



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**

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 khaini, 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

Deoranjn Singh state's new DC

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: The state government Thursday appointed Revenue & Disaster Management (R&DM) department Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Deoranjn Kumar Singh as the new Development Commissioner (DC)-cum-ACS.

According to a notification of GA&PG department, Singh, a 1993-batch IAS officer, will work as DC-cum-ACS and Planning & Convergence department Secretary. He will have the additional charge of R&DM department ACS.

Home department ACS Satyabrata Sahu, with additional charge of Forest, Environment & Climate Change department ACS, was appointed as Member of Board of Revenue. Industries department ACS Hemant Sharma, with additional charge of I&PR department ACS and IPICOL Chairman, will have the additional charge of Home department ACS.

Among others, W&CD department Principal Secretary Shubha Sarma will have the additional charge of WR department Principal Secretary, the notification said.



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.

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.

MAMDANI TAKES OATH AS MAYOR OF NYC

ASSOCIATED PRESS

New York, Jan 1: Zohran Mamdani was formally sworn in as New York City's 112th Mayor in a private ceremony held just moments into the New Year in an old subway station here.

The 34-year-old Indian-descent Queens state assemblyman became the first South Asian and Muslim elected to helm the largest city in the US. Mamdani was sworn in at the old City Hall subway station at a private ceremony attended only by his family and

close advisers, held around the stroke of midnight as the city ushered in the New Year.

He was sworn in on a Quran as the city's 112th Mayor —



his second-youngest — by state Attorney General Letitia James Thursday morning below City Hall Park in a grand, abandoned old subway stop with his wife, artist Rama Duwaji, by his side.

Indian-descent Mamdani is the son of renowned filmmaker Mira Nair and Columbia University professor Mahmood Mamdani.

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 territorial infighting due to space crunch was the major reason for the death of the felines.

The figures indicate that the country recorded 40 more tiger deaths in 2025 as compared to the previous year (2024) when it lost 126 of these big cats, 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.



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 meggetti) in Indian waters, from Aryapalli near Gopalpur in Ganjam district, official sources said Thursday.

Although the species is found in the Indo-West Pacific region, including Japan, Australia, East Africa and the Persian Gulf, it had not been reported in India before, said Anil Mohapatra, senior scientist at the Zoological Survey of India's (ZSI) Estuarine Biology Regional Centre in Gopalpur.

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 Meggitt's goby (Bathygobius Meggitti) from a coastal habitat in the Bay of Bengal was published in National Academy Science Letters, an international jour-

nal Monday," he said.

Describing the discovery as biologically important and scientifically noteworthy, Mohapatra said the species is very small, with a nearly cylindrical head and without scales.

"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

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 Smrutirekha 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).

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.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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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 daylight 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.



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 outfits. 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



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

Mumbai: Actress Alaya F wraps up a transformative year on a high note.

Reflecting on the personal growth she experienced in 2025, that the actress shared the ingful less- year brought mean- change and valuable sons. Alaya shared that she is excited to reveal the chapter she has been pre- for in 2026.

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.

FIANS



Hrithik's big revelation

Mumbai: Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan quipped about how he has never been able to form the perfect heart shape with his hands because of his “double thumb”.

The actor, calling it a ‘big revelation’, mentioned how it is the second thing that he cannot do with his extra thumb.

The actor shared a carousel post featuring himself in a silhouette alongside what looks like a shadow of his girlfriend, Saba Azad.

He wrote, “Caught some happy shadows dancing next to us. 2025 seems to be ending on a very merry note. Sending big love to all my fans out there. I especially dedicate the new year to you guys. Happy almost 2026, everyone.

#keepdancing #keepflowing #keeploving #keepgrowing #staycurious P.s. Not being capable of making a hand heart properly is only the 2nd thing I can't do with my double thumb. Big revelation.”

In the past few weeks, Hrithik was internet seen taking the storm with his appearances at his cousin's wedding. The actor along with Saba and Hridaan was seen turning eyeballs at the wedding and caught all the media glare.

FIANS



Mumbai:

Amidst all the New Year resolutions and vision boards, actor Arjun Kapoor's younger sister, Anshula Kapoor, advised all to take a breather and treat themselves and others with kindness and compassion.

She pointed out that January makes a lot of people reflect on their lives, often making them realise that they still do not have their life all figured out.

Anshula wrote on her Instagram, “It's the first day of the year and my feed is full of goals and vision boards. Love that. But January has a way of making people feel

behind before anything even happens. if you're sitting there feeling like you don't have your life together, pause for a second. (sic).”

She advised all to treat themselves with the same level of empathy they would show to a friend who



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.

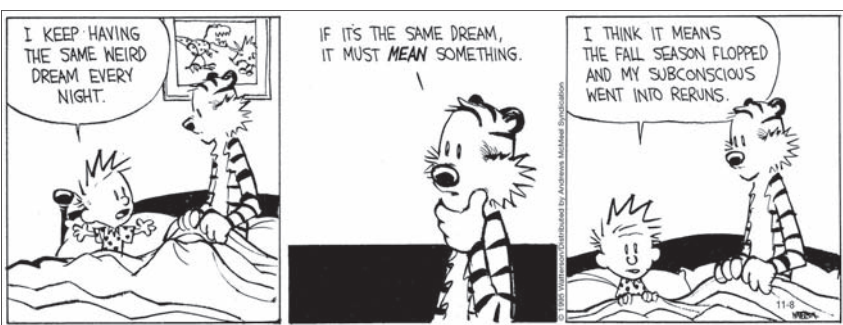
The Traitors contestant also reminded us all to “offer yourself that same kindness & turn that compassion inwards. Not every year needs a big reinvention. Not every January needs a master plan.”

FIANS

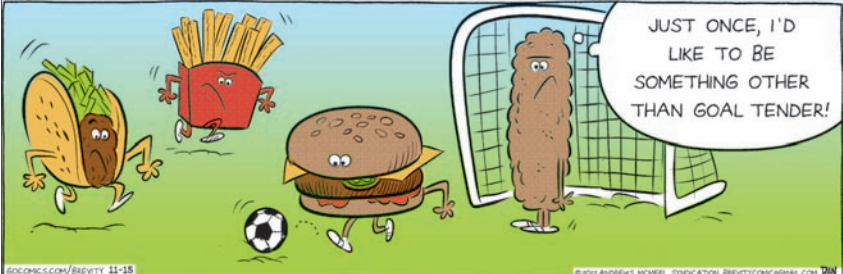
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

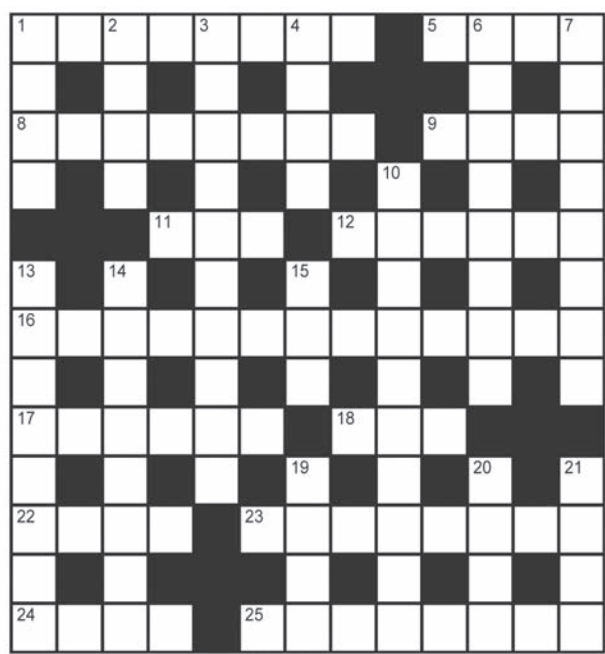


BREVITY



FUN post

CROSSWORD



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Across

- Monster's hangout, maybe (4,4)
- Laser light
- Fuel type
- Etcher's need
- Wildebceest
- Ranch feature
- Make-over shop (6,7)
- Printer type (3-3)
- Cigar residue

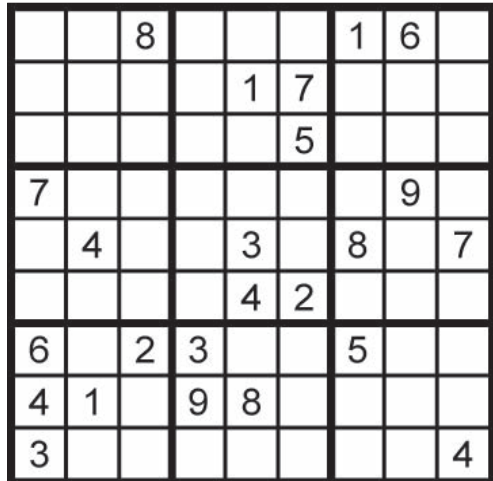
Down

- Garret
- Wine bottle item
- From time to time (3,3,4)
- Caddie's offering
- Beta follower
- Cozy retreat
- Grandfather clock feature

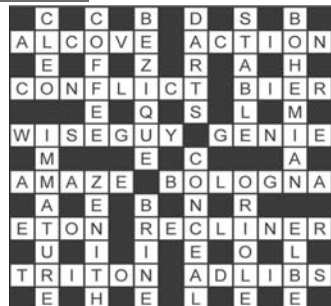
- Hogwash
- Restaurant appetiser
- Busybodies
- Exchange messages
- Volcanic glass
- Bingo and casino awards
- Secret agent
- Bistro
- Wedding wear
- Disease cause

SUDOKU

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

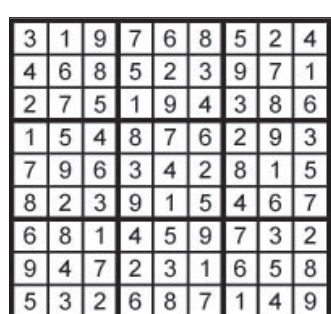


SOLUTIONS



CROSSWORD

SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

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

PICT: BIKASH NAYAK

Min: Decision on OMSA doctors’ demands soon

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling Thursday said the state government is examining the demands of the Odisha Medical Services Association (OMSA) and that efforts are under way to fulfill all reasonable demands of doctors in the coming days.

Speaking to the media, Mahaling said, “I have personally discussed with OMSA twice. We also had official discussions with the association, and our government has shown seriousness in addressing the doctors’ demands over the past 16 months. They were cheated by the previous government, but they have faith in our government.”

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 KBK (Kalahandi-Bolangir-Koraput) Exit Policy, permission for transfer of medical officers posted in KBK 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.

'Embrace entrepreneurship for financial self-reliance'

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati Thursday encouraged women to take up entrepreneurship by availing loans under various government schemes, with a focus on achieving financial independence.

Interacting with villagers at Krushnanjanpur village in the Sadar block of Puri district on the first day of the New Year, the Governor highlighted the importance of the MUDRA scheme and urged women to make effective use of such initiatives to become self-reliant.

Expressing happiness over the enthusiastic participation of women, Kambhampati extended New Year greetings and conveyed his hope of seeing a growing number of women entrepreneurs in the state in the coming days.

The Governor received a warm traditional welcome, with villagers performing ‘Ghoda Nacha’ and Odissi dances. During the programme, he distributed kits containing blankets, sarees, calendars, and sweets to around 50 women participants.

While interacting personally with the villagers, he enquired



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 Samrudhi 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.

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.

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.

6th Nat’l Chilika Bird Festival from Jan 6

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Reaffirming the state’s commitment to conservation-led tourism, sustainability, and community participation, Tourism department, in collaboration with Forest, Environment and Climate Change (FE&CC) department is all set to host the 6th edition of National Chilika Bird Festival from January 6 to 8.

The festival will highlight Chilika’s outstanding ecological significance, while fostering meaningful engagement between biodiversity conservation, local livelihoods, education and responsible tourism practices. The festival will offer visitors a unique opportunity to participate in guided birdwatching experiences at Mangalajodi, internationally recognised for its successful community-managed birding model, and at Nalbana Bird Sanctuary, a Ramsar site. The unique opportunity enables visitors to witness large congregations of migratory birds within a protected wetlandscape.

Beyond birdwatching, the festival pledge to offer a holistic and immersive experience that reflects the living culture of the Chilika lagoon. Visitors can engage with local crafts, savour authentic regional cuisine pre-



Temminck’s stint (Calidris temminckii), a small migratory wader foraging at Mangalajodi, Chilika

OP PIC

pared by community groups, and participate in interactive sessions led by ornithologists, conservation practitioners and wildlife photographers. These engagements are designed to enhance awareness of wetland ecology, migratory bird behaviour, and the principles of responsible nature-based tourism.

The festival will be formally inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida and FE&CC Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia at Lok Bhavan here.

Attendees will have the opportunity to witness the Chilika Boat Race near Barkul Panthanivas, and to participate

in regulated water sports activities. Together, the offerings will add a vibrant experiential dimension, while promoting sustainable and responsible use of the lagoon’s resources and celebrating traditional livelihoods linked to the lagoon. Further enriching the festival’s cultural and community-led dimensions, the Chilika Boat Race at Barkul will be inaugurated by Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan. The event will be contested by members of the local fisherfolk community, celebrating traditional livelihoods and the enduring relationship between Chilika and its people.

A strong emphasis on education and outreach forms a

The festival will be formally inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida and FE&CC Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia

key component of the festival programme. Special interactive sessions will be organised for students and teachers from nearby schools, introducing young learners to birdlife, wetland ecosystems, and conservation values through direct engagement with experts and practitioners.

At its core, the bird festival will be a celebration of community-led conservation. Local communities play a pivotal role as birding guides, hosts, artisans, and cultural ambassadors, demonstrating how conservation, livelihoods, and tourism can function in a mutually reinforcing manner. Through this flagship initiative, the state government continues to position Chilika as a national and international model for wetland conservation, inclusive development, and sustainable, community-driven tourism.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.14 ▼ 0.05	SENSEX	85188.60 ▼ 32.00	GOLD	₹135,690 ▼ ₹114
EURO	105.95 ▲ 0.07	NIFTY	26146.55 ▲ 16.95	SILVER	₹235,800 ▼ ₹73

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	24.8°	21.8°	Dense Fog
Min Temp	12.7°	11.8°	
Humidity	98%	98%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

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 Co-operative 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 Champapur 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 Shishupathar 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 Shishupathar 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 upgradation 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, Gunjlal Dhanwar, told police that disputes between the couple were frequent. He lodged a complaint alleging that his daughter was murdered.

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

Square, where local fruit vendor Sapan De had an argument with a vegetable vendor over an unspecified issue. Enraged, the vegetable vendor allegedly attacked De on the ear and head with a sharp blade, leaving him injured. De is undergoing treatment at the district headquarters hospital.

Following a complaint by De’s brother, Tapan, police registered a case (1/26) and took the accused into custody.

On Thursday morning, after another woman vendor opened her shop, the younger brother of the accused and his relatives allegedly arrived at the spot, questioned why a police complaint had been filed, hurled abuses and threatened that no



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 Abhisek Behera, Tehsildar Priyadarshi Sangram Keshari Khuntia 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.

PNN & AGENCIES

Kendrapara/Rajnagar, Jan 1: The authorities Thursday arrested 10 marine fishermen 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.

Youth beats elderly man to death

Digapahandi: An 85-year-old man was brutally beaten to death after he pulled up a youth for harassing his granddaughter at Sindhaba village under Digapahandi police limits in Ganjam district on New Year’s Day, Thursday. The victim was identified as Sania Gouda of Sindhaba village in Nimakhandi panchayat under Digapahandi block, police said. Police have detained two suspects — Shiva Gouda and his relative Chikun Gouda, both from Sindhaba village — and are questioning them. K Nuagaon police seized the body and conducted a post-mortem. Police said that Shiva Gouda had allegedly been harassing the victim’s granddaughter for several days. Sania had earlier warned him to stop. Shiva allegedly misbehaved with the girl again around 9pm Tuesday. Sania saw Shiva outside his house and admonished him. Police said the warning led to an argument, during which Shiva and Chikun abused Sania. When the elderly man objected, Shiva allegedly assaulted him with a broken wooden plank, leaving him critically injured. Sania was admitted to the Digapahandi Community Health Centre (CHC), where he succumbed during treatment. On being informed, K Nuagaon IIC Kishore Kumar Samal and ASI C Tarkeshwar Rao reached the village, launched an investigation and seized the body from the Digapahandi hospital for post-mortem. Police registered a case (1/26) based on a complaint filed by Bichitra Gouda, the son of the deceased. The body was handed over to the family members after post-mortem was conducted at the MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur.

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 soothing 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 fortnight, said a forest official.



Flocks of these winter guests are crowding the Satabhaya, Habelikhathi, Ekakula, and Raipatia water bodies and creeks. The habitat of these birds extends around a 10-km stretch. 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

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 prefer the Bhitarkanika wetland for its unique ecosystem and cool and serene environment, conducive to their winter habitation.

Lack of human interference, ideal climatic conditions, cool breeze, and the river system here — all have emerged to the liking of these delicate and chirpy winged species. This itself is a positive sign, and thus further research on the behavioural pattern of these threatened species is being taken up, concluded wildlife officials.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

e-Tender Notice No. ETCECONIIBBS 2025060, Dated : 23.12.2025

NAME OF WORK : EXECUTION OF PLATFORM SHELTER, PLATFORM SHELTER UPGRADEATION, IMPROVEMENT TO 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.ireps.gov.in

Notice : 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 PR-212/CJ/25-26

ବରଗଡ଼ ଅଧିକାରୀଙ୍କ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାଳୟ, ରାଉରକେଲା (କେ.ଓ.) ବରଗଡ଼
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

INVITATION FOR RE-TENDER
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 Lephripura (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, Pamposh

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

Sd/- Divisional Forest Officer Rourkela K.L. Division

AWARD OF THE Ph.D. DEGREE


GIET University, Gunupur has conferred the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Chemistry upon Ms. Gouda Mohini (Regd. No. 19SPHBS062) vide Notification No. 19SPHBS042 dated 28/11/2025. The Ph.D. has been awarded for the research entitled "Iron Oxide and Graphene Oxide Modified Materials for the Removal of Organic Contaminants from Waste water," 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 daughter of G. Jagannadham and Smt. G.Champa. She conveys her heartfelt gratitude to the University authorities, DRC members, Supervisor, Co-supervisor, Examiners, Teachers, her husband Dr. Gouri Shankar Nayak, her beloved daughter & son, family members, relatives, friends, and well-wishers for their constant encouragement and support throughout her doctoral journey. All have congratulated and appreciated Dr. Mohini on her significant academic accomplishment.

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To love is not to possess, but to give oneself.

THE MOTHER



Innovation for Women

Worldwide, women manage an estimated \$32 trillion in annual spending and are projected to control 75 per cent of discretionary spending within the next five years. Yet across nearly every industry, most products fall short of meeting their needs, reflecting a tacit assumption that women are somehow a niche market. For decades, companies have relied on superficial gestures: pink packaging, token “female-friendly” campaigns, and even the so-called pink tax, whereby women are charged more for the same product. Many of these “personalized” offerings amount to little more than marketing in disguise.

The result is a persistent gap between what women need and what companies deliver. Closing it requires designing products and services that reflect women’s priorities, decisions, careers, and lived experiences.

Historically, women have been expected to adapt to systems and services that were not built with them in mind. The evidence is everywhere: personal protective equipment is rarely made to fit, smartphones tend to be too large for smaller hands, and voice assistants consistently fail to recognize female voices. When male data are used as the benchmark for what’s considered “normal,” women are underserved, and entire markets remain underdeveloped.

This oversight represents one of today’s largest untapped growth opportunities. Consider financial services: women add \$5 trillion to the global wealth pool each year, but products still cater to men’s earning patterns and priorities. Despite managing a greater share of household budgets, women are up to eight percentage points less likely than men to feel financially skilled. Products that account for caregiving breaks, pay gaps, and longer lifespans could generate billions in value while improving women’s financial security.

Even in traditionally female-oriented industries like beauty, personal care, and groceries, only two-thirds of women feel their needs are met. While many brands continue to prioritize marketing over substance, most women say they would pay up to 15 per cent more for safer, higher-quality, or more convenient options. To seize this opportunity, companies should focus on what women actually value rather than “feminizing” existing products.

Nowhere are the stakes higher than in health care, where overlooking women’s experiences can have life-altering consequences. While women make 83 per cent of household healthcare decisions, only 41 per cent say their concerns are adequately addressed. Underdiagnosis and undertreatment – particularly related to menopause and bone, cognitive, and cardiovascular health – represent a \$100 billion-plus market opportunity in the United States alone. Cardiovascular disease, the leading cause of death among women, illustrates the problem. It remains chronically underdiagnosed because screening protocols are based on male symptom profiles. Correcting those biases could expand the cardiovascular market by 74 per cent to \$20 billion by 2030.

That same dynamic is playing out in nearly every industry: when women are excluded, markets underperform their potential; when they are addressed, well-being improves and profits rise. But that requires a fundamental shift. Women’s lives are not linear; their health, careers, families, and identities constantly evolve, as do their goals and values. Designing with that evolution in mind is the foundation of meaningful innovation.

To achieve this, research must go beyond demographics. Companies should invest in female-specific, life-stage research that captures the full depth of women’s lived experiences. Collaborating with universities, health providers, and data scientists can help generate new insights and drive inclusive innovation.

Equally important is normalizing topics once considered taboo, such as menopause, fertility, and financial independence. Addressing these issues openly could enable companies to empower women and identify new opportunities.

Ensuring that products reflect women’s actual experiences rather than assumptions requires rethinking research and development. Companies must adopt agile R&D practices like rapid prototyping, cross-functional collaboration, and real-time feedback. Likewise, involving women early in product testing can lead to stronger sales and better marketing.

Perhaps most importantly, innovation thrives when the people making decisions understand the people they serve. When women shape strategy, investment, and product design, solutions naturally become more relevant and effective. Studies have consistently shown that diversity gives organizations a clear strategic edge.

Finally, after decades of neglect, innovation and investment are beginning to catch up. Although less than 4 per cent of US research funding goes to women’s health, startups like Midi Health and Allara Health are personalizing midlife hormone care for women, and major providers have established dedicated centers focused on women’s cardiovascular and overall health.

At the same time, new investment platforms are closing gaps left by traditional financial institutions. Ellevest, for example, designs portfolios that account for gender pay gaps, longer life expectancy, and divorce, while Alinea uses AI-driven tools to help Gen Z women invest with confidence. This shift is increasingly visible in consumer goods as well. Drinkware maker Stanley, once known for rugged utility, has seen explosive growth fueled by women who turned its bottles into lifestyle icons.

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.

Alex Friedman is Managing Director and Partner at Boston Consulting Group X. Trish Stroman is Managing Director and Senior Partner at Boston Consulting Group.

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WISDOM CORNER

You cannot find peace by avoiding life.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

Happiness can exist only in acceptance.

GEORGE ORWELL

Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.

CARL JUNG

power post

FOCUS NATION

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 MPs 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

deport 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’

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 Khaonga Na Khanedoonga’ 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.

SPECTRUM EDUCATION

Normalisation of commercialisation

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 confirm 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 educational institutions. Equally important is why educationists, doctors, engineers and other domain experts are neither adequately encouraged nor financially supported to set up universities, medical colleges, engineering institutions and similar centres of learning. The discourse could instead shift towards meaningful public-private collaboration, particularly in technical and medical education.

At a time when there is an urgent need to upgrade educational standards and ensure transparency and fairness in admissions, the implementation of the Supreme Court’s directions is both necessary and timely—though such intervention ought to have come much earlier. The real test, however, will lie in their execution. It remains to be seen whether state governments will resist institutional and political pressures and place before the Court an honest and comprehensive account of the actual state of affairs, or whether the process will be diluted through manipulation and selective disclosure.

INFA

Letters TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST
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Childhood myopia

Sir, Concerns around smartphones and social media in India have largely centred on their effects on children’s mental health, attention spans, and academic performance. Far less attention has been paid to a quieter but equally serious consequence: the rapid rise of childhood myopia. Indian ophthalmologists are increasingly warning that prolonged screen exposure, reduced outdoor play, and intense near-work now common across urban and semi-urban India are reshaping children’s vision. Myopia typically develops between the ages of three and ten, when the eye is still growing, and while genetics matter, lifestyle has become the dominant trigger in modern Indian childhoods. Scientific evidence shows that sustained focus on close objects whether textbooks, mobile phones, or tablets causes the eyeball to elongate, making it difficult to see distant objects clearly. At the same time, children today spend far less time outdoors than previous generations. Sunlight plays a critical role in eye development by stimulating dopamine release in the retina, which slows abnormal eye growth. In India, shrinking playgrounds, safety concerns, academic pressure, and post-pandemic screen-heavy learning have sharply reduced outdoor exposure, especially in cities. As a result, myopia rates, once relatively low, are climbing steadily among school-going children. The implications extend well beyond the need for spectacles. High or progressive myopia significantly increases the risk of cataracts, glaucoma, retinal detachment, and irreversible vision loss later in life—conditions that could place an enormous burden on India’s already stretched healthcare system.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH

A dying shield

Sir, The current condition of the Aravalli mountain range is deeply alarming. One of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, the Aravallis act as a natural barrier against the Thar Desert, reducing sandstorms and preventing desertification of cities like Delhi. They recharge nearly 30 per cent of Delhi-NCR’s groundwater and support rich biodiversity. However, illegal mining and rapid urbanisation have degraded over 40 per cent of this range. The loss of Aravallis threatens our ecosystem, economy, and climate balance. Nature exists to fulfill our needs, not our greed—this truth must guide our actions now.

Chittaranjan Barik, JAGATSINGHPUR

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

Prayagraj/Ayodhya, Jan 1: The New Year began with a massive pilgrim surge across Uttar Pradesh as dense fog and biting cold failed to deter devotees from thronging major religious centres, prompting extensive security, traffic and crowd-control measures state-wide Thursday.

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

Director General of Police Rajeev Krishna has said special security arrangements had been put in place across Uttar Pradesh for December 31 and January 1 in view of the expected surge at temples, markets, malls and picnic spots.

In Prayagraj, loudspeaker announcements guided pilgrims along the ghats, while police and civil defence personnel remained deployed to ensure safety and regulate crowd movement.

Cold weather affected daily life in Prayagraj, with people seen warming themselves around roadside bonfires.

Shiv Chauhan, waiting for transport to travel out of the city, said the chill forced him to pause his journey. Autorickshaw driver Shivkumar Kushwaha said dense mist reduced visibility, making driving diffi-

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 Vindhyachal 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 Sharan 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 Bi-hari 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.

“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, Purujit 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.

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 noticeably in rural areas.

Another 25,47,207 electors

(1.65 per cent) were found enrolled elsewhere, while 7,74,472 forms (0.50 per cent) fell under “other reasons” such as incomplete or incorrect details.

District-wise analysis shows urban hubs like Gautam Buddha Nagar, Ghaziabad, Lucknow, Kanpur Nagar, Agra and Varanasi reported the higher share of uncollectable forms due to shifting. In some of these districts, over one-fifth of the electorate was marked uncollectable.

Border and migration-prone districts, including Bahraich, Shravasti, Bahrapur, Siddharthnagar and Maharajganj, showed a large share of voters classified as untraceable or absent, officials said. Election authorities said the categorisation of death, migration, duplication and other reasons would help in removing ineligible and duplicate entries and improve accuracy in the voter rolls ahead of future polls.

The Election Commission has also revised the schedule for the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Uttar Pradesh. The draft voter list will now be published on January 6, 2026, and the final roll on March 6, Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said in a statement December 30.

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.

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.

However, she pointed out that common washrooms some-



times become an issue due to heavy usage. “They get dirty easily because so many people use them,” she said.

Ramesh, a 52-year-old daily wage labourer staying at the shelter home near AIIMS, echoed similar sentiments.

“Earlier, I used to sleep near the bus stand and the cold was unbearable; here, at least we get a blanket and food. The only problem is that space becomes tight on very cold nights when more people come in,” he said.

Sunita, a 38-year-old woman who recently shifted to a night shelter with her two children, said the arrangement has made winters less frightening.

“My children can sleep peacefully here. The food is simple but filling. Sometimes there is a long wait during meal distribution, but we understand there are many people,” she said.

An elderly resident, Mohan Lal, 67, said the shelter has given him a sense of security. “At this age, sleeping outside can make you very sick. Here,

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.

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 action 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 Cybercrime 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.

Citing the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2023, DGP Rajeev Krishna Thursday told reporters that Uttar Pradesh recorded a conviction rate of 87.8 per cent in cybercrime cases, nearly double the national average, which, he said, reflected the quality of investigation in the state.

According to police, cybercrime cases increased in the post-Covid period as mobile phones, computers and e-commerce became integral to daily life, which the fraudsters exploited.

To strengthen enforcement, the state expanded its cyber policing infrastructure, increasing the number of cyber police stations from 18 to 75 across Uttar Pradesh.

The cyber helpdesks have also been strengthened in every police station, and nearly 18,000 police personnel have been trained in cybercrime investigation and response, police said.

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 co-ordinated 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.

of the day

quote

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

PINARAYI 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 action 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 Sindoor. I am confident that DRDO will work wholeheartedly to achieve this goal soon

RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER

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 Paragana 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-Banga border fencing near Uttarpada 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 - "Jotoi 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 @abhishekaitc 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 (ret'd). 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



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

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



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bangalore, Jan 1: Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara Thursday hinted about his Chief Ministerial aspirations, asserting he too has ambitions like everyone and expects a "political promotion" this year if the Congress high command decides so.

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. "The political promotion should happen in 26 (2026). It is left to our high command. If the high command does it (promotes), it will happen," Parameshwara told reporters in response to a question.

Asked whether he is optimistic about it, he said, "I have lived so far as an optimist, so it is not something new to me. Don't you have (ambition) to become something in life. A human should have ambition, if not he is not human."

"I too have ambition like everyone else. When I joined

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, in case of leadership change, 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.

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 Narmadeshwar 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 Heerapur 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.

Activists, however, argued that even under the MGNREGA, workers, on average, got around 50 days of work.

According to a reply by the Rural Development Ministry to a written question in Rajya Sabha in the Winter Session, in 2024-25, the average of employment provided per household under MGNREGA was 50.24 days. The new Act, the government said, is explicitly aligned with the creation of durable public assets across four priority thematic domains — water security and water-re-

- 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

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 Pushy-amitra Bhargava, 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.

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

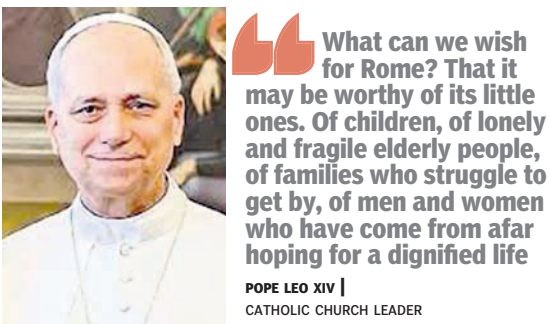
Dubai: Air traffic at Yemen's Aden international airport was halted Thursday as tensions persisted between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, two Gulf powers whose rivalry is reshaping war-torn Yemen. The Saudi-backed, internationally recognized Yemeni government ordered new restrictions on flights 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 Yousaf Hamad, 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.



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



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 Keurbhanga 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 Rabiul 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.



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

REUTERS

Several reported killed in Iran protests over economic woes



REUTERS

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.

VIOLENCE REPORTED IN SEVERAL CITIES

Fars reported that two people had been killed in Lordegan in clashes between security services and what it called armed protesters. It earlier said several had died. Hengaw said several people had been killed and wounded there by security forces. The Revolutionary Guards said one member of its affiliated Basij volunteer paramilitary unit had been killed in Kuhdasht and another 13 wounded, blaming demonstrators who it accused of taking advantage of the protests. 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 Marvdasht 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 accuses Ukraine of killing 24 people in New Year drone strike

REUTERS

Moscow, Jan 1: Russia accused Ukraine Thursday of killing at least 24 people, including a child, in a drone strike on a hotel and cafe where civilians were seeing in the New Year in a Russian-controlled part of Ukraine's southern Kherson region. Ukraine's military, which has accused Russia of killing many civilians in its own attacks on Ukrainian cities, did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment. Vladimir Saldo, the Russian-installed governor of the region, first made the accusation about the strike in a statement. Russia's Foreign Ministry and senior Russian politicians later accused Ukraine of carrying out "a terrorist attack". Reuters was not able to immediately verify photographs of what Saldo's press service said was the aftermath of the attack or the allegation. At least one dead body was visible in the images beneath a white sheet. The building showed signs that a fierce fire had raged and there were what looked like blood stains on the ground. Saldo said in his statement that three Ukrainian drones had struck the site of New Year celebrations in Khorly, a coastal village, in what he said was a "deliberate strike" against civilians. He said that many people had been burnt alive. 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.



Moscow says Kyiv struck New Year revellers in village

No immediate comment from Ukraine

Unverified images purport to show attack aftermath

"There is no doubt that the attack was planned in advance, with drones deliberately targeting areas where civilians had gathered to celebrate New Year's Eve," the ministry said in a statement, calling the attack "a war crime". Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, told the TASS state news agency that Moscow would seek its revenge on the battlefield and said that those who carried out the attack and their commanders should be targeted. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement on Telegram that Ukraine's backers in the West were ultimately to blame. Senior politicians, including the speakers of both houses of Russia's parliament, condemned Kyiv. Kherson is one of four regions in Ukraine which Russia claimed as its own in 2022, a move Kyiv and most Western countries denounced as an illegal land grab.

Pak witnesses drop in terror attacks since Afghan border closure

The year 2025 was also found to be 'deadliest' for terrorists in the country, with terrorists accounting for about 62 per cent of total combat-related deaths, and the worst for civilian casualties in a decade

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Jan 1: Pakistan saw a significant drop in cross-border terror attacks and deaths related to terrorism-linked violence since closing its border with Afghanistan but the year 2025 was the 'most violent' in a decade, a think tank report has said. The year 2025 was also found to be 'deadliest' for terrorists in the country, with terrorists accounting for about 62 per cent of total combat-related deaths, and the worst for civilian casualties in a decade, another think tank report said. Pakistan shut its border October 11 last year after clash-

es with Afghanistan, which were prompted by the allegations that Kabul was not doing enough to stop the use of its soil by terrorists. Dawn reported from the data collected by think tank Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) that terrorist attacks went down by almost 17 per cent in December, preceded by 9 per cent decline in November. Terrorism-linked fatalities among civilians and security officials also fell in the last quarter of 2025, by nearly 4 per cent and 19 per cent each in November and December, it said. However, the data of CRSS showed that with an almost 34 per cent surge in overall vio-



lence, the year 2025 went by as the most violent year for Pakistan in a decade. The comparative data for 2024 and 2025 reveals a sharp escalation in terrorism and counter-terrorism linked violence nationwide, with fatalities rising from 2,555 in 2024 to 3,417 in 2025, marking an increase of 862

deaths, or a roughly 34 per cent year-on-year surge in violence, it added. Separately, think tank Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies' (PICSS) report said the year 2025 was found to be "deadliest" for terrorists in Pakistan, with 2,115 terrorist fatalities, while 664

security personnel and 580 civilians accounted for combat-related deaths. Dawn said in another report quoting PICSS that Pakistan saw a "marked escalation" in 2025, with violence intensifying in both "tempo and lethality", pushing several security indicators to their highest levels in years. "The year 2025 has not only delivered a steep rise in overall combat-related deaths, but also became the deadliest year for terrorists since 2015, the most lethal for security forces since 2011, and the worst for civilian casualties in a decade," it added. According to the CRSS report, violence remained heavily concentrated in the country's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and southwestern Balochistan provinces, with both accounting for over 96 per cent of all fatalities and almost 93 per cent of violent incidents

recorded during the entire 2025. The most significant surge in violence was recorded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the fatalities rose from 1,620 in 2024 to 2,331 in 2025, an absolute increase of 711 deaths, accounting for over 82 per cent of the net national rise and marking almost a 44 per cent year-on-year surge in violence in the province. Balochistan also had an upward trend, with fatalities increasing from 787 to 956; an additional 169 deaths, which are nearly 22 per cent higher than the previous year's figures, the CRSS data showed. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was the worst-hit region, suffering over 68 per cent (2331) of the total violence-linked fatalities, and around 63 per cent (795) of the incidents of violence, followed by Balochistan, accounting for 28 per cent (956) of the fatalities and over 30 per cent (386) of the incidents of violence.

of the day

note

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 Service 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," HML Managing Director & CEO Tarun Garg said. Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) also

MARUTI SUZUKI ACHIEVED RECORD 2025 SALES, RETAINING TITLE AS INDIA'S TOP PV EXPORTER FOR THE FIFTH YEAR

MAHINDRA, TATA LEAPFROGGED LONG-TIME NUMBER TWO PLAYER HYUNDAI MOTOR

₹ welcomes 2026 weaker on corporate \$ demand

The rupee closed 2025 marking with a 4.72% decline for the year, its worst showing since 2022, when it dropped nearly 10%

REUTERS

Mumbai, Jan 1: The Indian rupee welcomed 2026 with a marginal decline, weighed down by dollar demand from corporates, while thin volumes in the first trading of the New Year curbed any major movements, according to traders.

The rupee opened lower at 89.9525 per US dollar Thursday, against Wednesday's close of 89.87. The currency moved in a narrow range before settling 0.1% down at 89.97.

Trading volumes were subdued due to New Year holidays in major markets, leaving routine flows as the primary driver for price action and Thursday's move reflects the broader pattern seen through much of 2025, where underlying demand-supply dynamics kept the rupee under pressure.

"Until the 90 level is not broken, it is difficult to guess any firm direction for the currency," trader with a brokerage said. "The rupee enters 2026 with both challenges and cushions. While global uncertainty persists, India's strong macro base, ample reserves, and pragmatic policy framework provide stability," said Amit



Pabari, managing director at FX advisory firm CR Forex.

Progress on a pending India-US trade deal remains a potential upside catalyst and could deliver a meaningful confidence boost if concluded, according to Pabari. The rupee is expected to trade in 89.30-90.20 range in the near term, with a mild bias toward strengthening he added.

Over the near term market participants are monitoring equity flows to assess whether the year shapes up differently from 2025, when foreign investors pulled out record amounts from the local stock market.

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 Sarafa 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 delivered returns of 73.45 per cent. Meanwhile, silver outperformed gold with a surge of about 164 per cent. In the international markets, spot gold slipped by \$28, or 0.65 per cent, to close at \$4,310.89 per ounce 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



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.

Shares start 2026 on subdued note

AUTO RALLY OFFSETS DECLINE IN ITC



REUTERS

Mumbai, Jan 1: India's equity benchmarks ended largely unchanged in the first trading session of 2026, as gains in auto stocks offset a decline in shares of cigarette-makers after the government announced a new tax.

The Nifty 50 index rose 0.06% to 26,146.55 Thursday, while the BSE Sensex index lost 0.04% to 85,188.6. The indexes rose 10.5% and 9.1%, respectively, in 2025 but lagged emerging and Asian market peers.

Twelve of the 16 major sectors rose on the day.

The auto index advanced 1% as sales to dealers rose from a year earlier in December aided by tax cuts. Shares of India's Mahindra & Mahindra gained 1.4%. Bus and truck maker Ashok Leyland jumped 3.2% to a record high.

On the other hand, cigarette makers ITC and Godfrey Phillips tanked 9.7% and 17.1%, respectively, after the govern-

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.

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-

ernment to review the computations behind this extremely severe tax increase and reconsider the enormous hike, given the huge implications.

"Such a massive increase will cause immense hardship and loss to millions of farmers, MSMEs, retailers and local value chains nurtured by the industry, besides providing a huge fillip to the illicit industry and damaging national enterprises," said TII in a statement.

The industry body further said it is well known that for every three legal cigarettes, one smuggled/illicit cigarette is sold in the country, and this high tax increase will further boost "illegal and illicit activity", depriving the exchequer,



besides promoting anti-social activity.

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

years since the introduction of GST in July 2017.

The Finance Ministry has notified the excise duty of Rs 2,050 - Rs 8,500 per 1,000 sticks, depending on the length of the cigarette, from February 1. The

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

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.

'BATTLE OF THE SEXES'

Sabalenka seeks rematch, revenge

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Brisbane, Jan 1: World number one Aryna Sabalenka Thursday said she wants a rematch of her "Battle of the Sexes" showdown with Nick Kyrgios so she can get revenge.

Australia's Kyrgios beat the Belarusian 6-3, 6-3 in a highly-publicised showdown in Dubai last Sunday, with modified rules that divided fans. Sabalenka's side of the court was reduced in size by nine percent in an attempt to restrict Kyrgios' power and speed advantage, while each player only received one serve.

"I think I would definitely do it again," she said ahead of the Brisbane International, her season-opening tournament as

she prepares for the Australian Open January 18. "I love revenge and I don't like to leave it the way it is."

While keen to face-off with Kyrgios again, Sabalenka said she would want a full court and two serves.

"I think for the next match we will come up with a different format," she said. "Before the match I didn't realise I would have to adjust and it was a bit tricky for me. I think I would keep the full court but I would take two serves. That would even our level a lot more."

The contest bore little resemblance to the era-defining 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" encounter between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs.



Back then, there was more at stake with the nascent women's professional tour, set up by King, fighting for legitimacy and prize money for female players far lower than for the men.

King, one of the all-time greats of the women's game who was

I always say that when you are losing, you are learning and I learned a lot about his game. I would do it again. I need revenge

ARYNA SABALENKA | WORLD NUMBER ONE

at the peak of her powers, saw off the 55-year-old Riggs, a top player in his day, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3 in Houston. The Sabalenka-Kyrgios showdown faced backlash, with some calling it a "money grab" while others said it did little to advance the women's game.

But Sabalenka said she felt exhibition tennis, like the Kyrgios contest, was important.

"I think it's really important for tennis to keep it interesting,

keep it fresh, keep it new, keep it fun," she said.

She added that she was proud of her part in the "Battle of the Sexes", despite Kyrgios barely playing in recent years and ranked a lowly 671.

"I am happy that I was able to challenge him, make him work and make him physically get tired and mentally get tired," she said. "I felt really excited to see a man getting tired and going for his full game. It was a really cool experience."

The Brisbane International starts Sunday with Sabalenka's sights set on a third Australian Open title after winning in 2023 and 2024. She was beaten in the Melbourne Park final last year by Madison Keys.

TOPS LIST UPDATED

Dope-tainted Reetika dropped; compound archers in core group



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Dope-tainted wrestler Reetika Hooda was dropped, compound archers like Parneet Kaur and Abhishek Verma were promoted to the core group while decathlete Tejaswin Shanker found a place in the developmental list of the updated directory of athletes supported by the Sports Ministry's flagship Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS).

The list was drastically pruned from 179 to 94 last year, marking the end of the 2024 Paris Olympics cycle. But it has been redrawn to reflect the performances of the past one year.

The number of core group athletes has now gone up marginally to 118, comprising 57 able-bodied and 61 para-athletes.

Hooda, an Asian Championships medallist who competed in Paris, failed a dope test during a selection trial in July last year. She was a part of the TOPS core group released in February last year.

"She has been dropped now," a Sports Authority of India (SAI) source told PTI when asked about Hooda's status.

However, World Para Athletics Championship gold-winning sprinter Simran, whose guide Umar Saifi flunked a dope test in October last, has been retained in the core group.

"We won't take a knee jerk decision in her case. She is there and her case will come up in the next Mission Olympic Cell meeting," the source said.

Simran, who was born with a visual impairment, is also a Paris Paralympics bronze winner in the 200m event.

The latest list offers a major upgrade to compound archers, who would be strong medal contenders in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics after the discipline was included in the Games roster.

Eight compound archers, including Parneet, Abhishek, and Jyoti Surekha, have made the core group alongside the three recurve stars in Deepika Kumari, Dhiraj Bommadevara and Ankita Bhakat.

Aditi Gopichand Swami, Ojas Pravin Deotale, Priyansh, Prathmesh Samadhan Jawkar and Rishab Yadav were the other compound names in the updated list.

In athletics, javelin ace Neeraj Chopra has been joined by Sachin Yadav, who outperformed him in last year's World Championships by finishing fourth. Chopra, hampered by fitness issues, stunningly ended eighth in the global showpiece.

The other names from track and field in the list are steeplechaser Avinash Sable, long jumper M Sreesanker and new addition Sarvesh Kushare, the high jumper who won a silver in the Asian Championships and finished a creditable sixth in the World Championships.

Three-time para-world championships medal-winning club thrower Ekta Bhyan has also been placed in the core group. The core group continues to be without names from tennis, golf and swimming.

SHORT TAKES

Chess wars: Defiant Kramnik sues FIDE

New Delhi: Russian chess great Vladimir Kramnik has sued world chess governing body FIDE for defamation in a Swiss civil court after he became the subject of an inquiry for allegedly harassing players with "unsubstantiated" cheating claims following the death of American Grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky. Kramnik posted on 'X' that he has been forced to take the legal route after being relentlessly attacked by fellow players and FIDE, whose CEO Emil Sutovsky described Kramnik's allegations of cheating against Naroditsky as "appalling and outright shameful". The exact cause of 29-year-old Naroditsky's death is not known but in his last livestream, he talked about being under immense mental stress over the allegations levelled by Kramnik.

Chelsea part ways with Maresca

Manchester: Chelsea parted ways with Enzo Maresca Thursday, a dramatic fall from grace for the Italian who was named manager of the month for November before the club won just one of their last seven league games to fall out of the Premier League title race. The Italian, who joined Chelsea in 2024 after steering Leicester City to Premier League promotion, leaves 18 months to the day since he was tasked with reviving the club's fortunes after two years of failing to qualify for the Champions League. Maresca eventually guided the London side to Champions League qualification with a fourth-placed finish, the Conference League trophy and the Club World Cup title in his first season with a young but expensively-built squad.

Gabon govt sacks nat'l team after poor show

Rabat: Gabon's government have announced the suspension of the national team, the sacking of the coach and kicked Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang off the squad in the wake of three defeats at the Africa Cup of Nations finals. Gabon's Minister of Sports announced on television the suspension of the national team after they finished last in their group and were eliminated from the tournament in Morocco. "Given the Panthers' disgraceful performance at the Africa Cup of Nations, the government has decided to dissolve the coaching staff, suspend the national team until further notice, and exclude players Bruno Ecuele Manga and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang," said acting sports minister Simplice-Desire Mamboula after Wednesday's 3-2 loss to the Ivory Coast in Marrakech.

The Indian selectors will be announcing the team for the three-match ODI series against the Black Caps, starting January 11 in Vadodara and there have been speculations about whether Pant can hold on to his place in the squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Rishabh Pant's form in the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy has been patchy with just one half-century in four matches but if he is dropped for the upcoming New Zealand series without being given even one ODI game in the last 18 months, it could be deemed as slightly harsh from the Ajit Agarkar-led committee.

It is an open secret that at least one member in the Indian team management doesn't exactly like Pant's high-risk high-reward batting template and would like him to employ a more traditional way of batting.

But dropping a second choice glovesman without giving him a fair go could obviously lead to more questions being asked without tangible answers being provided.

In 2025, Pant didn't play a single ODI although he was part of the Champions Trophy squad as well as in the series against



South Africa last month.

While Ruturaj Gaikwad, a specialist opener was tried at No 4, Pant was left cooling his heels during all the three games. Pant has played only 31 ODIs since his debut in 2018. Call it bad luck coupled with his batting philosophy, he got consistent chances in two separate phases.

He played 11 games between June 30, 2019 to Jan 14, 2020 before Covid-19 intervened. His best phase came in the post Covid-19 times when he played 15 ODIs between March 26, 2021

NZ ODIs

to Nov 30, 2022, before he met with a horrific car accident.

Incidentally in this phase, he scored a ton, had two scores of 75-plus and one 85 in the 15 innings. But since his return in 2024, post accident, he has just played a solitary ODI in Colombo, which incidentally was head coach Gautam Gambhir's first assignment.

It didn't help that Pant has only one significant score -- 70 -- in four Vijay Hazare Trophy games while flavour of the season, Ishan Kishan hit 14 sixes in Jharkhand's opening game

FOOTBALL CRISIS

ISL clubs demand cost coverage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: Thirteen of the 14 Indian Super League (ISL) clubs Thursday told All India Football Federation (AIFF) that they "may be ready and willing" to take part in the delayed 2025-26 season if there is no participation fee and the national body takes financial responsibility for the organisational and operational costs of running the truncated competition.

Putting conditions on their participation in the ISL, the clubs also requested the national federation to furnish "a clear, time-bound roadmap for execution of the long-term plan, including defined timelines for appointment of a commercial partner and/or broadcaster, finalisation of the league's revenue, governance, and risk-shar-



ing framework, and transition to a financially self-sustaining competition model consistent with statutory governance norms".

The ISL clubs also urged the AIFF to actively seek commercial or institutional support from the Government of India to minimise costs and help make the 2025-26 season sustainable.

"Upon receipt of the above confirmations, the undersigned clubs shall be in a position to formally confirm participation and cooperate fully with the AIFF to ensure the orderly, compliant, and successful conduct of the 2025-26 season," a letter from the 13 clubs to the AIFF said.

Pankaj Lochan Mohanty new ABFI president

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 1: Pankaj Lochan Mohanty of Odisha was unanimously elected as the President of the Amateur Baseball Federation of India (ABFI) during the federation's election held in Bhubaneswar.

The election for the office bearers saw Arvind Kumar of Haryana elected as General Secretary after the opposing candidate, Dillip of Goa, withdrew his nomination. For the post of Treasurer, S Venkatesh of Tamil Nadu defeated Sweta of Telangana by a margin of 33-13 votes.

In addition, four Vice Presidents, four Joint Secretaries, and four Executive Body Members were elected for a four-year term. A total of 46 members representing 23 states participated in the electoral process.

The election was conducted



under the supervision of Justice Debabrata Dash (Retd), who served as the Returning Officer and oversaw all election procedures.

Notably, Mohanty had earlier served as President of the Federation from 2016 to 2019.

During his previous tenure, several developmental initiatives were undertaken to promote baseball across the country. Owing to his popularity and extensive experience in sports administration, he was elected unopposed this time.

T20 WORLD CUP

Australia picks spin-heavy squad for SL, India tour

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne (Australia), Jan 1: Australian selectors have named a spin-heavy squad for the defending champions for the forthcoming Twenty20 World Cup in Sri Lanka and India.

The 2021 tournament winners decided Thursday not to pick a left-arm paceman in the absence of the T20-retired Mitchell Starc. Cooper Connolly, who has not played in any of the Australians' past 12 T20 Internationals, was the surprise inclusion.

Starc has missed just one of the past six ICC's T20 events but retired from the format at the international level late last year.

Australia opens the tournament February 11 against Ireland in Colombo then plays Zimbabwe in Colombo February 13, followed by matches in Kandy against Sri Lanka February 16 and Oman February 20.

A scan on Pat Cummins' back later this month will determine whether he will play in the tournament. Josh Hazlewood and Tim David are both on the comeback trail from hamstring injuries.

ICC rules permit squad changes until January 31.

Australia will play a three-match T20 series against Pakistan beginning later this month. Australia's group-stage matches are all being played in Sri Lanka but the team will travel to India for at least some of their Super Eights games if they qualify.

National Sports Governance Act comes into effect partially

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 1: The National Sports Governance Act partially came into effect Thursday with provisions that will set the ball rolling for the institution of an all-powerful National Sports Board (NSB) and a Tribunal to handle sporting disputes notified as enforced by the central government.

The Act was notified August 18 last year and has been described as the single biggest sporting reform in the country by Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya.

The provisions being brought into effect relate to the establishment and governance framework of National Sports Bodies, including the National Olympic Committee, National Paralym-

pic Committee, National Sports Federations (NSFs) and Regional Sports Federations.

"...the provisions of sections 1 to 3, sub-sections (1), (2) and (4) of section 4, sub-sections (1) and (2) of section 5, sub-section (5) of section 8, sub-section (1) of section 11, sections 14 and 15, sub-sections (1) to (7) and (10) of section 17, sections 30 and 31, and sections 33 to 38 of the said Act shall come into force," stated a late night press release from the Sports Ministry on Wednesday.

After elections under the provisions of the Act, all these bodies will be required to have Executive Committees of no more than 15 members with at least two Sportspersons of Merit (SOMs) in them.

The constitution of the Na-



NEW YEAR, NEW RULES

tional Sports Board (NSB) and the National Sports Tribunal (NST) will also get underway with the partial implementation.

The NSB will feature a Chairperson and members appointed by the Central Government from among "persons of ability, integrity and standing who possesses special knowledge or practical experience in the field of public administration, sports governance, sports law and other related fields."

The appointments will be done on the basis of the recom-

mendations of a search-cum-selection committee, which is yet to be finalised.

"The phased commencement of the Act is aimed at ensuring a smooth transition to the statutory sports governance framework," the ministry said.

The ministry has already allowed NSFs, which have elections due in the next few months, to postpone the process till December for the full-scale implementation of the Act. This means that elections of the All India Football Federation will be held quite late in the year.

"With effect from 1st January, 2026, the institutional mechanisms envisaged under the notified provisions of the Act shall become operational," it stated.

The NSB, which is proposed