



## 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

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## Record SIP inflows

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

BUSINESS | P11



## 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

SPORTS | P12

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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

## 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

seize the stage. Students of the school resisted the attackers, and at least 20 were injured by flying debris, according to the organisers. In the wake of the volatile situation, organising committee convener Mustafizur Rahman Shamim cancelled the show on the orders of the Faridpur district administration, The Daily Star newspaper reported.

James, the lead singer, songwriter and guitarist of Bangladeshi rock band Nagar Baul, has sung in several hit Bollywood films.

## 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 members 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 Samiti (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.

## 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 3.5-4 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.

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## 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 foot-hills 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



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

titude, and dream to have a meaningful life by serving the nature," Das said.

The DFO said that the women have undergone three months of physical training since October.

Two of the five women personnel are expert swimmers, and they have also been trained in cruise div

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.

## leisure

## 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 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 enthrall 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 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, 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.

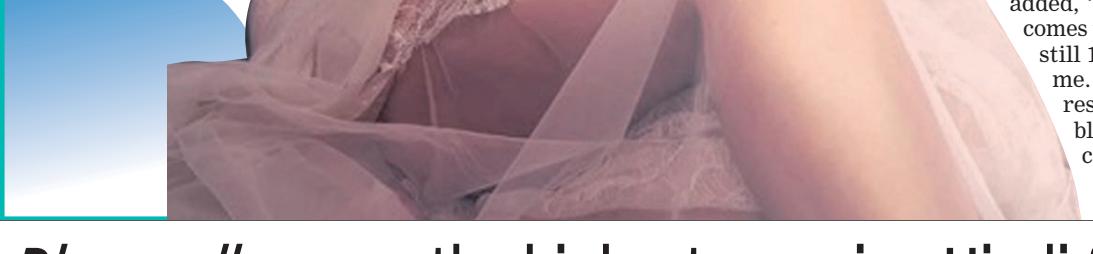
Sharing an album of some of her high-fashion moments, Bhumi wrote on her Instagram handle, "Fashion has been my quiet rebellion, my armor, my joy. Through love, hate, and every narrative formed around me, it's helped me stay rooted in who I am."

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 Biiwi*, 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.

IANS



## 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

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 *Chhavaa* ( ₹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



## Rashmika's secret to balance films in multiple languages

**Hyderabad:** Rashmika Mandanna has risen to become one of the top sellable stars in the film industry. She made her mark in the movie industry by being a talented actress across Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi films.

Walking the fine line in films of multiple languages, Mandanna has no illusions. She doesn't segregate the film industries; she believes in giving each of her films the same attention, grit, and gratefulness. Based out of either Mumbai or Hyderabad, she feels the urge to be available, if not on set, and, more crucially, to give her best to a movie, the project, and the people around her. Perhaps not having a particu-

lar image, she is more interested in breaking stereotypes, switching between roles, and growing.

This transiting across industries has given her pan-Indian stardom while staying true to herself.

About her personal life especially the much speculated marriage in the near future, Rashmika remains tight-lipped. Though a lot of talk is doing rounds among her followers, she categorically mentions that there are things which should not be said out in the open.

For now, the actress is working on upgrading her skills and broadening her horizons, thankful about what she has achieved till now and showing a lot of pride and confidence in her self-made success.

AGENCIES



## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBES

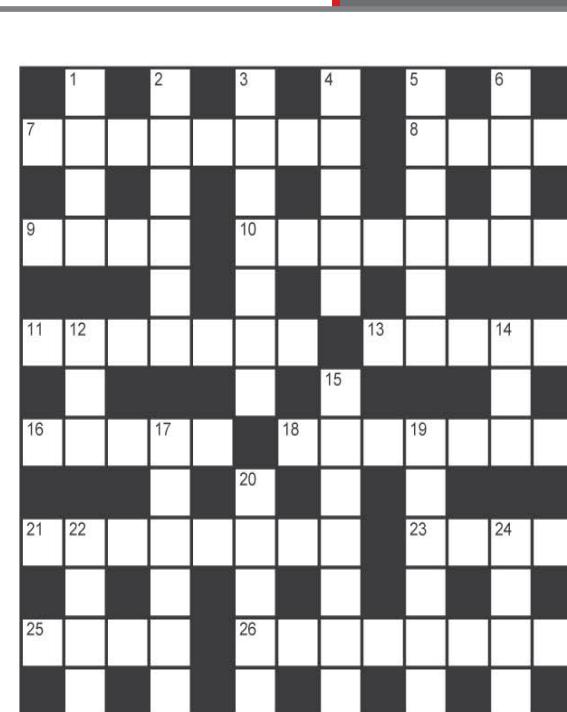


## BREVITY



## FUN POST

## CROSSWORD



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## Across

- 1 Beauty treatment
- 2 Consumer
- 3 Kind of surgeon
- 4 Speak well of the dead
- 5 Devour
- 6 Eucalyptus eater
- 7 Inclement
- 8 Similar
- 9 Cavort
- 10 Cane toad
- 11 Smart aleck
- 12 Place to hibernate
- 13 Market features
- 14 Relic repositories
- 15 Broad sword
- 16 Unkempt
- 17 Arrange
- 18 Hooligan
- 19 Circus performer
- 20 Relic repositories
- 21 Egg cells
- 22 Relic repositories
- 23 Pastoral place
- 24 Relic repositories
- 25 Relic repositories
- 26 Relic repositories

## Down

- 1 Place to hibernate
- 2 Market features
- 3 Relic repositories
- 4 Water sources
- 5 Avid (4,2)
- 6 Invoice amounts
- 7 Egg cells
- 8 Relic repositories
- 9 Relic repositories
- 10 Relic repositories
- 11 Relic repositories
- 12 Relic repositories
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- 24 Relic repositories

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## 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	9							
3	1	5						

## SOLUTIONS

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

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								

# downtown

## BLOs pillars of election process: CEC

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar Saturday began his three-day visit to Odisha by offering prayers at Srimandir in Puri, and described booth-level officers (BLOs), whom he will meet later, as 'pillars of the election process'.

Accompanied by his family, Kumar arrived at the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) here and straightaway went to Puri for darshan of the sibling deities – Lord Balabhadra, Devi Subhadra and Lord Jagannath.

"I have come to Odisha with my family to have darshan of Lord Jagannath, to understand and experience the local culture, and also to meet our BLOs, who are the pillars of our election process. We will be in Odisha for two to three days," Kumar told reporters here.

Kumar also said art, literature and culture of Odisha are ancient and unique. "I will learn as much as possible about these rich traditions," he said.

Senior temple officials and servitors apprised him of the spiritual and cultural uniqueness of Lord Jagannath, the distinctive rituals and traditions of Srimandir, the



**The CEC said both Srimandir at Puri and the Sun Temple at Konark stand as magnificent examples of Odisha's rich heritage and age-old traditions**

world-famous Rath Yatra held annually in the presence of millions of devotees, as well as the exquisite temple architecture and deep-rooted devotional practices.

The CEC later travelled along the marine drive to the famous Sun Temple at Konark. He was briefed on the extraordinary craftsmanship and historical significance of Konark, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built

in the distinctive Kalinga style of architecture.

"The Sun Temple at Konark is not only a symbol of Odisha's heritage but also a matter of pride and honour for the entire nation. One can truly appreciate how prosperous ancient India was in terms of wealth, knowledge, and scientific advancement," he said adding that this legacy fills one's heart with deep sense of pride.

The CEC said that both Srimandir at Puri and the Sun Temple at Konark stand as magnificent examples of the state's rich heritage and age-old traditions.

"The divine experience of visiting these sacred and historic places will remain etched in my memory forever," he stated.

On his second day tour, the CEC is scheduled to visit several heritage and cultural sites, including Raghurajpur village, renowned for Pattachitra paintings, Dhauli Shanti Stupa, the twin hill complexes of Khanadgiri and Udayagiri, and the Mukteswar Temple in Bhubaneswar.

Before concluding his visit, Kumar will interact with around 700 BLOs from Khurda and Cuttack districts in Bhubaneswar.

The BLOs will play a major role in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Odisha, which is likely to be conducted by the EC in the third phase.

The EC conducted SIR in Bihar in the first phase, and the exercise is underway in 12 states and Union Territories (UTs) in the second phase.

Odisha and the remaining states and UTs are expected to be covered in the third phase.

## Odisha forms committee to review OMSA demands

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: In a bid to strengthen public healthcare services while keeping public interest paramount, the Odisha government has constituted an inter-departmental committee to examine the various demands raised by the Odisha Medical Services Association (OMSA).

The committee has been formed by the Health and Family Welfare Department and will be chaired by the Additional Chief Secretary of the General Administration & Public Grievance (GA & PG) department.

The committee will examine OMSA's demands from administrative, legal and financial angles and submit its recommendations to the state government.

ily Welfare Minister, Mukesh Mahaling held a crucial discussion with OMSA representatives in Bhubaneswar to ensure uninterrupted healthcare services across the state.

Describing the outcome of the meeting as constructive, the minister said the government respects the demands raised by the doctors' association and has already taken steps by constituting a committee to examine the issues in detail. He assured that appropriate and positive measures would be taken following the committee's review.

Appealing to OMSA to keep public health at the forefront, the minister urged the association to refrain from agitation in the interest of the people. He reiterated that the state government remains sensitive to the concerns of doctors and is committed to making public healthcare services more efficient and effective. At the conclusion of the meeting, OMSA expressed a positive approach, emphasising public interest and agreeing to continue dialogue with the government while ensuring that healthcare services remain uninterrupted.

Health department Secretary Aswathy S, Special Secretary Dr Vijay Mahapatra, and other senior officials were present during the meeting.

Earlier, acting on the directions of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Health and Fam-

## State to get ₹155cr for crop survey, farmers' registry

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The state government is set to receive incentives of Rs 155 crore from the Centre for the successful implementation of the digital crop survey and farmers' registry, officials said Saturday.

The Union government has formally assessed and approved the state's proposals under the Special Central Assistance (SCA), declaring Odisha eligible for incentives for both components of AgriStack - a digital public infrastructure initiative for agriculture, they said.

"The Centre will provide an incentive of Rs 100 crore for the successful implementation of the digital crop survey (DCS) and Rs 55.48 crore for achieving the first milestone of the farmers' registry (FR)," one of the officials said. This recognition reflects Odisha's strong compliance with national standards, timely achievement of coverage milestones, and effective execution at scale, he said.

The farmers' registry provides a verified database of cultivators, enabling accurate beneficiary identification for schemes such as PM-KISAN, CM-KISAN and crop insurance, another official said.

## 127 NCC cadets to take part in RDC



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: As many as 127 NCC cadets (80 boys & 47 girls) from Odisha have been selected to participate in the Republic Day Camp (RDC) in New Delhi from December 27 to 29. The cadets will also represent the state at the Republic Day Parade and the NCC PM's rally in the national Capital.

The contingent has been chosen from among nearly 64,000

encouraged them and wished them success.

Addressing the cadets, the minister said that the discipline, dedication and commitment of NCC cadets towards national unity and integrity are a source of inspiration for everyone. He expressed hope that participation in the RDC would be a memorable and enriching experience for all the cadets and said it was a matter of pride for Odisha that its cadets would represent the state at such a national platform.

The minister further stated that efforts are underway by the HE department to increase the number of NCC cadets in state, enhance women's participation in NCC and to establish NCC battalions for women in the state.

Odisha NCC Directorate Deputy Director General, Commodore Vikram Singh, presented a detailed overview of NCC activities in the state and thanked the minister for the initiatives taken to strengthen NCC and motivate cadets.

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: The 27th General Conference of the All India Insurance Employees' Association (AIEEA), coinciding with its Platinum Jubilee year, will be held in Bhubaneswar from December 28 to January 1, 2026. Around 2,000 delegates and observers from across the country, including a large number of women employees, are expected to attend.

The conference is being hosted by the Bhubaneswar Divisional Unit of AIEEA in association with other life and general insurance sector units in Odisha. A broad-based reception committee, chaired by senior journalist and policy analyst Rajesh Mahapatra, is overseeing the arrangements. Renowned economist and social thinker Prabhat Patnaik will inaugurate the conference, while CITU general secretary Tapan Sen will attend as the guest of honour. Several trade union leaders from central and state government services, as well as the banking and insurance sectors are also expected to participate.

Held amid major global and national challenges, the conference will deliberate on key issues facing the insurance sector, including 100 per cent FDI, amendments to insurance laws, dilution of government equity in LIC and concerns over privatisation of public insurers. Pending demands such as wage revision, enhancement of family pension and higher employer contribution to NPS will also figure in the discussions.

The conference will also focus on the sharp decline in Class III and IV staff strength in LIC, wider employment concerns, economic inequality, labour reforms and democratic challenges, and is expected to chart programmes of action to defend public sector insurance and workers' interests.

## NO ENTRY

Amid reports of movement of elephants, Srikharchandi hills, a popular tourist destination in Bhubaneswar, has been closed by Forest department, Saturday, to ensure safety of visitors



## Delhi HC relief to Sengar draws protest in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Several human rights and democratic organisations Saturday, strongly opposed the Delhi High Court's recent stay order on life sentence awarded to former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar, the main accused in the Unnao minor rape case. Terming the order a planned assault on the judicial system, the groups organised a mass protest at Master Canteen here, demanding immediate intervention by the Supreme Court.

The protest was attended

by representatives of the All India Revolutionary Women's Organisation, Civil Society Forum for Human Rights and several human rights activists, lawyers, writers and social workers. Prominent participants included Narendra Mohanty, Basanti Acharya, Advocate Bishwapiya Kanungo and others.

The protesters alleged that the High Court's decision to suspend Sengar's conviction was legally flawed and ignored the gravity of the crime. Legal experts participated in the protest stated that the stay was not based on any prima

facie evidence establishing the accused's innocence, but rather on an erroneous classification of the offence.

The decision triggered widespread criticism across the country, with rights groups asserting that such orders weaken public faith in the justice delivery system and embolden perpetrators of crimes against women and minors. The demonstrators demanded that the Delhi High Court's order be withdrawn immediately and called upon the Supreme Court to intervene to ensure justice for the survivor.

## Speaking in Bengali can't be a crime: Mamata

AGENCIES

Kolkata, Dec 27: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Saturday, condemned the killing of a migrant worker from the state in Odisha and asserted that speaking in Bengali cannot be a crime.

Taking to her official X account, Banerjee told that a zero FIR has been filed in West Bengal and six people have been arrested in connection with the incident.

"We strongly condemn the brutal oppression and persecution unleashed upon Bengali-speaking people in every BJP-ruled state. We stand in solidarity with these persecuted, terrorised, and oppressed

## SAMBALPUR LYNCHING



migrant Bengali-speaking families, and we will provide them with all possible support. There is no price for a human life, but in cases where deaths have occurred, we pledge to provide financial compensation," CM Banerjee said.

The migrant worker from West Bengal, Jewel Sheikh, was allegedly killed in Sambalpur district following an altercation

over a 'bidli' Wednesday.

In connection with the killing of the youth, the West Bengal Police have already registered a zero FIR at the Suti police station and a police team from West Bengal went to Odisha to carry out the investigation.

"Most recently, migrant workers from the Jangipur area have faced various forms of oppression in the BJP-ruled state of Odisha. It is extremely unfortunate that a young migrant worker from the Sutia area of Jangipur was beaten to death in Sambalpur December 24. Migrant workers from Murshidabad are returning home from Odisha in fear. We stand with the families affected by this tragic incident,

and our financial assistance will reach the family of the deceased," the Chief Minister added.

She also said, "We condemn the perpetrators of these incidents in BJP-ruled states and pledge all possible assistance to the victims. Speaking the Bengali language cannot be a crime."

Referring to the Sambalpur incident, Banerjee said, "Regarding the death of the young man, Jewel Sheikh, the West Bengal Police have already registered a Zero FIR at the Sutia Police Station, and six people have already been arrested. A police team from my state has gone to Odisha for the investigation."

## Five-day AIEEA general conference from today



POST NEWS NETWORK

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LIFE INSURANCE CORPORATION OF INDIA

LIC/P/2024-25/26/E



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



PNN & AGENCIES

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 Kudanagar 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 Kudanagar police station IIC Arobinda Saran Mohanty.

Police assured the agitators that strict action would be taken.

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

## 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 Nirajan 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-storeyed 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.

Police assured the agitators that strict action would be taken.

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.

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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

## 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

PNN & AGENCIES

**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 onto dumpers for smuggling. The operation was carried out under the direction of the Keonjhar Divisional Forest Officer

## 3 manganese carrying dumpers impounded



and led by Champua range officer Akshay Chhatriya.

The team included Joda forest ranger Trinath Jena, Joda forest guard Debasish 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

## 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 opportunities, 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 Rourkela, he urged the entire fraternity of the institute to work towards rapid growth.



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Hailing the growth of NIT Rourkela, 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 pivotal 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 Jharpokharia 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.

## Two more Olive Ridley turtles satellite tagged

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Chhatrapur, Dec 27:** Two more Olive Ridley turtles, one male and another female, were satellite tagged in Rushikulya rookery, days after forest officials reinitiated the tracking of six of the rare turtle species in Gahirmatha.

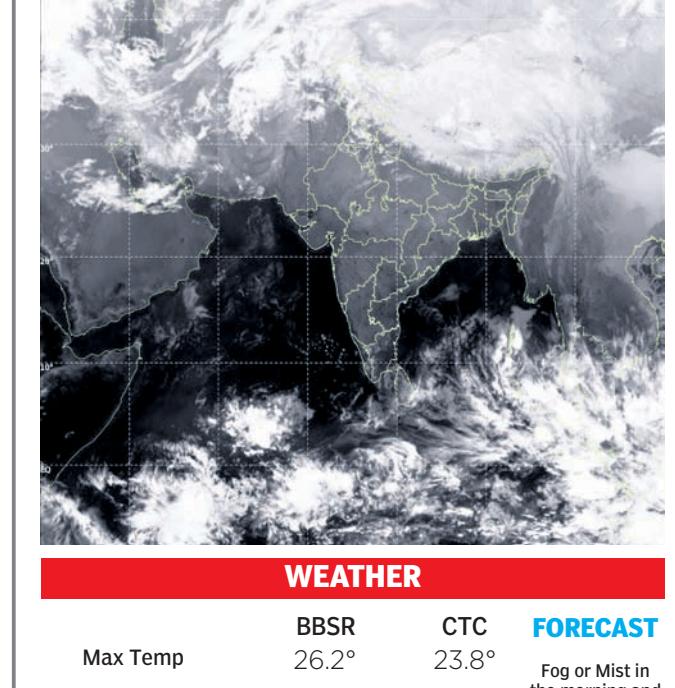
The forest officials said that the turtles were tagged to monitor and study their movements, their source and destination of nesting, and transition of seas during motion among other parameters. The satellite transmitters were procured from New Zealand, the officials added. A team of three scientists and researchers from Wildlife Institute of India in Dehradun are said to be conducting the research on the turtles. Berhampur DFO Sunny Khokhar, Chilika DFO Amlan Nayak and other forest officials.

With the mating season of the turtles underway, the forest officials have reportedly intensified patrolling of the restricted areas around the nesting regions.

of conducting the research is to find out the pattern of their movement and transition between seas. A deeper study is also needed to explore ways of conservation of these rare species." In the previous year, the turtles were tagged before nesting whereas this year the process was done during their mating season, DFO added.

The exercise was carried out in presence of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and MD, OFDC Prem Kumar Jha, Regional Chief Conservator of Forests (Berhampur) Vishwanath Neelannavar, Berhampur DFO Sunny Khokhar, Chilika DFO Amlan Nayak and other forest officials.

With the mating season of the turtles underway, the forest officials have reportedly intensified patrolling of the restricted areas around the nesting regions.



### WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	26.2°	23.8°	Fog or Mist in the morning and Mainly Clear Sky later
Min Temp	14.6°	12.8°	
Humidity	78%	80%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	



### EAST COAST RAILWAY

1) E-Tender Notice No. ST-SBP-TENDER-2025-38, Dt. 22.12.2025
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: 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-01, 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 - JUJUMORI), PEDESTRIAN SUBWAY AT KM NO. 527/6-7 (BRUNDAMAL - LAPANGA), LHS AT KM. 552/12-14 (SARALA - SASON)
Tender Value in (₹) : 1,68,69,162.50, BID SECURITY (₹) : 2,38,400.00
2) 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 ABBOT 200K OF SAMBALPUR DIVISION.

Tender Value in (₹) : 3,62,43,893.40, BID SECURITY (₹) : 3,31,200.00
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Date and time of closing of Tender : At 1100 Hrs. of 12.01.2026 (for Sl. No. 1), & At 1100 Hrs. of 15.01.2026 (for Sl. No. 2).

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.reps.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

Divisional Railway Manager (S&T) / Sambalpur

### WORKS DEPARTMENT

No. B-893

### OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER

RAIRANGPUR (R&B) DIVISION

e-mail: <a href="



## HITS

- Dhurandhar - ₹1,000cr\*
- Kantara: Chapter 1 - ₹900cr
- Chhaava - ₹797cr
- Saiyaara - ₹580cr
- Mahavat Narsimha - ₹326cr

## Hollywood

The year was quite eventful for Hollywood. While *Avatar 3*, *Deadpool 3*, *Gladiator 2* led post-strike box-office surge, Disney rebooted MCU and Warner reimagined *Harry Potter* for HBO. On collaboration front, Apple acquired Paramount and Netflix agreed to buy the film and streaming businesses of Warner Bros. Discovery in a major Hollywood deal. But the focus was on Oscars glories and also on marriages and breakups.

## ..AND THE MISSES

- Emergency
- Azaad
- Dhadak 2
- Sikandar
- War 2

## Academy glory

BEST ACTRESS  
Mikey MadisonBEST ACTOR  
Adrien BrodyBEST DIRECTOR  
Sean BakerBEST PICTURE  
Anora

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# national

**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 worst affected

**RAJDEEP SINGH SURIWAL** | 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 manda 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 Bangladeshi 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 MEHDHI** | NATIONAL CONFERENCE MP

**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 II

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

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 II.

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

The theatre's owner, part-

ners, 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.

## 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**

### 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.

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.

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.

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 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 survivor's father.

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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 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 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.

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## international



**Russia has boosted the production of arms and ammunition by 22 times during the course of the Ukraine conflict**

VLADIMIR PUTIN | PRESIDENT, RUSSIA

**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



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 Haqeeqat 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 SÜSSLI | 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 YOUSSEFF | 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. Manoj 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 Zelensky 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

**Overnight attack kills one, injures 19**  
**Poland temporarily closes two airports**  
**Zelensky to discuss territory, security guarantees with Trump**  
**Russian official sees 'turning point' in talks to end fighting**



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.

Under a US compromise, a free economic zone would be set up if Ukrainian troops pull back from parts of the Donetsk region, though details have yet to be worked out.

Axios quoted Zelensky as saying that if he is not able to push the US to back Ukraine's position on the land issue, he was willing to put the 20-point plan to a referendum - as long as Russia agrees to a 60-day ceasefire allowing Ukraine to prepare for and hold the vote.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Kyiv's version of the 20-point plan differed from what Russia had been discussing with the US, according to the Interfax-Russia news agency.

But he expressed optimism that matters had reached a "turning point" in the search for a settlement.

Putin's foreign policy aide, Yuri Ushakov, spoke with members of the Trump administration after Moscow received US proposals about a possible peace deal, the Kremlin said Friday. It did not disclose how Moscow had viewed the documents.

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 citizens.

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."

# Fresh truce between Thailand, Cambodia

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.

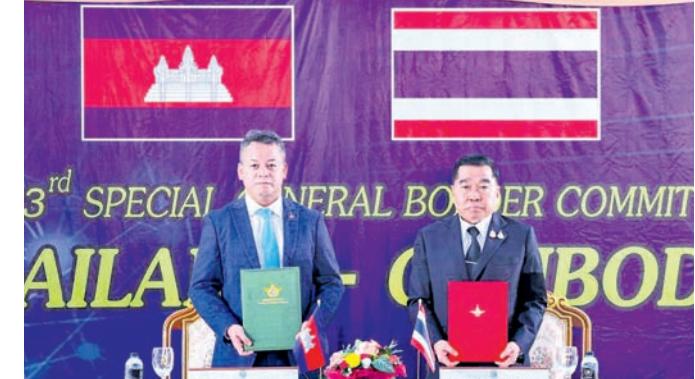
The ceasefire was holding, a Thai Defence Ministry spokesperson, Rear Admiral Surasant Kongsiri, told Reuters about two hours after it went into effect at noon (0500 GMT).

"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-



Renewed border clashes have killed at least 101

Border disputes date back more than a century

war Ibrahim had helped broker to halt a previous round of fighting.

"Both sides agree to maintain current troop deployments without further movement," the ministers said in a joint statement on the ceasefire.

"Any reinforcement would heighten tensions and negatively affect long-term efforts to resolve the situation," according to the statement released on social media by Cambodia.

For more than a century, Thailand and Cambodia have

contested sovereignty at various undemarcated points along their 817-km (508-mile) land border - a dispute that has occasionally exploded into skirmishes and fighting.

The new ceasefire will be monitored by an observer team from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations bloc as well as direct coordination between both countries, Natthaphon said.

Tensions between the two neighbours came to a head in July, when they clashed for five days along some parts of the frontier, leaving at least 48 people dead and 300,000 displaced before Trump intervened to bring about a truce.

# 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.

# China revises Foreign Trade Law to boost trade war capabilities

**Revisions aim to align with trans-Pacific trade bloc standards**

REUTERS

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.

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

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.



# 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 monthly 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

## Tilottama wins 50m rifle 3P gold at shooting Nationals



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

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.

Earlier, Tilottama had topped

## Dominant eyes 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 Harman-

## 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 Amritou 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

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 Amritou 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

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



## 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.

REUTERS

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.

"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 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 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.

Carlsen did push hard for victory but eventually reached a rook ending where he had two extra "f" and "h" pawns.

This theoretically drawn position requires precision from the weaker side which Eriugaisi 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 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.

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REUTERS