




New milestone

Actor Janhvi Kapoor adds another milestone by becoming New Balance's first Indian brand ambassador

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Somalia goes to polls

Somalis vote in a controversial election that marks the country's first-ever one-person, one-vote poll since 1969

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Small stocks lag

Smaller stocks lag behind their bigger blue-chip peer Sensex this year as elevated valuations triggered profit-booking

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Jeev lifts title

Jeev Milkha Singh ends a 13-year title drought after securing the IGPL Invitational Sri Lanka with a perfect finish

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Another Hindu man lynched in Bangladesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka/New Delhi, Dec 25: A Hindu man was lynched in Bangladesh over an extortion allegation, media reports said Thursday, days after another man from the minority religion was lynched in the country.

The incident took place Wednesday in Rajbari town's Pangsha upazila, The Daily Star newspaper quoted police as saying.

The deceased, identified as Amrit Mondal, had allegedly formed a criminal gang and was involved in extortion and other criminal activities.

On the day of the incident, Mondal was beaten up by locals when he, along with his group members, tried to extort money from a resident's house, the report said. Upon receiving information about the incident, police rushed to the spot and rescued Mondal in a critical condition.

He was taken to a hospital where doctors declared him dead around 2:00am, Assistant Superintendent of Police (Pangsha Circle) Debrata Sarkar said, according to the report.

Mondal's body was sent to Rajbari Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy, Sarkar said.

Most of his associated fled after the incident, but police arrested one man and recovered firearms from his possession.

According to the police, Mondal had at least two cases filed against him, including a murder case. The incident comes a week after another Hindu man, Dipu Das, was lynched and his body set on fire over blasphemy allegations in Mymensingh.

Police and other law enforcement agencies have made 12 arrests in the case so far. Das' killing sparked widespread protests by factory workers, students and rights groups in Dhaka and elsewhere in Bangladesh, and India expressed its concerns as well.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' interim government has said it would take care of Das' minor child, as well as his wife and parents.

MERRY CHRISTMAS
Swimmers take a Christmas Day dip in Blackroot Pool at Sutton Park, in Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, England, Thursday

AP/PTI

Odisha's Maoist head Ganesh gunned down

Uike, 69, who carried a bounty of ₹1.1 crore on his head, was among 4 Naxals killed by security personnel in Kandhamal Thursday morning

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Security forces killed top Maoist leader Ganesh Uike, who had a bounty of ₹1.1 crore on his head, along with three others, in an encounter in Kandhamal Thursday morning, in what is described as one of Odisha's biggest anti-Naxal operations in recent years. Uike, a central committee member of the CPI (Maoist), headed the outfit's operations in Odisha, making him one of the state's most wanted Maoist leaders. The operation comes amid intensified anti-Naxal campaigns in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and other affected states, in line with the Centre's target of eliminating Left-Wing Extremism by March 2026. However, villagers, tribal leaders, and human rights activists in Maoist-affected regions have repeatedly criticised such actions, alleging that innocent people are often falsely branded as Maoists or Naxals and killed in what they describe as 'fake encounters'.

"CPI (Maoist) central committee member Uike, 69, was heading the banned outfit in Odisha since December 2024," said Sanjeeb Panda, an ADG-rank officer who is in charge of anti-Naxal

operations in the state.

Two Maoists from Chhattisgarh were killed in an exchange of fire with security forces in Gumma forest under Belghar police limits Wednesday night. "Fresh gun battles took place in a forest in Chakapad police station area Thursday morning, in which four others, including Uike and two women, were killed," he said.

Uike, who was also known by Pakka Hanumantu, Rajesh Tiwari, Chamru and Rupa, was a native of Pulemala in Telangana's Nalgonda, Panda said.

The three others killed Thursday were Rajani, Sima and Umesh. These three cadres carry a cash reward of Rs 1.65 lakh each.

The joint operation, based on input from special intelligence

wing, involved 23 teams – 20 of SOG of Odisha Police, two of CRPF and one of BSF.

Taking to X, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said, "In a major operation in Kandhamal, Odisha, 6 Naxalites, including Central Committee Member Ganesh Uike, have been neutralised so far. With this major breakthrough, Odisha stands at the threshold of becoming completely free from Naxalism. We are resolved to eliminate Naxalism before the 31st of March 2026." Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said, "Today, Odisha has achieved a remarkable success in the campaign to build a Naxal-free India."

DGP YB Khurania said, "The killing of a central committee member is a big success for Odisha Police. It has broken the backbone of the Maoists in the state."

"This is one of the biggest operations against Maoists in Odisha in recent times. We thank the security personnel involved in the operation. We are determined to meet the Union Home Minister's target of eliminating Naxalism by March 2026," he added.

This is for the first time in recent times that a Maoist commander of central committee member rank has been killed by security forces in Odisha, he said.

Official work to go paperless soon

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday said official work at district and block level offices will go paperless soon, as the government is expanding the OSWAS.

Majhi was addressing the state-level celebration of Good Governance Day observed on the occasion of the birthday of former PM AB Vajpayee. At the event, Majhi launched the CM Dashboard, an extension of the Odisha State Workflow Automation System (OSWAS) to the district and block levels, and dedicated the 'Aam Sathi Unified WhatsApp Chatbot' to public for better quality medical and water supply related services.

"So far, over 4,000 government offices have been brought under OSWAS. With the expansion of OSWAS, government work will now be paperless at the district and block level. Through this, the system of good governance in the state will be further strengthened," he stated.

Majhi said that real-time monitoring of various projects and schemes can be done through the CM Dashboard, while more than

150 essential public services will be available through 'Aam Sathi Unified WhatsApp Chatbot'.

"Following the mantra of good governance of Vajpayee ji and the administrative reforms of Modi ji, our 18-month BJP government is working for the welfare of 4.5 crore people of Odisha," he said.

On the occasion, Majhi also inaugurated a photo exhibition organised by I&PR department here.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

But I wished for a pepper spray

UP school teacher shot dead

Aligarh (UP), Dec 25: A school teacher was shot dead by unidentified assailants on the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) campus, police said Thursday. AMU Proctor Mohammad Waseem Ali identified the deceased as Rao Danish Ali, a teacher at ABK Union High School, affiliated with the university.

On Wednesday night, Rao Danish Ali was walking near the Kennedy Auditorium with two of his colleagues when some masked men accosted him and fired at him from point-blank range after briefly talking to him, the proctor told PTI.

He collapsed on the spot and was rushed to the Jawaharlal

Nehru Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead on arrival, Mohammad Waseem Ali said. The incident occurred after 9pm. Rao Danish had gone to the AMU canteen for tea, which was part of his daily routine, he said. Though the shooting was captured on CCTV cameras installed near the canteen, the footage was unclear due to darkness and fog, the proctor said.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Neeraj Kumar, along with police personnel, rushed to the spot and an alert was issued to trace the assailants. Kumar told reporters late Wednesday night that police have spoken to the victim's family and colleagues to ascertain the motive behind the killing.

Army personnel can now use Instagram with riders

New Delhi, Dec 25: The Indian Army has brought a change in its social media guidelines under which its personnel can now sign up on Instagram, but with a rider that they can use it only as 'passive observers' without putting up posts or comments on the platform, sources said Thursday.

The move aims to augment the awareness level of Army personnel in the 'digital age of information' and guard them against any potential or inadvertent leak of sensitive information, they said.

The revision in guidelines was introduced a few days ago, and applies to all ranks in the Indian Army, a source in the

defence establishment said.

"The revised guidelines essentially mean that Army personnel can now sign up on Instagram, but with the condition that they can use it only as passive observers. They can view posts, but cannot post content or comments on the platform," the source said.

Essentially, no "user-generated content" is allowed, so even 'liking' a post would fall in that category, the source added.

Earlier, Army personnel could sign up and use X, but not Instagram.

"The restrictions already apply on X, so Army personnel using X can only view posts, but cannot post, repost or comment on them," another source said.

"The reason behind this

The move aims to augment the awareness level of Army personnel in the 'digital age of information' and guard them against any potential or inadvertent leak of sensitive information, sources said

change in guidelines is essentially that the information age is changing, and the Army cannot keep itself away from this information world," the source said. Through social media, Army personnel can see, observe and gain information, and keep themselves abreast of the hap-

penings in and out of the country, the sources said.

"But, one has to ensure that no sensitive information is leaked inadvertently on social media platforms, and hence they have to use them as passive observers," they said.

During an interactive session held here in November as part of the Chanakya Defence Dialogue, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi had emphasised the necessity of keeping a smartphone.

However, he also underlined the difference between "reacting impulsively" and "responding thoughtfully".

A soldier can keep in touch with his family or read e-books online, so a smartphone is a necessity today, Gen Dwivedi had said when asked how the Army looks at Gen Z, given that they are set to play a major role in the making of a Viksit Bharat.

Today's generation is socially conscious, digitally fluent and globally connected, he had said.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Today, you may be stumped by some mysterious and wonderful event. That, or you may encounter an unexpected yet advantageous incident. It may not exactly be path-breaking, but it is sure to make you take stock of things. Also, you may find it difficult to meet deadlines today.

TAURUS
You are likely to be become too ambitious today and strive to outdo others. So says Ganesha. You will be over eager to do some thing big, lay your hands on something precious and valuable. Though you are quite likely to succeed to some extent you over enthusiasm may land you in serious problems that may affect your persona; and private life.

GEMINI
You will be busy organising some religious function today or in visiting a place of religious significance. You will encounter expenses in religious and charitable work. However, you should guard against ignoring your daily work in pursuit of all these matters, says Ganesha.

CANCER
You will labour more to finish pending tasks. You will give priority to career compared to personal chores. So you will be caught up in your career and business riddles. By evening, however, you will have cheerful moments as Ganesha sees you having cherishing time with your beloved.

LEO
You will be able to meet all challenges and obstacles successfully. Your ultimate goal is to come out victorious from any situations. There is a possibility that you will have to face severe competition in business or trade. Personal life will proceed without any hiccups though, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
Your renewed enthusiasm for life will bring about a radical change in you. Ganesha says today is a good time to let others see how important and how brilliant you can be. Your intelligence will become very evident as you demonstrate how things should be done.

LIBRA
Ganesha says you will try to gain knowledge in new topics today. You will feel enthusiasm and a feeling of positivity today. You will show more interest when talking with friends and this will make you come closer to them. There will be benefits to you from your life partner. You will be happy to be in the company of a close relative today.

SCORPIO
The ground beneath you seems a bit shaky; watch your steps. A time would come when your confidence would be shattered, however, don't let set-backs and failures affect you. Adapt the attitude of 'this too shall pass' and the rest would fall in place, says Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS
A cheerful you, your energy level is on an all time high. Ganesha foresees that you will enrol you name for a correspondence or a part-time course. This will boost your confidence and brush up your memory as well. People who are in legal profession will have a rocking day ahead.

CAPRICORN
You are a die-hard romantic and with every plan to please your sweetheart, you are taking him/her closer to the cloud nine. But, don't live in fantasy world, warns Ganesha, as problems are going to follow you everywhere. If you are a businessman, your rivals may give you a hard time.

AQUARIUS
You will remember this day for the rest of of life as today you will make some important decisions and give a new direction to your life. You are in for a windfall and cherry on the cake will be all the recognition and rewards you get for your sincerity and hard work, predicts Ganesha.

PISCES
You will finally realize the worth of your resources today. You will take a decision to increase your savings and clamp down on unnecessary expenses. Your expenses are likely to increase temporarily. It is a good idea to invest in debt schemes today, says Ganesha.

CULKIN REVEALS THE REASON BEHIND HIS ACTING HIATUS

Macaulay Culkin, the former child star of *Home Alone*, recently revealed that after early success, he stepped away from acting to experience real life and spend time with people his own age. He shared this while appearing on the comedy show *Mythical Kitchen*

FRESH RAPE, SEXUAL ASSAULT CHARGES AGAINST BRAND

British comedian and actor Russell Brand faces new legal trouble in the UK after being charged with two offences. According to a *BBC* report, the charges include one count of rape and one of sexual assault, as authorised by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in a new police statement



Mumbai: TV actress Priyanka Chahar Choudhary has opened up about stepping into the iconic role in *Naagin 7* and how she handles inevitable comparisons with her predecessors. Speaking exclusively to this news agency, she shared that she stays focused on giving her 100% to the character, embracing the challenge while honouring the legacy of the show. When asked about being compared to her predecessors, Priyanka said she stays focused on her performance and remains unaffected by comparisons. "Yes, definitely, comparisons will be there and that is very normal. I feel one should take them in a positive way because comparisons happen everywhere. If there is any comparison, I would just like to say that since the show has had six seasons, there have been many iconic Naagins and al successful seasons." Season 7 as well, we are giving our best and putting in our 100 per cent effort. I will try to carry forward the legacy the way it has been so far. I am simply playing my character with honesty, and I will continue to give my 100 per cent, added Chahar. Priyanka has been promoting her show on social media. In an Instagram post, she expressed her delight at getting the opportunity to embark on this new professional journey.

Priyanka on dealing with comparisons

In



Rashmika celebrates growth & gratitude

Mumbai: As 2025 draws to a close, the year stands out for delivering several memorable cinematic moments, with Rashmika Mandanna emerging as one of its most celebrated performers. Beginning the year with *Chhaava* and concluding it with *The Girlfriend*, the actress showcased remarkable versatility across genres. Reflecting on her journey, Rashmika shared that she feels immensely proud of the year she has had, adding that seeing her friends, family and extended circle happy makes all her hard work worthwhile.

Describing the emotions she carries forward from 2025, the actress said she feels deeply content, joyful and loved, grateful for everything the year has given her. Her performance in *The Girlfriend* particularly resonated with audiences, touching many lives with its subtle yet powerful portrayal, especially among women. Rashmika noted that the role came naturally to her, as she simply stayed true to herself and her belief in standing by women.

She also expressed heartfelt gratitude to director Rahul Ravindran for writing such a sensitive female character and praised the producers for backing a story told from a woman's perspective. Concluding the conversation, Rashmika said she is happy to see more female-led narratives taking shape and promised to continue working hard to tell honest stories through a woman's lens.

AGENCIES



Janhvi hits new milestone

Mumbai: Janhvi Kapoor has achieved a significant milestone in her career by becoming the first Indian brand ambassador for global sportswear giant New Balance. The collaboration marks an important step in the brand's expansion strategy in India, while further cementing Janhvi's growing influence across cinema, fashion and youth culture.

New Balance officially announced the partnership, describing it as a union of performance, individuality and personality. The association aligns seamlessly with Janhvi's evolving public image, one that blends strong fashion sensibilities with a visible commitment to fitness and self-expression. In a market like India, where entertainment plays a major role in shaping consumer choices, the collaboration brings together a popular screen presence with a brand that has steadily built its credibility in the sportswear and lifestyle space.

Over the years, Janhvi has developed a distinct identity through her film selections, style statements and fitness-focused lifestyle. Her strong connect with younger audiences, along with her increasing presence on global fashion platforms, positions her as a strategic choice for New Balance as it aims to strengthen its cultural relevance in the country.

Expressing her excitement, Janhvi shared that she has long admired New Balance for its focus on innovation and individuality. She added that the brand's philosophy of owning one's story resonates deeply with her, making this partnership both meaningful and personal.

AGENCIES

TMMTMTM: A heartwarming romantic comedy

TITLE: Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri(TMMTMTM)
CAST: Kartik Aaryan, Ananya Panday, Neena Gupta, Jackie Shroff,
DIRECTOR: Sameer Vidwans,
DURATION: 2.41 hrs

especially since her younger sister is also set to move to Canada after her marriage.

Directed by Sameer Vidwans, the film is handled with great finesse. His direction is impressive, and the screenplay is well-structured. The cinematography is visually appealing and adds freshness to the

narrative. The first half of the film is stronger and more engaging compared to the second half.

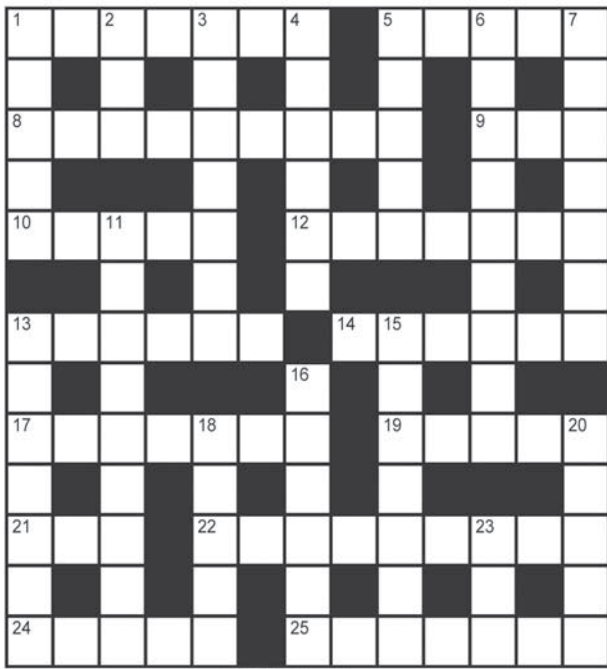
Talking about performances, Kartik delivers a solid act. He brings charm and depth to the character of Rehaan with his powerful performance. Ananya also does a commendable job, especially in several emotional scenes where she surprises with her expressive acting. Overall, *Tu Meri Main Tera, Main Tera Tu Meri* is a delightful romantic comedy.

AGENCIES



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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- Across**
- Transport, for some
 - Confronted
 - Words to a slowpoke (5,1,3)
 - Safety device
 - Relinquished
 - Oil source
 - Sound quality
 - Aquitania locale
 - Improvement
 - Sin city
 - Follow
 - Old printer type (3,6)
 - Flightless birds
 - File on a person
 - Sign up
 - Unclear
 - Troubled
 - Easement of tensions
 - Rabble-rouser
 - Storm warning?
 - Scamps
 - Not standing
 - Right hands
 - Kitchen utensil
 - King (Fr.)
- Down**
- No-frills
 - Chinese brew
 - Cheese type

SUDOKU

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

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

SOLUTIONS

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

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

FOCUS SCRAPPAGE POLICY

JUNK CARS, FEED LOBBIES



The vehicle scrapping regime unfolding across Delhi and the NCR is not an environmental policy. It is a case study in administrative arrogance, policy laziness, and predatory governance masquerading as green virtue

India has perfected a rare form of innovation: the ability to repeatedly convert economic assets into liabilities, wealth into waste, and citizens into offenders—without ever fixing the original problem. The vehicle scrapping regime unfolding across Delhi and the NCR is not an environmental policy. It is a case study in administrative arrogance, policy laziness, and predatory governance masquerading as green virtue.

Delhi is a mere test case, preceding an all-India car scrap policy. The NCR has approximately 40 million vehicles. Of the 4 crore cars over 3 crore would be non-Euro 5, and the so called “end-of-life,” stipulated to be banished. Strangely enough the Supreme Court does not find fault in the junking of almost Rs 18 trillion worth of people’s wealth - the usable cars, in a region with terrible commuting system.

The metro hardly connects the NCR except suburbs in a linear way. Majority of the people having fine cars but “legally infirm” are having trouble in earning their livelihood as their movement is barred by Delhi government, which is less than one-fourth of the NCR. No country in the world junked its way to prosperity. India, however, appears determined to try.

The latest phase targets what the state euphemistically calls “end-of-life” 10-year-old vehicles. In Delhi alone, 62 lakh largely roadworthy, low-emission cars were slated for scrapping in July 2025 to feed a Rs 30-lakh-crore industry—a scale that should alarm any serious economy. Only a poor country with distorted priorities discards working capital so casually.

Delhi’s winter pollution is not a discovery of the 21st century. Foggy, smog-laden winters have been recorded since 1951, again in 1971, and consis-

tently thereafter. The difference today is not pollution alone; it is how the state weaponises it. Every winter, AQI numbers are brandished like emergency sirens, followed by police action against citizens. Cars are seized on roads. Entry points into Delhi turn into choke points. In one recent episode, 4,000 vehicles were denied entry in a single day, paralyzing traffic, delaying wage earners, disrupting offices, and crippling industrial movement.

Citizens who bought vehicles on loans—often their single biggest household investment—are treated as environmental criminals. This, in a region that spans 25 districts across Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan, none of which has a remotely adequate public transport network. You cannot criminalise private mobility when states have failed to provide public alternatives. What a shame!

Every day, new pollution records are flagged in Noida and East Delhi. But there is a conspicuous silence on the elephant in the room: the poorly located Jewar airport. The massive construction frenzy around Jewar has turned a 300-km belt—from East Delhi

to Bulandshahr, Aligarh, and Mathura—into a high-particulate zone. Continuous earth-moving, unregulated industrial activity, concrete batching plants, and truck movement have transformed the region’s air quality. Yet no authority has the courage to acknowledge this. It is easier to stop a middle-class commuter than to question a mega-project blessed by powerful interests.

The vehicle scrapping policy is being sold as climate action. In reality, it is a mechanism to force consumption. People are being nudged—often shoved—into buying new vehicles regardless of financial capacity. This suits automobile manufacturers, scrappage operators, and a volatile EV lobby desperate for market capture. Today it is BS-IV. Tomorrow it is BS-VI. Already, there are whispers of pushing out Euro-3 vehicles barely five years old. This is a folly even the most developed nations refuse to commit. Germany, Japan, and the US regulate emissions through testing, not age-based extermination of assets.

India, instead, chooses the crudest metric possible: age equals guilt. The message is clear—owning durable goods

is risky in India. The state may arbitrarily decide tomorrow that your refrigerator, house, or tractor is “obsolete.” Such uncertainty kills capital formation, discourages savings, and entrenches poverty.

India loves boasting about trillion-dollar GDP milestones. Yet behind the propaganda lies a grim truth. Over 80 crore Indians depend on state food support. Per-capita income remains abysmally low—nearly twelve times lower than Japan’s, despite similar GDP headlines.

A country cannot scrap its way to higher incomes. Destroying household assets does not create wealth; it transfers it upward. Every forced scrappage is a silent tax on the middle and lower-middle classes, imposed without parliamentary debate or public consent. This is why India remains trapped in a vortex of low productivity and low trust. The state sees citizens not as wealth creators, but as compliance units.

Environmental policy requires nuance—targeting gross polluters, industrial emissions, construction dust, crop burning, and urban planning failures. What India has chosen instead is spectacle: roadblocks, seizures, panic, and chaos. Pollution is real. But so is policy failure.

Until India learns that governance is about building systems, not breaking assets, the cycle will continue. Every winter will bring the same drama, every year a new excuse, every decade a fresh policy disaster dressed up as reform. India does not suffer from a lack of ideas. It suffers from an excess of bad ones—repeated endlessly, enforced brutally, and defended shamelessly. The Centre must step in and stop this inhuman, impractical exercise of forced scrappage, where cars are not regulated for emissions, but segregated and junked to feed a predatory industry.

INFA



Shivaji Sarkar

NO COUNTRY IN THE WORLD JUNKED ITS WAY TO PROSPERITY. INDIA, HOWEVER, APPEARS DETERMINED TO TRY



Arvind Subramanian

The US and China have more in common than they would like to believe. Both are hijacking the global economy and limiting trading opportunities for everyone else



Malayaranjan Sahoo & Mohini Gupta

IF THE LEGAL DEFINITION SHRINKS THE ARAVALLIS, MANY DEGRADED RIDGES MAY NOT GET THE SAME LEVEL OF PROTECTION OR PRIORITY

The Supreme Court’s order of 20 November, 2025 can still help save the Aravalli range. It asked for a “Management Plan for Sustainable Mining” for the whole Aravalli belt, from Gujarat to Delhi, and said no new mining leases should be given until this plan is ready.

At the same time, the SC accepted a new way to define an Aravalli hill for mining rules. Under this rule, only land that rises at least 100 metres above the nearby ground will be counted as an Aravalli hill. Groups of such hills within 500 metres will be treated as an Aravalli range. This may look clear, but it can reduce the area that is officially called “Aravalli”, and that can reduce protection for many smaller hills.

On 17 December, the SC took up a fresh plea challenging the 100-metre rule and asked the Centre, the environment ministry, and the Haryana and Rajasthan governments to respond. The plea says many smaller hills are ecologically important and should not lose protection only because they are below 100 metres. This means the definition is still under challenge.

The Forest Survey of India (FSI) has warned about the same risk. In Rajasthan, FSI mapped 12,061 Aravalli hills that are at

least 20 metres high. Under the 100-metre rule, only 1,048 hills qualify, about 8.7%. That means more than 90% of the mapped hills could fall outside the Aravalli label for mining control.

This matters because the Aravallis are not only tall peaks. They are a very old mountain system made of many small ridges, low hills, and rocky plateaus, running from Delhi through Haryana and Rajasthan to Gujarat. Many landforms may not reach 100 metres, but they are still part of the same connected natural system.

These hills protect people and farms in several ways. They help slow down dust and sand moving from the Thar Desert toward Haryana and Delhi. They also help recharge groundwater because rainwater can soak into cracks in the rocks and soil. When hills are mined or levelled, water runs off faster and recharge reduces.

If large parts of the Aravallis lose protection, the result can be ecological destruction. Mining and cutting roads can strip vegetation, break wildlife habitat into small patches, and push animals out. Blasting and heavy trucks can increase erosion, silt up streams, and make floods worse during heavy rain. Over time, less green cover and

less recharge can raise heat, worsen dust, and weaken local climate stability.

The definition matters because rules often follow the official map. If smaller hills are no longer treated as Aravallis, it may become easier to mine them, cut roads through them, or convert them for buildings.

In 2009, the SC restricted mining in parts of Haryana’s Aravalli region, yet illegal mining continued in some places. Between April and June 2025, officials in Nuh registered 31 FIRs and seized 59 trucks linked to illegal mining. Reports said a hill near the Rajasthan border was almost completely removed.

Another recent update came on 22 December, when the Union environment minister repeated that no new mining leases will be allowed until the mining plan is finalised. He also said only a very small part of the wider Aravalli landscape is eligible for mining and that existing mines must follow strict safeguards. This supports the pause, but it does not settle the definition dispute.

There is also a policy mismatch. Rajasthan has started restoration work, including the Aravali Green Development Project across 3,700 hectares with about Rs 250 crore set aside. Such

projects aim to restore green cover and reduce erosion. But if the legal definition shrinks the Aravallis, many degraded ridges may not get the same level of protection or priority.

A single height rule may be easy to measure, but nature is not that simple. A 40-metre ridge can be important for groundwater and dust control. Small hills can also support native trees and grasses and help wildlife move between habitats. If these landforms are removed, the damage is often permanent because the rock and soil structure cannot be rebuilt easily.

The mining plan should use detailed mapping, strong safeguards, and public transparency. It should identify recharge zones and fragile slopes, set strict limits, monitor activity closely, and punish illegal mining quickly. It should also publish maps and compliance reports so local communities can flag violations. If India chooses wisely now, the Aravallis can remain a living shield for air and water in the region.

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The writer is a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

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WISDOM CORNER

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

On the outskirts of every agony sits some observant fellow who points.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

No valid plans for the future can be made by those who have no capacity for living now.

ALAN WATTS

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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



Christmas celebrated with festive fervour



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: The Capital city resonated with prayers, carols and festive cheer as Christmas was celebrated across Bhubaneswar Thursday, marking the birth of Jesus Christ with devotion, joy and communal harmony.

Major churches in the City, including St. Vincent Pro-Cathedral Church at Satya Nagar and the Church of Christ (Union Church), witnessed large congregations as devotees attended midnight Mass and special prayer services on Christmas Eve. Churches were beautifully illuminated with lights, stars, Christmas trees and nativity scenes, creating a spiritually uplifting atmosphere.

The prayer services featured

carol singing, Bible readings and sermons highlighting the message of peace, love and compassion. Members of the Christian community were joined by people from other faiths, reflecting the City's inclusive and harmonious spirit.

Extending his greetings on the occasion, Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati conveyed warm Christmas wishes, describing the festival as a symbol of hope, peace and goodwill. He urged people to uphold mutual respect, compassion and cultural harmony, which have long been hallmarks of Odisha's social fabric.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi wished the people of Odisha a joyful and blessed Christmas, stating that the festival embodies the values of love, unity and service to

humanity. He expressed hope that the teachings of Jesus Christ would inspire citizens to strengthen social harmony and extend care to the needy.

Beyond the churches, the festive mood was visible across Bhubaneswar. Markets, malls and public spaces were decked up with Christmas decorations, while hotels and community centres hosted special Christmas programmes, brunches and cultural events. A Christmas carnival and charity initiatives further added to the celebrations.

People from different walks of life exchanged greetings, sweets and gifts and even plants, as Bhubaneswar once again celebrated Christmas not just as a religious festival, but as a celebration of shared joy, peace and unity.



ENCHANTING MOVE: Artistes perform Odissi during International Odissi Dance Festival organised by Jyoti Kala Mandir at Bhanjakala Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Thursday

OUAT students end strike after CM assurance

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: After four days of continuous agitation, postgraduate and PhD students of the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) Thursday called off their hunger strike following an assurance from Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to address their long-pending demand for a monthly stipend.

Agriculture and allied science students had been on an indefinite hunger strike at the OUAT campus, braving the winter chill to demand financial assistance for research scholars.



More than 200 postgraduate and PhD students joined the protest, stating that despite pursuing higher education and research, they receive no stipend at the university level.

On the occasion of Good Governance Day, the protesting students submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister in the presence of Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh.

Chief Minister Majhi assured them that their demands would be addressed at the earliest, following which the students called off their strike.

It may be noted that around 268 students enroll each year in postgraduate and PhD programmes at OUAT, but the lack of financial support has fuelled growing discontent. Despite repeated representations to university authorities and the state government, and even after proposals were forwarded by the university, no concrete outcome emerged, prompting students to launch a peaceful, round-the-clock hunger strike.

VIVITSA WORLD SCHOOL OPENS IN SAMBALPUR



POST NEWS NETWORK

Sambalpur, Dec 25: Vivitsa World School was inaugurated at Bhalukunda, Sambalpur Thursday marking the launch of a new institution aimed at nurturing academically strong, value-based learners. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan attended the event as chief guest and jointly inaugurated the campus with other dignitaries.

Speaking on the occasion, Pradhan said he hoped Vivitsa World School would open new avenues for students. He referred to the discovery of 10,000-year-old letters and pictures in the Rairakhol area as evidence of the region's ancient tradition of intellectual exchange, expressing confidence that the school would carry this legacy forward and eventually evolve into a university. He also praised the people of Sambalpur for their extraordinary imagination, which he said is rarely found elsewhere in the world.

The dignitaries underscored the importance of quality education, strong foundational learning and the role of schools in nurturing socially responsible, future-ready citizens. Parents, educators and local residents attended the event, reflecting widespread interest and optimism about the new institution.

School chairperson Debashri Debjani Pansari said the school believes education must extend beyond textbooks, with a vision to create a nurturing environment where children grow into confident, compassionate and responsible individuals guided by strong lifelong values.

Saransh Pansari (Co-founder), Rita Pansari and Ramesh Agrawal, directors of the Ramesh Education Foundation, along with co-founders Rahul Agarwal and Khushboo Agarwal, were present at the launch. The programme concluded with interactive sessions with parents and a guided tour of the campus. For the current academic year, admissions are open from Class I to Class VIII.

President Murmu releases Constitution in Santhali

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 25: President Droupadi Murmu Thursday released the Constitution of India in the Santhali language during an event at Rashtrapati Bhavan, expressing the hope that this initiative will enable tribal communities to read and comprehend the statute in their native language.

Addressing the gathering, the President said that it is a matter of pride and joy for all the Santhali people that the Constitution of India is now available in the Santhali language, written in the Ol Chiki script.

The President said that this year, we are celebrating the centenary of the Ol Chiki script. She appreciated the Union Minister of Law and Justice and his team for bringing the Constitution of India in Ol Chiki script in its centenary year.

Among the dignitaries present on the occasion were Vice President CP Radhakrishnan and Union Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal.

The Santhali language, which was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution through the 92nd Amendment Act, 2003, is one of the most ancient living languages of India. It is spoken by a significant number of tribal people in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and Bihar.



She said the Constitution's Santhali version will help tribal people read and understand the Constitution in their own language.

Speaking in the regional language, the President said, "I am delighted to release the Constitution of India in the Santali language written in the Ol Chiki script. The availability of the Constitution in the Santali language is a source of immense happiness for the entire Santali community."

"All Santali people living in Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar will now be able to fully understand the Constitution written in their mother tongue and script. They will be able to properly comprehend the

articles of the Constitution," she said.

The Vice President thanked President Murmu, under whose guidance the initiative was undertaken.

He said that this initiative will enable Santhali-speaking people to read and understand the Constitution in their own language and contribute to nation-building in a bigger way.

The Vice President also recalled that during President Murmu's tenure as the then Governor of Jharkhand, she had initiated several tribal welfare measures and promoted tribal culture and languages, and he continued to carry forward her legacy during his own tenure as Governor of the state.

Comedian Gulua alleges death threats, extortion

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Popular Odia comedian and YouTuber Gulua (Ashis Kumar Das) has alleged that he is facing death threats and extortion demands. Sharing a video on his social media, Das claimed that some individuals initially demanded ₹1 crore, threatening to defame and physically harm him if he failed to pay. Following negotiations, the alleged extortion amount was reportedly reduced to ₹50 lakh.

In the 2-minute-37-second video, Das said he is currently in hiding and that he and his staff have received threats on three separate occasions. "I don't know whether I will be dead or alive by tomorrow. I urge people not to take this lightly and help me," he appealed. Das added that he had approached Baliana police station to lodge a complaint but was unable to pursue the case, alleging that the blackmailers have strong connections with the police and influential individuals.

Meanwhile, Das' wife, Barsha, has accused him of an ex-

tramarital affair and questioned the authenticity of his claims. She alleged that he engaged in the affair without divorcing her and forced her out of their home. Barsha stated that she plans to approach the court with evidence against him.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Tender Notice No. 52-SBP-TRD-OT-2025-26,
Date : 19.12.2025

NAME OF WORK: TRD RELATED WORK
IN CONNECTION TO THE WORK OF
"PROVISION OF 100M SNECK AT
BOTH END OF R/4 AT DUNGIRALI
STATION FOR LOCO REVERSAL."

Approximate Cost (₹) : 34,83,240.98,
EMD (₹) : 69,700.00, **Completion Period**
: 09 Months.

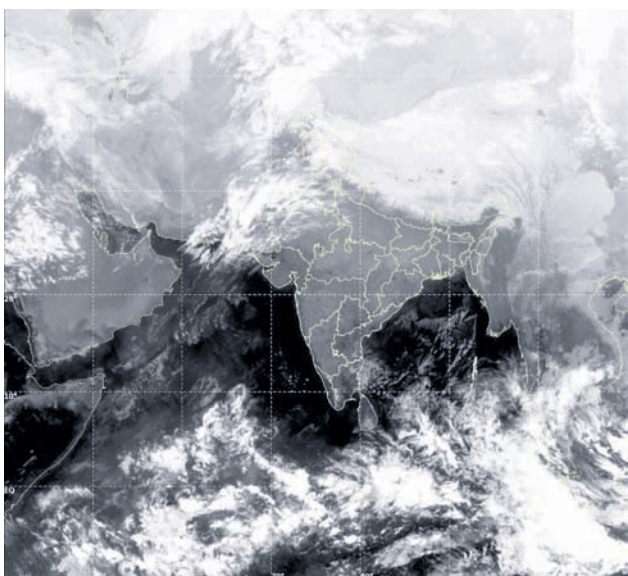
Tender Closing Date and Time :
At 1530 Hrs. of 12.01.2026

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier /
Fax or in person accepted against such
e-tenders even if these are submitted on
firm's letter head and received in time. All
such manual offers shall be considered
invalid and shall be rejected summarily
without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender
documents of the above e-tender is
available in website : <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

Note : The prospective tenderers are
advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen)
days before the date of closing of tender to
note any changes / corrigendum issued
for this tender.

**Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD),
PR-935/Q/25-26**
Sambalpur

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	89.84 ▲ 0.19	SENSEX	85408.70 ▼ 116.14	GOLD	₹138,179 ▲ ₹82
EURO	105.84 ▼ 0.06	NIFTY	26142.10 ▼ 35.05	SILVER	₹223,730 ▼ ₹60



WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	27.8°	25.8°	Fog or mist in the morning and mainly cloudy sky later
Min Temp	15.0°	13.6°	
Humidity	92%	94%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Long-term exposure to certain components of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) can significantly increase the risk of mental health disorders such as depression, according to a large-scale study published in JAMA Network Open. The research highlights that not all air pollution particles pose equal risks; specific components—including sulphate, ammonium, elemental carbon and soil dust—are more strongly linked to depression, especially among older adults with existing health conditions.

The study analysed data from 23,696,223 older adults and found that the association between PM2.5 exposure and depression was markedly stronger in individuals with cardiometabolic and neurological comorbidities. Older adults suffering from conditions such



as hypertension, cardiovascular diseases (including stroke and congestive heart failure), neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's disease and dementia, and respiratory illnesses such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease were particularly vulnerable.

Researchers from Emory University in the United States noted that exposure to a mixture of PM2.5 components posed a greater risk than exposure to PM2.5 mass alone. "Our results confirmed that the combined positive association of PM2.5 mixtures with

depression risk was much higher than PM2.5 alone, and further revealed that soil dust, sulphate and elemental carbon were the most responsible for the observed associations," the team said.

Sulphate, a secondary inorganic aerosol largely produced by fossil fuel combustion, often exists in forms such as ammonium sulphate, ammonium bisulphate or sulphuric acid. The study suggests that sulphate may contribute to depression by triggering oxidative stress and mitochondrial dysfunction, which can impair central nervous system function.

Elemental carbon, mainly emitted from traffic sources and biomass burning, was also found to have strong links to depression risk. These particles are extremely small—often around 50 nanometres—allow-

ing them to bypass the blood-brain barrier. Once inside the brain, they may exert neurotoxic effects through oxidative stress and systemic inflammation, potentially accelerating mental health decline.

Soil dust, another major contributor identified in the study, contains silica and heavy metals such as iron and calcium. Originating from both natural processes and human activities, soil dust may harm the nervous system due to the accumulation of heavy metals in the blood and bones, leading to neurotoxicity over time.

In contrast, other PM2.5 components such as nitrate and organic carbon showed weaker or even inverse associations with depression, indicating that their mental health impacts may be comparatively limited.

NOBEL PRIZES

CHEMISTRY
SUSUMU KITAGAWA (JAPAN), RICHARD ROSSON (AUSTRALIA, UNITED KINGDOM), OMAR M. YAGHI (PALESTINE, JORDAN, UNITED STATES)

LITERATURE
LÁSZLÓ KRASZNAHORKAI (HUNGARY)

PHYSICS
JOHN CLARKE (UNITED KINGDOM), MICHEL H. DEVORET (FRANCE), JOHN M. MARTINIS (UNITED STATES)

PHYSIOLOGY OR MEDICINE
MARY E BRUNKOW (UNITED STATES), FRED RAMSDELL (UNITED STATES), SHIMON SAKAGUCHI (JAPAN)

PEACE
MARÍA CORINA MACHADO (VENEZUELA)

ECONOMIC SCIENCES
JOEL MOKYR (NETHERLANDS, ISRAEL, UNITED STATES), PHILIPPE AGHION (FRANCE), PETER HOWITT (CANADA)



GLOBAL CONFLICTS & HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

WHY 2025 WAS A HIGH-CONFLICT YEAR

- INTERSTATE WARS & MILITARY CONFRONTATIONS: Ukraine-Russia, Israel-Hamas (Gaza conflict), India-Pakistan, Israel-Iran, Iraq, Israel-Lebanon
- CIVIL & REBEL WARS: Syria, Sudan, Myanmar, Yemen, Eastern Congo (M23), Chad, Ethiopia
- BORDER DISPUTES: Thailand-Cambodia, China-India
- REGIONAL INSURGENCIES: Sahel attacks, Afghanistan-Pakistan, Somalia

In 2025, conflict-driven hunger and displacement surged to unprecedented levels, according to humanitarian agencies, as wars and instability crippled food systems and basic services. Hundreds of millions are acutely food insecure, with children facing the highest risks of malnutrition and disease. The crises span multiple regions, underscoring the widening humanitarian fallout of prolonged global conflicts

NOTABLE MOMENTS

First American Pope

Robert Francis Prevost made history as the first American elected pope, becoming the 267th leader of the Roman Catholic Church. The 69-year-old cardinal chose the papal name Leo XIV, succeeding Pope Francis, who served from 2013 to 2025. Born in the United States and also holding Peruvian citizenship, Leo XIV has spent much of his life in Peru. He was elected by 133 cardinals sequestered in the Sistine Chapel, now leading the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

WORLD POWER REALIGNS

In 2025, relations among major global leaders were shaped by overlapping rivalry and cooperation rather than fixed alliances. The US strengthened strategic ties with India, Japan and South Korea to counter China's growing influence in deepened defense technology cooperation with Washington while maintaining economic engagement with China, reflecting its non-aligned approach. Japan and South Korea, long divided by historical disputes, moved closer under US pressure, expanding security coordination amid concerns over China and North Korea. China, meanwhile, reinforced partnerships with Russia and several Global South nations through trade, infrastructure and energy deals, positioning itself as an alternative to Western leadership. Despite tensions, cooperation continued in limited areas such as climate talks, global health and trade stability. Analysts say the world in 2025 was divided into competing blocs, but united by shared economic interdependence, forcing leaders to balance confrontation with selective collaboration.

Louvre jewel heist

On 19 October 2025, thieves disguised as construction workers stole eight pieces of the French Crown Jewels valued at approximately €38 million from the Galerie d'Apollon (lit. 'Apollo's Gallery') of the Louvre in Paris, France. The robbery took less than eight minutes, of which the thieves spent four in the museum itself, and occurred during regular opening hours. It was the first art theft from the Louvre since the painting de Sévres was stolen in 1998.

Hong Kong fire

On 26 November 2025, a large fire broke out at the Wang Fuk Court apartment complex in Tai Po, Hong Kong, which consumed seven out of eight blocks of the entire complex and raged for 43.5 hours, causing 161 people (including one firefighter) to perish in the fire; 79 were injured. Most of the casualties were found in their apartments. Fire alarms in all eight blocks in the northern suburb of Tai Po were also found to be not working effectively, the fire service says.

Musk's big bet on Trump

From June to September 2025, Elon Musk and President Donald Trump traded sharp social media attacks on X and Truth Social after Musk's exit from the White House and Trump's second administration. Musk had spent over \$100 million backing Trump's 2024 reelection and was rewarded with leading the Department of Government Efficiency. The relationship unraveled when Musk attacked Trump's "One Big Beautiful Bill Act," criticizing pork spending and the removal of EV and emissions tax credits vital to Tesla. The feud rattled investors, battered Tesla's stock, and dragged Musk's other companies into politics.

Historic homecoming

NASA astronaut Sunita Williams returned to Earth on March 18, 2025, aboard a SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule with Butch Wilmore, after an unplanned nine-month stay on the International Space Station (ISS) due to issues with the Boeing Starliner they arrived in, successfully splashing down near Florida after a 17-hour journey home from the ISS, ending a historic extended mission.

SUMMITS OF SIGNIFICANCE

GLOBAL CALAMITY

Disaster	Date / Period	Main Affected Areas	Deaths
Hurricane Melissa	21 Oct - 4 Nov	Jamaica, Cuba	102
Typhoon Kalmegi	October 31 - Nov 7	Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand	288
Myanmar earthquake	28 March	Myanmar, Thailand, Southwestern China, Vietnam	5,456+
Cyclone Dittwah	Nov 26 - Dec 4	Sri Lanka, India	647+
Cyclone Senyar	Nov 25 - Nov 30	Southern Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia	2,200+
Pakistan Monsoon Floods	Jun - Sept	Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan	1,142
European Floods	August	Germany, Belgium, Italy	159
West Africa Floods	Jun - Sept	Nigeria, Botswana, South Africa	278
Texas floods	July 4-5	Texas Hill Country, Central Texas	135+

BRICS
BRICS Rio Declaration (6-7 Jul 2025)
China-Central Asia Summit (Jun 16-18, 2025)

G20 SOUTH AFRICA 2025
G20 Johannesburg Summit (Nov 22-23, 2025)

AI Action Summit Paris (Feb 10-11, 2025)

WORLD IN TRANSITION

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION, CONFLICTS, DIPLOMACY & BREAKTHROUGHS THAT SHAPED 2025

In 2025, illegal immigration moved to the forefront of global politics, prompting governments to reassess border controls, asylum policies and refugee quotas. Several Western nations tightened entry rules, led by the United States, which rolled out tougher border enforcement and broader travel restrictions. Migration pressures driven by conflict, economic instability and climate stress intensified, while protests against immigration policies spread from London and Berlin to Toronto and Sydney, underscoring public concern over integration, housing shortages and national security



GLOBAL ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWN

The US government has implemented one of the toughest enforcement agendas in recent history, sharply reducing illegal crossings and increasing deportations.

Expanded border enforcement and deportation operations (e.g., Operation Safeguard and ICE raids targeting undocumented individuals) have led to tens of thousands of arrests and removals, including targeted enforcement in sanctuary cities like Los Angeles. The US government expanded its travel ban to include 38 countries, affecting travel, visas, and asylum options—citing national security reasons. Several EU countries strengthened asylum rules under new EU regulations.

forms. Nations such as Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands began faster deportations and classified countries like India, Bangladesh, and Morocco as "safe," reducing asylum approvals. In its biggest immigration shake-up in nearly half a century, the UK



is planning to bring in new rules to clamp down on soaring immigration figures. Australia similarly restricted immigration.

migration in 2024-2025 to address housing strains from rapid population growth via newcomers. Rules targeted low-wage temporary migrants and students, prioritising high-skilled permanent residents to curb migration. The UAE launched a strict enforcement drive, flagging over 32,000 visa violations in early 2025. Authorities carried out inspections, workplace raids, and deportations, showing a zero-tolerance policy toward illegal residency. Canada sharply reduced approvals for student and temporary visas, rejecting a large share of applications and tightening border entry checks.

Cuomo, running as an independent, to become the youngest person in over a century to lead the largest city in the US. "My friends, we have toppled a political dynasty," the self-described democratic socialist told the crowd during a victory speech. Mandomani has become the first South Asian and Muslim to lead the city. In his victory speech, he spoke of a "new age".

SANAE TAKAICHI BECOMES JAPAN'S FIRST FEMALE PREMIER

Sanae Takaichi made history by becoming Japan's first female prime minister in October. However, her surprisingly male-dominated cabinet and socially conservative track record have left some women ambivalent in a country that lags on gender equality.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

UKRAINE EXPANDED LONG-RANGE DRONE STRIKES DEEP INSIDE RUSSIAN TERRITORY

RUSSIA INTENSIFIED MISSILE ATTACKS ON UKRAINIAN ENERGY AND CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

WESTERN MILITARY AID CONTINUED AMID POLITICAL FATIGUE IN EUROPE AND THE US

People facing acute hunger globally	318-343 million
People in catastrophic hunger (near famine)	1.9 million
Children in hunger (global)	118 million
Children in hunger due to conflict	63 million
Displaced persons (conflict + violence)	120 million
Countries with acute hunger issues	68 countries



TRUMP RETURNS TO THE WHITE HOUSE

Donald Trump returned to the White House on January 20, 2025, beginning a second term after a historic political comeback. In his opening days, Trump promised to "restore American strength," tighten immigration controls, revive manufacturing, and put "America First" in foreign policy and trade. Expanded border enforcement and deportation operations (e.g., Operation Safeguard and ICE raids targeting undocumented individuals) have led to tens of thousands of arrests and removals, including targeted enforcement in sanctuary cities like Los Angeles. The US government expanded its travel ban to include 38 countries, affecting travel, visas, and asylum options—citing national security reasons. Several EU countries strengthened asylum rules under new EU regulations.

'Peace President' claim faces growing scrutiny
US President Donald Trump has repeatedly portrayed himself as a global peacemaker, claiming credit for easing tensions in

ZOHRAN MAMDANI WINS NEW YORK CITY MAYORAL ELECTION

Zohran Mamdani, 34, has won New York City's race for mayor in a contest that rallied young voters and sparked debate about the future direction of the US Democratic Party. Ugandan-born Mamdani, a Democrat, beat former New York Governor Andrew

AL-SHARAA HEADS POST-ASSAD SYRIA

On 29 January 2025, during the Syrian Revolution Victory Conference in Damascus, the Syrian General Command appointed Ahmed al-Sharara as president for the transitional period after he had served as the de facto leader following the fall of the Assad regime.



IN ETHERAL MEMORY



POPE FRANCIS
The Lord never tires of forgiving. It is we who tire of asking for forgiveness.
Born : 17 Dec 1936
Died : 21 Apr 2025
Leader of the Roman Catholic Church and spiritual head to 1.4 billion Catholics worldwide



CHARLIE KIRK
I want to be remembered for courage for my faith...
Born : October 14, 1993
Died : September 10, 2025
American conservative activist, founder of Turning Point USA—a major youth-focused right-wing movement that reshaped Republican politics and greatly influenced US elections and political discourse. He was fatally shot while speaking at a university event, prompting intense national debate about political violence, free speech, and polarization



DICK CHENEY
Freedom means the freedom to make mistakes.
Born : 30 Jan 1941
Died : 3 Nov 2025
46th US Vice President (2001-2009), one of the most powerful modern American leaders. Key architect of post-9/11 foreign policy, including wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, his death stirred global reflections on US influence in world security and diplomacy



RAILA ODINGA
Democracy is not given; it is fought for.
Born : 7 Jan 1945
Died : 15 Oct 2025
Veteran Kenyan statesman and former Prime Minister whose long career shaped democratic reform across Africa



NANCY LEFFENANT-COLON
The sky is the limit.
Born : September 29, 1920
Died : January 8, 2025
The first Black woman to serve in the US Army Nurse Corps after desegregation, later serving as an Air Force flight nurse in Korea and Vietnam



ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI
Leadership is service to the people.
Born : 26 Nov 1939
Died : 14 Apr 2025
Malaysia's fifth Prime Minister (2003-2009), known as "Pak Lah," he championed moderate governance, expanded political freedoms, and promoted anti-corruption and human-capital development

Bengal migrant worker beaten to death for not sharing bidi, say police

West Bengal's ruling TMC claimed that Juel was beaten to death over suspicion that he was an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant

PNN & AGENCIES

Sambalpur/ Kolkata, Dec 25: A group of six men allegedly sought a 'bidi' from migrant workers from West Bengal and then demanded to see their Aadhaar card, before beating one of them to death and injuring others in Sambalpur district, police said Thursday.

While the Odisha Police asserted that the incident occurred following an altercation over a bidi Wednesday night, the workers claimed they were assaulted on suspicion of being Bangladeshis.

West Bengal's ruling Trinamool Congress alleged that the incident in the BJP-ruled state was fallout of the saffron party's "sustained campaign against Bengalis".

The six accused people were arrested, a police officer said.

Juel Sheikh, the deceased, along with a few others from West Bengal, worked at a construction site in Shanti Nagar under the Ainthapali police station area.

When they were preparing food at their living place, a group of six men stopped them and asked for a bidi. When they denied, the workers were asked to show their Aadhaar cards. An altercation broke out over this, leading to a scuffle between the two sides, police said.

Sheikh was hit on the head, and he died while undergoing treatment at the Sambalpur hospital.

Majhar Khan, another migrant worker from West Ben-

gal, said, "The miscreants first asked bidi from us and then asked me to show our Aadhaar cards. Later, they rammed Juel Sheikh's head against a hard object."

Nizamuddin Khan alleged that the attackers called them Bangladeshis before assaulting Sheikh and two others. Two other injured persons have been hospitalised and are under treatment.

IGP (Northern Range) Himanshu Kumar Lal said, "We have arrested six accused people. The police are investigating the case."

Asked about the allegation, the IGP said the murder has nothing to do with whether the "victim was a Bengali or a Bangladeshi".

Additional SP Srimanta Barik said the workers from the neighbouring state had been living in the area for several years, and they know the accused persons.

Police said the investigation is in progress to find out if other individuals were involved in the crime. West Bengal's ruling TMC claimed that Sheikh was beaten to death over suspicion that he was an illegal Bangladeshi immigrant.

"The lynching of a Bengali migrant worker in Sambalpur is the direct outcome of @BJP4India's sustained campaign against Bengalis. A citizen of India was beaten to death because a mob believed the lie that Bengalis are infiltrators who must constantly prove their right to exist," the TMC alleged in a post on X.

"For years, BJP leaders have deliberately branded Bengali-speaking Indians as infiltrators, outsiders, and suspects. That poisonous narrative has now reached the streets, where anyone feels empowered to act as immigration officers and executioners," it claimed.



Youth dies after falling from train

Khallikote: A 26-year-old youth died after reportedly falling from a moving train near the Bhejput-Kalijai passenger halt under Khallikote police limits in Ganjam district, police said Thursday. The deceased was identified as Dilbar Hussain of North Tripura. Police said he was traveling from Guwahati to Bangalore and is suspected to have fallen from an express train late Wednesday night. Local residents Thursday morning spotted a body along the railway track and alerted the officials at the Kalijai railway gate. Government Railway Police (GRP) reached the spot, seized the body and sent it to Berhampur for post-mortem examination. This is the third body recovered from near the Kalijai passenger halt in the past 10 days. The body of Santosh Behera, 27, of Pathara village was found in the area December 15. An unidentified youth was killed after being hit by a train near the Gurapalli railway gate, a short distance from the Kalijai passenger halt December 20.

Fake Singapore job scam: Man held for cheating 500 people

PNN & AGENCIES

Berhampur, Dec 25: A 45-year-old man was arrested in Ganjam district for allegedly cheating around 500 people on the pretext of arranging jobs in Singapore, police said Thursday.

The accused, identified as Subrat Kumar Palo of Hillpatna here, was arrested Wednesday on the basis of an FIR lodged against him at Berhampur Sadar police station.

Two mobile phones, photo copies of air tickets, comput-

er generated work permits for Singapore, photocopies of health check-up certificates by a Chennai diagnostic centre and computer generated fake appointment letters of a shipping company were seized from his possession, police said.

Police also found that Palo, along with another person, started a job consultancy and training centre at Bhabinipur and advertised about it through posters, banners and leaflets to lure job aspirants by offering good jobs in Singapore besides conducting interviews.

6-hr bandh in Chandbali hits normal life

Case included under the 'Red Flag' category: DGP Khurania

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhadrak, Dec 25: Normal life was severely affected in Chandbali block Thursday due to a six-hour bandh called by opposition BJD and Congress in protest against the alleged rape and murder of a 10-year-old differently-abled girl, officials said.

No untoward incident has been reported so far amid heavy police deployment at all vulnerable places to maintain law and order, a police officer said.

The protesters, including locals and party workers, blocked key roads in the area by burning tyres, leading to disruption in vehicular traffic in Chandbali and adjacent areas. Left activists also participated in the bandh.

The agitators rejected the Rs 10 lakh financial assistance announced by Chief Minister

Mohan Charan Majhi for the next of kin of the deceased, and instead demanded Rs 50 lakh as compensation.

Shops, markets, and commercial establishments largely remained shut, local BJD MLA Byomakesh Ray said, adding that the public anger was clearly visible through the strike.

The heavy burning of tyres blanketed nearby areas in thick smoke, reportedly causing severe discomfort to local residents. People complained of breathing difficulties as the smoke spread across residential localities.

The BJD-led protest was spearheaded by the Chandbali MLA with participation from block chairperson Minati Sutar, NAC chairperson Shantilata Sethy, senior leader Bishwakeshari Mohanty, youth wing president Prabhass Nayak, and Zilla Parishad member Prince Rakesh



Nayak, among others.

In Kheranga, sarpanch Jitendra Biswal and in Digachhia, block BJD president Pratap Chandra Dhal led the agitators during the bandh. Congress workers, led by block president Bailochan Panda, led a bike rally with anti-government slogans.

Leaders including Ramesh Nayak, youth leader Satyananda Rout, former sarpanch Abhaya Sahu and samiti member Rajesh Swain took out a bike rally and picketed at major intersections. They forced the shops and business establishments to down their shutters.

Left party activists, including CPM district committee member Bikash Nath, area secretary Gourang Jena, member Malay Bhoi, Tihidi area secretary Bishnu Das, Krushak Sabha secretary Ashok Behera and Mahila Sabha leader Madhusmita Pakal, held demonstrations at Madhubabu Chhak.

The body of the Class III student was found near a bush in Baligaon in Chandbali police station area Tuesday. Police arrested a 30-year-old man identified as Satyabrata Das alias Babul, who is known to the victim, from Jagatsinghpur district the same night. The crime sparked

intense public anger, with villagers blocking roads by burning tires and subsequently demolishing the accused's house.

The incident also sparked intense political debates with the Opposition criticising the state government's handling of law and order.

The BJD and the Congress have demanded the resignation of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, who is also in charge of the Home department.

Meanwhile, the case has been included under the 'Red Flag' category, Director General of Police (DGP) YB Khurania informed Thursday.

Woman hacked to death by hubby

POST NEWS NETWORK

Deogaon, Dec 25: In a shocking incident, a woman was hacked to death by her husband with an axe allegedly over domestic dispute at Jurlakani village under this police limits in Bolangir district late Wednesday night.

The victim was identified as Tapa Mallik, 31, wife of Mahadev Mallik in the village. Mahadev tried to flee with the body after murdering his wife but was caught by the villagers. They tied him to a pole and brutally thrashed him before informing the police.

Police registered a case (415/25) and launched an investigation over a complaint filed by the deceased woman's father, investigating officer and Bandhapada OIC Malay Panda



said. Panda said the motive behind the murder is still unclear but family dispute is suspected. A forensic team from Bolangir visited the crime scene, seized the murder weapon and conducted a spot investigation.

The body was sent for post-mortem and the accused admitted to Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital in Bolangir for treatment under police custody, Panda said. He will be arrested and produced in the court once he recovers, Panda said.

50-yr-old found dead under culvert

POST NEWS NETWORK

Papadahandi, Dec 25: Police recovered the body of a 50-year-old man from beneath a culvert near Satnami Sahi in Papadahandi village of Nabarangpur district Thursday morning.

The deceased was identified as Majhia Bhatra of Daleiguda village. According to sources, Majhia had left home Wednesday evening but did not return home by night. Family members searched for him but found no trace.

The matter came to the light after locals noticed a body lying under the culvert near Satnami Sahi and alerted the police. Papadahandi police station IIC Deepak Kumar Jena, along with a police team, reached the spot and seized



the body. The identity was confirmed a short while later.

The deceased's nephew, Sri-pati Bhatra, lodged a complaint at Papadahandi police station. Police registered a case (09/25) and launched an investigation.

After the postmortem examination, the body was handed over to the family members.

Security guards held for double murder

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar/Angul, Dec 25: Five security guards were arrested in Angul district for allegedly shooting dead two persons who attempted theft at a stockyard, police said Thursday.

The incident happened at Lingarakata near Pipeline Road in the Talcher police station area in the early hours of Wednesday, they said.

A group of 12-13 people allegedly attempted theft at the stockyard where electric tower materials were kept.

On spotting them, one of the security guards deployed at the site opened fire from a 12-bore double-barrel gun, killing two



on the spot, police said. The deceased were identified as Dibyaranjan Parida (17) and Janardan Naik (20), they said.

Those arrested were identified as Ganeswar Sahoo (45), Abhimanyu Sahoo (35), Parshuram Parida (50), Kishan Manjhi (25) and Anandi Manjhi (48).

"It is for the court to see under what circumstances they

opened fire, which led to the killing of two people. They have been booked under BNS sections 103(1), which deals with murder, 238 (destruction of evidence) and 3(5), which is for common intention," a police officer said.

The gun used in the murder, along with an empty cartridge, has been seized.

Olive Ridley turtles' satellite tagging reinitiated to track migration pattern

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara/Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: With behavioural and migration patterns of endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles still shrouded in the realm of scientific study, the state Forest department has reinitiated the satellite tagging of these iconic marine animals ahead of their mass nesting.

These turtles turn up in millions for mass nesting along the Odisha coast every year. Gahirmatha beach off Bay of Bengal coast in Kendrapara district is incidentally acclaimed as world's largest-known nesting ground of these animals. Apart from Gahirmatha, these threatened aquatic animals turn up at Rushikululya river mouth and Devi river mouth for mass nesting, otherwise called 'arribada'.

The tagging programme was undertaken for three days from December 21 and six turtles were satellite tagged in Gahirmatha. Three more turtles will also be tagged in Rushikululya river mouth.

The tagging programme is expected to provide vital information on near shore movement patterns and would help



the government in bringing policies for the conservation of turtles as well as the betterment of all stakeholders including the local fishing communities, said senior forest officials.

There is a need to know more about Olive Ridley turtle movement patterns to identify critical habitats, reduce threats like fishing bycatch, design effective Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that follow their wide-ranging movements, understand their life cycle (feeding, breeding), and inform policies to protect them from human activities such as coastal development and plastic pollution, especially

since they are highly migratory and use vast, often international, ocean areas, they added.

Odisha has led the country in Olive Ridley sea turtle conservation with satellite telemetry studies on turtles in Odisha commencing in the early 2001, marking a significant advancement from beach-based monitoring to ocean-scale ecological research to know the long distance movement pattern. These studies were undertaken by the Wildlife Institute of India, in collaboration with the Odisha Forest department.

In the year 2024, as per the decisions taken in the High

Power Committee under the chairmanship of the Odisha Chief Secretary, it was decided to re-initiate the satellite telemetry programme on Olive Ridley sea turtles in state's coast to know the near shore movement pattern and beach dynamics.

Accordingly, as per the tripartite MoU executed between the PCCF (Wildlife) & CWLW, Odisha, the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun and the Dhamra Port Co. Ltd. (DPCL), two turtles were tagged with satellite tags to study the movement and nesting habitat dynamics.


One of the tagged turtles was spotted by near shore movements around Wheeler Island, Babubali Island and the adjacent spit, before moving north of the rookery. The satellite tag was detached and later found within the mangrove habitat of Bhitarkanika, with the last location 1 April 2025.

The second tagged turtle undertook a long-distance migratory journey. It initially moved eastward into the open ocean, subsequently approached near shore waters off Tamil Nadu and later travelled southward towards waters east of Sri Lanka.

of the day

quote

I know many across Britain are still struggling with the cost of living. Helping with that is my priority




KEIR STARMER | PRIME MINISTER, UK

Russia has made an offer to the French regarding Laurent Vinatier, arrested in Moscow last year and convicted of collecting military information, and that the ball is now in France's court



DMITRY PESKOV | KREMLIN SPOKESMAN

This Christmas is a different one because of the anti-terror and the terrorist attack motivated by ISIS and antisemitism. But at the same time as we have seen the worst of humanity, we have seen the bravery and kindness and compassion from those who rushed to danger



ANTHONY ALBANESE | PRIME MINISTER, AUSTRALIA

SHORT TAKES

Russian spirits exports to India surge

Moscow: The exports of Russian spirits to India have nearly quadrupled in the first 10 months of the year compared to the same period last year, making India an attractive emerging market for Russian exporters, according to a media report. Citing data from the Federal Centre for Agricultural Export Development of the Russian Ministry of Agriculture (Agroexport), leading financial and trade daily “Vedomosti” said India is emerging as an attractive market for Russian exporters of Vodka and other hard alcoholic beverages. “In the first 10 months of 2025, Russian spirits producers shipped approximately 520 tonnes of spirits, including vodka, gin, whiskey, and liqueurs, worth \$900,000 to India, this is three times higher in weight and four times higher in monetary terms than the same period last year,” it said.

Louvre museum installs security bars on balcony

Paris: France's Louvre museum Tuesday installed security bars on the balcony that burglars used to break in and steal some of the crown jewels. Four people broke into the world's most visited museum October 19 and escaped with jewels worth an estimated \$102 million, exposing glaring security gaps and revealing its deteriorating state. They parked a movers' lift outside the museum, jumped on the balcony of the Apollo gallery, smashed a window, cracked open display cases with angle grinders and fled on the back of scooters driven by accomplices in a heist lasting less than 7 minutes.

Kim oversees missile launch, submarine work

Seoul: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed construction of a submarine with his daughter, a potential heir, and oversaw the test-firing of long-range surface-to-air missiles, state media reported Thursday. Wednesday's missile test near the east coast, aimed at assessing the nuclear-armed country's strategic technology for developing a new type of high-altitude missile, destroyed targets in the air from 200 km (120 miles) away, KCNA said. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff confirmed the missile test occurred at 5 pm, Yonhap News Agency reported. The South Korean military had been aware of launch preparations and was ready for it, Yonhap said, citing a Joint Chiefs official. Kim observed construction at another site on an 8,700-ton nuclear-powered submarine capable of launching surface-to-air missiles, KCNA said.



How then can we not think of the tents in Gaza, exposed for weeks to rain, wind and cold; and of those so many other refugees and displaced persons on every continent, or of the makeshift shelters of thousands of homeless people in our own cities

POPE LEO XIV | CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADER

ANDREW'S DAUGHTERS JOIN ROYALS

Britain's Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie attended the royal family's traditional Christmas Day church service Thursday, while their father Andrew, recently stripped of his titles over ties to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, was absent



BANGLADESH UNREST

Rahman returns home after 17 yrs in exile



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 25: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman returned to Dhaka to a rousing welcome by thousands of his supporters Thursday after over 17 years in self-exile -- a homecoming that is expected to energise the party ahead of the February 12 parliamentary elections. Shortly after landing at the Hazrat Shahjalal International airport, Rahman, the leading contender to be the country's next prime minister, stood barefoot on Bangladeshi soil in a symbolic gesture to mark his return to the country's politics. Hours later, the 60-year-old son of ailing former prime minister Khaleda Zia, addressing his supporters, gave a clarion call to maintain peace and stability in the country and presented a broad plan to build an “inclusive Bangladesh”.

“It is time for us all to build the country together. We want to build a safe Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, no matter who a woman, man, or child is, they should be able to leave their homes safely and return safely,” he said. The homecoming of the BNP heir apparent comes amid a fresh wave of unrest and political instability gripping Bangladesh following the killing of prominent youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi, who was a prominent face in last year's

mass protests that forced the collapse of the Sheikh Hasina government. “I have a plan for the people of my country and for my country,” he said referring to US civil rights activist Martin Luther King's “I have a dream” remark. Rahman, accompanied by wife Zubaida and daughter Zai-
ma, was received at the Hazrat Shahjalal International airport in Dhaka by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and other senior party leaders amid tight security.

Rahman had been living in London since 2008. He was effectively leading the BNP since 2018 following Zia's ill health. BNP is seen as the forerunner to capture power in the February polls as former prime minister Hasina's Awami League party has been barred from contesting the election. Rahman's return to Dhaka also comes at a time Bangladesh-India relations are on a sharp downturn. In his speech,the BNP leader didn't make any direct reference to India. The BNP leader left the airport in a bullet-proof bus. Before leaving the airport, Rahman held a phone conversation with interim government chief, Muhammad Yunus, and thanked him for the arrangements made for his security as well as for his homecoming events.

I have a plan for the people of my country and for my country

TARIQUE RAHMAN|BNP CHAIRMAN

CHINA HITS OUT AT PENTAGON

On the references to the Line of Actual Control in the US report, the boundary question is a matter between China and India, and the current border situation between the two countries is generally stable with smooth communication channels, says Lin



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Dec 25: China Thursday denounced a Pentagon report, which accused Beijing of leveraging reduced border tensions with India to undermine US-India ties while deepening defence ties with Pakistan as an attempt to sow discord with false narratives. “The Pentagon's report distorts China's defence policy, sows discord between China and other countries, and aims at finding a pretext for the US to maintain its military supremacy,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here when asked about the US Department of War report submitted to the American Congress. China firmly opposes the report, Lin said. Separately, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang denounced the Pentagon report, which also highlighted the cooperation between China and Pakistan in sectors such as defence and space, with plans to set up a military base. The US releases such reports year after year, grossly interfering in China's internal affairs, Zhang told a separate media briefing. The US report maliciously misinterpreted China's national defence policy, made

The Pentagon's report distorts China's defence policy, sows discord between China and other countries, and aims at finding a pretext for the US to maintain its military supremacy

LIN JIAN | FOREIGN MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA

unfounded speculations about China's military development, slandering and smearing the normal actions of the Chinese military, he said, declining to directly respond to a question on the report alleging China's expanding defence and cooperation with Pakistan. The report is full of erroneous understandings of China and geopolitical biases, exaggerating the so-called “Chinese military threat” to mislead the international community, Zhang said. “We express our strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to this,” he said and urged

the US to stop fabricating false narratives and provoking confrontation and antagonism. In his response to the Pentagon report on India-China ties, Lin stated that Beijing views and handles its relations with New Delhi from a strategic height and a long-term perspective. “We stand ready to strengthen communication, enhance mutual trust, promote cooperation, and properly handle differences with India, and advance a sound and stable bilateral relationship,” he said. On the references to the Line of Actual Control in the US report, Lin said, “the boundary



A few thousand people wearing traditional costumes celebrate Christmas near St. Michael Monastery in the city center of Kyiv, Ukraine, Thursday
PTI PHOTO

DOJ may need ‘few more weeks’ to finish releasing Epstein files

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington, Dec 25: The Justice Department said Wednesday that it may need a “few more weeks” to release all of its records on the late sex offender Jeffrey Epstein after suddenly discovering more than a million potentially relevant documents, further delaying compliance with last Friday's congressionally mandated deadline. The Christmas Eve announcement came hours after a dozen US senators called on the Justice Department's watchdog to examine its failure to meet the deadline. The group, 11 Democrats and a Republican, told Acting Inspector General Don Berthiaume in a letter that victims “deserve full disclosure” and the “peace of mind” of an independent audit. The Justice Department said in a social media post that federal prosecutors in Manhattan and the FBI “have uncovered over a million more documents” that could be related to the Epstein case — a stunning 11th-hour development after department officials suggested months ago that they had undertaken a comprehensive review that accounted for the vast universe of Epstein-related materials. The memo did not raise the possibility that additional evidence existed that officials were unaware of or had not reviewed.

REUTERS

Tegucigalpa, Dec 25: Nasry Asfura, the conservative candidate for Honduran president backed by US President Donald Trump, was declared the winner Wednesday more than three weeks after the November 30 election, which was beset by delays, technical problems and allegations of fraud. The Honduras electoral authority, known as the CNE, said Asfura won 40.3% of the vote, edging out center-right Liberal Party candidate Salvador Nasralla who garnered 39.5%. The candidate of the ruling LIBRE party, Rixi Moncada, came in a distant third. Asfura ran on a broad pro-business platform saying

private investment was necessary to move the country forward, while his political agenda focused on jobs, education and security. He has also signaled he may swap Honduras' allegiance to Taiwan, and away from Beijing. The results were so close and the ballot processing system so chaotic that around 15% of the tally sheets, comprising hundreds of thousands of ballots, had to be counted by hand to determine the winner. In the weeks following the vote, LIBRE repeatedly called for protests against what they denounced as an “electoral coup.” The protests interrupted the manual count, blocking officials from accessing the building where tally sheets



ELECTION RESULTS DELAYED BY TECHNICAL ISSUES, MANUAL COUNT
TRUMP'S SUPPORT FOR ASFURA SEEN AS ELECTION MEDDLING BY OPPONENTS

ASFURA RAN ON PRO-BUSINESS PLATFORM EMPHASIZING JOBS, EDUCATION AND SECURITY

were being stored. The results were approved by two electoral council members and one deputy, as disputes continued over the razor-thin vote. The third council member, Marlon Ochoa, was not present in the video declaring the winner. “Honduras: I am ready to govern. I will not let you down,” Asfura said in a post on X following the confirmation of the results. He is due to take office January 27 for the 2026-2030 term. Nasralla rejected the CNE's declaration, saying it had excluded ballots that

should have been counted, but urged his supporters to remain calm and refrain from any acts of disruption or violence. “I will not accept a result based on omissions. Democracy does not shut down because of exhaustion, nor because today is the 24th — this is the saddest Christmas for the Honduran people,” Nasralla said at a press conference in the capital Tegucigalpa Tuesday afternoon. This is his third unsuccessful bid for the Honduran presidency. The head of the Honduran Congress also rejected the results. “This is completely outside the law. It has no value,” Congress President Luis Redondo, of the ruling LIBRE party, wrote on X.

Somalia's capital votes in first step to restoring universal suffrage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mogadishu, Dec 25: Residents of Somalia's capital Mogadishu voted Thursday in municipal elections meant to pave the way for the East African country's first direct national polls in more than half a century. With the exception of votes in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland and the breakaway region of Somaliland, Somalia last held direct elections in 1969, months before military general Mohamed Siad Barre took power in a coup. After years of civil war that followed Barre's fall in 1991, indirect elections were introduced in 2004. The idea was to promote consensus among rival clans in the face of an Islamist insurgency, although some Somalis say politicians prefer

indirect elections because they create opportunities for corruption. Under the system, clan representatives elect lawmakers, who then choose the president. The president, in turn, has been responsible for appointing Mogadishu's mayor. The vote in Mogadishu, a city of some 3 million people where security conditions have improved in recent years despite continuing attacks by al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab militants, is seen as a test run for direct elections at the national level. Around 1,605 candidates are running for 390 posts in Mogadishu's district councils, said Abdishakur Abib Hayir, a member of the National Electoral Commission. Council members will then choose a mayor.



“It shows Somalia is standing on its feet and moving forward,” Hayir told Reuters. “After the local election, elections can and will take place in the

entire country.” Residents waiting to vote formed long lines outside polling stations early in the morning, a Reuters witness said.

LAST DIRECT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WERE IN 1969

MOGADISHU VOTE IS A TEST FOR NATIONAL ELECTIONS

NATIONAL POLL EXPECTED IN 2026

EXTRA SECURITY DEPLOYED, AIRPORT, PORT CLOSED FOR VOTE

The streets were closed to vehicle traffic, and the airport, port and businesses remained closed. The electoral commission said about 10,000 security personnel were deployed at polling stations. “This is my first time to vote. I am very happy and I came here early in the morning, walking with other mothers,”

Addey Isak Abdi, 65, who was covered with a pink veil, told Reuters. A 2024 law restored universal suffrage ahead of federal elections expected next year. However, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud reached a deal in August with some opposition leaders stipulating that while lawmakers would be directly elected in 2026, the president would still be chosen by parliament. Opposition parties have argued the rapid introduction of a new electoral system would benefit Mohamud's re-election prospects. They also question whether the country is safe enough for mass voting given al Shabaab's control over vast areas of the countryside and regular strikes on major population centres.

of the day

quote

The outlook for 2026 for the retail sector is highly optimistic with expectations of continued double-digit growth and further transformation

ANAND RAMANATHAN | PARTNER & CONSUMER INDUSTRY LEADER, DELOITTE INDIA

India has achieved a rare convergence of high growth, low inflation, and improving fiscal indicators. The next Union Budget must continue this momentum through disciplined fiscal management and deeper institutional reforms

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE | DIRECTOR GENERAL, CII

Now, there is a new wave that is coming, AI, (which is now) at the heart and front and centre of anything that we do. Specific to an automotive or industrial setting, we always looked at it in terms of a siloed approach of engineering, which looked different. IT is looked at differently

SRIRAM LAKSHMINARAYANAN | CTO, TATA TECHNOLOGIES

SHORT TAKES

Petrol pump count doubles in a decade

New Delhi: India's petrol pump network has crossed the 1,00,000-mark, doubling since 2015 as state-owned fuel retailers aggressively expanded outlets to defend market share and push fuel access deeper into rural and highway corridors amid a sustained boom in vehicle ownership. At the end of November, the country had 1,00,266 petrol pumps - the third largest after the US and China with a much bigger geographical area, according to data available from the Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell of the Oil Ministry. Over 90 per cent of the pumps are owned by state-owned firms such as Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL). Russia's Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy Ltd is the largest private fuel retailer with 6,921 outlets, followed by 2,114 stations owned by a joint venture of Reliance Industries Ltd and BP. Shell has 346 outlets. The petrol pump network has almost doubled from 50,451 stations in 2015, PPAC data showed. India has the world's third-largest petrol pump network.

Samsung rules out India listing

New Delhi: Samsung Electronics has ruled out listing of its India business for now, saying it will instead focus on accelerating artificial intelligence adoption across its products and expanding its consumer finance arm to drive sales in one of the most important growth markets. In an interview with PTI, JB Park, President and CEO of Samsung Southwest Asia, said the South Korean giant is looking to deepen its manufacturing footprint in India and has applied under the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for components to manufacture mobile phone displays in India.

CCPA slaps ₹11L fine on Vision IAS

New Delhi: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has fined coaching institute Vision IAS ₹11 lakh for publishing misleading advertisements about its students' performance in the UPSC Civil Services Examination, a first case of penalty for repeat offence under consumer protection laws.



Looking ahead to 2026, the focus will be on deepening the reforms through technology-driven service delivery and effective on-ground implementation. Equally important will be the operationalisation of the rules under the Labour Codes

MANSUKH MANDAVIYA | UNION LABOUR & EMPLOYMENT MINISTER

INDIA TO ASSUME CHAIR OF KP

For the third time, India will chair the Kimberley Process (KP), a global initiative to remove conflict diamonds from the global supply chain, from January 1 next year, the Commerce Ministry said in a statement Thursday. KP is a joint initiative of different countries, industry and civil societies to control the flow of conflict diamonds, which are used by rebel movements to finance wars against legitimate governments in the world



Small stocks trail Sensex rally

Smallcap, midcap stocks struggle behind blue-chip peer Sensex this yr; outlook cautiously optimistic

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Smaller stocks lagged behind their bigger blue-chip peer Sensex this year as elevated valuations triggered profit-booking after a strong rally in the last two years.

Analysts attributed the underperformance of smallcap and midcap indices in 2025 due to market normalisation after their exceptional outperformance in 2023 and 2024.

Depreciation of the rupee, concerns over the US-India trade negotiations and persistent foreign fund outflows also led to a sharp risk-off reaction in the broader market, experts noted.

On the road ahead, market experts are of the view that the outlook for smallcap and midcap indices remains cautiously optimistic. They said that as valuations cool and earnings visibility improves, selective opportunities should emerge, supported by India's steady GDP growth and strong domestic liquidity.

Till December 24 this year, the BSE midcap gauge went up marginally by 360.25 points or 0.77 per cent. The BSE small-cap index, however, declined by 3,686.98 points or 6.68 per cent.

In contrast, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 7,269.69 points



or 9.30 per cent during the period under review.

"The underperformance of smallcap and midcap indices in 2025 is primarily a result of market normalisation after two years of exceptional out-performance. In 2024, the BSE smallcap index delivered returns of over 29 per cent, while the midcap index gained 26 per cent, far outperforming the Sensex. Such sharp rallies pushed valuations to elevated levels, especially in smaller companies where earnings growth did not keep pace with price appreciation," Ponnudi R, CEO - Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

In 2025, this imbalance began to correct, he said.

"Investors shifted focus toward largecap stocks with stronger balance sheets and

Persistent foreign institutional investor selling further pressured the segment, as FIIs preferred the relative safety of largecap stocks. Slower earnings momentum and tighter global liquidity also led to a clear rotation away from smaller companies

RAVI SINGH | CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER, MASTER CAPITAL SERVICES

stable earnings visibility amid global uncertainty. Smallcap and midcap companies, which are more sensitive to funding costs, margin pressures, and economic slowdowns, faced higher volatility. As a result, capital rotated toward blue-chip stocks, leading to relative underperformance in the broader market segments,"

Central Bank celebrates 115th Foundation Day

Bhubaneswar:

Central Bank of India celebrated its 115th Foundation Day in Mumbai with a series of commemorative events. M Nagaraju, IAS, Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, Government of India, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Addressing the gathering, Nagaraju said it is my privilege to be part of 115th Foundation Day celebration of Central Bank of India, the first 'Swadeshi Bank'. He highlighted significant role played by Central Bank of India in strengthening the nation's banking ecosystem and supporting inclusive economic growth. He further said that the bank has truly been part of the growth story of India. The RAM share in loan of 72% is evident of banks commitment of serving the common man of India. Earlier, while welcoming the Chief Guest in the presence of an august gathering comprising elite customers and Senior Executives from various banks, Kalyan Kumar, Managing Director & CEO, Central Bank of India, spoke about Nagaraju's distinguished career spanning over three decades, marked by rich administrative experience at the State, National, and International levels. On this occasion, the bank launched several customer-friendly products. A Handbook on Customer Service & Grievance Handling was also formally launched by M Nagaraju.



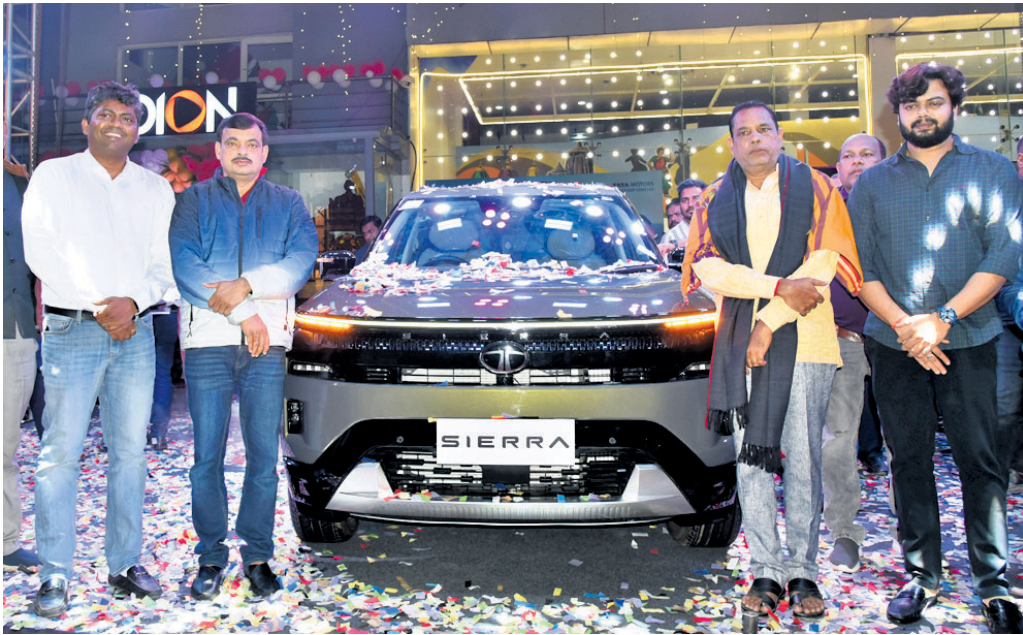
Punjab & Sind Bank celebrates Kisan Diwas

Bhubaneswar:

Punjab & Sind Bank celebrated Kisan Diwas in Bhubaneswar with the visit of Ravi Mehra, Executive Director, Punjab & Sind Bank. The event witnessed active participation from farmers, Self Help Groups (SHGs), and entrepreneurs engaged in the food and agro-processing sector. Addressing the gathering, Mehra elaborated on the bank's wide range of financial products and credit facilities tailored to support agriculture, food processing, and allied activities. He highlighted the bank's commitment to fostering rural entrepreneurship and strengthening the agri-value chain. Fresh sanction letters were handed over to SHGs, farmers, and entrepreneurs, reaffirming the bank's proactive support to grassroots development. During his visit, Mehra also met Krushna Chandra Patra, Minister of Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare, Government of Odisha. The discussions focused on various agriculture-related schemes of Punjab & Sind Bank and its role in supporting the government's vision of Viksit Odisha 2036 and Viksit Bharat 2047 through inclusive financing and sustainable agricultural growth.



Tata Motors unveils all-new Sierra



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 25: Tata Motors Private Limited and Tata Motor Passenger Vehicles Ltd, in association with Dion Automotives Private Limited, Thursday launched the all-new Tata Sierra here, marking the return of one of India's most iconic nameplates.

Positioned as a premium mid-SUV, the new Sierra aims to create a distinct space in the SUV segment with introductory prices starting at ₹11.49 lakh (ex-showroom).

The petrol variant is priced from ₹11.49 lakh, while the diesel variant starts at ₹12.99 lakh (ex-showroom), with on-road

prices in Bhubaneswar going up to ₹14.90 lakh.

The launch event was graced by Babu Singh, MLA, Ekamra Bhubaneswar as chief guest, along with MD Shoaib, Regional Manager, Tata Motors limited; Gyana Ranjan Mohapatra, Retd SP, Puri and other dignitaries. The Sierra has been reimagined to blend its legendary heritage with contemporary design, advanced technology, and enhanced comfort, targeting customers seeking individuality and premium mobility.

Speaking at the launch, Manoj Kumar Sahoo, Director, Dion Automotives Private Limited, said, "With the new Sierra, we are setting a new

benchmark for Indian mobility. Customers deserve more than the ordinary—innovation that inspires, emotionally resonant design, and a premium experience. The Sierra returns as an icon that reflects pride, individuality, and progress."

The latest avatar builds on that legacy, offering elevated space, luxury, safety, and everyday usability. With its globally acclaimed design, including recognition from the Red Dot Design Award, the Sierra is positioned to resonate across generations.

Under the brand philosophy 'Escape Mediocre', Tata Motors positions the Sierra as more than just an SUV—a statement of aspiration and distinction.

FSSAI cracks down on 'herbal tea'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued a stern warning to food business operators against using the word 'tea' for herbal infusions and plant-based blends not derived from Camellia sinensis, terming it a case of misbranding and misleading practices under the law.

The directive, issued December 24, comes after the regulator found several food business operators (FBOs) marketing products, such as 'Rooibos tea', 'herbal tea' and 'flower tea', none of which are obtained from the Camellia sinensis plant.

According to FSSAI regulations, the term 'tea' can only be used on packaging and labelling if the beverage is derived from Camellia sinensis.

This includes variants such as Kangra tea, green tea and instant tea. Such plant-based or herbal infusions or blends, which are not derived from Camellia sinensis, do not qualify to be named as tea, the FSSAI clarified. The violation, it said, amounts to misleading and misbranding under the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

The regulator has directed all FBOs, including those engaged in e-commerce, manufacturing, packing, marketing, import or sale of such products, to comply with food safety regulations.

NSE strengthens mkt leadership, investor participation in 2025

AGENCIES

Mumbai, Dec 25: As we head into a new calendar year, the National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) is poised to close 2025 on a positive and encouraging note, supported by steady market growth, more investors joining the markets, and new products being introduced.

Stock markets in India remained stable during the year. The Nifty 50 index rose by nearly 10%, and the total value of companies listed on NSE increased to around ₹469 lakh crore.

Companies continued to raise money through the markets in 2025. Total funds raised through NSE grew by about 7%, reaching over ₹19 lakh crore.

The IPO market also stayed active. More than 200 companies raised funds through IPOs on NSE's Mainboard and SME platforms, together mobilising close to ₹1.77 lakh crore. This highlights investor interest in new and growing companies.

NSE continued to hold its position as the world's largest derivatives exchange by trading volume. At the global level, NSE International Exchange (NSE IX) crossed an important milestone of over US\$1 trillion in notional turnover during the year.

The number of unique registered investors crossed 12.4 crore, with about 1.5 crore new investors added in 2025.

Lilly, Novo lock horns in India's obesity drug race

Although the US remains the largest market for obesity drugs, early sales figures in India show rapid uptake, even though most patients in the world's most populous nation pay for the medication out-of-pocket

REUTERS

Hyderabad, Dec 25: Global pharma giants Eli Lilly and Novo Nordisk are scrambling to cement their lead in India's booming obesity drug market before cheaper generic versions hit shelves in March next year. Novo's strategy emphasiz-

es price cuts and accelerated launches, while Lilly's products benefitted from hitting the market early. Both companies focused on aggressive outreach to doctors, heavier advertising about obesity, tie-ups with clinics, patient incentives and distribution deals with local drug-makers, according to doctors, analysts, medical representatives, patients and distributors who spoke to Reuters.

Lilly has even teamed up in India with well-known Bollywood actors in a social media ad campaign about obesity.

India, projected to have the world's second-largest overweight or obese population by 2050 in absolute numbers, is becoming a key battleground for obesity drugs. Analysts expect the global market for such



drugs to hit \$150 billion a year by the end of this decade.

"We believe that this market can be more than \$1 billion within two years," said Shrikant Akolkar, vice president at research firm Nuvama Institutional Equities. Data analytics firm Pharmarack said in July

that the market was estimated to be worth ₹6.28 billion (\$70.23 million) at present, growing fivefold since 2021.

US drugmaker Lilly's Mounjaro, approved for diabetes and weight loss in India, became the top-selling therapy by value in October, with sales doubling

- India's obesity drug market expected to exceed \$1bn in two years
- Lilly's Mounjaro leads in sales, Novo cuts prices to compete
- Lilly and Novo partner with local firms to expand market reach

within months of its March launch, outpacing Danish drug-maker Novo's Wegovy, which entered the Indian market in June.

"We realized just after a couple of months that for accessibility, we had to take a price cut," said Vikrant Shrotriya, Novo Nordisk's managing director in India, referring to Wegovy's price cut in November. Shrotriya spoke earlier this

month while launching Novo Nordisk's blockbuster diabetes drug, Ozempic, in the country.

Ozempic, a once-weekly injection approved by the US drug regulator in 2017 for Type 2 diabetes, became a global bestseller and is widely used off-label for weight loss due to its appetite-suppressing effects.

More than 20 Indian drug-makers, including Dr Reddy's, Cipla, Sun Pharma, Zydus and Lupin, plan to launch cheaper versions of Novo's weight-loss drug in India once its patent on semaglutide, the active ingredient in Wegovy and Ozempic, expires in March 2026.

Analysts expect generic drugs to cost about 60% less, intensifying the fight - particularly for Novo - for dominance in India's price-sensitive market.

3RD WOMEN'S T20I

Eves look to seal series

Women in Blue eye another dominant show against struggling Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 25: A dominant India will look to seal the five-match series with another ruthless display when they take on a low-on-confidence Sri Lanka in the third women's T20 International here Friday.

India have been outstanding with both the bat and the ball in the first and second T20Is, registering comprehensive eight-wicket and seven-wicket wins respectively in Visakhapatnam to underline their overall dominance over Sri Lanka.

It was India's ninth win in their last 11 T20Is against the island nation, who last tasted victory against the hosts in July 2024 at Dambulla.

India boast of an enviable batting line-up, with different players stepping up in the two games. While newly-appointed Delhi Capitals captain Jemimah Rodrigues starred in the opening T20I, opener Shafali Verma finished the job in the second.

The bowling unit has been equally sharp, with the spinners calling the shots by restricting Sri Lanka to 121 for 6 and 128 for 9 in the two matches. Youngsters N Shree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma and Kranti Gaud have shared the workload effectively, bowling with discipline and control.

India's bowling depth was on display when experienced all-rounder Deepti Sharma missed the second T20I with a mild fever and Sneha Rana stepped up with a frugal 1 for 11 in four overs.



Fielding was the lone area of concern in the opening game, where India dropped five catches, but they showed marked improvement in the second match with three sharp run-outs.

Led by Harmanpreet Kaur, India will aim to continue raising their standards as the series moves to Thiruvananthapuram, which will host the next three matches.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, will hope that the change of venue brings a change in their fortune for a side battered by back-to-

back heavy defeats. While the gulf in quality has been evident, Sri Lanka will be particularly disappointed by the manner of their batting collapses.

Asked to bat first in both matches, Sri Lanka failed to post competitive totals. They showed some promise early on but lost momentum as wickets tumbled in clusters during the latter half of their innings.

In the opening game, Vishmi Gunaratne laboured to 39 off 43 balls, while Hasini Perera and Harshitha Samarawickrama

also struck under a run-a-ball, denying the innings any late acceleration.

The second T20I followed a similar script. Sri Lanka appeared on track before losing captain Chamari Athapaththu, after which they collapsed spectacularly, losing six wickets for 26 runs, including three run-outs, to finish with another sub-par total.

Their bowling too has lacked the penetration required to trouble India's deep batting line-up.

IGPL
TOUR

Legend Jeev ends 13-yr title drought

The 54-year-old stalwart's Colombo triumph delivers a storybook finish to IGPL's inaugural season

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Colombo, Dec 25: India's golf legend Jeev Milkha Singh ended a 13-year title drought after securing the IGPL Invitational Sri Lanka with a perfect finish to the inaugural season of the IGPL here Thursday.

The 54-year-old, who has not won a pro event since 2012, gave his young rivals a perfect lesson, producing a closing six-under 65 to total 15-under to outwit Aryan Roopa Anand (68) by one shot.

"I had never played in Sri Lanka before. It is an emotional moment for me. Because this is where my parents fell in love and began their relationship," said an emotional Jeev, wiping his tears away.

"My mother played volleyball and my father was here for athletics. So, this is where their journey together began. We lost them in 2021 and I lost my will to play but a little later in 2022 I decided I would play for them and win. I hope today's win will put a smile on their faces."

Aryan needing an eagle on the Par-4 18th to force a play-off managed only a birdie and was sole second at 14-under.

As Jeev won his maiden IG-PL title, Pukhraj Singh Gill, despite finishing T-12th, won the IGPL Order of Merit by a razor thin margin over Aman Raj and Gaganjeet Bhullar.

After 11 events carrying ₹1.5 crore prize purse with ₹22.50



lakh for the winner, Pukhraj was less than ₹9,000 ahead of Aman Raj.

Starting two shots behind Aryan, Jeev, who had a modest second day, putted superbly to add to his splendid iron play that saw him hit his approaches to inside 5-10 feet.

At one stage he had five birdies in a row and seven in a span of nine holes between the sixth and the 14th on the Royal Colombo Golf Course greens.

Jeev's son, Harjai was one of the amateur players in the field. Watching the two in action was Jeev's wife, Kudrat, who of late has been accompanying her son for junior and amateur events. Harjai was T-22nd.

Jeev's last pro win was at the 2012 Scottish Open. In his career, Jeev's successes include four on the European Tour,

four on the Japan Tour and six on the Asian Tour. One of the Asian Tour wins was co-sanctioned with the European Tour.

Pranavi, winner of the IGPL Mumbai, was the top woman finisher at Tied-8th at 8-under.

Pukhraj (67), the Order of Merit champion at the inaugural IG-PL, registered his maiden professional win at IGPL Jamshedpur. He missed a 4-foot birdie at his final hole and finished Tied-12th with Chiragh Kumar (72).

Gill's benefits include a spot on \$2 million International Series in India early next year, and he will also get a spot in an event with Open Qualifying berths on the Asian Tour.

Bhullar, who won in his first three starts, earned ₹81,30,000 to be third. Pranavi, with ₹34,84,687, was the top woman pro earner of the season.

Clubs do not have voting rights in EFI governance: Delhi HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: The Delhi High Court has ruled that clubs affiliated with the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) do not have voting rights in the federation's governance, reinforcing the primacy of state associations and dealing a setback to club-based voting structures that had operated under ministerial exemptions.

Dismissing a set of appeals filed by a Chandigarh-based riding club and connected parties, a division bench of Justices Anil Kshetrapal and Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar upheld that the participation of clubs and institutional members in EFI elections was contrary to the Sports Code, which prescribes a pyramidal governance structure for national sports federations.

The court, in its order December 23, noted that Clauses 3.9 and 3.10 of the Sports Code explicitly reserve voting rights in a national federation's electoral college for affiliated State Associations (SAs) and Union Territory Associations (UTAs), and not for clubs or individual members.

"In the scheme of the Sports Code, a club does not possess any statutory or legal entitlement to participate in or influence the governance of a National Sports Federation," the bench observed, adding that allowing clubs to vote would dilute the representative structure envisaged under the Code.

The ruling comes against the backdrop of a long-running dispute over the governance of EFI, which has been under judicial scrutiny for several years over its electoral processes, membership composition and compliance with the Sports Code.

EFI, recognised as the national federation for equestrian sport since 1967, has allowed clubs, individuals and institutional units—including several affiliated with the Indian Army—to become members with voting rights.

This structure has been questioned by state associations, which argued that it enabled a handful of clubs and institutions to exercise disproportionate control over the federation.

BOXING DAY TEST

Smith returns as Australia prepare an all-pace attack

The Australians have already retained the urn with a 3-0 lead in the five-test series

REUTERS

Melbourne, Dec 25: Steve Smith returns to action in the Boxing Day test against England as Australia opted to include four fast bowlers in their 12-man squad, with spinner Todd Murphy, who was brought into the fold to replace Nathan Lyon, not finding a spot.

Fast bowler Jhye Richardson, who has not played in the longest format since 2021, has been brought back after fine domestic form on his return from shoulder surgery.

Brendan Doggett who played in the first two tests, and Michael Neser, who was part of the pink-ball encounter, have also been included with Australia going for an all-pace attack.

"You just got to play what surface you're presented with," Smith, who missed the Adelaide test due to a bout of vertigo, told reporters Thursday.

"The pitch has 10mm of grass, quite furry, quite green. I dare say it's going to offer similar conditions to today, quite cold and overcast. So, there's going to be quite a bit of movement. This one looks like it's going



to offer a fair bit of assistance for the seam bowlers and the weather throughout the week looks conducive for that too."

The 29-year-old left-arm pacifier Richardson's last appearance in the red-ball format was against England in December 2021 in which he picked five wickets to guide his side to a 275-run win.

Meanwhile veteran Usman Khawaja, who scored 82 and 40 in the previous test after coming in as a last minute replacement for Smith, has been included at the expense of Josh Inglis.

Australia have already retained the urn with a 3-0 lead in the five-test series.

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Vijayawada, Dec 25: The experienced Shruti Mundada, Parul Choudhary, and rising star Tanvi Patri upset higher-ranked opponents to reach the women's singles pre-quarterfinals of the 87th Senior National Badminton Championships in Vijayawada Thursday.

Shruti packed off seventh seed Jiya Rawat 21-14, 21-9 while Parul got the better of 9th seed 18-21, 21-18, 21-12 to advance to the next round. Tanvi Patri also ended the campaign of eighth seed Isharani Baruah 22-20, 21-19. Also advancing to the next round were top seed Unnati Hooda, second seed Anupama Upadhyaya, third seed Anmol Kharb, and world junior silver medallist Tanvi Sharma.

In men's singles, Aryaman Tandon upset third seed M Raghu 17-21, 21-11, 21-14 in the round of 32. Abhinav Garg and Rithvik Sanjeevi S also created upsets to reach the pre-quarters.

Garg got the better of 10th seed Abhinav Thakur 21-19, 21-16, while Rithvik defeated 13th seed Orijit Chaliha 21-15, 21-19. In the mixed doubles event, Nitin Kumar and Kanika Kanwal upset the 6th seeds Kevin Wong



CC and Pranavi N 23-21, 21-15.

Earlier Wednesday, Women's top seed Unnati, world junior championships silver medallists Tanvi Sharma, the experienced Aakarshi Kashyap, and upcoming junior Rounak Chauhan registered convincing wins to reach the next round.

Unnati, who had a bye in the first round, hammered wildcard entrant Akanksha Matte 21-8, 21-18, while Tanvi began her campaign with a 21-10, 21-14 win over Asian U-15 girls singles gold medallist Shaina Manimuthu. Also advancing to the next round

were the experienced Aakarshi, who defeated Asian U-17 championships silver medallist Lakshya Rajesh 21-7, 21-9, while Ashmita Chaliha got the better of Kavya Marvaniya 21-7, 21-11.

In the men's singles event, 11th seed Chauhan defeated Ranveer Singh 21-9, 21-13, while 12th seed D S Saneeth beat Ankit Mondal 21-7, 21-11 to book their spots in the next round. 16th seed and Guwahati Masters Super 100 champions Sanskar Saraswat also began his campaign in style with a 21-11, 21-13 win over Shikhar Rallan.

Borrowed gear to HIL riches: Vivek Lakra's extra-ordinary journey

The goalkeeper hailing from Sundargarh becomes costliest junior pick

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 25: Battling financial constraints, young goalkeeper Vivek Lakra rose from borrowing playing kits from seniors to becoming the costliest and most sought-after junior player at the upcoming Hockey India League, after being picked up by Shrachi Bengal Warriors for ₹23 lakh.

Lakra, who turned 18 only a few days ago, hails from Sundargarh, Odisha's famed hockey nursery, though he admits the sport was not his first choice. He was introduced to hockey

by his father, a die-hard fan of the game.

"I didn't expect that much as my base price was just ₹2 lakh. When the auction was going on I was just thinking any team picks me up and then when the bidding war started I was watching the proceedings with my friends. When the bidding war ended I went for ₹23 lakh the first person I informed was my father.

"Everybody in the family was happy because we were going through some financial problems," Lakra told PTI.

The journey, however, was far from easy, with the youngster often borrowing hand-me-down goalkeeper kits from seniors to train.

"When I went to camp at the lower level I used to stay in relatives house and train,"



said Lakra, who started playing hockey in 2016. "Then I joined Sports Hostel, Rourkela but there facilities weren't much

like goalkeeper kit and all. So I played as a striker for some months. Then a few kits of seniors were there in the store

room but they were worn out but I managed to fix them out somehow by stitching and then started to practice. But after that lockdown happened and when I came back after lockdown one senior, who played sub-junior, he gave his old kit for practice. Then I went to Malaysia for an exposure tour for Odisha. Then I went to play Khelo India, we finished runners-up there and became champions the year after. I also went to play 4-nation tourney in Germany with the Indian junior team. It was real struggle but worth it."

Lakra draws inspiration from the legendary PR Sreejesh, who is the chief coach of the Indian men's junior team.

"When I started hockey I always wanted to become a goalkeeper but as I didn't had kit so

I started playing as a striker.

"Sreejesh bhai is my inspiration. I watched him playing in 2018 World Cup in Bhubaneswar and that's when he inspired me," he said.

Lakra is keen to learn from Indian and foreign goalkeepers in his maiden HIL outing.

"I just want to learn from experienced goalkeepers from abroad as well India like Pathak bhaiya (Krishan Bahadur Pathak), Suraj (Karkera) bhaiya. I want to learn how to react in pressure situations and how to motivate my teammates being a goalkeeper when we are down.

"Pressure will be there because it is my first HIL and a big platform where I got an opportunity. I will just focus on doing on the field what I have learnt, and not do anything extra," he added.