



Rashmika's journey

Marking 9 years in cinema, Rashmika shares an emotional note thanking supporters, reflecting on growth

LEISURE | P2



Iran protests

Several people die in Iran overnight as soaring inflation sparks the country's largest protests since 2022

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Record PV sales

Passenger vehicle wholesales in India clock a record 45.5 lakh units in 2025, growing by nearly 6 per cent, turbocharged by GST 2.0

BUSINESS | P11



Reetika dropped

Dope-tainted wrestler Reetika Hooda has been dropped from the Target Olympic Podium Scheme core group

SPORTS | P12

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BHUBANESWAR | FRIDAY | JANUARY 2, 2024

Cigarettes, pan masala to get dearer from Feb

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 1: The government has notified February 1 as the date from which additional excise duty on tobacco products, and a health cess on pan masala will be levied, replacing the existing GST compensation cess levy on such 'sin goods'.

A health and national security cess and excise duty on pan masala and tobacco products respectively will be over and above 40 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate, while in case of 'bidis' it would be on top of the 18 per cent GST rate effective February 1, 2026, as per notifications issued by the Finance Ministry late December 31, 2025.

A new MRP-based valuation mechanism has been introduced for tobacco products (chewing tobacco, filter khati, jarda scented tobacco, gutkha) whereby GST value shall be determined based on the retail sale price declared on the package.

An additional excise duty of 91 per cent on gutkha, 82 per cent on chewing tobacco, and 82 per cent on jarda scented tobacco will be levied.

Cigarettes, depending on length and filter, will be taxed in the range of ₹2,050-Rs 8,500 per 1,000 sticks.

The proceeds from excise duty will be redistributed among states in accordance with the Finance Commission's recommendations. Centre's tax revenues form part of the divisible pool, and 41 per cent of it is shared among the states.

Besides, the health cess will be levied on the production capacity of pan masala manufacturing units. Part of the revenue from this cess will be shared with states through health awareness or other health-related schemes/activities.

The purpose of this health cess is to create a "dedicated and predictable resource stream" for two domains of national importance, health and national security, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said in Parliament last month.



R-DAY PREP: CISF personnel during a rehearsal ahead of the Republic Day, at Kartavya Path in New Delhi, Thursday

PTI PHOTO

SWISS SKI RESORT BAR FIRE KILLS 40

REUTERS



Crans-Montana (Switzerland), Jan 1: Around 40 people were killed and 115 injured when a fire ripped through a crowded bar during a New Year's Eve party in the upscale Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana, officials said Thursday.

Police said the fire broke out at 1:30am (0030 GMT) as revelers were celebrating in a bar called Le Constellation in the resort in southwestern Switzerland, which locals said was popular with teenagers.

Swiss President Guy Parmelin described the disaster as 'one of the worst tragedies our country has ever known' and said most of the dead were young people.

The cause of the blaze, which was initially reported as an explosion, remained unclear but authorities said the fire appeared to be an accident rather than an attack.

SCENES OF PANIC

Video footage verified by Reuters showed fire spreading from the building, and witnesses described scenes of panic and confusion as people rushed to get out. "There were people screaming, and then people lying on the ground, probably dead," said 21-year-old local Samuel Rapp, who saw the aftermath of the

fire. The head of the local canton's police, Frederic Gisler, said around 40 people were presumed to be dead and 115 were injured, most of them seriously. He said it was too early to give details on the identity of the dead and injured but Italian authorities said 16 Italians were missing and about a dozen in hospital.

WITNESSES

Two young French women who said they were in the bar told France's BFM TV that they saw the fire start in the basement section of the club after a bottle containing 'birthday candles' was held up too close to the wooden ceiling.

"The fire spread across the ceiling super quickly," one of the two women, who identified themselves as Emma and Albane, told BFM TV. The pair said they were able to climb a narrow staircase to the ground floor and escape the building.

BFM showed video of a waitress carrying a champagne bottle with a lit 'fountain candle' through the bar, one of many

in Crans-Montana, a fashionable ski centre with an array of boutiques, luxury hotels and restaurants. But the footage did not show the fire breaking out.

Local prosecutor Beatrice Pilloud said an investigation had been opened into the blaze at the bar, which Swiss company records showed was owned by a French couple, but she said it was too early to comment on any possible safety failures.

VICTIMS COME FROM SEVERAL COUNTRIES

Witnesses said many of those celebrating in the bar appeared to be from different countries but officials said the grim task of identifying badly burned bodies would take time. Italy's ambassador to Switzerland, Gian Lorenzo Cornado, told Sky TG24 local authorities had told him the fire was started by someone letting off a firework inside the bar. He was in Crans-Montana, where he said a number of Italians had gathered seeking information about missing relatives or friends.

Video footage showed lines of ambulances queuing and helicopters landing to take victims to nearby hospitals and specialist burns units in other Swiss cities. Switzerland's neighbours, France, Germany and Italy also offered to treat victims in their own centres.

15-pt agenda to boost governance

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Thursday unveiled a 15-point agenda aimed at improving administrative efficiency and accelerating governance reforms.

On the first day of the year, Majhi handed over the agenda to new Chief Secretary Anu Garg.

The directives are aligned with Odisha Vision 2036, a roadmap aimed at transforming the state into a USD 500-billion economy by 2036—its centenary year—while positioning Odisha among India's top five developed economies through inclusive, mixed-model growth, contributing to a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Stressing the need for a strong



and progressive Odisha, the CM directed the administration to focus on knowledge-driven industries and the services sector.

Instructions have been given to all district Collectors to fast-track various processes for rapid industrialisation, an official said, adding that Majhi has also asked authorities to fill all the vacant government posts in the next two years.

The CM has instructed officers to identify corrupt and inefficient employees and take strict action, including compulsory retirement, against them to ensure a transparent and efficient administration. He also stressed the need for regular review and evaluation of development projects to ensure effective implementation.

Majhi instructed Nabakrushna Choudhury Centre for Development Studies to strengthen its focus on research and evaluation and develop it as a centre of excellence.

The CM has directed that all government work, especially notices, be done only in Odia language. Majhi also stressed on holding grievance hearing sessions at different levels.

Commercial LPG price goes up by ₹111 per cylinder

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Price of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), or jet fuel, was reduced by 7.3 per cent Thursday, while commercial LPG rate was raised by ₹111 per cylinder, as state-owned oil marketing companies implemented their monthly price revisions aligned with global fuel benchmarks.

ATF price in Delhi was cut by ₹7,353.75 per kilolitre, or 7.3 per cent, to ₹92,323.02 per kl, according to state-owned fuel retailers.

Commercial LPG rates were hiked by ₹111 per 19-kg cylinder in line with global benchmarks. Commenting on the increase in price of commercial LPG cylinders, a statement issued by the Oil Ministry said the price of commercial LPG cylinders is market-determined and linked to international benchmarks.

Accordingly, revisions in commercial LPG prices reflect movements in global LPG prices and associated costs. The prices of domestic LPG remain unchanged, it added.

India imports about 60 per cent of its LPG requirement, and domestic LPG prices are therefore linked to international prices, with Saudi CP serving as the international benchmark.

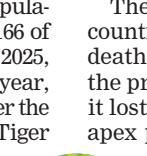
India loses 166 tigers in 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

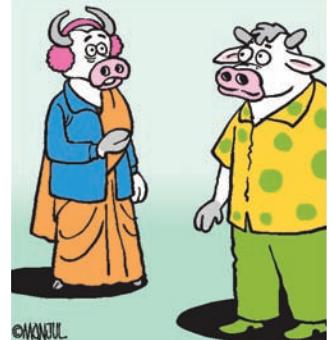
Bhopal, Jan 1: India, home to the world's largest tiger population, has lost as many as 166 of these majestic animals in 2025, 40 more than the previous year, due to various reasons, as per the latest data of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

The data also shows that Madhya Pradesh, dubbed the country's 'tiger state', recorded the highest number of deaths at 55. Among other states, Maharashtra, Kerala and Assam reported 38, 13 and 12 tiger deaths, respectively, in the bygone year.

Of these 166 deceased tigers, 31 were cubs. Experts feel ter-



IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Wear warm clothes, dear. If you are mistaken for *Bos taurus* instead of *Bos indicus*, it won't end well

In a first, goby fish recorded in Indian waters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Berhampur, Jan 1: A group of scientists has for the first time recorded the goby fish (Bathygobius meggettii) in Indian waters, from Aryapalli near Gopalpur in Ganjam district, the apex predators in the ecosystem who are considered to be at the top of the food chain.

The first tiger fatality of the bygone year was reported from the Bramhapuri forest division in Maharashtra January 2, where an adult male tiger died. This was followed by the death of a female tiger inside the Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh three days later.

Three live specimens were collected from an artificial



REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

rocky intertidal zone in Aryapalli, a fishing-dominated village, in December last year. After detailed studies, the scientists confirmed the species as goby fish and new to India.

"A report on the Meggett's goby (Bathygobius meggettii) from a coastal habitat in the Bay of Bengal was published in National Academy Science Letters, an international journal

discovery of this small species from a small artificial ecosystem emphasises the study of the micro habitat along the coastline for a better understanding of biodiversity of certain region," said Smritirekha Acharya, a senior research fellow and co-author of the article.

Other scientists and researchers who were involved in the study included Bhaskar Behera (Fakir Mohan University, Balasore), Subhrendu Sekhar Mishra (retired scientist, ZSI), KK Bineesh (scientist, ZSI), Rajesh Kumar Behera (senior research fellow), TKS Thatachari (senior zoological assistant) and Swarup Ranjan Mohanty (research associate).

These small fish use rock for hiding and feed on algae or small invertebrates and also serve as a good food source for the larger organisms. The

leisure

**JLO RESPONDS TO OUTFIT CRITICISMS**

Jennifer Lopez shut down trolls during her Up All Night Live in Las Vegas residency, pausing mid-performance to address criticism of her outfit. Responding to comments about "dressing her age," the pop star quipped, "If you had this body, you'd be naked too," drawing loud cheers before resuming her hit-filled set.

NETFLIX CRASHES AS STRANGER THINGS FINALE PREMIERES

Some users found it difficult to log in on Netflix Wednesday night to watch the finale of *Stranger Things*, the series that debuted in 2016 and became an instant hit with viewers with its band of adventure-loving kids, nostalgic 80s setting and the *Upside Down*.

**FORTUNE FORECAST**

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES

There are chances that today you will turn to your family for success and happiness, predicts Ganesha. Of course, your display will come at the cost of a small fortune. Later in the day, a platonic love affair may begin. Those already involved in a romantic relationship will encounter thrilling moments, says Ganesha.

TAURUS

There is a calculative and analytical day ahead of you, says Ganesha. You may find yourself controlling the direction in which things flow. Keep a check on resentment to avoid going into an emotional tizzy. Hopefully, predicts Ganesha, you may end up spending a lot of time trying to find solutions to pending problems.

GEMINI

Today, your actions may change your social surroundings forever, or at least leave a lasting impression on them. You, however, will appreciate a bit of quality time with yourself. Later in the evening, you may spend lavishly to leave a breathtaking impression on one of your friends from the opposite sex.

CANCER

With healthy financial condition, your focus will be more on your social commitments, says Ganesha. Though till afternoon you may have only yourself to give you company, you will be central to a conversation with like-minded people.

LEO

You will be so scheming and calculating today that you can even give the vixen in a soap opera a run for her money. With such stars on the horizon, it becomes imperative that you find a way to keep your temper, especially at work. You might find yourself in some risky situation towards the latter half of the day.

VIRGO

You will focus on your finances today and work towards consolidating your profits, says Ganesha. You may also make provisions for any crisis that may arise in future. Ganesha strongly feels that you may sign some agreements and documents that will become milestones in your future business life.

LIBRA

There is a very high probability of legal disputes receding and going your way due to out-of-court settlements that go in your favour. The afternoon may see you being unyielding when it comes to interacting with people. You will display courage and resilience when it comes to matters of relationships, or so hopes Ganesha.

SCORPIO

Systematic and organised, you are the one who would like to keep the work pending till the last moment. Instead, you prefer to complete your tasks in advance, when it comes to work. Your heart blossoms with love and affection as you look forward to a romantic date in the evening.

SAGITTARIUS

A day full of highs and lows in store for you, predicts Ganesha. Stress and worries are likely to surround you today. A quick makeover or a haircut may make you feel better. Try to complete the pending tasks.

CAPRICORN

It's a day of great expectations! You will expect a lot from people around you, even yourself, and the result may not be as expected, foresees Ganesha. The need for careful planning and smart execution of ideas will be pressing, and this should explain why you'll be thrifty in dealing with money matters later in the day.

AQUARIUS

Today, the slump in energy will beat the daylights out of you! Yes, the day does improve later and a sudden good news will take you by surprise. But be careful about meeting deadlines, says Ganesha, as you need to maintain your niche in the scheme of things.

PISCES

Indications are that you will be busy partitioning your time equally between business and family today. Make sure that means something a bit more meaningful than going home for lunch. You will encounter a little variety and excitement at the workplace today, possibly in the form of a new secretary. Keep hoping.

Rashmika celebrates her milestones

Mumbai: Rashmika Mandanna recently marked ninth year in the film industry by sharing a heartfelt and emotional note dedicated to everyone who has been part of her journey. Taking to social media, the actress reflected on her growth, experiences and the deep bond she shares with her fans, one she now fondly calls family. Celebrating the milestone,

Rashmika wrote that while she has completed 26 films, her greatest achievement is the love and support she has found along the way. Expressing gratitude, she thanked fans for their patience, faith and unwavering encouragement through every phase of her career. Reading messages, posts, and tweets, she admitted, brought her immense joy and made her feel calm, content and deeply loved. In an especially emotional moment, Rashmika confessed that while she doesn't know how she managed to sur-

vive the nine years, she knows she did so because of her fans' constant support.

She further thanked her audience for accepting her as she is and standing by her even when she was still finding herself. Emphasising the depth of the bond, Rashmika said the relationship

has grown beyond that of an actor and audience into something resembling family.

Professionally, Rashmika has had a strong year, with *Chhaava* finding success and films like *Kubera* and *The Girlfriend* earning her praise from audiences and critics alike.

AGENCIES

Alaya's introspection

Mumbai: Actress Alaya F has every reason to feel excited as she wraps up a transformative year on a high note. The personal growth in 2025, that the insightful lessons she new partner

Taking to Instagram, the

Bade Miya Chote Miyan

actress posted a video of herself and wrote, "One day I'll look back and know this for sure.. 2025 was the year I changed my life forever! So much gratitude for this transformative, powerful, beautiful year! I can't wait to show you what this year was building, in 2026."

The clip captures Alaya's ramp walks, stunning photo-shoots, vacation snapshots, and other cherished moments from the year.

In her earlier post, Alaya had taken a moment to look back on her journey through 2025. She described the year as one marked by grit, courage, and personal growth. Sharing her reflections, the *Freddy* actress had expressed pride in how far she had come, while also highlighting the challenges she faced and the lessons that helped shape her both personally and professionally.

IANS

Anshula calls for compassion

with the thoughts you're having right now, you wouldn't judge them. You'd soften your voice. You'd tell them to breathe. You'd remind them they're not broken, behind, or failing," added Anshula.

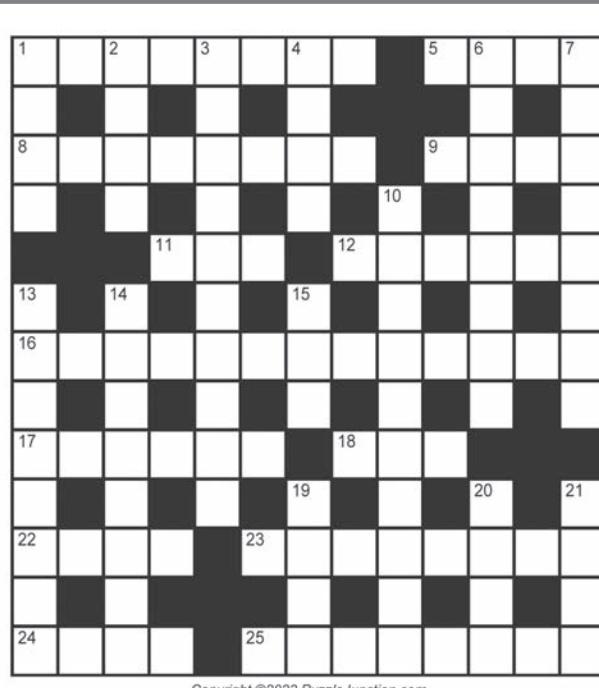
The *Traitors* contestant also reminded us all to "offer yourself that same kindness & turn that compassion inwards. Not every year needs a big reinvention. Not every January needs a master plan."

IANS

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.

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

FUN POST**CROSSWORD**

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Across

- 1 Monster's offering
- 2 Beta follower
- 3 Cozy retreat
- 4 Hogwash
- 5 Laser light
- 6 Restaurant appetiser
- 7 Busybodies
- 8 Fuel type
- 9 Etcher's need
- 11 Wildebeest
- 12 Ranch feature
- 13 Volcanic glass
- 14 Bingo and casino awards
- 15 Secret agent
- 16 Make-over shop
- 17 Printer type (3-3)
- 18 Cigar residue

Down

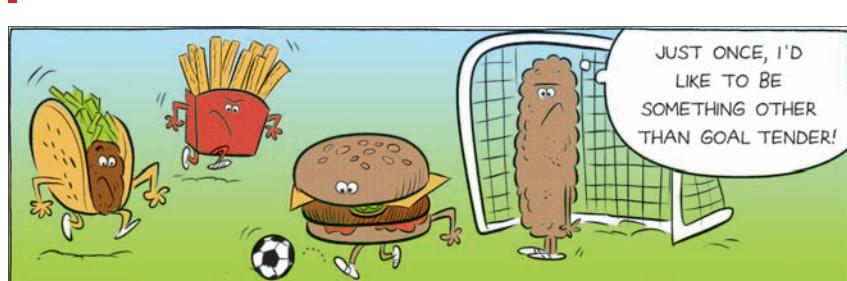
- 2 Caddie's offering
- 3 Beta follower
- 4 Hogwash
- 5 Laser light
- 6 Restaurant appetiser
- 7 Busybodies
- 8 Fuel type
- 9 Etcher's need
- 10 Exchange messages
- 11 Wildebeest
- 12 Ranch feature
- 13 Volcanic glass
- 14 Bingo and casino awards
- 15 Secret agent
- 16 Make-over shop
- 17 Printer type (3-3)
- 18 Cigar residue

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

SOLUTIONS

C	C	B	D	S	B
A	L	C	O	A	T
E	F	Z	R	A	H
C	N	F	I	L	T
O	N	G	E	C	A

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

CROSSWORD**SUDOKU****PEANUTS****CALVIN AND HOBBES****BREVITY**

downtown

City rings in 2026 with fun & prayers



POST NEWS NETWORK

RAM MANDIR

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: The Odisha capital welcomed the New Year with a mix of celebration and civic responsibility, as residents ushered in 2026 with lively hotel and club gatherings on New Year's Eve, followed by temple visits, sightseeing, and family outings January 1, all under close administrative supervision.

Hotels & clubs dazzle on New Year's Eve

On the night of December 31, Bhubaneswar's major hotels, lounges, and clubs were at the centre of celebrations. Premium hotels and popular venues across Jayadev Vihar, Janpath, Chandrasekharpur,

High alert for 'Zero Night' maintained

Anticipating large crowds

and late-night movement, the Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Police Commissionerate implemented extensive security measures for Zero Night, deploying multiple police platoons across the city, particularly near party zones, traffic junctions, and crowded areas.

Strict drunk-driving checks were conducted using breathalyser tests, and traffic diversions were enforced at key points to ensure smooth movement. Police also monitored event venues to prevent overcrowding, noise violations, and other law-and-order issues. Officials repeatedly urged citizens to follow safety norms, warning that violations would invite strict action. These measures helped ensure a largely incident-free New Year's Eve in the City.



DHAULI PEACE PAGODA

and Patia hosted gala dinners, live music performances, DJ nights, and themed parties.

Many city residents preferred staycations, celebrating with family and friends rather than traveling long distances. Several social figures, local celebrities, and influencers attended private events, sharing countdown party moments on social media while encouraging responsible celebrations.

While the festive mood was lively, celebrations remained largely controlled, with most venues ending loud music and events by midnight in line with police guidelines.

High alert for 'Zero Night' maintained

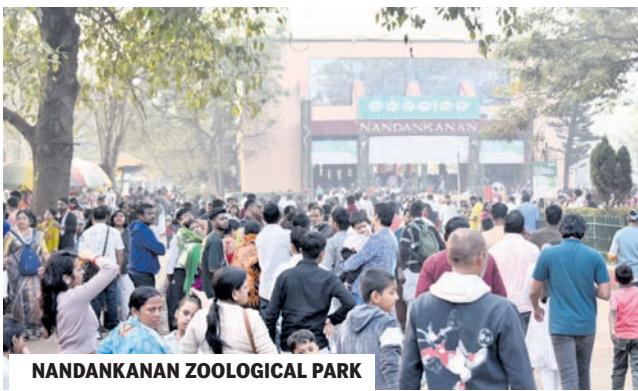
Anticipating large crowds

Jan 1: Temples, tourism & family outings

As the New Year began, the festive energy shifted from nightlife to spirituality and leisure. Early in the morning, people visited prominent temples such as Lingaraj Temple, Mukteswar Temple, and ISKCON Bhubaneswar to offer prayers and seek blessings for the year ahead. Tourist and recreational spots—including Ekamra Kanan, Khandagiri-Udayagiri hills, Nandankanan Zoological Park, and Dhauli Shanti Stupa—saw heavy footfall as families and visitors stepped out to enjoy the holiday. Several well-known Odisha personalities were also seen at temples and public places, extending New Year



KHANDAGIRI & UDAYGIRI CAVES



NANDANKANAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK

greetings and sharing messages of hope and positivity.

Government stance & public response

The state government upheld discipline by prohibiting New Year celebrations inside government offices, directing officials to treat January 1 as a regular working day and reinforcing a focus on governance and public service. Residents appreciated this balanced approach, which allowed celebrations while ensuring public safety and order. The City's calm yet

festive atmosphere reflected Bhubaneswar's evolving identity—modern in celebration, yet mindful of tradition and responsibility.

A promising start to 2026

As fireworks dimmed and prayers echoed, Bhubaneswar welcomed 2026 with optimism, unity, and renewed aspirations. The smooth conduct of New Year celebrations reflected effective coordination between citizens, event organisers, and the administration, setting a positive tone for the year ahead.

PICS: BIKASH NAYAK

Padhee lauded the effective use of mechanised cleaning systems, and stressed the need to maintain high standards of cleanliness through round-the-clock sanitation services.

During the inspection, Padhee reviewed sweeping operations in different parts of the city, closely observing on-ground sanitation processes and interacting with staff deployed during night hours. She appreciated the dedication of sanitation workers and BMC officials, lauded the effective use of mechanised cleaning systems, and stressed the need to maintain high standards of cleanliness through round-the-clock services.

The visit underscored the state government's focus on strengthening urban sanitation, enhancing operational efficiency, and ensuring a clean, healthy, and liveable environment for Bhubaneswar residents.

Padhee conducts late-night sanitation inspection in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Housing & Urban Development department Principal Secretary Usha Padhee conducted a late-night inspection of sanitation activities at various locations across Bhubaneswar.

She was accompanied by Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Commissioner Chanchal Rana, Deputy Commissioner (Sanitation) N Ganesh Babu, and other officers.

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Prez inaugurates IGNOU skill & regional centres at Rairangpur

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rairangpur/Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: In a major boost to education and skill development in the state, President Droupadi Murmu virtually inaugurated Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) Regional Centre and Skill Centre at Rairangpur Thursday.

The inaugurations marked a significant step towards expanding access to higher education and vocational training in underserved regions.

The online ceremony was attended by Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Education Minister of State (I/C) Jayant Chaudhary, and IGNOU Vice Chancellor Uma Kanjilal, along with senior officials and academicians.

Addressing the gathering, President Murmu highlighted the transformative role of open and distance learning in bridging educational gaps.

Describing IGNOU as "the people's university", she said the new centres would empower rural youth, women, working professionals and learners from disadvantaged communities. She noted that inaugurating the centres on the first day of the year symbolises India's renewed commitment to inclusive education and skill-based



development.

Speaking on the occasion, Pradhan said the initiative aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which promotes flexible, lifelong and multidisciplinary learning. He stressed that regional and skill centres strengthen local educational capacity while connecting learning with employment opportunities.

Chaudhary said IGNOU has played a vital role in making education accessible and flexible nationwide. "Skill-based education is the foundation of a self-reliant India. These centres will significantly benefit youth and working professionals," he said.

Sharing his views at the inauguration ceremony, Kanjilal said the Rairangpur Regional Centre will serve learners

across Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Balasore, Bhadrak and Jajpur districts by providing academic support, counselling, examinations and outreach services. The Skill Centre will offer industry-oriented training in areas such as IT, digital literacy, entrepreneurship and vocational trades, aligned with national skill initiatives.

Senior Regional Director Manoj Kumar Dash termed the inauguration a historic moment for northern Odisha, stating that the centres will enhance employability, support distance learning and contribute to national education and skilling goals.

Established in 1985, IGNOU is one of the world's largest open universities, with 57 regional centres and over 2,400 learner support centres across the country.

Guv, CM & LoP greet people on NY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Leader of Opposition Naveen Patnaik Thursday greeted the people of the state on New Year's and expressed hope for peace, unity, progress and prosperity in 2026.

Odisha Governor in a post on X said, "I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to you and your family on the occasion of the New Year. May the divine blessings of Prabhu Jagannath bestow peace, good health and happiness, and may the year ahead be marked by harmony, purpose and optimism for the greater good. I wish you every success and a truly fulfilling year ahead."

Majhi also extended new year greetings and called upon people to work together for building a strong, inclusive and prosperous Odisha. "The life of all may be blissful by the grace of Lord Jagannath," the CM said.

Patnaik also shared his New Year greetings and hoped that 2026 would bring happiness, peace and prosperity to people across the country.

In a video message, Patnaik conveyed his warm New Year 2026 greetings to the people of the state and said, "Jai Jagannath. My greetings and best wishes to all on the occasion of the New Year 2026. By the immense grace of Lord Jagannath, may the New Year bring happiness, peace, and prosperity to everyone's life."

Dense fog engulfs Capital city; conditions likely to persist: IMD

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: New Year celebrations started on a foggy note in the Capital city Thursday as several parts of the city witnessed dense fog during morning hours, significantly reducing visibility and disrupting normal life.

According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), visibility dropped sharply to as low as 30 to 50 metre at several locations in twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack between 4am and 12pm, making travel in peril. Vehicles were seen moving slowly on major arterial roads, while traffic police remained on alert at key junctions to prevent accidents.

Rail and road commuters also faced difficulties, especially on highways connect-



Low visibility in NH 16 near Palasuni over bridge Thursday

ing Bhubaneswar to Cuttack, Puri, and Khurda, where thick fog reduced visibility for long stretches. Despite the challenging conditions, no major accidents were reported.

IMD said the dense fog was caused by high moisture levels, calm winds, and a drop in night temperatures, a common winter phenomenon in the region. Weather officials have advised motorists to drive cautiously during early morning hours and use fog lights where necessary.

As the day progressed, visibility gradually improved after 9am, allowing normal movement to resume across the City. The weather department forecasted foggy mornings to continue over the next few days in parts of Odisha, particularly in coastal and river-basin areas.

Authorities have urged residents to remain cautious during early morning travel as winter weather conditions persist.

Lingaraj Temple engulfed in fog

PICS: BIKASH NAYAK

Centre to procure additional 6 lakh MT of rice from Odisha



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra Thursday said the Centre has agreed to procure an additional 6 lakh MT of rice from the state.

The state government has been urging the Centre to procure the surplus rice as warehouses are full.

"The Government of India has agreed to procure 6 lakh MT of rice, including 5 lakh MT of boiled rice, from Odisha by April," Patra said.

"The state has surplus rice of 7 lakh MT. So, the remaining 1 lakh MT of rice will be sold through auction," he added.

The Centre usually procures around 50 lakh MT of rice from Odisha, officials said.

Patra said paddy procurement is underway in 18 of 30 districts, and the state has secured 10.50 lakh MT of paddy from around 2.30 lakh farmers during the ongoing kharif season.

"The government has paid a total of Rs 2,350 crore to the farmers as MSP and input assistance for the procured paddy," he said.

Paddy procurement will continue till March, and the government will buy paddy from all registered farmers, he said.

During a review meeting held Wednesday evening, the minister instructed officers to expedite the procurement process by adopting all transparent measures. He also stressed taking appropriate action over allegations of irregularities.

'Embrace entrepreneurship for financial self-reliance'

PNN & AGENCIES



Expressing concern over low enrolment in social security schemes, Kambhampati advised local bank officials to intensify awareness campaigns about pro-people welfare initiatives

about the benefits they had received from various government schemes, including PMSBY, PMJJBY, Subhadra Yojana, PMAY, Atal Pension Yojana, and Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana.

Expressing concern over low enrolment in social security schemes, Kambhampati advised local bank officials to intensify awareness campaigns about pro-people welfare initiatives.

Villagers also raised several grievances during their inter-

action with the Governor, who directed the district administration to take prompt action to address the issues.

Puri MP Sambit Patra, Brahmagiri MLA Upasana Mohapatra, Puri Konark Development Authority Secretary Dilip Kumar Moharana, and senior district officials were present on the occasion.

Earlier, Kambhampati had expressed his intention to visit Puri on the first day of the New Year during a meeting with Patra at Lok Bhavan.

Villagers also raised several grievances during their inter-

CS Garg pays courtesy visit

Bhubaneswar: Newly appointed Chief Secretary Anu Garg paid a courtesy visit to Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati at Lok Bhavan here Thursday, marking the first day of the New Year. During the meeting, Garg extended greetings to the Governor and discussed key administrative priorities, ongoing development initiatives, and welfare programmes, aimed at promoting the overall progress of the state. The deliberations highlighted the importance of smooth coordination between the governor's office and the state administration to ensure effective governance. Kambhampati welcomed the visit and praised the administration's dedication to public service. He highlighted the importance of continued development and the well-being of the people of Odisha in the coming year, emphasising the need for teamwork to achieve these goals.

However, in view of the heavy influx of devotees to the Srimandir and the potential inconvenience due to security arrangements, he decided not to visit the temple and instead interacted with villagers at Krushnanjanpur.

The state has surplus rice of 7 lakh MT. So, the remaining 1 lakh MT of rice will be sold through auction," he added.

The Centre usually procures around 50 lakh MT of rice from Odisha, officials said.

He further said the state government has constituted a high-level committee under the chairmanship of General Administration and Public Grievance (GA&PG) department Additional Chief Secretary to examine the demands.



The committee also includes Health, Finance and Law department secretaries as members. The minister said he is personally in touch with the committee and expressed hope that a decision would be taken soon in this regard.

The doctors' association has been agitating for a long time over an 18-point charter of demands.

These includes implementation of the Central Dynamic Assured Career Progression (DACP), inclusion of dental and adhoc doctors under DACP, the KKB (Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput) Exis Policy, permission for transfer of medical officers posted in KKB areas after completion of their five-year tenure, a transparent transfer policy, cadre restructuring, safety and security for medical officers posted at health facilities across the state and health insurance coverage for all doctors.

Speaking to media, OMSA president Kishore Chandra Mishra said, "The previous government had also constituted a ministerial committee to consider our demands, but nothing came of it. The present government has now formed a secretarial committee. Is it right to delay a decision on fulfilling the rightful demands of doctors under the pretext of forming committees?"

He further said that doctors would continue with their protest until their demands are fulfilled by the state government.

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Grown in Koraput, sold as brand 'Andhra Coffee'



TDCCOL procurement target hit

POST NEWS NETWORK

Nandapur, Jan 1: Koraput coffee, which has earned international acclaim, is allegedly being diverted and sold by middlemen from neighbouring Andhra Pradesh due to official apathy in marketing and procurement, sources said.

The district administration and the Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation of Odisha Ltd. (TDCCOL), responsible for supporting growers and marketing the produce, have been accused of neglecting their duties, allowing Andhra Pradesh-based traders to gain control of the trade. As a result, middlemen are reportedly buying coffee berries directly from farmers in Koraput and routing them out of the state.

TDCCOL has fixed the procurement price at ₹105 per kg for coffee berries, with payments made to farmers a few days later through the NEFT system. However, traders from Andhra Pradesh are allegedly offering about ₹5 more per kg and purchasing berries clandestinely from areas such as Golur, Padua, Chatua and Kulabir in Nandapur block, as well as Lamtapur, Semiliguda, Dasamantapur, Laxmipur and Koraput blocks.

Some traders have also set up temporary processing units in Nandapur block. After procuring and processing the beans, they allegedly brand the produce as "Andhra Coffee" and sell it in international markets, triggering resentment among local stakeholders.

Officials said TDCCOL's plan to procure 100 metric tonnes of coffee beans has been affected by the diversion.

Nandapur block alone has 1,785 women self-help groups (SHGs), while the district has more than 20,000 such groups. Intellectuals have questioned why these groups are not being engaged in village-level procurement and marketing to ensure better returns for growers and protect the Koraput Coffee brand.

Coffee is cultivated on nearly 7,000 hectares across the Nandapur, Lamtapur, Koraput, Semiliguda, Dasamantapur and Laxmipur blocks using funds from the Coffee Board, the district watershed project and the MGNREGS scheme, official sources said. Of the total area, more than 5,000 hectares fall under government revenue and forest land. After shade plantations were raised, coffee saplings were distributed to farmers for individual and group cultivation, with the aim of ensuring sustainable income through coffee sales.

Experts said the district's soil and climate, owing to its

high altitude, are well-suited for coffee cultivation and produce superior-quality beans. However, Koraput coffee is reportedly being sold in international markets under the "Andhra Coffee" label.

Coffee plantations in Andhra Pradesh have suffered damage due to berry borer infestation, leading to a decline in production. As a result, traders from the neighbouring state have reportedly become active in Koraput to procure berries from local farmers.

Recently, coffee growers from Golur and Khudub villages raised concerns over trade and marketing issues with Nandapur Block Development Officer (BDO) Durga Prasad Dora. It has also come to light that Andhra Pradesh traders have set up a temporary coffee processing unit in Champatpur village, alarming local farmers.

Koraput TDCCOL has been assigned a target of procuring 100 metric tonnes of coffee beans by January 10, district TDCCOL officer Ashutosh Nanda said. So far, about 40 metric tonnes of coffee berries have been procured.

Nanda said TDCCOL purchases only fully ripe berries, but many farmers bring mixed lots of ripe and unripe berries, which are rejected. Those rejected lots are allegedly being bought by Andhra Pradesh traders, he said.

Sources alleged that middlemen have since reduced prices and are buying coffee berries from farmers at around ₹95 per kg, pulping and drying the produce before illegally transporting hundreds of bags of coffee beans to Andhra Pradesh.

Koraput Coffee Board Deputy Director Sachidananda Swain said he would discuss the issue with the District Collector and TDCCOL authorities and submit a separate proposal to streamline procurement and marketing of coffee berries in the district.

Satkosia to remain closed from Jan 4 for croc, bird count

Angul: Satkosia gorge in Angul district and the Shishupather reservoir in neighbouring Cuttack district will remain closed to tourists from January 4 in view of the annual crocodile and bird census, officials said. The crocodile census is scheduled to be conducted from January 4 to January 8, followed by the bird census January 17 and 18. The Satkosia forest division has informed the Collectors of Angul and Cuttack districts about the schedule through an official letter (No. 8105). As per the notification, tourist entry to both Satkosia gorge and the Shishupather reservoir will be prohibited in two phases. Tourist access will remain suspended from January 4 to January 8 during the crocodile census and again from January 17 to January 18 during the bird census. Officials said the temporary closure is necessary to minimise disturbance to wildlife and to ensure accurate data collection during the census operations.



CHILLY MORNING: Women labourers and street vendors warming themselves around a bonfire to beat the biting cold in Keonjhar town as temperatures have remained below 10 degrees Celsius for last two to three days

OP PHOTO

Demand for NICU at SRMMCH



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatna, Jan 1: Shaheed Rendo Majhi Medical College and Hospital, which has emerged as a key healthcare institution in Kalahandi district, is currently functioning from the district headquarters hospital. Since its upgrade to a medical college, several improvements have been made in healthcare services.

Despite persistent challenges such as shortage of doctors and staff, the hospital caters not only to Kalahandi district but also parts of Chhattisgarh's Deobhog area, Nabarangpur, Bolangir,

as well as Rayagada and Kandhamal districts. Thousands of people from these areas depend on this hospital for treatment.

The hospital has earned a reputation as a reliable healthcare centre in western Odisha, offering services in surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, medicine and other departments. While there has been noticeable progress in diagnostics and treatment facilities, the obstetrics department presently has only a Special Newborn Care Unit (SNCU). However, in cases of premature births, low birth weight babies and critically ill newborns, the

absence of a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) poses a serious challenge.

Due to the lack of advanced NICU facilities, many pregnant women, new mothers and critically ill newborns are forced to travel to distant cities such as Burla, Cuttack, Berhampur or Bhubaneswar. Private hospitals offering such facilities are often beyond the financial reach of poor families, depriving them of timely and life-saving neonatal care.

In view of this situation, there has been a strong demand for the establishment of a Level-III or IV NICU with advanced facilities at Shaheed Rendo Majhi Medical College and Hospital. Journalist and social activist, and President of Lanjigarh Press Club, Sushil Kumar Bag, has drawn the attention of the state government to this pressing issue. He has written to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Health Minister Dr Mukesh Mahaling, urging immediate steps to set up a full-fledged NICU at the facility.

Sundargarh man kills wife, arrested

POST NEWS NETWORK

Hemgir, Jan 1: A 30-year-old woman was allegedly beaten to death by her husband at Khutipani village under Hemgir police limits in Sundargarh district late Wednesday night, police said Thursday.

Hemgir police Thursday arrested the accused, Makund Dhanwar, 34, in connection with the killing of his wife, Pushpa Dhanwar, 30, in the village.

A team led by Inspector in-charge Manoranjan Bishi rushed to the spot and launched an investigation. "A case (1/26) has been registered, and the 'lathi' used in the assault has been seized," Bishi said.

According to police, the couple was returning home after visiting the weekly market at Hemgir Wednesday when they got into an argument on the road. In a fit of rage, Makund assaulted Pushpa with a lathi and later dragged her for about 300 metres to their home. Profusely bleeding, she succumbed to her injuries, police said.

Makund did not inform anyone about the incident. Suspicion arose Thursday when Pushpa did not come out of the house, prompting villagers to alert others. Following a tip-off, police reached the spot, recovered the body and sent it for postmortem.

Pushpa's father, Gunjal Dhanwar, told police that disputes between the couple were frequent. He lodged a complaint alleging that his daughter was murdered.

10 Andhra fishers held for intruding into Gahirmatha

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara/Rajnagar, Jan 1: The authorities Thursday arrested 10 marine fishers from Andhra Pradesh on the charge of illegally fishing within the prohibited turtle congregation zone in Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary of Kendrapara district, said forest officials.

The fishing equipment of the 10 individuals, hailing from Vizianagaram district of the neighbouring state, were seized. Later they were remanded to judicial custody. Two fishing vessels had trespassed into prohibited sanctuary corridors contravening the provisions of Wildlife Protection Act, Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act and mandatory rules of marine sanctuary, a forest official said.

With the latest interception, 367 marine fishers have so far been arrested this season 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.

OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER, ROURKELA (KL) DIVISION	
(Phone No. 0661-2950169 // E-mail: dfok1973@gmail.com)	
Order No. 260	Date: 31.12.25
No. MM-454: E-procurement Bid Identification No. 06 RKL-KL-F.E. & C.C./2025-26 Dtd.	
1. Name of Work	Construction of Forester Quarter at Lephrirpa (KL) Range under Rourkela K.L. Division, District: Sundargarh
2. No. of Works	: 01 No.
3. No. of Covers	: Single Cover
4. Estimated Cost (Excluding GST)	: Rs. 17,72,069.00
5. Period of Completion	: 03 Calendar Months
6. Date & Time of availability of bid document in portal	: From 10.00 A.M. of Date: 01.01.2026 to 05.00 P.M. of Date: 07.01.2026
7. Last date/time for receipt of bids in the portal	: Upto 05.00 P.M. of Date: 07.01.2026
8. Date of Opening of bid documents	: At 11.30 A.M. of Date: 08.01.2026
9. Class of Contractor	: "C" & "D" Class Contractor
10. Name and address of Officer Inviting Bid	: Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela K.L. Division, Panipoh

Further, details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal www.tenderodisha.gov.in. In the Addendum/Corrigendum if any will be hosted in the website only.

Sd/- Divisional Forest Officer

Rourkela K.L. Division

Tension flares after attack on vendor

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, Jan 1: Tension gripped Kacheri Market in Bhadrak town after a dispute between street vendors escalated into violence. A fruit vendor was allegedly attacked with a blade by a vegetable vendor from another community, prompting a complaint at the Town police station.

Police said the accused has been detained. However, the situation worsened when relatives of the accused allegedly abused and threatened a woman fruit vendor, further heightening unrest in the area.

According to sources, the incident occurred Wednesday evening at Apartibindha



one would be allowed to open shops, warning of dire consequences if they did.

Police have stepped up vigil in the market area to prevent further escalation.

After the incident, activists of various Hindu organisations reached the spot and staged a protest, demanding the immediate arrest of the attackers. They blocked traffic at the busy intersection, leading to disruption.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Manas Mahari alleged that police personnel were present

nearby during the attack on the fruit vendor but remained mute spectators. He demanded the arrest of the accused as well as strict action against the police personnel concerned.

As tension escalated, MLA Sitanshu Sekhar Mahapatra, DIB Additional SP Anshuman Dwibedi, Additional SP Arup Abhishek Behera, Tehsildar Priyadarshi Sangram Keshari Khunti and Town police station IIC Prabhanshu Mishra reached the spot and held discussions with the protesters.

The situation eased after a decision was taken to remove all roadside vendors from Kacheri Bazaar. It was decided that no vendor would be allowed to sit along the roadside.

Chilika, Bhitarkanika reverberate with cacophony of winged guests

PNN & AGENCIES



Bhubaneswar/Rajnagar, Jan 1: Much to the delight of ornithologists, migratory winged species are arriving in batches from Himalayan region to wetland sites in Chilika and Bhitarkanika National Park, triggering soothng chirpy cacophony in the region.

The marshy and swampy wetland spots in Bhitarkanika have again emerged as a congenial and human-interference-free winter habitat for feathered guests from cool northern hemispheres. Unbearably cool atmospheric conditions during the winter months force these migrant species to temporarily leave their original habitat. The Chilika and Bhitarkanika wetland spots in the state are the favoured destination of migratory birds.

Chirpy cacophony is pervading the wetland sites as winged species have thronged the region with a drop in temperature in their original habitat. Their flight has begun since past fort-night, said a forest official.

Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s Red Data Book, containing the list of highly threatened animals worldwide.

Apart from these, other exotic birds sighted this time are black-tailed godwit, northern pintail, lesser whistling duck, grey plover, egret spotted bills, oriental darter, white-bellied seagull, and black-necked stork.

These migrant avian creatures are arriving from the northern hemisphere and cold places like Ladakh. They wing their way in and around the water bodies, adding to the scenic beauty of the place. There is ample food security for the birds as the place, crisscrossed by innumerable water inlets and nullahs, is free of human interference, he observed.

Prominent among the winged visitors to Bhitarkanika this time are Indian skimmers, grey pelicans, white-backed vultures, lesser adjutant, and greater spotted eagles. All of these sighted species are conferred endangered status under the International

EAST COAST RAILWAY

e-Tender Notice No. ETCECONIIIBBS 2025060, Dated: 23.12.25

NAME OF WORK : EXECUTION OF PLATFORM SHELTER, PLATFORM SURFACE ALONG WITH ELECTRIFICATION WORK (PLATFORM 1A, 1B, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6) AT PURI RAILWAY STATION.

Approx. Cost of the Work : ₹ 2868.23 Lakhs, EMD : ₹ 15,84,100/-, Completion Period of the Work : 08(Eight) Months.

Tender Closing Date & Time : At 1200 hrs. of 23.01.2026.

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 : 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 / corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenderers/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal.

Only registered tenderer / bidder can participate on e-tendering.

The tenderers should read all instructions to the tenderers carefully and ensure compliance of all instructions including check lists, para 3.1 (additional check-list) of Tender form (Second sheet) Annexure-I of chapter 2 of Tender documents, submission of Annexure-B duly verified and signed by Chartered Accountant.

Chief Administrative Officer (Con)/ Bhubaneswar

AWARD OF THE Ph.D. DEGREE

GIET University, Gunupur has conferred the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Chemistry upon Mr. Godaba Dharmendra (Regd. No. 19SPHBS042)

vide Notification No. 162/GIETU/EXAM/Ph.D./2025 dated 24/12/2022. The Ph.D. has been awarded for his research entitled "Removal of Anionic dyes from wastewater by using iron oxide and graphene oxide modified on activated carbon derived from plant residues," completed under the able supervision of Dr. Jitendra Kumar Sahoo, Assistant Professor in Chemistry, School of Sciences, GIET University, Gunupur, Odisha.

The research findings have been presented at various national and international conferences and published in reputed journals.

Dr. Godaba Dharmendra is the son of Shri. G. L. Patnaik and Late Smt. G. Kusuma. He conveys his heartfelt gratitude to the University authorities, DRC members, Supervisor, Examiners, Teachers, his wife Smt. Lipsa Patnaik, his beloved daughter Bidisha Patnaik, family members, relatives, friends, and well-wishers for their constant encouragement and support throughout his doctoral journey.

All have congratulated and appreciated Dr. Patnaik on his significant academic accomplishment.

AWARD OF THE Ph.D. DEGREE

GIET University, Gunupur has conferred the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Chemistry upon Mrs. Gouri Mohini (Regd. No.

PRAYER FOR INDIA

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where Knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls..

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake (Rabindranath Tagore)

More than a century after Tagore wrote his immortal lines, it is perhaps time to revisit the great poet's vision of a new and awakened India. Inspired by the Nobel laureate, here is a prayer for India in 2026. An India which doesn't look at the present and future through a rear-view mirror. Where our MP's don't spend hours debating who cut which stanza from Vande Mataram in the 1930s or what Jawaharlal Nehru did or didn't do in the 1950s or what atrocities Aurangzeb committed in the seventeenth century but instead focus on what is our present leadership doing to build a better India for tomorrow.

An India where votes aren't garnered by appealing to caste and religious divisions but on real issues of governance. Where it really shouldn't matter which temple existed under which mosque in which century, where history is not reduced to a WhatsApp University course. Where the focus shouldn't be on building more places of worship but instead on how many quality schools and hospitals are being built.

An India where groups like the Bajrang Dal who are seen vandalizing Christmas events and assaulting Muslims under the guise of 'love jihad' are given exemplary punishment. And if they still don't fall in line, these self-styled Hindu Rakshak groups must be banned. Any form of religious extremism or violence across communities must be rejected, not just in well-spun words but with concrete action.

An India which puts constitutionalism above vigilantism, where the rule of law applies to every citizen, where you don't



Any form of religious extremism or violence across communities must be rejected, not just in well-spun words but with concrete action

depot someone and call them Bangladeshis only because they speak Bengali. Where words like 'ghuspetiya' or infiltrator doesn't become a political bogey, where hate isn't 'normalised' in a manner that the 'othering' of communities can lead to their social exclusion and targeting.

An India where environmental protection is the mantra of every government. Where precious ecologically sensitive areas don't get destroyed by rampant mining and greedy real estate mafias. Where climate change is not an issue only to be debated in air-conditioned seminar rooms but must translate into action on the ground.

An India where political parties don't end up as family proprietary firms, where there is genuine inner-party democracy and dissent is not seen as a rebellion. Where a 'washing machine' doesn't become associated with shifting political loyalties for those seeking protection from the law. Where the Enforcement Directorate isn't weaponised to become the Election Department of the ruling party by only focusing on opposition-ruled states.

An India where the ECI fulfils its constitutional responsibility to ensure free and fair elections. Where the ECI acts as a neutral umpire and doesn't end up becoming the B team for one side.

An India which embraces every Indian from Kashmir to Kerala. Where it cannot be that a Kashmiri student or shawl-seller is stereotyped as 'anti-national'

and made a soft target every time there is a terror attack in some corner of India. Where Kashmir is treated not just as a piece of land to be administered but where winning hearts and minds is given priority. Where south versus north, Tamil versus Hindi linguistic divides are shunned, where diversity is seen as a strength not a weakness.

An India which actually translates 'beti bachao, beti padhao' from slogan into reality. Where any sexual assault on a woman in any part of the country must lead to fast track punishment.

Where crimes against women don't become another glaring instance of a 'broken' criminal justice system where the process is the punishment. Where it cannot be that women who speak out against sexual harassment are denied agency and trapped in victim-blaming narratives.

An India which strives to reduce income inequalities, where Human Dignity Index matters as much as the GDP. Where the poor can finally get access to quality health and schooling, where equal opportunity becomes the goal of every government. Where it cannot be that the houses of the poor are bulldozed while the illegal colonies of the rich and influential are regularized. Where it cannot be that every major project is given to the favored few business cronies while many hard working entrepreneurs struggle with ease of doing business. Where becoming the third

largest economy should be celebrated but being ranked in the 130s in nominal GDP per capita should remain a cause of concern.

An India where lakhs of students aren't hostage to paper leaks and exam manipulation. Where exams are conducted in a meticulous manner without succumbing to criminal networks that facilitate cheating. Where the process of admission to colleges and specialized courses is guided by merit and not by 'sifarish'. Where skill development and job opportunities go in tandem, where an aspirational India is given every chance to move ahead.

An India where 'Na Khaaoonga Na Khanedonga' isn't another hollow slogan. Where rent-seeking politicians and bureaucrats are replaced by those who make personal integrity a byword. Where assets of elected representatives and officials are monitored and opened up to public scrutiny. Where the disproportionate assets of leaders are seized and the monies then spent on building homes for the poor.

An India where science is valued more than superstition, where work matters more than lineage, where a person's worth is judged by their knowledge bank and not just their bank balance.

An India where courts dispense justice and not just adjournments. Where when cash is found at a judge's door, the country should be alarmed and not silent. When judicial appointments are not based on political or ideological links but on their track record at the Bench.

Oh yes, before one forgets, an India where the media remembers that its role is that of a watchdog and not a lapdog. Where asking inconvenient questions to those in power is part of our professional dharma. Where an editor or reporter isn't judged by how close they are to a minister but how close they are to unravelling the truth.

Into that heaven of freedom, may India awake. Happy New Year!

The writer is senior journalist and author.



AN INDIA WHICH DOESN'T LOOK AT THE PRESENT AND FUTURE THROUGH A REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Alex Friedman, Trish Stroman

The lesson is clear: by involving women in the innovation process, companies can tap into markets that have been hiding in plain sight. Serving women better is more than fair: it could unleash a wave of global economic growth

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The lesson is clear: by involving women in the innovation process, companies can tap into markets that have been hiding in plain sight. Serving women better is more than fair: it could unleash a wave of global economic growth

SPECTRUM EDUCATION

Normalisation of commercialisation



Dhurjati Mukherjee

MOST BUSINESS HOUSES FIND EDUCATION A PROFITABLE AND SAFE BUSINESS TO INVEST WHERE RISK INVOLVED IS VIRTUALLY NIL

At the fag-end of last year, a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court brought into sharp focus the functioning of private and deemed universities across the country. What began as a student's grievance has culminated in an unprecedented nationwide audit of India's vast higher education sector.

In a sweeping directive, the apex court has ordered the Centre, all states and UTs, and the University Grants Commission (UGC) to file personally sworn affidavits detailing the establishment of these institutions, their governance structures, regulatory approvals, and compliance with the statutory requirement of operating on a not-for-profit basis. While such scrutiny is long overdue, the real test will lie in whether the new year witnesses a meaningful and rigorous review of private universities, exposing systemic deficiencies rather than allowing the exercise to remain a mere procedural formality.

A central question being raised—rightly so—by a large section of scholars is whether education in India has steadily become profit-oriented. This

reality can scarcely be denied, as evidenced by the growing presence of business houses establishing universities and academic institutions across the country. The more fundamental issue, however, is why such business enterprises continue to enjoy a range of concessions and regulatory leniencies while contributing little of tangible value to society. This imbalance has seldom been interrogated with the seriousness it deserves, either by governments or by civil society, resulting in the normalisation of a model that prioritises commercial gain over the public purpose of education.

Most business houses find education a profitable and safe business to invest where risk involved is virtually nil. Moreover, in the name of being not-for-profit, they get land from state governments at highly subsidized rates. Recall, in 2017, a Supreme Court verdict invalidated engineering degrees awarded via unapproved distance mode to deemed universities and barred them from conducting such courses without clear regulatory approval.

The current order is far-reaching as it questions

how private universities acquire land, appoint leadership, handle finances and whether they have credible grievance redressal mechanism. The demand for personal accountability—from chief secretaries to the UGC chairperson—signals judicial impatience with status quo. Besides, private universities, many of which operate under different central laws, are rattled.

Prime Minister Modi has been criticizing Macaulay for anglicising the Indian way of thinking, but the spread of quality education happened due to the efforts of the British. Both the Centre and states have not invested adequately to ensure spread of education to all parts of the country and allowed private parties to take over the business of education.

There is no monitoring of fees being charged, whether seats are reserved for poor and marginalised sections and whether these institutions conform to guidelines of the authorities, either by the Centre or states.

The larger question is how and why business houses with little or no academic background are permitted to establish

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

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HERE NOW

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Massive pilgrim surge across UP on New Year



Thousands of devotees took a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam in Prayagraj, while Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi saw very high pilgrim turnout

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

RAM TEMPLE MANAGEMENT IN AYODHYA SUSPENDED VIP DARSHAN PASSES AND REQUESTED LOCAL RESIDENTS TO POSTPONE VISITS TO ALLOW OUT-OF-TOWN PILGRIMS TO HAVE THEIR DARSHAN IN VIEW OF THE UNPRECEDENTED RUSH

cult on city roads.

In Mirzapur, heavy crowds were reported at Vindhya Chal Dham, where the district administration had anticipated an influx of 1.5 to 2 lakh devotees. Heaters were installed inside the temple, bonfires lit along major routes and night shelters arranged for pilgrims arriving from distant places.

"Queues are being managed systematically so that the crowd remains under control and devotees do not face inconvenience," District Magistrate Pawan Kumar Gangwar said, adding that security was tightened at the temple complex, Ganga ghats and key roads.

Ayodhya witnessed one of its heaviest pilgrim turnouts in recent times, with massive crowds gathering at the Ram Janmabhoomi and Hanuman Garhi temples.

Officials said the surge fol-

lows the formal completion of the grand Ram temple in November 2025. The second anniversary of the temple inauguration was held December 31.

According to authorities, millions of devotees poured into the temple town for New Year prayers and observances linked to the second anniversary of the consecration, overwhelming city resources.

Temple authorities managed queues, while security agencies intensified surveillance using drones and CCTV cameras.

Apart from the Ram temple, police deployment was strengthened at Nageshwar Nath, Hanumangarhi, Kanak Bhawan, Rampath and the Saryu ghats.

Traffic and crowd-control measures included restricted vehicle movement, designated parking areas and regulated pedestrian routes to prevent congestion near temple corridors.

In Varanasi, long queues were seen at the Kashi Vishwanath, Sankat Mochan and Kaal Bhairav temples. Officials said the number of pilgrims had been steadily rising over the past six to seven days.

According to the Kashi Vishwanath temple administration, around 3.5 lakh devotees offered prayers at the shrine till Thursday afternoon. Sub-divisional magistrate Shambhu Sharai said arrangements were strengthened from Saturday, with barricading ensured to manage the heavy footfall.

Strict restrictions were imposed on overloading of boats at the Ganga ghats, and life jackets were made mandatory for all passengers. Bomb disposal squads conducted intensive checks at sensitive locations, Agarwal added.

Meanwhile, Varanasi Junction braced for a surge in passengers ahead of the Magh Mela, which begins Saturday and will continue till February 15. Station Manager Arpit Gupta said a holding area has been created, more police personnel have been deployed and medical facilities have been enhanced.

Surveillance was strengthened at the station and five special trains will operate from Varanasi Junction during the Magh Mela period, they said.

Heavy pilgrim movement was also reported from Mathura and Vrindavan, where devotees thronged the Banke Bihari and Radha Rani temples despite the cold.

A person carries a toddler during a visit at the Kartavya Path on the first day of the year 2026, in New Delhi, Thursday

PTI PHOTO

NEW YEAR RUSH Delhi zoo welcomes over 25,000 visitors

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The Delhi zoo witnessed a significant spike in visitor footfall on New Year's Day, with the numbers rising by nearly 86 per cent Thursday as compared to regular weekdays during this time of the year, officials said.

According to data shared by the zoo authorities, 25,111 visitors entered the National Zoological Park Thursday, compared to the usual 12,000-15,000 on regular weekdays, indicating a substantial spike on the first day of 2026, they said.

On weekends during the same period, the footfall typically ranges between 15,000 and 20,000, zoo director Sanjeet Kumar said.

In anticipation of the New Year rush, the zoo authorities made special arrangements by opening additional entry and exit gates, strengthening security measures, upgrading CCTV surveillance and coordinating with police for crowd and traffic management, Kumar said.

Surveillance was strengthened at the station and five special trains will operate from Varanasi Junction during the Magh Mela period, they said.

Heavy pilgrim movement was also reported from Mathura and Vrindavan, where devotees thronged the Banke Bihari and Radha Rani temples despite the cold.

"On a regular day, visitors use a single main gate for entry. However, on New Year's Day, additional gates were made operational to ensure smooth movement," he said.

Delhi's disposal rate for POCSO cases second-highest in country

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Courts in Delhi disposed of significantly more POCSO cases than were registered in 2025, with the city recording second-highest disposal rate in the country at 178 per cent, a report said.

Delhi courts disposed of 1,792 cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in 2025 against 1,006 fresh registrations, thereby clearing a substantial portion of the backlog from previous years, it noted.

The report titled 'Pendency to Protection: Achieving the Tipping Point to Justice for Child Victims of Sexual Abuse' was published by the Centre for Legal Action and Behaviour Change for Children, an initiative of India Child Protection.

At the national level, courts disposed of 87,754 POCSO cases while 80,320 cases were filed during the year, resulting in a disposal rate of 109 per cent, the report said.

As many as 24 states and Union Territories recorded disposal rates above 100 per cent.

Delhi recorded the second-highest disposal rate in the country after Chhattisgarh.

The report was based on data drawn from the National Judicial Data Grid, the National



Crime Records Bureau and Lok Sabha questions and answers, as of December 2, 2025.

The report said the findings indicate that India has reached a tipping point where the justice system has begun to reduce pendency instead of merely managing it.

As of 2023, the backlog of POCSO cases in the country stood at 2,62,089.

To eliminate the entire backlog within four years, the report recommended setting up 600 additional e-POCSO courts across the country at an estimated cost of Rs 1,977 crore and suggested that the Nirbhaya Fund could be utilised for the purpose.

Despite the improvement in disposal rates, the report flagged several concerns, including wide inter-state dis-

parities, fluctuating conviction rates and prolonged pendency of older cases. Nearly half of the pending POCSO cases nationally have remained unresolved for over two years, it said.

In Delhi, the report said, 54 per cent of pending cases have been awaiting disposal for six to 10 years, nine per cent for five years, 10 per cent for four years, 13 per cent for three years and the remaining 14 per cent for two years.

Highlighting the broader implications, director of the India Child Protection, Purushottam Praharaj, said the country's response to child sexual abuse was at a crucial juncture.

India Child Protection is a partner of Just Rights for Children, a network of over 250 NGOs working across.

UP Police froze ₹325 crore in cyberfraud cases in 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Jan 1: The Uttar Pradesh Police froze Rs 325.25 crore siphoned off in financial cybercrime cases in 2025, accounting for nearly one-fourth of the total money lost by the victims, police data showed.

Providing cumulative figures, police said that between 2017 and mid-December 2025, 87,850 cybercrime cases were registered across the state. Of these, investigations were completed in 75,272 cases, leading to an arrest against 53,639 accused.

During this period, Rs 382.25 crore of the total amount cheated through cyberfrauds was recovered, the data showed.

According to the data, Rs 325.25 crore siphoned off in financial cybercrime cases in 2025 was frozen through the banking system, accounting for nearly one-fourth of the total money lost by the victims, after cases were reported to the police.

The funds were frozen after prompt complaints were registered on the National Cyber Crime Reporting (NCR) portal and the 1930 helpline, with the recovery rate rising from 11 per cent in 2024 to 24 per cent last year.

While police did not share details, officials said the frozen funds reflected improved response time and coordination in tackling financial cyberfrauds.

Permanent migration leading cause for 2.88cr uncollectable voter forms in UP



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow (UP), Jan 1: Permanent migration has emerged as the primary reason for electoral discrepancies in Uttar Pradesh, accounting for nearly 1.30 crore of the 2.88 crore uncollectable electoral forms identified during the Special Intensive Revision.

Official data as of December 27, 2025, shows that permanent shifting of voters constitutes 8.40 per cent of the total electorate. Election officials said this trend reflects large-scale inter-district and inter-state migration, with the highest impact observed in urban and semi-urban areas.

Apart from 1,29,77,472 cases of permanent shifting, the second largest category includes untraceable or absent electors. This accounts for 79,52,190 cases, or 5.15 per cent of the electorate, and is largely attributed to temporary migration, frequent changes in residence and inaccurate addresses.

Deaths of registered voters accounted for 46,23,796 forms, or 2.99 per cent of the electorate, indicating outdated entries in the rolls due to the time gap between revisions, most noticeable in rural areas.

Another 25,47,207 electors

DELHI'S NIGHT SHELTERS FOR HOMELESS

Warm beds, hot meals, roof over head

As Delhi continues to battle harsh winter conditions, night shelters remain a crucial lifeline for the city's homeless -- offering warmth, food and care, while also highlighting the need for continued improvement in basic facilities to ensure dignity for all

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: As a biting cold wave grips the national capital, Delhi's night shelters are offering more than just a place to sleep for the homeless, providing warm beds, blankets, regular meals and basic dignity at a time when survival on the streets becomes increasingly difficult.

For many residents, these shelters have brought a sense of relief and stability.

Mausam Kumari (45), a mother of a 12-year-old child, has been living in a shelter near AIIMS for over a month. "We are getting all essential facilities here. We get sanitary napkins, separate rooms and meals three times a day. What more would a poor homeless person need," she said.

Claims and objections will be invited from January 6 to February 6. The notice stage, disposal of claims and objections, and decisions on enumeration forms will continue till February 27, before the final electoral roll is published March 6, he added.

However, she pointed out that common washrooms some-



I get a medical check-up also," he said.

At the Sarai Kale Khan night shelter, caretaker Vikas said arrangements are in place to ensure that no one is left out in the cold.

"We have adequate beds and blankets. People are given three meals a day, along with tea, biscuits and snacks," he said.

According to him, the shelter maintains a sufficient stock of blankets. "If someone needs more than one blanket, even up to four, we provide it," Vikas added.

Each night, at least 60 people stay at the Sarai Kale Khan shelter, with separate rooms earmarked for women to ensure safety and privacy. As temperatures dip sharply after sunset, the shelter fills up quickly with daily wage workers, elderly persons and families who otherwise sleep on pavements or under flyovers, he added.

A similar picture emerges at night shelters near AIIMS. Ved Pal Singh, a caretaker there, said that 16 shelters have been built in the area, with a combined capacity of around 350 people.

Singh said the numbers fluctuate, but on most days, around 25 people stay there. To manage overcrowding, rescue vans deployed by the state government help shift people to nearby shelters when capacity is exhausted.

The funds were frozen after prompt complaints were registered on the National Cyber Crime Reporting (NCR) portal and the 1930 helpline, with the recovery rate rising from 11 per cent in 2024 to 24 per cent last year.

While police did not share details, officials said the frozen funds reflected improved response time and coordination in tackling financial cyberfrauds.

In 2025 alone, police blocked more than 77,000 mobile numbers and disabled 17,692 mobile handsets by blocking their IMEI numbers as part of a coordinated action against cyber criminals.

Police said public awareness remains a key component of their strategy, and urged citizens to avoid falling prey to cyberfraud and report any incident on the 1930 helpline number immediately.

national

of the day quote

The new year has begun. God should send rain and snow to ease our difficulties. I pray that peace prevails in our country, and that we become friends with neighbours so that we can emerge out of these difficulties

FAROOQ ABDULLAH | NC PRESIDENT

There can be no development in the state if the interests of the indigenous population are not protected

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

Before the BJP came to power in the state in 2018, Tripura had only four EMRSs. The Centre has since sanctioned 21 EMRSs for the state. Currently, 12 EMRSs are functioning, while two more will become operational by March 2026

MANIK SAHA | TRIPURA CM

SHORT TAKES

Man kills 3 sons; dies by suicide

Uyyalawada (Andhra Pradesh): A man allegedly killed his three minor sons and later died by suicide by hanging at his residence here in Nandyal district, police said Thursday.

Police are investigating the exact cause of death of the children, an official said, adding that further details would emerge after inquiry. "The man allegedly killed his three minor sons on Wednesday and later hanged himself at their house in Uyyalawada village," Allagadda Deputy Superintendent of Police K Pramod Kumar told PTI.

Former Bihar CM Rabri Devi turns 67

Patna: Former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi turned 67 Thursday, with Rashtriya Janata Dal leaders and his well-wishers greeting him on the occasion. Senior party leaders came to her official residence at 10 Circular Road in Patna to convey their best wishes to Rabri Devi, currently the Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Legislative Council.

Wanted Naxalite killed in encounter

Patna: A Naxalite carrying a reward of ₹50,000 on his head was killed in an encounter with security personnel in Bihar's Begusarai district, police said. The deceased has been identified as Dayanand Malakar, secretary of the north-Bihar Central Zonal Committee of the outlawed CPI-Maoist. Two of his associates were arrested, they said. According to a statement issued by the Special Task Force (STF) of Bihar Police, "Malakar alias Chotu, a Naxal who was wanted by the police in more than 14 criminal cases, died following an encounter with a joint team of STF and district police in the Teghra area of Begusarai Wednesday evening."

Mixed rainfall forecast for Jan-March period

New Delhi: Southern and central India are expected to witness good rainfall from January to March, while the northwest region comprising Punjab and Haryana is likely to get below-normal showers, the weather office said Thursday. However, the mixed rains forecast was unlikely to have an impact on the rabi crop as the northwestern parts of the country are well irrigated and good monsoon rains have resulted in reservoirs being full, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told a press conference here.



May the new year bring development and prosperity for Delhi. All of us together will endeavour with full dedication to make a better, Viksit Delhi

REKHA GUPTA | DELHI CM

MUMBAI WAKES UP TO UNSEASONAL RAINS

The New Year began on a rainy note for Mumbai as several parts of the country's financial capital witnessed moderate to heavy showers Thursday morning. Instead of welcoming the year with the first rays of sunshine, parts of Mumbai, especially the island city, were greeted by rains



FARIDABAD GANGRAPE

Accused threatened to kill victim before dumping her on road

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Faridabad, Jan 1: A day after a 25-year-old woman was reportedly gangraped in a moving van through the night and thrown out of the speeding vehicle, chilling details have surfaced pointing at the brutality of the two alleged perpetrators. According to the victim's family members, when the woman, a mother of three, screamed for help, the accused allegedly threatened to kill her before taking turns to rape her.

They later threw her out of the speeding van on a desolate stretch of the little-populated Gurgaon-Faridabad road after driving around for about three hours, they said, bringing back memories of the horror of the Nirbhaya rape on a similar chilly December night 13 years ago. The two men accused of the Faridabad assault, one from Uttar Pradesh and the other from Madhya Pradesh, have since been arrested and sent to judicial custody, police said.

According to officials at a private hospital where the woman was admitted Wednesday, her condition remains stable Thursday.

"The victim, whose condition is stable now, is undergoing treatment at the hospital," Dr Amit Yadav, director of the private hospital, said.

Haryana Congress president Rao Narendra Singh, who visited the woman at the hospital Thursday, raised questions on the "deteriorating law and order situation" in the state.

Calling it an inhumane and heinous crime, Rao said such cases must be tried in a fast-track court.

"I saw the victim, who was unconscious and unable to speak, with significant injuries to her face. Law and order have collapsed in Haryana, exposing the BJP government that boasts of women's safety," Singh said.

The woman, who had been living with her parents after



According to the victim's family members, when the woman, a mother of three, screamed for help, the accused allegedly threatened to kill her before taking turns to rape her

troubles with her husband, suffered severe injuries to her head and face, which required more than 12 stitches, police said. Recapping what had happened, police said that according to the survivor's sister, the woman had argued with her mother Monday evening, after which she went to her friend's house in Sector 23.

As she was getting late, she took an auto-rickshaw to the NIT 2 Chowk and then walked to the Metro Chowk.

As she stood there around midnight to take an auto to Kalyanpuri, the two men, who live in Faridabad, offered the woman a lift, but instead of taking her to her destination, they allegedly drove towards Gurugram and raped her inside the moving van, police said.

She was driven around through the night and thrown out of the vehicle near Raja Chowk in Faridabad around 3 am. Her sister said in her complaint that the woman was seriously injured after she was thrown out of the vehicle.

"Considering her condition, we decided to admit her to a private hospital," she said. Police have seized the Maruti Eeco used in the alleged crime, a senior officer said.

The woman, who had been living with her parents after

irregularities allegedly committed by Singh. The protesters pursued a 24-hour hunger strike on Monday on the completion of 100 days of their agitation without any success

The university has been witnessing sustained protests since mid-September against irregularities allegedly committed by Singh

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A three-member enquiry panel has been set up to probe into all matters pertaining to the ongoing situation in Tezpur University including allegations levelled against the Vice Chancellor. The VC shall recuse himself from all duties and proceed on leave immediately and shall remain on leave till the completion of enquiry," a senior MoE official said.

The enquiry panel has been asked to submit its report within a maximum of three months. The committee will be headed by Manipur University Vice

AGENCIES

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Indian Railways has successfully completed the final high-speed trial of the indigenously designed and manufactured Vande Bharat Sleeper Train under the supervision of the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS). The trial was conducted on the Kota-Nagda section, during which the train achieved a maximum speed of 180 kmph, marking a significant milestone in India's journey towards advanced and self-reliant rail technology.

During the trial, comprehensive technical evaluations were carried out, including assessment of ride stability, oscillation, vibration behaviour, braking performance, emergency



braking system, safety systems, and other critical parameters. The train's performance at high speed was found to be fully satisfactory, and the trial was declared successful by the CRS.

PM to launch Kolkata-Guwahati Vande Bharat sleeper: Vaishnav



in mind," the minister said.

Vaishnav said Guwahati-Kolkata air travel costs around ₹6,000 to ₹8,000.

Talking about per-kilometre fares, he said these would be ₹3.8 per km for 1st AC, ₹3.1 per km for 2nd AC and ₹2.4 for 3rd AC. The railway minister briefed reporters with a PowerPoint presentation, according to which the 16-coach train comprises 11 3-AC coaches, four 2-AC coaches and one 1-AC coach. Of the total 823 berths, 611 are in 3rd AC, 188 in 2nd AC and 24 in 1st AC.

Other features include ergonomically-designed berths with improved cushioning, automatic doors with vestibules for smooth movement, enhanced ride comfort through superior suspension and noise reduction, an automatic train

protection system (Kavach), an emergency talk-back system and disinfectant technology to maintain high sanitation standards, among others.

"The disinfectant technology will kill 99.9 per cent of germs. The same technology is being used on the Vande Bharat chair-car version," Vaishnav said. According to the minister, production is being ramped up and eight more trains will be ready for operation in six months. "By this year, 12 trains will be ready. From next year onwards, production will ramp up rapidly as the entire supply chain will be in place by then," he added. On catering facilities, Vaishnav said trains originating from Guwahati will serve Assamese cuisine, while those starting from Kolkata will offer Bengali food.

Pak, India exchange lists of prisoners, nuclear installations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: In continuing an annual practice that began in 1992, India and Pakistan Thursday exchanged lists of their nuclear installations that cannot be attacked in the event of hostilities.

The exchange of the details of the nuclear installations covered under a bilateral pact came notwithstanding ties between the two countries remained under deep freeze following the May 7-10 military conflict.

It was done simultaneously through diplomatic channels in New Delhi and Islamabad. The two sides also exchanged lists of prisoners in each other's custody, with New Delhi urging Islamabad to expedite the release of 167 Indian fishermen and civilian prisoners as they completed their jail-terms. It also sought immediate consular access to the 35 civilian prisoners and fishermen in Pakistan's custody.

The exchange of the list of nuclear installations took place under the provisions of an agreement on the prohibition of attack against nuclear installations and facilities, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"India and Pakistan today exchanged, through diplomatic channels, simultaneously at New Delhi and Islamabad, the list of nuclear installations and facilities, covered under the agreement on the prohibition of attack against nuclear installations and facilities between India and Pakistan," the MEA said.

The situation in Tezpur University had been tense with students accusing the VC and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg, even as the state was mourning his death.



People crowd the Marble Rocks waterfall on New Year's Day, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

Tezpur varsity VC sent on leave amid protests

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Nearly three months after students and teachers launched protests demanding the removal of Tezpur University Vice Chancellor (VC) Shambhu Nath Singh, the Ministry of Education (MoE) asked him to proceed on leave and ordered the setting up of an enquiry panel to probe into the allegations against him, according to a senior MoE official said.

The university has been witnessing sustained protests since mid-September against irregularities allegedly committed by Singh. The protesters pursued a 24-hour hunger strike on Monday on the completion of 100 days of their agitation without any success

"A three-member enquiry panel has been set up to probe into all matters pertaining to the ongoing situation in Tezpur University including allegations levelled against the Vice Chancellor. The VC shall recuse himself from all duties and proceed on leave immediately and shall remain on leave till the completion of enquiry," a senior MoE official said.

The enquiry panel has been asked to submit its report within a maximum of three months. The committee will be headed by Manipur University Vice

Chancellor N Lokendra Singh. The other two members of the panel are Nagaland University Vice Chancellor Jagadish Kumar Patnaik and UGC Secretary Manish R Joshi.

Meanwhile, the ministry has appointed Amrendra Kumar Das from IIT Guwahati's Department of Design as Pro Vice Chancellor of Tezpur University.

Earlier this month, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had spoken to Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan urging him to appoint a Pro Vice Chancellor immedi-

ately to restore academic stability at the campus.

Tezpur University, one of the two central universities in Assam established in 1994 under the 1985 Assam Accord, has been witnessing turmoil since September 27 last year and calls for the VC's removal have intensified.

The situation in Tezpur University had been tense with students accusing the VC and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg, even as the state was mourning his death.

India welcomes New Year with fanfare & gusto

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Crowds thronged illuminated malls, recreational centres and tourist spots and devotees visited places of worship and took a dip in holy rivers as people across the country welcomed the New Year with joy and enthusiasm Thursday.

Mizoram, the Christian-majority state, celebrated New Year with religious and traditional fervour, marking it with community feasts and church services.

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President C P Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and chief ministers of several states greeted people on the occasion and wished for peace and prosperity.

In the national capital, roads near the India Gate and Connaught Place witnessed mas-



People visit the 'Bangla Sahib Gurudwara' on the New Year's day, in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

sive traffic snarls while serpentine queues formed at key metro stations Thursday.

In Goa, one of the country's most sought-after New Year destinations, saw restaurants, beach shacks and nightclubs packed with tourists and locals.

Usually, the New Year is cele-

brated for two days in the state. All churches in the state held midnight services Wednesday night to bid farewell to 2025 and welcome 2026.

In Maharashtra, the New Year began on a rainy note for Mumbai as several parts of the country's financial capital witnessed moderate to heavy showers Thursday morning. Instead of welcoming the year with the first rays of sunshine, parts of Mumbai, especially the island city, were greeted by rains

2026 to offer prayers and seek blessings.

In West Bengal, large gatherings were seen at various tourist destinations across the state as people stepped out in large numbers to welcome the New Year.

In Karnataka, music and celebration marked New Year euphoria across Bengaluru from the night of Wednesday, with huge number of people stepping out to welcome 2026 amid lights, laughter and heightened security.

Tamil Nadu welcomed 2026 with vibrant celebrations at beaches and public spaces and prayers at temples amid tight security.

national

of the day quote



For some seats and votes, we will not accept political corruption

PINAYI VIJAYAN | KERALA CM

Delhiites gave us the mandate to serve, and we made clean air our foremost pledge. The record good AQI days in 2025 prove that science-led actions works wonders

MANJINDER SINGH SIRSA | DELHI ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

The DRDO is responsible for equipping our vital installations with an air defence system to ensure complete aerial protection over the next decade. We witnessed the importance of air defence in modern warfare during Operation Sindo. I am confident that DRDO will work wholeheartedly to achieve this goal soon

RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

X POST OF THE DAY

JOURNALIST: Who is responsible for death of 10 people due to contaminated water?
BJP leader: Don't ask nonsense question.

JOURNALIST: Mind your language, I don't fear anyone no matter who you are ??
Best thing to watch to start 2026 ?

@Amockx2022

SHORT TAKES

Soren urges tribals to study PESA Act

Seraikela (Jharkhand): Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren Thursday urged the tribal community to study the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) and understand its provisions to fully benefit from it. Addressing a public meeting after paying tribute to the tribal martyrs killed in police firing on this day in 1948 for the cause of separate Jharkhand state, Soren said while the Chotanagpur and Santal Paraganas Tenancy Acts are already there to protect tribal land, implementation of PESA Act would further strengthen gram sabha and panchayats.

Bengal: BSF arrests smuggler, seizes gold

Kolkata: The BSF South Bengal Frontier Thursday arrested a smuggler in West Bengal's Nadia district and seized six gold biscuits weighing 700 grams, a statement by the paramilitary force said. The value of the gold biscuits is around ₹1 crore, it said. Acting on specific intelligence inputs, BSF personnel intercepted a person close to the Indo-Bangla border fencing near Uttarpara Gede village December 30 and seized the biscuits.

Abhishek Banerjee to start campaigning

Kolkata: As West Bengal gears up for assembly elections in a few months, Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee is set to hit the road from Friday with a report card of the Mamata Banerjee government's work in the last 14 years of its rule since 2011. In an X handle post Thursday, the TMC raised the slogan coined by Banerjee - "Joto koro hamla, abar jitbe Bangla" (how much you may attack, Bengal will emerge victorious again). The post said, "No injustice, no conspiracy, no intimidation has ever bent Bengal's spine. In every battle to safeguard the rights and dignity of Bengal's people, Shri @abhishekaits has led from the front."



Even today, every worker and supporter of our party remains steadfast and committed to this goal

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CM

CH'GARH GOVT SIGNS MOU

The Chhattisgarh government Thursday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for expanding the healthcare sector in the state by developing quality human resources and creating new employment opportunities for the youth, an official said



Lokpal scraps controversial tender to buy 7 BMW cars

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Anti-graft ombudsman Lokpal has cancelled its controversial tender to procure seven luxury BMW cars, collectively worth around ₹5 crore, two months after it was floated, officials said Thursday.

The move assumes significance as Opposition parties and civil society activists had slammed the Lokpal's decision to procure the high-end vehicles.

Officials said the decision to cancel the procurement offer was taken following a resolution of the full bench of the Lokpal, after which a corrigendum was issued by it dated December 16, 2025.

The Lokpal had, October 16, 2025, floated a request for proposal seeking bids from reputed agencies for the supply of seven BMW 3 Series 330Li cars.

The procurement was intended to provide a vehicle each for the chairperson and six members of the Lokpal, currently headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar (retd). The Lokpal is headed by a chairperson and can have a maximum of eight members - four each judicial and non-judicial.

The tender had specified BMW 330Li "M Sport" models with "long wheelbase" in white colour for procurement. The on-road price of the proposed cars in New Delhi was estimated at around ₹5 crore.

The Lokpal's decision had



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The Lokpal had, October 16, 2025, floated a request for proposal seeking bids from reputed agencies for the supply of seven BMW 3 Series 330Li cars

drawn sharp criticism from the Opposition parties, who accused the "guardians of integrity" of "chasing luxury over legitimacy".

Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, had dubbed the institution "Shauq Pal", while former Niti Aayog Chief Executive Officer Amitabh Kant had demanded that the Lokpal cancel the tender and opt for electric vehicles manufactured in India.

According to the tender document, the selected vendor/firm was required to conduct a comprehensive practical and

theoretical training programme for the drivers and other designated staff members of the Lokpal to ensure efficient, safe and optimal operation of the BMW vehicles.

It had also mentioned both classroom sessions and on-road practical sessions, covering "familiarisation with all controls, features and safety systems of the BMW 330Li M Sport", "hands-on operational training, including start-up, parking, and emergency handling" and "understanding of fuel efficiency parameters and driving modes", among others, for the drivers.

The move assumes significance as Opposition parties and civil society activists had slammed the Lokpal's decision to procure the high-end vehicles

Parameshwara hopes for 'political promotion'

The senior leader, who had served as state

Congress chief in the past, had in November said that he too was in the race to become the CM, amid speculations about a change in the state's top post



politics, naturally I had an ambition to become MLA and Minister. From each step there will be a desire to go one more step ahead, but it is all left to our high command," he added.

Asked whether the situation was favourable for him, Parameshwara said, "you (media) are observing it every day as to whom the situation is favourable and to whom it is not."

"You people watch it through the camera lens, it may appear to you in detail." The power tussle within the ruling party has intensified amid speculations about a change in chief minister in the state, after the Congress government reached the halfway mark of its five-year term November 20. The speculation was fueled by the "power-sharing" pact between CM Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM D K Shivakumar in 2023. Amid the ongoing power tussle for the top post, there has also been demand for a "Dalit CM" within the ruling Congress, with Parameshwara, a senior leader from the community, as a prime contender.

There have been speculations within the party circles that Siddaramaiah's faction will push for Parameshwara or other senior leaders among them for the CM post, in case of any change of guard.

Hospitals asked to maintain stocks of anti-rabies vax

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The National Medical Commission (NMC) has issued a public notice directing all government and private hospitals to maintain mandatory stocks of anti-rabies vaccine (ARV) and rabies immunoglobulin (RIG) at all times.

The Commission referred to the November 7 Supreme Court order which issued stringent and time-bound directions to all states and Union Territories (UTs) and the central government to secure educational institutions, hospitals, sports complexes, bus stands/ depots and railway stations from stray dog ingress.

Major highlights of the order include identification and securing of premises of government and private educational institutions (schools, colleges, hostels), hospitals and medical facilities, sports complexes/stadiums, bus stands/ ISBT (Inter-State Bus Terminal) and railway stations through fencing, boundary walls, gates and similar structural and administrative measures within eight weeks. According to the order, each institution must designate a nodal officer responsible for cleanliness, prevent dog ingress, maintain liaison with municipal authorities, display the details of the nodal officer prominently and notify the municipal body. It also called for mandated quarterly inspections to ensure no dog habitats exist within or near these premises and to immediately remove any stray dog found inside the institution.

SNIPPETS

Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor takes charge as Vice Chief of Air Staff

New Delhi: Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor Thursday took charge as the IAF's Vice Chief of Air Staff, succeeding Air Marshal Narmadishwar Tiwari, who retired Wednesday after four decades of illustrious service to the nation. During his distinguished flying career, Air Marshal Kapoor has flown all variants of the MiG-21 and MiG-29, accumulating more than 3,400 hours of flying experience on a variety of combat and trainer aircraft, the defence ministry said. Prior to this appointment, he served as the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the South Western Air Command (SWAC).

ED freezes ₹192cr of WinZO funds

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Thursday said it has conducted searches at the accounting firm of real money online money gaming app WinZO and has frozen fresh bank deposits, mutual funds and fixed deposits worth ₹192 crore. The raid at the office premises of the auditor was conducted December 30. During the search, the federal probe agency said in a statement, "proceeds of crime" (name for illicit funds under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act) possessed by ZO Games Pvt. Ltd. (fully owned Indian subsidiary of Winzo Pvt. Ltd.) worth around ₹192 crore were frozen. These funds are in the form of bank balances, fixed deposits and mutual funds, it said.

8 dead in two accidents in MP

Katni/ Seoni: Eight persons, including three children, died in two separate road accidents on the first day of 2026 in Katni and Seoni in Madhya Pradesh. In the first accident, four persons were killed after a pickup vehicle collided with a motorcycle in Katni district at 7pm between Heerupur and Badgaon near Salaiya outpost, Rithi station house officer (SHO) Mohammad Shahid told PTI. The pick-up vehicle was driven away from the spot by its driver, who later abandoned it and fled, he added. The four deceased have not been identified as yet, though they are likely to be residents of Panna district based on motorcycle's registration details, the official said. In the second accident, a couple and their two children died after their motorcycle rammed into a parked truck in Seoni.



Visitors on the inaugural day of the 'Ahmedabad International Flower Show', at Sabarmati Riverfront, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat

PTI PHOTO

MGNREGA replacing law sets stage for political skirmishes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The rural jobscape is set to change in the future, and more politically contentious, as 2025 became the year when the two-decade-old MGNREGA, brought during the first UPA government, was replaced by the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Act, or VB-G RAM G, as the government dubbed it.

The law met with protests from Opposition parties in Parliament, as well as activists outside it, who argued that it alters the rights-based approach in the earlier Act.

Removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the original Act also met with vociferous denunciation by the Opposition.

In defence, Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan slammed critics and dismissed their objections as "misinformation" against the VB-G RAM G Act, which, he said, is a step ahead of MGNREGA.

According to the Rural Development Ministry, the VB-G RAM G Act is aimed at



establishing a "future-ready, convergence-driven, saturation-oriented rural development architecture."

The government argued that it aims to transform rural employment from a standalone welfare intervention into an integrated instrument of development.

While the MGNREGA provided for 100 days of wage labour, the VB-G RAM G Act provisions 125 days of work, which, the government said, enhances the "guarantee" for work.

The law met with protests from Opposition parties in Parliament, as well as activists outside it, who argued that it alters the rights-based approach in the earlier Act

■ Removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the original Act also met with vociferous denunciation by the Opposition

lated works, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related infrastructure, and extreme weather events mitigation.

All work originates from the Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans (VGPPs), prepared at the gram panchayat level through participatory processes and approved by the gram sabha, and would be digitally and spatially integrated with national platforms, including PM Gati Shakti.

The MGNREGA was a demand-driven scheme, which meant the additional funds had to be provided if there was demand for work. The VB-G RAM G Act provides for normative allocation to states, and any

expenditure beyond it has to be borne by the state.

While under the old Act, the Centre bore 100 per cent of the wage cost, and 75 per cent of the material cost, the VB-G RAM G provides for a cost-sharing pattern of 60:40 between the Centre and states, 90:10 for North Eastern and Himalayan States, and 100 per cent central funding for Union Territories without legislatures.

Activists have said the pattern weakens the law and puts additional burden on states, and will eventually lead to people not getting work.

Chouhan, however, said the allocations would be sufficient under the scheme for employment to be provided.

The VB-G RAM G talks about a comprehensive digital ecosystem, including biometric authentication, global positioning system or mobile-based worksite monitoring, proactive public disclosures, and AI for planning, audits and fraud risk mitigation, which will be used to modernise governance, accountability and citizen engagement.

WATER CONTAMINATION

NHRC NOTICE TO MP GOVT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The National Human Rights Commission Thursday said it has issued a notice to the Madhya Pradesh government over the death of seven people and more than 40 falling ill after allegedly consuming contaminated water in the Bhagirathpura area of Indore district.

Reportedly, the locals had been complaining about the "supply of contaminated water for several days", but no action was taken by the authorities, the apex rights body said.

The NHRC has taken suo motu cognisance of media reports that at least seven people died and more than 40 others fell ill after consuming contaminated water.

According to Mayor Pushyamitra Bhagavata, preliminary assessment suggested that drainage water entered the drinking water pipeline due to a leakage, triggering an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting in the Bhagirathpura area.

international



What can we wish for Rome? That it may be worthy of its little ones. Of children, of lonely and fragile elderly people, of families who struggle to get by, of men and women who have come from afar hoping for a dignified life

POPE LEO XIV | CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADER

NEPAL'S RASUWA BORDER CHECKPOINT REOPENS

A key land trade route between Nepal and China resumed its operations from Thursday, nearly six months after it was shut down due to damage caused by monsoon floods



of the day quote

Due to the disaster-situation triggered by severe weather conditions across the island, foreign warships that arrived for the event were promptly redirected to support humanitarian efforts. Particularly, helicopters deployed from the Indian Navy's aircraft carrier INS Vikrant



HARINI AMARASURIYA | PRIME MINISTER, SRI LANKA

We Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait share a bond of blood and kinship. The reunification of our motherland, a trend of the times, is unstoppable



XI JINPING | PRESIDENT, CHINA

In the face of China's rising expansionist ambitions, the international community is watching to see whether the Taiwanese people have the resolve to defend themselves



LAI CHING-TE | PRESIDENT, TAIWAN

SHORT TAKES

Yemen's Aden airport shuts

Dubai: Air traffic at Yemen's Aden international airport was halted Thursday as tensions persisted between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, two Gulf powers whose rivalry is reshaping war-torn Yemen. The Saudi-backed, internationally recognized Yemeni government ordered new restrictions on flights to and from the UAE, aiming to curb escalating tensions in Yemen, a Saudi source told Reuters. But the move triggered a defiant response: Yemen's transport minister, aligned with Yemen's southern separatists, ordered a full shutdown of air traffic rather than comply.

Nepal probe panel to summon ex-PM Oli

Kathmandu: A commission appointed by Nepal's interim government to probe alleged excessive use of force during the September 8-9 Gen Z movement will summon ousted prime minister KP Sharma Oli for clarification, officials said Thursday. At least 19 youths, who were demonstrating against the Oli government in Kathmandu, were killed in police firing on Sep 8, with the total death toll from the two days of unrest reaching 77 people nationwide. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other bodies have alleged that security forces used disproportionate and unlawful force, including firing live ammunition indiscriminately at protesters. The commission chief, Gauri Bahadur Karki, Thursday told reporters that preparations were underway to seek clarification from CPN-UML chairperson and former prime minister Oli after the process of recording the statement of then home minister Ramesh Lekhak is completed.

Afghan flash floods kill at least 17

Kabul: The season's first heavy rains and snowfall ended a prolonged dry spell but triggered flash floods in several areas of Afghanistan, killing at least 17 people and injuring 11 others, a spokesman for Afghanistan's national disaster management authority said Thursday. The severe weather also disrupted daily life across central, northern, southern, and western regions, according to Mohammad Yousef Hammad, who is spokesman for Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority. He said the floods also damaged infrastructure in the affected districts, killed livestock, and affected 1,800 families, worsening conditions in already vulnerable urban and rural communities.



Fireworks explode over Sydney Harbour Bridge to mark the New Year in Sydney, Australia

Hindu businessman set on fire in B'desh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Jan 1: A Hindu businessman has been brutally attacked, hacked and set on fire by unidentified miscreants in Bangladesh, police said Thursday.

The victim, identified as 50-year-old Khokon Chandra Das, was assaulted near Keurbangha Bazar in Damudya in Shariatpur district Wednesday night while returning home after closing his shop, Bengali daily Prothom Alo reported, quoting police.

He was later shifted to Dhaka for advanced treatment as his condition deteriorated. Das, who runs a medicine shop and mobile banking business, was travelling in an autorickshaw when the attackers intercepted the vehicle and allegedly beat him up, hacked him with sharp weapons and then poured petrol on his head before setting him on fire, the report said.

In a bid to save himself, Das jumped into a roadside

pond, prompting locals to raise an alarm.

The attackers fled the scene, police said, adding that he was rescued by locals and taken to Shariatpur Sadar Hospital, before being referred to Dhaka due to the severity of his injuries.

Nazrul Islam, a doctor at the emergency department of Shariatpur Sadar Hospital, said Das suffered multiple injuries across his body, including a serious wound to his abdomen, along with burn injuries on his face, head and hands.

His wife, Seema Das, said the family could not understand why he was targeted. She claimed that his husband recognised two of the attackers, which is why they tried to kill him. Damudya Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Rabibul Haque said two men, identified as Rabbi and Sohag, have been named in the case.

"Efforts are underway to arrest them and identify others involved in the attack," he said.

Several reported killed in Iran protests over economic woes



REUTERS

First reported deaths in unrest
Activist news site reports more protests Thursday
Began with rallies over inflation, falling currency

VIOLENCE REPORTED IN SEVERAL CITIES

Dubai, Jan 1: Several people were killed during unrest in Iran overnight into Thursday, Iranian media and rights groups reported, as the biggest protests to hit the country for three years over soaring inflation sparked violence in several regions.

The semi-official Fars news agency and rights group Hengaw reported deaths in Lordegan, a city in western Iran. Authorities confirmed one death in the western city of Kuhdasht, and Hengaw reported another death in the central province of Isfahan.

The clashes between protesters and security services mark a significant escalation in the unrest that has spread since shopkeepers began protesting Sunday over the government's handling of a currency slide and rapidly rising prices.

Hengaw said that the man, named by the Revolutionary Guards as Amirhossam Khodayari Fard, had been protesting and was killed by security forces. Hengaw also reported that a protester was shot dead Wednesday in Isfahan province

in central Iran. Reuters could not immediately verify any of those reports. Protests also took place Thursday in Marvdash in the southern Fars province, the activist news site HRANA reported. Hengaw said demonstrators had been detained Wednesday in the western provinces of Kermanshah, Khuzestan and Hamedan.

Government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said Thursday that the authorities would hold a direct dialogue with representatives of trades unions and merchants, but without giving details.

The Basij is a volunteer paramilitary force loyal to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which on Thursday accused those involved in the unrest in Kuhdasht of "taking advantage of the atmosphere of popular protests".

GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN

Merchants, shop owners and students in a number of Iranian universities have been demonstrating for days and closing major bazaars. The government shut down much of the country Wednesday by declaring a holiday due to cold weather.

Authorities have in recent years quashed protests over issues ranging from high prices, droughts, women's rights and political freedoms, often with tough security measures and extensive arrests.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said initial information indicated that 24 people, including one child, had been killed, and that 50 people had been injured, including six minors who were being treated in hospital.

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business

of the day quote

Due to timely and early sowing, the prospects for the wheat crop look bright, and it is in excellent condition as of now. No problems have been reported from wheat-growing areas

PK SINGH | AGRICULTURE COMMISSIONER

The move is expected to support domestic steel prices, which will be at a discount over imports. Indian mills have already raised prices by Rs 1,500-2,000/tonne across categories in the last few weeks, and with January-March being a peak demand period, prices are likely to remain firm

DRUV GOEL | CEO, BIGMINT

Higher commodity prices and elevated risk on US trade deals kept FDI away and impacted the rupee majority due to lack of intent in inflows and going elsewhere, which are our competitors

JATEEN TRIVEDI | VP RESEARCH ANALYST, COMMODITY AND CURRENCY, LKP SECURITIES

SHORT TAKES**GST kitty surges 6%**

New Delhi: Gross GST collections rose 6.1 per cent to over Rs 1.74 lakh crore in December 2025, on slow growth in revenues from domestic sales following the sweeping tax cuts, according to government data released Thursday. Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue in December 2024 was over Rs 1.64 lakh crore. Gross revenue from domestic transactions rose 1.2 per cent to over Rs 1.22 lakh crore, while revenues from imported goods were up 19.7 per cent at Rs 51,977 crore during December, 2025. Refunds were up 31 per cent to Rs 28,980 crore in December. Net GST revenues (after adjusting refunds) stood at over Rs 1.45 lakh crore, up 2.2 per cent year-on-year.

₹638 crore fine on VIL

New Delhi: Telecom operator Vodafone Idea (VIL) Thursday said it has received about Rs 638 crore GST penalty order from the Office of Additional Commissioner, Central Goods and Services Tax, Ahmedabad. In a statutory filing, Vodafone Idea said it disagrees with the order and will take legal action against it. The filing comes just a day after debt-laden telco received a major relief on its Adjusted Gross Revenue dues, with the Union Cabinet on Wednesday deciding to freeze its dues along with a 5-year payment moratorium and allowing capped AGR dues to be reassessed.

Power intake up 7%

New Delhi: Power consumption grew nearly 7 per cent to 138.39 billion units (BU) in December from 129.39 BU a year ago, as the use of heating appliances like geysers and blowers increased on account of severe cold in North India. According to the government data, the peak power demand met or the highest supply during December also rose to 241.20 GW from 224.23 GW recorded in December 2024. The peak power demand had touched an all-time high of about 250 GW in May 2024. The previous all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023.

Coal output grows 4.6%

New Delhi: Coal India Thursday reported a 4.6 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) growth in production and a 5.2 per cent fall in offtake in December. The miner, along with its eight subsidiaries, produced 75.7 million tonnes (MT) of coal in December 2025, higher than 72.4 MT in the same month in 2024.



In India, around 70 per cent of FMCG packaging is in a flexible format, much of which ends up in landfills

AMIT TANDON | FOUNDER AND CEO, POLYCYCL

BHARAT TAXI TO LAUNCH SOON

The cooperatives-backed ride-hailing service Bharat Taxi will be officially launched in Delhi and other cities by the end of January, following an encouraging response during its soft launch, a senior cooperation ministry official said Thursday. The digital platform, operated by Sahakar Taxi Cooperative Ltd, was introduced in the capital on a pilot basis December 2, 2024.



PV SALES ON FAST LANE

Passenger vehicle wholesales in India hit record 45.5 lakh units in 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Passenger vehicle wholesales in India clocked a record 45.5 lakh units in 2025, growing by nearly 6 per cent, turbocharged by GST 2.0 in the latter part of the year that helped overcome a sluggish start, as per industry estimates.

The growth in 2025 was led by record annual sales from the likes of market leader Maruti Suzuki India, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, Toyota Kirloskar Motor, and Skoda Auto India, thereby helping the industry beat the previous highest of 43.05 lakh units clocked in 2024.

Home-grown automakers Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles leapfrogged long-time number two player Hyundai Motor India to become the second- and third-largest PV makers by volume in 2025, with the South Korean arm slipping to fourth position. SUVs continued to enjoy strong traction, going up to 55.8 per cent of total PVs sold in India from 53.8 per cent in 2024, even as small cars showed signs of recovery in the GST 2.0 era.

Maruti Suzuki India clocked wholesales of 18.44 lakh units in 2025, bettering its previous highest of 17.90 lakh units registered in 2024, company Senior Executive Officer, Marketing & Sales, Partho Banerjee, told reporters in an interaction.

For the industry, he said, 2025 total sales is estimated at



45.5 lakh units as compared to 43.05 lakh units clocked in 2024.

Factors such as GST reduction, coupled with income tax relief on income of up to Rs 12 lakh and repo rate cuts, helped the auto industry performance in 2025, he noted.

Similarly, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles MD and CEO Shailesh Chandra said CY25 saw steady progress for the PV industry, powered by a growing preference for SUVs and accelerating adoption of cleaner, emission-friendly powertrains.

For Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles, he said, "The momentum sparked by the roll-out of GST 2.0 in late Q2 FY26 gained further traction in Q3, resulting in several new records... it was the fifth consecutive year of record-breaking annual sales, with 5,87,218 units sold, including the highest-ever EV volumes of

81,125 units in a calendar year." Likewise, M&M CEO, Automotive Division, Nalinikanth Gollagunta, said, "The calendar year 2025 ended on a positive note, with Mahindra clocking its highest-ever volumes in both SUVs and LCVs (over 3.5T) segments, a significant milestone for the company."

Hyundai Motor India Ltd reported a 6.6 per cent year-on-year growth in total sales at 58,702 units in December 2025. It included monthly domestic sales of 42,416 units and exports of 16,286 units.

"Driven by the positive momentum from GST 2.0 reforms, Hyundai Motor India recorded a robust 6.6 per cent year-on-year growth in total monthly sales for December 2025," HAMIL Managing Director & CEO Tarun Garg said. Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) also

In times to come, my take is that the tailwinds which are there right now will continue, and if in the next year the monsoon is good, there is no reason why the auto industry should not be growing at a rate of 6-7 per cent growth

PARTHO BANERJEE | SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MARKETING & SALES, MARUTI SUZUKI

reported its highest-ever calendar year sales with a total of 3,88,801 units in 2025, reflecting a growth of 19 per cent compared to the 3,26,329 units sold in CY 2024.

Commenting on the performance, TKM Vice-President, Sales-Service-Used Car Business and Profit Enhancement, Varinder Wadhwa, said that 2025 has been a meaningful year for Toyota, marked by stronger customer acceptance across its products and services, both in domestic and export markets.

"This sustained performance has been driven by progressive GST reforms by the government of India, strategic product enhancements, and the introduction of new model variants," he added.

Skoda Auto India also reported its best-ever sales performance at 72,665 units in 2025 as compared to 35,166 units in 2024. Another automaker, JSW MG Motor India, reported a 19 per cent year-on-year sales growth at 70,554 units in calendar year 2025 compared to 2024.

Shares start 2026 on subdued note

AUTO RALLY OFFSETS DECLINE IN ITC



REUTERS

This was the smallest daily trading range recorded since September 17, 2025, reflecting a phase of indecision and limited participation from both buyers and sellers

SUDEEP SHAH | HEAD - TECHNICAL AND DERIVATIVES RESEARCH, SBI SECURITIES

ment imposed excise duty on cigarettes from February.

Jefferies analysts called the move "a clear negative" for market leader ITC, saying it would hurt cigarette sales volumes and revive concerns about losing share to the illicit industry.

ITC dragged the fast-moving consumer goods index 3.2% lower. Overall trading remained muted due to the New Year holiday across the globe.

Among other stocks, Piccadilly Agro climbed 6.8% after the sugar company started commercial production at its Chhattisgarh unit. India's broader small-caps fell 0.1% while mid-caps gained 0.4%.

RBI says 98.41% of withdrawn ₹2000 banknotes returned

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Thursday said 98.41 per cent of the Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation have been returned. The RBI had announced the withdrawal of Rs 2000 denomination banknotes from circulation May 19, 2023. "The total value of Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation, which was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, when the withdrawal of Rs 2000 banknotes was announced, has declined to Rs 5,669 crore at the close of business on December 31, 2025," it said. Thus, 98.41 per cent of the high-value banknotes in circulation as of May 19, 2023, have since been returned. A facility for deposit and/or exchange of the Rs 2000 banknotes was available at all bank branches in the country up to October 7, 2023. From October 9, 2023, the RBI's 19 Issue Offices are also accepting Rs 2000 banknotes from individuals/entities for deposit into their bank accounts. Apart from this, members of the public are sending Rs 2,000 banknotes through India Post from any post office within the country to any of the RBI Issue Offices for credit to their bank accounts, an official statement said.

The total value of Rs 2,000 banknotes in circulation was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, the RBI said, stressing that the bills continue to be legal tender.

Gold kicks off New Year on strong note; silver slides after record rally

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Gold prices started the new year on a firm note Thursday, rising by Rs 640 to Rs 1,38,340 per 10 grams in the national capital, according to the All India Saraf Association.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,37,700 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

However, silver prices extended losses for the second consecutive day, depreciating Rs 1,600 to Rs 2,37,400 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of Rs 2,39,000 per kg.

The rally in both gold and silver during 2025 was spectacular. The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,37,700 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

On the last trading day of the year 2025, spot gold closed with a loss at \$4,310 per ounce as US yields rebounded," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

He added that the international gold prices are expected

GOLD & SILVER

10g = ₹1,38,340*

₹1,39,000

GOLD 10g

₹1,37,700

GOLD 10g

₹1,38,340*

GOLD 10g

1kg = ₹2,37,400*

₹2,41,000

SILVER 1kg

₹2,39,000

SILVER 1kg

₹2,37,400*

SILVER 1kg

RALLY IN BOTH GOLD, SILVER DURING 2025 WAS SPECTACULAR
YELLOW METAL DELIVERED RETURNS OF 73.45%
SILVER OUTPERFORMED GOLD WITH SURGE OF ABOUT 164%

to be range-bound in the short term.

On the outlook, Rahul Kalantri, Vice-President of Commodities at Mehta Equities, told PTI that "in 2026, the key drivers for gold and silver prices will be a mix of macroeconomic, monetary, and geopolitical factors such as expectations around US Federal Reserve interest rates, the strength or weakness of the dollar.

He added that continued central-bank purchases and

exchange-traded funds (ETFs) flows will provide structural support, and episodes of geopolitical or financial market stress will boost safe-haven demand. "Together, these factors will determine whether bullion stays near record highs or experiences volatility through the year," Kalantri added.

According to market experts, China's new curbs on silver exports are also expected to influence global supply and guide bullion prices in the near term.



years since the introduction of GST in July 2017.

Currently, cigarettes attract 28 per cent GST, plus a compensation cess at a varied rate. Taxes on cigarettes have remained at the same level in the past 7

duty will be over and above the maximum 40 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate.

This is in contrast to global best practices and public health guidance, which emphasises annual increases in duties to ensure that cigarette prices rise faster than incomes, sources said.

Globally, more than 80 countries revise tobacco taxes annually, many using inflation-indexing or multi-year excise schedules. Prior to the GST roll-out, even in India, excise rates on cigarettes were increased annually, they added.

TII said cigarettes are already a highly taxed product in the country.

"Legal cigarettes constitute only 10 per cent of the total

Excise hike on cigarettes risks rise in smuggling: Tobacco body

GOVT HIKES EXCISE DUTY ON CIGARETTES, LEVIES HEALTH CESS ON PAN MASALA FROM FEB 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The overall impact of the proposed hike in excise duty on cigarettes from February 1 will be "revenue neutral", as it will further boost the "illegal and illicit" trade, industry body Tobacco Institute of India said Thursday.

Terming it as "unprecedented increase" in duty, TII, a representative body of leading cigarette makers like ITC, Godfrey Phillips India, and VST Industries, along with farmers, exporters and ancillaries of the cigarettes segment of the tobacco industry in India, said it is "shocked and surprised".

Tobacco Institute of India (TII) has requested the gov-

tobacco consumption while contributing 80 per cent of tobacco tax revenue. Cigarette taxes in India as a percentage of per capita GDP are amongst the highest in the World, as per the WHO data," it added.

Australia, which has been at the forefront of tobacco control, with high tax and stringent regulatory measures, has had unintended consequences of an "exploding black market" with large criminalisation of the trade.

"Parliamentarians are now demanding a rollback of taxes to ensure people go back to the legitimate trade. It is important to take cognisance of such global experiences and have a balanced policy," the institute said.

