



## Note of gratitude

As 2025 comes to a close, Samantha Ruth Prabhu celebrates personal and professional milestones

LEISURE | P2



## China sanctions US cos

China announces sanctions targeting 10 individuals and 20 US defence firms over arms sales to Taiwan

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Silver skyrockets

Silver prices soar by ₹9,350 to hit fresh lifetime high of ₹2,36,350 per 1 kg tracking strong global cues

BUSINESS | P11



## Suryavanshi honoured

Teenage batting prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi conferred with the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar

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BHUBANESWAR | SATURDAY | DECEMBER 27, 2025

## 15 lakh hectares to be irrigated in 3 years: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Keonjhar, Dec 26:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday said that 15 lakh hectares of land will be irrigated during the next three years in the state. Majhi said this while addressing farmers in his home district Keonjhar after inaugurating the paddy procurement process.

He also said that the Kanpur irrigation project in Keonjhar district will be inaugurated in the next two to three months.

"Our government is fully committed to the welfare of farmers. The biggest achievement of the government, which has prepared several schemes for farmers, is the provision of a bonus of Rs 800 per quintal of paddy," he said.

The input subsidy being provided to the paddy farmers in addition to the MSP set by the Centre has boosted the morale of farmers, he stated. Majhi claimed that the previous BJD government had announced a bonus of Rs 100 per quintal of paddy for the farmer, but "could not give it, or maybe it did not give it knowingly."

"But our promise is like a picture drawn on stone. We are providing an input subsidy of Rs 800 per quintal of paddy. That has definitely boosted the morale of farmers," he further said.

Last year, input subsidy of Rs 7,000 crore was provided to about 20 lakh farmers. This year, this number is expected to increase further.

He informed the farmers that all officers have been instructed that the entire paddy procurement process will be conducted transparently. If there is any negligence in this, the concerned officials will definitely bear the consequences, the CM warned.

### IRREGULAR by MANJUL



## GET, SET, SAIL

In this photo provided by the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, competitors make a start in the Sydney Hobart yacht race in Sydney, Friday

AP PHOTO

## Free bus travel for school kids

*The Odisha government has announced free travel for school students on government-run buses under the Mukhyamantri Bus Seva (MBS), replacing the earlier 50 per cent fare concession. The move aims to improve access to education and curb dropouts caused by long travel distances. As per the provision of the scheme, students will receive zero-fare tickets through electronic ticketing machines upon showing a valid student ID or wearing a school uniform. The Transport department has asked the OSRTC to update software and revise bus routes and timings to cover more schools for the benefit of students*

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The state government will provide free travel for school students in government-run buses under the Mukhyamantri Bus Seva (MBS) scheme, a move aimed at reducing dropouts, officials said.

A notification by the state Transport department December 24 stated that the provision will replace the earlier 50 per cent fare concession for stu-

dents in both AC and non-AC bus services.

"To improve access to schools and reduce student dropouts due to distance, there will be a provision of free bus travel for students under MBS scheme instead of the 50 per cent concession in ticket fares in both non-AC and AC bus services for students as notified earlier," the notification said.

According to the notification, a zero ticket will be generated in the electronic ticket issue



machine (ETIM) for all school students on presenting a valid student ID card or wearing school uniform.

The decision was taken at a high-level meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi in August.

The Odisha State Road Transport Corporation (OSRTC) has been asked to make necessary modifications in the software

application.

The OSRTC has also been directed to revisit the existing bus routes and bus timings to include the maximum number of schools in the routes.

In May, the state government had decided to offer 50 per cent concession in bus fares for students along with women, transgenders, persons with disabilities and senior citizens under the MBS scheme.

## US strikes Islamic State militants in Nigeria

REUTERS

**Palm Beach, Dec 26:** The United States carried out a strike against Islamic State militants in northwest Nigeria at the request of Nigeria's government, President Donald Trump and the US military said Thursday, claiming the group had been targeting Christians in the region.

"Tonight, at my direction as Commander in Chief, the United States launched a powerful and deadly strike against ISIS Terrorist Scum in Northwest Nigeria, who have been targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians, at levels not seen for many years, and even Centuries," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

The US military's Africa Command said the strike was carried out in Sokoto state in coordination with Nigerian authorities and killed multiple ISIS militants.

Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Maitama Tuggar told the BBC that the strike was a joint operation targeting terrorists, and it has nothing to do with a particular religion.

Without naming ISIS specifically, Tuggar said the operation had been planned for quite some time and had used intelligence to target militant groups.



gence information provided by the Nigerian side. He did not rule out further strikes, adding that this depended on decisions to be taken by the leadership of the two countries.

The strike comes after Trump in late October began warning that Christianity faces an existential threat in Nigeria and threatened to militarily intervene in the West African country over what he says is its failure to stop violence targeting Christian communities.

Nigeria's foreign ministry said the strike was carried out as part of ongoing security cooperation with the United States, involving intelligence sharing and strategic coordination to target militant groups.

This has led to precision hits on terrorist targets in Nigeria by air strikes in the North West, the ministry said in a post on X.

## CEO among 3 held for IT firm manager's gangrape

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Jaipur, Dec 26:** Three people, including the CEO of a private IT company, have been arrested for alleged gangrape of a female manager of the company after a birthday party in Rajasthan's Udaipur, police said Friday.

According to police, the accused CEO, Jitesh Sisodia, had organised a party on his birthday last Saturday, in which the manager was also a guest. The other accused in the case were a female executive head of the company and her husband Gaurav Sirohi of Meerut.

All the three accused were arrested Thursday and produced in a court, which remanded them to four-day police custody.

"The accused were arrested following the registration of a case at Sukher police station under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. They were produced before a court on Thursday and sent on four-day police remand," Udaipur Superintendent of Police Yogesh Goyal said.

According to the woman's



## 2 brothers drown in waterfall near Similipal

PNN & AGENCIES

**Baripada, Dec 26:** Two brothers drowned while bathing at a waterfall near Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district Friday, police said. The victims were identified as Satyabrata (23) and Abhishek Nayak (17) from Bhadrak district.

complaint, she was left alone as other guests gradually left after the party. The female executive head then offered to drop her home and took the woman in her car, in which Sisodia and Sirohi were also seated. On the way, they bought something resembling cigarettes from a shop and offered it to the woman. She allegedly lost consciousness after consuming it. She woke up the next morning to realise that she was sexually assaulted, the complaint said.

Based on the woman manager's complaint, a case was registered, and the three accused arrested. The woman's medical examination was done and statements were recorded, and the case was handed over to ASP Madhuri Verma.

The incident occurred at Sitakund, a popular tourist and picnic spot adjoining Similipal.

According to police, Satyabrata and Abhishek had come to Sitakund with their family for picnic. "When the family members were busy cooking, the two siblings went to the water body around noon to take a

bath and accidentally slipped into deep waters and drowned," Aditya Prasad Jena, IIC of Baripada Sadar police station, said.

After receiving information, the local fire service team reached the spot and rescued the duo. They were taken to a local hospital, where doctors declared them dead, he said.

## Dodo's closest living relative spotted in Samoa

**A** manumea, the closest living relative of the extinct dodo bird, has been sighted for the first time since 2013, raising hope that the critically endangered species can be saved from extinction, independent reported.

The Samoa Conservation Society's latest field survey, conducted from 17 October to 13 November, recorded at least five sightings of *Didunculus strigirostris* in the South Pacific nation's rainforest.

"It remains unclear whether these sightings involve the same individual or different birds. All individuals observed

appeared to be adults, so we cannot confirm whether the species is nesting in the area or simply foraging," Moeumu Uili, project coordinator at the Samoa Conservation Society, told local media.

Wildlife experts say the rainforest valleys near Uafato village, where the sightings occurred, may be playing a role in protecting the bird and its habitat from cyclonic damage.

Manumea's reliance on the large native seeds that other birds cannot consume has made it a national symbol in Samoa, though many people in the country don't know what it

looks like, experts say. The bird is known to play a key role in dispersing these large seeds, thereby helping maintain Samoa's forest ecosystems.

The dodo-like bird was known to exist in the Samoan rainforest but had

proved difficult to photograph due to its quick movement and rainy conditions.

The chicken-sized bird with an unusually thick, curved beak that bears tooth-like serrations is the only living species of the genus *Didunculus*, meaning "little dodo". Surveys in the early 1990s indicated there were some 7,000 manumeas in Samoa. But rampant habitat destruction decimated the species, with only 50-150 thought to exist as of 2024.

Efforts to spot and track the bird highlight the challenges in protecting wildlife species

from extinction, particularly in fragile island ecosystems, where they are vulnerable to invasive predators like feral cats and rats.

"It seems very likely that feral cats are a major cause of decline. There has to be some kind of control programme," Joe Wood, who works on manumea conservation efforts at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, told Live Science.

Researchers are working to deploy advanced AI sound monitoring tools to locate the bird in the future and understand its behaviour.



## leisure

## FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181\*

## ARIES

You have your hands full today. There will be planning, meetings and a lot of work to do. You may feel tired and dejected due to insufficient inputs from others. However, Ganesha says things will become clear slowly as matters come to a conclusion.

## TAURUS

You may feel let down as your folks may not extend the support you expected from them, says Ganesha. You should try to remain practical and not get swayed by emotions. It is highly likely that family feuds may erupt today. Ganesha advises you to avoid confrontations and keep smiling to emerge a winner.

## GEMINI

Today, you will decide to become a bit more conscious about your health. You may or may not enrol yourself into a gym and measure your calories, but you will be concerned about your lifestyle and food habits today, predicts Ganesha. That's quite unlike a Piscean.

## CANCER

Today, you are likely to be brimming with love and compassion. However, certain negative thoughts will spoil all your good work. But don't fret! Your efforts won't go wasted and you will get the desired results sooner or later, says Ganesha.

## LEO

Working hard, or hardly working – there is a vast difference between the two. You would be wiser to be working hard today, especially if it is success that you desire, says Ganesha. Remember that there is no substitute for hard work, and the sooner you realise this, the better. So sweat it out today. Also, hard work always pays its dividends, so, after a long day at work, you can look forward to an enchanting evening with your love.

## VIRGO

The bulb of ideas will burn bright today. A possible see-saw between your contractual obligation and current duties may baffle you. New contacts will stand you in good stead. Blood will prove thicker, and family and friends will consolidate their place in your life.

## LIBRA

Your instincts are at their peak today. Generally, this means a lot of good, but for you, it may also mean having to put up with the trouble of small things bothering you in a big way. So, it becomes highly important for you to remain balanced and focused. Do so and you may produce wonderful results at work, and also look forward to raking in the money from various sources, says Ganesha.

## SCORPIO

Ganesha predicts today will be a day full of focus and a clear thought process. The clarity of thought you have been acquired over a period of time, says Ganesha, and that could make all the difference. A crisp application of thoughts to ideas and actions will bring much appreciation from bosses and peers.

## SAGITTARIUS

Settling for a new, better employment will help you fast-track your career growth. A telephonic interview might ring in a new offer. A lucrative deal with an MNC would serve well. Your dedication and devotion to work will also peak today, says Ganesha.

## CAPRICORN

You will find the day to be taxing, mostly because of the amount of work delegated to you, says Ganesha. But it will take trouble to dampen your spirit. You will be in the fray in the latter part of the day, but will leave your rivals trailing behind in terms of business strategies. Success will be yours if you ensure to be mindful of your moves.

## AQUARIUS

You may huff and puff, but today is not the day when you'll finish what you started. Don't lose heart, the future is promising. Take a break, says Ganesha, you've worked enough. The results are on the way.

## PISCES

You are likely to be grinding yourself under at the workplace today. A turning point will arise in romantic liaisons, though if the evening awaiting you is anything to go by, it is something you should welcome wholeheartedly, says Ganesha.



## JORDYN WOODS, ANTHONY TOWNS GET ENGAGED

American television personality Jordyn Woods shared a series of pictures Friday as she announced her engagement to basketball player Karl-Anthony Towns after 5 years of togetherness. Woods, who is best known for appearing in reality show *Life of Kylie*, uploaded pictures on her Instagram handle

## DIDDY'S PLEA SEEKING IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American rapper Diddy has pleaded to be released from prison. The rapper reached out to an appeals court through his legal team. He is currently serving a 4 year sentence after being convicted on prostitution-related charges, reports *Mirror.co.uk*



## Sam's year of gratitude

MUMBAI: As 2025 comes to a close, Samantha Ruth Prabhu has much to celebrate. The year marked significant personal and professional milestones, including launching her own production house and producing her first film, *Subham*. And as the year reached its finale, Samantha added the biggest chapter of all by getting married. She tied the knot with filmmaker Raj Nidimoru in December.

Samantha shared a series of reflective pictures on Instagram, capturing moments from the past year. Among them was an unseen wedding photo of her and Raj in their wedding attire, with Raj's playful expression bringing a smile to Samantha's face. The post also included a video of her gym training, a still from her cameo in *Subham*, and a shot of a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. Samantha dropped these pictures and wrote, "A year of gratitude".

Samantha also shared a glimpse from her mehendi ceremony, where her henna artist, Arulmozhhi Ilavarasu, created a minimalist design. She revealed that Raj's name was hidden in the intricate henna on her right middle finger, in line with traditional customs. The couple tied the knot in an intimate ceremony at the Isha Yoga Center in Coimbatore, with Samantha wearing a red banarasi saree and Raj donning a beige kurta with a gold jacket.

AGENCIES

MUMBAI: Actress Shruti Haasan used social media to share the dilemma she faces during her visits to a dentist, something most of the netizens would be able to relate to.

Shruti took to the Stories section of her Instagram handle and posted a picture of herself, hiding half of her face with her hands, expressing a cocktail of feelings after surviving a day at the dentist.

Sharing what it is like for her to be in that chair, the *Salaar* actress wrote on the photo-sharing app, "Not a fan of dental work but fan of nice smile...Not a fan of pain, fan of nice clean teeth. You get the idea (sic)."

On another note, Shruti recently decided to take some time off her busy schedule and go on a long-overdue vacation.

Taking to her Insta

Stories, Shruti shared a selfie of herself on board a flight. She was visibly delighted in the photo captioned: "Vacay time after ages and ages."

However, Shruti did not reveal where she was off to or when she would be back.

Coming to her professional commitment, Shruti is gearing up for the much-awaited sequel, *Salaar Part 2: Shouryanga Parvam*. The expectations from the second instalment in the franchise are sky high, given the tremendous success of the original drama *Salaar: Part 1 – Ceasefire*, which was released in 2023.

IANS

Shruti shares her bittersweet feeling



MUMBAI: Television actress Sumbul Touqeer, known for her role in the show *Imlie*, reflected on the challenges of the past year.

Opening up about

2025, the actress shared a heartfelt note acknowledging the pain, losses and difficult moments she faced. However, Sumbul also highlighted how the year served as a reminder to cherish life, loved ones and every precious moment. In an exclusive quote shared with this news agency, the actress shared, "I think 2025 taught me patience. I have learned to trust the process and not rush things. I now understand that everything happens at the right time. In the future, I want to carry this patience with me, both in my personal life and my career, and take every situation calmly."

## Sumbul's heartbreak



Sumbul also admitted that 2025 was a year of heartbreak incidents. She stated, "2025 has been a difficult year, with many losses and challenges, and I think it reminded us how unpredictable life is and how important it is to value every moment and every person we have. My thoughts are with all those who faced pain and loss this year."

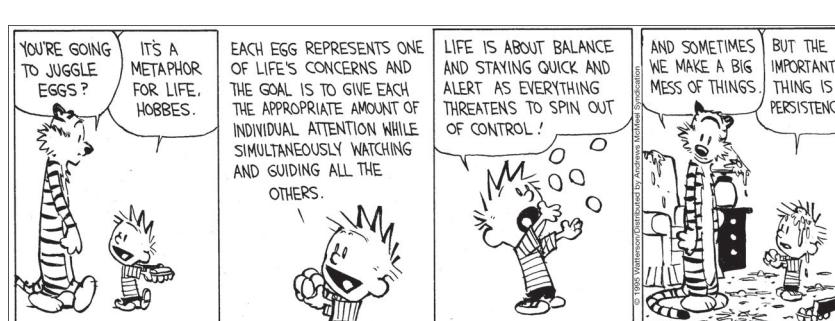
Sumbul also expressed happiness with how 2025 unfolded for her, particularly as she worked on her much-anticipated Bollywood debut with the movie *Jhaad Phoonk*.

IANS

## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBES

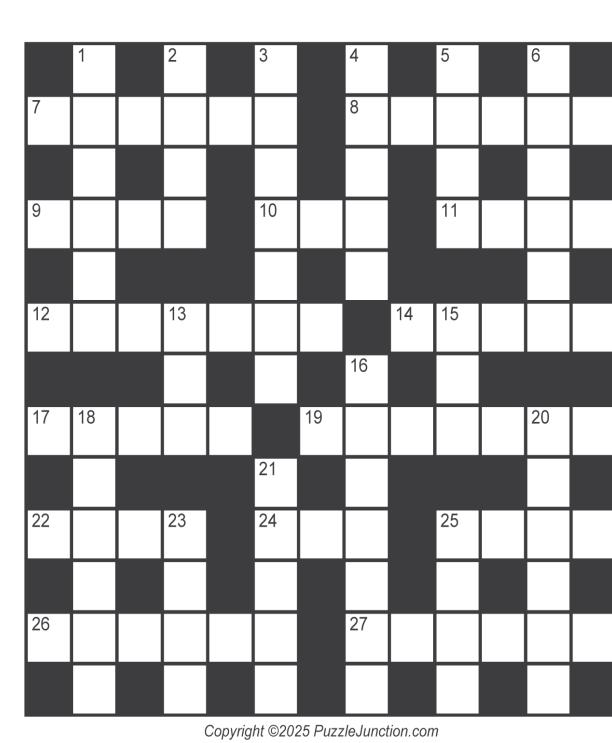


## BREVITY



## FUN POST

## CROSSWORD



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## Across

7 Feeble

8 Prompt the grey

cells

9 Bubble over

10 Sty resident

11 Pace

12 Engraving

14 Encompassing

17 Bellyache

19 Fin

## Border

24 Drunkard

25 Repeat

26 On fire

27 Songbird

## Down

1 Open up

2 Horizontal

structure

3 Comical

4 Hunt like a cat

5 Self-satisfied

6 Heart condition

13 Jump

15 \_\_\_ music

16 Army unit

18 Snub

20 Breathe out

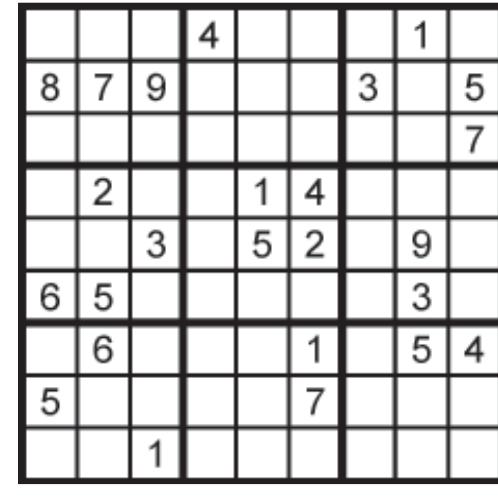
21 Guide

23 Lacerate

25 Wickedness

## SUDOKU

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



## SOLUTIONS

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



## SUDOKU

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown

## Strict vigil on other states' paddy vehicles

Enforcement teams deployed in bordering districts including Nuapada



POST NEWS NETWORK

Road under Nuapada block and Sinapali under Sinapali block.

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** With the ongoing Kharif paddy procurement in the state, a close watch has been kept to ensure paddy from outside the state is not brought and sold in the state. This system has been tightened especially in the bordering areas of the state.

This move comes under the government's steps to bring transparency in the paddy procurement process. Massive awareness is being created so that registered farmers can sell their paddy at Mandis, officials said.

As per reports, enforcement teams have been deployed in bordering districts of Nuapada, Bargarh, Jharsuguda and Sundargarh. In Nuapada district, camera mounted vehicles with staff have been deployed at the border check post at Khariar

### Tokens issued in 4 more districts

**Bhubaneswar:** While the Paddy procurement continues in the state during the current Kharif season, advance tokens have been issued to the farmers in four more districts; Balasore, Nayagarh, Gajapati and Kandhamal. Procurement will begin in Balasore and Nayagarh on the 29th Dec, while Gajapati will see procurement on the 30th Dec. Similarly, procurement will begin in Kandhamal 31 Dec. As per reports, tokens have been issued to 65,273 farmers in Balasore district, 28,723 in Nayagarh district, 10,112 in Gajapati and 3176 in Kandhamal district. Apart from this, procurement is currently underway in 12 districts of the state namely Bargarh, Balangir, Boudh, Ganjam, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Koraput, Nabarangpur, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Subarnapur and Sundargarh. So far, 630,438 metric tonnes of paddy have been collected from 1,41,381 farmers from these districts.

all efforts to curb such practices. The bordering districts are on alert round the clock to act promptly on such tip-off. The block level teams are also on alert.

## Higher Edu Min briefs Guv about ongoing process to appoint VCs

POST NEWS NETWORK

nance in higher education institutions across the state.

The Minister also shared updates on reforms undertaken to improve academic standards, enhance institutional performance, and raise the quality of teaching and learning across universities and colleges.

In addition, he discussed measures to promote sports, including initiatives to encourage student participation and strengthen sports infrastructure across the state.

The Governor appreciated the initiatives of the Higher Education Department and emphasised the importance of academic excellence, effective governance, and a student-centric approach to ensure the holistic development of higher education in Odisha.

## Naveen: BJD will remain state's voice for next 100 yrs

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** Amid speculation over the party's future and leadership succession, former chief minister Naveen Patnaik Friday asserted that the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is and will remain the voice of the people of Odisha for the next 100 years.

The BJD President said this while addressing party workers and leaders during a state-level event celebrating the regional party's 29th Foundation Day at the party headquarters here Friday. Speaking at the event, the BJD supremo said, "Defeat and victory are the parts of Democracy. At present, some people and political parties are engaged in spreading propaganda about our party. There are rumours that the Biju Janata Dal will break apart. I want to make it clear that Biju Janata Dal is not about one or two leaders. It is a people's movement, deeply connected to Odia aspirations and pride. BJD is and will remain the voice of the people of Odisha for the next 100 years."

Addressing the gathering, Patnaik said the party is deeply connected with the identity, aspirations and self-respect of the people of Odisha.

"BJD is not just a political party; it is a people's movement. It is the party of every Odia. The hopes and dreams of 4.5 crore people are linked with the party," he said. Calling the BJD one of India's most successful regional parties, Patnaik recalled that



since 1997, the party has served Odisha, inspired by the ideals of Biju Patnaik. He said that service, self-esteem, and fight have been the 'Mantra' of BJD.

Patnaik asserted that the 24-year tenure of the BJD government from 2000 to 2024 was the "golden era" of Odisha's development. "We fought poverty, starvation, infant mortality and natural calamity; we succeeded too. We gave Odisha a new identity. We have empowered mothers, increased farmers' income, introduced free healthcare under BSKY, strengthened the state's economy, attracted investment and generated employment for youth," he said.

The BJD supremo also targeted the present BJP-led state government, raising questions over the claims of "double engine development". Addressing the young party workers, Patnaik called them the most important assets of the regional Party. He urged the young party leaders and workers to become more active in social media and counter misinformation about the BJD.

Fortis Chemicals also participated in the 84th Indian Roads Congress (IRC) Annual Session held in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, which was visited by Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways, who announced Rs 1,000 crore road projects for Odisha.

The collaboration is expected to promote sustainable and cost-effective road maintenance, contributing to safer and more durable road infrastructure across the country.



### TAKING TO THE STREETS

Members of All India Mahila Sanskritik Sangathan stage a protest near Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar, Friday, demanding stringent punishment to the accused in the Unao rape case in UP and rape & murder of a Class III girl in Chandbali, Bhadrak



**PROMOTING ODISSI:** Students admire the artworks at an exhibition marking the inaugural day of International Odissi Dance Festival organised jointly by Odia Language, Literature and Culture department and GKCM Odissi Research Centre at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Friday

## Don't give shelter to injured Maoists, ADGP urges people

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar/Phulbani, Dec 26:** A day after neutralising four Maoists, including Ganesh Uike, 69, who carried Rs 1.2-crore bounty on his head, Odisha Police Friday intensified operations in Kandhamal district hoping to arrest more ultras.

Additional DGP (anti-naxal operations) Sanjeeb Panda said security forces were carrying out combing operations in the forest within Chakapada police station limits, bordering Ganjam district, with the hope of arresting more Maoists who might have been injured during Thursday's operations.

"We appeal local people not to give shelter to such injured persons. They might be Maoists hailing from Chhattisgarh," Panda told reporters.

He added that more personnel from the joint force comprising the Odisha Special Operations Group (SOG), CRPF, BSF and District Voluntary Force (DVF) have been deployed to strengthen the ongoing operations in the forested areas and possible hideouts.

The ADG said during the



Thursday's operation, the ultras first opened fire on security personnel.

"The rebels fired around 100 rounds, which were retaliated by the security personnel. The exchange of fire continued for some time. As they remained silent, search operation was carried out in which four bodies (2 male and 2 female) were recovered," Panda said.

He said it was obvious that some people might have suffered injuries and fled the place.

The senior officer said Ganesh Uike was also known by several aliases, including Rupa, Rajesh Tiwari, Chamru and Pakka Hanumantu.

He hailed from Pullema-

la village in Telangana's Nalgonda district.

The other Maoists killed Thursday were identified as Rajani, Umesh and Sima, all party members carrying rewards of Rs 1.65 lakh each, he said.

During subsequent searches, security forces recovered two INSAS rifles, one .303 rifle and other Maoist materials from the encounter site.

Earlier, two Maoists, Bari alias Rakesh, an area committee member, and Amrit, a party member, were killed in an encounter in Belghar police station area of Kandhamal district December 24. They were carrying rewards of Rs 15.5 lakh and Rs 1.65 lakh respectively, police said.

### CEC to meet BLOs Dec 29

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar is scheduled to meet a section of booth-level officers (BLOs) here December 29 during his three-day tour to Odisha beginning Saturday, official sources said.

Though the agenda of the CEC's meeting with BLOs has not been announced, sources Friday said Kumar is likely to meet a section of the officers to gauge their mood before initiation of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) drive of electoral rolls in the state. Official sources said there are over 45,000 BLOs across the state and Kumar will speak to a gathering of around 700 of them at the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) auditorium here at 3pm Monday.

BLOs have major role to play in the SIR exercise as they will distribute and collect enumeration forms (EF) from electors by undertaking house-to-house visits. Kumar is scheduled to reach here Saturday morning and will visit Puri and offer prayers at Srimandir before proceeding to Konark Sun Temple, an official said.

His itinerary for Sunday includes visits to heritage village Raghurajpur, Dhauli Shanti Stupa.

He is scheduled to depart from Bhubaneswar later that night, the official added.

## Former MLA Sanchita Mohanty dies at 67

**Bhubaneswar:** Senior BJD leader and former MLA Sanchita Mohanty died at her residence here Friday following a brief illness, family sources said. Sixty-seven-year-old Mohanty was elected to the Odisha Assembly from the Korei constituency in 2004. She was diagnosed with cancer a week ago.

She had attended the birthday party of her grandson Thursday night and suddenly collapsed at about 7.40 am Friday, her son Satyakam Mohanty said. Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Speaker Surama Padhy, Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik, many ministers and MLAs have expressed grief over the demise of Mohanty. The chief minister visited Mohanty's residence and paid floral tributes to the mortal remains of the departed leader.

The ADG said during the

## Congress demands withdrawal of Tata Power's security deposit levy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The Congress, Friday, demanded complete withdrawal of additional security deposits (ASD) imposed on domestic power consumers of Odisha and free electricity for agriculture purposes.

Addressing a press conference, Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das also urged the state government to provide 300 units of free power to all domestic consumers.

Slamming Tata Power for levying additional security deposits on domestic consumers, Das alleged that in Odisha,

Das said, "We are generating electricity at low cost using our coal and water. However, domestic power consumers in Odisha are the most exploited and neglected in the entire country."

Notably, four power distribution companies in Odisha have imposed additional security deposits on consumers.

States such as Punjab, which is getting coal from Odisha, have waived electricity charges for their agricultural consumers and are providing 300 units of free power to domestic consumers," he alleged.

If needed, the government may hike power tariff for industries. A slight increase in tariff can ensure free electricity for all domestic and agricultural consumers in the state," Das said. Das announced that Congress supporters will lock down electricity offices across the state December 29.

## Vinod Kumar convicted in housing scam for 12th time

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** A Special Vigilance Court here Friday found former IAS officer Vinod Kumar, the ex-managing director of Odisha Rural Housing Development Corporation (ORHDC), and five others guilty in a housing scam case.

This was Kumar's 12th conviction in corruption cases linked to the ORHDC scam, and he was an accused in 15 other pending Vigilance cases.

The six convicted individuals had been found guilty of misusing Rs 52.95 lakh of government funds meant for housing schemes for the rural poor, a



statement issued by the Vigilance department said.

The court sentenced each convict to undergo rigorous imprisonment (RI) for a period of three years.

The former officials had abused their power and shown undue favour to a private build-

er Sangram Keshari Sahoo by creating fake and forged documents.

Hence, all the erring officials and the builder were convicted by the Special Judge, Vigilance, Bhubaneswar, it said.

They were charge-sheeted under various sections of Prevention of Corruption Act and IPC for misappropriation of government funds to the tune of Rs 52.95 lakh.

Vinod Kumar, a 1989-batch officer, was dismissed from service on charges of corruption in 2022. During his tenure as the managing director of ORHDC in 1999, he had sanctioned housing funds to the tune of Rs 33.34 crore through unfair means when rural housing was taken up in a big scale after the Super Cyclone.

He was also accused of granting loans to real estate firms/contractors and NGOs without verifying house construction/reconstruction after the Super Cyclone that devastated the state and claimed thousands of lives. In 2018, the Special Vigilance Court had convicted Kumar for financial irregularities in the ORHDC and sentenced him to three years of imprisonment. The state government had made 27 Vigilance cases against Kumar, of which he has been convicted in 12 cases.



The path is long, but self-surrender makes it short; the way is difficult, but perfect trust makes it easy

THE MOTHER

## Beyond Transfer Raj

The Centre's recent directive to states regarding the transfer of IAS, IPS, and IFS officers pertains not only to administrative procedures but also raises important questions about the governance and oversight of the civil services. By demanding annual reports on how Civil Services Boards manage postings, New Delhi has told the states that your transfer business is now our business too.

Formally, this is sold as compliance with Supreme Court guidelines—fixed tenures, institutional oversight, fewer whimsical reshuffles. Fair enough. But everyone in governance knows the real problem isn't ignorance of the rules; it's the routine decision to ignore them. Civil Services Boards exist in many states largely as constitutional dÃ©cor. They are often assembled under pressure, sidelined for convenience, and rarely allowed to interfere with political priorities.

Seen through that lens, the Centre's move is less reformist and more corrective. A constantly shuffled bureaucracy doesn't just hurt officers; it sabotages delivery. Projects stall, files reset, responsibility dissolves—and when outcomes disappoint, fingers point conveniently upwards to Delhi.

States will, predictably, cry foul. Transfers have always been a core instrument of state authority, and federalism bristles when oversight starts resembling supervision. This is what happens when states abuse discretion long enough for the Centre to step in. The real question isn't whether Delhi is overreaching, but whether states have earned the right to complain.

Unless this exercise leads to consequences—not just reports—it will become another case of central monitoring without central courage. And the babu transfer culture will survive yet again: bruised, documented, and fundamentally unchanged.

### Deadline heat

Deadlines in government are famously elastic, especially when they run into land disputes, contractor delays, or inter-departmental buck-passing. But this time, the subtext feels sharper. The mood currently hanging over Gujarat's babus is one of quiet desperation after a message from the Chief Minister's office: stop explaining, start finishing. And the PMO is also leaning in.

On paper, this looks like routine governance, review meetings, status reports, and coordination memos. In reality, it signals something deeper: a system under pressure to show delivery, not just intent. When departments are asked to account for both completed and ongoing projects, and unfinished works are given a hard March deadline, it's rarely about curiosity. It's about urgency, optics, and ticking political clocks.

The issues being flagged aren't new. Land acquisition bottlenecks, traffic choking urban centres, industrial growth rubbing up against environmental limits, roads and bridges that seem perpetually "under renovation"—this is Gujarat's long-running to-do list. What's changed is the tone. The insistence on quality, ministerial coordination, and cross-departmental alignment suggests that silos are no longer being indulged. Or at least, not publicly.

With the 2026-27 budget looming in February, this push smells suspiciously like pre-budget housekeeping. No finance minister wants to present a fresh slate of promises while last year's commitments are still stuck in the files or, worse, on the ground. Action plans, acceleration strategies, completion targets: these are the bureaucratic equivalent of a government tightening its shoelaces before a sprint.

The real test, of course, lies beyond review meetings and deadline-driven emails. Will this pressure translate into smoother roads, cleaner air, faster approvals, and less finger-pointing? Or will March arrive with the familiar chorus of "procedural delays" and "unforeseen constraints"?

For now, Gujarat's babus know one thing for sure: the comfort of slow drift is over. Someone, somewhere, is counting.

### CIC's real test begins now

After years of drifting in institutional limbo, the Central Information Commission (CIC) is finally back at full strength. Raj Kumar Goyal's appointment as Chief Information Commissioner, along with eight new Information Commissioners, closes a vacancy cycle that should never have been allowed to stretch this long. But before applauding too loudly, it's worth asking whether numerical strength automatically translates into institutional spine?

The CIC's problem was never just about empty chairs. It was about delays that quietly hollowed out the Right to Information Act. Appeals languished for years, penalties were rarely imposed, and public authorities learned that stonewalling carries few consequences. Vacancies merely made this decay visible; they didn't cause it.

Goyal, a former law secretary with a long rÃ©sumÃ©, brings administrative gravitas. That helps. But the CIC doesn't need another well-run secretariat as much as it needs a commission willing to annoy ministries, question routine denials, and restore urgency to a law that was designed to be citizen-centric, not file-centric. RTI jurisprudence isn't about elegance of orders alone. It's about signalling that delay is not a neutral act, but it's denial by other means.

The commission has been "fully staffed" before, without becoming fully effective. Unless this new team prioritises backlog clearance, enforces penalties, and reasserts the CIC's independence, the reboot risks becoming cosmetic. So, the real test is whether it remembers how and when to bite. Transparency, after all, doesn't fail dramatically. It erodes quietly, one unanswered appeal at a time.

Share a babu experience! Follow

dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

## WISDOM CORNER

Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart

ANNE FRANK

I never paint dreams or nightmares. I paint my own reality

FRIDA KAHLO

Be less curious about people and more curious about ideas

MARIE CURIE

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1901: Marlene Dietrich—whose beauty, voice, aura of sophistication, and languid sensuality made her one of the world's most glamorous movie stars—was born in what is today Berlin.

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FOCUS INDIA-NEW ZEALAND FTA

# NEW CHAPTER ON ANVIL

India and New Zealand have just concluded negotiations on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) marking a significant milestone in their economic partnership. The negotiations, finalised on 22 December, aim at doubling the bilateral trade over the next five years, synergising the respective strengths of both countries. Union Minister for Commerce, Piyush Goel with his New Zealand counterpart Todd McClay with their respective teams, closed the negotiations in New Delhi.

To mention the key highlights of the Agreement, India will gain zero-duty access for all goods exports to New Zealand, while New Zealand will receive duty concessions on 70 per cent of India's tariff lines, covering 95 per cent of its export to India.

On investment, New Zealand has committed to facilitating investments amounting to 20b USD in India over the next 15 years. Such investments will focus on manufacturing, infrastructure, services and innovation. On service sector, in which India has competitive advantage owing to its large base of manpower, New Delhi has secured commitments across 118 services including IT, professional services, education, financial services, tourism and construction. On people's mobility, again, one of the India's top priorities, the Agreement includes a dedicated quota of 5000 temporary employment visas for Indian professionals and 1000 on work and holiday visas.

If we look at sectoral opportunities, four major sectors may receive a boost out of this Agreement. They are textiles, apparel, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, IT and services. Zero-duty access in textile and apparel improves India's price competitiveness in 1.9b USD textiles import market of



New Delhi safeguarded the interests of its farmers and dairy producers, which is considered politically sensitive. That is why India made no concessions on import of dairy products, onions, sugar, spices, edible oils and rubber

New Zealand.

Pharmaceuticals will have increased access to New Zealand's 1.4b USD pharmaceutical import market. Cooperation in agricultural productivity will benefit India with New Zealand establishing Centres of Excellence for apples, Kiwi fruit, and honey. India's IT sector is poised to benefit from enhanced access to New Zealand's growing service market.

The strategic significance of the FTA between India and New Zealand is part of New Delhi's broader strategy to diversify its exports and strengthen ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The Agreement is most likely to enhance economic growth, create jobs and increase people-to-people connections. Furthermore, it aligns with India's Act East Policy and New Zealand's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

While it sounds all good, the Agreement might come across some challenges during its implementation. These include the usual Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) on account of divergent regulatory standards, exclusion of India's dairy sector, implementation capacity—constraints of MSMEs and service providers and potential competition for Indian industries.

However, both countries are working on addressing these potential challenges through continued dialogue and cooperation.

New Delhi safeguarded the interests of its farmers and dairy producers, which is considered politically sensitive. That is why India made no concessions on import of dairy products, onions, sugar, spices, edible oils and rubber.

No wonder, New Zealand's Foreign Minister Winston Peters criticised the deal, saying it gives too much away, especially on immigration, and does not benefit New Zealand's dairy farmers.

According to an official statement, from the External Affairs Ministry, the FTA would significantly deepen bilateral economic engagement, enhance market access, promote investment flows, strengthen strategic cooperation between the two countries, and also open up new opportunities for innovators, entrepreneurs, farmers, MSMEs, students and youths of both countries across various sectors.

Specifically, on the economic impact, the FTA is projected to double the bilateral trade within five years that is largely due to India's exports to New Zealand.

land availing zero-duty access on almost all tariff lines.

The Agreement will help Indian exporters, reeling under the impact of unexpected 50 per cent tariffs imposed by the Trump Administration on Indian goods. Since then, Indian exporters have been diversifying their shipments to the India-Pacific region. India has already signed a trade pact with Australia. Commerce Minister Goel assured that the Agreement with New Zealand will provide a fillip to labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, leather, rubber, footwear and home dÃ©cor. It will also encourage export of automobiles, auto components, machinery, electronic goods and electrical and pharmaceutical products.

The employment visas although temporary, will cover AYUSH practitioners, Yoga instructors, Indian chefs and music teachers, as well as from high-demand sectors like IT, engineering, healthcare, education, and construction, strengthening professional and semi-professional mobility and services personnel.

The India-New Zealand FTA is expected to be signed in coming months, paving a new way for its implementation. Both countries are working on addressing the possible challenges while maximising the benefits accruing from this Agreement. At any rate, with the FTA, India and New Zealand are set to take their bilateral trade to the next level. This Agreement should also deliver concomitant political and strategic benefits. Credit for having another FTA with a country in the Indo-Pacific region must be given to the current Indian government.

*The writer is Professor of Practice, NIIS Group of Institutions*

INFA

SPECTRUM INVESTMENT

## Money lessons from cricket selection



**BAD SELECTORS AND BAD INVESTORS OVERREACT TO RECENT PERFORMANCE, IGNORE FUNDAMENTALS, AND CHASE POPULARITY**

Indian cricket selections often trigger emotions that go far beyond sport. Few decisions illustrate this better than phases where Shubman Gill was dropped from the Indian T-20 World Cup team, while Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan were preferred. At first glance, this appears irrational to fans—Gill represents technique, temperament, and long-term promise. Yet selectors opted for Samson's explosive ness and Kishan's left-handed aggression.

Surprisingly, this mirrors one of the most misunderstood tensions in investing and personal finance, i.e. long-term compounding versus short-term outcomes.

Shubman Gill is often described as a "classical investment." His game is built on sound fundamentals—timing, patience, shot selection. He may not always explode in the first few overs, but given time, he tends to accumulate value consistently.

In financial terms, Gill resembles a large cap stock, a blue-chip mutual fund or a long-term SIP strategy. Such investments may appear boring in the short run. They don't

double overnight, and they don't create headlines every week. But over time, they deliver predictable, sustainable returns.

Many investors make the mistake of abandoning these "Gill-like" assets during temporary underperformance, just as selectors sometimes bench him after a few low scores. The irony is that these assets are often the ones that create the most wealth over a 10-20 year horizon.

From a personal finance perspective, if your goals are retirement, child's education, or long-term wealth, your portfolio must be Gill-heavy, i.e. disciplined, patient, and compounding.

On the other hand, Sanju Samson represents flair, instinct, and unpredictability. On his day, he can win matches single-handedly. On other days, he can be dismissed easily, leaving fans frustrated.

In investment language, Samson is like a mid-cap stock, a thematic or sectoral fund or a startup equity bet. These investments can generate extraordinary returns in short periods, but they can also underperform sharply. Selectors

choose Samson when they want instant impact, much like investors chase momentum stocks during bull markets.

The risk with this strategy is, over allocation. Many investors load their portfolios with "Samsons" because stories are exciting and returns look glamorous, until volatility hits. Without a solid Gill-like base, the portfolio becomes unstable.

Ishan Kishan's selection often depends on match conditions. A left-hander at the top, he disrupts bowling plans and maximizes powerplay advantages. His value is contextual.

In finance, Kishan resembles tactical asset allocation like short term debt or arbitrage funds. These are not meant to be permanent holdings. They serve specific purposes like liquidity, tactical advantage, or short-term goals.

When selectors drop Gill, it is rarely because he lacks ability. It's usually because the T-20 format requires aggression, quick runs and risk.

Cricket formats offer a brilliant analogy from 'financial goals' perspective. While Test cricket is like retirement planning, ODIs are medium term goals (purchasing a home)

and finally T20s are short term goals (vacation). The mistake most people make is playing T20 shots in Test matches—chasing quick returns for goals that demand patience.

Good selectors, like good financial advisors, balance stability with aggression, rotate players based on conditions, avoid emotional decision making and focus on end results.

Dropping Gill does not mean he is a bad cricketer. Selecting Samson or Kishan does not mean they are better players. It simply means the change of context. Similarly, selling a long-term investment does not mean it was wrong. Buying a high-risk asset does not mean it will always work. The real mistake lies in misalignment between strategy and objective.

If you want financial success, build your portfolio around Gill like discipline, adding Samson like aggression selectively and Kishan like tactics wisely. Because in cricket, as in money, class may not always trend, but it endures.

*The writer is the Founder and CEO of fintech startup FinCist.*

### Discipline before devices

Sir, The advisory asking MPs to refrain from using smart gadgets inside Parliament highlights a hard truth: technology has raced ahead of institutional discipline. Smartwatches, hidden cameras and recording spectacles may be innocuous elsewhere, but within the House they threaten privacy, security and parliamentary privilege. Earlier suspensions show that breaches are no longer hypothetical. Democracy thrives on transparency, not covert recording. Lawmakers, of all people, must respect the sanctity of procedures they are sworn to protect. Convenience cannot trump constitutional conduct. If restraint is essential for citizens, it is non-negotiable for legislators.

Gopalaswamy J, CHENNAI

### Misplaced priorities

Sir, The latest train fare hike reflects a troubling pattern: passengers are repeatedly asked to pay more without seeing proportional improvements in basic facilities. Overcrowded coaches, unhygienic bogies, malfunctioning toilets, delayed trains, and poor customer service remain routine realities for millions. Calling this "fare rationalization" ignores the lived experience of ordinary commuters who depend on railways for affordable travel. Sustainability cannot come at the cost of dignity and safety. Before burdening passengers again, the Railways must first ensure clean coaches, punctual services, and humane travel conditions. Without accountability and visible upgrades, this hike appears less like reform and more like misplaced priorities.

Dr. Vijaykumar HK, RAICHUR

### Battle of survival

Sir, After re-uniting for the cause of Marathi language, the estranged Thackeray cousins, Uddhav and Raj, have now come together for protecting the "Marathi manoos" in Maharashtra. The two also want to "save Mumbai and Maharashtra" whatever that means although it is not difficult to fathom that they are fighting a battle for survival. With the BMC polls round the corner, political exigency appears to have pushed the two to try their luck together at the polls. Shiv Sena(UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray is in the doldrums, and he is fighting to remain in circulation. Raj Thackeray, on the other hand, does not look politically ambitious and is satisfied by throwing punches at politicians through his mesmerising oratorical skills.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

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

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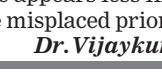
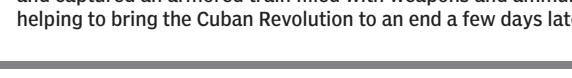
OrissaPost

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# CHANDBALI SHAKEN BY 3 RAPE CASES IN 3 DAYS

POST NEWS NETWORK



**Chandbali, Dec 26:** Three back-to-back rape cases reported within just three days have sent shockwaves across Chandbali subdivision in Bhadrak district, sparking public anger, prompting political slugfest and raising serious questions over law and order.

Police have registered three separate rape cases under Chandbali subdivision over the last 72 hours — two at Chandbali police station and one at Dhamra police station. The incidents have deeply shaken residents of the otherwise peaceful coastal belt, with protests mounting and demands growing for stricter policing and swift justice.

Odisha Crime Branch categorised the rape and murder of a differently-abled minor girl in Chandbali NAC's Baligaon area as a "red flag" case, highlighting its seriousness. Police arrested Babul Das of Rampalli village in connection with the case, following which angry locals ransacked his house.

Amid simmering tension over the Baligaon incident, another minor girl was allegedly raped by a 26-year-old man in her home in the area, following which she attempted suicide by consuming poison and is now hospitalised in a critical condition. According to an FIR registered at Dhamnagar police station, the minor was alone at home cooking in the

evening of December 17. The accused allegedly gagged the girl with her own scarf, and raped her. Before leaving, he warned the victim that her sisters too would face the same fate if she disclosed the matter.

Fearing social stigma and intimidation, the 17-year-old victim initially remained silent. However, she later wrote a detailed account of the incident before consuming poison December 20 in a suicide attempt.

She was initially taken to Dhamra Community Health Centre, then to Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital and later shifted to a private nursing home in Cuttack, where her condition is stated to be serious.

The victim's widowed mother approached Dhamra police with the handwritten note and lodged a formal complaint, prompting police action.

Acting on the complaint, Dhamra police registered a case (56/25) and arrested Gyanaran-

jan Pati, a resident of the same village in connection with the incident.

Chamra PS Officer In-Charge Shobhan Swain recorded the victim's statement Thursday night in Cuttack. After medical examination, the accused was produced before Chandbali court Friday. The accused's family denies the allegations, claiming he has been falsely implicated and defamed.

In the third incident, a youth allegedly pushed a minor girl into the Baitarani river after he established physical relationship with her on the promise of marrying her. The incident has further intensified public concern over rising crimes against women and children in the region.

The political atmosphere has also heated up, as BJP, BJD and Congress leaders have engaged in mudslinging in the wake of the heinous crimes. Opposition parties have alleged administrative failure and a collapse of law and order, claims rejected by the ruling dispensation.

Locals have also raised concerns over the alleged rise in illicit drug trade in the area, linking it to the surge in violent crimes and demanding immediate action to curb narcotics circulation.

The back-to-back cases have intensified calls for stronger policing, fast-track trials, and decisive government action to restore public confidence and safety in the Chandbali subdivision.

According to forest officials, a herd of 29 elephants moved from the Turekela area earlier

## Man hacks bull with axe, held

**CHENDIPADA:** Police arrested a man for allegedly hacking a bull with an axe in Kanlo village under Bagadia police station in Angul district Friday. The accused was identified as Padmalochan Palai, a resident of Kanlo village, police said. According to preliminary information, a bull had been roaming in the village for several days and reportedly entered Palai's courtyard, damaging and feeding on crops. Angered by the repeated intrusion, Palai struck the animal on its back with an axe, causing serious injuries to it. The injured bull collapsed near the village square, triggering outrage among villagers. Residents reported the incident to Bagadia police. Police arrested the accused and seized the axe used in the attack. An investigation is underway.

On the allegation of possession of disproportionate assets (DA), Vigilance officers raided the properties of the two government officers at nine locations, an officer of the anti-corruption wing said.

The department has identified the officers as Nihar Ranjan Sarkar, JE of Malkangiri block and Nirjan Satapathy, forester, Koraput.

## JE, forester under Vig lens

PNN &amp; AGENCIES



NIHAR RANJAN SARKAR

NIRJAN SATAPATHY

On the allegation of possession of DA, Vigilance officers raided the properties of the two government officers at nine locations

possession of the JE, he said.

Sarkar joined the government service in November 2015 on a contractual basis. He was regularised in August 2022. In December last year, he was posted as JE at the Malkangiri block.

Similarly, during the raids in connection to the forester, two triple-storeyed buildings in Bhubaneswar, another building in Koraput, seven high-value plots, including two in prime location of Bhubaneswar, 1 kg gold, ₹8.70 lakh cash, and one SUV were detected by the Vigilance officers.

Satapathy entered into government service in January 1988 as a forest guard under the Koraput forest division with a monthly initial salary of ₹625.

ers had detected one palatial triple-storeyed building, eight valuable plots, including six in posh area of Malkangiri town, and ₹2.11 lakh cash from the

## Wild elephants kill woman, injure two

POST NEWS NETWORK



**Lathor, Dec 26:** A woman was killed and two others seriously injured after a herd of wild elephants went on a rampage at Hatipada under Chakapada village in Bolangir district Thursday night.

The deceased has been identified as Phulmati Nag, 45, and the injured as Khud Hati, an elderly woman, and Gautam Nag, a young man. The injured were initially taken to the Khaprakhol Community Health Centre and later shifted to Patnagarh hospital after receiving first aid, doctors said.

According to forest officials, a herd of 29 elephants moved from the Turekela area earlier

this week and have been staying in the Bender forest under Lathor range.

The elephants entered Hatipada village Thursday night, damaged houses and fed on paddy crops. While the animals were vandalising Khud Hati's house, they knocked down the wall, which collapsed on Khud Hati, her daughter Phulmati and son-in-law Gau-

tam. Phulmati died on the spot.

The body was sent to Khaprakhol Community Health Centre for post-mortem Friday morning and later handed over to the family.

As Dhanu Jatra festivities were underway in Lathor village, the Forest department blocked the forest road at night to prevent public movement through the elephant corridor.

However, a few youths forcibly entered the restricted route on motorcycles Thursday night and came face to face with the elephant herd. They abandoned their motorcycles and fled into the forest in the dark, narrowly escaping. Two motorcycles were recovered Friday morning.

Several houses and tube wells were damaged in Chakapada and nearby Khaipada villages, leaving residents in panic. Kantabanji ranger Siddhanta Kumar Sahu said a report would be submitted to provide ₹10 lakh compensation to the victim's family, with efforts to release an initial instalment soon. Forest personnel remain on round-the-clock alert to ensure public safety.

## Man sentenced to life for murder after 71-day trial

POST NEWS NETWORK



Bissamkata police station Inspector In-Charge Suryachan-

conviction in the district's judicial history.

According to case records, the murder took place October 14, 2025, under the jurisdiction of Bissamkata police station. A case (153/25) was registered the following day. Police completed the investigation and filed the chargesheet within 20 days.

After a swift trial, the court pronounced its judgment convicting the accused Friday.

The investigation was led by

dra Padhi. The prosecution was conducted by Additional Public Prosecutor Prashant Kumar Rath, while the overall proceedings were supervised by Sub-Divisional Public Prosecutor Ajit Pattnaik.

Speaking after the verdict, Rath said he had only performed his duty and credited the success of the case to the Rayagada SP, the Bissamkata police team and the district prosecution machinery.

## Miscreants torch bus in Rourkela

**ROURKELA:** Unidentified miscreants set fire to a private bus late Thursday night near Bali Jodi Chhak under the Tangarpali police station limits in Rourkela, police said Friday. The bus was completely gutted, while another bus parked behind it suffered partial damage. No casualties were reported as there were no passengers inside the vehicles at the time. According to police, the bus owner, Anay Mallik, lodged a complaint at Tangarpali police station.

A case has been registered against unknown persons, and an investigation is under way. Preliminary investigation suggests that miscreants took advantage of the darkness and poured a flammable substance on the parked bus, before setting it ablaze. The fire quickly engulfed the vehicle, reducing it to ashes. Due to the intensity of the flames, another bus parked close behind was also damaged. Firefighters rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control, though the first bus could not be saved.

Shallow to moderate fog would occur during morning hours at isolated pockets in several districts during the next five days, she said.

## Woman cheated of ₹80K by contractor

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, Dec 26:** A woman from the Soundaryanagar area of Berhampur was allegedly cheated of ₹80,000 by a contractor on the pretext of undertaking construction work at her house. Following registration of a complaint, Sadar police registered a case and launched an investigation.

According to police sources, the complainant, identified as Nibedita Bisoyi, was constructing a house at Soundaryanagar. A contractor, Gobinda Behera of Ambagada Kadalibada Sahi, had agreed to carry out various construction works and took an advance payment of ₹80,000 from her.

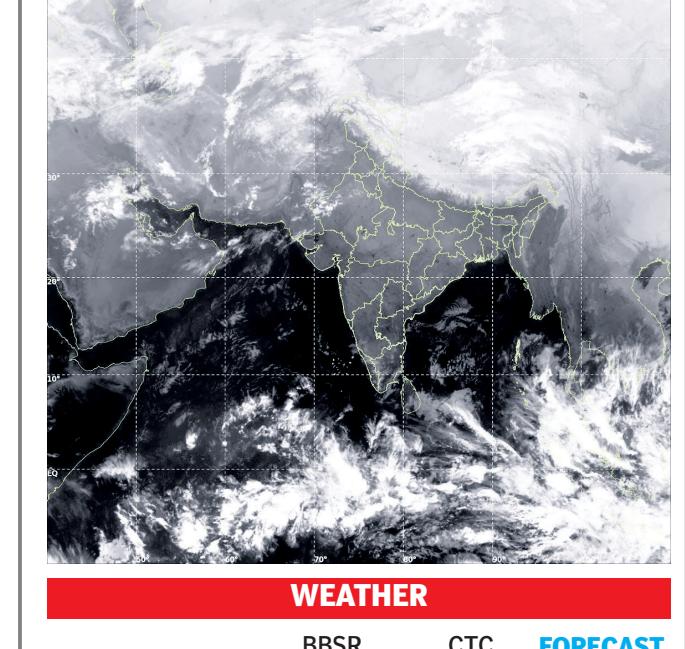
However, despite receiving the money, the contractor allegedly delayed the work for nearly two months, citing personal engagements and commitments. Despite repeated reminders, he neither began the construction work nor returned the amount.

The complainant alleged that Behera and his family members repeatedly assured her that the amount would be refunded, but to no avail. When she continued to demand the money, she was allegedly threatened.

Left with no alternative, Bisoyi approached the police and lodged a complaint. Further investigation is underway, police said.

## MARKET WATCH

CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	89.90 <span>▲ 0.13</span>	SENSEX	85041.45 <span>▼ 367.25</span>	GOLD	₹140,079 <span>▲ 1982</span>
EURO	105.92 <span>▼ 0.07</span>	NIFTY	26042.30 <span>▼ 99.80</span>	SILVER	₹235,898 <span>▲ 12,108</span>



## WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	26.8°	24.4°	Dense fog
Min Temp	15.0°	13.6°	
Humidity	92%	94%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	



## Decades-old bat colony under threat as poachers strike



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Khaira, Dec 26:** A bat colony that has thrived for decades in Saradanga village under Khaira block of Balasore district is rapidly declining due to poaching, loss of habitat and alleged inaction by the Forest department, raising serious concerns among villagers and wildlife observers.

Once safely roosting on two tamarind trees which are over 100 years old, the bats were left homeless after the trees collapsed in recent years. Since then, the colony has scattered across bamboo, mango and other nearby trees, exposing the flying mammals to hunters who locals say are captur-

ing and selling them for profit.

Residents warned that unless immediate protective measures are taken, the colony could disappear entirely within a short time.

The bats first settled decades ago on two tamarind trees in the courtyard of an elderly woman known locally as Menki Mausi. Childless, she treated the bats as her own children and ensured their safety. Later, she adopted Harekrushna Panda of nearby Kalamachua village as her son and arranged his marriage. Panda, villagers said, continued her legacy by protecting the bats and preventing any harm to them.

About 25 years ago, the then divisional forest officer of Balasore

and the district collector visited Saradanga and expressed appreciation for the conservation of the bat colony. Panda was rewarded with ₹5,000 and assurances were given to provide water and other facilities to protect the bats during extreme summer heat. Locals said those promises were never fulfilled.

In recent years, with Panda's death and Cyclone Phailin uprooting the old tamarind trees, the bats were left without a caretaker and shelter. With no dedicated protection in place, the colony dispersed across nearby trees.

Villagers alleged that poachers have taken advantage of the situation, using nets to trap and poach bats for monetary gain. The threat intensifies as the breeding season approaches, further endangering the survival of the species in the area. When contacted, Kupari forest officer Naresh Singh said the issue would be looked into.

Local residents have urged the Forest department to intervene urgently, restore habitat support and ensure protection for the bats before it is too late.

## UCO BANK

ZONAL OFFICE  
18/1, Ainthapali Road, Sambalpur,  
Ph.: 0663-2540640

## POSSESSION NOTICE

Appendix - IV [See Rule 8(1)]

(Under Section 13(4) of the Securitization & Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 for Immovable Property)			
Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of UCO Bank, Concerned Branches under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of Powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued a Demand Notice under section 13(2) of the said Act calling upon the Borrower/Guarantor/Co-Applicant to repay the amount with interest at the contractual rate together with incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of the said Notice. The Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor/Co-Applicant and the public in general that the undersigned has taken POSSESSION of the property described here-in below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules. The Borrower/Guarantor/Co-Applicant in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the UCO Bank, Concerned Branches for an amount with interest and expenses thereon. The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-Section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.			

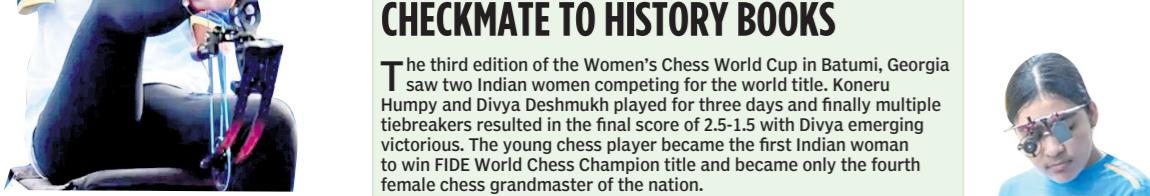
## WOMEN LEAD FROM THE FRONT

Indian women sportspersons soared to new heights in 2025; besides cricket triumphs, they led globally in archery, athletics, snooker, chess, and motorsport



## TAKE A BOW, SHEETAL

For Sheetal Devi, the bow asked for patience before it delivered promise. In 2025, that discipline led to a world title at the World Archery Para Championships. Later in the year, she crossed another milestone when she was selected to represent the Indian compound team for the Asia Cup, becoming the first para-archer to be included at that level. Her journey showed how excellence and ability are understood in Indian sport.



## CHECKMATE TO HISTORY BOOKS

The third edition of the Women's Chess World Cup in Batumi, Georgia saw Indian women competing for the world title. Koneru Humpy and Divya Deshmukh played for three days and finally multiple tiebreakers resulted in the final score of 2.5-1.5 with Divya emerging victorious. The young chess player became the first Indian woman to win FIDE World Chess Champion title and became only the fourth female chess grandmaster of the nation.



## SHOOTING STAR SURUCHI

Another shooter who caught the limelight this year was Suruchi Singh Phogat. The 19-year-old also made her debut in women's air pistol on the World Cup circuit and finished as individual gold medal in all three World Cups she played this year and then finished off her season with a fourth gold at the ISSF World Cup Finals. Her dominating run throughout the season also saw her rise as the world's best to be ranked World No. 1.



## PUNCHING INTO BOXING FAME

India placed first in the medal tally at the 2025 World Boxing Championship in Liverpool with Jasmin Lamboria becoming the World Champion. But this was not a solo feat as she was joined by the gold medalist Minakshi Hooda, silver medalist Nupur Sheoran and bronze medalist Pooja Rani.



## TRACK GLORY FOR POOJA

Clinching double-gold medals in both the 1500 meters and 800 meters running events at the National Inter-State Championships, Pooja Rani made a breakthrough year. After having won silver and bronze in the same categories in the 26th Asian Athletics Championship in Gumi, South Korea earlier this year, she outdid herself. This is her second double-gold win after the National Inter-State Championships.



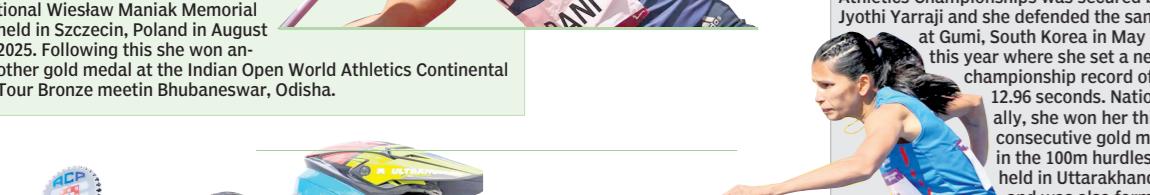
## JYOTHI'S ARCHERY FEAT

Securing India's maiden medal at the World Cup Final, Jyothi Surekha Veniamin became the first Indian woman compound archer to win a bronze in the competition. Having previously exited at the opening round itself, Jyothi's resolve this time made her the first Indian woman to medal at the ending finale.



## ANNU'S GOLDEN LAUNCH

Ending the year 1-3 by following her season best throw of 62.59 meters, Annu Rani won the International Wieslaw Manik Memorial held in Szczecin, Poland in August 2025. Following this, she won another gold medal at the India Open World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze meet in Bhubaneswar, Odisha.



## SNOOKER FEAT

Cricket country proud as she beat Hong Kong's Ng On Yee to clinch the IBSF World Snooker (15-red) title, the country's first ever in the women's category. Anupama Ramachandran from Chennai beat Yee in a thrilling contest, securing a 3-2 win in the final.



## TAMING THE UNTAMED

## SAMRAT NEW AIR PISTOL KING

In 2025, Samrat Rana emerged as India's "new king" of air pistol shooting by becoming the first Indian ever to win a World Championship gold in the men's 10m event. The 20-year-old from Karnal, Haryana, defeated World No. 1 Hu Kai of China in a nail-biting finish following his world title. Rana also secured a bronze medal at the season-ending ISSF World Cup Final in Doha in December.



## CHOPRA BREAKS 90M BARRIER

Indian athletics witnessed a landmark moment when Neeraj Chopra achieved the long-awaited 90m throw, recording a personal best of 90.23m at the Doha Diamond League. It was a breakthrough year in the making. Crossing the 90m mark had become something of a mythical barrier in his career. When he finally achieved it, the moment resonated deeply not just as a athletic achievement, but as a triumph of perseverance, discipline and unwavering ambition.



## national

of the day quote

The sacrifices made by Guru Gobind Singh and his entire family are unparalleled not only in Indian history but also in world history. Despite immense personal loss, Guru Gobind Singh never wavered from his principles and gave a powerful message to the world about protecting humanity and upholding righteousness.

When I read reports about the poor state of healthcare and hear the cries of families who have lost their loved ones, it deeply pains me.

ASHOK GEHLOT | FORMER RAJASTHAN CM

India's climate is being deliberately poisoned. Right-wing forces, emboldened by power, are openly attacking Dalits, STs and minorities - through fear, lynching, threats and hate, all under the garb of religion.

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | TMC GENERAL SECRETARY

## SHORT TAKES

## CEC calls on Vice President

New Delhi: Chief Election Commissioner Ganesh Kumar called on Vice President C P Radhakrishnan here Friday. The Election Commission shared a photograph of the meeting on its social media handle. "Chief Election Commissioner, Ganesh Kumar, called on the Hon'ble Vice-President of India, C P Radhakrishnan, at Vice-President's Enclave today," the poll authority said. While Radhakrishnan was elected as the vice president in September, Kumar took over as the chief election commissioner in February this year. Besides the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and state assembly and legislative council polls, the EC also holds elections to the posts of president and vice-president.

## VV Rajesh elected as 1st BJP mayor in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: BJP leader V V Rajesh was elected mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Corporation Friday after the saffron party won 50 of the 101 wards, marking its first-ever victory in a municipal corporation in Kerala. In the mayoral election Friday, Rajesh secured 51 votes, including the support of an independent councillor. R P Sivaji of the LDF received 29 votes, while UDF candidate K S Sabarathan secured 19 votes, of which two were later declared invalid.

## Man burns wife to death

Hyderabad: A man allegedly burnt his wife to death here, suspecting her fidelity, police said Friday. He purchased petrol in a bottle and poured it on his wife while she was sleeping, and set her on fire December 23, they added.

The couple got married 10 years ago. The man is a construction worker, and the woman was doing housekeeping work.

## CLASSIFIED

## AFFIDAVIT

I, Shifa Lakra, daughter of Anal Lakra, residing at Patalkanda, Biramitrapur have changed my name to INAYA ANVYN and shall henceforth be known as Inaya Anvyn for all purposes.



The BJP will not speak on the train fare hike. If we do it, then all the leaders will start talking about it

SIDDARAMAIAH | KARNATAKA CM

## ATTACKS ON MINORITIES IN B'DESH

## India expresses grave concern

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 26: India Friday said the "unremitting hostilities" against minorities in Bangladesh is a matter of "grave concern" as it demanded punishment to the perpetrators involved in the lynching of a Hindu youth in Mymensingh area last week.

New Delhi also reacted cautiously to the return to Dhaka of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairman Tarique Rahman after 17 years, saying it should be seen in the context of India's push for ensuring free, fair and inclusive parliamentary polls in that country.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India condemned the recent killing of Hindu youth Dipu Chandra Das and demanded action against those involved in the killing.

The unremitting hostilities against the minorities in Bangladesh including Hindus, Christians and Buddhists at the hands of extremists is a matter of grave concern."

"We condemn the recent gruesome killing of a Hindu youth in Bangladesh and expect that the perpetrators of the crime would be brought to justice," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing.

Bangladeshi authorities have already arrested 12 people for Das's murder.

Over 2,900 incidents of violence against minorities including cases of killings, arson and land grab have been documented by independent sources during the tenure of the interim government," Jaiswal said.

"These incidents cannot be brushed aside as mere media exaggeration or dismissed as political violence," he added.



External Affairs Ministry spokesperson

Randhir Jaiswal said India condemned the recent killing of Hindu youth Dipu Chandra Das and demanded action against those involved in the killing

Bangladesh has witnessed a fresh wave of unrest and political instability following the killing of 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.

His killing has also triggered some fresh strain in India-Bangladesh ties as certain elements in that country sought to link New Delhi to his death.

India dismissed the charges. "We have rejected the false narrative that has been projected in Bangladesh. The law and order situation and developments happening there is the

responsibility of the government of Bangladesh. To portray a narrative where things go in another direction is completely false and we reject that," Jaiswal said.

The external affairs ministry spokesperson said India is closely following all the developments in the neighbouring country.

"India stands for strengthening our ties with the people of Bangladesh. We favour peace and stability in Bangladesh. And we stand for free, fair, inclusive and participatory elections in Bangladesh," he said.

The parliamentary elections are slated for February 12.

On the killing of another Hindu man, Amrit Mondal alias Samrat, by a mob in Rajbir Town Wednesday night, Jaiswal appeared to link it to deteriorating security situation and hostilities towards minorities in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh government said Mondal was accused in several serious cases, including murder and extortion and that the incident was not a communal attack.

On BNP leader Rahman's return to Bangladesh from London, Jaiswal said: "As you are aware, India supports free, fair and inclusive elections in Bangladesh. This development should be seen in that context."

Rahman, 60, returned to Dhaka to a rousing welcome by thousands of his supporters Thursday -- a homecoming that is expected to energise the BNP ahead of the February 12 parliamentary elections.

"India wants close and friendly relations with the people of Bangladesh which is rooted in the Liberation struggle and strengthened through various development and people-to-people initiatives," he said.

## Class XI student shot dead after dispute at UP school



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Gorakhpur, Dec 26: Uttar Pradesh Police detained two people after a Class XI student was shot dead following a dispute at a school playground here Friday afternoon, police said.

Additional forces have been deployed to maintain law and order in the area, they said, adding that two accused are absconding. The incident occurred at around 1.00 pm on the premises of Co-operative Inter College in Pipraich, police said.

According to eyewitnesses, the victim, Sudhir Bharti, was at the playground when an argument broke out between him and another person from the same neighbourhood.

The alteration escalated quickly, during which the accused allegedly took out a country-made pistol and fired at Bharti. The student collapsed and died on the spot, they said.

Following the incident, authorities closed the school as a precautionary measure, they said, adding that police arrived at the spot shortly after the incident and detained the accused.

The situation became tense as residents and relatives of both sides gathered there.

Some relatives of the accused tried to block the movement of police vehicles by lying down in front of them.

Senior Superintendent of Police Rajkaran Nayyar said an additional police force has been deployed in the area, and the situation is under control. He assured of strict action against those responsible.

The SSP said the family has provided information about two absconding accused, among them one is a minor. Three police teams have been constituted to arrest the absconding accused, he said, adding that interrogation of the two detained is underway.

He explained that "authorities" cited the ban on the Awami Action Committee (which he heads) and other APHC constituents as grounds to remove the title or lose the account en-

## Mirwaiz drops 'Hurriyat' title from X profile 'under immense pressure'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Dec 26: Moderate separatist leader and the head Muslim cleric of Kashmir, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, has removed the designation "chairman All Parties Hurriyat Conference" (APHC) from his verified X profile, a move he described as "Hobson's choice".

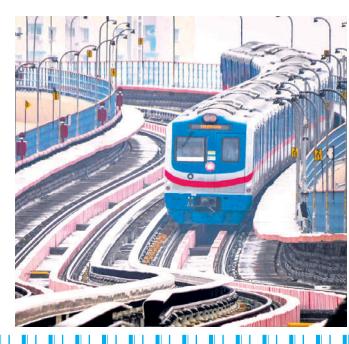
The digital update, noticed Thursday evening, is seen by observers as an effective blow to the 33-year-old APHC, a conglomerate of separatist groups, formed in 1993 to highlight the so-called right for self-determination for people of Kashmir.

The Mirwaiz's bio now lists only his name, location, and basic details. He chose to clarify the change in his X handle, which has a following of over 2,32,000 users, saying that the decision was made under significant pressure.

He explained that "authorities" cited the ban on the Awami Action Committee (which he heads) and other APHC constituents as grounds to remove the title or lose the account en-

## KOLKATA METRO SERVICES DISRUPTED

Metro services on the Blue Line (Dakshineswar to Kavi Subhash) were disrupted Friday evening after a 17-year-old girl jumped onto the tracks at Netaji Bhavan station, officials said. The girl was rescued from the tracks and rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors declared her 'brought dead', they said



A man carries a child on his shoulder as he walks along a road on a foggy morning near the India-Pakistan border, in Jammu

## Jharkhand govt ensures transparent rice procurement at over 700 centers

**Jharkhand:** The Government of Jharkhand is ensuring a smooth and transparent rice procurement process at more than 700 procurement centers across the state. Farmers can sell their harvested rice at the nearest procurement center in their respective blocks. Payments are being made directly to farmers' bank accounts at the rate of ₹2450 per quintal. In a public appeal, Chief Minister Hemant Soren urged farmers not to fall prey to intermediaries who may promise compensation or payments in exchange for a fee. He emphasised that any illegal demands for money or misleading information should be immediately reported to the concerned block office or district administration. The state government remains firm in its commitment to protecting the interests of farmers and ensuring that all processes are carried out with transparency and fairness.

## President Murmu to undertake sea sortie in submarine Dec 28

**New Delhi:** President Droupadi Murmu will embark on a sea sortie in a submarine from Karwar Harbour in Karnataka December 28, her office has said. Murmu (67) will be the second head of state to sail in a submarine. Former president (late) A P Abdul Kalam had undertaken a submarine sortie February 13, 2006 at Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh). Murmu is the first President of India to have taken sortie in two fighter aircrafts of the Indian Air Force. She flew in Rafale October 29 this year and took a sortie in Sukhoi 30 MKI in 2023. The president's undersea sortie is scheduled during her four-day visit to Goa, Karnataka and Jharkhand from Saturday.

## SNIPPETS

## Tripura Assembly Speaker Biswa Bandhu Sen dies at 72

**Agartala:** Tripura Assembly Speaker Biswa Bandhu Sen died at a private hospital in Bengaluru Friday, officials said. He was 72. He is survived by wife, son and a daughter. Sen was undergoing treatment in the Karnataka capital after suffering a massive cerebral stroke, they said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the Speaker's death and recalled his efforts to boost Tripura's progress. "Pained by the passing of Shri Biswa Bandhu Sen Ji, Speaker of the Tripura Assembly. He will be remembered for his efforts to boost Tripura's progress and commitment to numerous social causes. My thoughts are with his family and admirers in this sad hour. Om Shanti," the PM said on X. Sen's body will be brought here Saturday, the officials said.

## Delhi court grants bail to six accused in India Gate protest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 26: A Delhi court Friday granted bail to six protesters arrested in connection with the agitation on Kartavya Path, where slogans were allegedly raised in support of slain Maoist commander Madvi Hidma, saying they were not required for further investigation.

Additional Sessions Judge Amit Bansal was hearing the bail plea of Ilakkiya, Ayisha Wafiya, Ravjot Kaur, Gurkirat Kaur, Abhinash Satyapathi and Kranti.

"The applicants (six accused people) have already suffered a custody of about one month each, and it seems from the submissions that they are not required for any further investigation." "No reasonable apprehension has been shown by the prosecution that there is a threat of tampering with the witnesses or that the applicants are a flight risk," the court said.

It said that none of the accused persons were members of the banned Maoist student organisation, Radical Student Union (RSU).

mainly indulged in coordinating mass shutdowns and political mobilisations. However, its influence has steadily eroded over the last decade due to internal differences, followed by a legal crackdown post-2019. Most of the constituent groups are now banned under anti-terror laws, rendering the conglomerate largely inactive. The move has drawn both support and criticism across Jammu and Kashmir's political spectrum, with the ruling National Conference (NC) chief spokesperson and MLA Tanvir Sadiq calling the pressure "wrong" and emphasising that the Mirwaiz has the role of a religious scholar in the Valley.

PDP leader Waheed Para defended the move, comparing it to the Treaty of Hudaybiyah, where Prophet Muhammad agreed to remove certain titles in the interest of peace.

## Chinese tourists return to Kushinagar after 5 years



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kushinagar (UP), Dec 26: A delegation of Chinese tourists arrived in Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh, giving a boost to tourism in the Buddhist pilgrimage town that had come to a halt due to travel restrictions imposed during the coronavirus outbreak, officials said.

The team arrived in Delhi from China December 21 and travelled to Kushinagar via Shrawasti. The group will leave for Bihar Thursday and is scheduled to visit Vaishali, Rajgir, Nalanda and Bodh Gaya before touring Sarnath, the site believed to be where Buddha held his first sermon, December 30, after which it will return to China.

Officials said improving bilateral ties and the resumption of visa issuance by India have been welcomed by Chinese citizens and are expected to increase tourist inflow, strength-

ening people-to-people relations and positively impacting the tourism sector.

Tourism officer Pran Ranjan said around 1,800 Buddhist tourists visited Kushinagar in November, with most coming from Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Pankaj Kumar Singh, general manager of The Royal Residency hotel, said the Centre resumed issuing visas to Chinese tourists about six months ago, but footfall on the Buddhist circuit remains below expectations.

He cited restrictions on Chinese tourists travelling onward to Lumbini in Nepal, Buddha's birthplace, as a key reason, noting that a fresh Indian visa is required for re-entry.

Officials said Chinese tourists had been barred from visiting India due to the India-China border dispute and COVID-19. The last Chinese tourist group visited Kushinagar in March 2018, when 11,213 Chinese tourists arrived between April 2017 and March 2018.

The Centre approved visa issuance to Chinese tourists on July 24 this year. Officials said nearly 90 per cent of the world's Buddhist population resides in China, and tourism generates about ₹12 lakh annually in hotel stays alone in Kushinagar.

# national



**Our legal framework draws a very clear and deliberate distinction. Those who traffic narcotics, organise supply chain, who profit from human vulnerability are not victims of circumstances. They are perpetrators of serious harm. For those actors, the law must speak firmly, decisively and without hesitation**

SURYA KANT | CJI

of the day quote



We will not allow the government to loot. Not only is the public rejecting the 100-metre parameter, but the Supreme Court's empowered committee has also said that the 100-metre limit is unjustified

DEEPENDER HOODA | CONGRESS LEADER



Why? Translate it. Why don't you ask Stalin to speak in English or Urdu? This is the only thing that is left now, so respect the Kashmiri language a little

MEHBOOBA MUFTI | PDP CHIEF



The alliance between the BJP and the Shiv Sena is a selfless alliance. It is not for power. Some people form alliances for selfish reasons and for power, but this alliance has been formed for the people and for development

EKNATH SHINDE | MAHA DEPUTY CM & SHIV SENA LEADER



> MNREGA  
> Right to Food  
> Right to Education  
> Right to Information  
> 10% GDP

> Aadhaar & DBT  
> Lifted 20 Cr people out of poverty  
> Liberalization of Indian Economy  
> No Hate Speech Ever  
Humble tributes to Dr Manmohan Singh on death anniversary

@mr\_mayank

## Unnao rape survivor's mother to move SC against Sengar bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 26: The Unnao rape survivor's mother Friday said she will approach the Supreme Court challenging the suspension of life term of convict Kuldeep Sengar as she participated in a protest outside the Delhi High Court against the last week's verdict.

Activists from the All India Democratic Women's Association along with activist Yogita Bhayana and the survivor's mother held a protest outside the court, demanding cancellation of the bail of Sengar, an expelled BJP MLA.

Speaking to PTI, the survivor's mother said she had come to the high court to protest as her daughter had endured immense suffering.

"I am not blaming the entire high court, but only the two judges whose decision has shattered our trust," she said.

The mother added that earlier judges had delivered justice to the family, but the accused had now been granted bail.

"This is an injustice towards our family. We will approach the Supreme Court, as I have faith in it," she told PTI.

Scores of protesters gathered outside the high court holding placards saying: "Kuldeep Sengar ki umar kaid ki saza barkaraar rahe" and "Mahilaon ki garima ke saath khilwad nahi chalega"

They also raised slogans such as "Balatkariyo ko sanrakshan dena band kro" and "Guneh-

garon ko bachana band karo" (stop protecting rapists and convicts) in support of the Unnao rape survivor.

Criticizing the central government over the ruling, one of the protesters said, "How can the BJP government or the court give him bail. They have to dismiss his bail or this government must go."

"This is not a coincidence that the bail was granted just two days before court holidays. This is a planned move.

The citizens of this country are not foolish. Till how long will they continue to deceive us..."

another woman said.

Demanding the cancellation of Sengar's bail, another protester said, "He has raped a girl and killed her father because of which she is still in this condition. Stop giving protection to the rapist and protect the victims."

As the agitators continued their protest, the Delhi Police announced through microphone that demonstration in front of the Delhi High Court is not allowed, warning them of legal action.

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"This is an injustice towards our family. We will approach the Supreme Court, as I have faith in it," she told PTI.

Scores of protesters gathered outside the high court holding placards saying: "Kuldeep Sengar ki umar kaid ki saza barkaraar rahe" and "Mahilaon ki garima ke saath khilwad nahi chalega"

They also raised slogans such as "Balatkariyo ko sanrakshan dena band kro" and "Guneh-

garon ko bachana band karo" (stop protecting rapists and convicts) in support of the Unnao rape survivor.

Criticizing the central government over the ruling, one of the protesters said, "How can the BJP government or the court give him bail. They have to dismiss his bail or this government must go."

"This is not a coincidence that the bail was granted just two days before court holidays. This is a planned move.

The citizens of this country are not foolish. Till how long will they continue to deceive us..."

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## international

of the day quote

What is important is that both of us have to keep the promises that both will not threaten, offend, and instigate, and to reduce hostility between the two countries



ANUTIN CHARNVIRAKUL |

PRIME MINISTER, THAILAND

As I meet people of different faiths, I find it enormously encouraging to hear how much we have in common, a shared longing for peace and a deep respect for all life



KING CHARLES | KING, BRITAIN

On earth, there is no room for God if there is no room for the human person. To refuse one is to refuse the other



POPE LEO | HEAD OF CATHOLIC CHURCH

## SHORT TAKES

## Thailand bombs village in Cambodia

**Bangkok:** Thailand and Cambodia were engaged in combat along their border Friday, even as the two countries held talks to try to put an end to armed clashes that erupted in early December, breaking a ceasefire that had been reached five months earlier. Cambodia's Defence Ministry said that Thailand deployed F-16 fighter jets to drop around 40 bombs on a village in the northwestern province of Banteay Meanchey. There were no immediate reports of casualties, but the ministry said that houses and infrastructure were destroyed. Thailand's military confirmed the attack, saying that a joint army-air force operation was essential to protect Thailand's Sa Kaeo province, which borders Banteay Meanchey and where the two nations have overlapping territorial claims.

## Pak, UAE leaders hold 'substantive talks'

**Islamabad:** Pakistani and the UAE leaders Friday held "substantive talks" to further strengthen bilateral ties, according to an official statement. The talks came during the day-long official visit of UAE President and Ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to Pakistan at the invitation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. This was Al Nahyan's first official visit to Pakistan in his capacity as the UAE president. "During the visit, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed held substantive talks with the Prime Minister. Their discussions focused on exchange of views on further strengthening the longstanding fraternal relations between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates," according to the statement.

## Explosion at mosque in Syria's Homs kills 5

**Damascus:** Five people were killed in an explosion at a mosque of the Alawite minority sect in the Syrian city of Homs Friday, Syrian state news agency SANA said. SANA cited Syrian Health Ministry official Najib al-Naasan as saying 21 others were wounded and that the figures were a preliminary toll, indicating they could rise. Homs city's press office said an explosive device had detonated inside the Imam Ali bin Abi Talib mosque and that security forces had cordoned off the area. Local official Issam Naameh told Reuters the blast took place during Friday noon prayers, typically the busiest time for mosques. Syrian state media SANA published footage of rescuers and security forces examining debris splayed across the mosque's green carpet. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack.

## Chinese sanctions hit 20 US defence firms



The Foreign Ministry in a statement warned that any attempt to provoke China on the Taiwan issue would be met with a firm response

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Beijing, Dec 26:** China Friday imposed sanctions on 20 US defence firms in response to the Trump administration's approval of record \$11.1 billion arms sales package to Taiwan.

The Foreign Ministry in a statement warned that any attempt to provoke China on the Taiwan issue would be met with a firm response.

In response to the US announcement of large-scale arms sales to what it described as "China's Taiwan region",

the ministry said Beijing has decided to take countermeasures against 20 American military-related firms and 10 senior executives who have been involved in arming Taiwan in recent years.

"The Taiwan question is at the very core of China's core interests and the first red line that must not be crossed in China-US relations. Anyone who attempts to cross the line and make provocations on the Taiwan question will be met with China's firm response," it said.

It urged the US to abide by the one-China principle and to "stop the dangerous moves of arming Taiwan, stop undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and stop sending wrong signals to 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces".

China will continue to take resolute measures to firmly defend national sovereignty, the report said.

In response to the US announcement of large-scale arms sales to what it described as "China's Taiwan region", the ministry said Beijing has decided to take countermeasures against 20 American military-related firms and 10 senior executives who have been involved in arming Taiwan in recent years.

The proposed arms sales, which require approval by the US Congress, come amid concerns in Taipei over a potential invasion by China, which claims the self-governing island as part of its territory.

security and territorial integrity, the statement said.

The sanctions were largely seen as symbolic, as most of the targeted US defence firms do not have business operations in China.

The proposed arms sales, which require approval by the US Congress, come amid concerns in Taipei over a potential invasion by China, which claims the self-governing island as part of its territory.

If approved, as is widely expected given strong bipartisan support for Taiwan in the US Congress, the package would surpass the \$8.4 billion worth of arms sold to Taiwan during the Biden administration, the New York Times reported earlier.

The size of the proposal is likely to reassure China hawks in Washington who have grown uneasy about President Donald Trump's commitment to defending Taiwan as he seeks to cut trade and economic deals with Beijing, the report said.

## Indian student shot dead near University of Toronto campus



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Toronto, Dec 26:** A 20-year-old Indian doctoral student has been shot dead near a leading university in Toronto, with authorities probing the case as a homicide, officials said Friday.

The shooting took place Tuesday near the campus of the University of Toronto Scarborough, local police said and identified the victim as Shivank Avasthi.

In New Delhi, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has been in touch with the local authorities in Canada.

"We are in touch with his family. It's very unfortunate. We convey our deepest condolences. We are also in touch with local authorities as to what were the circumstances that led to the death. We are in touch with the local authorities in the matter," he said.

"Our consulate is extending all possible support to the family of the person who died," he said. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation said police were called to the area of Highland Creek Trail and Old Kingston Road at about 3:30 pm Tuesday for a report of an injured person lying on the ground, Duty Inspector Jeff Allington told reporters near the scene.

## CHINA OPENS WORLD'S 'LONGEST' TUNNEL

China opened to traffic a 22.13-km-long tunnel, which it claimed to be the "world's longest", in Xinjiang province, Friday. The Tianshan Shengli tunnel, which traverses through the central Tianshan Mountains in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, has reduced a treacherous mountain journey of several hours to about 20 minutes, official media reported



## Malaysia ex-PM Najib Razak jailed for 15 more years

REUTERS

**Kuala Lumpur, Dec 26:** Malaysia's influential former premier Najib Razak was jailed Friday for a further 15 years and fined \$2.8 billion for power abuse and money laundering in the biggest trial of the multibillion-dollar 1MDB scandal, a ruling that could have big political ramifications.

Malaysia and US investigators say at least \$4.5 billion was stolen from 1Malaysia Development Berhad, a state fund Najib co-founded in 2009 during the first of his nine years in power in the Southeast Asian country.

More than \$1 billion allegedly made its way into accounts linked to 72-year-old Najib, who was first imprisoned in 2022 in another 1MDB case and has long insisted he has been made the scapegoat for Malaysia's biggest-ever financial scandal.

During a verdict that took five hours to deliver, high court judge Collin Lawrence Sequerah said Najib's contention that he was repeatedly deceived by others at 1MDB was implausible and to believe that would "stretch the imagination into the realms of pure fantasy".

The ruling could fuel further tensions in Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's governing alliance, which includes the once dominant United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party, over which Najib has retained significant influence even from jail.

On a day of reckoning for arguably Malaysia's most divisive politician, Najib was found guilty of all four counts of abuse of power and all 21 money laundering charges, after a marathon legal battle that included multiple appeals and a partial royal pardon.

## JUSTICE FOR HADI'S KILLING

## Protesters block key Dhaka junction



## BNP's Tarique Rahman visits his father's grave

**Dhaka/New Delhi:** BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman Friday visited the grave of his father and Bangladesh's former president Ziaur Rahman in Dhaka, a day after he returned home from self-exile in the UK. Rahman reached Zia Udayan in a red-and-green bulletproof bus and paid floral tributes at the grave, offering 'dua' and 'munajat' for the eternal peace of his father's soul, news portal bangla.daily-sun.com reported. The 60-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader returned to the country Thursday after over 17 years. He has been living in London since 2008. This is the first time in almost 19 years that Rahman has paid tribute at his father's grave, news portal tbsnews.net reported.

street protest dubbed the July Uprising that toppled the Hasina-led government.

He later floated the Inqilab Mancha. Hadi was a candidate for the scheduled parliamentary election in February.

He was shot in the head by masked gunmen December 12 in Dhaka. Six days later, he died at a Singapore hospital.

## Trisha Mukherjee wins Rupert Cornwell Prize

AGENCIES



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New York, Dec 26:** The fifth Rupert Cornwell Prize for Journalism has been won by Trisha Mukherjee, a freelance journalist based in New York.

The annual award is aimed at younger journalists at the start of their careers. Ms Mukherjee, beat an exceptionally talented group of applicants with her proposed series of stories about the US-Mexican border.

The prize was established in memory of Rupert Cornwell, the distinguished foreign correspondent and writer who died in 2017. The goal is to help fund a suitable journalistic project in any of the broad regions Cornwell spent much of his career covering – North America, Europe and the Soviet Union.

The £5,000 prize is supported by The Independent and is awarded by the Rupert Cornwell Trust. "It's a true honor to be awarded this year's Rupert Cornwell prize. I am deeply inspired by Mr. Cornwell's tenacious and incisive journalism. Reporting from anywhere,

he knew how to make each sentence sing. I hope to carry forth his inimitable spirit in my own reporting at the US-Mexico border and beyond," Ms Mukherjee said. On behalf of the judges and the trust, Cornwell's widow Susan, a former US Congressional correspondent for Reuters, praised Ms Mukherjee's "topical, detailed and well-researched" proposal.

"Trisha's pitch showed her to be a talented and sensitive writer. The judges were also impressed with her focus on global human rights and her desire to create a more compassionate world through stories," Cornwell said.

Ms Mukherjee has contributed to the New York Times and Business Insider.

After Friday prayers, leaders and supporters of Inqilab Moncho and July Moncho, joined by students and members of the public, brought out a protest procession from the Dhaka University Central Mosque and marched towards Shahbagh, where they staged a sit-in demonstration, The Daily Star newspaper reported.

Md Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, said the agitators began blocking the intersection at around 2:30 pm local time and traffic has remained suspended since then.

The protesters blocked the main roads at Shahbagh, bringing vehicular movement in the area to a complete halt.

Addressing the demonstrators, Inqilab Moncho Member Secretary Abdullah Al Jaber said the group would continue the blockade until justice was ensured for Hadi's killing, adding that protesters were prepared to stay overnight at the site if necessary.

"From today, we declare this Shahbagh as 'Shaheed Osman Hadi Chattar'. Our movement will not leave the streets until justice is ensured for Hadi's killing," Al Jaber was quoted as saying by The Dhaka Tribune newspaper.

Shahbagh is a strategic junction connecting several key parts of Dhaka, and blockades there often cause widespread traffic congestion across the city. Hadi, a staunch critic of India alongside the Awami League, was one of the leaders of last year's violent student-led

justice is ensured for Hadi's killing," Al Jaber was quoted as saying by The Dhaka Tribune newspaper.

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## Russia plans a nuclear power plant on the moon within a decade

REUTERS



space vehicles - once a Russian speciality.

## IS THAT A NUCLEAR REACTOR ON THE MOON?

Russia's state space corporation, Roscosmos, said in a statement that it planned to build a lunar power plant by 2036 and signed a contract with the Lavochkin Association aerospace company to do it.

Roscosmos did not say explicitly that the plant would be nuclear but it said the participants included Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom and the Kurchatov Institute, Russia's leading nuclear research institute.

Roscosmos said the purpose of the plant was to power Russia's lunar programme, including rovers, an observatory and the infrastructure of the joint Russian-Chinese International

Lunar Research Station.

"The project is an important step towards the creation of a permanently functioning scientific lunar station and the transition from one-time missions to a long-term lunar exploration programme," Roscosmos said.

the plans. He added that the United States was currently behind in the race to the moon.

He said energy was essential to allow life to be sustained on the moon and thence for humans to get to Mars.

International rules ban putting nuclear weapons in space but there are no bans on putting nuclear energy sources into space - as long as they comply with certain rules.

Some space analysts have predicted a lunar gold rush: NASA says there are estimates of a million tonnes of Helium-3, an isotope of helium that is rare on earth, on the moon.

Rare earth metals - used in smartphones, computers and advanced technologies - are also present on the moon, including scandium, yttrium and the 15 lanthanides, according to research by Boeing.

Russia plans a power plant on the moon

Plant will power joint Russian-Chinese research

US also plans a nuclear reactor on the moon

Russia's Sean Duffy said in August, when asked about



**THE PATHWAY**  
The pathway ahead demands sustained demand creation, policy stability and bold investments. These will determine whether India not only meets its goals but sets a new benchmark in competitive, low-carbon steelmaking

NAVEEN JINDAL | PRESIDENT, INDIAN STEEL ASSOCIATION

**TITAN ENTERS LAB-GROWN DIAMOND BIZ**

Titan Co, the country's leading jewellery maker, on Friday announced its entry into the lab-grown diamond segment, under the brand name of "beYon". Focusing on the emerging segment of affordable lab-grown diamonds in the country, the company will open a store in Mumbai December 29

**Total small business credit touch ₹46L-cr**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Aggregate small business credit exposure has reached Rs 46 lakh crore, an increase of 16 per cent as of September 30, a report said.

"Active loan accounts have grown by 11.8 per cent to 7.3 crore. Policy support and multiple government credit schemes for MSMEs have helped sustain this momentum," CRIF High Mark-SIDBI Report said.

Portfolio quality has improved across segments, it said, adding that loans overdue by 91 to 180 days declined to around 1.4 per cent as of September 2025, from 1.7 per cent in September 2023, it said.

Enterprises continue to show lower risk profiles. Sole proprietors have also seen steady improvement and the share of very low and low-risk borrowers increased between September 2023 and September 2025, supported by better underwriting practices and wider use of digital data.

"Sole proprietors continue to dominate the credit ecosystem. They account for around 80 per cent of total credit and nearly 90 per cent of borrowers. The fastest-growing segment is sole proprietors with an entity presence. This segment has grown by 20 per cent year-on-year, led largely by loans against property," it said. As of September 2025, 23.3 per cent of borrowers were new to credit and 12 per cent were new to enterprise borrowing and this points to increasing formalisation, it added.

For enterprises, working capital loans dominate and account for nearly 57 per cent of outstanding credit.

Term loans continue to support capital expenditure. Among sole proprietors, loans against property remain the largest category, followed by business loans and commercial vehicle loans. Unsecured lending has grown by 31 per cent year-on-year, even amid concerns around stress.

**PROFIT TAKING****INDICES TRIM WEEKLY GAINS**

REUTERS

**Mumbai, Dec 26:** Indian equities eased Friday as investors locked in gains near record highs, with thin year-end participation and persistent foreign selling keeping risk appetite in check

The Nifty 50 index fell 0.38% to 26,042.3, while the BSE Sensex index shed 0.43% to 85,041.45.

The session's moves trimmed the weekly uptick in the Nifty and Sensex, which rose 0.3% and 0.1%, respectively, snapping a three-week losing run.

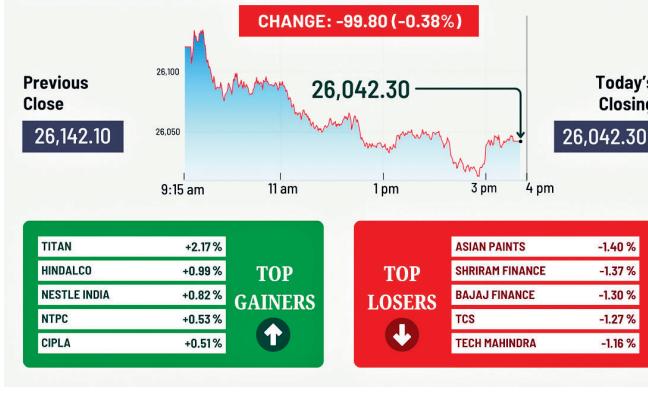
"The consolidation near record-high levels continued this week due to the lack of fresh triggers and muted year-end activity," said Siddhartha Khemka, head of research of wealth management at Motilal Oswal Financial Services.

The average daily trading volumes of Nifty 50 stocks in December has been around 250 million shares, compared with about 300 million shares the previous month.

After touching fresh peaks in November, helped by improving earnings expectations, steady growth and supportive policy

**NSE NIFTY**

DECEMBER 26, 2025

**Gold, silver smash all-time peaks again**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Silver prices soared by Rs 9,350 to hit a fresh lifetime high of Rs 2,36,350 per kilogram in the national capital Friday, tracking strong global cues, according to the All India Sarafra Association.

The white metal had closed at Rs 2,27,000 per kilogram Wednesday.

Over the past the four sessions, silver prices have added Rs 32,250, or 15.8 per cent, from Rs 20,400 per kilogram since December 19.

During the calendar year, the white metal had risen Rs 1,46,650, or 163.5 per cent, from Rs 89,700 per kg recorded December 31, 2024.

Meanwhile, gold prices maintained their upward momentum in the local bullion market. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity jumped Rs 1,500 to touch a new record of Rs 1,42,300 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes).

It had finished at Rs 1,40,800 per 10 grams in the previous market session.

So far this year, gold prices have added Rs 63,350, or 80.24 per cent, from Rs 78,950 per 10 grams recorded December 31, 2024.

"The precious metals rally continued on the last trading day of the week, with gold and silver reaching new record highs once again," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold rose \$50.87, or 1.13 per cent, to hit a new lifetime high of \$4,530.42 per ounce.

"Gold continues to trade at a record high of \$4,530 per ounce, buoyed by the Fed rate cut expectations and positive under-tone in the commodities market.

This trend has been intensified by the low liquidity that is

**GOLD & SILVER**

10g = ₹1,42,300\*



1kg = ₹2,36,500\*



Spot gold prices for 24-carat in Delhi for per 10 grams

Source: All India Sarafra Association

Silver prices are in national capital for per kg

\*Provisional

**GOLD GLITTERS**

- The yellow metal jumped Rs 1,500 to touch a new record of Rs 1,42,300 per 10 grams
- So far this year, gold prices have added Rs 63,350, or 80.24 per cent, from Rs 78,950 per 10 grams recorded December 31, 2024

**SILVER SURGE**

- The white metal soars Rs 9,350 to record Rs 2.36 lakh/kg in Delhi; crosses ₹75/ounce mark in int'l markets
- During the calendar year, the white metal had risen Rs 1,46,650, or 163.5 per cent, from Rs 89,700 per kg recorded December 31, 2024

Thin trading condition due to the year-end holidays is exacerbating the moves," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities and Currencies, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Spot silver rose to hit \$75 per ounce-mark for the first time in the overseas trade. The white metal climbed 43.72, or 5.18 per cent, to touch a new record of \$75.63 per ounce in overseas trade.

"Spot silver hit a high of \$75 during the Asian trading hours on Friday. The strong bullish momentum has attracted more momentum-driven traders, who have been active in the precious metals market since early December," Saumil Gandhi of HDFC Securities said.

This trend has been intensified by the low liquidity that is

near the year-end and Christmas holiday season, he added.

Jigar Trivedi, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities, said silver has been in a multi-year supply deficit, global mine output has lagged demand, and above-ground inventories are declining.

He further stated that structural tightness on the physical market could support much higher prices if deficits deepen. Silver is crucial in solar panels, EVs, 5G/AI electronics, and other clean-tech infrastructure.

As these sectors grow, industrial demand may outpace supply further, tightening markets, Trivedi, said, adding that other catalysts are weak dollar and rising safe haven demand could push silver prices to \$100 per ounce in 2026.

**BIPF felicitates recipients of Prof Ghanashyam Dash Scholarship**

POST NEWS NETWORK



**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** The Bansidhar & Ila Panda Foundation (BIPF) Friday felicitated the recipients of the 21st edition of the 'Professor Ghanashyam Dash Scholarship for Higher Education' (PGDS) for the academic year 2025-26.

This year, five meritorious students have been selected under the prestigious scholarship. Four recipients are pursuing MBBS-Chumki Jena (AIIMS Bhubaneswar), Annapurna Chakrabarty (SCB Medical College & Hospital, Cuttack), Gyana Ranjan Behera (Jagannath Medical College & Hospital, Puri) and Dhableswar Pujari (Saheed Laxman Nayak Medical College & Hospital, Koraput). Naba Jyoti Giri has been selected for pur-

suing B.Tech in Computer Science at NIT Rourkela.

Instituted in 2005 by IMFA, the scholarship is named after renowned historian Late Professor Ghanashyam Dash, father of late Ila Panda, with the objective of enabling equal access to higher education through financial assistance.

The scholarship supports students pursuing professional degrees in engineering, medicine, STEM and liberal arts, covering up to 90 per cent of academic fees and eligible expenses, amounting to Rs 6 lakh per recipient over a four-year course.

Since 2016, BIPF has been

administering the scholarship and has strengthened it by introducing 'UTSAAH', a structured mentorship programme. Under this initiative, scholars receive mentoring through 20 modules focusing on academics, career planning, mental wellness, AI skills, leadership, communication and life skills.

Congratulating the scholars, Shaifulika Panda, Trustee and Founder CEO of BIPF, said, "Education is fundamental; for every individual educated, the impact uplifts families and transforms entire communities. By supporting meritorious students, we fuel their potential to become enablers of national growth. Through mentorship, we aim to equip them with leadership qualities and agile skills to navigate an evolving world."

**BoM opens 62nd branch in Ganjam**

POST NEWS NETWORK



**Bhubaneswar, Dec 26:** Bank of Maharashtra, one of India's leading public sector banks, expanded its footprint in Odisha with the inauguration of a new branch at Humma in Ganjam district.

With this addition, the bank now operates six branches in Ganjam and a total of 62 branches across the state.

The new Humma branch was inaugurated by Ali Kishore Pattnaik, Managing Director of Odisha Diesel Pvt Ltd, in the presence of Dilip Kumar Raulo, Zonal Manager, Bhubaneswar Zone; Sanjib Kumar Dash, Deputy Zonal Manager and G Sai Sankar, Branch Manager, Humma. Addressing the gathering, Pattnaik appreciated the role of public sector banks in supporting local economic de-

velopment and financial inclusion. He encouraged residents and entrepreneurs of Humma and surrounding areas to actively avail themselves of the banking products and benefits offered by public sector banks to support personal and business growth.

Commenting on the expansion, Dilip Kumar Raulo said the new branch reflects the bank's commitment to strengthening its presence in Odisha.

**Govt to sharpen focus on steel output as 2030 target nears**

*The industry has added a record 15 MT of capacity over the past three to four quarters, with another 5 MT likely by the end of FY2026*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

when India is the world's second-largest crude steel producer, and steel demand continues to be supported by strong infrastructure spending, housing, railways, automobiles, defence manufacturing and capital goods under government initiatives such as PM Gati Shakti, National Infrastructure Pipeline, and Make in India.

However, the industry is also bracing for continued challenges in 2025, including rising imports, volatile raw material prices and global trade uncertainties. Imports, particularly from Asian markets, remain a concern for domestic producers despite safeguard and anti-dumping measures already in place.

In May 2017, the government unveiled the ambitious National Steel Policy (NSP), targeting the addition of over 200 MT of steelmaking capacity with investments estimated at around Rs 10 lakh crore.

Alongside capacity expansion, the emphasis will remain on the adoption of low-carbon technologies, the development of green steel capacity and the production of special and high-end steel grades to meet the evolving needs of domestic industries and export markets, a steel ministry official said.

The push comes at a time



According to steel ministry data, India's steel production capacity rose from 97 MT in 2012-13 to 138 MT in 2017-18, and has since expanded steadily with significant brownfield and greenfield investments by both public and private sector players.

As per data research firm BigMint, India's installed steelmaking capacity was 235 MT as of November 2025, and it is estimated to remain at around the same levels by FY26. The

imposition of safeguard duties and anti-dumping duties on imports of flat steel products from countries such as China and Vietnam.

To promote value-added steel, the ministry has rolled out the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, offering fiscal incentives for the manufacturing of high-end and speciality steel used in sectors such as defence, power transmission, renewable energy, automobiles and aviation.

The government is also focusing on strengthening raw material availability. "New reserves of coking coal are being explored, and we are engaging with resource-rich countries to diversify sourcing," the official said.

For iron ore, auctions are already underway, and steelmakers are encouraged to participate. The ministry is also promoting beneficiation and pelletisation of low-grade iron ore to improve resource efficiency.

With just five years left to meet NSP targets, industry

leaders say momentum must accelerate.

Industry body Assocham noted that while the government support has been significant, challenges such as rising coking coal costs, high logistics expenses, limited availability of railway rakes and infrastructure bottlenecks continue to weigh on the sector.

In the new year, Assocham expects a pickup in steel demand and does not anticipate further relaxation of quality control orders (QCOs). It also flagged growing trade barriers globally.

"Trade restrictions imposed by other countries on Indian steel exports are increasing. Some relief could emerge if free trade agreements with the EU and the US are concluded, supporting the domestic industry," it said.

On the green steel transition, PHDCCI Secretary General Ranjeet Mehta said it remains a highly capital-intensive industry, with greenfield capacity requiring very large investments per tonne.

# Suryavanshi conferred with Rashtriya Bal Puraskar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** The 14-year-old batting prodigy Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who has taken the cricket world by storm with his audacious stroke-play, and seven-year-old chess prodigy Vaka Lakshmi Pragnika were among a host of children who were Friday conferred with the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar by President Droupadi Murmu here.

Swimming sensation Dhinidhi Desinghu was also among the recipients of the award given for exceptional achievements in the field of sports, bravery, social service and environment.

Just a few days back, Suryavanshi slammed 190 runs off 84 deliveries, studded with 16 fours and 15 sixes, for Bihar



against Arunachal Pradesh in a Vijay Hazare Trophy Plate group match in Ranchi.

With that effort, he became the youngest male cricketer to score a century in List A cricket at just 14 years and 272 days. He reached the three-figure mark off just 36 balls.

Suryavanshi's unprecedented batting saw Bihar pile up 574 for 6, the highest total ever recorded in List A cricket.

Earlier in the year, Suryavanshi became the youngest centurion in men's T20 cricket when he smashed 101 off 38 balls for Rajasthan Royals against Gujarat

Titans an IPL game in Jaipur. His hundred, which came off 35 deliveries, was the second-fastest in IPL history. The India U-19 cricketer had slammed a century in a four-day game against Australia Under-19 this year.

Hailing from Surat in Gujarat, Pragnika won the Under-7 Girls title at the 2025 FIDE

World Schools Chess Championship in Serbia, where she scored a perfect 9 out of 9 points.

Karnataka swimmer Dhinidhi had qualified for the 2024 Paris Olympics in women's 200m freestyle, becoming the country's youngest athlete at the quadrennial showpiece.

## Honour for Jyotsna

Odisha's 17-year-old Weightlifting Champion Jyotsna Sabar has also been conferred with the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar by the President. The Gajapati girl has been bestowed with this honour for setting the Asian Youth Record and winning medals at World, Asian, and Commonwealth Championships. Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi congratulated Jyotsna for this feat. Taking to X, Majhi wrote, "Heartiest congratulations to Jyotsna Sabar, the pride of Odisha, on being conferred the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar by Hon'ble President Smt Droupadi Murmu Ji. Rising from a remote tribal region in Gajapati, Jyotsna's journey to the pinnacle of international weightlifting is truly extraordinary."



## VIJAY HAZARE

# Rajesh scripts history as Odisha outclass Services



The bowler claimed a hat-trick and became the first bowler from Odisha to do so in List A cricket

nak, who played a measured and unbeaten knock of 32 off 69 balls, anchoring the chase with maturity. Rajesh Mohanty chipped in with a handy 12 off 13 balls, including a six, to push Odisha closer to the target.

Odisha eventually reached 84 for 6 in 24.3 overs, sealing a comfortable four-wicket win. The match highlighted Odisha's bowling depth and game awareness, setting a confident tone for their Vijay Hazare Trophy campaign.

## Kohli pips Bevan to own 'world record'



The "King" Virat Kohli has claimed another throne as he slammed a 77-run knock for Delhi in the Vijay Hazare Trophy match against Gujarat in Bangalore Friday. Kohli has officially broken one of the most long-standing world records in 50-over cricket, surpassing the legendary Australian finisher Michael Bevan to become the highest-averaging batter in the history of List A cricket (minimum 5,000 runs). While Kohli has long been compared to Sachin Tendulkar for his century-scoring prowess, his latest feat solidifies his status as the most efficient run-scorer the game has ever seen. Following his blistering 77 off 61 balls against Gujarat in the Vijay Hazare Trophy at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, Kohli's career List A average has risen to 57.87, narrowly eclipsing Bevan's iconic mark of 57.86. Since his continuity in the One-day format has been questioned, Kohli has ascended to the top of this run-scoring chart, averaging nearly 150 over the last 6 games in the 50-over format. In this six-match stretch, Kohli has amassed 584 runs at an astronomical average of 146.00.

# Women in Blue pocket series

Shafali's blitz after Renuka, Deepti show powers easy win over Sri Lanka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Star all-rounder Deepti Sharma etched her name into global cricket folklore, becoming the first-ever cricketer across men's and women's games to register 1,000 runs and 150 wickets in T20Is

Lankan top order and swinging the momentum decisively in India's favour.

The ever-reliable Deepti (3/18) provided excellent support with timely breakthroughs and also joined Australia's Megan Schutt as the highest wicket-taker in women's T20Is, claiming her 151st scalp in the format.

Chasing the modest target, the big-hitting Shafali picked up from where she had left off

in the previous match, going all guns blazing to register her second consecutive half-century.

After facing three dot balls, the explosive opener danced down the track to clobber a towering 83-metre six over long-off, following it up with back-to-back boundaries through mid-wicket and mid-off.

Timing the ball to perfection, she punished the Sri Lankan bowlers with an entertaining

knock, smashing 11 boundaries and three sixes.

Spinner Kavisha Dilhari (2/18) briefly stalled India's momentum by removing vice-captain Smriti Mandhana's (1), whose lean patch continued, and Jemimah Rodrigues, but the outcome was never in doubt with Shafali finishing it off in style with a boundary.

### BRIEF SCORES

**Sri Lanka:** 112 for 7 in 20 overs. (Imesha Dulani 27, Hasini Perera 25; Renuka Singh 4/21, Deepti Sharma 3/18) lost to **India:** 115 for 2 in 13.2 overs (Shafali Verma 79 not out; Kavisha Dilhari 2/18) by eight wickets.

## Suraj shoots golden double

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 26:** Team Odisha played its third match of the 79th National Football Championship for Santosh Trophy 2025-26 against Chhattisgarh and registered a 3-1 victory to qualify for the final round of the championship held here Friday.

Suraj began the senior final in dominant fashion, hitting 19 of his first 20 targets, and went on to close the contest with 31 hits, finishing three clear of defending champion Vijayveer Sidhu of Punjab, who settled for the silver medal with 28 hits.

Rajasthan's Bhavesh Shekharwati rounded off the podium, claiming bronze with a total of 24 hits. Earlier in the qualification round, Ankur Goel topped the standings with a strong score of 582-20x.

Odisha showed dominant display in their final group game by earning a two goal cushion before the first half ended. Forward Jitu Muduli (32) led the attack to fire the first blow to Chhattisgarh, while midfielder Chandra Mohan Murmu (37) added another.

After the halftime, in only five minutes, Chhattisgarh's

midfielder Avishek Kunjam (51) got their first goal to shake Odisha's defense.

However, captain and forward



Kartik Hantal (64) of Odisha got them a two goal margin again after adding the third goal.

Chhattisgarh showed frustration, collecting two yellow cards in the second half af-

ter going down 3-1. The team showed moments of promise, particularly through their wide players and set-piece situations.

Odisha moved into the final round undefeated as the team

grabbed the pole position in Group F after winning all three games. Despite the scoreline, the win provides a strong platform heading into their final round with boosting confidence.

## Odisha storm into final round of Santosh Trophy

POST NEWS NETWORK

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But they would have been well pleased with their work in the field early on, rattling through Australia in 45.2 overs.

The alarm bells were soon ringing, however, as their top order collapsed before they were bowled out in 29.5 overs.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan labelled the pitch a "shocker" but Australia seamer Michael Neser, who led his team's bowling with 4-45 and batting with 35, had no complaints.

"We know it can move real fast day one and two, and then once that wicket hardens up and dries out, it can be quite nice to bat on," he told reporters.

## Ashes batters run for cover on manic Day 1

REUTERS

**Melbourne, Dec 26:** Australia finished marginally on top at the end of a chaotic opening day of the fourth Ashes test after an extraordinary 20 wickets fell in front of a record crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground Friday.

Australia nightwatchman Scott Boland was four not out with Travis Head yet to score as the hosts went to stumps at four for no loss in their second innings, carrying a 46-run lead over England.

With England bowled out for 110 in reply to Australia's first innings 152, it was the highest number of wickets in a single day at the MCG since a record



25 fell in the 1902 Ashes.

Josh Tongue took a career-best 5-45 to skittle Australia on the grassy pitch after En-

gland captain Ben Stokes won the toss and elected to field in the traditional Boxing Day test.

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**Vijayavanshi, Shruti send top two seeds packing to reach semis**



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Surya, Shruti send top two seeds packing to reach semis**

Producing major upsets, local favourite Surya Charishma Tamari and seasoned campaigner Shruti Mundada ousted the top two seeds -- Unnati Hooda and Anupama Upadhyaya -- in straight games to advance to the women's singles semi-finals of the Senior National Badminton Championships, here Friday.

Surya was in complete control against top seed Unnati, sealing a 21-12, 21-15 quarter-final win in 36 minutes, while Shruti accounted for second seed and former national champion Anupama 22-20, 21-12 in a 39-minute contest.

In the semi-finals, Surya will face Rakshita Sree after the 18-year-old came from a game down to beat world junior champion Shruti Mundada, who won 21-16, 21-19.