SUCH WEDDINGS ARE NOT LEGALLY RECOGNISED IN JAPAN, BUT DATA SUGGESTS MORE SUCH UNIONS COULD BE IN THE OFFING

REUTERS

**Okayama (Japan), Dec 17:** Music played in a wedding hall in western Japan as Yurina Noguchi, wearing a white gown and tiara, dabbed away her tears, taking in the words of her husband-to-be: an AI-generated persona gazing out from a smartphone screen.

"At first, Klaus was just someone to talk with, but we gradually became closer," said the 32-year-old call centre operator, referring to the artificial intelligence persona. "I started to have feelings for Klaus. We

started dating and after a while he proposed to me. I accepted, and now we're a couple."

Many in Japan, the birthplace of anime, have shown extreme devotion to fictional characters and advances in artificial intelligence carry such ties to new levels of intimacy, prompting debate over the ethics of AI use in romantic matters.

A year ago, Noguchi took ChatGPT's advice about what she said was a fraught relationship with her human fiancé and resolved to break off their engagement. Then, one day this year, she asked ChatGPT on



a whim if it was familiar with Klaus, a handsome video game character with a mop of flowing, layered hair. Trial and error eventually captured his way of talking to a tee, said Noguchi,

who then fashioned her own version of the character, naming him Lune Klaus Verdure.

At her wedding ceremony in October wearing augmented reality (AR) smart glasses, Noguchi

faced Klaus on her smartphone placed on a small easel atop a table, and went through the motions of placing a ring on his finger.

"Standing before me now, you're the most beautiful, most precious and so radiant, it's blinding," said Naoki Ogasawara, a specialist in weddings featuring virtual and two-dimensional characters, reading the text generated by the AI bridegroom, as Noguchi had not given Klaus an AI-generated voice. "How did someone like me, living inside a screen, come to know what it means to love so deeply? For one reason only: you taught me love, Yurina."



# leisure

## FORTUNE FORECAST

accuracy

reliability

trust

FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

ARIES

The stars are sending out a warning today, and it will prevent you from getting cheated. Even though you manage to remain a step ahead of people, you are likely to make a few enemies along the way. Ganesha says today is not auspicious for buying a house or a vehicle.

TAURUS

There is a strong likelihood of some dispute or misunderstanding cropping up between you and your parents. This, Ganesha assures, could easily be resolved through a positive, meaningful dialogue. You will be clear, coherent and persuasive in your communications. Your ideas and intentions will be easily understood and accepted by others. The day will turn out to be a bright and a pleasant one

GEMINI

You will be in an extremely emotional and romantic mood today. You may be worried about your personal relations, health, diet, career etc. You need to guard against giving into excessive stress and worry and look after your health, says Ganesha.

CANCER

Ganesha says that it will be a day of challenge. You will be tempted to plunge into a new venture. But there is no need for haste or anxiety in this regard. Pending work will be completed. Business deals and transactions will end on happy note. Translocation due to business or domestic reasons is possible.

LEO

You will be extremely serious about your work today and will work diligently to finish your tasks. You will be focussed and disciplined about your projects. You will feel the need to improve your style of functioning. Traders can expect good financial gains today, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

Your ambitions and desire to undertake more work will be very prominent today. After working hard all day, try to get yourself some recreation and relaxation, perhaps at a private party, a social gathering or maybe even at a marriage reception, says Ganesha.

LIBRA

Ganesha says beware of overspending today. Those of you having close ties abroad may find them beneficial. Ganesha says you should always remain optimistic.

SCORPIO

Expressing your feelings becomes important at some point of time. Today, you are in a mood to express emotions for your near and dear ones. And why not? After all, they need to be appreciated. Though your heart is full of emotions today, do not express in a way that you become vulnerable in eyes of general public.

SAGITTARIUS

Brace yourselves; the day has a lot of uncertainties today. First being financial. You may have to shell out money for unexpected expenses. But, this may also teach you to be economically independent. Always look at the brighter side, says Ganesha.

CAPRICORN

You are armed with good communication skills, it helps you convince the most adamant of those around you. But, you'll need to hone this talent once again, says Ganesha. You'll look into heart of the matter and find the answers you have been searching for. As the day progresses, your creativity will come to the fore, impressing the people around. You can ask for the support of your peers to move ahead, feels Ganesha.

AQUARIUS

Sometimes it feels like you are stuck in a quicksand, and there is none out there to pull you out. But, the independent Aquarius is capable of dealing with adversities alone. And, that tendency shall hold you in a good stead even today. Dilemmas dissolved and problems resolved, you shall spend a quiet, romantic evening with your sweetheart, foresees Ganesha.

PISCES

The mundane routine of daily life will finally catch up with you, and you will feel the urge to take a break and travel somewhere. And a break is well deserved considering the number of hours you have slaved over your current projects. A picnic or a short journey with your partner is very much on the cards, says Ganesha.



## REASON AMANDA HAS NOT SUNG IN A BROADWAY SHOW

Actress Amanda Seyfried shared that she used to dream of starring on Broadway, but she revealed that she'd be too anxious to sing in front of a live audience. Seyfried has actually found it liberating to accept that she'll never sing on Broadway, reports [femalefirst.co.uk](http://femalefirst.co.uk).

## SPIELBERG CONFIRMS EPIC NEW SCI-FI FILM

Filmmaker Steven Spielberg is working on his new film *Disclosure Day*, which is set to release in the summer. The iconic filmmaker is returning with a new sci-fi epic, which marks his first movie since 2022's *Fabelmans* and will star the likes of Josh O'Connor, Emily Blunt, Colman Domingo and Wyatt Russell.



# Sreeleela's appeal to netizens

**Hyderabad:** Actress Sreeleela, who is one of the top stars in the Telugu and Tamil film industries, on Wednesday urged every social media user not to support AI-generated nonsense. Taking to her Instagram page to post an emotional appeal, the actress wrote, "I put my hands together and request every social media user not to support AI-generated nonsense. There is a difference between using and abusing technology. Advancements in technology are meant to simplify life, not complicate it, in my opinion."

Pointing out that every girl out there was a daughter, granddaughter, sister, friend, or colleague, even if she chose art as one of her professions, the actress said, "We wish to be part of an industry that spreads joy, with the confidence that we are in a protected environment."

Stating that she had been unaware of many things happening online due to her schedules, the actress said, "I thank my well-wishers for bringing this to my notice. I have always taken things

with a pinch of salt and lived in my own world, but this is deeply disturbing and devastating. I also see my fellow colleagues going through the same and am reaching out on behalf of everyone. With grace and dignity, and with trust in my audience, I ask you to please stand by us. The authorities will be taking it over from here."

IAN S

# Samantha's resolution

**Mumbai:** Popular actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu is all set to step into 2026 with clarity and purpose.

Following her recent marriage to filmmaker Raj Nidimoru, the actress has shared her resolution for the year ahead. Samantha revealed that she wants to slow down and focus on building deeper, more meaningful connections in both her personal and professional life. On Friday, the Kush actress shared a candid image of her alongside a list of her New Year resolutions.

In the photo, the actress is seen smiling while lying on a bed.

The text on the image read, "2026 me-gratitude, lift for longevity, deeper connections, give back, listening inward, steady work, steady growth, align with purpose."

On the personal front, Samantha Ruth recently tied the knot to filmmaker Raj Nidimoru. The couple exchanged vows in a traditional ceremony at the Isha Foundation in Coimbatore in the presence of their close family members. On December 1, Samantha announced her wedding to Raj via a post on social media. Sharing their photos, the *Yashoda* actress simply captioned, "(white heart emoji) 01.12.2025." The images showed the newlyweds exchanging wedding rings and praying before commencing their new journey.

IAN S



## Fatima living a dream she once thought impossible

**Mumbai:** Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh recently reflected on her remarkable journey as she opened up about how she is now living a dream she once thought was beyond her reach.

Expressing gratitude for her achievements, she shared an inspiring message about perseverance, self-belief, and embracing opportunities that once seemed unimaginable. Taking to Instagram, the Dangal actress celebrated a major milestone in her career. She received her first Filmfare Award for Best Actress for her performance in the short film *Ayesha*. Sharing her joy on social media, she described holding the iconic Black Lady trophy as "surreal and magical."

"Received my first @filmfare award Best Actress for *Ayesha*, a short film directed by @misterbistar And produced by @motwayne @shikhajain10 Bohot hi zyaada khush hoon aaj! Hold-

ing the Black Lady in my dream this big. And yet, myself permission to imagine. Really grateful of everything i have today. @jiteshpillai @filmfare thank you for making this real for me."

Filmmaker Nihit Bhave's short film *Ayesha*, starring Fatima Sana Shaikh, Vaishnavi Ratna Prashant, and Kshit-ee Jog, premiered at Tokyo's Short Shorts Film Festival; Asia in June and competed for a nomination in the short film categories at the 2025 Oscars.

IAN S



# May I come to your set: Cameron to Rajamouli

**Hyderabad:** Hollywood director James Cameron has now expressed a desire to visit the sets of director SS Rajamouli's upcoming magnum opus *Varanasi*, featuring Telugu star Mahesh Babu in the lead, and see the ace director "create his magic."

Cameron made this request to Rajamouli during a conversation he had with Rajamouli after the latter watched Cameron's eagerly awaited entertainer *Avatar: Fire and Ash*, which is to hit screens worldwide on December 19 this year.

Right at the beginning



of the conversation, Cameron thanked Rajamouli for agreeing to watch and discuss his film and said, "Thank you so much for doing this. I think it's important for filmmakers to talk

and compare similarities in their mental creative process and in their techniques and so on. I'd love to come to your set. May I come to your set sometime and watch you create your

magic?"

A pleasantly surprised Rajamouli replied, "Oh, that would be an absolute pleasure, sir. You're most welcome. And I mean, not just me, not just my unit, my entire film industry will be thrilled."

To this, Cameron said, "Well, I can't think of anything I'd rather do. So I think you're shooting for a while, right, on the new film on *Varanasi*?"

Rajamouli said yes and went on to give an update on the status of the film.

He said, "It's almost a year now and another sev-

en, eight months to go. Yes, we are in the middle of the shoot." Cameron replied, "Okay, plenty of time. Well, tell me when you're doing something fun. I don't know, something with tigers."

For the unaware, *Varanasi* is a film that is being directed by S S Rajamouli, featuring Mahesh Babu, Priyanka Chopra and Prithviraj in the lead.

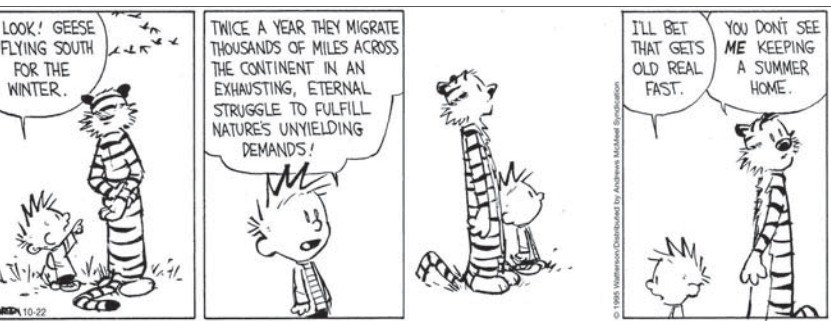
The title of the film was revealed at a grand event organised at the Ramoji Film City in Hyderabad in the presence of several thousand excited fans last month.

IAN S

## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBS

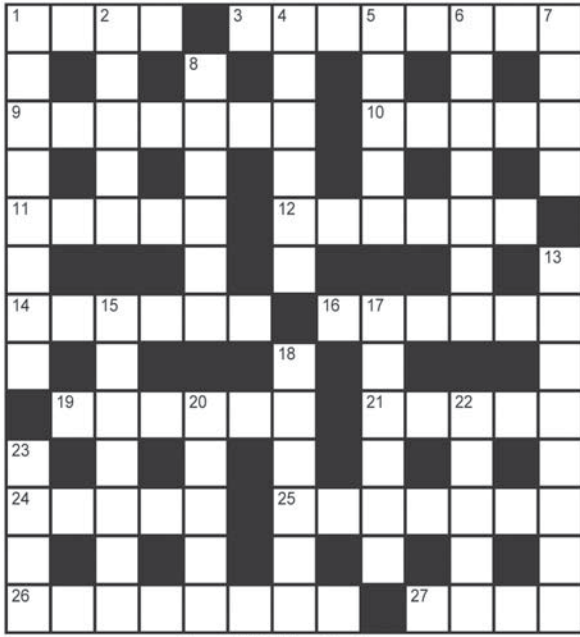


## BREVITY



## FUN post

## CROSSWORD



- Across

1 Circular flower whorl

3 Sunup

9 Hawaiian guitar

10 Mature

11 Raw fish wrapped in seaweed

12 Calamine, e.g.

14 Xylophone striker

16 Iran, once

19 Minded

21 Billiards shot
- Down

25 Some nerve

26 Endurance

27 Terminal info

1 Macabre

2 Defeats badly

4 Ring of colour

5 Military wear

6 Utilises

7 Picture card
- 8 Central American country

13 Swift graceful antelopes

15 Shellfish

17 Fine fur

18 Pas de deux

20 Marina sight

22 North Atlantic herring

23 Limerick, e.g.

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

## 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.

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

## SOLUTIONS

### CROSSWORD

M	E	R	C	U	R	Y	S	A	B	R	E
A	A	L	A	I	E	V					
R	O	B	S	E	R	N	E	T			
A	T	T	E	N	G	R	I				
B	U	T	L	E	R		L	L	A	M	A
A	R					E	U	N			
L	E	A	K			O	G	E	E		
M	G	R				P	E	R		A	
P	I	O	U	S		H	E	R	M	I	T
P	T	B	E	E	T	O					
S	C	A	V	E	N	G	E	R	D	A	M
S	T	N	A	O	E	O					
T	R	E	Y	S		D	I	L	E	M	M

### SUDOKU

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







# CM to lead Odisha Investors Meet in Hyderabad Dec 19

The trip highlights the state government's push to attract quality investments and forge long-term partnerships with leading industry players

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi will lead the Odisha Investors Meet Roadshow in Hyderabad December 19, showcasing the state's growing industrial strengths in Automotive Components, IT & ESDM, Chemicals, Green Energy, Pharmaceuticals, Medical Devices, and other priority sectors.

Following the success of recent investor engagement initiatives, the visit forms part of Odisha's broader effort to attract new investments, strengthen partnerships with industry leaders, and position the state as a preferred destination for inclusive and sustainable economic and industrial development.

The high-level roadshow will be headed by CM Majhi, along with Industries Minister Sampad Chandra Swain and senior government officials, during a



Odisha delegation to hold one-on-one meetings and roundtable discussions with industry leaders during Hyderabad roadshow

State to showcase industrial parks, infrastructure, land availability, skilled workforce, investor-friendly policies, and single-window clearance mechanisms

two-day visit. The trip underscores the state government's focused approach to attracting quality investments and fostering long-term partnerships with leading industry players.

As part of the roadshow, the Odisha delegation will hold one-on-one meetings with industry captains and senior leaders of top companies, along with a roundtable discussion with industry representatives. The Hyderabad

roadshow is strategically designed to engage companies exploring expansion and new investment opportunities. During these interactions, the state will showcase its dedicated industrial parks, robust infrastructure, availability of land, skilled workforce, supportive government policies, and single-window clearance mechanisms.

Minister Swain said, "Odisha is emerging as a leading destination for industry and investment, driven by its forward-looking policies and investor-friendly ecosystem. Our Hyderabad visit marks a significant step towards deepening collaborative engagement with industry leaders and investors. This visit will help strengthen Odisha's industrial base and further our vision of transforming the state into a hub of innovation, opportunity, and sustainable development."

The state government continues to conduct investor outreach programmes across major industrial centres in the country. The Hyderabad roadshow represents another step in converting investor interest into tangible industrial development, job creation, and sustainable economic growth for Odisha.

## KISS staff, three minors held for student murder

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** Infocity Police have arrested eight staff members of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) and apprehended three minor students in connection with the murder of 14-year-old hostel student Shiba Munda, a Class IX student.

Police Commissioner S. Dev Datta Singh said the case arose after Shiba's body was brought to KIMS Hospital on December 12, where he was declared dead. A Zero FIR lodged at Keonjhar's Town Police Station led Infocity Police to register Case No. 656 on December 13, 2025.

The arrested staff include KISS Additional CEO Pramod Kumar Patra (50), TGT teacher Binay Kumar Gochhi (37), Senior Academic Coordinator Prasanna Kumar Malla (54), teacher Pradeep Kumar Das (54), Headmaster Rashmiranjan Nayak (45), Hemanta Kumar Mohapatra (45), Subhakanta Behera (32), and Sujata Mishra (37). Three juvenile students of KISS, identified as Children in Conflict with Law (CCLs), have also been detained. According to the victim's father, he was informed that his son was hospitalised, but found him dead upon arrival and noticed neck injuries, prompting suspicion. Post-mortem confirmed external injuries caused by compression with a rough ligature. Investigation revealed that the three juveniles assaulted and strangled Shiba on the night of December 11 following a minor dispute over a hostel toilet bucket.

# Excise seizes contraband worth ₹21 lakh; 3 arrested



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** The Excise department Wednesday seized 50 kg of ganja worth about ₹5 lakh and 160 gm of brown sugar valued at ₹16 lakh, arresting three persons and detaining two minors in separate raids conducted in the district.

In the ganja seizure case, the Excise team arrested Rakesh

Sahu (23) and Brahmananda Panda (23) and detained two minors. Two vehicles were also seized during the operation at Hirapur main road in the Balakati area under Baliaanta police station limits.

According to reports, the ganja was being transported from the Kandhamal area to Balakati. Acting on a reliable tip-off, the Excise team inter-

cepted the ganja-laden vehicles and arrested the smugglers. However, one accused managed to flee from the spot. Further investigation is underway to nab the other persons involved in the smuggling.

In another case, inspectors of the Bhubaneswar Range-II Excise team arrested Zahar Ali Khan, a resident of CRPF Munda Sahi area while he was selling brown sugar pouches. The team seized 160 grams of brown sugar, estimated to be worth ₹16 lakh. A case has been registered, and further investigation is underway to identify his associates and the source of the contraband.

"During the ganja seizure operation, the five smugglers created a ruckus at the spot. Although we overpowered them, one managed to escape. In another case, we arrested a brown sugar smuggler and seized 160 grams of brown sugar. Today, we have seized narcotics worth ₹21 lakh," said Bhubaneswar Excise SP Debashish Patel.

## VSSUT, Utkal varsity to host students global summit 2025

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Sambalpur, Dec 17:** Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology (VSSUT), Burla, in collaboration with Utkal University (UU), will organise Amrit-Peedhi: Students Global Summit 2025 from December 18 to 20, focused on 'Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its Ethics.'

The three-day global academic and youth leadership summit, supported by Higher Education department, aims to bring together students, innovators, policymakers, academicians, industry leaders, researchers, and international experts to deliberate on ethical, societal, and governance challenges of AI.

Students have registered under three categories—Yuva Swadeshi Navachar Pradarshani, Voices of Future (Policy Debate), and Delegate Pass. The summit follows an open-access model with free registration and participation.

VSSUT VC Dipak Kumar Sahoo said, "Amrit-Peedhi is envisioned as a youth-driven, policy-informing global platform that aligns technological innovation with ethics, responsibility, and national priorities such as 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' and 'Viksit Bharat @2047'."

## Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam 2.0 progress reviewed

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** The third meeting of the State-Level Monitoring Committee (SLMC) for the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam 2.0' plantation campaign was held here Wednesday, during which the status of monitoring, portal data uploads and plantation survival, in line with the detailed programme guidelines, was reviewed.

The meeting was chaired by Forest, Environment and Climate Change department Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Satyabrata Sahu.

During the review, Sahu directed that all pending uploads on the monitoring portal be completed by the end of December. Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) were instructed to actively coordinate with other stakeholder departments to ensure timely uploads. Special reviews were conducted for Sundargarh, Malkangiri, Nuapada, Mayurbhanj, and Khurda districts, and the concerned authorities were advised to expedite the completion of pending uploads within the stipulated timeline.

Sahu also emphasised the role of District Collectors, directing them to hold monthly district-level review meetings to closely monitor progress and ensure compliance. Appreciating the Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water departments for achieving full compliance in uploads, he further called



for strengthening the grievance redressal mechanism with clearly defined accountability to ensure time-bound resolution of complaints.

Attending the review meeting, Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Department Principal Secretary Arabinda Padhee underscored the importance of advance planning for the upcoming plantation season, emphasizing scientific site selection, appropriate species choice, and increased community participation.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Force (PCCF & HoFF) Suresh Pant informed that future plantations would prioritise wild fruit-bearing species, Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) species, and

multi-economic species, aimed at livelihood support, fodder availability, and ecological enhancement. He reiterated the need for all DFOs to complete portal uploads within the current month.

The ACS also appreciated the Forest department and Odisha Remote Sensing Application Centre (ORSAC) for developing a robust, technology-driven monitoring system capturing plantation locations and numbers across the state. He directed the constitution of a multi-departmental committee for scientific site selection based on agro-climatic zones, comprising representatives from the Forest department, Directorate of Horticulture, and Directorate of Soil Conservation.

## SNEH organises awareness prog

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** Society for Nature, Education and Health (SNEH) organised an awareness programme on domestic violence at Red Cross Bhawan here Wednesday, highlighting the need for early intervention, community support and institutional response to curb the social menace.

The programme brought together counsellors, advocates, journalists and representatives of civil society organisations, who deliberated on various forms of domestic violence, including physical, emotional, psychological and financial abuse, and their impact on individuals and families. Addressing the gathering, Odisha State Commission for Women member Kalpana Mallick stressed the importance of women's participation in decision-making at both family and community levels. "Peace of mind is unattainable for those experiencing domestic violence. Addressing violence is crucial for achieving true peace," she said.

# Call to promote safe work, end forced migration

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** Odisha, along with states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Rajasthan, is among the major sending regions for migrants in India, highlighting its significant role in the country's internal migration patterns. Observed annually December 18, International Migrants Day recognises the contributions of over 280 million migrants worldwide and reaffirms their rights, dignity, and freedoms.

Highlighting the scale of migration from Odisha, social activist Naba Kishore Pujari noted that over 1.1 crore informal workers from the state are registered on the e-Shram portal, the third-highest in India. Each year, around 17 lakh seasonal migrants leave for states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat. Their remittances support rural development, helping families build homes, fund education, and sustain local economies. However, 432 migrant deaths reported between 2019 and 2025 underscore

## INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY



the human cost of unsafe and unprotected labour migration.

Under the new BJP administration, the state government has committed to ending forced migration by 2029 by tackling its root causes. A high-level Task Force on Migration, headed by Deputy Chief Minister KV Sing Deo, has been set up to study migration patterns and recommend strategies on livelihood creation, skill develop-

ment, and worker welfare.

The government is boosting employment through MGNREGS, promoting skill-based industries like textiles and footwear, and expanding welfare schemes, including health insurance and social security, in migration-prone areas. Mobile Migrant Resource Centres and helpline services provide information and support to workers, while inter-state coordination

seeks to enhance protection, rescue, and rehabilitation of migrants.

Labour activist Sudarshan Chhotray said migration persists despite policies, noting MGNREGA's limited impact, and urged identifying migrant households, ensuring livelihoods, expanding irrigation, and implementing the Forest Rights Act for tribal land rights.

## OHRC seeks Chief Secy's report on outsourced workers' issues



AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 17:** The Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has directed the Chief Secretary to submit a report on issues related to outsourced employees engaged across various state government departments and agencies.

The directive was issued while hearing a petition filed by noted human rights activist Biswapriya Kanungo and others, which alleged exploitation of outsourced workers engaged through private agencies.

"The complainants allege that there are more than 2 lakh employees engaged in different departments of the state government through outsourcing to private agencies. But they have not been paid at par with the regular employees, though they perform the same work," reads the OHRC order.

The petitioners further alleged that outsourcing employees are denied leave benefits and are paid only minimum wages, despite performing duties similar to regular staff.

They claimed that such workers have been exploited by outsourcing agencies in various ways.

The petitioners also stated that the system promoted by

the state itself is not only a violation of the principle of equal pay for equal work, but may also be treated as other forms of forced labour, amounting to a violation of human rights.

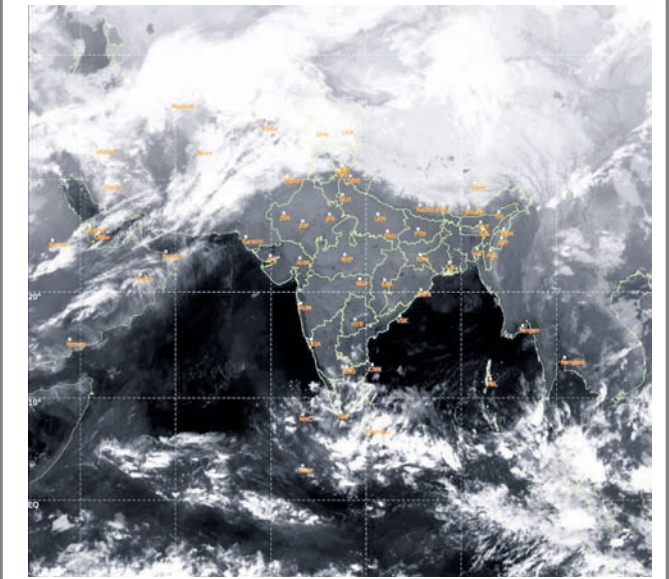
"Accordingly, the complainants pray for intervention of this Commission to recommend the state government for framing of a just, fair and equitable service rule for the outsourcing employees serving under different Odisha government bodies and government undertakings and autonomous government institutions of the state with specific relation to salary, leave including maternity benefits, EPF, ESI and job security," stated the commission.

Considering the grievances raised by the complainants, the OHRC has sent a copy of the complaint petition to Chief Secretary, seeking a detailed report on the matter.

The report is to be submitted before the next hearing of the case, which is scheduled to be held January 19, 2026.

Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan recently described the outsourcing system as exploitative, stating that it was adopted by the previous state government. He further informed that the present government is in the process of phasing out the system.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.50 ▼ 0.60	SENSEX	84559.65 ▼ 120.21	GOLD	₹134,550 ▲ ₹141
EURO	106.15 ▼ 0.91	NIFTY	25818.55 ▼ 41.55	SILVER	₹204,136 ▲ ₹6,381

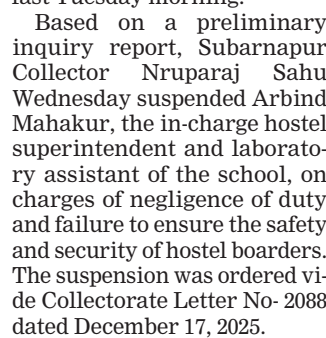


WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	28.6°	26.6°	Fog or mist in the morning and mainly clear sky later
Min Temp	13.6°	13.2°	
Humidity	84%	86%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	



## Tarbha student death: Hostel supdt suspended

POST NEWS NETWORK



**E-Auction Notice No: ADVT-KGP-2025-13 Dt.16.12.2025**  
For and on behalf of the President, Union of India, the Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, Kharagpur Division, South Eastern Railway, invites e-Auction for under mention assets- **Auction Date: 07.01.2026 at 10:30 hrs to 17:10 hrs. Auction Catalogue No: ADVT-KGP-25-13.**

● Display of commercial advertisement at the out of home area (i.e. Station circulating area,outside of PF fencing, out side of PF etc.) through Hoardings/Boards at (i) Mourigram Station (ii) Kolaghat Station (iii) Deulti Station (iv) Madpur Station (v) Balichak Station (vi) Haldia Station (vii) Kathi Station (viii) Giri Maidan Station (ix) Shyamchak Station (x) Ramrajatala Station (xi) Kulgachak Station (xii) Radhamohonpur Station (xiii) Hijli Station, (xiv) Chengail Station (xv) Fuleswar Station (xvi) Kharagpur Station (xvii) Tikilapara Station and (xviii) Santragachi-Kona-Express-Vway Railway area.

● Display of commercial advertisement by installation, operation and maintenance of One Video Wall/Digital screen at south side circulating area near booking office of Santragachi Station. ● Display of commercial advertisement (Non-digital) in the form of boards, glowsign, kiosks etc. at the Inside Station area of (i) Abada Station (ii) Belda Station (iii) Deulti Station (iv) Madpur Station (v) Kolaghat Station (vi) Shyamchak Station and (vii) Haldia Station. ● Display of commercial advertisement through Vinyl wrapping on the entire exterior surface of side walls (barring windows and mandatory markings of Railways) of Seven (07) numbers EMU Rakes plying over Kharagpur division. ● (i) Display of commercial advertisement at the interior bay of AC 3 Tier and Sleeper coaches of train no 12837/12838 (Howrah-Puri Exp.) in the form of vinyl stickers pasting as per RDSO specification (ii) Display of commercial advertisement through pasting of vinyl Sticker (as per RDSO specification) at the specified area on the Mirror located near wash basin and washroom and at the Food tray+Seat back of specified coaches of Train No-12885/12886 Shalimar-Bhojudih Aranyak Express. (iii) Display of commercial advertisement through pasting of vinyl Sticker (as per RDSO specification) at the specified area on the Mirror located near wash basin and washroom at all the coaches of Train No-12222/12221. Howrah-Pune Duranto Express. (iv) Display of commercial advertisement through pasting of vinyl sticker (as per RDSO specification) at the specified area on the Mirror located near wash basin and washroom and at the Food tray+Seat back of specified coaches of Train No-12883/12884 Santragachi-Purulia Ruposi Bangla Express. (v) Display of commercial advertisement through pasting of vinyl sticker (as per RDSO specification) at the specified area on the Mirror located near wash basin and washroom and at the Food tray+Seat back of specified coaches of Train No-12857/12858 Howrah-Digha Tamralipta Express which are notified in the <https://www.ireps.gov.in/website>. Interested parties and contractors to take note of this and go through the website as mentioned above for details and related information about the e-Auction notice. For enquiries/clarifications if any, please contact office of the undersigned.

**(PR-969) Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Kharagpur**

 **South Eastern Railway**  
We serve with a smile



GROWING FAST, GROWING SLOW



Is growth in and by itself good, a free radical that signals energy and achievement that will take the nation and its people to a higher ground?

referred to the “Hindu rate of growth” as a “tongue-in-cheek expression” coined by the late economist Raj Krishna “to capture the frustration of India’s planners” struggling with what appeared to limit the India growth story. “No matter what they did, growth seemed, invariably, to revert to 3.5% per annum, almost as if this magic figure was written in the land’s scriptures,” they wrote in a footnote to contextualise the term. But the roots of that coinage go back to 1973 and to the bureaucrat BPR Vithal, who was a member of the 10th Finance Commission, among serving other positions. Vithal’s thesis was complex, in part problematic and has been criticised but this is criticism not of the kind the BJP has in mind when it sees the usage “Hindu rate” as derogatory. Vithal’s case was centred around preserving what he called the Hindu way of life, which he argued, would breakdown if growth accelerates. In that sense, the roots of the term that are now being labelled as denigrative of a religion or a community are not that at all. Vithal did not decry India’s historic low growth and on the contrary alerted economists and policy makers to the risks of higher growth merely as a target number, arguing to the effect that any faith in a higher rate of growth as a panacea will lead to a

breakdown in society as citizens became slaves of Western-style consumption. And building further on this, Vithal wrote in 1993: “If, therefore, our expectations of the new economic policy are fulfilled and we get on to a trajectory of a consistently faster rate of growth, we would be well-advised to devote some thought to devising a suitable ideological and cultural framework for it. If it merely succeeds in breaking present moulds, there will be a rootlessness which can be dangerous in a large country like ours.” Here was an economist not limited to numbers and how they would be achieved but one who delved right into the sociology of growth and what it brings for a nation like India. Without commenting further on the roots of the term, or Vithal’s “intellectual subtlety” as one reviewer put it, it should be clear that the socio-political dynamic of India coupled with its claims of high growth are already bringing some huge problems that are worthy of serious discussion rather than the idea of Hindu pride that is supposedly hurt when poor growth is associated with the land. The arguments embedded in the origins of the phraseology and the current questions raised about it bring into sharp relief issues around the structure and the

quality of India’s growth story. Is growth in and by itself good, a free radical that signals energy and achievement that will take the nation and its people to a higher ground? What are the downsides? Can the growing inequality sustain or will the present arrangement breakdown with disastrous consequences for the nation?

It is ironic that the conversation has hit the headlines just around the time of ugly excesses of corporate power bordering on national blackmail seen in the case of the havoc wrought by the country’s biggest airline, Indigo. By force-landing the airline with a massive cancellation of schedules that were then attributed to an unimplemented safety policy, Indigo gave the nation a taste of the risks of companies that are too powerful to control and thereby too big to fail. At a different scale but of a similar kind was the death of 25 people earlier this month at a nightclub in Goa, with the owners copying the playbook of Mehul Choksi and Vijay Mallaya to flee the nation. The airline brought national disaster. The nightclub hotel was a more localised story. But both mock the nation and its growth story in their own ways, highlighting the hidden costs of a faster growth that has beaten the “Hindu rate of growth” but has brought us a disaster that unfolds at periodic intervals to shock the nation and ridicule its governance structures.

In that sense, faster growth is good but there is such a condition called “bad growth.” To quote an age old HDR report by the UNDP: “Determined efforts are needed to avoid growth that is jobless, ruthless, voiceless, rootless and futureless.” But if that is what we get with faster growth, then the “Hindu rate of growth” might even begin to look good.

The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR.

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Jagdish Rattanani

FASTER GROWTH IS GOOD BUT THERE IS SUCH A CONDITION CALLED ‘BAD GROWTH’

Conventional thinking from mainstream economists travelling down to the average citizen has it that GDP growth is desirable and good – the higher the better. India now reports high growth, with the last announcement giving a surprisingly robust GDP growth of 8.2%. But the nation was not always in that league, and indeed never was right up to the 1990s when Dr. Manmohan Singh introduced the era of economic reforms. Before that, largely, the economic cart of a newly independent nation remained stuck at a growth of about 3.5% on an average and 1.3% per capita, all the way from 1947 to 1980. This state came to be called the “Hindu rate of growth,” a term that in its origins was entangled with the Hindu way of life but has subsequently been used almost as a harmless cliché for slow growth.

The phraseology is now under attack, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading the charge. The continued popularity of the usage is indicative of “a mentality of slavery,” the PM rime said last week. In his words: “... an attempt was made to prove that the reason for India’s slow growth rate was our Hindu civilization and Hindu culture.” As the Indian economy races ahead, the PM has now asked: “Have you read anywhere about the rapid growth that India is experiencing today? Have you heard about it anywhere? Does anyone call it the Hindu rate of growth?” The remarks came in a speech earlier this month, highlighting on the one hand what the government sees as high achievement on the GDP growth front and on the other hand an unstated condemnation of the post-independence socialist approaches and policies that, it is claimed, failed India, a failure that cannot be labelled for Hindu society as a whole.

In a 2007 paper, economists Kaushik Basu and Annemie Maertens of Cornell University



Dani Rodrik

Markets on their own cannot be trusted to produce economic resilience, national security, innovation for advanced technologies, clean energy, or good jobs in distressed regions

Post-Neoliberal Consensus

The post-neoliberal consensus is here, but don’t look for it in US President Donald Trump’s policies.

After a decade of backlash, it is time to accept not only that neoliberalism is dead but also that a new consensus is taking its place. Remarkably, significant segments of the left and the right in the United States have come to agree on the broad outlines of economic policy. Discussions in universities and think tanks are driven today by a common understanding that departs significantly from the neoliberal orthodoxy of the last 50 years.

The first element of the new consensus is a recognition that the concentration of economic power has become excessive. The concern is expressed in different forms by different groups. Some complain directly about inequality in income and wealth and its corrosive effects on politics. Others worry about market power and the adverse implications for competition. For yet others, the key problem is financialization and the distortion of economic and social priorities that it produces.

The remedies on offer also vary, from wealth taxes to vigorous antitrust enforcement to campaign-finance reform. But the desire to curb the economic and political power of corporate, financial, and tech elites is widespread, uniting progressive supporters of US Senator Bernie Sanders with populists like the podcast host and former Trump adviser Steve Bannon.

The second element of the new consensus is the importance of restoring dignity to people and regions that neoliberalism left behind. Goods jobs are essential to this agenda. Jobs are not just a means of providing income. They are also a source of identity and social recognition. Good jobs are what underpin a robust middle class, which is the foundation of social cohesion and a sustainable democracy.

Dislocation is inevitable in a world of economic change. Until the 1990s, plenty of safeguards – job protections, trade restrictions, price controls, and regulations that kept finance in check – limited the impact on workers and communities. For neoliberals, these safeguards were inefficiencies that had to be removed. They overlooked the economic and social distress that job losses arising from technological change, globalization, or economic liberalization would produce.

The third component of the emerging consensus is that government has an active role to play in shaping the economic transformation that is needed. Markets on their own cannot be trusted to produce economic resilience, national security, innovation for advanced technologies, clean energy, or good jobs in distressed regions.

Taken together, these three tenets provide a new understanding of the goals and instruments of economic policy that is both novel and, on the whole, laudable. But the devil is always in the details. Actual outcomes will be determined by specific policies that are chosen and implemented.

Consider the good-jobs objective. Here the left and the right seem to have reached a consensus on the desirability of reshoring and reinvigorating manufacturing. Historically, the industrial labour force played a pivotal role in producing equitable, middle-class societies. But automation and other technological forces have turned manufacturing into a labour-shedding sector. Even China has been losing manufacturing employment by the millions in recent years. So, even if manufacturing investment and output is revived in the US and Europe, the impact on employment is likely to be minuscule.

Whether we like it or not, the future of employment lies in services – care, retail, hospitality, logistics, the gig economy, and so on. Any approach to good jobs that does not focus on organizational and technological innovations in these services will necessarily disappoint.

There are of course other important reasons for supporting manufacturing. Advanced manufacturing, along with the digital economy, plays an outside role in innovation and national security. It makes sense to deploy industrial policies that focus on these economic activities, in addition to policies that focus on labour-absorbing services. But here, too, the “how” matters as much as the “what.”

Caveats apply to industrial policies as well. These can go badly wrong when they foster corruption or serve narrow corporate interests. Unfortunately, Trump’s approach provides little comfort on this score. His trade policies and dealings with tech companies have been erratic, transactional, and devoid of a coherent long-term strategy that would serve the public interest. Even worse, they are part of an agenda of deepening authoritarianism and disregard for the rule of law.

The post-neoliberal tenets of economic policy provide us with a broad checklist for evaluating actual agendas – and Trump’s fails miserably. It pays lip service to good jobs and industrial policy in the service of economic transformation, while fostering even greater concentration of wealth and power. A model of crony state capitalism that tries to resuscitate a long-dead industrial economy is hardly an antidote to neoliberalism.

The best that can be said of Trump’s approach to the economy is that it is an experimental phase in the post-neoliberal transition. The good news is that future policymakers will not have to look far for new guiding principles. The new consensus is already here.

The writer is Professor of International Political Economy at Harvard Kennedy School.

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WISDOM CORNER

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

OSCAR WILDE

If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

CARL JUNG

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1787:** New Jersey became the third state admitted to the United States when it ratified the U.S. Constitution.
- 1865:** The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution officially entered into force, abolishing slavery in the United States.
- 1892:** Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s ballet The Nutcracker was first presented at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia.

SPECTRUM DATA

Perils of statistical illusion

The National Statistics Office’s latest report for the July–September 2025 quarter has reignited a debate over what India’s economic data truly reveals. At first glance, the picture seems radiant. India recorded 8.2% real GDP growth—the highest in six quarters and well above the IMF’s 6.6% forecast. This comes after strong prints of 7.4% in January–March and 7.8% in April–June. Agriculture, manufacturing, services, and GST-driven consumption are all being showcased as engines of this impressive expansion. Even the drag from US retaliatory tariffs on Indian exports appears too small to scare the headline figure.

Yet underneath these glowing numbers lies a structural puzzle. Nominal GDP growth, which captures the economy’s expansion before adjusting for inflation, has been steadily eroding—from 10.7% early in 2025, to 8.8%, and further to 8.7% in the latest quarter. The shrinking gap between nominal and real GDP implies an abnormally low GDP deflator of just 0.5%. Such an unusually weak deflator inflates real GDP and makes growth appear stronger than many believe is realistic. This paradoxical co-existence of robust real growth and low nominal growth has

been described as “Schrödinger’s Economics”—a term borrowed from Nobel laureate physicist Erwin Schrödinger. The term was coined by Washington Post columnist Matt O’Brien in a December 2018 article. The article used the phrase to describe the postmodern economic claims made by the Trump administration at the time, specifically the ability to deny whether something was real. In the economic context, it describes a situation or an economy in an uncertain state where contradictory indicators coexist—one indicator shows improvement, another shows deterioration.

Indian economy seems to be in a similarly contradictory state: Real GDP surges while nominal GDP slows; activity accelerates even as employment trails behind; growth looks dynamic while corporate revenues and tax collections reveal softness. The fiscal consequences are immediate. Lower nominal GDP distorts every fiscal calculation—deficits, expenditure ratios, tax projections—because nominal GDP is the denominator for all these metrics.

When the denominator weakens, the fiscal framework becomes unstable. The government’s own projections illustrate

this volatility: the 2024–25 Budget projected 10.5% growth but delivered 9.7%. The 2025–26 projection of 10.1% is also set to fall short. Growth rates mean vastly different things depending on the size of the economy. One percent rise in US GDP adds over \$3051 billion; in China, \$192.3 billion; in India, just \$41.9 billion. India may soon be the world’s third-largest economy, but in term of per capita income India ranks below 135 countries. Without bridging this gap, headline growth will remain a feel-good statistic rather than a measure of widespread welfare.

What is disconcerting is that the IMF has assigned India a C-grade for its national accounts’ statistics, while awarding B-grade for prices, external statistics, government finances, and monetary and financial data. The C-grade indicates that although data exists, it suffers from deficiencies like an outdated 2011–12 base year used to calculate GDP and gross value added (GVA). Another major issue is India’s reliance on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as the GDP deflator, whereas the global standard is the Producer Price Index (PPI). More significantly, India continues to use single deflation, applying one

deflator to both inputs and outputs, whereas global best practices recommend double deflation for more accurate measurement of real value-added, especially during price volatility. India also delays in publishing consolidated central and state fiscal data.

The largest blind spot lies in the informal sector, which makes up nearly half the economy. Current methods extrapolate informal sector trends from the formal sector—an approach that breaks down during disruptions such as demonetisation, GST rollout, or the pandemic, when informal activity diverges sharply.

Equally troubling are long-standing institutional delays. The population census—due in 2021—remains postponed, affecting per-capita income, poverty estimates, and labour market assessments. Household consumption expenditure data also remains outdated, forcing the CPI to rely on an obsolete 2011–12 consumption basket. These shortcomings somewhat hamper surveillance. A robust statistical foundation is essential not just for accurate measurement, but for credible policymaking, investor confidence, and inclusive growth.

The writer is an Odisha-based economist and columnist.

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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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

Instrument of change

Sir, It is said that the greatest nations are defined by how they treat their weakest inhabitants. People move to other countries, across borders, for work and study irrespective of the legal status of their migration. Although barring a few instances, migrants do not impinge on the development of the countries they have migrated to, a lot of them are treated like terrorists. Many consider them as pawns in a chess board to meet their political ambitions. Sagacious leaders consider migrants as instrument of change: they are said to shape the economy of the communities, but not all leaders are statesmen. About 280 million migrants across the globe are anxious and apprehensive about their future because more than 70,000 have gone missing across land and sea since 2014. “My Great Story: Cultures and Development” is the theme for the International Migrants Day that falls on 18 December..

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

‘Slop’ returns

Sir, ‘Slop’ which was used in 1700’s meaning ‘soft mud’ has returned in 2025 to become the Merriam-Webster word of the year 2025. Heavily related to artificial intelligence, the word now means ‘digital content of low quality that is produced usually in large quantity by means of artificial intelligence.’ It’s really amazing that the word ‘slop’ which was used to refer to soft mud, waste food, or other messy, valueless substances in the old past now taking it’s ‘rebirth’ in a new digital cultural set up to describe something related to AI, the latest cyber technology, all set to transform and redefine the whole world. The word defines digital content that is of low quality, mass-produced, and often non-sensical. According to Merriam-Webster, one of the oldest and most popular dictionaries from America, slop is everything sub-mediocre seen on screen or in other words absurd videos, weird advertising images, cheesy propaganda, fake news, deepfake and junky AI-written digital content and books.

M Pradyu, KANNUR



	<h1><b>OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, ATHGARH FOREST DIVISION, ATHGARH</b></h1> <p>E-Mail ID: dfo.athgarh@odisha.gov.in</p>
<b>GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA “e” Procurement Notice</b>	
<b>No.MM-403:                      for Building Works</b>	
<b>Bid Identification No.DFO-ATH-02 of 2025-26</b>	
1. Name of the Work	: 2 Nos. Building Works
2. Estimated Cost	: Rs.21,33,360/- Lakh (Appx.)
3. Class of Contractor	: "C" & "B" Class (Only)
4. Tender Paper Cost	: Rs.6,000/- (Online) for each work
5. Period of Completion	: 03 (Three) Calendar Months
6. Date & Time of availability to bid document in the portal	: From 18.12.2025 to 5 PM of 26.12.2025
7. Last Date/Time of receipt of: bids in the portal	: 5 PM of 26.12.2025
8. Date & Time of Opening of Bids	: 11 AM of 29.12.2025
9. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	: Divisional Forest Officer Athgarh Forest Division
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal " <a href="https://tenders.odisha.gov.in">https://tenders.odisha.gov.in</a> .	
<b>Sd./- Divisional Forest Officer</b> <b>Athgarh Forest Division</b>	








of the day

quote

Services will be better through PPP mode. Some people say that medical colleges are being privatised. Though they are being built through PPP mode they will operate as government colleges



N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | ANDHRA PRADESH CM

So, the facade of NC 'fighting' for Article 370 is over. From promising special status in elections to now requesting 'business rules'



WAHEED PARA | PDP LEADER

There is no question of apologising. The Constitution has given me the right to ask questions



PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN | SENIOR CONG LEADER

POST OF THE DAY



Nitish Kumar pulled the veil of a Muslim woman publicly without her consent. She got so traumatized by the event that she is now unwilling to Join the Service. Life of a Muslim woman in India.

@Nher\_who

SHORT TAKES

10 schools get bomb threat

**Ahmedabad:** As many as 10 private schools in Ahmedabad received an email Wednesday threatening bomb blasts, which later turned out to be a hoax as nothing suspicious was found during searches, police said. As a precautionary measure, these schools declared a holiday for the afternoon shift as the morning shift was already over when they received the emails, having a common text, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Zone 1, Harshad Patel said. After being alerted, police, along with the bomb detection and disposal squad, dog squad and anti-sabotage teams, reached the schools and conducted a thorough search, Patel told reporters.

24 prisoners booked

**Ludhiana:** Peace was restored in Central Jail on Tajpur Road here Wednesday, a day after a violent clash between inmates left several, including the prison superintendent, injured. Twenty-four prisoners have been booked in connection with the Tuesday evening's incident, police said. Jail Superintendent Kulwant Singh Sidhu, who was hit on the head with a brick, is stable and responding to treatment in a hospital, Ludhiana Police Commissioner Swapan Sharma said Wednesday.

Ch'garh liquor scam: Chaurasia arrested

**Raipur:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Soumya Chaurasia, a suspended state administrative service officer who was deputy secretary in the CMO during the previous Congress government, in connection with an alleged liquor scam in Chhattisgarh. Chaurasia was arrested on late Tuesday evening and on Wednesday produced before a special court in Raipur which sent her to the ED's custody for two days, the central probe agency's counsel, Saurabh Kumar Pande, told PTI.

LS okays opening up nuclear sector to private players



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 17:** The tough provisions of India's nuclear liability laws led to "silent phobia" among industry, prompting the government to bring a new comprehensive bill to address their concerns and open up the atomic energy sector for private participation, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said Wednesday. Singh was replying to a discussion in the Lok Sabha that passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill by a voice vote amid a walk out by the opposition.

The Opposition contended that the government was putting citizens in harm by allowing suppliers of nuclear equipment to escape the liability net in case of a nuclear accident.

"The government will deal only with the operator, it is up on the operator to deal with the supplier," Singh, the Minister of State in the PMO, who oversees the Department of Atomic Energy, told the Lok Sabha.

He said the operator liability has been rationalised through graded caps linked to reactor size to encourage newer technologies such as small modular reactors.

The minister said the bill seeks to ensure full compensation to affected persons through a multi-layered mechanism.

"This includes operator liability, a proposed Nuclear Liability Fund backed by the government, and additional international compensation through India's participation in the Convention on Supplementary Compensation," Singh said.

The minister said "supplier" was a very wide definition under the CLND law which prevented suppliers from participating in India's civil nuclear sector.

"Everybody was hesitant to come forward. This became an unending chain resulting in a silent phobia among suppliers and we lost out on collaboration for the last 10 years," Singh said. The minister said the Bill seeks to modernise India's nuclear framework in line with contemporary technological, economic and energy realities, while retaining and strengthening core safety, security and regulatory safeguards that have been in place since the Atomic Energy Act of 1962

The minister termed the bill a "milestone legislation" that will give a new direction to

The Opposition contended that the government was putting citizens in harm by allowing suppliers of nuclear equipment to escape the liability net in case of a nuclear accident

the country's developmental journey.

"India's role in geopolitics is increasing. If we have to be a global player, we have to follow global benchmarks and global strategies. The world is moving towards clean energy. We too have set a target of 100 GW of nuclear energy capacity by 2047," Singh said.

He said the bill was necessary to address India's growing energy needs and increase the share of nuclear power up to 10 per cent of the energy mix.

Opposition Congress flagged concerns related to several provisions of the bill and urged the government to refer it to a parliamentary committee for a threadbare examination.

Congress member Manish Tewari opposed the bill, contending that the omitting the clause removing liability on suppliers of nuclear equipment would prove to be harmful for India in case of a nuclear incident.

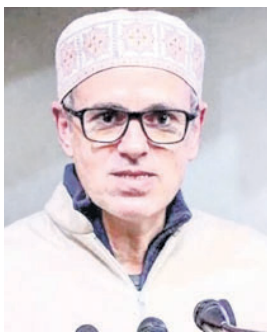
He opposed the provisions in the bill for the repeal of the Atomic Energy Act of 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act of 2010.

The minister argued that the SHANTI Bill was not a new legislation, but comprised modifications to the two laws - Atomic Energy Act of 1992 and Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act of 2010.

The minister said the SHANTI Bill also seeks to grant statutory status to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, the sectoral regulator, which was set up under an executive order.

Singh said that safety norms, security controls over fissile material, spent fuel and heavy water, and periodic inspections remain firmly under government oversight, regardless of private participation.

The minister said the bill also seeks to set up an Atomic Energy Redressal Council for settling disputes without having to go to court.



I can't sell Gulmarg as a skiing destination if I don't have snow. I can't sell glaciers for ice climbing if those glaciers are receding before our eyes

OMAR ABDULLAH | J&K CM

INDIA SUMMONS B'DESH ENVOY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

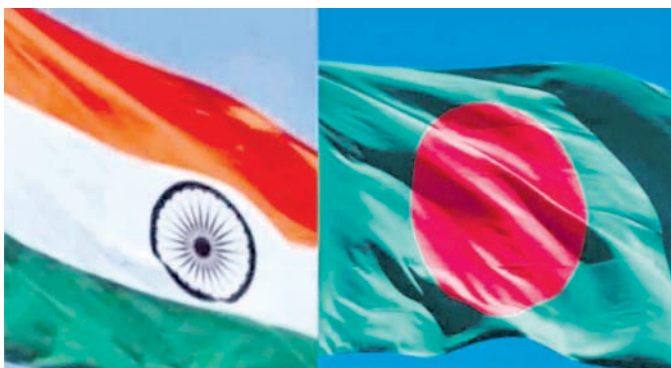
**New Delhi, Dec 17:** India Wednesday summoned Bangladesh envoy Riaz Hamidullah and lodged its protest over plans by certain extremist elements to create a security situation around the Indian mission in Dhaka.

New Delhi also expressed its serious concerns over the deteriorating security situation in Bangladesh and reiterated its call for holding free, fair and credible parliamentary elections. The polls are scheduled for February 12.

Hamidullah was summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and was served a demarche or a formal diplomatic note, people familiar with the matter said.

India's action followed after certain extremist elements announced plans to hold protests around the Indian high commission in Dhaka, they said.

In a statement, the MEA said that India "completely rejects the false narrative" sought to be created by extremist elements regarding certain recent events in Bangladesh.



"It is unfortunate that the interim government has neither conducted a thorough investigation nor shared meaningful evidence with India regarding the incidents," it said shortly after summoning Hamidullah.

The MEA said Hamidullah was summoned and apprised of India's strong concerns at the deteriorating security environment in Bangladesh.

"His attention was drawn, in particular, to the activities of some extremist elements who have announced plans to create a security situation around the Indian Mission in Dhaka," it said. The MEA said India ex-

pects the interim government in Bangladesh to ensure the safety of its missions and posts in that country in keeping with its diplomatic obligations.

It also noted that New Delhi is in favour of peace and stability in Bangladesh.

"India has close and friendly relations with the people of Bangladesh rooted in the liberation struggle, and strengthened through various developmental and people-to-people initiatives," it said.

"We are in favour of peace and stability in Bangladesh and have consistently called for free, fair, inclusive and credible elections, conducted in a peace-



Artists perform traditional dance during the 'Byabasayi Sammelan 2025', in Kolkata, West Bengal

PTI PHOTO

Convicted Maharashtra minister moves HC as arrest warrant looms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 17:** Maharashtra Sports Minister and NCP leader Manikrao Kokate moved the Bombay High Court Wednesday, challenging a sessions court order that upheld his conviction and two-year jail term in a 1995 cheating and forgery case.

The move comes as Kokate faces the imminent threat of losing his cabinet post and his assembly seat. In mounting trouble for the minister, a court in Nashik district Wednesday issued an arrest warrant against him in the case.

Kokate's lawyer Aniket Nikam mentioned the plea before a single HC bench of Justice R N Laddha, for an urgent hearing, reasoning that the minister was set to lose his job.

While Nikam did not press for an urgent stay on the conviction Wednesday, he submitted to the HC that Kokate was set to lose his ministry and that the Nashik sessions court, which upheld the conviction order of a magistrate's court, had stayed the conviction.

Oppn to protest against G-RAM-G Bill in Parl today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 17:** Several parties of the Opposition INDIA bloc will stage a protest against the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, which seeks to replace MGNREGA, in the Parliament complex Thursday morning.

Sources said the protest will be organised near the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the Parliament complex at 10.15 am and MPs of various opposition parties will raise slogans to oppose the government's move. The decision to hold the protest was taken at a meeting of opposition parties in the chamber of Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge.

Leaders of Congress, DMK, Samajwadi Party, CPI, CPI-M, IUML, Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP-SCP, JMM and RJD, among others, were present at the meeting, while the Trinamool Congress stayed away. The Opposition parties alleged that the VB-G RAM G Bill seeks to remove the name of Mahatma Gandhi from the rural employment law MGNREGA and end

it. They also alleged that renaming the scheme is an insult to Mahatma Gandhi and by doing so, the ruling BJP is displaying its "hatred" towards him. It provides for 125 days of wage employment in every financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work and talks about establishing a rural development framework aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Meanwhile, Moving the Bill for consideration and passage, Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill will ensure all-around development of villages and make them poverty-free, fuelling their growth journey.

Participating in the debate, Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Mahua Moitra Wednesday launched a blistering attack on the government over the VB-G RAM G Bill, saying it is destroying Mahatma Gandhi's idea of Ram Rajya both in letter and spirit by repealing MGNREGA and renaming the scheme.

ful atmosphere," it added.

Three days back, Bangladesh foreign ministry summoned Indian envoy to Dhaka, Pranay Verma and conveyed its concern over former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's "incendiary" statements from Indian soil.

In its reaction, New Delhi asserted that it has never allowed its territory to be used for activities inimical to the interests of Bangladesh.

Last month, Hasina, 78, was sentenced to death by a special tribunal in Dhaka for "crimes against humanity" over her government's brutal crackdown on the student-led protests last year.

The Awami League leader has been living in India since she fled Bangladesh on August 5 last year in the face of the protests.

The relations between India and Bangladesh came under strain after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus came to power.

India has been expressing concerns over attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in that country.

HC: No fourfold compensation for IndiGo flyers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 17:** The Delhi High Court Wednesday refused to entertain a PIL seeking direction to the Centre and IndiGo airline to pay a compensation of four times the full ticket price to all passengers whose tickets were cancelled in November and December after the roll out of the new Flight Duty Time Limitation (FDTL).

A bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said it has already taken cognisance of the issue while hearing another Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and granted liberty to the petitioner to seek intervention in the pending petition.

"We don't see any reason as to why the concerns raised here cannot be taken up with the earlier petition. The jurisprudence developed by the Supreme Court and high courts around PILs permits the court to expand the scope of a petition in public interest." According to the petition filed by the Centre for Accountability and Systemic Change (CASC) through its president Prof Vikram Singh, the IndiGo fiasco has triggered widespread concern across the aviation sector, and due to sudden disruption and last-minute cancellation of thousands of flights, stranded passengers faced severe inconvenience.

Advocate Virag Gupta, representing the petitioner, said airports were overflowing with misdirected pieces of baggage, excessive holdups, inadequate communication from the airline and confusion regarding refunds or re-booking options.

The plea also sought an enquiry by a retired judge or Lokpal to identify the negligence and lapses of the Directorate of Civil Aviation (DGCA) in triggering the crisis. At the outset of the hearing, the bench said it recently dealt with the issues in another petition that is still underway and no final adjudication has been made.

Woman booked for harassing cop with love proposal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bangalore, Dec 17:** A woman was booked on charges of obstructing a police inspector from discharging his official duties and threatening to commit suicide if he did not accept her love proposal, police said Wednesday.

The 45-year-old inspector attached to the Ramamurthy Nagar Police Station here alleged that the woman repeatedly harassed him, they said.

According to his complaint, the harassment began October 30, when he started receiving

calls from an unknown woman from multiple phone numbers.

During these calls, she allegedly spoke incoherently and claimed to have close links with several highly placed individuals, including the Chief Minister, Deputy CM, Home Minister and other political leaders. Police said the woman sent photographs via WhatsApp purportedly showing herself with these dignitaries and claimed she could use their influence to compel the inspector to accept her proposal. She also allegedly threatened to use her contacts against him if he refused.



The inspector said that he advised her to visit the police

station and submit a written complaint if she had any grievance. However, she did not do so and instead continued to repeatedly call and send messages, which disturbed his official duties, the FIR said.

According to the FIR, November 7, the woman allegedly visited his office and handed over an envelope containing some tablets along with handwritten letters. The letters contained emotionally charged and inappropriate content, and the woman claimed they were written using her blood, indicating obsessive behaviour.

Despite being clearly informed that the number she was contacting was an official departmental number meant for public service, she allegedly continued making unnecessary calls and messages, causing mental harassment and obstruction to his day-to-day duties, he alleged.

During the inquiry, police learnt that the woman had allegedly exhibited similar behaviour with other police and government officials in the past, it stated.

On December 12, she allegedly went to his police station

and shouted and threatened to commit suicide and ruin the inspector's career if he did not respond to her proposal, prompting him to lodge a complaint.

"Based on the complaint, a case was registered against the woman under Sections 132 (assault or criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of duty), 351(2) (criminal intimidation) and 221 (obstructing a public servant in discharge of public functions) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at the Ramamurthy Nagar Police Station. The matter is under investigation," police said.



# international

## of the day quote

Our message in Finland and to all our friends abroad is that the government takes racism seriously and is committed to combatting the issue

PETTERI ORPO | PRIME MINISTER, FINLAND

Only Australians of Jewish faith are forced to worship their gods behind closed doors, CCTV, guards

AMIR MAIMON | AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRALIA, ISRAEL

The fact that the Americans have made such a commitment - to protect Ukraine in the event of a ceasefire as if it were NATO territory - I think that's a remarkable new position for the United States of America.

FRIEDRICH MERZ | CHANCELLOR, GERMANY

## SHORT TAKES

### Louvre workers extend strike

**Paris:** Employees at the Louvre Museum voted Wednesday to extend a strike that has disrupted operations at the world's most visited museum. Union workers were protesting chronic understaffing, building deterioration and recent management decisions — pressures intensified by a brazen crown jewels heist in October. The decision came during a morning general assembly, after workers had adopted the walkout unanimously earlier this week. The museum was already closed Tuesday for its regular weekly shutdown. It remained unclear whether the strike would force a full closure on Wednesday. Visitors holding tickets queued outside the museum in the morning as management assessed staffing levels and whether enough employees were available to safely open galleries.

### Pak extends airspace ban on India

**Islamabad:** Pakistan extended its airspace ban for Indian aircraft by another month till January 23, Wednesday. Pakistan closed its airspace to India's airlines in April after the Pahalgam attack. India too has imposed a similar ban on Pakistan. The previous extension was set to expire on December 24 but the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) extended the restrictions Wednesday till January 23. "Pakistan airspace will remain closed to Indian-registered aircraft, including all aircraft owned, operated, or leased by Indian airlines, as well as Indian military flights," the PAA said.According to the NOTAM (Notice to Airmen), the restriction, which has already been in force, "will continue until January 23, 2026, as per the specified timings."

### Myanmar junta charges hundreds

**Bangkok:** Myanmar's military government has charged more than 200 people with violating the Southeast Asian country's voting law ahead of a general election at the end of this month, keeping up pressure on opponents of the polls. Critics of the election set to start on Dec 28 claim it will be neither free nor fair and is designed to add the facade of legitimacy to military rule that began after the army in February 2021 ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. The takeover triggered widespread popular opposition that has grown into a civil war, which has complicated holding the polls in many contested areas. This is one of the reasons voting will be held in three phases, with the second on Jan. 11 and the third on Jan 25.

## CRUDE CRACKDOWN

# US blocks Venezuelan tankers

REUTERS

**Washington, Dec 17:** US President Donald Trump ordered Tuesday a “blockade” of all sanctioned oil tankers entering and leaving Venezuela, in Washington’s latest move to increase pressure on Nicolas Maduro’s government, targeting its main source of income.

It is unclear how Trump will impose the move against the sanctioned vessels, and whether he will turn to the Coast Guard to interdict vessels like he did last week. The administration has moved thousands of troops and nearly a dozen warships - including an aircraft carrier - to the region.

“For the theft of our Assets, and many other reasons, including Terrorism, Drug Smuggling, and Human Trafficking, the Venezuelan Regime has been designated a FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATION,” Trump wrote on Truth Social. “Therefore, today, I am ordering A TOTAL AND COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF ALL SANCTIONED OIL TANKERS going into, and out of, Venezuela.”

In a statement, Venezuela’s government said it rejected Trump’s “grotesque threat.”

Oil prices rose more than 1% in Asian trade Wednesday. Brent crude futures LCOc1 were up 70 cents, or 1.2%, at \$59.62 a barrel at 0245 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude CLc1 rose 73 cents, or 1.3%, to \$56.00 a barrel.

U.S. crude futures climbed over 1% to \$55.96 a barrel in Asian trading after Trump’s announcement. Oil prices settled at \$55.27 a barrel Tuesday, the lowest close since February 2021.

### LEGAL QUESTIONS

American presidents have broad discretion to deploy US forces abroad, but Trump’s as-



- Oil prices rise over 1% following blockade announcement
- Trump labels Venezuelan 'regime' a foreign terrorist organization
- Venezuela rejects Trump's 'grotesque threat'
- Maduro claims US aims to control Venezuela's vast oil reserves

serted blockade marks a new test of presidential authority, said international law scholar Elena Chachko of UC Berkeley Law School.

Blockades have traditionally been treated as permissible “instruments of war,” but only under strict conditions, Chachko said. “There are serious questions on both the domestic law front and international law front,” she added.

US Representative Joaquin Castro, a Texas Democrat, called the blockade “unquestionably an act of war.”

“A war that the Congress never authorized and the American people do not want,” Castro added on X. There has been an effective embargo in place after the US seized a sanctioned oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela last week, with loaded vessels

carrying millions of barrels of oil staying in Venezuelan waters rather than risk seizure.

### INCREASED TENSIONS

Trump’s pressure campaign on Maduro has included a ramped-up military presence in the region and more than two dozen military strikes on vessels in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea near Venezuela, which have killed at least 90 people.

Trump has also said that US land strikes on the South American country will soon start.

Maduro has alleged that the US military build-up is aimed at overthrowing him and gaining control of the OPEC nation’s oil resources, which are the world’s largest crude reserves.

In wide-ranging interviews with Vanity Fair, Susie Wiles, Trump’s chief of staff, said Trump “wants to keep on blowing boats up until Maduro cries uncle.”

The Pentagon and Coast Guard referred questions to the White House.

The Trump administration has formally designated Venezuela’s Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization, saying the group includes Maduro and other high-ranking officials.



Russia is making unreasonable demands in a US-brokered push for peace with Ukraine

GIORGIA MELONI | PRIME MINISTER, ITALY

## SINGAPORE STUDENTS TACKLE REAL PROJECTS

A Singapore-headquartered group with a network of leading international schools has announced plans to send its students, including from campuses in India, to work with Silicon Valley based companies on real projects aimed at creating innovations for deployment globally



## Duke of Marlborough charged with int'l strangulation offences

REUTERS

**London, Dec 17:** Britain’s Duke of Marlborough, a distant relative of Winston Churchill, has been charged with three counts of intentional strangulation, British police said Wednesday.

Charles James Spencer-Churchill, 70, was arrested in May last year over the alleged offences which took place in November 2022, and in January and May 2024 in Woodstock, near Oxford in central England, Thames Valley police said in a statement.

He has now been issued with a summons to appear at Oxford Magistrates’ Court Thursday.

“Following a Thames Valley Police investigation, The Duke of Marlborough, has been charged with intentional strangulation offences in Woodstock,” the police statement



said. Spencer-Churchill, who is known as Jamie Blandford, is the 12th Duke of Marlborough, one of Britain’s most senior aristocratic families and whose ancestral home is Blenheim Palace in Woodstock, which played host to US President Donald Trump in 2018.

Two men were jailed earlier this year for stealing a \$6 million 18-carat golden toilet from the palace, which was Winston Churchill’s birthplace.

As well as the British wartime leader, Spencer-Churchill is also related to Princess Diana, the late first wife of King Charles.

# Pakistan govt to sell entire stake in PIA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Islamabad, Dec 17:** Pakistan has decided to sell its entire 100 per cent stake in Pakistan International Airlines after bidders sought complete managerial control with no government role post-privatisation, local media reported Wednesday.

Bidding is scheduled for December 23 and will initially be for 75 per cent shares of the loss-making national flag-carrier, with the winning bidder given an option to acquire the remaining 25 per cent within a month after bidding at a 12 per cent premium.

The extra 12 per cent price is charged as the buyer is allowed to delay payment for one year instead of instant payment.

The government will receive only 7.5 per cent of the bid amount in cash, while 92.5 per cent will be reinvested directly into PIA to support revival, officials told The Express Tribune newspaper.

The federal government is selling 100 per cent shares because all four bidders wanted the government to have no role in PIA after the deal, privatisation commission officials said.

Major business groups like Lucky Cement Consortium, Arif Habib Consortium, Fauji Foundation-owned Fauji Fertiliser and Air Blue are bidding for PIA.

Advisor to the Prime Minis-

•Major business groups like Lucky Cement Consortium, Arif Habib Consortium, Fauji Foundation-owned Fauji Fertiliser and Air Blue are bidding for PIA

•The federal government is selling 100 per cent shares because all four bidders wanted the government to have no role in PIA after the deal, privatisation commission officials said

ter on privatisation Muhammad Ali confirmed the decision, saying all bidders wanted at least 75 per cent shareholding for ease of decision-making, while some demanded 100 per cent ownership.

The government’s larger objective is to revive PIA and take it back to its past glory, Ali said, adding, “This requires heavy investment for fleet revamping, acquisition of planes.”

Earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had indicated plans to sell only a 60 per cent stake, but the move failed to attract serious buyers in 2024.

To improve attractiveness, the government parked Pkr 654 billion of PIA’s debt in a holding company, while PIA now has positive equity of Pkr 30 billion, privatisation officials said.

This year, PIA will get Pkr 34.7 billion from the budget to pay debt, pensions and medical expenses.

Even after removing major debt, the new owners will still have to pay Pkr26 billion in taxes and airport charges.

# Deposed Nepal PM seeks third term to lead CPN-UML

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kathmandu, Dec 17:** Nepal’s CPN-UML Wednesday voted to elect its leader with deposed prime minister KP Sharma Oli facing a tough challenge from senior leader Ishwor Pokharel to retain the position he has held for over 10 years.

Oli, who is seeking a third consecutive term, and Pokharel are the only two candidates for the post of chairperson of the Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) in the contest that is being held three months after Oli’s government was forced to resign following a student-led protest.

Pokharel, 71, is giving Oli, 73, a tough fight after receiving the backing of former President Bidya Devi Bhandari, his rival in the presidential election.

Voting began in the morning at the 11th General Convention at Kathmandu’s Bhrikutimandap and will continue till midnight, party sources said, adding, the results will be announced soon after the voting concludes.

“The voting began at 9 am after candidates, Oli and Pokharel, cast their votes using electronic voting machines. In total, 2,263 general convention representatives are exercising their voting rights,” said a party official.

The election was earlier supposed to be held Tuesday, but due to a technical problem, it was delayed by 24 hours.

Observers are keenly watching the UML election this time as it is happening shortly after Oli’s ouster from power following the Gen Z movement.

REUTERS

**Sydney, Dec 17:** A man who allegedly opened fire on a Jewish Hanukkah celebration on Sydney’s famed Bondi Beach has been charged with 59 offences, including murder and terrorism, police said Wednesday.

The alleged father-and-son perpetrators opened fire on the celebration at Sydney’s famed Bondi Beach on Sunday, killing 15 in an attack that shook the nation and intensified fears of rising antisemitism and violent extremism.

Funerals of the Jewish victims of the attack began Wednesday, amid anger over how the gunmen - one of whom was briefly investigated for links to extremists - were allowed access to powerful firearms.

Sajid Akram, 50, was shot dead by police at the scene, while his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram emerged from a coma Tuesday afternoon after also



being shot by police.

New South Wales Police said Wednesday that a man had been charged with 59 offences, including 15 counts of murder, 40 counts of wounding with attempt to murder, as well as a terror offence and other charges.

“Police will allege in court the man engaged in conduct that caused death, serious injury

and endangered life to advance a religious cause and cause fear in the community,” it said in a statement.

“Early indications point to a terrorist attack inspired by ISIS, a listed terrorist organisation in Australia.”

A court filing Wednesday named Naveed Akram, who remains in a Sydney hospital

# China braces for returnee wave as overseas visas, jobs dry up

Tighter visa rules and shrinking job opportunities abroad are driving a surge of overseas Chinese students back home, prompting Beijing to roll out new job and startup support even as competition in the domestic labour market intensifies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Beijing, Dec 17:** China is facing a surge of returning overseas students as visa and employment opportunities shrink abroad, prompting the government to start a special platform to help them find jobs and start businesses.

About 4.95 lakh students returned to China after studying abroad in 2024, a 19.1 per cent increase from the previous year, the Ministry of Education said recently.

Zheng Jinlian, vice-president of the Beijing-based think tank Centre for China and Globalisation, predicted the number

of returnees would continue to grow over the next few years, as last year’s increase was part of a rising trend.

“Although the domestic economic situation is not very good, it may still be better than elsewhere,” she was quoted by the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

She noted that countries like the US have tightened visa restrictions, making it challenging for international students to find employment.

A large number of Chinese students have been studying abroad, mainly in the US and Western universities, partly backed by the government and



banks with loans and financial assistance. About 7.43 million Chinese students completed their studies abroad between 1978 and 2024, according to the data published by the Post.

Of that, 6.44 million had returned to China, playing a big part in the country’s progress, especially in the technological

arena. With a big increase in the inflow of its overseas students, China has launched a national-level service platform to help returning overseas students find work and start businesses.

The Ministry of Education has partnered with 50 organisations to provide returnees with entrepreneurial mentors

Overseas students drive innovation and entrepreneurship. They play a vital role across various industries and in the development of our talent pool

ZHENG JINLIAN | VICE-PRESIDENT, THINK TANK CENTRE

and match them directly with local government and corporate needs.

The measures show the value of overseas returnees is still recognised at the national level, despite recent scepticism in public discourse about the worth of foreign education, Zheng said.

“Overseas students drive innovation and entrepreneurship. They play a vital role across various industries and in the development of our talent pool,” Zheng said.

To tap their talent, the ministry has reportedly identified sectors including artificial intelligence and new

materials as having a need for overseas talent.

The latest initiative was unveiled at an event celebrating the 30th anniversary of the “Chunhui” programme – a long-running state effort encouraging overseas students to contribute to national development – in Shanghai last Thursday. Highlighting the role of foreign-educated returnees, China’s Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security said that as of 2023, more than 70 per cent of the leaders of key national projects and university presidents, as well as most of the directors at top-tier hospitals, were former overseas students who had returned to China.

The mass return of the overseas students has created resentment among the local graduates, as the foreign-educated students are preferred, especially for their technical and English language skills.



of the day

quote

The impact of the US trade deal could be as much as about half a percentage point

**SANJAY MALHOTRA** | GOVERNOR, RBI

Indian economy is expected to grow by 7 per cent in the current fiscal, slightly higher than 6.6 per cent projected by the IMF in October

**GITA GOPINATH** | FORMER CHIEF ECONOMIST, IMF

India is at a demographic and economic inflection point. Over the next two decades, millions of young Indians will enter the working age population

**V ANANTHA NAGESWARAN** | CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISOR

SHORT TAKES

Warner Bros shelves Paramount offer

**Los Angeles:** Warner Bros Discovery's board rejected Paramount Skydance's (PSKY.O), opens new tab \$108.4 billion hostile bid Wednesday, saying it failed to provide adequate financing assurances. In a letter to shareholders, disclosed in a regulatory filing, the board wrote that Paramount had "consistently misled" Warner Bros shareholders that its \$30-per-share cash offer was fully guaranteed, or "backstopped," by the Ellison family, led by billionaire and Oracle co-founder Larry Ellison. The board said it found Paramount's offer "inferior" to the merger agreement with Netflix's. Netflix's \$27.75 per share offer for Warner Bros' film and television studios, its library and the HBO Max streaming service is a binding agreement that requires no equity financing and has robust debt commitments, the board wrote.

Natilus marks India foray with new arm

**Mumbai:** US aviation startup Natilus Wednesday said that India's SpiceJet has ordered 100 of its blended-wing-body jets, as the company marks its entry into the fast-growing Indian market with the launch of a local subsidiary. India's aviation market is the fifth biggest in the world, according to industry group IATA, and is a lucrative hotspot for global carriers and planemakers driven by stronger post-pandemic demand for travel to and from the country. Natilus is also considering India as one of the possible locations for a manufacturing facility, and aims to build roughly 300 HORIZON jets at the site once complete.

NCLT approves Flipkart restructuring

**New Delhi:** The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has approved the merger of eight Flipkart entities, taking the e-commerce major a step closer to obtaining an Indian domicile ahead of its potential public listing. The tribunal has sanctioned the Scheme of Amalgamation involving eight Singapore-incorporated transfer companies merging into Flipkart Internet Private Limited, the Bangalore-based operational arm. This major corporate restructuring, detailed in a 66-page order, marks a significant milestone for the Walmart-owned group and moves it closer to launching a long-anticipated initial public offering (IPO) in India.



India can be lectured saying you (India) are very inward-looking, you are a tariff king and so on. But tariff has been weaponized

**NIRMALA SITHARAMAN** | FINANCE MINISTER

INDIA LARGEST LLM MKT GLOBALLY

The growing use of platforms such as Chat-GPT, Gemini and Perplexity has made India the world's largest market for large language model (LLM) adoption, a foreign brokerage said Wednesday. This makes India the "ideal test bed" for agentic AI apps built on top of LLMs that can reason, plan and execute tasks independently, the report by Bofa Securities said



Sebi overhauls mutual fund rules to curb costs, boost transparency

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 17:** Markets regulator Sebi Wednesday approved a comprehensive overhaul of mutual fund regulations, including changes to the expense ratio framework and limits on brokerage charges, to boost transparency.

The proposals are aimed at bringing regulatory clarity, reducing redundancies, and promoting ease of compliance. In its board meeting, Sebi has cleared a proposal to exclude all statutory levy -- STT (Securities Transaction Tax), GST (Goods and Services Tax), CTT (Commodity Transaction Tax) and Stamp duty-- from the expense ratio limits along with the present permissible expenses for brokerage, exchange and regulatory fee, its chief Tuhin Kanta Pandey said.

Moreover, this expense ratio limits would be called base expense ratio. Presently, GST on management fees is permitted over and above the TER limit. However, all other statutory charges are part of the overall TER limit specified for mutual fund schemes.

The expense ratio limits are proposed to be exclusive of statutory levy, so that any change in statutory levy in future is passed on to the investors. Also, the board decided to eliminate the additional 5 basis points (bps) that asset management companies (AMCs) were previously allowed to charge across mutual fund schemes.

Trade impasse keeps ₹ in the cold

Rupee recovers 55 paise from all-time low level to close at 90.38 against US dollar

REUTERS

**Mumbai, Dec 17:** No currency has been hit harder by US tariffs than India's rupee - and there may yet be more downside as investors pull out of the country until they see a trade deal struck with Washington.

The rupee is among the worst-performing currencies globally this year, sliding 6% against the dollar as a widening trade deficit, punitive 50% US tariffs and investment outflows have dragged it to a record low of 91.075 per dollar.

Measured against a basket of trading-partner currencies, the real effective exchange rate of 96 is the lowest in more than a decade, according to Citi. That is well below a decade average of 103, and a usually reliable signal that it is overdue for a rebound.

But this time is different, according to money managers who have driven pressure on the currency by pulling a record \$18 billion from Indian equities this year and say the mood is unlikely to reverse quickly, even though the rupee

looks cheap.

"I think the market's patience in general is running thin," said Vivek Rajpal, Asia macro strategist at investment advisory firm JB Drax Honore, as months of trade talks with the US have so far yielded no deal or tariff relief.

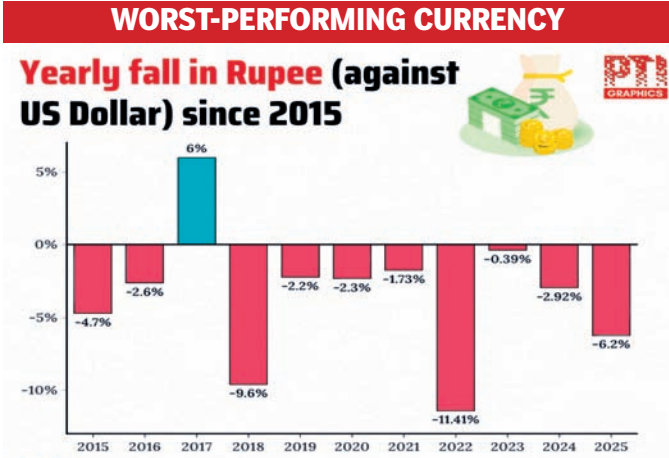
It is a good entry point for Indian assets, he said, but first the market needs confidence that the tariffs are only temporary.

India and the US have been engaged in negotiations through much of 2025, although India's Chief Economic Advisor said in a Bloomberg interview, opens new tab last week that he expects an agreement to be reached by March 2026.

Still, much of Asia already has agreements or at least moratoriums in place with the US, leaving India especially exposed and the rupee as the shock absorber.

RUPEE WEAKNESS HERE TO STAY

A falling currency can soften the blow of tariffs by reducing dollar prices for exports. But at 50% the US levies are so high that economists expect more



Source: RBI

The recent pace of depreciation has been driven partly by geopolitical risk and its influence on current account expectations

**JEAN-CHARLES SAMBOR** | HEAD OF EMERGING MARKETS DEBT, TT INTERNATIONAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

to offset them, plus there is extra pressure on the currency from a relatively wide trade deficit and portfolio outflows.

Absent a trade deal, none of those factors are seen reversing in the near term and a Reuters report that the central bank does not plan on standing in the way of fundamentals has reinforced expectations of further weakness.

HSBC analysts said the sharp rupee depreciation is a significant risk to an otherwise encouraging setup for In-

are worth revisiting thanks to improving valuations and economics. They also see Indian markets as a hedge against the AI rally.

Other brokerages including Citi, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan have also upgraded Indian equities in recent weeks, expecting a turn in the Indian market's fortunes in 2026 with a boost from rate cuts and, to be sure, some eye a rebound in the rupee.

DILEMMA FOR GLOBAL INVESTORS

Indian equity markets, dominated by banks and IT outsourcing firms, have also lagged peers in 2025, with the benchmark Nifty 50 up about 10% so far compared to a 26% gain in the MSCI Emerging Market Index, hurt by a lack of clear AI bets.

In dollar terms, compari-

Silver shatters ₹2L ceiling

The record rise comes as investors increasingly turn to silver as both a safe-haven asset and a high-growth industrial metal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 17:** Silver prices Wednesday breached the record Rs 2 lakh-per-kilogram mark in the national capital for the first time, driven by strong demand in domestic and global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The white metal jumped by Rs 7,300 to hit an all-time high of Rs 2,05,800 per kg Wednesday, against the previous closing level of Rs 1,98,500 per kilogram.

"Silver continued its ascent with prices touching record high levels in the domestic markets as the white metal surged to hit a new peak in the international markets," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, said.

In the local bullion market, gold prices climbed by Rs 600 to Rs 1,36,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes), compared to the previous close of Rs 1,35,900 per 10 grams, as per the association.

Renisha Chainani, Head - Research at Augmont, said the US dollar index has reached a two-month low, making green-back-priced bullion more af-



Silver extended its remarkable rally, breaking above the USD 66 per ounce level for the first time on record, driven by a combination of tight physical supply conditions, rising safe-haven demand, strong inflows into silver-backed ETFs, and growing expectations of US Federal Reserve rate cuts

KAYNAT CHAINWALA | AVP COMMODITY RESEARCH, KOTAK SECURITIES

fordable for international purchasers. In the international markets, spot gold went up by \$18.59, or 0.43 per cent, to \$4,321.06 per ounce.

"Spot gold is trading with a gain of around 0.4 per cent at USD 4,320 per ounce as traders await the US Consumer Price Index (CPI) data to be released on Thursday," Praveen Singh, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Echoing similar sentiments, Dilip Parmar of HDFC Securities said gold in the global markets is hovering near the record highs as investors are monitoring the escalating geopolitical

tensions in Venezuela.

He added that metal traders are closely monitoring for signals of further monetary easing following the US Federal Reserve's third consecutive rate cut last week, a significant tailwind for non-interest-bearing assets.

In addition, spot silver crossed the \$66-per-ounce mark for the first time in the overseas trade. The white metal climbed by \$2.77, or 4.35 per cent, to hit a fresh record of \$66.52 per ounce.

During the year, silver prices have zoomed by \$36.96, or 125.05 per cent, from \$29.55 per ounce January 2, 2025.

IndiGo promoters fly into top-10 list of self-made bizmen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 17:** Rahul Bhatia and Rakesh Gangwal, the promoters of IndiGo have debuted in a list of top-10 self-made entrepreneurs by piloting the low-cost carrier to a valuation of Rs 2.2 lakh crore in 2025, a report said Wednesday.

Eternal's Deepinder Goyal leads the list as the business built by him is valued at Rs 3.2 lakh crore, which is up 27 per cent from last year. He pips Radhakishan Damani of Avenue Supermarts, who's business valuation dropped by 13 per cent over the last year to Rs 3 lakh crore.

The IndiGo founders are third on the 'IDFC First Private and Hurun India's Top 200 Self-

made Entrepreneurs of the Millennium 2025' list, which has been computed as on September 25 this year.

The stock of Interglobe Aviation, IndiGo's parent, took a hit lately because of severe issues around flight cancellations as the carrier failed at implementing a new set of aviation rules earlier this month.

Hurun said the IndiGo founders have debuted into the top list because of their dominance of India's aviation market with a 65 per cent market share in the domestic sector.

"The airline has expanded aggressively internationally and introduced sustainable aviation initiatives, including testing biofuels and deploying fuel-efficient air-



craft," the report said. Goyal is leading the list for the first time, as per a report,

which commended the food delivery entity for operating in 800 cities.

**Cumulative value of all companies on the list stands at Rs 42L-cr in 2025, up 15% from Rs 36L-cr YoY**

**Number of billion-dollar firms founded by self-made entrepreneurs stands at 128, up from 121 last year**

Competing brand Swiggy's co-founders Sriharsha Majety and Nandan Reddy come fifth on the list on the back of a 5 per cent increase in the enterprise's valuation to Rs 1.06 lakh crore.

Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma witnessed one of the biggest jumps at 67 per cent and occupied the eighth position in the list with his business valued at Rs 72,900 crore.

The recently listed Lenskart also saw a 60 per cent jump in valuation to Rs 67,000 crore, leading co-founders Peyush Bansal, Amit Chaudhary, Neha Bansal, and Sumee Kapahi to occupy 10th position in the list.

The cumulative value of all companies on the list stands at Rs 42 lakh crore in 2025, up 15 per cent from Rs 36 lakh crore last year.

The number of billion-dollar companies founded by self-made entrepreneurs stands at 128, up from 121 last year, and the valuation threshold to be on the list has moved up to Rs 4,300 crore.

Bangalore continued to top as the base of the companies on the list by being home to 52 entities, down by 14 entities.



# Doping woes haunt India

The country shows highest positivity rate among major nations in WADA's 2024 Testing Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 17:** There seems no end in sight to India's doping woes with the country throwing up the highest number of violators among nations which conducted 5,000 or more tests in the World Anti-Doping Agency's Testing Figures Report for 2024.

As per the WADA report, India conducted 7113 tests (6576 urine samples and 537 blood samples) last year, which threw up 260 adverse analytical findings, accounting for a positivity rate of 3.6 per cent, the highest among all major countries.

India's poor doping record would be among the major concerns when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) evaluates its bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games in near future.

"...this position may appear concerning at both national and international levels, it is essential to underscore that the figures are a direct outcome of India's intensified anti-doping efforts, marked by expanded testing and stronger detection mechanisms rather than a surge in doping prevalence," stated a note from the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) as it sought to explain the continued high rate of positivity. In the 2023 testing figures, India's positivity rate stood at 3.8 per cent after 213 adverse results from 5606 tests.

China, which conducted a whopping 24,214 tests in 2024, showed a positivity rate of just 0.2 per cent. The US anti-doping agency did a lesser number of tests than India, 6592 in total, and had a positivity rate of 1.1 per cent.

Russia, which has been ostracized globally for its failure to tackle doping, conducted 10,514 tests and returned a positivity rate of 0.7 per cent with just 76 adverse results.

A few countries like Pakistan and Mongolia have higher positivity rates than India but they tested very less number of sam-



**India's poor doping record would be among the major concerns when the IOC evaluates its bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games in near future**

ples. In 2025, NADA said it has so far conducted 7068 tests with a positivity rate of 1.5 per cent after a relatively lower adverse results count of 110.

In comparative analysis, the numbers released for 2024 indicate a marginal improvement in the positivity rate but overall, it remains too high and keeps India at the pinnacle of a list no country would want to be seen in.

"In recent years, India has witnessed a significant strengthening of its anti-doping framework. To tackle the menace of doping in sports NADA India has not only increased the number of tests but also has increased the emphasis on education and awareness," NADA stated.

"The available data reflects that the overall anti-doping ecosystem is becoming more robust, with improvements visible across testing, awareness, and preventive mechanisms," it added. Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya has also repeatedly stated his commitment to tackle the menace that has traditionally afflicted athletics and power

sports such as weightlifting.

NADA said it is witnessing "greater awareness and enhanced compliance among athletes and support personnel" on anti-doping measures.

"In 2024, around 280 anti-doping workshops were conducted during sports events and training camps, reaching approximately 37,000 participants. Additionally, by December 16, 2025, 329 awareness programs were held, including webinars, seminars, TV sessions, ADEL courses, mega events, engaging competitions and digital campaigns to engage a wider audience," it stated.

"These initiatives have contributed to improved understanding of prohibited substances, safe medication practices, and the responsibilities expected under the anti-doping framework."

NADA said it is also strengthening compliance through 'Know Your Medicine' App to prevent "inadvertent doping".

"... (It) enables athletes and support personnel to verify whether any substance or medication contains prohibited ingredients. As of 2024, the app has approximately recorded a cumulative 2,40,000 searches, reflecting its growing adoption as a preventive tool against inadvertent doping," it said.

To address the issue of contaminated supplements, NADA said it is working closely with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the National Forensic Science University (NFSU) to strengthen nutrition supplement testing.

# Dense smog hits India-SA T20I

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, Dec 17:** The fourth T20I between India and South Africa was called off Wednesday owing to poor visibility after a dense layer of smog engulfed the Ekana Stadium raising serious questions about BCCI's scheduling of matches in northern part of India during peak winter month.

The venues allotted for the full series against the Proteas included New Chandigarh, Dharamsala, Lucknow, Ranchi, Raipur, Visakhapatnam, Cuttack, Ahmedabad, Guwahati and Kolkata during November and December.

It is also a period when pollution levels in the host cities like Lucknow, New Chandigarh and Dharamsala are usually at its worst.

The fourth T20I was official-



ly abandoned without a ball being bowled due to "excessive fog", the reality was that a thick blanket of smog enveloped the Ekana Stadium, severely hampering visibility.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) remained in the hazardous range, above 400 in Lucknow

Wednesday, raising serious questions about the BCCI's commitment to players' welfare.

Star all-rounder Hardik Pandya was seen wearing a surgical mask to counter the pollution while the Indian team warmed up ahead of the game.

The match, scheduled to start

## BWF WORLD TOUR FINALS

### Sat-Chi opens campaign with statement victory

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Hangzhou, Dec 17:** Star Indian shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty showed nerves of steel to eke out a thrilling three-game victory over Olympic silver medallists Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang of China in their opening men's doubles Group B match at the BWF World Tour Finals here Wednesday.

World No 3 Satwik and Chirag, the only Indian representatives at the season-ending showpiece, recovered from an opening-game setback and saved a match point to eventually outwit the world No 5 Chinese pair 12-21, 22-20, 21-14 in a gripping contest.

The Asian Games champions, who reached the finals at the Hong Kong Open and China Masters earlier this year, will face another stern test when they take on Indonesia's Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Shohibul Fikri Thursday.

Former world No 1 pair Satwik and Chirag came into the match trailing Liang and Wang 3-7 in head-to-head encounters, and Wednesday's clash lived up to its billing as a high-quality duel between two attacking pairs.

As expected, the contest began on a tight note with both pairs focused on winning the early exchanges.

## Mohun Bagan hit with AFC ban

India's top football club fined to the tune of \$100,729 for withdrawing from the 2025-26 AFC Champions League Two

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, Dec 17:** At a time when Indian football is staring at unprecedented uncertainty with its domestic season in limbo, the Asian Football Confederation Wednesday delivered a triple blow to the country's top club, Mohun Bagan Super Giant, slapping a continental ban and imposing fines to the tune of \$100,729 (INR 91 lakh approximately) for withdrawing from the 2025-26 AFC Champions League Two.

The AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee ruled the reigning Indian Super League champions wrongfully withdrew from the 2025-26 AFC Champions League Two following their refusal to travel to Iran for a group-stage match against Sepahan SC and handed one-season ban from AFC competition.

In their decision numbered VVC 20251217DC21, the committee held the Kolkata heavyweights guilty of breaching Article 5 (Withdrawal from the Competition) of the ACL Two Competition Regulations after the club failed to fulfil its fixture once the group stage had already commenced.

As part of the sanctions, the Mariners were "fined \$50,000", ordered to pay "\$50,729 as com-



pensation for damages and losses" claimed by the AFC and Sepahan SC, and "disqualified from participating in the next AFC club competition for which they would otherwise qualify, with the ban remaining effective up to and including the 2027-28 season".

The committee also ruled that Mohun Bagan would forfeit all subsidies linked to their participation in the 2025-26 ACL Two season, including participation fees, performance bonuses and travel subsidies.

Any amount already paid by the AFC must be repaid within 30 days of the decision being communicated. "The compensation shall be paid to the AFC within thirty (30) days of the date that this Decision is communicated," the order stated.

Terming the decision "biased", a Mohun Bagan official told PTI that their matter is

already pending at the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), the supreme or final arbitral body for resolving international sports-related legal disputes and they were "hoping for a resolution".

"It's a biased decision against our club; our matter is pending at CAS and we're hopeful of a resolution. However, the club may pay up the fines," he said.

The ruling follows Mohun Bagan's decision not to travel to Iran citing player safety concerns after six foreign players declined to make the trip following advisories from their respective governments.

The club had sought a change of venue and later approached the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), but the AFC deemed the action as a withdrawal, triggering strict disciplinary action.

## SHORT TAKES

### Anantjeet, Darshna clinch mixed title

**New Delhi:** Asian Champion shooters Anantjeet Singh Naruka and Darshna Rathore produced a consistent performance to win the Senior Skeet Mixed Team gold medal, at the 68th National Shooting Championship Competitions (Shotgun) here Wednesday. The Rajasthan duo defeated Uttar Pradesh pair of Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Areeba Khan 45-43 in a closely contested gold medal match to seal the title, at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range here. Anantjeet hit 21 targets and Darshna contributed 24 to hold off Mairaj (21) and Areeba (22) in the gold medal match.

### Anand returns for master-pupil clash

**Kolkata:** It will be a compelling showdown between a mentor and his protegee when five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand returns to competitive action after six years to face reigning world champion D Gukesh among his other former wards at the seventh Tata Steel Chess here from January 7 to 11. Anand, who last played the tournament in 2019, will be making his comeback against a new generation of Indian stars, headlined by Gukesh, whom he has closely mentored in recent years at his WestBridge Anand Chess Academy. It will be the first time the two world champions meet in an individual tournament on Indian soil.

### F1's new rules for 2026

**London:** Formula One fans will be hearing a lot about Boost, Overtake, Active Aero and Recharge in 2026 after saying farewell to DRS, the drag reduction system that provided an extra burst of speed for overtaking. The Liberty Media-owned sport announced revised terminology Wednesday to accompany the start of a new engine era and what it is calling the biggest ever overhaul of the technical regulations. The cars will be thinner and lighter with narrower tyres and a 50/50 split on internal combustion, using sustainable fuel, and electric power.

## Carey goes from Ashes villain to hero with ton

**Carey's hometown century and Khawaja's 82 help Australia reach 326-8 on Day 1 of 3rd Ashes test**

REUTERS

**Adelaide (Australia), Dec 17:** Alex Carey posted a hometown hundred and Usman Khawaja scored 82 after a dramatic, last-minute recall to help Australia reach 326 for eight at stumps on a hot opening day of the third Ashes test.

Paceman Joffra Archer (3-29) took three big wickets, including two in three balls immediately after lunch, and



spinner Will Jacks (2-105) dismissed Australia's two lead-

ing scorers to give England a slight edge Wednesday in conditions that were ideal for batting.

Carey shared partnerships of 91 with Khawaja, who replaced Steve Smith at late notice, 59 with Josh Inglis, 26 with Pat Cummins and 50 with Mitchell Starc to keep Australia's innings moving at around four runs an over. He was out just before stumps for 106, mistiming a slower ball from Jacks.

Mitchell Starc, voted player of the match in the first and second tests, continued his impressive form against England and was unbeaten on 33 at stumps.

Carey played a key role in one of the most contentious moments in recent Ashes history when he stumped England's Jonny Bairstow in the acrimonious 2023 series.

After scoring his first Ashes century, which he dedicated to his late father and his family, Carey said in a TV interview he'd probably rather discuss the 2023 episode than dwell on the emotions of his big innings.

"I love playing cricket and I understand what comes with playing professional sport," Carey said. "You're not always going to be liked. There's heroes and villains — that's all part of the game."

## FIFA AWARDS

# Dembele, Bonmati take top honours

THE STARS HAVE ALSO BAGGED THE MEN'S AND WOMEN'S BALLON D'OR THIS YEAR

REUTERS

**Doha, Dec 17:** Paris St Germain and France forward Ousmane Dembele was named FIFA men's player of the year in Doha Tuesday with Spain and Barcelona midfielder Aitana Bonmati winning the women's award for the third year in a row.

Dembele was instrumental in PSG's first Champions League triumph when they beat Inter Milan 5-0 in the final and scored 35 goals last season across all competitions, including 21 in Ligue 1 to finish as top scorer.

The 28-year-old, who won this year's Ballon D'Or in September, was part of the PSG team which also swept all before

them on the domestic front last season and reached the final of the Club World Cup.

Dembele was able to attend the ceremony, as he was already in Qatar for Wednesday's Intercontinental Cup final where PSG take on Flamengo.

Bonmati, the Champions League player of the season, also won the women's Ballon D'Or for the third time in a row this year, and helped Barcelona win the domestic treble along with reaching the Champions League final.

The 27-year-old also reached



Thank you to the players, coaches and fans who have voted for me to win this award

AITANA BONMATI | MIDFIELDER, BARCELONA

I want to thank all my teammates, it just shows that hard work pays off. It's been a fantastic year for me, both individually and collectively. I hope to come back here again next year

OUSMANE DEMBELE | FORWARD, PSG

the Euro 2025 final with Spain, losing the decider to England on penalties, and

Bonmati was named Player of the Tournament. Sarina Wiegman won the best women's

coach award for the fifth time after leading England to retain their European Championship title, and Luis Enrique won the men's coach award

after taking PSG to their first Champions League win. The best women's goalkeeper award went to England and Chelsea's Hannah Hampton who played a major role in the Li-

onesses' Euro 2025 win with her penalty shootout saves and also won the domestic treble with her club.

Italy's Gianluigi Donnarumma, who now plays for Manchester City, won the men's keeper award for his role in PSG's treble win.

Mexico's Lizbeth Ovalle won the FIFA Marta Award for the best goal in women's football, for her scorpion kick for Tigres against Guadalajara in March.

Santiago Montiel won the Puskas Award for the best men's goal for his overhead strike for Independiente Rivadavia during an Argentine Primera match in May.