



Fashion impact

Actor Bhumi Pednekar opens up about the special place fashion holds in her life

LEISURE | **P2**



Thailand, Cambodia truce

Thailand and Cambodia end weeks of fierce border clashes with a second ceasefire in recent months in the worst fighting in years

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Record SIP inflows

Investors pour over ₹3 lakh crore into mutual fund schemes through SIP, for the first time in a calendar year

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Long wait ends

England celebrate their first Test win in Australia in 15 years as they chase down 175 runs for a four-wicket Ashes victory

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MGNREGA repeal: Cong to launch nationwide stir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Congress will launch a nationwide campaign against the repeal of the UPA-era rural employment legislation MGNREGA January 5, similar to the pushback against the three farm laws which eventually forced the Narendra Modi government to rollback its decision, party president Mallikarjun Kharge said.

At a press conference here Saturday after a meeting of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), Kharge said the party will lead the 'MGNREGA Bachao Abhiyan' across the country.

The VB-G RAM G Bill, replacing the 20-year-old MGNREGA, was passed in Parliament during the recently concluded Winter Session of Parliament amid vociferous protests by the Opposition. The new law has a provision for 125 days of wage employment for rural workers.

Kharge said the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was not just a scheme, but the 'Right to

Work' given by the Constitution.

"People are angry over the repeal of MGNREGA. The government will have to face the consequences," he said.

"At the CWC meeting, we took an oath that a campaign would be launched with MGNREGA as its focal point. The Congress would take the lead and start a "MGNREGA Bachao Abhiyan" from January 5," Kharge said.

He said party leaders took an oath of protecting MGNREGA at any cost.

"We will fight unitedly for the rights of rural labourers to dignity, employment, wages and timely payment and will protect the rights of demand-based employment and gram sabha," he said.

Kharge said the Congress would democratically oppose the "conspiracy" to erase Mahatma Gandhi's name from MGNREGA and to "convert the rights of workers into charity".

"This law has been brought to crush the poor. We will fight against it on the streets and in Parliament," he said.

P9

WAR-RAVAGED

Firefighters work at the site of an apartment building hit during Russian missile and drone strikes in Kyiv, Saturday (**Report on P10**)

REUTERS

Green stickers must for vehicles

CASH PAYMENT AGAINST E-CHALLANS

Bhubaneswar: The State Transport Authority (STA) has instructed all RTOs to accept cash payments against e-challans issued to motorists for traffic violations, officials said. The move comes in the wake of complaints by vehicle owners stating that they were facing difficulties in making online payment of fines due to problems such as non-receipt of one-time passwords (OTP) and change of mobile numbers linked to the system. Under the new arrangement, a designated officer will be responsible for accepting e-challan payments at RTO offices. Only the vehicle owner or the defaulter will be allowed to make payment for active e-challan dues, a transport department officer said. After receiving the e-challan, a money receipt will be issued and the payment will also be updated online. The money received for e-challan will be deposited in the government treasury on the next working day, he said. For online payments, one can use the transport department (mParivahan) application and <https://echallan.parivahan.gov.in/>.

Jena said Saturday.

Addressing the media, Jena said vehicles without a valid PUC certificate would face strict action under the Motor Vehicles Act. He added that vehicle owners would be required to carry all mandatory documents at all times. The announcement comes amid public concern over the enforcement drive against vehicles whose PUC certificates had expired. The transport department had begun imposing fines of ₹10,000 on such vehicles, with penalties being issued through camera-based systems installed at toll gates, even without

on-road document checks. The move triggered anxiety among motorists and led to long queues at pollution testing centres across the state.

Following complaints from the public, the government extended the intensified checking process until February.

From then on, Jena said, green stickers would be issued only to vehicles that comply with pollution norms. The transport department will supply the stickers.

Jena clarified that both new and old vehicles are required to obtain PUC certificates and that compliance would be enforced strictly.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The state government has decided to make green stickers mandatory for all vehicles from February, with the facility available only to those holding a valid Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificate, Commerce and Transport Minister Bibhuti Bhushan

Mob attacks music concert in B'desh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 27: At least 20 students were injured in a mob attack in Bangladesh that forced the cancellation of a concert by popular rock singer James, who has also sung several hit Hindi film songs, officials and organisers have said. The incident occurred Friday night in Faridpur, amid a recent spate of attacks on cultural institutions in the country.

In recent weeks, organisations such as Chhayanaut and Udichi Shilpi Goshthi in Dhaka have been vandalised. James' concert was to mark the closing of Faridpur Zilla School's 185th anniversary celebrations. The programme was to be held late at night on a temporary stage set up within the school premises, news portal tbsnews.net reported.

However, just before the programme was due to begin, a group of outsiders tried to force entry after being turned away, throwing bricks and stones and attempting to

Tight security in Puri, Bhub for New Year

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The Odisha Police has made tight security arrangements in pilgrim town Puri and Bhubaneswar for New Year celebration.

With over 3.54 lakh devotees expected to visit Puri's Jagannath temple on New Year's day, comprehensive security, traffic, crowd management, and emergency preparedness measures have been taken, a police officer said Saturday.

The Odisha Police have mobilised a force of 60 platoons of police personnel, supervised by a specialised command structure comprising 10 additional SPs, 33 DSPs, and 62 inspectors, and 245 sub-inspectors for crowd control in Puri, he said.

The Commissionerate Police has also made tight security arrangements to ensure a safe and enjoyable night for revelers in Bhubaneswar city. Police Commissioner Suresh Dev Datta Singh said 15 platoons of police force will be deployed for security, with a focus on traffic management and law and order.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

Your regime is so good that people can't stop remembering former PMs

Differently-abled woman raped

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: A physically challenged woman was allegedly raped in Puri district, police said Saturday.

The incident happened Friday night in the Brahmagiri police station area, they said.

A middle-aged man allegedly forcibly entered the woman's house and raped her when other family mem-

bers were away, according to the complaint.

The accused has been detained, police said, adding that a case has been lodged under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

The victim has undergone a medical examination, and her statement has been recorded, they said.

BJD leader Sanjay Das Burma demanded stringent action against the accused.

All-woman squad to protect wildlife

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The state government has inducted a five-member all-woman squad for the protection of forest and animals in Debrigarh Wildlife Sanctuary, officials said Saturday.

For the first time, an all-woman squad has been inducted into the force in the sanctuary.

Of the freshly inducted personnel, four hail from tribal families living in villages situated on the foothills of the wildlife sanctuary, DFO, Hirakud division, Anshu Pragyan Das said.

Since childhood, they have spent their time wandering in the forests and have witnessed increasing human pressure on the sanctuary, cases of electrocution of animals due

ing, she added.

The all-woman squad will start working in the sanctuary from January 1, Das said.

Anjali Topno, a member of the squad, said, "I feel honoured to be a part of the Debrigarh enforcement unit. I am financially independent now, and would also be able to support my family. Everyone will look at me with pride as I am contributing towards the protection of Debrigarh sanctuary and saving this forest for our future generations."

"We wanted an all-woman enforcement squad, as many of our frontline staffers are women living inside the sanctuary. This move will motivate villagers to protect the sanctuary," Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) PK Jha said.

to the erection of wires by residents of peripheral villages to protect their crops, and also the Odisha-Chhattisgarh cross-border trade of wildlife animals and their parts, she said.

"The women have been selected because of their commitment to wildlife and forest protection, fearless at-



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FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Today you will go overboard trying to spruce up your looks. You attempt to imbibe new looks. A very desirable date will raise high expectations in you and will keep you on the edge of your seat. Ganesha advises you to take it easy as real relationships are not measured by outward expressions.

TAURUS
Today, you may experience the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain. Household tasks may weigh you down around afternoon. Later in the day, you will be able to achieve whatever you desire solely on account of your determination and mental strength. Pleasure awaits in the warmth and company of your soul mate, says Ganesha.

GEMINI
For a one-tracked fish, you will do an amazing job in dividing your time between work and family. Despite your preoccupation with work, you will take time off for your family, and even plan out a small outing, leaving them pleasantly surprised. Also, your dreams are about to come true.

CANCER
You will spend your day reflecting on your past and thinking what went wrong, predicts Ganesha. But keep in mind that your mistakes won't lead to the end of the world, unless you are a nuclear scientist. So get your act together, and stop brooding over your mistakes.

LEO
The friends we make go a long way in making us who we are, says Ganesha. Over the years, with your natural instinct to be a social charmer, you have built a fine circle of dedicated friends on whom you can bank with confidence under any circumstance. Today might be a day when you get the opportunity to make use of such friendship.

VIRGO
Razor-sharp and aesthetic to the last cell in your body, entertain and enthral people with your guile, especially at a social do, says Ganesha. But conserve that zest and save the time to pay due attention to matters of supreme importance, warns Ganesha.

LIBRA
Monotonous is the word to describe the way things have been till now, but no more, says Ganesha. It might be a very good idea for you to take a break from things around you and go on a small trip. Invigorate yourself with a small picnic with family and friends.

SCORPIO
Investing in real estate could yield maximum profits today, says Ganesha. An unusual gain from speculative trade is also on the cards. But you may need to spend time in the waiting room, before a more profitable opportunity comes by.

SAGITTARIUS
Your friend base is slated to multiply today. At work, additional responsibilities will be thrust upon you, and you will also be given charge of new resources. Ganesha predicts you taking up the challenge and emerging triumphant in all spheres today.

CAPRICORN
Planning strategic moves will be done with, and all that will remain is execution. But Ganesha says there may be delays in implementing ideas that are crucial to the success of your project, and this may leave you disappointed and dismayed. But the problem will be short-lived and you will have nothing to worry about as you have all it takes to be a winner.

AQUARIUS
Ganesha says it's okay to cry on somebody's shoulders. In fact, sharing problems lightens the load, and if nothing else, your friends will think you're as human as them. You will feel much better by evening and will even smile a little, says Ganesha.

PISCES
Needless rigidity only serves to imprison you within outmoded walls of faulty reasoning. Inculcating some flexibility will give you some much-needed wriggle room to manoeuvre things your way for good, says Ganesha.



I'M AN EASY CRIER: KATE HUDSON

Hollywood star Kate Hudson says she is an "easy crier". "I cry every day 'cause every time Hugh and I start talking about the movie, we get so emotional," Hudson told people.com of her new film based on the real-life of American singer and songwriter Neil Diamond.

WINSLET SHARES HER FIRST INTIMATE EXPERIENCES

Hollywood actress Kate Winslet has shed light on some of her "first intimate experiences". Talking about them, she has said that some of these experiences were same-sex. The actress revealed she was "curious" about obsessive relationship between two teenage girls, reports *Female First UK*.



Bhumi on impact of fashion in life

Mumbai: Actress Bhumi Pednekar used social media to open up about the special place fashion holds in her life.

The *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* actress shared that she uses fashion to express herself. She added that through everything life throws at her, fashion is something that has helped her stay rooted.

Sharing an album of some of her high-fashion moments, Bhumi wrote on her Instagram handle, "Fashion has been my quiet rebellion, my armor, my joy. Through love, hate, and every narrative formed around me, it's helped me stay rooted in who I am."

Expressing her gratitude to all the designers and stylists who have helped create her own style, the Shubh Mangal Savdhan actress added, "Grateful beyond words to the designers, to all the incredible stylists that worked with me, all makeup and hair artists, photographers, all assistants, master ji, dress dada and all magazine editors who shaped these moments."

Work-wise, Bhumi last graced the big screen with the film *Mere Husband Ki Biwi*, co-starring Arjun Kapoor and Rakul Preet Singh.

She was also a part of the OTT series, *The Royals*, where she essayed the role of a strong-willed entrepreneur, Sophia Shekhar.

AGENCIES



Suniel says 'no' to ₹40cr offer of endorsing tobacco brand

Mumbai: Suniel Shetty is now a grandfather but he continues to remain a huge inspiration for people for being so fit till date.

Though, Shetty admits that youngsters also consider him as inspiration despite the fact that he's no longer relevant at the movies or box office. Which is why, he refused a Rs 40 crore deal to endorse a tobacco brand, said the actor in a recent interview.

"I have been offered Rs 40 crore for a tobacco ad. I looked at him and said, 'Do you think I will fall for the money? I won't.' I probably needed that money, but no, I won't do it. It is something that I don't believe in. I won't do anything that will leave a blemish on Ahan and Athiya. Now nobody even dares to come to me with such offers." Suniel added, "I am not relevant when it comes to cinema or box office, but still 17-18 year olds look up to me. I get so much love and respect, it is unreal. So I am blessed, so will I do it for a few crores? No, I won't."

AGENCIES

Dhurandhar now the highest grossing Hindi film in India

Mumbai: On Friday, its 22nd day in theatres, *Dhurandhar* crossed another huge milestone. As it took its domestic earnings to ₹648 crore, the Aditya Dhar film became the highest-grossing Bollywood film in India, beating the mark set by Shah Rukh Khan's *Jawan* two years ago. *Dhurandhar* is now set to cross ₹700 crore domestically, and potentially even challenge *Pushpa 2: The Rule* for the highest collections by a Hindi film in India.

Dhurandhar started its fourth week at the ticket window with a net collection of just over ₹15 crore. This has taken its domestic collection to ₹648.50 crore net after 22

days. *Dhurandhar* is now at number 1 in the list of the highest-grossing Bollywood films domestically, having displaced Atlee's *Jawan*, which earned Rs 640 crore in 2023. The Ranveer Singh-starrer had earlier beaten the lifetime collections of Vicky Kaushal's *Chhaava* (₹601 crore) and Rajkummar Rao and Shraddha Kapoor's *Stree 2* (Rs 598 crore).

The other Bollywood films to have grossed over ₹500 crore net in India are *Animal* (Rs 553 crore), *Gadar 2* (₹525 crore), and *Pathaan* (₹543 crore). Shah Rukh Khan's *Pathaan* was the first Bollywood film to enter this club. Prior to that, the record had been held by Aamir Khan's

Dangal for seven years. The sports drama had netted Rs

387 crore in India in all languages.

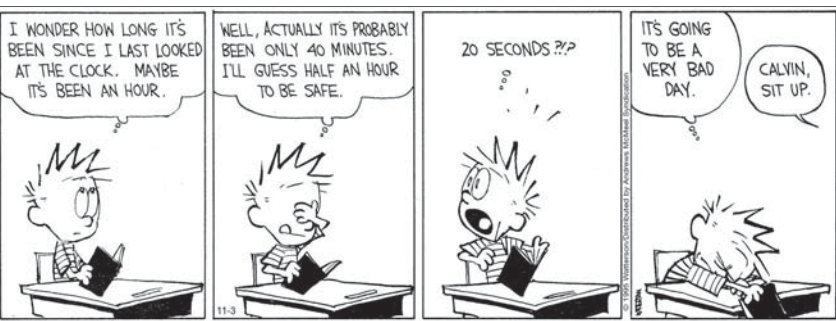
AGENCIES



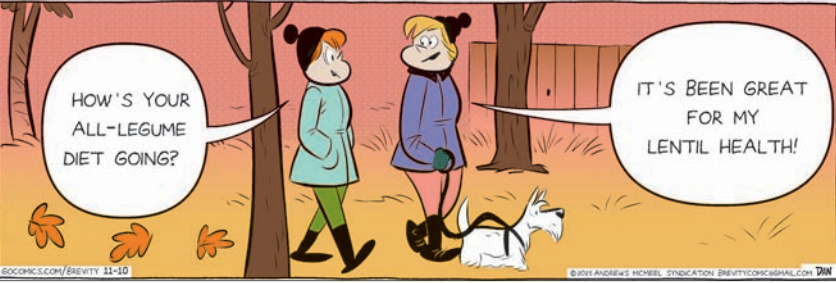
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

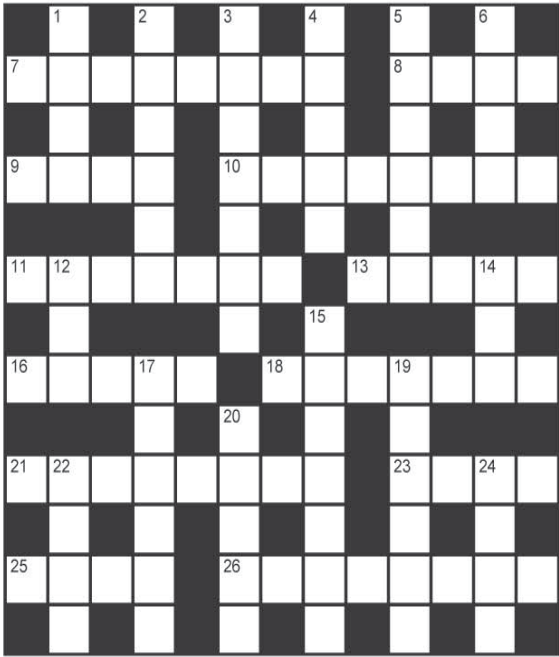


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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Across

- Beauty treatment
- Consumer
- Kind of surgeon
- Speak well of the dead
- Devour
- Eucalyptus eater
- Inclement

Down

- Place to hibernate
- Market features
- Relic repositories
- Hooligan
- Similar
- Cavort
- Cane toad
- Smart aleck

- Water sources
- Avid (4,2)
- Invoice amounts
- Egg cells
- Pastoral place
- Broad sword
- Unkempt
- Arrange
- Circus performer
- Mystique
- Filly's mother

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

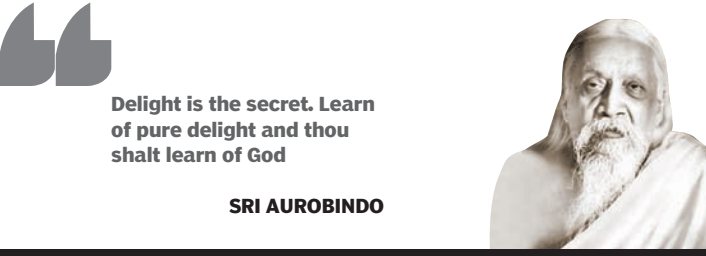
U	S	A	P	S	A
I	N	F	I	R	M
B	L	U	O	U	G
B	O	I	L	I	L
E	T	C	H	I	N
O	G	P	A		
G	R	I	P	E	F
E	U	A		X	
A	B	U	S	O	T
U	E	H	O	V	E
A	F	L	A	M	E
F	R	R	N	L	E

CROSSWORD

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



Silent Complicity

Intent has an ally in apathy. Intent seeks to take ground; apathy will kindly adjust. Intent is the Bharatiya Janata Party’s determination to implement its ideology. The party has the power of government and the backing of a significant number of Indians who want the ideology implemented. This number is actually a minority as every election has shown. But it is armed with intent.

Apathy is the inability of the rest of us, who are a majority, to resist it. The expectation, even from those who acknowledge the reality and its dangers, is that the problems created by government must be solved by checks and balances. That the Opposition, and Parliament and the justice system will manage the problem. But it has not so far and this New Year we are entering into will show again that it cannot.

To those who are new to this: What does the BJP’s ideology seek? It wants to persecute and harm minority Indians, Muslims and Christians, and that is about it. The ideology has no higher purpose and offers nothing of value other than going after fellow Indians. It exists as hate and expresses itself as hate. This emotion in inexhaustible and can renew itself and always find new ground to fight battles on. The New Year, 2026, will show this as well.

In 2025 we continued down a path we took more than a decade ago. Rajasthan became the eighth state to ban marriage between Hindus and Muslims. This happened in September, three months ago. In September 1935, Germany banned marriage between Jews and Christians. These relationships were labeled as “race defilement” (Rassenschande), to the horror of the world. India has done this through cleverly named laws that achieve the same thing. The law empowers a bureaucrat to determine whether an adult is entitled to change their faith. The other provisions in the law repeat or tighten the provisions made in similar laws the BJP has introduced over the last few years.

The intent was first shown in the 2018 Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act. This law had an innovation. It is aimed at preventing interfaith marriage by criminalising conversion but it makes an exemption for people to convert to their ‘ancestral religion’. The term was left undefined but readers will not require to be told what it means.

This law was passed and implemented. No resistance from the courts. Intent noted this and sought to take more ground. Similar laws came to Himachal Pradesh in 2019, Uttar Pradesh in 2020, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat in 2021, Haryana and Karnataka in 2022. Note that the government changed in Karnataka but the law remains. Intent will always win over apathy. Rajasthan became the eighth state and will not be the last.

Alert readers will observe how rapidly the space was occupied in a few years while reversal happened nowhere. The same story is repeated on the issue of beef. The first laws criminalising possession of beef came only in 2015 (by BJP governments in Maharashtra and Haryana). These laws and the discourse surrounding them produced a new category of violence: beef lynching. In my decades as a journalist, I had not heard of such a thing as a beef lynching before this but the act is now so commonplace as to be normal. There are endless murders all around us and apathy has adjusted to them, making space for intent. Gujarat, the laboratory which has now become a factory, passed a law in 2017 that made cattle slaughter punishable by life in prison. This is an economic offence, but no white collar crime attracts life. Those who steal billions can be rehabilitated as we are seeing happen before us.

A few weeks ago, Uttar Pradesh said it wanted the case against those accused of the first infamous lynching, that of Akhlaq in September 2015, to be withdrawn, because justice is offensive. The judge bravely refused this and the decade-old trial will continue but we have to turn to individual acts of courage in a land ruled generally by apathy. The total exclusion of 200 million Indian Muslims from power at the Centre is today as normal as it might be in a nation where discrimination is legal. Indians shrug their shoulders.

Intent will violently disrupt the annual festival of Christians and the rest of us will look on. Disapproval is not the same as action and intent takes violent action while apathy will pull out its cellphone and record.

A law criminalising the divorce of only one religion came in 2019, and for all the rest it remains a civil offence. A law excluding only one religion from the Citizenship Amendment Act also came in 2019. A law which prevents Indians of one religion from buying and renting property in Gujarat where even foreigners can, was tightened in 2019. We are told that India was at the forefront of fighting apartheid in South Africa but today we are comfortable with it being practised in our land. If we were not comfortable, if we were outraged, then we would do something about it. Kashmiri carpet seller lynching and Bangladeshi vendor lynching have joined beef lynching and we have been inert.

Intent will not relent because intent seeks to achieve something; apathy wants only to not be disturbed.

This New Year will bring, once again, a repetition of both intent and apathy.



Aakar Patel

RAJASTHAN BECAME THE EIGHTH STATE TO BAN MARRIAGE BETWEEN HINDUS AND MUSLIMS. THIS HAPPENED IN SEPTEMBER, THREE MONTHS AGO. IN SEPTEMBER 1935, GERMANY BANNED MARRIAGE BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS. THESE RELATIONSHIPS WERE LABELED AS “RACE DEFILEMENT” (RASSENSCHANDE), TO THE HORROR OF THE WORLD



Akihisa Nagashima

SAUDI ARABIA, WHICH HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN ITS OWN POWERFUL MILITARY MODERNIZATION, COULD ALSO BE WELCOMED INTO AN INDO-PACIFIC FRAMEWORK

We are living in an age of global disruption. Supply chains are being reconfigured to avoid dependence on any one producer or country. Trade ties are being upended by high and unpredictable tariffs (and the threat of more). Longstanding alliances are being strained by doubts about partners’ reliability.

Even the most peaceable of neighbors, like those in North America, now eye each other with suspicion. Meanwhile, many of the structures that, however imperfect, delivered relative peace, stability, and prosperity for more than eight decades have been so enfeebled that they can hardly be counted on to function at all.

Of course, not all disruption is bad. As this year’s Nobel laureate economists – Philippe Aghion, Peter Howitt, and Joel Mokyr – taught us, “creative destruction” is vital to economic dynamism and innovation. But a stable world order is built on creation, not destruction: the formation of strong multilateral institutions, robust alliances, resilient trade relationships, and durable shared norms, founded on the rule of law. The same is true of a stable regional order – a lesson the countries of the Indo-Pacific should take to heart.

Rather than turn a blind eye to proliferating instability, Indo-Pacific leaders should seek to realize the late Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō’s vision of a region that is open, united, stable, and secure. This process should build on existing frameworks, such as the “Quad,” comprising Japan, Australia, India, and the United States. Created as a multilateral response to the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the Quad was relaunched (under Abe’s leadership) in 2017 as a platform



Rather than turn a blind eye to proliferating instability, Indo-Pacific leaders should seek to realize the late Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzō’s vision of a region that is open, united, stable, and secure

for strategic cooperation, including joint military training and intelligence sharing.

That cooperative framework should now be expanded. Perhaps the most obvious candidate for membership is South Korea, which shares many security concerns with Japan and the US, holds military exercises with both countries, and increasingly shares intelligence with Japan.

Saudi Arabia, which has been engaged in its own powerful military modernization, could also be welcomed into an Indo-Pacific framework. Given the importance of oil exports to its economy, safeguarding maritime security in the Indian Ocean is of paramount interest. Moreover, as the Gulf’s dominant economy, it has plenty to offer Indo-Pacific partners, particularly as an entry point for other Gulf states.

No discussion of an Indo-Pacific institutional architecture is complete without the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which has earned a reputation for advancing its members’ economic and political development through cooperation, without impinging on their sovereignty. Over the last year, Malaysian Prime

Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who held ASEAN’s rotating chair until the end of October, sought to fortify the 11-member bloc through greater economic and commercial engagement, including increased investment ties.

At the same time, Anwar worked to deepen ASEAN’s relationships with the rest of Asia, including China, as well as with the US. And he contributed to the bloc’s expansion. By welcoming Timor-Leste as a member, ASEAN both reduced the risk of a revival of tensions with Indonesia and extended its influence deeper into the western Pacific.

A bold expansion into the Indian Ocean would open unique opportunities for ASEAN and enhance Indo-Pacific stability. Sri Lanka’s accession, for example, would mean gaining an ASEAN outpost in the middle of the Indian Ocean, which would facilitate increased trade and investment ties with India, Africa, and the Gulf. It is thus good news that Sri Lanka, said to be considering a bid for membership in the bloc, is already seeking to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties with ASEAN countries through a Sectoral Dialogue Partnership.

Despite its successes, ASEAN is under considerable pressure. Beyond the civil war ravaging Myanmar, border clashes between Cambodia and Thailand – which Anwar helped to tamp down earlier this year – recently erupted again. But this conflict may not be intractable. A contact group composed of Japan and India, working alongside Anwar, might provide the diplomatic heft necessary to resolve the dispute. As the old adage goes, sometimes the only way to solve a problem is to broaden it.

Other piecemeal efforts to strengthen regional ties are also gaining steam. As punishing US tariffs undermine the competitiveness of Indian exports, Indian firms are increasingly turning to the United Arab Emirates as a bridge to American markets, a stepping stone toward deeper engagement with the Arab world, and a source of capital for Indian industry.

India and the UAE are thus reshaping Indo-Pacific trade in accordance with Abe’s vision, articulated two decades ago, of a “broader Asia” formed by a “dynamic coupling” of the region’s countries. But fully realizing that vision will require governments to strengthen their commitment to fostering an open, rules-based maritime order, upholding free trade and freedom of navigation, and nurturing economic security and prosperity, from the east coast of Africa to the island nations of the South Pacific.

Indo-Pacific unity is not only possible. In our age of disruption, it is essential. And it is being built the only way it can be: from within.

The writer is a former national security adviser to former Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba
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SPECTRUM FOREIGN POLICY



Piotr Opalinski

ISLAMABAD PERCEIVES INDIA’S PRESENCE IN IRAN AND AFGHANISTAN AS A THREAT TO ITS STRATEGIC DEPTH

India’s increased involvement in Afghanistan and its consistent pursuit of developing cooperation with Iran and Central Asian states are part of a broader strategy for balancing a geopolitical environment increasingly shaped by China’s growing power. This pivot to the West is becoming a tool for overcoming asymmetries and a response to Chinese actions perceived as building a “ring” or “string of pearls” around India.

In recent years, Beijing has strengthened its influence in India’s immediate vicinity: from Sri Lanka and Maldives to Bangladesh and Nepal.

Delhi needs a strategic “second circle”: a space that will make its trade routes independent from its neighbours, increase its logistical resilience, and hinder geopolitical encirclement. This logic is not new. The ancient concept of Raja mandala, described in the Arthashastra, envisaged building alliances beyond the immediate neighbourhood—especially when neighbours are hostile.

A key element of India’s strategy to escape the continental “squeeze” is Chabahar Port,

India’s largest infrastructure investment outside its borders in years, and its significance extends far beyond logistics.

The project, however, is not without risks. These include tensions related to sanctions on Iran, Beijing’s pressure on Tehran, and the uncertain situation in Afghanistan.

So, the country remains an area of strategic importance yet burdened by uncertainty. Despite lack of formal recognition, India-Taliban relations are deepening, serving as tool for risk management and regaining strategic space. The escalating conflict between Taliban government and Islamabad is indirectly fostering rapprochement between Afghanistan and India, increasing Delhi’s manoeuvrability in the region.

Afghanistan is becoming a battleground for access to Central Asia, where transportation infrastructure serves to build political influence. The most dynamically developing corridor is the Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan, supported by China and linked to the CPEC. It shortens transit to approximately five days and strengthens Pakistan’s role

as a logistics hub, deepening Afghanistan’s dependence on Beijing and Islamabad.

Islamabad perceives India’s presence in Iran and Afghanistan as a threat to its strategic depth. The weakening importance of transit routes through Afghanistan, reduces Pakistan’s role as a link between South and Central Asia and Middle East. In response, Pakistan has engaged in diplomatic and intelligence activities aimed at restoring its influence in Afghanistan and controlling the Taliban’s relations with Delhi.

Islamabad is balancing Chinese interests with its own strategic autonomy in the region, leveraging its influence channels to maintain independence in key political and economic decisions. China and Pakistan’s actions must also be understood in the context of broader regional rivalry, including the growing presence of India and the US in South and Central Asia.

India’s Western shift is the result of the collaboration of several key power centers, each interpreting it through the prism of its own priorities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

views this strategy as a tool for political diversification, allowing India to expand its influence beyond its immediate neighborhood and reduce its dependence on Sino-Pakistani pressure.

The NSC sees the pivot as an instrument to manage the risks associated with terrorism and the stability of Afghanistan, which remains a crucial element of regional security. The Indian Army sees the Western vector as an opportunity to relieve the Himalayan front by shifting its strategic attention to new operational areas. In turn, the ruling BJP sees this orientation as evidence of India’s growing position in the global system, its ability to shape its own geopolitical space and build a soft power. power on the international stage. The shift, a process that has been ongoing since the middle of last decade, is result of an integrated approach by various centers of power, skillfully combining the priorities of security, the economy, and India’s global image.

The writer is an expert, Centre for International Relations, Poland.
INFA

WISDOM CORNER

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

MAHATMA GANDHI

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

“For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

NELSON MANDELA

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

■ **1895:** The first public demonstration of the Cinématographe, an early motion-picture apparatus designed by the Lumière brothers, took place at the Grand Café in Paris.

■ **1923:** Gustave Eiffel, designer of the famous Eiffel Tower, died at age 91.

Letters

TO THE EDITOR

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

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



Lessons from Japan

Sir, Japan’s record USD 785-billion budget signals a decisive shift driven by security imperatives. Despite public debt exceeding twice its GDP, Tokyo has raised defence spending to USD 58 billion, nearly 10% higher than last year, with a clear roadmap to reach 2% of GDP in five years. The focus is on credible deterrence—long-range surface-to-ship missiles, unmanned aerial and sea-surface systems, satellite surveillance, and layered coastal defence across its 29,000-km shoreline—largely in response to China’s growing assertiveness, as outlined by its PM Takaichi. For India, the lesson is stark as it faces unresolved land borders, an expanding Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, frequent cyber and space threats, and a long, vulnerable coastline. Budgetary caution cannot substitute preparedness. Like Japan, India must prioritise sustained defence investment, indigenisation, surveillance and deterrence to safeguard sovereignty and regional stability.

RS Narula, PATIALA

Man of the year

Sir, Donald Trump, like it or not, is the “Man of the year 2025”. His influence was not restricted to the USA alone. It encompassed the world. Like him or hate him, he continued to dominate not only US politics but the politics of the world itself, with his quirky style of functioning. He was the upender, unpredictable, unique, ultimate, unyielding, unrepentant, uncivil, uncharitable, unsmooth and uncouth—all rolled into one six foot three inches of a man weighing 224 lbs. He was the first to use the taboo “F” word without feeling sorry for it. America and the world have never seen, and perhaps will never see, a democratic president who, to say the least, even gave established dictators a run for their money. He turned every press briefing into prime-time spectacle, live-tweeted policy like a midnight comic, rebranded the Oval Office as “The Boardroom,” and still walked away crowing that the Constitution was just another terms-of-service page begging to be rewritten. Trump made American democracy dysfunctional -by putting “fun” into it. He is the Man and Superman of the year 2025.

Avinash Godbole, DEWAS (MP)

Charred body found in gutted shop; kin cry foul, block road



PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara, Dec 27: A 46-year-old vegetable trader was charred to death inside his shop in Kalabuda Bareni market under Kudanagari police station late Friday night.

While police suspect that the trader, Subash Mallick of Gobindapur village, might have died in a fire triggered by a short circuit, the family members and the locals alleged that some miscreants might have torched the shop after locking the door from outside.

Sources said Subash, after attending a party at Kalabuda, returned at midnight in an inebriated condition and slept in his shop.

A local temple priest saw the shop burning at around 3.45am and informed the family members of the deceased. The family members and locals later unlocked the door from outside, but failed to enter the shop.

Police and a forensic team rushed to the spot. Police suspect that the fire was caused by a short circuit. However, the

possibility of foul play cannot be ruled out.

Mallik's family members alleged that the door of the shop was locked from outside.

The locals later staged a road blockade by keeping the body and 'gheraoed' the Kudanagari police station demanding proper investigation into the incident and arrest of the culprits. Traffic was disrupted for some time before police and local administration intervened and convinced the protesters to lift the blockade.

Police seized the body and sent it for autopsy.

Acting on an FIR lodged by Om Prakash Mallick, the son of the deceased, police registered a case under Section 106 and 326(g) of BNS and launched an inquiry into the incident.

The forensic team collected evidence from the spot, and further investigation is underway, said Kudanagari police station IIC Arobinda Saran Mohanty.

Police assured the agitators that strict action would be taken.

Man found dead in Balasore hotel; roomies missing

PNN & AGENCIES

Balasore, Dec 27: A 23-year-old man was found dead under mysterious circumstances at a hotel in Balasore district, police said Saturday.

The deceased, Akash Mahanta of Mayurbhanj district, had checked into the hotel along with a man and a woman around 9pm Thursday, they said.

They had told the hotel receptionist that they were visiting Balasore to appear in a job interview. Around 3pm Friday, a hotel staffer found the door of the room slightly open and Akash lying unconscious on the bed. The man and the woman, who were accompanying him, had gone missing, police said.

A case was registered based on a complaint filed by Mahanta's wife, said Biranchi Sahu, the Inspector In-Charge of the Sahadevkhunta police station.

An investigation has also been started, he said. Based on CCTV footage, a man has been detained, and his interrogation is underway, he added.

Police said liquor bottles were found in the room, and blood was also seen on Mahanta's face.

Vig nabs forester

Bhubaneswar: Vigilance department personnel have arrested Niranjan Satpathy, forester, Semiliguda forest range under Koraput forest division, for possession of disproportionate assets (DA). Vigilance sources said Satpathy will be taken to the court of Special Judge, Vigilance, Bhubaneswar. Satpathy was found in possession of DA, including two multi-storied buildings at Bhubaneswar and one in Koraput, seven high-value plots, approximately one kg of gold, ₹66.42 lakh deposits, ₹9.28 lakh in cash and a four-wheeler during a raid by the Vigilance sleuths. A case has been registered against Satpathy. Investigation is continuing.

Pradhan inaugurates projects worth ₹215cr in NIT Rourkela

PNN & AGENCIES

Rourkela, Dec 27: Union Education minister Dharmendra Pradhan Saturday launched several developmental projects worth ₹215 crore in Rourkela. Pradhan, who was on a two-day visit, launched the projects at a function in the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela.

He inaugurated the Indoor Sports Complex newly constructed at a cost of ₹35 crore on the NIT campus. The complex has a multipurpose hall with a badminton court, an open-air theatre and ancillary facilities.

The Union minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of a new building of the Department of Civil Engineering at a cost of ₹91.18 crore, a 500-bed hostel (Rs 55.35 crore), and a guest house (Rs 33.51 crore).

Speaking on the occasion, Pradhan said that the Indoor Sports Complex dedicated to the public will help the students reach new heights not only in the field of sports but also in the creative and cultural fields. The students will benefit from the new facilities and op-



portunities, which will spread the image of NIT Rourkela far and wide.

Remembering his days at Rourkela as a foot soldier of the party, he said, Rourkela then and now is very different. And the growth of this city has a direct relation to the growth of the state, both are interlinked.

Rourkela is not just a city but a symbol of India's industrial and educational strength, he said. As Odisha approaches its centenary in 2036 and the nation moves towards the centenary of Independence in 2047, institutions like NIT Rourkela will play a pivotal role in driving inclusive growth and national development, he added.

Hailing the growth of NIT Ro-

urkela, he urged the entire fraternity of the institute to work towards rapid growth.

Pradhan urged the students to create jobs instead of searching for the same. During his speech, he spoke about one of the startups which received ₹100 crore order for underwater drones.

"Stories like this really give reasons to feel proud of. Be job creators instead of job pursuers," said the Union Education minister.

"With its vibrant alumni community around the globe, I am confident that the institute (NIT Rourkela) will play a decisive role in shaping India's economic and industrial future," he added.

Teacher held for molestation of 10-year-old girl

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, Dec 27: A 40-year-old assistant teacher at an upper primary school under Jhara-pokharia police limits of Mayurbhanj district was arrested Saturday for allegedly molesting a 10-year-old girl student.

The accused was identified as Manoranjan Majhi. Police registered a case (322/25) under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and produced him in court.

According to police, Majhi operates a shop from his home. While he was at the shop during school holidays, the girl, a student at his school, came to buy something. Taking advantage of her being alone, he allegedly molested her and reportedly threatened the girl not to disclose the matter. The child later narrated her ordeal in front of her family, following which her father filed a written complaint at the police station. Officers arrested the teacher and recorded the girl's statement.



Cong team meets Chandbali victim's kin

Bhubaneswar: The Congress Saturday blamed the wide circulation of drugs and liquor across Odisha as the major factor behind the rise in crimes against women and girls. This was stated by Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Bhakta Charan Das after meeting the family members of a 10-year-old girl, who was allegedly raped and murdered at Chandbali in Bhadrak district. "Met the grieving family of the little girl who was brutally raped and murdered at Chandbali in Bhadrak district. I strongly demand the strictest possible punishment for the culprit and adequate compensation for the family. Justice must not be delayed, diluted or denied. This heinous crime demands decisive and exemplary action," Das told reporters. He demanded at least ₹50 lakh compensation for the girl's family. "I express my deepest condolences. We strongly condemn this barbaric crime, fuelled by unchecked drugs and liquor due to government failure. With over 1,500 such cases in the last 10 months, strict laws, fast-track courts, and harsh punishment for culprits are required," Das said in a post on X. He said the BJP government must stop the wide circulation of drugs, liquor and other intoxicant substances that are destroying the youth society.

17 fishermen held for flouting fishing ban

Kendrapara: Forest officials arrested 17 marine fishermen and seized their seaworthy fishing trawler on the charge of illegally fishing within the turtle congregation zone in Gahirmatha marine sanctuary, an official said Saturday. The fishing trawler, used by the intruders for fishing along the prohibited sanctuary area, besides the fishing implements were seized by the forest patrol teams. The fishing vessel had trespassed into prohibited sanctuary corridors contravening the provisions of Wildlife Protection Act, Orissa Marine fishing Regulation Act and mandatory rules of marine sanctuary, added the forest officer. With the latest interceptions, around 350 fishermen have so far been arrested for acts of intrusion into the marine sanctuary as the Forest department is intent on ensuring the safety of Olive Ridley sea turtles, said forest officials. It should be noted here that the state government has clamped a seven-month log fishing ban along the 20-km stretch Dhamra-Devi river mouth from November 1 in view of the ensuing mass nesting of endangered Olive Ridley marine turtles.

3 manganese carrying dumpers impounded

POST NEWS NETWORK

Joda, Dec 27: Forest department officials seized three dumpers loaded with illegally mined manganese near Tiring hill area close to the Baitarani reserved forest under the Joda section of Keonjhar district late Friday night.

A motorcycle was also seized during the operation. Forest officials said the estimated value of the seized manganese exceeds ₹5 lakh.

Acting on a tip-off, a forest squad conducted a raid while high-grade manganese ore was being illegally loaded on to dumpers for smuggling. The operation was carried out under the direction of the Keonjhar Divisional Forest Officer



and led by Champua range officer Akshay Chhatriya.

The team included Joda forester Trinath Jena, Joda forest guard Debashish Mohapatra, Jurudi forest guard Suraj Kumar Das, Dubuna forest guards Subrat Patra, Saroj Naik, and members of the Bamebari and Joda forest squads.

During the raid, three dumpers bearing registration numbers OR-09L-7516, OR-09K-7623 and OR-09J-7731 were seized

along with a motorcycle bearing registration number OR-09P-8957. Officials said the dumpers were carrying about 25 metric tonnes of high-grade powdered manganese.

"The estimated value of the seized mineral is over ₹5 lakh," Chhatriya told reporters.

A case has been registered at the Champua range office, and further investigation is underway.

It may be recalled that

three youths were killed after a mound of earth collapsed during illegal manganese mining at Dala Pahad July 1 this year. Following the incident, senior officials from the Directorate of Mines in Bhubaneswar and district-level authorities visited the area and announced measures to curb illegal mining.

However, allegations persist that the Mines department has failed to effectively prevent illegal extraction and transportation of minerals. A special team from the Joda mining sub-directorate, under the Bhubaneswar headquarters, was deployed to curb mineral theft; but critics say the initiative has remained largely ineffective.

Women revive degraded forest with bamboo

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nayagarh, Dec 27: A women-led initiative to protect bamboo forests has transformed a once-degraded woodland into a thriving ecosystem in Baijhari forest under Duda panchayat of Dasapalla block in Nayagarh district, while also creating sustainable livelihoods for tribal and Dalit women.

The protection of the Shinka bamboo groves has not only revived the forest cover but also restored a traditional source of income through the preparation of leaf plates made from sal and siali leaves.

By 2020, the Baijhari forest had nearly vanished due to rampant exploitation. Shinka bamboo had become scarce, forcing women to stop making leaf plates — an activity that had supported many households. Some families managed to sustain the practice by



sourcing bamboo from nearby forests, but most women lost their livelihood.

Faced with mounting hardship, village women came together towards the end of 2020 and resolved to restore

and protect the bamboo forest. Their collective efforts gradually yielded results. As bamboo regenerated, other plant species also began to thrive. Encouraged by the women's commitment, men in the village also

joined the effort, helping curb illegal felling, charcoal making and stone theft.

With the forest slowly recovering, women resumed leaf-plate making, which has now become the mainstay of households across the village. The initiative has provided a steady income to tribal and Dalit families and strengthened food security.

Pranati Malik, a resident of Baijhari, said the village has 53 families, mostly from tribal communities and a few Dalit households. "When the bamboo forest disappeared, women lost their income completely. Protecting the bamboo helped us secure the entire forest and revive our livelihoods," she said.

Subhadra Jani explained that Shinka bamboo is essential for stitching leaf plates. "Other bamboo varieties are not suitable for the purpose. After cutting the bamboo, we remove

the outer layer, split and dry it in the sun before using it to stitch sal and siali leaf plates," she said.

Minati Malik said the destruction of bamboo inadvertently taught the community the value of conservation. "If bamboo had not been destroyed, we might never have realised the need to protect the forest. By protecting bamboo, we protected the entire forest. The forest now supports our survival," she said.

Residents say Shinka bamboo is a rare variety found only in select forests and is uniquely suited for leaf-plate making. Using other bamboo types is labour-intensive and leads to wastage.

The Baijhari model is now being cited locally as an example of how community-led forest conservation can restore ecosystems while empowering women economically.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP- TENDER-2025-40, Dt. 19.12.2025	
NAME OF WORK : MISCELLANEOUS WORK IN RELATION TO CABLE DIVERSION DUE TO LIMITED HEIGHT SUBWAY (LHS), RE-BUILDING OF BRIDGES, ROAD OVER BRIDGE (ROB)/ ROAD UNDER BRIDGE (RUB) ETC. OF SAMBALPUR DIVISION. SCOPE OF WORK: LHS:- JT-01, JT-07, JT-36, JT-69, ST-14, 24, 45, TRESPASSING LOCATION NEAR KM-257/5-7 OF AMBODALA-LANJIRAGH ROAD.	
Tender Value in (₹) : 1,76,69,162.50, BID SECURITY (₹) : 2,38,400.00	
E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP- TENDER-2025-41, Dt. 22.12.2025	
NAME OF WORK : INTERLOCKING OF 03 NOS. OF LEVEL CROSSING GATES (RV-163, RV-164 & ST-63) WITH TVU ABOVE 20K OF SAMBALPUR DIVISION.	
Tender Value in (₹) : 3,62,43,893.40, BID SECURITY (₹) : 3,31,200.00	
E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP- TENDER-2025-42, Dt. 22.12.2025	
NAME OF WORK : MISCELLANEOUS WORK IN RELATION TO CABLE DIVERSION DUE TO LIMITED HEIGHT SUBWAY (LHS), RE-BUILDING OF BRIDGES ETC. OVER SAMBALPUR DIVISION. SCOPE OF WORK: LHS:- RV-108, JT-55, JT-74, JT-75, JT-24, JT-29, JT-37, JT-36, JT-39, JT-41, JT-51, JT-56, JT-69, JT-80, ST-38, ST-83, JT-01A, ST-14, ST-24, ST-45, JT-01, JT-07, JT-30, JT-34, JT-43, RV-63, RV-67, RV-137, LHS AT KM. NO. 111/7-8 (HANDAPA - BOINDA), WATERWAY AT BRIDGE NO. 96 (HATIBARI - JUJOMURA), PEDESTRIAN SUBWAY AT KM NO. 52/7/6-7 (BRUNDAMAL - LAPANGA), LHS AT KM. 552/12-14 (SARLA - SASON)	
Tender Value in (₹) : 1,68,34,442.70, BID SECURITY (₹) : 2,34,200.00	
Date and time of closing of Tender : At 1100 Hrs. of 12.01.2026	
No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration. Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-Tender is available in website : https://www.irops.gov.in	
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / Corrigendum issued for this tender.	
Divisional Railway Manager (S&T) / Sambalpur	
PR-941/Q/25-26	

WORKS DEPARTMENT

No.B-893

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
RAIRANGPUR (R&B) DIVISION**

e-mail: eerbairangpur@yahoo.co.in

Government of Odisha 'e' Procurement Notice

Bid Identification No. SE41 of 2025-26

1	Nature of work	: Building work
2	Number of works	: 03 (Three) Nos.
3	Amount put to tender	: Rs.67,87,460.00 to Rs.44,05,117.00
4	Class of contractor	: B Class
5	Date & time of availability of bid document in the portal	: Dt.31.12.2025 at 10.00 A.M.
6	Last date/ time of receipt of bid in the portal	: Dt.06.01.2026 upto 04.00 P.M.
7	Date of opening of bid	: Dt.07.01.2026 at 11.00 A.M.
8	Name & address of the office inviting bid	: Superintending Engineer, Rairangpur (R&B) Division
9	The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal " http://tendersodisha.gov.in ". All future corrigendum will be available on ONLINE mode only.	

Sd./- Superintending Engineer, Rairangpur (R&B) Division

OIPR-34041/11/0023/2526

of the day **quote**

Under the guise of pseudo-secularism, extremist Islamic organisations should not be allowed to infiltrate democratic institutions and the media and attempt to gain control

RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR | BJP STATE CHIEF

Sambhar has created a distinct identity on the global tourism map. Its unique natural beauty and biodiversity make it a major attraction for domestic and international tourists

DIYA KUMARI | DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER, RAJASTHAN

Drug abuse has emerged as a serious public health crisis in Haryana, with young people being the most affected

RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA | CONGRESS LEADER

SHORT TAKES

2 killed as BJYM leader crashes car

Morena: A leader from the BJP's youth wing ploughed into a group of people, killing an 11-year-old boy and a senior citizen, in Madhya Pradesh's Morena district, police said Saturday. Dipendra Bhadoria, a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) who was at the wheel, was caught by people in the vicinity after the accident in the Porsa area Friday night. According to eyewitnesses, the car was heading towards Jotai from Porsa when the driver, who was speeding, lost control and hit a group of people sitting around a bonfire on a cold night. The accused is the BJYM's Porsa urban mandal president and was allegedly in an inebriated state at the time of the accident, they said.

Woman raped on agri univ campus

Jabalpur: A 22-year-old woman was allegedly raped by a clerk of a state government-run university on the campus on the pretext of providing her a job at the facility in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur city, police said Saturday. The police Thursday arrested Durga Shankar Singerha (58), an upper division clerk (UDC), and Mukesh Sen, a peon, in connection with the assault that took place on the campus of the Jawaharlal Nehru Agricultural University. The survivor, a resident of the Tilwara area, came across information on social media about contractual vacancies at the university around 20 days ago, Additional Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar told reporters.

Trinamool delegation to meet CEC over SIR

New Delhi: A 10-member Trinamool Congress delegation will meet Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar December 31 on the issue of Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal, a source said Saturday. According to the source, the delegation, which will include Abhishek Banerjee and Derek O'Brien, Trinamool leaders in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, respectively, will raise the issue of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in the state. The ruling party of Bengal has been raising concerns over the SIR exercise for some time now. Banerjee, the national general secretary of the party, demanded that the Election Commission (EC) must come out with the number of illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas out of the 58.20 lakh names deleted in the draft electoral rolls published for West Bengal under the SIR.



Whether the lynching takes place in India or Bangladesh, it is terrorism. If any innocent is killed through lynching or extrajudicial killing, that amounts to terrorism. We are against it in the same manner as we are against (Israeli PM Benjamin) Netanyahu

RUHULLAH MEHDI | NATIONAL CONFERENCE MP

ISLAND TOURISM FESTIVAL BEGINS IN ANDAMANS

Andaman and Nicobar Islands MP Bishnu Pada Ray inaugurated the 'Island Tourism Festival (ITF) -2025' here Saturday evening. The five-day ITF is being organised by the Department of Information, Publicity and Tourism (IP&T) in association with the Department of Art and Culture of the Andaman and Nicobar administration and is being held in 13 venues across the islands



MEDICAL COLLEGE ADMISSION ROW

Protests outside Lok Bhavan in Jammu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Dec 27: Dozens of protesters Saturday gathered outside Lok Bhavan here and set ablaze an effigy of Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, demanding revocation of the MBBS admission list of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi.

Raising slogans such as "LG go back", the protest was organised by Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, a recently-formed conglomeration of various right-wing organizations.

JK BJP's women activists and several trade leaders including president of Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industries Arun Gupta also joined the protest.

The protest led to the blocking of the main road outside Lok Bhavan, resulting in traffic snarls on adjoining roads and causing hardship to commuters for more than one-and-a-half hours.

Police personnel were deployed in strength outside the Lok Bhavan to maintain law and order and regulate traffic, and a tough time to push back protesters who tried to move inside the complex.

"We will continue our protest till the resolution of our genuine demands which are related to our faith. We are not against students of any particular religion, we just want the seats in the medical college to be reserved for Hindu students alone," Samiti convener Colonel Sukhvir Singh Mankotia told reporters.

Indian mission launches one stop help centre in Canada



The Consulate has also set up a 24x7 helpline and the new Centre aims to provide critical and timely support to Indian passport holder women who could be facing domestic violence, abuse, family conflict, abandonment, exploitation and legal challenges, among others

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto, Dec 27: The Consulate General of India in Toronto has established a 'One Stop Centre for Women,' a dedicated support centre exclusively to assist women Indian nationals in distress.

The Consulate has also set up a 24x7 helpline and said, the new Centre aims to provide critical and timely support to Indian passport holder women who could be facing domestic violence, abuse, family conflict, abandonment, exploitation and legal challenges, among others.

The One Stop Centre for Women (OSCW) will provide coordinated, beneficiary-centred assis-

tance by connecting aggrieved women to timely and appropriate pathways of support, including immediate counselling, facilitation of psycho-social support, and coordination of legal assistance and advice, the Indian mission said in a post on X Friday. This would be done while helping women access relevant community and social-service resources in Canada, it said, adding, "Entire intervention by the OSCW will be within the purview of Local Laws in Canada."

The Centre would be run by a woman Centre Administrator, who will ensure the "delivery of safe, dignified, and comprehensive assistance" to women in need (on means tested basis) through prompt handling of distress calls via 24x7 helpline.

"This, inter-alia, would include Counselling and emotional support through empanelled NGOs. All the financial assistance will be on means tested basis as per Government of India's Rules," the statement said.

The Centre would function from the Consulate General of India, Toronto and the Centre Administrator can be reached on +1 (437) 552 3309 and osc.toronto@mea.gov.in, the statement said.

SC to hear CBI's plea against HC order

The development comes amid growing disappointment in several quarters after the Delhi High Court recently granted conditional bail to Sengar and suspended his life sentence in the case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Supreme Court will hear a plea filed by the CBI challenging a Delhi High Court order suspending the life sentence of expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar in the 2017 Unnao rape case December 29.

According to the apex court's cause list for December 29, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices JK Maheshwari and Augustine George Masih is slated to hear the plea.

Besides the plea filed by the CBI, the apex court will also



UNNAO RAPE CASE

hear a separate petition filed by advocates Anjale Patel and Pooja Shilpkar challenging the high court order.

The high court suspended the jail term of Sengar December 23, who was serving a life sentence in the 2017 Unnao rape case, saying he had already served seven years and five months in prison.

The CBI challenged the high court's order in the top court December 26. The high court suspended Sengar's life term till the pendency of his appeal challenging his conviction and sentencing in the case.

Sengar has challenged the December 2019 trial court verdict in the case. However, the former BJP MLA will remain in jail as he is also serving a

10-year term for the custodial death of the rape survivor's father.

Imposing several conditions, the high court had directed Sengar to furnish a personal bond of ₹15 lakh with three sureties of the like amount.

It also directed him not to come within a 5-km radius of the survivor's residence in Delhi and not to threaten her or her mother. Violation of any of the conditions would lead to the cancellation of bail, the high court said.

The rape case and other connected cases were transferred to Delhi from a trial court in Uttar Pradesh on the directions of the Supreme Court August 1, 2019.

Sengar's appeal against his conviction in the case of the custodial death of the survivor's father is also pending, where he has sought suspension of sentence on the ground that he has already spent a substantial time in jail.

THEATRE STAMPEDE CASE

Chargesheet filed against Allu Arjun



The theatre's owner, partners, manager and lower balcony In-charge and gatekeeper were named as accused no. 1 to 10 in the charge sheet filed December 24, while Arjun has been named as accused no 11

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Hyderabad, Dec 27: The city police have filed a charge sheet in a court here against 23 persons, including top Telugu actor Allu Arjun, in connection with the death of a woman in a stampede during the premiere of 'Pushpa-2' film at Sandhya theatre here last year.

The theatre's owner, part-

ners, manager and lower balcony In-charge and gatekeeper were named as accused no. 1 to 10 in the charge sheet filed December 24, while Arjun has been named as accused no 11.

Hyderabad Police Commissioner V C Sajjanar Saturday stated that the investigation into the Sandhya theatre stampede case has been completed.

The investigation established lapses in planning, crowd management, security arrangements, and coordination among the theatre management, event organisers, private security personnel, and others involved during the incident, the Commissioner said.

"Following a comprehensive and detailed probe, a chargesheet was filed before the court on December 24. A total of 23 accused have been charge-sheeted in the case. Of

these, 14 accused were arrested, while nine accused, who obtained anticipatory bail, were served notices," he said in a release.

Further proceedings in the case will continue as per law, he said.

Earlier, Allu Arjun was arrested after the 35-year-old woman died and her eight-year-old son was injured in the stampede during the screening of 'Pushpa 2' movie at Sandhya theatre here December 4, 2024.

The stampede occurred as fans gathered to catch a glimpse of the actor during the premiere.

Following the incident, the city police registered a case against Allu Arjun, his security team, and the theatre management under different sections of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at the Chikkadpally police station based on a complaint lodged by the deceased woman's family.

Allu Arjun was arrested December 13, 2024 and released from jail December 14, 2024 after the Telangana High Court granted him interim bail. He was granted regular bail later.

Allu Arjun and the makers of the film 'Pushpa' had extended financial assistance to the family of the boy. The Telangana government had also announced financial assistance to the family.



People take a holy dip in the 'Amrit Sarovar' on the occasion of the 359th birth anniversary of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, Saturday

PTI PHOTO

Army intensifies winter ops in J&K to flush out Pak terrorists

Traditionally, the onset of the 40-day 'Chillai Kalan', the harshest phase of winter in the Kashmir Valley from December 21 to January 31, ushers in a 'temporary lull' in terrorist activities, as communication routes close and heavy snowfall isolates the mountain regions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Amid freezing temperatures and treacherous terrains, the Indian Army has intensified its counter-terrorism operations across Kishtwar and Doda districts in Jammu and Kashmir to pursue and neutralise Pakistani terrorists attempting to exploit the harsh winter for concealment, sources said Saturday.

Traditionally, the onset of the 40-day 'Chillai Kalan', the harshest phase of winter in the Kashmir Valley from December 21 to January 31, ushers in a 'temporary lull' in terrorist activities, as communication routes close and heavy snowfall isolates the mountain regions, they said.

However, this winter has marked a "decisive shift" in the

operational approach of the Army and other security forces, a source in the defence establishment said.

Instead of reducing activities, the Army has adopted a "proactive winter posture", establishing temporary bases and surveillance posts deep within the snow-capped areas to maintain pressure on the possible terrorist hideouts, the sources said.

Operating in sub-zero temperatures with limited visibility, the Army patrols have been regularly traversing the high-altitude ridgelines, valleys, and forested areas to "deny the terrorists any sanctuary", they added.

The shift, according to experts, signifies an evolution in counter-terrorism tactics, underlining both the Army's adaptability and its resolve to



maintain operational momentum, irrespective of the weather or terrain.

According to assessments by various intelligence agencies, there are "approximately 30-35 Pakistani terrorists" in the Jammu region currently, defence sources said.

Inputs gathered over the past few months suggest that these Pakistani terrorist groups, finding themselves cornered by successful counter-terror operations, have shifted deeper into the higher and middle-mountain reaches of the region, areas now devoid of habitation, they said.

sources said.

According to the sources, the Army has intensified its counter-terrorism operations across Kishtwar and Doda districts.

Undeterred by freezing temperatures, treacherous terrains, and heavy snowfall, Army units have expanded their operational reach into the higher and snowbound areas to pursue and "neutralise Pakistani terrorists attempting to exploit the harsh season for concealment", the sources said.

A defining feature of this year's counter-terror strategy has been the integrated approach to operations.

The Army is leading a synchronised effort involving multiple security and law enforcement agencies, including the civil administration, J&K Police, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Special Operations Group (SOG), forest guards, and village defence guards (VDGs), another source said. This inter-agency cooperation ensures seamless sharing of intelligence, resource optimisation, and sharper operational execution, the source added.

These terrorists are believed to be seeking temporary winter hideouts to evade detection and avoid a direct confrontation with the security forces.

Reports indicate that these remnants of terror groups are attempting to coerce or threaten the local villagers for shelter and food supplies, even though their support among the locals and overground workers has sharply declined.

Intelligence from multiple agencies is carefully synthesised to draw "precise situational pictures" of terrorist movement and hideout patterns.

Once intelligence is verified, coordinated joint operations are planned and launched, minimising overlaps and ensuring maximum impact with tactical precision, defence sources said.

The synergy among ground units and intelligence frameworks has enhanced the response time, enabling security forces to act the moment actionable information surfaces, they added.

The principal focus of the Army and other forces this winter is twofold: to eliminate the remaining terrorist pockets within the known areas and to ensure that terrorists remain confined to the inhospitable higher reaches, a source said.

This containment strategy not only prevents terrorists from infiltrating or regrouping in the populated belts but also significantly disrupts their logistics and communication channels, reducing any operational capability, the source added.

of the day quote

The forthcoming elections are not about hopes and aspirations. It is about dedicating oneself to the cause of protecting 'swadesh' and 'swajati'. I am sure people know that the BJP is their last hope. They will vote for us, and we will win this election

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | CHIEF MINISTER, ASSAM

This is just 5.79 per cent of the population, the lowest among all the states where SIR is being held, the ECI come out with the number of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas out of 58.20 lakh names deleted

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | TMC LEADER

It should be ensured that the construction work is completed at the earliest and in a manner that there is no inconvenience to traffic movement on Nehru Path

NITISH KUMAR | CHIEF MINISTER, BIHAR

POST OF THE DAY

Nepal, the only Hindu state, is anti-India. Bangladesh, a country we liberated, is our enemy.

Sri Lanka, for who we fought a war, is against us. Maldives threw us out of their country. China, who helped Pakistan in operation Sindoor is our biggest trading partner and supposed to be a friend. USA, of 'Ab Ki Baar Trump Sarkaar' imposed sanctions and we are unsure whether it is a friend or an enemy. New Zealand saw anti Indian protest. Japan saw an anti Indian protest. Canada restricted Indian student inflows. Australia imposed restrictions on Indian students. S Jaishankar, the man with laser eyes, is the best External Affairs Minister. India is a VISHWA GURU. Good Morning India.

@maheshperi

SHORT TAKES

Lankan police detain Tamil politician

Colombo: A Sri Lankan Tamil politician and an ex-minister has been detained for questioning by the police after a weapon issued to him was found in possession of a criminal. Douglas Devananda, who has been declared a proclaimed offender by a Chennai court in 1996 in the case relating to a shootout at Choolaimedu in 1986, was detained by the crime investigation department of police Friday through a court order, police said. He was detained for questioning after a firearm officially issued to him was found in the possession of a noted underworld figure.

Woman held for killing daughter

Mumbai: A 30-year-old woman from Navi Mumbai has been arrested for allegedly killing her six-year-old daughter, apparently because she did not want a girl child, a police official said. The woman, who is being treated for depression, has also told the police that she was upset because the girl did not speak Marathi. According to the Kalamoli police official, the woman has studied BSc and lives with her husband, who is an IT engineer. The woman took her daughter to a hospital December 23, claiming that she had become unresponsive due to ill health. While doctors at the medical facility declared her dead, they also alerted the police.



I believe that the women who will work here will not only be empowered but also become self-reliant and get the opportunity and time to engage in spiritual contemplation in their own way

RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

INDIA'S FIRST URBAN NIGHT SAFARI

To promote tourism activities in Uttar Pradesh, the Kukrail Night Safari is being developed as a major attraction in Lucknow, said a statement released Saturday. Inspired by the Singapore model, the Kukrail Night Safari in Lucknow is set to be India's first urban night safari, promising an after-dark wildlife experience and nocturnal animal viewing



PM Modi single-handedly destroyed MGNREGA: Rahul



Claiming that the UPA-era MGNREGA was not just a work programme, but a development and conceptual framework appreciated around the world, Gandhi claimed that its repeal was an attack on a rights-based approach and on the country's federal structure

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "single-handedly destroying" MGNREGA without consulting his Cabinet or the states and without studying the matter, terming it an attack on the democratic structure that will ruin the rural economy.

Addressing a press conference after the crucial CWC meeting, he targeted the BJP-led NDA government over the VB-G RAM G Act, alleging that the PM carried out a devastating attack on states and the poor, "much like demonetization". He said the Congress has vowed that it would resist the government's action and expressed confidence that the entire opposition would be

aligned with it.

"The prime minister single-handedly destroyed MGNREGA without asking his Cabinet, and without studying the matter," the former Congress chief said.

"We are going to resist it, we are going to fight it, and I am confident that the entire opposition will stand united against this action," he said, referring to the Congress' 'MGNREGA Bachao Abhiyan' that it plans to launch nationwide January 5.

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi later said, "There is only one purpose behind the end of MGNREGA -- to erase the right to employment for the poor, to steal economic and political power from the states, and to hand over that money to billionaire friends."

"The entire country will bear the cost of the whims of the 'lone ranger' Prime Minister. Jobs will end, and the rural economy will collapse. When villages weaken, the country will weaken," he also said.

Claiming that the UPA-era MGNREGA was not just a work programme, but a development and conceptual framework appreciated around the world, Gandhi claimed that its repeal was an attack on a rights-based approach and on the country's federal structure.

"It is a devastating attack on states and the poor people, carried out by the prime min-

EVICION ROW

Keep off Karnataka's affairs, Cong leaders tell Kerala CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi/Bangalore, Dec 27: Leaders of the ruling Congress in Karnataka Saturday reacted sharply to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's criticism of "bulldozer action" to evict minorities from a Bangalore locality, insisting they cannot allow setting up of slums in the city and asked him to focus on his state.

As the controversy escalated, Congress high command said the Karnataka government should have exercised "far greater caution, sensitivity and compassion".

While Chief Minister Siddaramaiah defended the eviction drive at Fakir Colony, saying it was necessary against the illegal occupation of government land, his deputy DK Shivakumar asked Vijayan to refrain from "interfering in Karnataka's affairs", remarks that were

echoed by his Cabinet colleague Ramalinga Reddy.

Vijayan slammed the alleged "bulldozer action" in Bangalore in a Facebook post Friday. He strongly criticised the reported demolition, calling the action "shocking and painful".

Speaking to reporters in New Delhi, Siddaramaiah said that since 2019, people were living without authorisation on a five-acre plot designated for solid waste management.

"... There is no safety there. So officials served notice to the illegal occupants, asking them to vacate. As they failed to vacate, they were evicted," he said.

The chief minister said he has asked the Greater Bengaluru Authority chief commissioner and the Urban Development Department secretary to make alternative arrangements for those evicted "because most of them are migrants".

ister single-handedly, much like demonetisation. The PM single-handedly destroyed MGNREGA without asking his Cabinet, without studying the matter," he said at the press conference.

"The MGNREGA, apart from being a rights-based programme, also strengthened our panchayats. It allowed political action in the panchayats, it injected money into the panchayats, and it allowed the decision-making power at the panchayat level," Gandhi explained. He termed the VB-G RAM G legislation on rural employment an "attack on the democratic structure, on the third tier of government and our basic architecture of our country".

"This is an attack on the states of India because they are simply taking away money that belongs to the states and decision-making power that belongs to the states. It is an attack on the infrastructure of the states because MGNREGA was used to build infrastructure," Gandhi claimed.

The Congress leader linked the decision to scrap MGNREGA to the decimation of Indian labour, saying that MGNREGA guaranteed a minimum floor below which Indian labour could not fall.

"It is going to cause tremendous pain to the weaker sections, to Adivasis, to Dalits, to OBCs, to poor general castes, and to minorities. At the same time, it is going to benefit Mr Adani in full measure. That is the purpose of this exercise: to take money away from poor people and hand it to people like Mr Adani," Gandhi alleged.

The VB-G RAM G Bill, replacing the 20-year-old MGNREGA, was passed in Parliament during the recently concluded Winter Session of Parliament amid vociferous protests by the opposition. The new act has a provision for 125 days of wage employment for rural workers.

IndiGo cancels 57 flights due to 'bad weather'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 27: Domestic carrier IndiGo Saturday cancelled 57 flights across its network, citing "bad weather" at various airports, according to the airline's website.

The airline has also cancelled 13 flights, as of now, for Sunday, with two of them for "operational reasons", and the remaining largely due to "forecasted bad weather".

The Gurugram-headquartered IndiGo, which cancelled thousands of flights early this month on account of stricter norms related to the pilots' duty period and rest, have been cancelling some flights for more than one week now on account of "bad weather".

The 57 flights cancelled Sunday include from Chandigarh, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Amritsar, Bangalore, Delhi, Gaya, Kolkata, Chennai, Jaipur and Pune, among others.

Aviation regulator DGCA has announced the period between December 10 and Febru-



ary 10 next year as the official fog window this winter.

As part of the DGCA fog operations (CAT-IIIB) norms, airlines have to mandatorily roster pilots who are trained to operate in low-visibility conditions, as well as deploy a CAT-IIIB-compliant aircraft fleet for such operations.

Category-III is an advanced navigation system that empowers an aircraft to land under foggy conditions.

Category-III-A is a precision instrument approach and landing that enables a plane to land with a runway visual range (RVR) of 200 metres, while Category-III-B helps in landing with

an RVR of under 50 metres.

IndiGo, whose operations are under DGCA monitoring after the cancellations of thousands of flights early this month, is already operating a curtailed schedule in compliance with the government's order.

Under its original winter flight schedule, the airline was permitted to operate 15,014 domestic flights per week, or about 2,144 flights per day, roughly six per cent higher than the 14,158 weekly flights it operated during the summer schedule of 2025.

However, after the massive disruptions, which saw the airline cancelling 1,600 flights on a single day on account of new rest norms for pilots, which allow more rest to the pilots, the government cut down the airline's domestic flight schedule by 10 per cent or 214 flights per day.

As a result of that, IndiGo cannot operate more than 1,930 flights per day on domestic routes under its current winter schedule.

World's longest handwritten Bible to be unveiled in Kerala

The ambitious project has been jointly undertaken by the KCYM Thrissur Archdiocese and the Sacred Heart of Our Lady of Sorrows Basilica Pilgrim Centre as part of the 2025 Jubilee Year celebrations

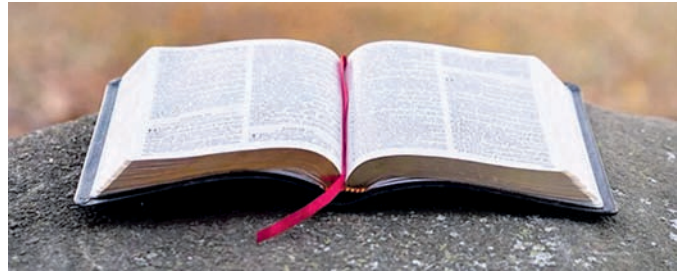
INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Thrissur, Dec 27: The world's longest handwritten Bible, stretching an extraordinary 100 kilometres, will be unveiled Sunday by Cardinal Mar George Koovakkad at Thrissur in Kerala.

The ambitious project has been jointly undertaken by

the KCYM Thrissur Archdiocese and the Sacred Heart of Our Lady of Sorrows Basilica Pilgrim Centre as part of the 2025 Jubilee Year celebrations. The initiative also marks the centenary of the Thrissur Basilica, one of Kerala's prominent pilgrimage centres.

Copied entirely by hand by 2,025 participants, the Bible



symbolises collective faith and meticulous devotion.

The organisers said the manuscript was created using a special pen on a cloth-like material, chosen for its durability and ability to be rolled and

preserved. Speaking to IANS, Rev. Fr. Gio Cheradai said the written cloth can be rolled up and mounted on rollers, allowing readers to scroll through the text.

"The written cloth material

can be rolled up, and anyone wishing to read it can do so by turning the roller. There are about 12 reels in which the longest handwritten Bible is rolled up. We will place this unique piece inside the Bible Tower," he said.

The unveiling ceremony will be held at 8.30 am at the courtyard of the Sacred Heart of Our Lady of Sorrows Basilica.

Along with the formal release of the manuscript, the organisers will also receive the Best of India Record, recognising the creation of the world's longest handwritten Bible.

Rev. Fr. Thomas Kakassery, Rector of the Basilica, said the initiative was conceived as a spiritual offering during the Jubilee Year and as a tribute to the Basilica's 100-year legacy.

Cheradai added that Cardinal Mar George Koovakkad, the guest of honour at the event, will write the final sentence, formally marking the completion of the historic manuscript.

The event is expected to draw large participation from clergy, youth organisations and devotees, marking a significant moment in the religious and cultural life of Thrissur.

of the day

quote

The entire nation must rise for their rights. To strive for justice is a sacred duty, and I am ready to lay down my life for Haqeeqi Azadi (true freedom) of my nation

IMRAN KHAN | PM, PAKISTAN

What we cannot do is defend against threats from a distance or even a full-scale attack on our country

THOMAS SUESSLI | HEAD OF ARMED FORCES, SWITZERLAND

The commission firmly rejects any initiative or action aimed at recognising Somaliland as an independent entity, recalling that Somaliland remains an integral part of the Federal Republic of Somalia

MAHMOUD ALI YOUSSEUF | CHAIRPERSON, AFRICAN UNION

SHORT TAKES

Indian-origin student held in US for arson

Houston: A 22-year-old Indian-origin student has been arrested in the US on charges of arson and terroristic threat against family members, according to official records. Manojh Sai Lella, a senior at the University of Texas at Dallas, was arrested by Frisco police Monday. Police responded to Lella's home after family members reported a mental health episode and alleged threats. Authorities said he allegedly tried to set the home on fire several days earlier. Lella faces arson with intent to damage a habitat or place of worship, a first-degree felony, and terroristic threat of a family/household member, a Class A misdemeanour. Police stressed there is no evidence of a threat to a place of worship. Bond was set at \$100,000 and \$3,500, respectively, according to the documents.

Mosque bombing in Syria leaves 8 dead

Idlib: A bombing at a mosque in the Syrian city of Homs during Friday prayers killed at least eight people and wounded 18 others, authorities said, as long-standing sectarian, ethnic and political fault lines continue to destabilise the country, even as large-scale fighting has subsided. Images released by Syria's state-run Arab News Agency showed blood on the mosque's carpets, holes in the walls, shattered windows and fire damage. The Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib Mosque is located in Homs, Syria's third-largest city, in an area of the Wadi al-Dhahab neighbourhood dominated by the Alawite minority. SANA, citing a security source, said that preliminary investigations indicate that explosive devices were planted inside the mosque. Authorities were searching for the perpetrators, who have not yet been identified, and a security cordon was placed around the building, Syria's Interior Ministry said in a statement.

17 terrorists killed in Pak's Balochistan

Karachi: Pakistani security forces have killed at least 17 terrorists belonging to outlawed insurgent groups in different intelligence-based operations in the troubled Balochistan province, the ISPR said Saturday. According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, these terrorists were killed in separate operations conducted between December 24 and 26 in the Kohlu, Kalat and Panjgur areas of the province. The intelligence-based operations (IBOs) were conducted on the reported presence of terrorists in the respective areas, the ISPR said.

ZELENSKY-TRUMP MEETING TODAY

Rattled Russia pounds Ukraine

The overnight attack, which involved about 500 drones and 40 missiles and knocked out power and heat in parts of the capital, came as Russia's response to the ongoing peace efforts brokered by Washington

REUTERS

Kyiv, Dec 27: Russia attacked Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine with hundreds of missiles and drones Saturday, ahead of what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said would be a crucial meeting with US President Donald Trump to work out a deal to end nearly four years of war.

Before the strikes, the Ukrainian leader had said Sunday's talks in Florida would focus on the territory to be controlled by each side once fighting ends in Europe's deadliest conflict since World War Two, started by Russia's 2022 invasion of its smaller neighbour.

The attack continued throughout the morning, and a nearly 10-hour air raid alert for the capital only ended at 11:20 local time (0920 GMT). Authorities said one person was killed by the attack in the Kyiv region, while at least 19 people were wounded in the capital itself, including two children.

He said rescuers were still searching for a person trapped under the rubble in one of the damaged residential buildings.

Russia made no immediate comment on the attacks.

THOUSANDS OF HOMES WITHOUT HEAT

Explosions echoed across

Kyiv from the early pre-dawn hours on Saturday as Ukraine's air defence units went into action. The air force said Russian drones were targeting the capital and regions in the northeast and south.

Authorities said various locations in seven different districts of Kyiv had sustained damage, and at least three high-rise apartment blocks were on fire.

State grid operator Ukrenergo said energy facilities across Ukraine, including in Kyiv and the surrounding region were struck by Russia, and emergency power cuts had been implemented across the capital.

Ukraine's foreign minister said a third of Kyiv was left without heat by the strikes as temperatures hovered around 0 degrees Celsius (32 degrees Fahrenheit) Saturday morning.

Authorities in Kyiv region, which surrounds the city but does not include it, said 320,000 households had lost power after the attack.

The strikes also prompted the temporary closure of Rzeszow and Lublin airports in southeastern Poland, to the west of Ukraine, after the Polish armed forces scrambled fighter jets, the Polish Air Navigation Services Agency posted on X.



If Russia turns even the Christmas and New Year period into a time of destroyed homes and burned apartments, of ruined power plants, then this sick activity can only be responded to with truly strong steps

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY | PRESIDENT, UKRAINE

Russia had launched strikes on Ukraine's energy infrastructure Thursday night and stepped up attacks on the southern region of Odesa, the site of Ukraine's main seaports, Ukrainian authorities said.

NUCLEAR PLANT, FREE ECONOMIC ZONE ALSO AT ISSUE

In addition to territory, a critical point is control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station, Europe's largest, which was seized by Russia in the opening weeks of the war.

Moscow is demanding that Ukraine withdraw from the areas of the eastern region of Donetsk that Russian troops have failed to occupy in their drive to secure all of the Donbas, which also includes the Luhansk region.

Kyiv, however, wants the fighting halted at the current lines.

REUTERS

Bangkok, Dec 27: Thailand and Cambodia ended weeks of fierce border clashes Saturday with a second ceasefire in recent months in the worst fighting in years between the Southeast Asian nations.

The ceasefire was holding, a Thai Defence Ministry spokesperson, Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri, told Reuters about two hours after it went into effect at noon (0500 GMT).

"So far there's been no report of gunfire," he said.

Cambodia's Ministry of National Defence did not report any clashes after what it said had been a Thai airstrike early Saturday before the ceasefire announcement.

The agreement, signed by Thai Defence Minister Natthaphon Narkphanit and his Cambodian counterpart Tea Seiha, ended 20 days of fighting that killed at least 101 people and displaced more than half a million on both sides and included fighter-jet sorties, exchanges of rocket fire and artillery barrages.

The clashes were reignited early this month after a breakdown in a ceasefire that US President Donald Trump and Malaysian Prime Minister An-

MYANMAR GOES TO POLLS

Myanmar heads to the polls Sunday as it battles a civil war that has ravaged parts of the country as well as one of Asia's worst humanitarian crises. Already one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries, Myanmar has been hammered by a conflict triggered by a 2021 coup in which the military ousted an elected civilian government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi



Wife seeks justice after hubby dies in Canadian hospital waiting triage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Toronto (Canada), Dec 27: Wife of a 44-year-old Indian-origin man who died due to suspected cardiac arrest awaiting treatment for over eight hours at a Canadian hospital wants to see staff at the facility held accountable, a media report has said.

On Saturday, an Indian community leader drew attention to the inadequacy of hospital beds in Canada leading to a late triage that resulted in the death of Prashant Sreekumar at Grey Nuns Hospital in Edmonton, capital of Alberta province in northwest Canada.

Prashant, an accountant, was taken to the hospital after he experienced severe chest pains while at work December 22. At the hospital, he was checked in at triage and then made to sit in the waiting room.

Hospital staff did an electrocardiogram (ECG), offered him some Tylenol for his pain, but kept him waiting even as nurses checked Prashant's blood pressure. After more than eight hours, when Prashant was finally called into the treatment area, he died within seconds in what was apparently a cardiac arrest, local media said.

"I want justice for Prashant," Niharika said in an interview with Postmedia late Friday. "She wants to see hospital staff held accountable for the way her husband was treated in the emergency department, and questions whether negligence or even racism played a role," Calgary Sun, one of the news outlets of the parent company Postmedia, said.

"We are all Canadian cit-



izens. We have worked and paid so much into the tax bucket in this country and the onetime Prashant needed medical help, he was not given it," Niharika said.

Prashant's sudden passing has left Niharika devastated, the Calgary Sun said, adding, at the same time, she doesn't know how she will financially sustain herself and three children, aged three, 10 and 14.

Meanwhile, family friend and Indian community leader Varinder Bhullar, who would use Prashant's accounting services, said Canada's health care system is deteriorating. "It's getting worse," as compared to the time 30 years ago when he had come to Canada, he said.

Pointing out that typically, people with chest pain do get attention promptly, Bhullar said, "In this case, they did do an ECG when he walked into the ward with chest pain. There was no issue in the ECG. Then they did some blood work, in which too, they did not detect anything," he told PTI Videos.

So, he said, he believes it kind of gave them a "false indication."

Italy loosens court control over public tenders, amid stirs

REUTERS

Rome, Dec 27: Italy's parliament Saturday approved a reform that loosens controls and sanctions regarding public tenders, amid protests from magistrates and opposition lawmakers who say it will encourage wasteful spending and possible illegality.

The reform, presented by Giorgia Meloni's coalition two years ago, limits the powers of Italy's powerful court of auditors, responsible for ensuring compliance with Italian and European Union rules on the use of public funds.

Meloni's right-wing government has clashed frequently with various branches of Italy's judiciary, accusing judges of leftist bias and hampering its initiatives on areas from public works to immigration.

Just two months ago the auditors' court refused to authorise a landmark government plan to build a bridge connecting Sicily to the mainland, a ruling denounced by Meloni as "intolerable interference."

The bill was passed in the upper house Senate Saturday by 93 votes to 51.

BNP's Tarique registers as Bangladeshi voter after 17 years abroad in self-exile

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka/New Delhi, Dec 27: BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman on Saturday completed the formalities to enlist himself on Bangladesh's voter list and obtain a national identity (NID) card, two days after his return from over 17 years of self-exile in London.

The 60-year-old leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) visited the Election Commission (EC) office in Dhaka under tight security, where he provided fingerprints and iris scans for biometric enrollment, news portal tbsnews.net reported. He earlier submitted his voter registration application online, officials said.

"Tarique Rahman has already filled out the online form and has come to complete the registration by providing his fingerprints and iris scan," ASM Humayun Kabir, director general of the National Identity Registration Wing of the Election Commission, told reporters. He is expected to receive his NID card within 24 hours, the official said.

Rahman's daughter Zaima also completed her registration formalities for the NID card.

Foolproof security arrangements were in place around the



EC office premises, with members of the Bangladesh Army, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Ansar and police deployed in and around the area.

According to a report in Bengali daily Prothom Alo, Bangladesh first introduced a voter list with photographs and biometric data in 2008 during the military-backed caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed that followed the 2007-2008 political crisis.

Rahman, son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, was a political prisoner at that time. After his release from prison, he left for London September 11, 2008. Bangladesh is going to the polls February 12. Rahman will contest the upcoming election from his ancestral Bogura Sadar (Bogura-6) constituency, with BNP leaders already collecting his nomination papers on his behalf earlier this month.

China revises Foreign Trade Law to boost trade war capabilities

Revisions aim to align with trans-Pacific trade bloc standards

REUTERS

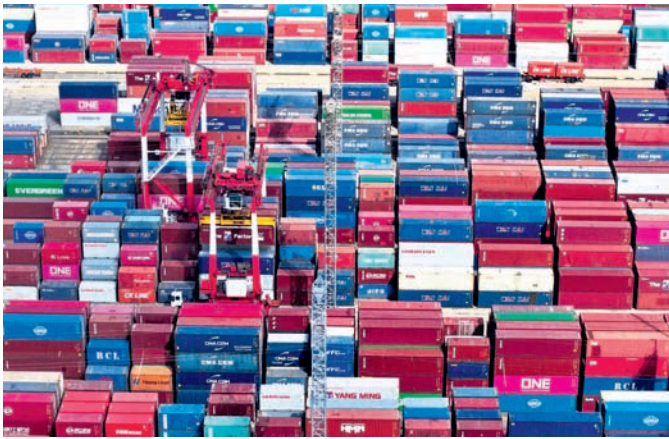
Beijing, Dec 27: China Saturday passed revisions to a key piece of legislation aimed at strengthening Beijing's ability to wage trade war, curb outbound shipments from strategic minerals to sex dolls, and further open its \$19 trillion economy.

The latest revision to the Foreign Trade Law, approved by China's top legislative body, will take effect March 1, 2026, state news agency Xinhua reported Saturday.

The world's second-largest

economy is overhauling its trade-related legal frameworks partly to convince members of a major trans-Pacific trade bloc created to counter China's growing influence that the manufacturing powerhouse deserves a seat at the table, as Beijing seeks to reduce its reliance on the US.

Adopted in 1994 and revised three times since China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, most recently in 2022, the Foreign Trade Law empowers policymakers to hit back against trading partners that seek to curb its exports and



to adopt mechanisms such as "negative lists" to open restricted sectors to foreign firms.

The revision also adds a provision that foreign trade should "serve national economic and

social development" and help build China into a "strong trading nation", Xinhua said.

It further "expands and improves" the legal toolkit for countering external challenges, according to the report.

The revision focuses on areas such as digital and green trade, along with intellectual property provisions, key improvements China needs to make to meet the standards of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, rather than the trade defence tools the 2020 revamp honed in on following four years of tariff war with the first Trump administration.

Beijing is also sharpening the

wording of its powers in anticipation of potential lawsuits from private firms, which are becoming increasingly prominent in China, according to trade diplomats.

"Ministries have become more concerned about private sector criticism," said one Western trade diplomat with decades of experience working with China. "China is a rule-of-law country, so the government can stop a company's shipment, but it needs a reason."

"It's not totally lawless here. Better to have everything written out in black and white," they added, requesting anonymity, as they were not authorised to speak with media.

of the day

quote

It has touched an all-time high of \$80.62 billion in 2024-25. We are hopeful that this year (2026), FDI may cross the last year's data of \$80.62 billion

AMARDEEP SINGH BHATIA | SECRETARY, DPIIT

As India's GCC landscape continues to evolve, flexible space operators will remain indispensable partners, offering flexibility, faster speed to market, and enterprise-grade infrastructure that global companies require, to scale efficiently in a highly competitive market

SHRINIVAS RAO | CEO, VESTIAN

The Petroleum and Natural Gas's progressive and forward-looking reforms would directly benefit households and daily commuters by making CNG and PNG more affordable

ABHILESH GUPTA | MD AND CEO, THINK GAS

SHORT TAKES

PNB reports loan fraud of ₹2,434cr

New Delhi: State-owned Punjab National Bank reported a loan fraud of Rs 2,434 crore committed by former promoters of SREI Equipment Finance Ltd (SEFL) and SREI Infrastructure Finance Ltd (SIFL) to the banking sector regulator, the Reserve Bank. These two entities with financial debt amounting to Rs 32,700 crore went through resolution under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and the new promoter National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL) acquired them in December 2023. The bank has reported a case of borrowing fraud to the RBI against the erstwhile promoters of SEFL and SIFL, amounting to Rs 1,240.94 crore and Rs 1,193.06 crore, respectively.

IndiGo faces ₹13L fine related to GST

New Delhi: IndiGo has been slapped with a penalty of little over Rs 13 lakh in relation to the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and the company will contest the ruling. The Office of the Assistant Commissioner of State Tax, Excise and Taxation Department, Punjab has imposed the penalty of Rs 13,28,255 pertaining to the financial year 2021-22. "The department has raised GST demand along with penalty. The company believes that the order passed by the authorities is erroneous. Further, the company believes that it has a strong case on merits, backed by advice from external tax advisors.

Housing sales volume down 14% in 2025 in 7 major cities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Housing sales declined 14 per cent this year to nearly 3.96 lakh units across seven major cities, mainly due to high prices and poor demand following layoffs in the IT sector, but rose 6 per cent in value terms to Rs 6 lakh crore, according to Anarock.

The average housing price rose by 8 per cent in the top seven cities.

On Friday, Anarock, one of the country's leading real estate consultants, released data on India's seven major primary housing markets.

Housing sales in the top seven cities witnessed a 14 per cent decline in 2025 to 3,95,625 units, from 4,59,645 units in the preceding year, the consultant said, while attributing the fall

Over 1.3 lakh jobs were created in the last five years and that electronics is now India's third largest export category, climbing from seventh place

ASHWINI VAISHNAW | UNION MINISTER OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

CONSUMER HELPLINE RECOVERS ₹45CR

As the year 2025 draws to a close, a quiet success story emerges with Rs 45 crore recovered and 67,265 consumer grievances resolved through the government's National Consumer Helpline. The numbers from 2025 tell a story of India's digital economy and its discontents. E-commerce platforms account for nearly 40,000 complaints and Rs 32 crore in refunds, more than two-thirds of the total, followed by travel and tourism at Rs 3.5 crore



Zepto files confidential IPO papers with Sebi; eyes ₹11K-cr via issue

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: Quick commerce unicorn Zepto has filed preliminary papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 11,000 crore through its initial public offering (IPO) using a confidential route, people familiar with the development said Saturday.

The company is targeting a stock market listing sometime next year, a move that could make it one of the youngest startups to debut on Indian exchanges.

If the listing goes through, Zepto will join its rivals Zomato and Swiggy, both of which are already listed on the exchanges.

According to the people familiar with the development, Zepto has filed "the pre-filed draft red herring prospectus with Sebi and the stock exchanges...in relation to the proposed initial public offering of its equity shares on the main-board of the stock exchanges".

Zepto has opted for the confidential pre-filing route, which allows the company to engage with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) for initial feedback on its draft document without it being publicly disclosed.

This route has been increasingly favoured by companies seeking more flexibility in their IPO preparations and responding to market conditions before a public filing.

Eternal, which owns Zomato and quick commerce platform Blinkit, was listed in 2021, while Swiggy, which operates Instamart, made its stock market debut in November 2024.

This public-market push comes following strong private funding support.

Valued at \$7 billion, Zepto has raised a total of \$1.8 billion, or about Rs 16,000 crore, from marquee investors since its inception. In October 2025, the company raised \$450 million (about Rs 3,757.5 crore) in a funding round led by the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) at a valuation of \$7 billion.

Zepto achieved unicorn status in August 2023, after raising \$200 million in its Series E funding round, which valued the startup at \$1.4 billion.

Silver rallies 158% YTD, \$100 per ounce possible in 2026

The white metal significantly outpaces gold's gain of over 70%

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 27: Silver has delivered exceptional returns of 158 per cent year-to-date (YTD) in 2025, with domestic spot rates rising nearly Rs 1,45,000 per kg or around 170 per cent this year.

Strong industrial demand, tight supply, robust ETF inflows and US Federal Reserve rate cuts and hopes of additional cuts could even take silver to

\$100 per ounce, analysts said.

Industry experts said that key demand drivers for silver include industrial use in electric vehicles, solar, semiconductors and data centres.

Further a multi-year structural supply deficit — 148.9 million ounces in 2024, has buoyed investor sentiments along with expectations of further Fed easing of 0.75 per cent and at least two rate cuts next year. A weaker dollar, geopolitical tensions are also boosting precious-metal demand beyond industrial use.

Geopolitical tensions have increased due to the US blockade of Venezuelan crude, Rus-



US military strike against ISIS in Nigeria.

MCX silver March futures had touched an intraday high of Rs 2,32,741 per kg Friday.

Silver prices are propelled by strong industrial and investment demand, persistent supply shortfalls, its recent designation as a US critical mineral, and a wave of momentum-driven buying

Several analysts now view the \$100 per ounce milestone as attainable in 2026, with the majority of them predicting \$70-\$85 per ounce range for silver

HEAVIEST EVER SELL-OFF

FII's dump shares worth ₹1.58L-cr

Foreign investors selling cross Rs 22,100cr in Dec

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Dec 27: Robust GDP growth and prospects of improvement in corporate earnings next year augur well for positive foreign institutional investor (FII) flows in 2026, analysts said Saturday, even as sell figure in December crossed Rs 22,130 crore.



As the year 2025 draws to a close, FII selling in India is on track to set a new record in outflows

VK VIJAYAKUMAR | CHIEF INVESTMENT STRATEGIST, GEOJIT INVESTMENTS

Foreign institutional investors have net sold shares worth Rs 1,58,407 crore in CY25, marking their heaviest selling since they started investing in India. Analysts however said that there are signs of a reversal of foreign institutional investor outflows due to macro strength and earnings visibility.

"As the year 2025 draws to a close, FII selling in India is on track to set a new record in outflows," said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Ltd.

In 2024, FIIs have been selling through the exchanges, as much as Rs 1,21,210 crore worth of equities. However, for the year, the net FII inflow was positive since they had invested Rs 1,21,637 crore through the primary market. But for 2025, the net sales figure is massive, he added.

The sustained selling by FIIs

that improvement in fundamentals is likely to attract net FII inflows in 2026.

Analysts said that sustained FII selling, along with the high trade deficit, contributed significantly to the depreciation of the rupee in 2025. The rupee's annual depreciation is around 5 per cent, and it dipped marginally Friday amid crude oil price recovery. Meanwhile, Net foreign direct investment (FDI) in India nearly doubled to \$6.2 billion during April October from \$3.3 billion a year earlier, primarily due to fall in repatriation of foreign capital despite a rise in outward FDI.

Malabar launches Mine Diamond Festival

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Malabar Gold & Diamonds Saturday launched its Mine Diamond Festival at the Saheed Nagar showroom, offering customers up to 30 per cent off on diamond value, along with attractive offers on platinum jewellery.

The festival comes at a time when diamond jewellery buying in India is witnessing a shift from being wedding-centric to serving diverse occasions such as milestone gifting, anniversaries, career achievements, self-purchase and every day wear. Tapping into this evolving consumer mindset, the



Mine Diamond Festival showcases certified natural diamond jewellery from Malabar's exclusive brand, Mine Diamonds.

Running from December 20, 2025, to January 26, 2026, the

festival features a wide range of designs including solitaires, lightweight daily-wear jewellery, celebration pieces and bridal collections. Customers can explore necklaces, ear-

rings, rings, studs, layered chains and coordinated sets, catering to both first-time buyers and those upgrading their collections.

Reaffirming the brand's focus on transparency and trust, MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds said, "Today's customers want natural diamonds that seamlessly fit into everyday life, backed by complete clarity on certification and pricing."

Customers can also benefit from lifetime maintenance, one-year free insurance and a buyback guarantee, with transparent pricing clearly displayed.

Capital Toyota hosts two-day boot camp



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Capital Toyota, Bhubaneswar organised the Toyota Off-Road Boot Camp Saturday, with the experiential event continuing till December 28 at Kalyani OM-FED Ground, Jagannathpur, Nakhara.

The initiative offered Toyota customers and automobile enthusiasts a first-hand experience of off-road driving in controlled real-world conditions.

The two-day programme showcased Toyota's renowned four-wheel-drive capabilities, with a special focus on the Toyota Hilux and Toyota Fortuner.

Participants were provided hands-on opportunities to navigate specially designed off-road obstacles under expert supervision, allowing them to understand Toyota's engineering excellence, safety standards and strong off-road DNA.

The Toyota Hilux 4x4 demonstrated its global reputation for durability, powered by a 2.8-litre GD diesel engine delivering high torque. Its robust ladder-frame chassis, advanced four-wheel-drive system with low-range transfer case and superior suspension highlighted its capability across extreme terrains.

The Toyota Fortuner 4x4 impressed participants with its advanced drivetrain, commanding ground clearance and strong body-on-frame construction. The SUV showcased a blend of luxury, comfort and off-road performance, reaffirming its benchmark position in the premium SUV segment.

The event was held in the presence of Satish Garg, Chairman, Gargson Group; Siddharth Garg, Managing Director, Capital Toyota; and Champak Kumar Das, General Manager, Capital Toyota.

Reliance Foundation announces 2025-26 scholarship results

POST NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai, Dec 27: On the eve of the 93rd birth anniversary of Reliance Founder Dhirubhai Ambani, Reliance Foundation announced the results of its prestigious Undergraduate and Postgraduate Scholarships for the academic year 2025-26.

A total of 5,100 students—including 5,000 undergraduates and 100 postgraduates—have been selected from over 1.25 lakh applicants across 15,544 institutes, representing 28 states and four Union Territories. Selected UG scholars will receive financial assistance of up to Rs 2 lakh, while PG scholars will receive grants of up to Rs 6 lakh.



The current cohort forms part of Reliance Foundation's 2022 commitment to award 50,000 scholarships over 10 years. With this, the Foundation has awarded 33,471 scholarships till date, nurturing academic excellence and leadership among Indian youth.

"India's youth have shown incredible drive, hard work

and talent, and our scholarships aim to provide mentoring, an excellent peer network and more, in addition to the financial grants to accelerate their journey. Our Reliance Foundation Scholars demonstrate excellence and confidence in their chosen disciplines, pursuing remarkable professional goals and we are privileged to support them in their journey. As we welcome the new cohort of 5,100 extraordinary UG and PG scholars, we encourage them to continue to push boundaries, think big and ahead, and accelerate progress towards a Viksit Bharat," said a spokesperson from Reliance Foundation.

Eng's drought-breaking win

Stokes & Co claim first test win in Australia in 15 years defeating the hosts by four wickets in a frenetic Boxing Day contest

REUTERS

Melbourne, Dec 27: England celebrated their first test win in Australia in 15 years Saturday as they chased down 175 runs for a four-wicket Ashes victory completed in two manic days at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Though the hosts had already locked away the urn after three straight victories in Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide, Ben Stokes's men gave their travelling army of fans a consolation prize for staying loyal through the depths of a mostly dismal tour. Their nerves were jangling when England were reduced to 165 for six, 10 runs short of victory, but Harry Brook (18 not out) and Jamie Smith (three not out) held on, with the winning run taken with four leg byes off pace bowler Mitchell Starc. It was England's first test victory in Australia since the 2010/11 Ashes, when Andrew Strauss's team thumped the hosts by an innings and 83 runs in the fifth match of the series at the Sydney Cricket Ground. For Stokes and long-time comrade Joe Root, winless in Ashes tours dating back to 2013/14, it was a day of joy and relief. England were under fire after surrendering the urn meekly in Adelaide, and amid reports of heavy drinking during the mid-tour break in Noosa. "There's been a lot thrown at this team, and the way that we responded throughout these two days has been excellent," said Root. The victory came without injured paceman Jofra Archer, while Gus Atkinson was out of service due to a hamstring strain early on day two after Australia



That Indian side wasn't great: Cook on Eng's 2-2 home draw

Batting great Alistair Cook said England's 2-2 home series draw against Shubman Gill-led India was against "not a great Indian side", flagging concerns over the team's preparation for the Ashes, in which they are currently trailing 0-3. The five-match series against India ended in a 2-2 draw earlier this year. It was Gill's maiden assignment as Test captain and the young batter finished the series with a prolific 754 runs, including four centuries. Cook said England's recent results had masked deeper issues, creating an illusion of progress. "They started off with a bang, Key, McCullum and Stokes. I think McCullum won his first eight out of 10 games or something the first year. Since then it's gone downhill," Cook said on the opening day of the ongoing Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. "This year I think their percentage of win is like just above 30 percent so it's a bit of a downward trend. "...I like Rob Key, I like McCullum, I like how they think but I do think they've, this last little bit, they have taken our eye off the ball for the bigger series." Citing the five-Test series against India, Cook said, "... they were talking about India, they lost, they drew India and India just got thumped by South Africa. So that Indian side wasn't a great Indian side either. "So actually it's a reality, it's just hit this England Test team and now they're going to decide how they want to play with what players afterwards."

I've been on a couple of tours before when it has not gone too well, so to end up on the right side of the result after a long period of time is a pretty special feeling

BEN STOKES | CAPTAIN, ENGLAND

had resumed with a 46-run lead and 10 wickets in hand. But with the help of a sporting pitch and some injudicious Australian batting, the tourists routed the hosts for 132 in 34.3

overs midway through the second session. England's supporters could be forgiven for feeling uneasy about the chase, given how lamentable the tourists' batting has been throughout the series, but the top order functioned well, with three batters making vital contributions. Zak Crawley (37) and Ben Duckett (34) set the tone, racing to a 51-run partnership at more than seven runs-per-over before Starc shattered Duckett's stumps. However, 22-year-old Jacob Bethell, the replacement

The Test was wrapped up inside two days on a surface that heavily favoured the fast bowlers, with not a single over delivered by a spinner across the match

for the dropped Ollie Pope, kept the momentum in England's favour in just his fifth test, putting on 47 runs for the third wicket before Scott Boland trapped Crawley lbw for 37. The series now heads to Sydney for the fifth and final Test January 4, with England restoring pride after a bruising Ashes campaign which saw them lose the first three games in Perth, Brisbane, and Adelaide as Australia retained the urn.

BRIEF SCORES
Australia 152 & 132 (Travis Head 46, Steven Smith 24; Brydon Carse 4-34, Ben Stokes 3-24) lost to England 110 & 178/6 (Jacob Bethell 40, Zak Crawley 37; Scott Boland 2-29, Jhye Richardson 2-22) by four wickets

INDIAN WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Nita FA win again as Pyari's hat-trick run continues

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Kolkata, Dec 27: Nita Football Academy continued their impressive run in the Indian Women's League 2025-26, defeating Kickstart FC 5-0 at the National Centre of Excellence Saturday.

Pyari Xaxa (2', 31', 76') scored her second hat-trick in as many matches, helping her side take the game away from Kickstart in the first half itself. Nita FA's Togolese forward Amiratou N'Djambara (38') and India U20 international Neha (64') scored one each. Nita FA remain at the top of the league at the moment, with seven points from three matches, after their second win by a margin of five goals. They won their last game 6-1 against Sesa FA. Kickstart, meanwhile, are yet to score a point in their three matches, and now languish in the relegation zone.

The side from Cuttack seems to have developed a propensity to score early goals, and they opened the scoring against Kickstart just as the clock ticked into the second minute.

Nita FA remain at the top of the league at the moment, with seven points from three matches

Neha produced a perfect cross from the left that Pyari, rushing in at the far post, tapped in. The 19-year-old was a menace down the left wing and kept troubling Kickstart in the early exchanges. Kickstart began to gain some foothold in the game after the opening exchanges, Kiran Pisda playing a key role for them in the middle. Nita FA goalkeeper Adrija Sarkhel had to pull off a diving save to keep a long shot by Kiran out in the 12th minute. The latter produced another shot from long range, this time on the turn, but Adrija managed to tip it around the post. Nita FA head coach Paromita Sit, realising that her side was losing control of the game, made an early substitution, bringing on Jasoda Munda in place of

Poonam. Her tactic paid dividends soon enough. Neha produced another cross in the 31st minute, as Pyari poked it in on the volley. Two goals already to her name, Pyari soon turned provider when Ghanaian midfielder Matilda Kwao barged upfield to play to the former, who, with one touch, set Amiratou up to score the third of the game. Kickstart started the second half with more intent, though the Nita FA defence managed to hold on. Their best chance came in the 49th minute, when substitute Olivia Chanu's cross was brought down by Kiran, who set it up for Lhingneilam Kipgen to have a crack, but Adrija was up to the task once again, diving to keep Kickstart out. After setting up the first two goals, Neha finally got one of her own when Matilda played her through on the left. The 19-year-old burst into the box and smashed it into the bottom corner. Pyari got her second hat-trick of the season in the 78th minute, finishing off any thoughts of a fightback that Kickstart may have had.



SHORT TAKES

Mhatre named India captain for U19 WC

Mumbai: Ayush Mhatre was Saturday named captain of the 15-member Indian side for the U-19 World Cup to be held in Zimbabwe and Namibia from January 15 to February 6 next year. However, along with Vihaan Malhotra, Mhatre will miss the preceding assignment to South Africa -- a three-match ODI series -- due to their respective wrist injuries. In their absence, batting prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi will captain India on the tour of South Africa where all the three ODIs will be played at Benoni January 3, 5 and 7. Aaron George will be the vice-captain. Both Mhatre and Malhotra -- who has been named vice captain for the U19 World Cup -- will report to the Centre of Excellence in Bangalore for further management of their injuries before joining the Indian team. Sooryavanshi and George have also been named in the U19 World Cup team. India will begin their campaign against the USA January 15 at the Queens Sports Club, Bulawayo, followed by matches against Bangladesh January 17 at the same venue and New Zealand January 24.

Salah's Egypt into knockout round

Rabat: Mohamed Salah scored again for Egypt's 10 men as his team reached the Africa Cup of Nations knockout stage, while host Morocco was forced to wait as VAR provided the main talking point Friday. Morocco was held 1-1 by Mali in the late Group A game with both teams awarded penalties following VAR decisions. Earlier, Egypt held on to beat South Africa 1-0 and was grateful that another spot kick wasn't given. Salah, who secured the Pharaohs' opening win with a stoppage-time strike against Zimbabwe Monday, did it again in Agadir and his penalty before the break secured progression from Group B. South Africa should arguably have been given a penalty in stoppage time when Yasser Ibrahim blocked a shot with his arm. Salah converted his penalty after he was struck in the face by the hand of the retreating South Africa forward Lyle Foster.

Tilottama wins 50m rifle 3P gold at shooting Nationals



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Dec 27: Teenage Bengaluru shooter Tilottama Sen gave a composed performance to win the women's 50m rifle 3-Positions gold at the National Shooting Championships, here Saturday. The 17-year-old, who was the youngest Indian shooter to secure a Paris Olympics quota place for the country, took the top podium spot with a score of 466.9. Kerala's Vidarsa K Vinod secured the silver medal with 462.9, finishing four points adrift, while Railways' rifle stalwart Ayonika Paul completed the podium with the bronze after scoring 451.8. Earlier, Tilottama had topped

the qualification round with 591, underscoring her consistency across standing, kneeling and prone positions. Vidarsa followed closely in second place with 589, while Tilottama's Karnataka statemate Anushka Thokur finished third in qualification with 588. In the final, Anushka narrowly missed out on a medal, finishing fourth with 441.2. Ayushi Podder was placed fifth with 430.6, followed by Ashi Chouksey, who finished with 430.6 after qualifying with a score of 585. Shriyanka Sadangi (403.9 in final and 585 in qualification) and Ramita (403.8, 586) rounded off the final lineup.

Dominant eves eye fourth successive win over SL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Dec 27: Formidable India will be eager to register a dominance-extending fourth victory on the bounce in the fourth Women's T20I against Sri Lanka here Sunday.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led team has not even given a chance to its Lankan counterparts to compete in this five-match series, which currently stands 3-0 in favour of the hosts. It is evident in the fact that India, who chased in all three preceding matches, have not batted more than 14.4 overs, have not lost more than three wickets, and have never faced a target in excess of 129. The primary credit-holders for that overwhelming success are Indian bowlers. Seasoned spinner Deepti Sharma took four wickets across two matches, and Renuka Singh equalled that feat in a single match at the Greenfield Stadium here Friday. The toss also might have played a small part as Harmanpreet called it right on all three occasions and elected to field, giving her bowlers a chance to operate in conditions with lesser dew. But the bowlers have maximised that opportunity spectacularly, not allowing any of the Sri Lankan batters to cross an individual 40 so far. In this series, India also have tried various combinations as well. Arundhati Reddy played the first two matches, while Renuka came in for her pace colleague in the next contest.



preet called it right on all three occasions and elected to field, giving her bowlers a chance to operate in conditions with lesser dew. But the bowlers have maximised that opportunity spectacularly, not allowing any of the Sri Lankan batters to cross an individual 40 so far. In this series, India also have tried various combinations as well. Arundhati Reddy played the first two matches, while Renuka came in for her pace colleague in the next contest.

"We have been trying different combinations with the (T20) World Cup (2026) in mind. We want to keep our standards high after winning the (ODI) World Cup recently. And we want our standard and performance to remain high," said Renuka in the post-match press conference here. The Indian batters too have backed the bowlers with a crushing show with Shafali Verma and Jemimah Rodrigues leading the parade with a fifty each.

FIDE WORLD RAPID CHAMPIONSHIPS

Erigaisi, Gukesh in joint lead with Carlsen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Doha, Dec 27: Reigning classical world champion D Gukesh, Arjun Erigaisi and world No 1 Magnus Carlsen were among the leaders after the first five rounds on the opening day of the FIDE World Rapid Championships here Thursday. The trio shared the top spot on 4.5 points alongside Maxime Vachier-Lagrave and Vladislav Artemiev. Carlsen was in great form on day one winning the four games easily but he was held to a draw in the fifth and final round by Erigaisi late Friday as both ended up on 4.5 points. In the Queen's Gambit Declined, the Norwegian and the young Indian GM went for a line which quickly transitioned into an equal queen and rook endgame.



Carlsen did push hard for victory but eventually reached a rook ending where he had had two extra "f" and "h" pawns. This theoretically drawn position requires precision from the weaker side which Erigaisi demonstrated, denying Carlsen the perfect score on the opening day. After an unimpressive showing in the Global Chess League in Mumbai recently, Gukesh had a great run after starting with a draw in round one. He then went on to notch up four wins to join the leaders. Meanwhile, Women's World champion in classical chess, Ju Wenjun, ended the day on 3 points as well.

Sabalenka, Kyrgios await 'Battle of the Sexes' challenge

In the original 1973 "Battle of the Sexes", women's trailblazer Billie Jean King beat then 55-year-old former Grand Slam champion Bobby Riggs, who had maintained that women's tennis was inferior to the men's game

REUTERS

Dubai, Dec 27: World number one Aryna Sabalenka and Australian Nick Kyrgios said they were excited about facing the unknown when they meet in Sunday's "Battle of the Sexes" exhibition match that has divided opinion in the tennis world. Sunday's showdown between four-times Grand Slam champion Sabalenka and former world number 13 Kyrgios is seen by many as entertainment, but critics believe it risks undermin-

ing women's tennis by trivialising decades of progress toward equality. The duo said they were not paying too much attention to the debate surrounding the contest at Dubai's Coca-Cola Arena. "This event is really unpredictable, and I don't know what to expect," Sabalenka told reporters Saturday. "That's what I love because this is the feeling you chase when you play sport, these unpredictable situations, and I love to challenge myself. For me, it's a huge challenge, es-



pecially playing Nick, the guy who's unpredictable and crazy. "That's great training for me and that's a great message to the girls out there. I hope they're going to watch, and they're going to see how strong and tough I

am to have the guts to challenge myself to play against the guy," she added. In the original 1973 "Battle of the Sexes", women's trailblazer Billie Jean King beat then 55-year-old former Grand Slam

- Sabalenka embracing the unpredictability of exhibition match
- Kyrgios sees event as a chance to promote unity in sport
- Critics say match risks undermining women's tennis

champion Bobby Riggs, who had maintained that women's tennis was inferior to the men's game. Kyrgios said the world needed more collaborative efforts like his match against Sabalenka. "There's too much division and too much fighting and not enough teamwork," Kyrgios said. "So regardless of the outcome, obviously I'm not saying I don't want to win, but I want to win. "I think it shows that we can do some pretty incredible things together in sport," he added.