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FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: **BHUBANESHWAR:** EMPREO KIA, [PATIA](#), PH: 9777064777, 9124401571, **CENTRAL KIA, [PAHAL](#)**, PH: 7440004288, 7440002919, **TRUPTI KIA, [PATRAPADA](#)**, PH: 7064414001/ 7064414004/ 7064414005, **PURI BYPASS ROAD**, PH: 7064414001, **BHAWANIPATNA:** MAJESTY KIA, PH: 9124572956, **BOLANGIR:** MAJESTY KIA, PH: 9124672378/ 9124572963, **CUTTACK:** CENTRAL KIA, PH: 9237304769, **ROURKELA:** KRISHNA KIA, PH: 7852941723, **BALASORE:** BASANTI KIA, PH: 7077732182, **BERHAMPUR:** CENTRAL KIA, PH: 9124563157, **SAMBALPUR:** CENTRAL KIA, PH: 7440004263, 7440003022, **ANGUL:** CENTRAL KIA, PH: 7440004255, 9124563136, **JAIPUR:** SANJIB KIA, PH: 9937689001, **JEYPORE:** MAJESTY KIA, PH: 9124572378, **KEONJHAR:** TRUPTI KIA, PH: 7064414005

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# leisure

## FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
You are creative, and today you will prove to be resourceful and thereby successful! Okay, you are ambitious, says Ganesha, but don't bite off more than you can chew. Be confident of your abilities, work hard and have faith in providence.

**TAURUS**  
You will feel the burden of financial responsibilities on your shoulders today, says Ganesha. Do not let expenses bother you. Money will come to you from unexpected sources later in the day. If you can maintain an impartial judgement, then you will yield wonderful results on the financial front, advises Ganesha.

**GEMINI**  
You are extremely competitive. And it doesn't matter how far behind the competition is. So today, you will continue your usual quest for getting better. You won't have it any other way as you despise mediocrity. You will find yourself in the company of like-minded people who will inspire you to study new subjects.

**CANCER**  
Your business acquaintances will come forward in the manner that may seem nothing short of some divine intervention. This means that they will virtually save your neck from the guillotine, predicts Ganesha. You will grow wiser in your spending ways, as you will know what to buy and what not to buy. At work, you will impress everyone with your skills and efficiency.

**LEO**  
Che Guevara may not hold the beacon any more, and the best of the Beatles are long gone. But your desire to revolutionise the world is as strong as ever, sees Ganesha. The best ideas are the ones that come suddenly and subconsciously.

**VIRGO**  
Professionalism will be overshadowed by personal preoccupations. Drill your way out of problems today by meeting them head-on. Don't get stuck up on the emotional front, especially in the evening, cautions Ganesha.

**LIBRA**  
Trivialities should be the least of your concerns today. Do not let the small things faze you out. Remember that it is the overall picture that matters, and not one small stroke of the brush. Bear this in mind, since you may come under some pressure from subordinates at your workplace.

**SCORPIO**  
Work pressure will keep on mounting today, predicts Ganesha. But you shall handle it with great style, all thanks to your patience. But keep a watch on the radar and learn how to spot stress early and then act on it as quickly as you can.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Look before you leap, says Ganesha. Cupid has strung his bow and aimed an arrow at you. Love's labour will easily aid you to woo a young, tender heart. But don't be swept away by easy prospects and guard your reputation at all costs.

**CAPRICORN**  
You will starve for some free time, but will find it difficult to steal even a minute from your busy schedule, even if it is for unwinding your overworked soul, says Ganesha. In times like these, one can hardly think straight, let alone be innovative. You will, however, work your way out by prioritising matters. By the end of the day, your efforts may get paid off, leaving you with the thought that it was all worthwhile after all!

**AQUARIUS**  
You find solace in travel today. But if you plan to include others, beware, as you may end up doing all their dirty work too. But, you will find fulfillment even in that, which, says Ganesha, is your strong point. You know how to turn a weakness into strength.

**PISCES**  
Today just might be the day when you invent a better mousetrap. However, your ideas have a propensity to wane and wax at the same speed, says Ganesha. Hence, keep a notebook handy to jot down all your earth-shattering revolutionary ideas.

## BRUNSON SHUTS DOWN PREGNANCY RUMOURS

Quinta Brunson has shut down pregnancy rumours sparked by a New Year's Eve photo she shared online. Social media users speculated after seeing her in a white knitted pullover and beanie. Addressing the buzz on Instagram, the 36-year-old clarified, "Not preggers. Sweater in odd position"

## WILL SMITH SUED FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Will Smith is facing a new lawsuit that could shake Hollywood. A former tour violinist has filed legal action accusing the actor and his management team of sexual harassment, retaliation and wrongful termination connected to Smith's 2025 world tour

## Chitrangda on saying no

**Mumbai:** Actress Chitrangda Singh says learning to say no has been a crucial lesson in her journey as an artiste and feels that taking on bad work can dilute an actor's credibility, even though not every decision turns out right in hindsight.

Talking about what saying 'no' has taught her, Chitrangda told this news agency: "I think what saying no has taught me is that you tend to dilute your equity as an actor, or your sort of credibility as an actor, if you do bad work, and I'm not saying every time you make the right choice."

The actress added: "Sometimes you say no to good work and you don't realise that you're making a mistake. But yeah, there have been times I said no, and I'm happy that I did say no, so many times, actually."

Emphasising the importance of the creative team, Chitrangda added that a director's vision and strong filmmaking are what truly help an actor shine.

"Because I feel that, at the end of it, it is the team that really, really matters. It's the director's vision, what happens at the edit table, how they look at a character. So yeah, it's very important that you work with good makers. I think that really does help an actor shine," she added.

## Kriti rejects performance pressure

**Mumbai:** Kriti Sanon is welcoming 2026 with a calm, confident mindset, choosing excitement over pressure as she prepares for her upcoming film *Cocktail 2*. In a recent interview, the ac-

tor spoke openly about navigating expectations after the success of her previous projects and why she consciously avoids box office comparisons while making creative decisions.

Reacting with surprise to *Cocktail 2* being her 20th film, Kriti laughed it off, saying she often misses such milestones. When asked whether the success of her last release adds pressure on her future films, she firmly dismissed the idea, explaining that every project is different and attracts a distinct audience. According to her, expecting

the same outcome from every film is unrealistic, given the many factors that influence a movie's box office journey.

Kriti emphasised that her approach as an actor is to give each film her complete honesty and effort, while leaving the results to fate. She added that she prefers enjoying the creative process rather than burdening herself or her filmmakers with unnecessary pressure.

*Cocktail 2* marks Kriti's collaboration with director Homi Adajania and reunites her with Shahid Kapoor after *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*. The film also stars Rashmika Mandanna, making it a fresh and much-anticipated trio. Positioned as a spiritual successor to the 2012 cult hit *Cocktail*, the film promises a new story, new characters and renewed excitement.

## Rashmika urges for love, gratitude

**Mumbai:** Actress Rashmika Mandanna

rang in the New Year with a heartfelt message for her "lovelies", urging everyone to begin 2026 with love and gratitude.

Rashmika took to her Instagram stories, where she shared a picture of herself. In the image, the actress is seen sitting inside a vehicle, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing large, black-framed glasses and a sweater.

For the caption, she wrote: "Happiestttt new year my love- liesssss!! I know I am late but

just wanted to say let's all start the new year with love and gratitudeeeee!! I love you all so so much."

The actress is currently on a Roman holiday with beau Vijay Deverakonda. She had shared a string of glimpses from her getaway in Rome. In some images, Vijay's actor brother Anand Deverakonda could be seen.

She simply captioned the post, "Rome so far.."

Work-wise, Rashmika will next be seen in the forthcoming pan-India film *Mysaa*. She also has *Cocktail 2*.

Last year, the actress was seen in five films

such as *Chhaava*, *Sikandar*, *Kuberaa*, *Thamaa* and *The Girl-friend*.

*Chhaava* is an epic historical action film based on the life of Sambhaji, the second ruler of the Maratha Empire, who is played by Vicky Kaushal. *Sikandar*, starring Salman Khan, was directed by A. R. Murugadoss.



**Mumbai:** Bollywood diva and fitness icon Malaika Arora is stepping into 2026 with clarity and purpose, placing equal emphasis on physical health and inner calm.

The diva took to social media to share her goals for the year, underscoring the importance of discipline, movement and mental well-being. She also shared a video with a text overlay that read: "2026 Train hard, Protect peace, Build wealth."

In the clip, the actress

is seen working out with weights, doing pilates and yoga.

"2026 goals: move your body, protect your peace," Malaika wrote, reflecting her long-standing commitment to fitness and mindful living.

As the first quarter of the 21st century concluded, Malaika had spoken to this news agency reflecting on the phase marked by change, growth and constant re-invention.

Talking about how it has been personally for you, Malaika told: "Personally,

it's been a journey of re-invention for me, growing beyond glamour and dance into fitness, entrepreneurship, and now a published author."

Looking at the films and performances that have defined this era, Malaika named titles such as *Lagaan*, *Dil Chahta Hai*, *Queen*, *Gully Boy* and *Andhadhun* as milestones that reshaped mainstream Hindi cinema.

"As we close this chapter, films like *Lagaan*, *Dil Chahta Hai*, *Queen*, *Gully*

Malaika's goals

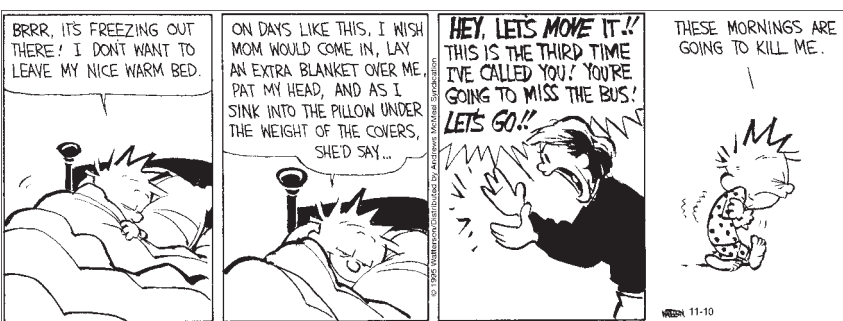
Boy, *Andhadhun* etc have truly defined the era."



## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBS

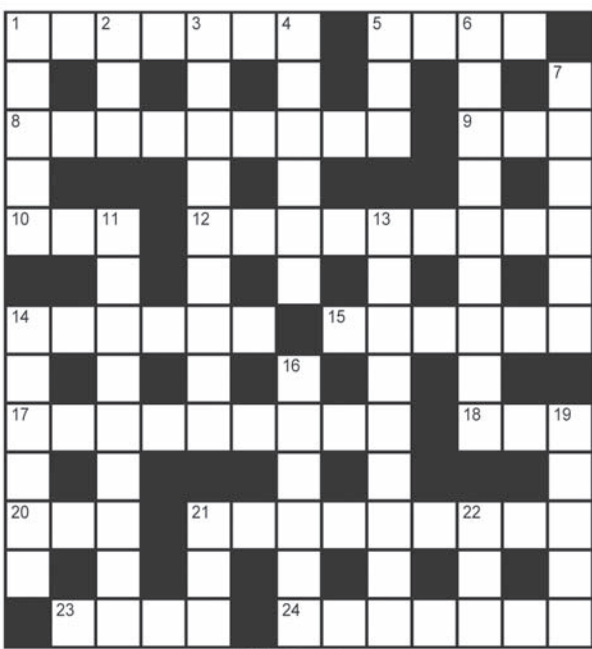


## BREVITY



## FUN post

## CROSSWORD



### Across

- Move about in haste
- Big brass
- Balcony
- Garage contents
- Blubber
- Church type
- Worldwide
- Trite phrase
- Right away
- Collector's goal
- Razor-billed bird

### Down

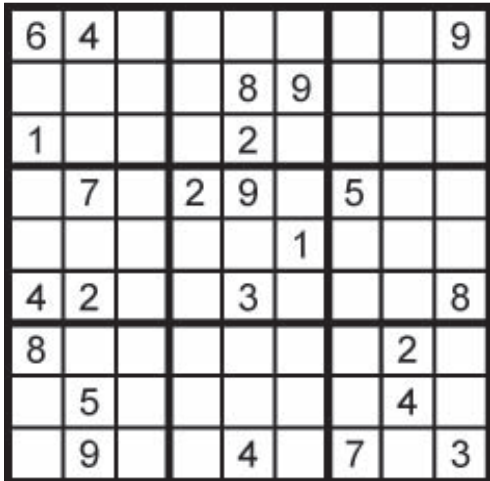
- Big trucks
- Woodworking tool
- Seating aid (5,4)
- Dried fruit
- Bunion's place

### Across

- Sleds
- Stuff in a muffin
- Astronaut's concern
- Hiking accessories
- Threatening words (2,4)
- Racetrack figure
- Fellow worker
- Stringed instrument
- Snipping sort
- Irascible
- Beachgoer's goal
- Prone

## 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.

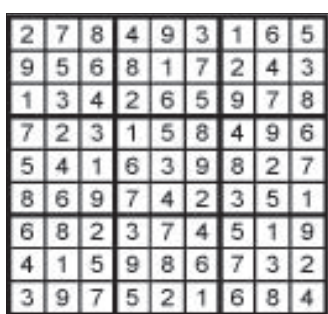


## SOLUTIONS

### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW



OIPR-06014/13/0080/2526

# People should come together to make India self-reliant: CM

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 2:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday said people should come together to make India self-reliant.

Addressing an event to mark the 39th Freedom Fighters' Mahotsav and death anniversary of former CM Harekrushna Mahtab, Majhi said, "Today, there is no need for the freedom movement. But, there is a need for another movement to make India self-reliant. All should come together to make it happen."

He said Mahtab always stood against injustice and secured a special place among the greatest freedom fighters of the country.

"A full-size statue of Mahtab will be installed at a central location in Bhubaneswar in recognition of his contributions," he said.

Majhi emphasised that the state government, inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been consistently working to honor Odisha's great leaders by observing their birth and death anniversaries in their native places.

Majhi said his government is committed to the social security and all-around welfare of the families of freedom fighters.

"Our government has increased the monthly pension of the freedom fighters who were imprisoned, from Rs 10,000 to



Rs 20,000. After the death of the freedom fighters, their spouses or unmarried daughters are eligible to receive the amount," he said.

"Similarly, the pension of freedom fighters who were not imprisoned was increased to Rs 15,000 from Rs 9,000 a month," he added.

Majhi said that apart from this, 152 people who were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the Emergency are also getting a monthly pension of Rs 20,000.

Works, Law and Excise Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan said without Mahtab, the present geographical and administrative identity of Odisha might not have been possible. Mahtab laid the foundation for development in infrastructure, industry, agriculture, and irrigation in Odisha.

Cooperation, Handlooms,

Textiles, and Handicrafts Minister Pradeep Bal Samanta said, "Hundreds of freedom fighters sacrificed their blood and sweat on this land to give us freedom. Their unmatched patriotism and dedication can never be equaled."

Bhartruhari Mahtab, Cuttack MP and chairman of Freedom Fighters' Hall Trust, in his welcome address, said, "Before 1987, there was no specific day dedicated to freedom fighters. Since then, this day has been observed to keep alive the values, ideals, and sacrifices of freedom fighters and to inspire patriotism among future generations."

Former minister and Opposition Deputy Leader Prasanna Acharya said Mahtab was one of the key figures who worked to make Odisha the first state of India formed on the basis of language. He not only dreamed of a new Odisha but also inspired the youth of the state.

Former minister Niranjan Patnaik said, "No matter how times change, we must never forget the sacrifices of our freedom fighters."

On this occasion, the CM felicitated the president of the Freedom Fighters' Day Celebration Committee and eminent freedom fighter Bimbadhar Muduli. He also inaugurated and visited a photo exhibition on the life of Mahtab organised by the Information and Public Relations department.

# ₹40cr fraud: EOW nabs prime accused in WB

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 2:** The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Odisha Police arrested the prime accused in Rs 40 crore share trading fraud case from West Bengal (WB), a senior official said Friday.

The accused was identified as Amit Mandal, a resident of South Boilapara under Bishnupur police station area in Bankura district of WB.

He was arrested December 31, 2025 in connection with a case registered over the allegations of Sushant Kumar Das of Khurda district. Das alleged that the accused Mandal, along with his associates, induced him to invest in share trading by assuring returns of around 3.5 to 7 per cent per month.

The accused persons also executed an agreement with Das, apart from issuing post-dated cheques (PDCs) to win his



confidence. Lured by Mandal and associates, Das deposited Rs 8.5 lakh during the period 2022-2024.

The deposit was taken through the personal accounts of the accused Amit Mandal, who claimed to have one entity namely 'Kalpana Financial Services'. Das also alleged that although the returns were paid to the victim for a few months initially, they were later stopped and the accused Mandal absconded.

Subsequently, the complainant also came to know that Mandal had also cheated



**EXAM TIME:** Students of RD HSS appear Chemistry Practical Exam at college's science laboratory in Bhubaneswar Friday

## CM Majhi lauds record-breaking success of Vigilance department

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 2:** In a comprehensive review of the Vigilance Department, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi lauded the department's record-breaking achievements in 2025 and reiterated his commitment to making Odisha completely corruption-free.

The Chief Minister, who also leads the Home Department, highlighted that over the past 20 years, Odisha Vigilance has set a benchmark in proactive anti-corruption measures, strengthened by the government's zero-tolerance policy. "The time has come to make Odisha completely corruption-free," he said, urging the department to continue its rigorous campaign against corrupt practices. Between April and December 2025, the state government directed the Vigilance Department to investigate 125 cases—a record for such a short period. In total, 488 cases were decided, including 108 cases where penalties were imposed and a historic 173 cases involving disproportionate assets were concluded.

several other people in Odisha, misappropriating deposits worth crores of rupees.

The EOW sleuths during the course of investigation ascertained that the accused Mandal along with some of his associates induced the general public to invest with him for share trading to get high monthly returns ranging from 3.5 to 7 per cent.

In order to induce the general public to give deposit, Mandal in connivance with his agents and associates in Odisha arranged several meetings in different hotels at Angul and Bhubaneswar.

"The accused Amit Mandal, during 2020-2024 period by inducing around 500 depositors from Odisha and 100 depositors from West Bengal has collected more than Rs 120 crore. At present, he has to return the invested amount of more than Rs 40 crore. He used to pay the

## CIPET IPT holds GeM training



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 2:** CIPET Institute of Plastics Technology (IPT), Bhubaneswar organised a two-day training programme focused on Government e-Marketplace (GeM) here Friday.

The programme was aimed at imparting skill upgradation and practical knowledge on the GeM platform to vendors and other key stakeholders. More than 100 stakeholders from different states across the country participated in the training, reflecting strong interest in enhancing digital procurement capabilities.

The training programme was formally inaugurated by CIPET IPT principal director and head Pramod Kumar Sahoo, who highlighted the importance of GeM in promoting transparency, efficiency and ease of doing business.

# CM to inaugurate National Road Safety Month today

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 2:** With an objective to significantly reducing road accidents and foster a culture of safe and responsible driving, National Road Safety Month will be observed across the country throughout the month of January. In Odisha, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi will inaugurate the state-level campaign here Saturday, followed by a collective road safety oath-taking ceremony.

At the inaugural programme, participants will pledge to strictly follow traffic rules, respect pedestrians, avoid reckless driving, and actively promote road safety awareness among the public. This symbolic gesture aims to reinforce individual responsibility and collective commitment toward safer roads.

As part of the inaugural activities, a Padayatra intended to sensitise citizens about the importance of responsible road behaviour,

use of helmets and seatbelts, adherence to speed limits, and to avoid drunk driving will be organised from Mahatma Gandhi Marg to Ram Mandir, led by CM.

Senior government officials, public representatives, students, youth volunteers, traffic personnel, and members of civil society organizations will take part in the programme, reflecting a whole-of-society approach to road safety. Their presence will underscore state government's strong commitment to reducing road fatalities, preventing injuries, and ensuring safer road infrastructure and traffic management.

The programme will commence at 7:45 am at Mahatma Gandhi Marg marking the formal launch of a series of road safety awareness campaigns, educational programmes, enforcement drives, and community outreach activities, planned across the state throughout month.

Through sustained efforts

and public participation, the initiative aims to bring about lasting behavioural change and make Odisha's roads safer for all users.

As part of the awareness month, transport authorities in will conduct frequent and surprise vehicle checks across the state, targeting rule violations such as the non-use of helmets, seatbelts, and expired pollution control certificates (PUC). Authorities have stated that there will be no grace period, and any violation will result in immediate penalties, in line with the Motor Vehicles Act.

Apart from enforcement, awareness campaigns will be actively organised by various stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and private companies. These initiatives will include rallies, training sessions, and public outreach programmes aimed at educating people about safe road behaviour and the importance of adhering to traffic rules.

## SIR: ECI seeks Odia interpreters for four GPs in West Midnapore

AGENCIES

**Kolkata, Jan 2:** The Election Commission of India (ECI) has sought to engage Odia interpreters-cum-translators for four gram panchayats (GPs) – two each under the Dantan and Mohanpur community development blocks – in West Midnapore district of West Bengal (WB), for hearings on claims and objections related to the draft voters' list.

This is because the majority of voters in these four GPs located close to the WB-Odisha border in the West Midnapore district are predominantly Odia-speaking.

"Even the duly-filled enumeration forms filled by them are in Odia scripts, thus necessitating the appointment of Odia interpreters-cum-translators for hearing sessions," a senior official from the CEO's office said.

These voters who have their ancestral roots in Odisha, the official said, had been settled in these four GPs under the two community development blocks for generations, and most of them depend on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood.

"Often, the new brides com-



ing to these families have their roots in Odisha, and they are conversant with no other language but Odia. In such a situation, it had become extremely difficult for the Electoral Registration Officers, Assistant Electoral Registration Officers, and Booth-level Officers to communicate with these voters, who are mainly Bengali-speaking, to interact with these Odia-speaking voters, and hence the necessity for Odia interpreters-cum-translators during the hearing sessions," the official from the office of the CEO said.

Pertinent to mention here that the draft voters' list was published December 16. The final voters' list will be published February 14. Soon after that, the ECI will announce the polling dates for the crucial Assembly elections in West Bengal.

# ECoR rolls out revised timetable

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Jan 2:** With an aim to improve connectivity, punctuality, safety and overall travel comfort across its network, East Coast Railway (ECoR) has rolled out a series of passenger-friendly and operational enhancements with implementation of its revised Working Time Table (WTT) 2026, effective from January 1.

Under the new timetable, six new trains (three pairs) have been introduced to strengthen rail connectivity on key routes. These include services on the Udhna-Berhampur-Udhna route, Sambalpur-Boudh-Sambalpur section, and the weekly Boudh-Bhubaneswar New-Boudh Express.

In addition, fourteen trains (seven pairs) have been extended to new destinations in order to enhance access to interior and regional areas. Notable extensions include the Howrah-Titlagarh Express up to Junagarh Road, Bolangir-Sonepur Passenger and Bhubaneswar-Sonepur Inter City up to Purunakatak and Visakhapatnam-Bhubaneswar Inter City, Visakha Express and Konark Express up to Bhubaneswar New.



To meet increasing passenger demand, the frequency of Udhna-Berhampur-Udhna Amrit Bharat Express (19021/19022) has been increased from weekly to tri-weekly. The days of service of four trains, including Secunderabad-Visakhapatnam Vande Bharat and Rourkela-Puri Vande Bharat Express, have also been revised to improve operational efficiency.

Two trains, the Puri-Bhanjapur-Puri Express (12891/12892) have been renumbered with the change taking effect from February 1, 2026.

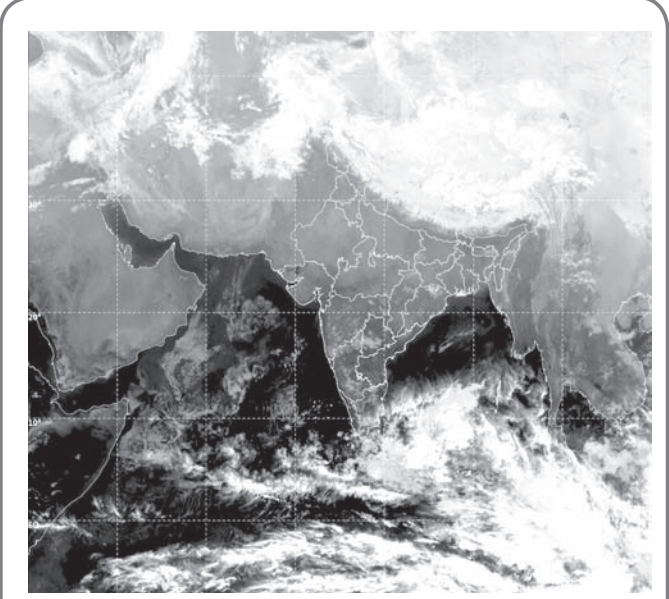
In a significant move to reduce travel time, ten trains have been speeded up, cutting end-to-end journey time by up to 35 minutes on selected routes. Passenger safety and comfort have also been enhanced with the conversion of

four trains to LHB coaches.

The revised timetable provides 56 additional stoppages at important stations such as Loisinga, Norla Road, Bolagarh Town PH, Sakshigopal, Mancheswar, Naraj Marthapur, Bhusandpur, Boinda, Ambodala, Theruvali, Muribahal, Deogaon Road, Talcher Road and Nergundi, benefiting local commuters and nearby regions.

Further, arrival and departure timings of 25 trains have been revised to improve punctuality. For better terminal management and optimal path utilisation, 27 ECoR-owned trains have undergone marginal adjustments in their total time on run without affecting passenger convenience. Timings of 10 trains at selected stations have also been advanced from January 1, 2026.

MARKET WATCH					
CURRENCY		BOURSES		COMMODITIES	
INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION	INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR	90.34 ▲ 0.20	SENSEX	85762.55 ▲ 573.41	GOLD	₹1,35,643 ▼ ₹161
EURO	106.00 ▲ 0.04	NIFTY	26328.55 ▲ 182.00	SILVER	₹235,656 ▼ ₹217




WEATHER			
	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	28.0°	25.0°	Dense Fog
Min Temp	12.7°	11.8°	
Humidity	98%	98%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	



“

Genius discovers a system; average talent stereotypes it till it is shattered by fresh genius.



SRI AUROBINDO

## Institutional Shield

India-Bangladesh relations today feel like they’re running on muscle memory, while politics keeps tugging at the steering wheel. For years, the relationship worked because institutions, security agencies, and seasoned diplomats on both sides quietly did the heavy lifting. Now, when tempers flare and rhetoric rises, their experience matters more than ever. Thankfully, India has a formidable bench of people who understand Bangladesh beyond the headlines.

Look at the depth of institutional memory India possesses. Former R&AW hands such as Amitabh Mathur, Amar Bhushan, Ravi (C.K.) Sinha, Shashi Bhushan Singh, Alok Tiwari, R. Kumar, and officers like Shashi Bhushan Singh Tomar have spent decades building networks, countering misinformation, handling crises and shaping quiet backchannel understanding. Add to that seasoned neighbourhood watchers like Alok Joshi, Ashok Sinha, and Vivek Johri, and you see why India’s strategic brain trust is deep.

Even the Intelligence Bureau has officers who know Bangladesh from ground reality, not Power Point briefings — people like Sheel Vardhan Singh, Balbir Singh, Surendra Singh, Ramakant, and Sumit. Diplomatically too, voices such as Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty have long cautioned that our Bangladesh policy cannot be driven by ego or electoral reflexes.

Which is precisely the challenge today. Dhaka’s political volatility and rising nationalist pressures have made diplomacy reactive rather than strategic. Visa disruptions, rhetorical blame games, and episodic friction show what happens when politics outrun institutional wisdom.

For stable ties, Delhi must lean on this institutional memory — the officers who understand nuance, can read Bangladesh’s domestic pulse, and know when to use firmness and when to use patience. Relations aren’t collapsing; they’re being stress-tested. And this is when seasoned hands, not sound bites, should guide the relationship.

### Gujarat: Prime postings, familiar faces

There’s a curious rule of gravity in Indian bureaucracy: spend time in Delhi, return to your cadre, and you somehow land a little closer to power than when you left. Gujarat offers a textbook case. Officers who’ve done stints in the Union government — especially anywhere near the Prime Minister’s Office — seem to glide smoothly into the state’s most influential chairs. Coincidence? Maybe. But patterns like these rarely lie. They usually tell you something about power, comfort zones, and a state government that clearly prefers familiar hands on the wheel.

Truthfully, Delhi-returned officers do bring weight. Exposure to the PMO, big-ticket ministries, and national policy machines gives them scale, visibility, and a ringside view of how politics and governance truly tango. Any government would want that expertise. The problem begins when this turns from a professional advantage into an unofficial entitlement program.


Because what does it say to equally capable officers who stayed back, kept systems running, faced public heat, dealt with the grind, while someone else comes back from the capital and jumps the queue? Merit starts to look suspiciously like “central connections.” And when governance starts smelling like a loyalty ecosystem, morale and institutional fairness quietly take a hit.

Gujarat prides itself on efficiency and administrative discipline. But efficiency isn’t just about trusted names and cosy familiarity. It’s also about widening the talent pool, rewarding competence grounded in state reality, and resisting the temptation to build a closed circle of Delhi-certified insiders.

Sure, this trend may make political management easier. And when posting patterns mirror proximity rather than performance, it’s not just a bureaucratic quirk but a governance signal. The question is: who’s it really meant for?

“

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BABUDOM BYTES  
Dilip Cherian

**RHB’s curious concession to babus**

The Rajasthan Housing Board (RHB), established to bring the housing dream closer to economically weaker, lower, and middle-income individuals, has quietly employed a regulatory sleight of hand by slashing administrative charges for IAS, IPS, and IFS officers purchasing luxury flats. Gone from the usual 10 per cent to a cosy 5 per cent, this tweak translates into roughly Rs 8-9 lakh in savings per flat for senior officers. Meanwhile, the very citizens the board was supposed to champion continue to pay full freight with no such concession in sight.

This appears to be a classic case of policy capture by design. The housing board’s mandate, enshrined in statute nearly five decades ago, is unambiguous: facilitate housing schemes that serve public needs, with transparency and fairness at the core. Yet here we are, watching a body created for equitable access hand out elite perks to the elite themselves.

Share a babu experience! Follow [dilipthecherian@twitter.com](#). Let’s multiply the effect

## WISDOM CORNER

“

The journey matters as much as the goal.

KALPANA CHAWLA

“

You don’t see any borders between countries from space. That’s man-made, and one experiences it only when you return to Earth.

SUNITA WILLIAMS

“

We all are part of humanity, and the Earth is our one home, and all of us are in it.

SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1777: The Battle of Princeton was fought in New Jersey during the American Revolution. The clash, along with the Battle of Trenton, marked the first victory for the Revolutionary War general George Washington in the open field.
- 1938: U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the National Foundation of Infantile Paralysis (later called the March of Dimes) to find a cure for polio, a disease he had been stricken with in 1921.
- 1962: Pope John XXIII excommunicated Fidel Castro after he took control of Cuba in 1959 and turned the country into the first communist state in the Western Hemisphere.
- 1977: Apple was incorporated by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. It went on to become one of the most recognizable brands in the world.
- 1987: Aretha Franklin became the first woman voted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. More than 80 other women have entered the hall since her induction was announced

FOCUS

DEBT SUSTAINABILITY

# SOVEREIGN BORROWERS’ CLUB



### While creditor coordination has long been institutionalized- through the Paris Club, the London Club, and the Institute of International Finance – borrower countries have often been discouraged

One of the most promising ideas in the Seville Commitment (Compromiso de Sevilla), which heads of state and government adopted in July, is the creation of a platform for borrower countries, supported by existing institutions and facilitated by a United Nations secretariat. This simple but potentially transformative concept could shift the balance of information and influence, which has long favored creditors. By allowing borrower countries to discuss technical issues and debt challenges, access capacity-building assistance, and coordinate their actions, the platform would amplify their voice in the global financial system.

While creditor coordination has long been institutionalized– through the Paris Club, the London Club, and industry-led efforts such as the Institute of International Finance – borrower countries have often been discouraged from sharing information, leading to ad hoc exchanges. Establishing a borrowers’ club is therefore a political signal: it recognizes that enabling the Global South to speak with one voice can benefit financial stability.

This is not the first attempt at borrower coordination, and lessons should be drawn from past efforts, which began during the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s. Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and other countries in the region explored forming a “debtors’ club,” supported at the time by UN Trade and Development and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The result was the Cartagena Group, formed in June 1984 by 11 Latin American countries accounting for 75% of regional debt. The group highlighted the external origins of the crisis. Their proposals were sent to the 1984 G7 leaders’ summit in London, only to be rejected in favor of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank’s case-by-case approach. Subsequent attempts have faced similar barriers. More recent initiatives, such as the Sustainable Debt Coalition, established during the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference in Egypt, and proposals by the V20 Group, have linked debt to climate breakdown, but remain fragmented.

During Europe’s post-2008 sovereign-debt crisis, the inadequacy of existing tools led to the creation of new institutions such as the European Stability Mechanism. No such innovations exist for developing countries.

Of course, the G20’s Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) offered temporary relief for low-income countries during the pandemic, but private and multilateral creditors largely did not participate, limiting its impact. And while the G20’s Common Framework for Debt Treatments was designed to provide relief to countries in debt distress, only Zambia, Chad, Ghana, and Ethiopia have used the mechanism for debt restructuring, with others citing concerns about timeliness and outcomes.

The IMF-World Bank Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable has identified promising strategies to address liquidity challenges– including a more flexible “three-pillar approach” that combines reform, financing, and restructuring – but implementation remains slow.

These piecemeal initiatives, which have largely disappointed, should inform the design of a borrowers’ club under the Seville Commitment. The governance structure must accommodate diverse debt profiles and complex political realities, and the funding model must guarantee institutional independence and protect decision-making from creditor influence. The secretariat must be capable of generating credible data and countering misperceptions that inflate borrowing costs for developing countries. There must also be coordination mechanisms to ensure effective alignment with the newly created Seville Forum on Debt.

Such a club should not be a confrontational bloc, but rather a mechanism for mutual capacity-building in four main areas.

First, debt restructuring

must emphasize preserving market access. Many countries avoid the Common Framework (like the DSSI before it) and even precautionary IMF programs because they fear rating downgrades and negative market reactions. Borrowers need stronger communication strategies to present credible macroeconomic programs and provide consistent, evidence-based messaging to rating agencies and private creditors.

Second, long-run sustainable growth must be integrated into financial programming, as required by the Global Sovereign Debt Roundtable’s three-pillar approach. Given that current models do not capture climate-transition risks or opportunities, borrowers need shared analytical tools that allow them to articulate credible, comparable, and climate-aligned growth strategies.

Lastly, debt transparency must be improved. The World Bank advocates “radical transparency,” but many countries struggle to operationalize this in debt-management practices. A borrowers’ club could help standardize templates, disclosure protocols, and peer-review processes tailored to developing-country contexts.

Some progress has been made toward alleviating the developing world’s debt crisis. To seize this opportunity, Global South countries and international financial institutions must build on the momentum of the Seville Commitment and the G20 leaders’ summit in South Africa.

**Homi Kharas is a senior fellow at the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution while Mahmoud Mohieldin is a former minister of investment of Egypt (2004-10).**

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## SPECTRUM NEW HIGHER EDUCATION BILL

# Outcomes matter more than intent

In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the Union Government has introduced the Developed India Education Institutions Bill–2025 in Parliament, proposing the creation of a National Higher Education Regulatory Council. In a vast and diverse country like India—marked by historical, social, and regional variations—there is an undeniable need for a coherent, democratic, and inclusive regulatory framework that ensures equity, transparency, and justice in higher education.

India has previously witnessed the benefits of independent regulatory reforms. Institutions such as the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI, 1992), the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI, 1997), and the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA, 2016) have largely functioned with minimal political interference and have delivered tangible public benefits through timely reforms.

The proposed council will comprise three interlinked verticals: a Regulatory Council, an Accreditation Council, and a Standards Council.

Institutions of national importance such as IITs, IIMs, and NITs will also come under this framework. One of the stated objectives is to address persistent issues such as delayed approvals, overlapping regulations, excessive compliance burdens, and regulatory inconsistency caused by multiple authorities. A single regulator could potentially streamline governance and enhance efficiency.

However, a significant departure from NEP 2020 is the government’s decision not to establish an independent Higher Education Financing Authority as originally envisaged. Instead, funding will remain under the direct control of the Ministry of Education. While the government argues that diversified funding sources make a single authority impractical, this raises concerns about excessive centralisation of financial power. Although the regulator will not have the authority to fix fees, it will frame policies to prevent the commercialisation of education.

The Bill aims to unify regulatory norms, improve transparency, and strengthen quality assurance. Strict penalties—up to Rs 2 crore—and even cancellation of affiliation are proposed for violations. These measures may help curb malpractices such as fake certificates, irregular admissions, and poor infrastructure, par-

der this framework. One of the stated objectives is to address persistent issues such as delayed approvals, overlapping regulations, excessive compliance burdens, and regulatory inconsistency caused by multiple authorities. A single regulator could potentially streamline governance and enhance efficiency.

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ticularly in the private sector.

Yet, many structural challenges in higher education remain unresolved: outdated curricula, limited emphasis on research, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving; rote-based examination systems; weak industry-academia linkages; bureaucratic interference; and rampant commercialisation. Social inequities continue to obstruct inclusive access, especially for Dalits, backward classes, and marginalised communities.

While the Bill has several al positive features, apprehensions persist regarding over-centralisation, erosion of university autonomy, and transitional challenges in implementation. Questions also remain about adequate representation of women, minorities, and tribal communities in the new regulatory structure, and whether regional needs will be meaningfully addressed.

Despite having over 1,300 universities and 52,000 colleges, India’s global standing in higher education and research remains weak. Compared to Asian peers like China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, India lags significantly in patents and innovation.

Every year, Indian students spend nearly Rs 30,000

crore in foreign exchange on overseas education. With developed countries tightening visa norms, Indian students face increasing uncertainty and costs. If India is to realise its vision of becoming a \$25–30 trillion economy by 2047, it must achieve self-reliance in high-quality education and advanced technical knowledge.

Improving higher education is impossible without strengthening school education. Alarming findings from the 2024 ASER survey show that only 44.8 percent of Class V students can read a Class II-level text, and only 30.7 percent can solve basic arithmetic. The proposed higher education regulator must therefore act as a bridge between school education reforms and higher learning.

Ultimately, policy intent alone does not guarantee success. What matters is effective implementation, continuous evaluation, and corrective reform. As the Bill is currently under Parliamentary Standing Committee scrutiny, it is imperative to incorporate stakeholder feedback and expert opinion to build a balanced, inclusive, and outcome-oriented regulatory institution.

**The writer is an expert in Economics. Views are personal.**

L

etters

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](#)



### Drunken drivers

Sir, The incident of December 23, involving the Vancouver–Delhi flight where a pilot was offloaded for being under the influence of alcohol, is deeply disturbing and shameful. It dangerously blurs the line between a drunken bus driver and an airline pilot—both entrusted with precious human lives, yet betraying that trust through reckless behavior. A pilot does not merely fly an aircraft; they carry the hopes, safety, and lives of hundreds of passengers. Such acts of indiscipline and moral failure cannot be treated lightly. Monetary fines or mild penalties are grossly inadequate. Pilots and drivers found guilty of such misconduct should be immediately removed from operational duties and reassigned to administrative roles. This serves not just as punishment, but as a harsh reminder of the immense responsibility they carry. Lives are not expendable, and negligence must never be normalized.

RS Narula, PATIALA

### Indore: A lesson to learn

Sir, It only took just a few days for Indore to tumble down from the chart of best city to the worst because of the contaminated water crisis causing deaths and hundreds hospitalised due to gastrointestinal issues. Laboratory and medical investigations have confirmed that contamination occurred due to a pipeline leakage. The horrifying incident has raised serious concerns about drinking water safety not only in this city , which was ranked the cleanest for eight consecutive years , but in other Indian towns and cities as well raising serious doubts about drinking water supply. It highlights the urgent need for regular monitoring of drinking water pipelines and faultless design and laying of water and drainage pipelines. Also it is really shocking to note that when the residents of the affected locality repeatedly complained about water quality no effective measures were taken by the authorities. Laxity, neglect and dereliction on the part of the civil authorities have paved way for this crisis. The incident is a lesson for all local body administrations - to be alert, accountable, responsible , efficient and prompt in serving the public.

M Pradyu, KANNUR

# Cong boycotts Vaiko's Equality March

## TN CM CALLS FOR ELIMINATING DRUG TRAFFICKING NETWORK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu), Jan 2:** The TNCC boycotted the maiden political gathering of the DMK allies for this year to mark the launch of MDMK chief Vaiko's Equality March from here Friday by Chief Minister MK Stalin.

Stalin, president of the DMK, who flagged off the ten-day padayatra, said the drug trafficking network was wide and the drug menace affected the youth, and called for concerted efforts by the Centre and states to eliminate drug trafficking at ports and other entry points in the country.

Tamil Nadu Congress chief K Selvaperunthagai had earlier announced that the party would not take part in the event as the invitation allegedly carried a photograph of the slain LTTE leader V Prabhakaran.

Tiruchi Urban District Congress president Rex later told reporters that the decision to abstain from the meeting was made based on the invitation.

However, leaders of other allies of the DMK, viz, VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan and IUML



leader Khader Moideen, took part. State Ministers K N Nehru and Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi also participated along with the chief minister in the event.

Before flagging off, the Chief Minister, who pitched for concerted efforts to eradicate drug trafficking, said the state government has taken several steps to contain the drug menace.

Though such measures yielded

positive results to some extent, the state and the Central governments should join hands to combat the drug menace, he said.

"It's a big network. Both states and the Centre should stake coordinated steps to eliminate drugs at the entry points through ports," the chief minister said, flagging off the "Equality March" of MDMK chief Vaiko, here.

The ten-day 'Samathuva Nadai Payanam', which marks Vaiko's political campaign before the Assembly election, aims to promote communal amity and to create awareness on the evil effects of drug and alcohol use. It will conclude January 12 in Madurai after traversing nearly 175 km. Vaiko will be accompanied by 100 volunteers from the MDMK, of which he is the general secretary.

At the launch, which marked the first political event of Stalin this year ahead of the Assembly polls, the CM said parents and teachers should also supplement the government's efforts in weaning away youngsters from the influence of drugs.

"The state government is taking various steps to contain drugs, and these are yielding results to some extent. It's important to give up addiction, and others around them should reform them (addicts)," he said.

The recent police action led to the confiscation of over one lakh tables, which penetrated Tamil Nadu through Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The police even arrested a suspect from Nigeria in connection with the trafficking of drugs, he said.

"Drug elimination should be a joint liability of society. I urge the parents and teachers to en-

sure their wards don't go wayward," the Chief Minister said.

"We are witnessing hate speeches resulting in the Christians, Muslims and SCs living in apprehension due to attacks on them. Instead of living together, they are causing a division and are using religion to spread hatred rather than bring people together," Stalin claimed.

Wishing Vaiko all the success for his padayatra, the chief minister expressed concern for his age and remarked, "Your objective is big for you. So is our concern for your health. Be cautious. Please don't undertake such arduous tasks in the future. You can always order your party members to take up the yatra," he advised.

Though Vaiko is 82 years old, his determination and enthusiasm seemed like that of a 28-year-old man, Stalin said.

In his speech, Vaiko said this equality walk was to highlight that there was no place for caste and religious conflicts in Tamil Nadu and to create a drug-free society.

Speaking on the occasion, VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan said the poll battle in the Assembly election this year will be between "Samathuvam" (equality) and Sanatanam, which was keen on gaining a foothold in the state.

# Kerala issues fresh K-TET guidelines after Supreme Court ruling



*As per the new guidelines, candidates who have cleared either K-TET Category I or Category II will continue to be eligible for appointment as Lower Primary (LP) and Upper Primary (UP) teachers*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 2:** The Kerala government has issued new guidelines on the Kerala Teachers' Eligibility Test (K-TET) for appointments and promotions in government and aided schools, following recent Supreme Court judgments on the mandatory nature of Teachers' Eligibility Tests.

The decision comes in the background of a Supreme Court judgment dated August 7, 2023, and a later ruling September 1, 2025, in Writ Petition No 1385/2025 and connected civil appeals.

The government said it sought clarification from the Director of General Education and examined the issue in detail before issuing the revised norms. As per the new guidelines, candidates who have cleared either K-TET Category I or Category II will continue to be eligible for appointment as Lower Primary (LP) and Upper Primary (UP) teachers.

However, those who have passed K-TET Category III will

be considered only for High School Teacher posts.

The government has also clarified that High School language teachers must possess both K-TET Category III and Category IV qualifications.

In a major change, the earlier exemption from K-TET for candidates holding higher qualifications such as SET, NET, MPhil, PhD or MEd has been withdrawn. The government said these candidates will now also have to clear the relevant K-TET category.

For promotions, only serving High School teachers who have K-TET Category III qualification will be considered for promotion as Headmasters and for by-transfer appointments to Higher Secondary School Teacher (HSST) and HSST (Junior) posts. The existing exemptions for Central Teachers' Eligibility Test (CTET) candidates will continue. Those who have passed the CTET Primary Stage will be eligible for LP teacher appointments, while candidates with CTET Elementary Stage qualification can be considered for UP teacher posts.

The government has said that current procedures for promotion to the post of Higher Secondary School Principal will remain unchanged.

## ASSEMBLY BOOK FESTIVAL

# Theyyam to light up Thiruvananthapuram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 2:** During the fourth edition of the Kerala Legislative Assembly International Book Festival, the state Assembly premises will be transformed into a vibrant cultural space for a week, blending books, art and tradition.

As part of the programme, the ritual art form Theyyam, rooted in north Kerala, will be performed in the state capital, offering southern audiences a rare opportunity to experience the form.

The performances will be held at the Kerala Legislative Assembly complex from January 8 to 12, as part of the week-long book festival scheduled from January 7 to 13, 2026, an official release said here Friday.

The evening programmes are expected to attract book lovers, art enthusiasts and visitors from across the state.

Theyyam is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of northern districts such as Kannur, Kasaragod and parts of Kozhikode.

It combines ritual, dance, music and storytelling, and is traditionally performed in village temples and Kavus.

The performances are being organised by the Mahe Theyyam Heritage Committee under the leadership of Padma Shri awardee E P Narayanan.

The Theyyam segment will

be inaugurated January 8 at 6 pm by Culture Minister Saji Cherian, in the presence of Kerala Assembly Speaker AN Shamseer.

Different Theyyam forms will be presented each evening.

These include Pookkuttichathan Thira, Muthappan Velattam, Padaveeran Theyyam, Kuttichathan Thira, Agnikandakarnnan Theyyam, Vasoori-



mala Bhagavathi Thira, and Pottan Theyyam.

A Kalaripayattu demonstration will also be held January 11 before the Theyyam performance.

The setting of the Legislative Assembly complex is also expected to give the performances wider visibility and public engagement.

Organisers said the book festival is not limited to literature alone but also aims to celebrate Kerala's rich cultural heritage.

For visitors, the event offers a unique chance to witness the vibrant costumes, powerful music and strong social messages of Theyyam, without travelling to North Kerala.

# Tamil Nadu deploys AI tools to prevent human-animal conflicts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, Jan 2:** Tamil Nadu has successfully deployed AI tools to prevent human-animal conflicts, a move that has significantly reduced incidents involving wild elephants, the state's Additional Chief Secretary (Climate Change and Forests) Supriya Sahu said.

In an exclusive interview with PTI Videos, Sahu said the state is embedding technology and community participation to address issues ranging from wildlife protection to climate change and waste management.

"In Madukkarai, to prevent accidental deaths of wild elephants on railway tracks, we have deployed artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) technologies. Cameras equipped with AI and thermal sensors have been installed along vulnerable stretches," she said.

The initiative, she said, has helped achieve "near-zero elephant deaths" in the area as automated alerts generated by the system are shared in real time with local communities, train drivers, and forest teams.

The project is being expanded to other regions, including the Nilgiris, she added.

Sahu, who recently received the 2025 United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Award, said the state is also building long-term climate models through a dedicated "Climate Studio".



**The initiative has helped achieve 'near-zero elephant deaths' in the area as automated alerts generated by the system are shared in real time with local communities, train drivers, and forest teams**

"We are creating decadal models of climate change and partnering with institutions such as IIT Madras, Anna University, the Gandhi Devadasan Institute, and organisations like CEEW, WRI, and ICLEI. We are also working with UNEP on cooling guidelines and implementing cool roof solutions across cities," she said.

On coastal protection, she said the state government, in collaboration with the World Bank, is implementing the Tamil Nadu Strengthening

Coastal Resilience and the Economy (TN-SHORE) project to develop bio-shields and protect shoreline communities during natural disasters.

"We are planting new mangrove areas, rejuvenating existing ones, and restoring seagrass and coral reefs in the Gulf of Mannar. Efforts are also on to revive islands at risk of submergence. These are part of large-scale nature-based solutions being rolled out with the involvement of local communities," she said.

Sahu said the state is also intensifying efforts to ensure segregation of household waste to reduce landfill accumulation.

"We are working closely with the Department of Municipal Administration to strengthen segregation of household garbage at the source. In urban areas, bio-mining of legacy waste has been completed in over 70 to 75 sites," she said.

# Kochi-Muziris Biennale draws 1.6L footfalls in first 20 days



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kochi, Jan 2:** Around 1.6 lakh people visited the Kochi-Muziris Biennale contemporary arts festival from December 12 to 31, 2025, organisers said Friday.

A statement by Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF) said that the numbers reflect strong tourist engagement and a growing local audience that returns multiple times to

experience this edition's scale and diversity.

The integration of AI-based data tools into visitor management and analytics systems is expected to further refine projections and insights in the coming weeks, KBF said.

Biennale officials said this would enable more accurate tracking of visitor flows, peak timings, venue popularity, and engagement patterns, helping to improve planning,

crowd management, and audience outreach. Dr Venu V, Chairperson of the KBF, said the defining feature of this edition was its expanded geographical and artistic spread.

"This edition is characterised by a wider range of venues than before. The addition of performative art enhances the experience and encourages repeat visits," he said.

Unlike earlier editions, which were primarily concentrated in a few major hubs, this iteration of the Biennale has unfolded across a broader network of sites, historic buildings, warehouses, public spaces, and neighbourhood venues.

"There are 29 venues, of which only six are ticketed. As a result, the overall footfall has increased manifold. Several venues do not require tickets, such as the Art by Children and the Students' Biennale, where visitor numbers are not ticketed and therefore cannot be accurately measured at present," Thomas Varghese, CEO of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, said.

**REQUIREMENT OF BUILDINGS FOR 2 ODISHA BN NCC, BERNAMPUR**  
2 Odisha BN NCC, Bernampur requires building/house for the following purpose:

Sl. No.	Purpose	Period	Plinth Area including Parking (Approx.) In Sq.ft.
1	PI Staff Accommodation of 2 (O) BN, 10 (O) Bn, 3 (O) Med Coy & 1(O) Naval Unit NCC, Bernampur.	03 years w.e.f 01.03.2026	15759.02 Sq.ft.

The building preferably be surrounded by boundary wall. The same should be in well condition, maintained properly and also hygienic from sanitation point of view. The building should be connected by road and in suitable location at Bernampur, Dist. Ganjam. All electric and plumbing fittings should be in good working condition. Adequate water supply is also required with a separate electric meter. The property should have well parking space. The property should be free from any litigation/dispute. The interested property owners will submit their property details with valid ownership documents in the following address within 20 days from the date of publication of the advertisement.

**The Defence Estates Officer**  
Govt. of India, Ministry of Defence  
163, Prachi Enclave, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar, Odisha - 751016  
Tele: 0674-2747631, 345, E-mail: deobhub-ests@nic.in

**Leadership and legend**  
BHUANESWAR REGIONAL OFFICE (550000), 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Alok Bharti Tower, Sahid Nagar - 751007, Ph: 0674-2545467

**TENDER NOTICE**  
Tender Ref. No. BBSRO/ESTB/BHADRAK BO/INTERIOR REFURBISHMENT/CIVIL & ELECTRICAL WORK  
E-tenders are invited in 2 bid system from the interested parties/firms through online mode only for appointment of Contractor for interior refurbishing works of our Bhadrak Office located at Biswal Complex, Samaraipur, Post: Prachi Nagar, Bhadrak-756181. The details/documents are available on our website: [www.newindia.co.in](http://www.newindia.co.in) in (public notice section) & [www.tenderwizar.com/](http://www.tenderwizar.com/) NIAEPROC.  
Amendments / Corrigendum / cancellation / retender etc. if any shall be published only in the above website. The pre bid meeting on site would be on 12.01.2026 at 03:00 PM & the last date for submission of e-tender is 22.01.2026 till 05:00 PM followed by opening of technical bid & price bid on 23.01.2026 (tentative).

**Sd/- Dy. General Manager**  
Bhubaneswar RO  
CIN No.- L66000MH1919G0I00526

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
Auction Catalogue No. SDCM-KUR-EMR-26  
Lot No./Category: MSS-KUR-BBS-Med-Str-107-25-1 (Misc-Static-Structures-Medical facilities at station)

**DESCRIPTION / OPERATION OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL ROOM (EMR) AT BHUBANESWAR RAILWAY STATION FROM LEADING EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS i.e. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HOSPITAL/ NURSING HOME/ POLYCLINIC/ CLINICS/ PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS/ COMPANIES/ INSTITUTIONS/ NGO'S INVOLVED IN HEALTHCARE FOR PROVIDING ROUND THE CLOCK EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL ROOM (EMR) BY CHARGING OF CONSULTATION FEES TO THE RAILWAY PASSENGERS/ VISITORS/ PERSONS WHO NEEDS EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES AT RAILWAY STATION ALSO PROVIDING OF SETTING UP MEDICAL STORE, ROUND THE CLOCK AMBULANCE SERVICES AND ENGAGING OF MEDICAL PRIVATE PRACTITIONER AT EMERGENCY MEDICAL ROOM (EMR) FOR RAILWAY PASSENGERS/ VISITORS ON PAYMENT BASIS.**

Auction Start Date & Time : 16.01.2026 at 11:00hrs, Auction End Date & Time : 16.01.2026 at 11:30 hrs.

Complete details available at website: [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

Sr. Divl. Commercial Manager / PR-966/Q/25-26 Khurda Road

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**  
e-Tender Notice No. ETCECONIIBBS/2025/2, Dtd: 24-12-2025

**NAME OF WORK : VERIFICATION, ALTERATION, MODIFICATION AS PER FIELD SURVEY AND PROVIDING ASSISTANCE FOR FINALIZATION OF AWARD OF SUBMITTED LAND ACQUISITION PROPOSAL FOR PRIVATE LAND/ GOVERNMENT LAND, PREPARATION OF PLAN FOR FOREST DIVERSION PROPOSAL AS PER FOREST CONSERVATION ACT-1980, DEMOLITION OF STRUCTURES, OBTAINING PERMISSION FOR CUTTING OF TREES IN EXISTING RAILWAY LAND, FELLING OF TREES, PROVIDING LAND BOUNDARY POSTS WITH UNSERVICEABLE SLEEKERS & OTHER ALLIED WORKS IN CONNECTION WITH CONSTRUCTION OF 3RD LINE BETWEEN KHURDA ROAD - ICHCHPURAM SECTION & STATION PREMISES AND CONSTRUCTION OF FLYOVER AT KHURDA ROAD OF EAST COAST RAILWAY.**

Approx. Cost of the Work ₹ 105.29 Lakhs, EMD : ₹ 2,02,700/-, Completion Period of the Work: 12 (Twelve) 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](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

**Note :** The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenderers/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/ bidder can participate on e-tendering.

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

Chief Administrative Officer (Con)/ PR-213/C/25-26 Bhubaneswar

of the day

quote

Moments like these capture the true spirit of Arunachal Pradesh, its untamed landscapes, rich rivers, and growing potential as a destination for adventure sports and eco-tourism

CHOWNA MEIN | ARUNACHAL DY CM

The Mumbai mayor will be from the Mahayuti (BJP-led ruling alliance). The Mumbai mayor will be a Hindu and a Marathi person

Keep your job cards well preserved. Once you elect the BJP to power, we will double the 100 days of rural job guarantee to 200 days

SUVENDU ADHIKARI | BJP LEADER

SHORT TAKES

**Dalit boy kidnapped, assaulted by five men**

**Bareilly (UP):** A 16-year-old Dalit boy was allegedly kidnapped, stripped, and brutally assaulted by five men in the Cantt police station area here, police said Friday. Police said the assault was triggered by a minor dispute between the victim and one of the accused on Instagram a few days before the incident. A video of the incident, which took place on the night of December 31, has surfaced on social media.

**ED arrests IAS officer in money laundering case**

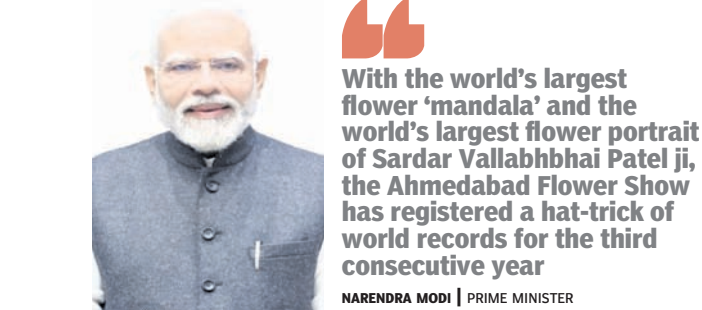
**Ahmedabad:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested IAS officer and former collector of Gujarat's Surendranagar district, Rajendrakumar Patel, in connection with a bribery-linked money laundering case, officials said Friday. Patel, a 2015-batch IAS officer who last served as the collector of Surendranagar, was transferred without posting a week ago following the arrest of a deputy mamlatdar (revenue officer) Chandrasingh Mori from the latter's office by the ED in a money laundering case stemming from bribery.

**Red Fort blast: NIA conducts searches**

**Srinagar:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Friday carried out searches in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian and Pulwama districts as part of its probe into the November 10 blast near the Red Fort in Delhi, officials said. They said the NIA sleuths, assisted by police and CRPF, brought along one of the accused -- Yasir Ahmad Dar -- to the searches. Ahmad was arrested in connection with the "white collar" terror module.

**Three murdered in separate incidents**

**Medininagar/Hazaribag (Jharkhand):** Three persons, including two women, were allegedly murdered in separate incidents across Jharkhand's Hazaribag, Palamu and Gumla districts, police said Friday. In Hazaribag, a person was killed and two others injured after a clash between two groups at Indrapuri Chowk under Lohsinghna police station limits Thursday night, an official said. In Gumla, a man allegedly murdered his 19-year-old wife and dumped her body in a forest near Aamtipani village within Gurdari police station limits, police said. In another incident in Palamu district, a man allegedly killed his wife and buried her body in a pit at Darauna village within Nawabazar police station limits.



NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

With the world's largest flower 'mandala' and the world's largest flower portrait of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel ji, the Ahmedabad Flower Show has registered a hat-trick of world records for the third consecutive year

CASHLESS HEALTH SCHEME TO BE ROLLED OUT IN PUNJAB

Punjab Health Minister Dr Balbir Singh Friday said the 'Mukh Mantri Sehat Yojna' to provide free cashless medical treatment of up to Rs 10 lakh to every family in the state will be formally launched January 15



Dr Balbir Singh

10 DEAD, OVER 1,000 AFFECTED



Family members of a victim, who died after consumption of allegedly contaminated water, mourn in Bhagirathpura area of Indore

INFANT BORN AFTER 10-YEAR WAIT DIES

In a narrow, quiet lane of Marathi Mohalla, the silence is heavy in the Sahu family with grief that no amount of money can compensate, as they mourn their six-month-old baby, born after ten years of fervent prayers, medical treatments and sacred vows. Last week, baby Avyan, referred to as a miracle child by the family, was extinguished by a simple, everyday act of diluting the infant's milk with tap water. Baby Avyan is now the youngest face of a devastating water contamination crisis in Indore's Bhagirathpura area, a tragedy that has turned India's "cleanest city" into a site of mourning.

rathpura, at a spot over which a toilet has been constructed. They claimed the leakage led to contamination of the water supply.

More than 1,400 people have been affected by vomiting and

diarrhoea in Bhagirathpura over the past nine days. A health department official, citing the situation till Thursday night, said that 272 patients were admitted to hospitals in the area, of whom 71 have been

discharged. The official said 32 of the 201 patients currently hospitalised are undergoing treatment in intensive care units. Officials have said that a leakage was found in the main drinking water supply pipeline near a police outpost in Bhagirathpura at a spot over which a toilet has been constructed. They claimed the leakage led to contamination of the water supply in the area.

Additional Chief Secretary Sanjay Dubey told PTI, "We are closely examining the entire drinking water supply pipeline in Bhagirathpura to find out if there is any leakage elsewhere."

'No plans to change land acquisition policy'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 2:** With land acquisition emerging as one of the biggest impediments in the timely execution of infrastructure projects in the country, Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan said the government has no plans to change its policy for acquiring land.

He said that in the over 3,300 projects worth Rs 85 lakh crore that were taken up during review meetings of the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 7,735 issues were raised, and 7,156 of them were resolved.

Regular issues are resolved at the ministry level, while complex and critical issues are escalated for review by it. Somanathan said PRAGATI has a

multi-tier follow-up mechanism that ensures the timely implementation of decisions.

Projects are tracked and monitored by the Cabinet Secretariat, while schemes and grievances are reviewed at the ministry level, with continuous PMO oversight and finally at the level of the prime minister, he said.

Addressing a press conference here, the country's top bureaucrat said that of the 7,156 issues resolved through PRAGATI, 35 per cent pertained to land acquisition, 20 per cent were forest, wildlife and environment related issues, and 18 per cent were about right of use/way, while other projects were delayed due law and order, construction, power utility approvals and financial matters.

Maintenance not a matter of precise mathematics: HC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 2:** The Delhi High Court, while enhancing a woman's interim maintenance, has said the amount cannot be determined with mathematical precision. Justice Amit Mahajan has also said that "mere earning in foreign currency" does not entitle the wife to claim maintenance by "mechanically converting the husband's foreign income into Indian currency".

The court was hearing revision petitions filed by the woman and her husband against a May 2023 order of a family court awarding Rs 50,000 as monthly interim maintenance. The wife had sought an enhancement of the amount, while the husband had contested the award order. In an order dated December 23, the court said, "The determination of interim maintenance is not an exercise capable of mathematical precision."

"More often than not, particularly in cases where one of the spouses is employed abroad and has failed to place a complete and candid disclosure of income before the court, the assessment necessarily involves a degree of estimation and informed guesswork," it added. The court said it could not



THE COURT WAS HEARING REVISION PETITIONS FILED BY THE WOMAN AND HER HUSBAND AGAINST A MAY 2023 ORDER OF A FAMILY COURT AWARDDING RS 50,000 AS MONTHLY INTERIM MAINTENANCE

.....

THE WIFE HAD SOUGHT AN ENHANCEMENT OF THE AMOUNT, WHILE THE HUSBAND HAD CONTESTED THE AWARD ORDER

.....

IN AN ORDER DATED DECEMBER 23, THE COURT SAID, "THE DETERMINATION OF INTERIM MAINTENANCE IS NOT AN EXERCISE CAPABLE OF MATHEMATICAL PRECISION"

embark upon a roving or final inquiry at the interim stage and was required to arrive at a reasonable figure on the basis of available material, surrounding circumstances, lifestyle indicators and the admitted earning capacity of the earning spouse.

"It stands admitted that the husband is gainfully employed with Amazon.com Services LLC

as a software engineer and he has also not denied that he is residing in the US." "It is also admitted that the wife is unemployed, and the wife had specifically asserted that her husband has been earning approximately Rs 1.76 crore per annum," the court pointed out. It noted that the wife had submitted an affidavit regarding the husband's income in US dollars and the conversion rates prevailing at the relevant time.

"In the present case, it is undisputed that the husband is earning in foreign currency and is residing in the US. Consequently, he is also required to incur expenses in foreign currency, and the standard as well as the cost of living in the US cannot be equated with that prevailing in Delhi," the court observed. It, however, said the entirety of the husband's income could not be equalised or proportionately mirrored in the amount of maintenance. "Mere earning in foreign currency does not, by itself, entitle the wife to claim maintenance by mechanically converting the husband's foreign income into Indian currency and applying the formulae evolved by Indian courts without due regard to the attendant circumstances," the court said.



An aerial view of boats anchored at the Sangam on the eve of the Pausa Purnima snan during the Magh Mela, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

KKR BANGLADESHI PLAYER ROW

Shah Rukh faces political backlash



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 2:** Superstar Shah Rukh Khan finds himself at centre of an escalating controversy over the decision of his IPL team KKR signing Bangladeshi player Musafizur Rahman with multiple parties speaking out -- either slamming him or saying he was being targeted for his Muslim identity. Leaders of the BJP and the Shiv Sena said they would not tolerate Rahman being part of the IPL given the atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh. The Opposition Congress' Bhaji Jagtap backed the star and said the controversy is evidence of the "BJP-RSS" double-faced policy" as India still plays cricket with Pakistan.

"In Bangladesh, Hindus are being tortured, killed, they are being thrown out of their

CDS inaugurates upgraded runway at IAF's Car Nicobar base

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Sri Vijaya Puram, Jan 2:** Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan Friday inaugurated the upgraded runway at the Indian Air Force's (IAF) Car Nicobar air base in Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The apron areas have been expanded for smooth aircraft movement, and the facility will help the IAF carry out long-range firing exercises in a minimal time, officials said.

The upgraded runway will also support the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN), improving civil air connectivity to remote island areas.

It will further enhance Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief capability by enabling swift mobilisation of resources during natural calamities and emergencies in the earthquake and tsunami-prone region and adjoining areas, the officials said.

Gen Chauhan arrived in Car Nicobar Island around 11.30 am and was welcomed by Vice Admiral Ajay Kochhar, Commander-in-Chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), and several other senior officials.

"The CDS inaugurated the resurfaced and upgraded runway at the Indian Air Force's Car Nicobar Air Base," an official said.

Located nearly 535 km from Sri Vijaya Puram, Car Nicobar in Nicobar district suffered the maximum damage during the 2004 Tsunami.



of the day

quote

I wanted to hold a get-together among SAARC leaders, even if only for five minutes

ALI HAIDER AHMED | MINISTER, MALDIVES

Trump should know that intervention by the US in the domestic problem corresponds to chaos in the entire region and the destruction of the US interests

ALI LARIJANI | SECRETARY OF THE SUPREME NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL, IRAN

The Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations remains applicable to UNRWA, its property and assets, and to its officials and other personnel. Property used by UNRWA is inviolable

STEPHANE DUJARRIC | SPOKESMAN FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, UN

SHORT TAKES

**Magnitude 6.3 quake hits southern Mexico**

**Guerrero:** A magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck the southern Mexican state of Guerrero Friday, the German Research Center for Geosciences (GFZ) said. The quake was at a depth of 10 km (6.21 miles), GFZ said. There was no serious damage in Guerrero reported immediately, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum said on X, after speaking with the state's governor. She added that no damage had been reported in the capital, Mexico City. Sheinbaum was speaking at her morning news conference when earthquake alarms sounded, with the president calmly evacuating alongside journalists.

**SL navy arrests 11 Indian fishermen**

**Colombo:** Lanka Navy Friday said it has arrested 11 Indian fishermen and seized their trawler for allegedly fishing in the island nation's waters. Sri Lanka Navy spokesperson Commander Buddhika Sampath told PTI that the fishermen were arrested late Thursday night north of Kankesanthurai in the northern province. After arrest, they were being brought to the Myladi fisheries inspectorate for further action, the navy said. The fishermen issue is a contentious matter in India-Sri Lanka ties. Most of these incidents happen in the Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka's northern tip, which is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries. Sri Lanka Navy personnel sometimes even fire at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seize their boats for illegally entering Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

**Zelenskiy appoints new chief of staff**

**Kyiv:** President Volodymyr Zelenskiy named Ukraine's defence spy chief as his top adviser Friday, placing a popular military leader at the heart of decision-making as Kyiv seeks to strengthen its defences against Russia and its hand in US-backed peace talks. The appointment of Kyrylo Budanov, a decorated war veteran widely respected by Ukrainians, as presidential chief of staff marks a significant shift for a position traditionally occupied by a civilian mainly focused on domestic politics. Budanov, 39, replaces longtime Zelenskiy confidante Andriy Yermak, a widely criticised power broker who resigned in November amid a corruption scandal that fuelled public anger as Ukraine fights for survival against Russia.

YEMEN CONFLICT

Saudi jets strike UAE-backed forces

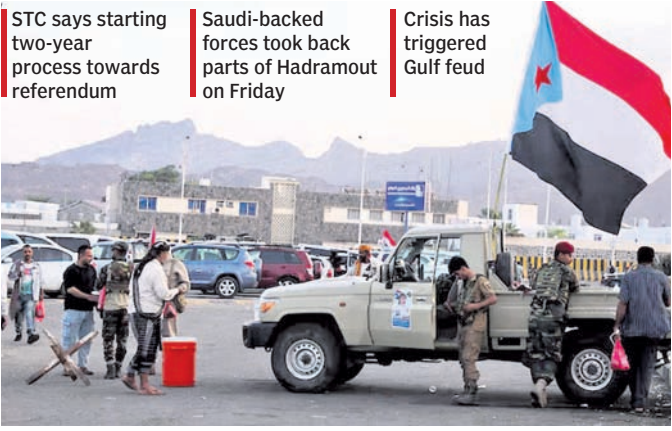
Dubai, Jan 2: Yemen's southern separatist movement said Friday it aimed to hold a referendum on independence from the north in two years, following its seizure of swathes of the country last month in a move that triggered a major feud between Gulf powers.

Southern Transitional Council leader Aidarous al-Zubaidi called on the international community to sponsor talks between concerned parties in the south and north on a path and mechanisms that "guarantee rights of the people of the south".

The announcement comes as the Saudi-backed internationally recognised government moved to recapture the crucial region of Hadramout from the STC, which is backed by the United Arab Emirates.

RIFT BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND UAE

The STC's sudden seizure of swathes of southern and eastern Yemen from the government in early December



STC says starting two-year process towards referendum

Saudi-backed forces took back parts of Hadramout on Friday

Crisis has triggered Gulf feud

revealed a bitter rift between Saudi Arabia and the UAE and caused a major fracture in the coalition fighting the Iran-aligned Houthis movement, which holds Yemen's capital Sanaa and the heavily populated northwest.

Earlier Friday, the Hadramout governor under the internationally recognised government said he had launched a "peaceful" operation to restore control over the area.

Saudi airstrikes hit an air-

Trump threatens Iran over protest crackdown as deadly unrest flares

REUTERS

Dubai, Jan 2: US President Donald Trump threatened Friday to come to the aid of protesters in Iran if security forces fire on them, days into unrest that has left several dead and posed the biggest internal threat to Iranian authorities in years.

"We are locked and loaded and ready to go," he said in a social media post. The United States bombed Iranian nuclear facilities in June, joining an Israeli air campaign that targeted Tehran's atomic programme and military leadership.

Responding to Trump's comments, top Iranian official Ali Larijani warned that US interference in domestic Iranian issues would amount to a destabilisation of the entire Middle East. Iran backs proxy forces in Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen.

The comments came as a local official in western Iran where several deaths were reported was cited by state media as warning that any unrest or illegal gatherings would be met "decisively and without leniency", raising the likelihood of escalation.

This week's protests over soaring inflation are so far smaller than some previous bouts of unrest in Iran but have spread across the country, with deadly confrontations between demonstrators and security forces focused in western provinces.

Swiss resort fire likely started by sparkler candles

REUTERS

Crans-Montana, Switzerland, Jan 2: Dozens of young partygoers hurt in a New Year's Eve bar fire in Switzerland were transferred to specialist burn units across Europe with serious injuries Friday after being hit by the devastating blaze, which has killed at least 40.

Initial findings showed the fire that spread among the mostly young crowd of revellers in Le Constellation bar in the Swiss ski resort of Crans-Montana was likely caused by sparkler candles being carried too close to the ceiling, the local prosecutor said.

Meanwhile, investigators focused on the painful task of identifying the burned bodies, warning that this process was very sensitive and would take time.

So severe were the burns that Swiss officials said it could take days before they name all those killed in the fire. The official toll is 40 dead, while 119 have been injured, many of them very seriously. Those numbers are not final, officials said.

"Many of those injured are still fighting for their lives today," Valais area chief Mathias Reynard told a news conference. Around 50 of the injured have been, or will be, transferred to burn units in hospitals elsewhere in Europe, he said. Germany and France are



Severe burns making identification of bodies challenging

Dozens transferred to specialist burn units across Europe

Many of those injured are fighting for their lives

among the countries treating some of the injured.

Of the injured, 113 have been identified, 71 of whom are Swiss, 14 French and 11 Italian, four Serbian, one Bosnian, one Belgian, one Polish, one Portuguese and one Luxembourgish, police chief Frederic Gisler told the same news conference.

FIRE LIKELY CAUSED BY PARTY CANDLES

Initial investigations suggest that the fire which tore through the Swiss ski resort bar started when 'fountain candles' were carried aloft too close to the ceiling, local prosecutor Beatrice Pilloud said. "Everything suggests that the fire started from the burning candles or 'Bengal lights' that had been attached to champagne bottles," she told the news conference, adding that, while this hypothesis was likely, it was not yet confirmed.

China launches new 'upgraded' missile destroyer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Jan 2: The Chinese navy has commissioned a new "upgraded" missile destroyer as it's expanding its fleet at a breakneck speed to catch up with the US naval strength.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy has commissioned a new Type 052D guided missile destroyer named Loudi, which features upgraded radar, weapon and network systems, official media here reported Friday. Zhang Shengwei, a crew member of the Loudi, was quoted by state-run Global Times as saying that the new-type warship adopts a new system and architecture, giving it enhanced combat capabilities in air defence, sea attack and task force command.

The Loudi can not only conduct long-range assault and strike missions against its targets, but also defend friendly ships in defensive missions, Zhang said. Observers say the new ship's addition highlights the feverish pitch at which the Chinese navy is expanding its fleet, adding a ship a month.

According to a recent BBC report, the Chinese navy has emerged as the world's largest, operating 234 warships compared to the US Navy's 219 ships.

HK arrests 21 for corruption in building renovation crackdown

REUTERS

Hong Kong, Jan 2: Hong Kong's anti-graft agency arrested 21 people on suspicion of corruption in relation to renovation work at two residential estates, it said Friday.

Hong Kong has stepped up a crackdown on corruption linked to building renovation following a fire in late November that ripped through seven high-rise towers and killed more than 160 people.

John Lee, the city's leader, last month set up an independent committee to investigate the fire and the construction industry, and determine whether there was any bid-rigging in the award of contracts.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) said in a statement it conducted enforcement operations last week against a triad-linked corruption syndicate associated with building renovation.

Venezuela's Maduro willing to hold 'serious' talks with US

REUTERS

Madrid, Jan 2: Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro said in a New Year's interview that his country is willing to receive US investment in its oil sector, coordinate in the fight against drug trafficking and hold serious talks with the United States.

"We must start to speak seriously, with the facts in hand," Maduro said in his annual interview with a Spanish journalist, originally published in Mexican newspaper La Jornada and broadcast on Venezuelan state television on New Year's Day.

"If they want to speak seriously about an agreement to battle drug trafficking, we are ready...If they want Venezuela's oil, Venezuela is ready to accept US investments like those of Chevron, when, where and how they want to make them."

The comments echo previous statements by Maduro about his willingness to dialogue with Donald Trump, even as the US president has escalated pressure on Maduro - including

expanded sanctions, a ramped-up US military presence in the region and more than two dozen strikes on vessels allegedly involved in trafficking drugs in the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea.

Maduro said the pressure is an effort to gain control of Venezuela's vast natural resources.

"What is the goal of the United States? They've said it," Maduro said in the interview. "To grab all the oil of Venezuela...the gold, the rare earths."

SANCTIONS HALVE OIL EXPORTS

US sanctions and recent seizures of oil tankers have halved Venezuela's normal rate of oil exports, though US major Chevron, which has a special license from the United States to export Venezuelan oil, has continued to export.

Foreign currency flows to Venezuela's private sector are set to fall on the reduction in oil exports, stoking inflation and worsening already difficult economic conditions for Venezuelans. The bolivar currency depreciated 83% over 2025.



Members of 'Bengali Hindu Adarsha Sangha UK' stage a protest against alleged atrocities on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, outside the Bangladesh High Commission in London

PTI PHOTO

Pak court sentences pro-Khan journalists

REUTERS

Karachi, Jan 2: A Pakistani anti-terrorism court sentenced eight journalists and social media commentators Friday to life imprisonment in absentia after convicting them of terrorism-related offences linked to online activity in support of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan.

The convictions stem from cases registered after violent protests May 9, 2023, when Khan's supporters attacked military installations following his brief arrest. Since then, the government and military have launched a sweeping crackdown on Khan's party and dis-

senting voices, using anti-terrorism laws and military trials to prosecute hundreds accused of incitement and attacks on state institutions.

In its ruling, the court said actions by the accused "fell within the ambit of terrorism" under Pakistani law and that their online material promoted "fear and unrest" in society.

Most of those convicted are believed to be outside Pakistan and did not appear during the proceedings, court documents showed.

The convicted include former army officers-turned YouTubers Adil Raja and Syed Akbar Hussain, journalists Wajahat Saeed Khan, Sabir Shakir and

Shaheen Sehbai, commentator Haider Raza Mehdi, and analyst Moeed Pirzada, according to the court's decision.

The Committee to Protect Journalists said in 2023 the investigations amounted to retaliation against critical reporting. "Authorities must immediately drop these investigations and cease the relentless intimidation and censorship of the media," CPJ Asia programme coordinator Beh Lih Yi said.

The court handed down life sentences along with additional prison terms and fines, ordering further jail time if the fines are not paid. All sentences are subject to confirmation by the Islamabad High Court.

China taxes condoms, contraceptive drugs to boost births

Condoms and contraceptive pills now incur value-added tax of 13%, the standard rate for most consumer goods

REUTERS

Hong Kong, Jan 2: China removed a three-decade-old tax exemption on contraceptive drugs and devices from January 1 in new steps to spur a flagging birth rate.

Condoms and contraceptive



pills now incur value-added tax of 13%, the standard rate for most consumer goods.

The move comes as Beijing struggles to boost birth rates in the world's second-largest economy. China's population fell for a third consecutive year in 2024 and experts have cautioned the downturn will continue.

China exempted childcare subsidies from personal income tax and rolled out an annual childcare subsidy last year, following a series of "fertility-friendly" measures in 2024, such as urging colleges and universities to provide "love education" to portray marriage, love, fertility and family in a

positive light.

Top leaders again pledged last month at the annual Central Economic Work Conference to promote "positive marriage and childbearing attitudes" to stabilise birth rates.

China's birth rates have been falling for decades as a result of the one-child policy China implemented from 1980 to 2015, and rapid urbanisation.

The high cost of childcare and education as well as job uncertainty and a slowing economy have also discouraged many young Chinese from getting married and starting a family.

of the day

quote

Social media should be re-sponsible for the content they publish. Intervention is required

ASHWINI VAISHNAW | UNION MINISTER

A high degree of localisation has enabled us to achieve such scale while maintaining world-class quality, highlighting the strength and global competitiveness of India's automotive manufacturing ecosystem

HISASHI TAKEUCHI | MD AND CEO, MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA

We look forward to 2026 with confidence. We will be collaborative, agile, and bold... working as one team to live our purpose and achieve our potential. Think big. Do less. Execute flawlessly. And, most importantly, enjoy the journey

ANISH SHAH | CEO AND MD, MAHINDRA GROUP

SHORT TAKES

CIL opens auctions to neighbour nations

New Delhi: State-owned CIL Friday said buyers from neighbouring nations Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal can now join its online coal auctions directly, skipping the Indian middlemen. The move will help in utilising the surplus coal resources better and promote transparency. Earlier, access to Coal India Ltd's (CIL) dry fuel by consumers across the borders was only through domestic coal traders who were allowed to buy and sell without any end-use restrictions. "In a first, effective January 1, 2026, CIL has permitted coal consumers located in the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, who wish to import coal from India, to directly participate in the Single Window Mode Agnostic (SWMA) auctions conducted by the company," CIL said. SWMA auction is a unified, simplified e-auction system launched in 2022 to replace multiple existing auction windows (Spot, Special Spot, Forward) into one single platform, making coal procurement easier, transparent, and market-driven for all buyers.

₹7,295-cr scheme to ease export credit

New Delhi: The government Friday announced a Rs 7,295-crore export support package, comprising a Rs 5,181-crore interest subvention scheme along with a Rs 2,114-crore collateral support, to improve exporters' access to credit. Both measures will be rolled out over a period of six years (2025-31). Additional Secretary in the Commerce Ministry Ajay Bhadoo said that these interventions will address the trade finance issues of exporters. Under the interest subvention scheme, exporters will get a subsidy on pre- and post-shipment export credit. This is the second component of the Rs 25,060-crore export promotion mission (EPM) approved in November 2025.

UCO Bank sees 13% growth in total biz

Kolkata: Public sector lender UCO Bank Friday reported a 13.29 per cent growth in its total business to Rs 5.54 lakh crore for the third quarter of the current fiscal. The bank's total business stood at Rs 4.89 lakh crore in the corresponding period of the previous year. According to a regulatory filing, the Kolkata-headquartered bank's total advances rose by 16.27 per cent to Rs 2.43 lakh crore during the quarter that ended in December, compared to Rs 2.09 lakh crore in the year-ago period.

I repeat -- gig work is one of the largest organised job creation engines in India. And we provide insurance, fair, timely and predictable wages. Gig doesn't need more regulation, it needs less regulation

DEEPINDER GOYAL | FOUNDER, ETERNAL

Govt accelerates electronics mfg

Foxconn, Dixon, Samsung among 22 projs cleared for electronics components manufacturing scheme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 2: Foxconn, Dixon, Tata Electronics and Samsung are among the 22 new proposals approved by the government under the ambitious Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), with a projected investment of Rs 41,863 crore and production worth Rs 2,58,152 crore.

The approvals - third set of clearances under the scheme - are expected to generate 33,791 new jobs, reduce India's import dependence for critical electronic components, and accelerate the build-out of high-value manufacturing capabilities in the country.

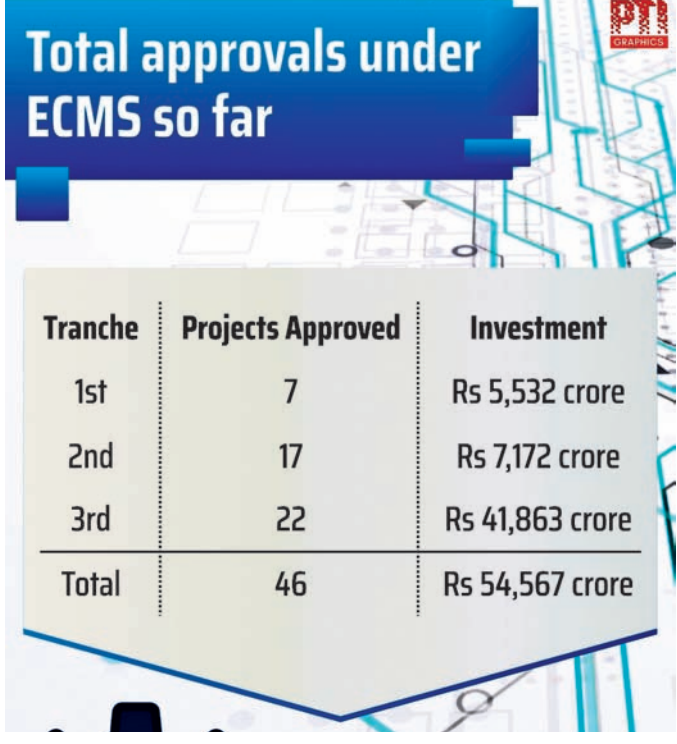
Taken together with previous ECMS tranches and ongoing semiconductor initiatives, the latest clearances underline India's firm resolve to emerge as a major hub in global electronics supply chains.

According to sources, a large chunk of investments and employment will come from Apple's new vendors, who are now joining its global supply chain. Some of them will be exporting to Apple's international locations.

Notably, Motherson Electronic Components, Tata Electronics, ATL Battery Technology India, Foxconn (Yuzhan Tech India's), and Hindalco Industries are five vendors from Apple's ecosystem.

The approved projects are spread across eight states, including Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and reflect the government's focus on geographically balanced industrial growth and expansion of electronics manufacturing across the country, according to the IT Ministry.

At a briefing announcing the new set of investment proposals approved by the govern-



The approval of the third tranche under the ECMS sets a powerful new trajectory for India's electronics manufacturing journey

PANKAJ MOHINDROO | CHAIRMAN OF INDIA CELLULAR AND ELECTRONICS ASSOCIATION

ment, Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw underlined the Centre's focus on big reforms, enabling policies, and efficient and speedy execution of projects and initiatives.

The results are clearly visible sector after sector, Vaishnaw said. The minister asked the industry to prioritise setting up design teams and nudged players to go for Six Sigma to be globally competitive.

In the latest batch, the maximum investments are set to come in the category of enclosures (mobile enclosures are structural housings that protect and support internal electronic components, widely used in smartphones and handheld devices), where three projects will attract Rs 27,166 crore worth of investments.

Nine projects fall in the PCB space (commonly used in con-

sumer electronics, industrial controls, and automotive systems, among others) and would involve an investment of Rs 7,377 crore, while Rs 2,922 crore investment would go into a lithium-ion cell project.

Li-ion cells are rechargeable energy storage components used to power portable consumer electronics, including smartphones, notebooks, tablets, power banks, and audio accessories.

Of 11 products, 5 are bare components, such as PCBs, capacitors, connectors, enclosures, and Li-ion cells; 3 pertain to sub-assemblies, such as camera modules, display modules, and optical transceivers; and 3 are supply chain items like aluminium extrusion, anode material, and laminate.

As per a background note circulated by the ministry on the new tranche of approvals, the nod includes the manufacturing of 11 target segment products that have cross-sectoral applications, such as mobile manufacturing, telecom, consumer electronics, strategic electronics, automotive, and IT hardware.

BANK CREDIT TO INDUSTRY ZOOMS

Bank credit to industry grew at a faster pace of 9.6 per cent in November 2025 as against 8.3 per cent in the same month of the preceding year, according to Reserve Bank data. On a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis, non-food bank credit grew by 11.4 per cent as on the fortnight ended November 28, 2025, compared to 10.6 per cent during the corresponding fortnight of the previous year (November 29, 2024)



OHPC signs MoU with ALIMCO to empower Divyangjans, sr citizens

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 2: Odisha Hydro Power Corporation Ltd. (OHPC) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation of India (ALIMCO), Bhubaneswar, to distribute aids and assistive devices to around 400 Divyangjans and senior citizens across Odisha under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative.

Fully funded by OHPC, the programme aims to enhance mobility, independence, and quality of life for persons with disabilities and eligible elderly citizens. As per the MoU, ALIMCO will supply and distribute a wide range of modern, need-based assistive devices. These include tricycles, motorised tricycles, wheelchairs (including joystick-operated models), rollators, walkers, CP chairs, hearing aids, crutches, Braille and smart canes, smartphones for the visually impaired, and ADL kits for leprosy patients.



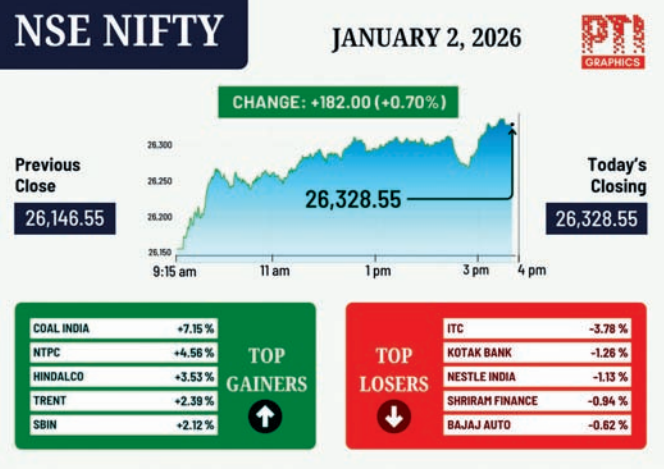
Senior citizens will receive support equipment such as walking sticks, elbow and axilla crutches, walkers, wheelchairs with and without commode, commode chairs and stools, silicon foam cushions, knee braces, spinal and cervical supports, lumbar-sacral belts, rollators with brakes, walking sticks with seats, foot care kits, and other essential aids to ensure comfort and safety.

The MoU was signed by Anima Tripathy, Chief General Manager (HR), OHPC, and Vivek Dwivedi, General Manager (Marketing) I/c, ALIMCO, in the presence of OHPC Directors Sandeep Patnaik (HR) and Amiya Kumar Mohanty (Operation) I/c, along with senior officials from both organisations.

The initiative underscores OHPC's commitment to social responsibility and inclusive development, reinforcing its focus on empowering vulnerable sections of society to lead lives of dignity and independence.

Nifty hits record intra-day peak

Rising for the third-straight session, the 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 182 points, or 0.70%, to 26,328.55. During the day, it surged 193.45 points, or 0.73%, to reach an all-time peak of 26,340



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 2: Equity benchmark index Nifty hit its lifetime peak before closing 182 points higher Friday, and the BSE Sensex jumped 573 points, powered by strong buying in power, banking and metal stocks.

Unabated capital infusion by domestic institutional investors amid a sharp rally in Asian peers also supported the domestic stock market, traders said.

Charting out a firm trend, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 573.41 points or 0.67 per cent to settle at 85,762.01. During the day, it jumped 623.67 points, or 0.73 per cent, to 85,812.27.

A total of 2,772 stocks advanced, while 1,449 declined and 150 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Rising for the third-straight session, the 50-share NSE Nifty went up by 182 points, or 0.70 per cent, to 26,328.55. During the day, it surged 193.45 points, or 0.73 per cent, to reach an all-time peak of 26,340.

"After the New Year holiday, the global markets initiated 2026 on a positive note, while strong domestic automobile sales

helped Indian equities to touch a fresh all-time high. Investor sentiment remains broadly constructive as attention turns to Q3 earnings, which are expected to guide near-term market direction," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

From the 30-Sensex firms, NTPC, Trent, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Maruti, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank and Bharat Electronics were among the biggest gainers.

In contrast, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Titan Company, Axis Bank and Bharti Airtel were the laggards.

Shares of cigarette and tobacco product makers ITC, Godfrey Philips and VST Industries ended lower Friday, extending their previous day's decline, after the government imposed an additional excise duty on such products effective February 1.

ITC's stock ended 3.79 per cent lower at Rs 350.15 on the BSE. During the day, the stock tumbled 5.11 per cent to Rs 345.35 -- its 52-week low. ITC emerged as the biggest laggard among the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty firms.

On the weekly front, BSE benchmark jumped 720.56 points or 0.84%, and Nifty climbed 286.25 points or 1.09%

LIC launches spl campaign to revive lapsed policies

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 2: Insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on Friday announced the launch of a two-month-long campaign for the revival of individual lapsed policies.

This special drive, to be carried out from January 1 to March 2, 2026, is extended to all non-linked policies with a very attractive concession in late fee. Concession is being offered in late fee for all non-linked insurance plans up to 30 per cent of the late fee, up to a maximum amount of Rs 5,000,

if eligible for revival, LIC said in a statement.

There is a 100 per cent waiver of late fee for micro insurance policies to facilitate affordable restoration of risk cover, it said. Policies which are in a lapsed condition during the premium-paying term and not completed policy term are eligible to be revived in this campaign, it said. There are no concessions on medical/health requirements, it said.

The campaign is launched for the benefit of policyholders who were not able to pay premiums on time due to any unfavourable circumstances, it said.

Odisha to host Mining and Infrastructure International Expo

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 2: Reinforcing its position as the 'Mineral Hub of India', Odisha will host the 4th Edition of the Odisha Mining and Infrastructure International Expo 2026 from January 8 to 11 at Baramunda Ground, Bhubaneswar.

The four-day international B2B trade show aims to position Odisha as India's mining powerhouse and a global hub for innovation, sustainable mining and advanced infrastructure solutions.

The expo seeks to create a robust ecosystem for environmentally responsible mining, cutting-edge technologies and global policy dialogue. Recognised as India's largest mining exhibition, the event will showcase advanced machinery, equipment and services while connecting entrepreneurs, start-ups and young professionals from Odisha with global industry leaders.

Announcing the event, Swami Prem Anveshi, Chair-



man, Futurex Trade Fair and Events Pvt Ltd, said, "Over the past three years, the expo has emerged as a catalyst for the future of mining in India and beyond. The 2026 edition will promote sustainable technologies and foster dialogue on policy, innovation and global best practices, helping shape a

unified roadmap for the Indian mining industry."

Tapan Kumar Chand, former CMD, NALCO and Chairman of the Expo Organising Committee, said the focus would be on sustainable and zero-net mining, global policy discussions and empowering start-ups. "The 4th edition will feature over 250 exhibitors from 10+ countries, spread across 30,000 sq. mtrs, with 20,000+ visitors and 150 live demonstrations," he added.

The expo will be inaugurated by Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati and conclude with the valedictory ceremony graced by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi as chief guest.

KFC, Pizza Hut operators merge

The deal comes at a time when fast-food operators in India are grappling with slowing same-store sales and pressure on margins, as consumers cut back on eating out and ordering food amid rising living costs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 2: Sapphire Foods India and Devyani International Ltd (DIL), the two leading operators of the KFC and Pizza Hut brands, are set to merge, creating a fast-food giant with over 3,000 stores.

The boards of Devyani International Ltd (DIL) and Sapphire Foods India Ltd (SFIL), the two leading franchise operators of Yum! Brands, at their respective meetings held Thursday, approved a scheme of arrangement for the merger, which will have a combined turnover of nearly Rs 8,000 crore.



As per the scheme of arrangement, SFIL will merge with DIL, an RJ Corp firm promoted by the Jaipuria family. The combined entity will have operations in markets such as India, Nigeria, Nepal, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

Besides Yum! Brands like

KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell, the combined entity will also hold licenses for other global QSR brands, including Costa Coffee, Tea Live, New York Fries, and Sanook Kitchen, in their respective markets.

Moreover, this strategic consolidation of the two Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) operators will also create a single unified Yum! India Franchisee for KFC and Pizza Hut.

The merger is happening at a time when Indian QSR chains are witnessing sluggish growth, lower margins, and almost flat demand growth.

According to the scheme

of arrangements, 177 equity shares of DIL will be issued for every 100 equity shares of SFIL.

Currently, SFIL Promoters owns 25.35 per cent stake in the company, of which Arctic International, a group company of DIL, will buy 18.5 per cent. "Balance to get swapped for DIL shares," said DIL.

The proposed merger is subject to receipt of all customary regulatory and statutory approvals. "The process of obtaining these approvals is expected to take approximately 12 to 15 months, following which the merger will become effective," according to a joint statement.

Union Bank celebrates 'Ethics & Compliances Week'

Bhubaneswar: Union Bank of India has conducted walkathon for observing 'Ethics & Compliances Week' in Bhubaneswar. The walkathon started from Rupali Square, proceeded to Ram Mandir Square, and returned to the starting point. It was attended by Hare Krishna Das, Zonal Head, Bhubaneswar, D Venkatswarulu, Deputy Zonal Head, Bhubaneswar, Niranjan Barik, Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, Vinay Sharma, Deputy Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, Jeetendra Kumar Samal, Deputy Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, along with staff members from various offices and branches in and around Bhubaneswar. On this occasion, the officials of the bank encouraged for following Ethics, Sincerity, good practices in every sphere of life.



## Set to retire, Pak-born Aussie Khawaja criticises racial stereotypes

*The first Muslim to play for Australia has scored 6,206 runs at an average of 43.49 in his 87 tests with 16 centuries and 28 half-centuries*

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Sydney, Jan 2:** Veteran Australia batter Usman Khawaja has announced he will retire from international cricket after the fifth Ashes test beginning Sunday at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

He didn't go quietly. The Pakistan-born Khawaja, who was the first Muslim to play for Australia, used his retirement announcement Friday to criticize the "racial" stereotyping he experienced during his career. It will be the 39-year-old

Khawaja's 88th and final test — played at the ground where he began his first-class career. Khawaja scored his first Ashes century at the SCG with 171 against England in 2018.

It was also at that the SCG where he revived his career at age 35, scoring two centuries against England. That prompted one of the great late-career revivals, as Khawaja hit seven centuries in his next two years back in the side. But Khawaja's position had come under scrutiny and criticism this season after being unable to open in the first Ashes test in Perth due to back spasms and then missing the Brisbane test with the injury.

He was then initially left out in Adelaide until Steve Smith's vertigo allowed Khawaja to return, before an 82 in the first innings there ensured he would stay in the side for the fourth test



Once the racial stereotypes came in, of me being lazy, it was things I've dealt with my whole life. Pakistani, West Indian, colored players...we're selfish, we only care about ourselves, we don't care about the team, we don't train hard enough

USMAN KHAWAJA

in Melbourne. Australia, with a 3-1 lead going into the fifth test, has retained the Ashes.

Khawaja said he felt he was treated "a little bit different, even to now," because of his Pakistani and Muslim background.

"Different in the way I've been treated, different in how things have happened," he said at a media conference in Sydney. "I had back spasms, it was something I couldn't control. The way the

media and the past players came out and attacked me . . . I copped it for about five days straight. Everyone was piling in.

Khawaja was criticized in the days leading up to the Perth match for golfing twice and not taking part in an optional training session. Some commentators suggested the golf might have been responsible for his back issues. "I can give you countless number of guys who have played

golf the day before a match and have been injured, but you guys haven't said a thing," Khawaja told the assembled media. Khawaja said he knew the end of his career was imminent. "I guess moving into this series, I had an inkling this would be the last series," he said. "I'm glad I can go out on my own terms."

"Usman has made a huge contribution to Australian cricket both through his outstanding achievements as one of our most stylish and resilient batters . . . and off field, particularly through the Usman Khawaja Foundation," Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg said in a statement. Khawaja said his No 1 emotion on announcing his retirement was "contentment." "I'm very lucky to have played so many games for Australia the way I have," Khawaja said.

## India may tour Bangladesh for three-match ODI, T20I series



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Dhaka, Jan 2:** The Bangladesh Cricket Board Friday announced it will host India for a three-match ODI as well as T20I series to be played in September this year.

However it is not clear if BCCI will agree to travel to Bangladesh in prevailing conditions with no stable government in place.

According to a media release by the BCB, the three ODIs will be played September 1, 3 and 6, while the T20Is will be played on September 9, 12 and 13.

The Indian team will reach Bangladesh August 28 for their limited-overs affair. In July last year, India's tour of Bangladesh was called off indefinitely and the six-match white-ball tour was deferred for more than one year.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) have mutually agreed to defer the white-ball series, three ODIs and three Twenty20 Internationals, between Bangladesh and India in August 2025 to September 2026," the BCCI had informed in a statement last July.

### INDIAN WOMEN'S LEAGUE

## East Bengal go top of table after drubbing Nita FA 5-0



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Kalyani, Jan 2:** Defending champions East Bengal FC rose to the pole position in the Indian Women's League 2025-26 with a 5-0 win over Nita Football Academy at the Kalyani Stadium in Kalyani, West Bengal, Friday.

What was, at least on paper, a top-of-the-table clash turned out to be anything but a tussle of equals on the pitch. East Bengal's familiar scorers Sulanjana Raul (6) and Soumya Guguloth (42) netted in the first half before the Ugandan duo of Resty Nanziri (50) and Fazila Ikwaput (63) put the game to bed early in the second half. Substitute Priyangka Devi Naorem capped off the scoring with a fifth goal in the 88th minute.

With four wins in four, East Bengal moved to the summit of the points table. Sethu FC, who won by an equally handsome margin of 5-0 against Sesa Friday, are in second place with 10 points from five games. Nita FA also have 10 points and have slipped to the third spot, trailing Sethu on goal difference.

Coming off the back of their record 9-0 win over Sesa, East Bengal began the new year just how they ended the previous one. Sulanjana Raul opened the scoring in only the sixth minute with a stupendous finish. Receiving a cut-back from the by-line by Resty Nanziri, the 18-year-old set herself up with a perfect first touch before curling it into the far corner with the inside of her right boot.

It was the India U20 international's third goal in as many matches. As is their nature, the Moshal Girls were in no mood to sit with a one-goal lead and pushed to extend it. They churned out more opportunities in the next few minutes.

East Bengal were clinical as ever and were justly rewarded with a second goal three minutes before the break. Sitting a bit deeper than usual, Fazila slipped a fine through ball for Soumya in the middle. The AIFF Women's Player of the Year took it at the top of the box before shooting into the bottom corner with her weaker left foot to make it 2-0.

East Bengal's foot remained on the gas in the second half as well. Anthony Andrews' side scored their third in the 50th minute from a set-piece. Sarita Yunnam's corner, a rather tame one, fortuitously landed at the feet of Resty. The Ugandan made a great turn to evade a crowd of legs and laced a fierce shot into the back of the net as Adrija's jump went in vain.

Resty turned provider for the next goal in the 63rd minute, playing a brilliant one-two with her compatriot Fazila. Getting on the end of Resty's cross, Fazila saw her initial attempt blocked by Jasoda Munda, but was quick to pounce on the rebound from six yards out to score her sixth goal of the campaign.

Fazila, aiming to win her third consecutive IWL golden boot, almost scored another in the 78th minute when she rattled the crossbar from inside the box.

### HOCKEY INDIA LEAGUE

## Hunt for glory begins

*Home favourites Tamil Nadu Dragons face Hyderabad Toofans in HIL opener*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, Jan 2:** Accord Tamil Nadu Dragons will bank on the home support when they cross swords with Hyderabad Toofans in the opening match of the men's Hockey India League (HIL) here Saturday.

The second edition of the revived Hockey India League is scheduled to be held in multi-cities, starting with Chennai before it moves to Ranchi and ends in Bhubaneswar with the final scheduled for January 26.

The Toofans had finished runners-up in the last edition, having lost narrowly to the title-winner Shrachi Bengal Tigers. While Toofans will be looking to change their fortunes this edition, the Tamil Nadu Dragons will be vying to start on a high note after missing out on the 3rd place finish last season.

This season will have a single round-robin stage, with the top four teams advancing to the knockout rounds, unlike the previous edition, which split the teams into two groups of four teams for the first phase.

In the playoffs, the top 2 teams will compete against each other in Qualifier 1, with the winner advancing to the final and the loser going into Qualifier 2.

The second team of Qualifier 2 will be decided by the winner of Eliminator 1, which will be against the team ranked 3rd and 4th on the league table.

Among the top Indian players to watch out for this season are India captain Harmanpreet Singh (JSW Soorma Hockey Club), Hardik Singh (HIL GC), Manpreet Singh (Ranchi Royals) and Rupinder Pal Singh, who returns to competitive hockey with SG Pipers.

Junior World Cup bronze medallists will also be in action, with India captain Rohit and Dilraj Singh rep-



resenting SG Pipers, Amir Ali and Manmeet turning out for Ranchi Royals, Sunil PR playing for Vedanta Kalinga Lancers and Prince Deep

Singh for Accord Tamil Nadu Dragons.

Among the foreign stars, Tom Boon will feature for Ranchi Royals, Christopher Ruhr

## Vedanta Kalinga Lancers meet Odisha Deputy CM

**Bhubaneswar:** Vedanta Kalinga Lancers met and interacted with Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo, Deputy Chief Minister of Odisha, during a pre-season meet and greet in Bhubaneswar Friday, as the team prepares for the upcoming season of the Hockey India League, set to get underway in Chennai. The evening was marked by a strong sense of Odisha pride, bringing together players, coaching staff and senior leadership ahead of the new campaign. As part of the event, players were handed over their official jerseys for the season, showcasing readiness and renewed ambition as the Vedanta Kalinga Lancers look ahead to the Hockey India League. Senior Vedanta leadership present at the event included C Chandru, CEO, Vedanta Jharsuguda, and S Suresh, CFO, Aluminium Mines, reinforcing Vedanta's commitment to contributing to Odisha's rich hockey legacy. Sharing excitement for the new season, Head Coach Jay Stacy said, "It has been a great experience being in Bhubaneswar. The warmth of the people and their passion for hockey is evident everywhere. It was an honour to meet Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo and to see the support the state continues to extend to the sport. Representing Vedanta Kalinga Lancers in a state that has contributed so much to hockey is something we value deeply. We have had some very good training sessions at the Kalinga Stadium, and the group is excited for the new season. Our focus is on giving our absolute best, returning to Bhubaneswar in a strong position and, hopefully, playing the final in front of our home crowd." The team was undergoing an intense pre-season camp at the Kalinga Stadium, with the entire squad training under the supervision of Head Coach Jay Stacy, as they prepared for their first match January 4 in Chennai.



## Australian Open: Venus makes historic return

*The 45-year-old is set to become the oldest woman to compete in an Australian Open main draw 5 years after her last appearance as she receives wild card*

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Melbourne, Jan 2:** Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams received a wild card entry into the main draw at the 2026 Australian Open.

It will be her first appearance at Melbourne Park since 2021 and the first time she will have competed outside the United States since 2023.

Of her seven Grand Slam singles titles, none have come in Melbourne. Venus reached the final twice, in 2003 and 2017, and both times her sister and 23-time Grand Slam champion, Serena Williams, emerged victorious.

In addition to her two AO finals, Williams reached the semifinals in 2001 and another



six quarterfinals, contributing to her tournament win-loss record of 54-21.

The 45-year-old is set to become the oldest woman to compete in an AO main draw, surpassing the record previously held by Japan's Kimiko Date, who was 44 when she lost in the first round of the Australian Open 2015.

Following a 16-month layoff, Venus returned to tennis last July and competed in three tournaments in 2025. She defeated compatriot Peyton Stearns 6-3, 6-4 in the first round at the Mubadala Citi DC Open, before falling to Magdalena Frech.

In August, Williams fell to Spain's Jessica Bouzas-Maneiro 4-6, 4-6 in the first round of

I'm excited to be back in Australia and looking forward to competing during the Australian summer. I've had so many incredible memories there, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to return to a place that has meant so much to my career

VENUS WILLIAMS

Cincinnati and took 11th seeded Karolina Muchova to three sets in the first round of the US Open. In doubles, playing alongside Leylah Fernandez, Williams advanced to the quarterfinals, where they fell to eventual finalists Katerina Sinikova and Taylor Townsend.

Venus will prepare for the Australian Open 2026 at the Hobart International, where she also received a wildcard and will join fellow major champions Barbora Krejickova and Emma Raducanu. The Australian Open 2026 main draw begins on January 18.

## Marijne returns as chief coach of embattled women's hockey team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Jan 2:** Dutchman Sjoerd Marijne was Friday reappointed as the chief coach of India's women's hockey team, five years after guiding the side to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics following which it has been battling a difficult transition phase.

Marijne would be replacing Harendra Singh, who had to resign in December last year due to the team's underwhelming results and allegations of a "high-handed coaching approach".

The 51-year-old Marijne, who was associated with the team from 2017 to 2021, will be supported by Matias Vila as analytical coach. Also returning to the Indian hockey set-up is South African Wayne Lombard, who will once again serve as scientific advisor and head of athletic performance.

"It's great to be back. After 4.5 years, I return with fresh energy and a clear vision to support

the team's growth and help the players achieve their full potential on the world stage," Marijne stated in a press release issued by Hockey India.

Marijne, who had immense goodwill within the team and was widely credited for building a cohesive unit that revelled in each other's success, quit immediately after the Tokyo Games, citing family reasons. During his tenure, India also broke into the top 10 of world rankings. Vila, a former Argentina mid-fielder, made his international debut in 1997 and represented his country at the Olympic Games in 2000 and 2004. He has been involved in coaching for over two decades.

### Transition woes

After the Tokyo high, the team was hit by a challenging transition period when key players like injury-ravaged captain Rani Rampal, Vandana Katariya and Deep Grace Ekka, retired from the game.

The women's team eventually failed to qualify for the 2024 Paris



Olympics but finished on the podium in both the 2022 Commonwealth Games and the 2023 Asian Games, clinching bronze medals.

The team won a silver medal at last year's Asia Cup but it was not enough to ensure direct qualification for the World Cup this August in Belgium and the Netherlands. The side was also relegated to the Nations Cup after managing just two wins from its 16 games in the elite FIH Pro League last year.

Marijne's first big challenge as chief coach will be the World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad, Telangana from March 8 to 14. He will arrive in India January 14, while the National Coaching Camp begins on January 19 in SAI, Bangalore.