



Diana's perspective

Professionalism requires actors to set aside personal relationships and fully commit to their roles, says Diana Penty

LEISURE | P2



NK fires missiles

North Korea launches ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters, just hours before South Korea's President left for China

INTERNATIONAL | P10



India may benefit

Restructuring of Venezuela's oil sector could deliver a direct benefit to India, unlocking close to \$1bn in long-pending dues

BUSINESS | P11



B'desh snubs India

BCB decides against sending its national team to India for the T20 World Cup next month citing security concerns

SPORTS | P12

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CM for regular training to 'Ama Bus' drivers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday expressed serious concern over frequent accidents caused by state-run 'Ama Bus' and directed the authorities to provide training to drivers for skill development and instil a sensitive attitude among them. He also announced an ex gratia of 4 lakh from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) to the family of the autorickshaw driver, Bishnu Patra of Jajpur district, who died in a mishap caused by 'Ama Bus' at Rupali Square here Saturday.

While Patra died at the spot, two passengers, including a female student, were injured. "One of the passengers is undergoing treatment at the Capital Hospital, and another injured was discharged after treatment," an officer said.

The bus driver, who fled the spot after the accident, was arrested and booked for culpable homicide, he said.

The CM also wished a speedy recovery to the injured student, Namita Pradhan, 21. He has directed the Transport department to take steps to improve this problem in coordination with the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT), which operates the city buses, as per a statement issued by the CMO.

P3

Red Fort blast accused used 'ghost' SIM cards



Srinagar/New Delhi: Investigations into the "white-collar" terror module linked to the blast near Delhi's Red Fort November 10 last year show that highly educated doctors used a sophisticated web of 'ghost' SIM cards and encrypted apps to coordinate with Pakistani handlers, officials claimed Sunday. Each accused, including Dr Umar-un-Nabi, who was killed while driving the explosives-laden vehicle near the Red Fort, carried two to three mobile handsets, they said. The accused carried one "clean" phone registered in their own names for routine personal and professional use to avoid suspicion and one was the "terror phone" used exclusively for WhatsApp and Telegram communication with their handlers in Pakistan.

At least 30 killed in Nigeria shooting

Minna: At least 30 villagers have been killed and several others are missing after gunmen raided a village in northern Nigeria's Niger state, police said Sunday, the latest in a cycle of deadly violence in the conflict-hit region. The gunmen stormed the Kasuwan-Daji village in Borgu local government area Saturday evening and opened fire on residents. They also razed down the local market and several houses, state police spokesman Wasiu Abiodun said in a statement. At least two residents put the death toll at 37 and said it could be much higher as some people remained missing as of Sunday.

P10

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Why do Indians visiting Venezuela need an advisory? They already have undergone training



STREET SHOW: The New Year's first 'Patha Ustav' held on Master Canteen-Rama Mandir stretch in Bhubaneswar saw huge footfall, Sunday

PHOTO: BIKASH NAYAK

Despite SC nod, no ad-hoc judges appointed in HCs

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Jan 4: No ad-hoc judges have been appointed in high courts so far to tackle pending criminal cases, nearly a year after the Supreme Court cleared the decks for it, as the high courts have not evinced interest.

According to people aware of the procedure to appoint Supreme Court and high court judges, none of the 25 high courts have recommended names for appointment as ad-hoc judges.

Concerned over the pendency of over 18 lakh criminal cases, the Supreme Court had January 30, 2025, allowed the high courts to appoint ad-hoc judges, not exceeding 10 per cent of the court's total sanctioned strength.

However, the Union Law Ministry is yet to get any recommendation from any of the high court collegiums to appoint retired judges on an ad-hoc basis.

Article 224A of the Constitution allows the appointment of



retired judges as ad-hoc judges in high courts to help manage case backlog.

According to the laid-down procedure, the respective high court collegiums send recommendations or names of candidates to be appointed as HC judges to the Department of Justice in the Law Ministry. The department then adds inputs and details on the candidates before forwarding them to the Supreme Court Collegium.

The SC Collegium then takes a final call and recommends to the government the appointment of the selected persons as judges.

The President signs the 'warrant of appointment' of the newly-appointed judge.

The procedure to appoint ad-hoc judges will be the same except that the President will not sign the warrant of appointment. But the assent of the President will be sought for appointing ad-hoc judges.

Except in one case, there is no precedent of appointing retired judges as ad-hoc HC judges, officials said. In a judgement April 20, 2021, on the appointment of ad-hoc judges in the high courts, the top court had imposed certain conditions. However, later a special Supreme Court bench comprising then Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices BR Gavai (another former CJI) and Surya Kant (incumbent CJI) had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

The verdict, which was authored by former Chief Justice SA Bobde, directed retired high court judges to be appointed as ad-hoc ones for a period of two to three years to clear the backlog.

Two bodies recovered from Dhenkanal quarry

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: A day after at least four people were feared dead at an unauthorised stone quarry near Gopalpur under Motanga police limits in Dhenkanal district, bodies of two workers were recovered Sunday, said officials.

Though the exact cause behind the incident is unclear yet, teams of local fire service, Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF), along with dog squad, were engaged in rescue operations, an officer said.

Dhenkanal Collector Ashish Ishwar Patil and SP Abhinav Sonkar have reached the spot to supervise the rescue operation. "As per available information, only two persons were there, and two bodies were recovered. One person belonged to Balasore district, while another deceased was from either Keonjhar or Mayurbhanj district. Their identities have not yet been established," Patil told reporters.

Blasting permission at the stone quarry expired in September while its lease period ended in December 2025, he said.

"We will take legal action against the mine lease holder as blasting and mining continued at the quarry after expiry of the lease period," Patil said.

Pitabas murder: Cops name 16 in chargesheet



POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Jan 4: Nearly three months after BJP leader and lawyer Pitabas Panda was shot dead outside his residence, police submitted a preliminary chargesheet in the high-profile murder case in a court here Sunday. The 1,667-page chargesheet was filed in 18 copies, while CCTV footage and other evidence were also attached.

Led by investigating officer (IO) and Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Priyash Ranjan Chhotray, a team of police officials submitted the documents at the district court, marking a major procedural milestone in the case. The chargesheet, filed in the Sub-Divisional Judicial Mag-

istrate (SDJM) court, names 16 accused, including former Berhampur MLA and BJD Ganjam district president Bikram Kumar Panda, and former Berhampur mayor Siva Shankar Das, they said. Pitabas Panda, a member of the Odisha State Bar Council and former BJP leader, was shot dead October 6, 2025 night near his residence in Baikunthanagar under Baidyanathpur police station.

The police had registered the case (518/25) and began an investigation immediately.

They also arrested Panda, Das, corporator Malaya Bisoyi, and BJD leader Madan Dalai. Some accused had previously secured bail from lower courts but have now approached the High Court.

Trump's Venezuela oil plan may not be a cakewalk

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington, Jan 4: The United States might have taken charge of Venezuela's oil sector, but that is unlikely to change oil prices immediately as years of neglect and sanctions have damaged the industry there.

According to reports, Venezuela's oil industry is in disrepair after years of neglect and international sanctions, so it could take years and major investments before production can increase dramatically. But some analysts are optimistic that Venezuela could double or triple its current output of about 1.1 million barrels of oil

a day to return to historic levels fairly quickly.

"While many are reporting Venezuela's oil infrastructure was unharmed by US military actions, it has been decaying for many, many years and will take time to rebuild," said Patrick De Haan, who is the lead petroleum analyst at gasoline price tracker GasBuddy.

American oil companies will want a stable regime in the country before they are willing to invest heavily, and the political picture remained uncertain Saturday with Trump saying that the United States is in charge, while the current Venezuelan vice president argued, before Venezuela's high court



ordered her to assume the role of interim president, that Maduro should be restored to power.

"But if it seems like the US is successful in running the country for the next 24 hours,

I would say there would be a lot of optimism that US energy companies could come in and revitalise the Venezuelan oil industry fairly quickly," said Phil Flynn, a senior market analyst

Maduro in Brooklyn jail

New York: Brooklyn jail holding Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is a facility so troubled, some judges have refused to send people there even as it has housed such famous inmates as music stars R Kelly and Sean "Diddy" Combs. Opened in early 1990s, the Metropolitan Detention Centre, or MDC Brooklyn, currently houses about 1,300 inmates. It's the routine landing spot for people awaiting trial in federal courts in Manhattan and Brooklyn, holding alleged gangsters and drug traffickers alongside some people accused of white-collar crimes.

at the Price Futures Group.

And if Venezuela can grow into an oil production powerhouse, Flynn said, "that could cement lower prices for the lon-

ger term" and put more pressure on Russia.

Oil isn't traded over the weekend, so there wasn't an immediate impact on prices. But a major shift in prices isn't expected when the market does reopen. Venezuela is a member of OPEC, so its production is already accounted for there. And there is currently a surplus of oil on the global market.

Venezuela is known to have the world's largest proven crude oil reserves of approximately 303 billion barrels, according to the US Energy Information Administration. That accounts for roughly 17 per cent of all global oil reserves.

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST



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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES



You may pick up the hammer and chisel today. No, you're not taking up sculpture; you're finally giving in to your spouse's demands to take some home improvement measures. It's in your interest to be speedy and focused, as you are the guilty party, says Ganesha.

TAURUS




You will find comfort, perched on a branch in the family tree, today. Your maturity will help you deal with emotional issues with ease. Energy and exuberance will be an investment you make today, the results of which you will reap in the days to come, hopes Ganesha.

GEMINI



Your desire for a clean house will reach the level of obsession, predicts Ganesha. You may plan to wash your car, clean your yard and arrange your wardrobe. And you don't trust the housemaid with any of the chores, because no one can clean the house better than you. Personal hygiene will also get your full attention, feels Ganesha.

CANCER



Today is a crucial and fascinating day for you, predicts Ganesha. You will learn and gain from your bosses and elders. Peers and siblings may extend their full support to you. Your chances of winning legal battles are remote, so an out-of-court settlement may be your best bet.

LEO




This day brings good tidings for jobs and businesses. Those in business can look forward to a highly profitable day. Long-term business deals may be in the offing as well. If you happen to be in the services, rest assured, you may look forward to extra perks, pay hike and promotions. Just make sure that you hone your skills to reach where you want to be, advises Ganesha.

VIRGO




Today finds you ambitious and meticulous. Actions will not speak – they'll roar! Your planning and scruples will set the pace at work. Expect pats on the back from your bosses and a round of cheers from your peers.

LIBRA




Of late, you have been very concerned about the health of one of your close friends. Take this day to lay your fears to rest by spending time with that friend. Work can wait, as today you must prove to yourself, if not to others, that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'. Ganesha wishes you the very best.

SCORPIO




Your mind shall take over the proceedings today. And it shall, in all likelihood, draw you to the work bench and keep your nose to the grindstone. But your heart will flutter like a butterfly, and if you manage to strike the right balance, you may win over your special one and your boss too, says Ganesha.

SAGITTARIUS




Chances of you hitting a roadblock today are high. But remember the saying, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going.' So don't succumb to pressure, advises Ganesha, but rise up to the occasion and show who's the boss.

CAPRICORN



Today, you will remain unruffled by the commotion around you, says Ganesha. However, the emotions locked up inside you will probably cloud your power of reasoning and may leave you feeling a little lost. But this will only be a passing phase, and you will come out of the bewilderment in no time. You will promptly get back to pursuing your goals and your reputation with seniors will play a crucial role in bagging you tangible rewards.

AQUARIUS



Today, you will experience the harmonious balance between logic and emotion. You will consequently know how to mix business with pleasure. Money wise, you are content, but trivial issues may bother you today, says Ganesha.

PISCES



An action-packed day awaits you, busy as you will be corresponding with old contacts, telephonic interviews, organising meetings and scheduling tasks, says Ganesha. Do not forget to breathe!



DICAPRIO QUESTIONS
FUTURE OF THEATRE

Leonardo DiCaprio has expressed uncertainty over whether audiences still share the same enthusiasm for cinema halls amid the rapid rise of streaming platforms. Reflecting on the film industry's transformation, the actor questioned if traditional theatres could eventually turn into niche cultural spaces, comparing them to jazz bars.

JOHNSON TALKS ABOUT HIS
CHILDHOOD HARDSHIPS

Dwayne Johnson recently reflected on his challenging childhood, opening up about growing up in a dysfunctional family. In an interview with *Variety*, the actor revealed his parents shared an "explosive, volcanic" relationship. He spoke about his father's struggles with addiction and instability, while his mother held the family together as she raised him



Diana on professionalism



Mumbai: Actress Diana Pentty, who was recently seen in the streaming show *Do You Wanna Partner*, spoke about how it's imperative for a good actor to look beyond personal relationships with their co-actors, and deliver what's required from them. The actress spoke with this news agency during the promotions of *Do You Wanna Partner*, and said that though she had a great camaraderie with her co-star Tamannaah Bhatia while working on the show, she is quite clear in her head about her process which is detached from personal relationships. The actress told, "As a good actor, you're supposed to either way, whether you get along with somebody, you don't get along with what you bring to the screen and to the character should be independent of your personal equation. So, that is a basis of how good an actor or not you are. But in this case, I feel like we were also lucky that we got along and that it was just effortless off screen as well. So, it was much easier to bring that energy on screen and into all the scenes". Talking about her camaraderie with Tamannaah, she said, "So, I don't think we struggled with that at all".

IANS



Mumbai: Actress Sara Arjun, who made her debut as the leading lady in Aditya Dhar's *Dhurandhar* opposite Ranveer Singh, posted a heartfelt note on social media showing her gratitude to the audience for showing love and support to the film. Calling the audience, her 'strongest Dhurandhars', Sara pointed out that this movie is proof that cinema has not lost its place in the growing era of short content.

Thanking the viewers for dismissing the assertion, she wrote on her Instagram, "For a long time, there has been a narrative that audiences no longer have the patience for long-form storytelling, that attention spans have shortened, that cinema no longer finds its place. But you proved otherwise. You reminded everyone of the true strength of an audience and what happens when people come together to support something they genuinely believe in. (sic)."

Sara expressed her delight that they were able to connect with the audience. She revealed, "As artists and makers, we can control every part of the process, but we have no control over the audience, and that's beautiful. We give our everything and trust that someone, somewhere, will connect. When that connection happens, it is one of the most fulfilling feelings in the world."

IANS

Sara's
heartfelt
note

NATYA MAHOTSAV-2026 - DAY I



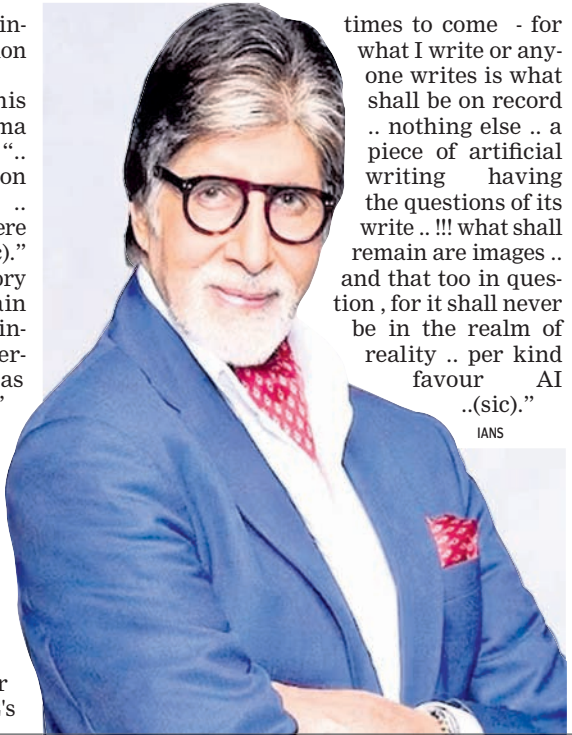
The 4th Natya Mahotsav , organised by Kalinga Natya Sangha, commenced Sunday at Bhanja Kala Mandap, Bhubaneswar. Marking the opening day of the festival, Bamanda Kalakar Sangha from Deogarh staged Odia play *Antardwanda*. Written by Kumud Chandra Satpathy, the drama was directed by Romeo Mohapatra.

Mumbai: Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has yet again shared a thought-provoking reflection, delving into the shifting meanings of history, truth and storytelling in

STORY ..(sic)."
The icon reflected on the absence of definiteness in the times ahead, suggesting that what remains on record will largely be what is written, interpreted and preserved.
"There shall never ever be definiteness in the

Big B talks about shifting
meanings of truth

an era dominated by information cycles. Taking to his blog, the cinema icon wrote: ".. the information cycle attracts .. attracts all that there ever is or is not ..(sic)."
He noted that history may no longer remain just "history," but instead fragment into personal narratives such as "his story," "my story," or someone else's version altogether.
"And History - if ever it can have the same meaning after a few years - shall ever be referred to as HIS STORY .. or MY STORY .. or the OTHERS STORY .. or SOMEONE ELSE's

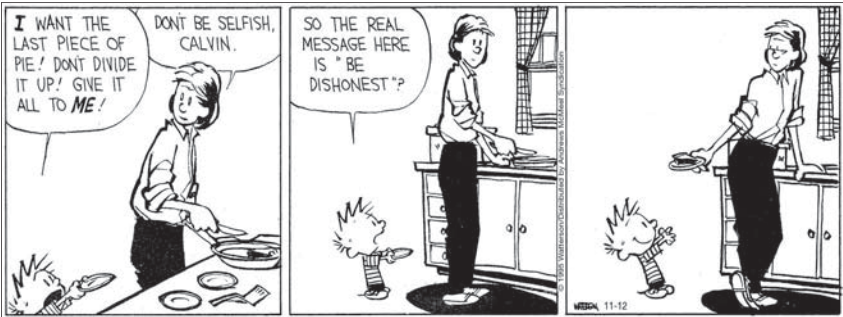


times to come - for what I write or anyone writes is what shall be on record .. nothing else .. a piece of artificial writing having the questions of its write .. !!! what shall remain are images .. and that too in question , for it shall never be in the realm of reality .. per kind favour AI ..(sic)."
IANS

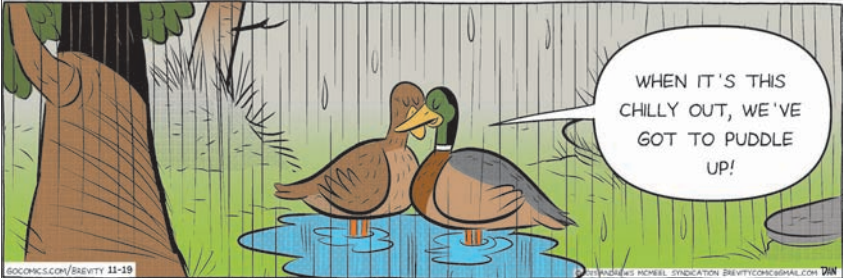
PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

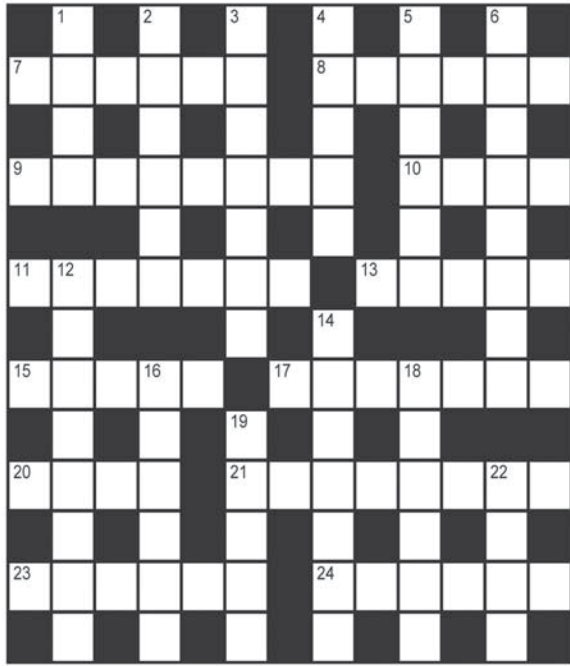


BREVITY



FUN
post

CROSSWORD



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- Across

7 Mooring item

8 Decanted

9 Budgie

10 Swerve

11 Wetlands

13 Durable cotton fabric

15 Long-legged wading bird

17 Excoriate

20 Bland

21 Mitre or fez, e.g.

23 Intertwine

24 Universe

Down

1 Old Peruvian

2 Clippers

3 Vine

4 Markings

5 Military vehicle

6 Health food

12 Addax, for one

14 Crowned head

16 Don't give it away

18 Small magazine

19 Headman

22 Sailor's greeting

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

C	O	N	C	O	R	D	L	E	A	K
A	C	O	R	O	A	N	G			
A	C	A	R	I	A	C	T	O	T	A
A	M	O	I	E	I	A				
O	U	S	H	E	L	O	X	G	I	N
			E	E			U	C		
H	O	A	R	S	E	S	C	R	A	P
U	L					T	A			
M	A	C		P	O	I		M	O	U
B	O	A	M	P						
U	S	H	E	R		B	R	I	S	T
G	O	T		R	N	E	L			
	P	L	O	Y		E	N	G	A	R

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

CS REVIEWS FOOD SUPPLY DEPT FUNCTIONING

Ensure hassle-free payment to protect farmers’ interests: Garg



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Chief Secretary Anu Garg Sunday reviewed the functioning of the Food Supply and Consumer Welfare (FS&CW) department, focused on Kharif paddy procurement, market management and the Public Distribution System (PDS). Stressing the need to safeguard farmers’ interests, Garg advised officials to ensure smooth procurement operations and timely payments.

The review meeting at Lok Seva Bhavan was attended by FS&CW department Principal Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh, Cooperative department Commissioner-cum-Secretary Rajesh Prabhakar Patil and Odisha State Supply Corporation Limited MD K Sudarshan Chakravarthi, along with senior officers of the departments.

Officials informed the chief secretary that 19,67,812 farmers have registered for paddy procurement in the 2025-26 Kharif season, covering a total registered cultivation area of 61,67,414 acres. In the previous agricultural year (2024-25), the state harvested 73.45 lakh metric tonne of Kharif paddy and

19.18 lakh metric tonne of Rabi paddy.

As of January 3, paddy harvesting has commenced in 18 districts, with around 11.84 lakh metric tonne already harvested. So far, 2,71,318 farmers have sold 12.05 lakh metric tonne of paddy. Preparations are underway to begin harvesting in other districts based on crop maturity, the officials said.

Officials informed Garg that technology is being extensively used to streamline procurement process in all districts. Satellite imagery is aiding accurate assessment of paddy cultivation, while digital systems are improving transparency and efficiency, the officials said. Garg reviewed key aspects such as farmer linkage with societies, token system, quality control, lifting of paddy by millers, and direct transfer of payments to farmers’ bank accounts within 48 hours of sale. She also stressed strict monitoring to ensure millers return the prescribed quantity of rice to the state.

The meeting also reviewed the deployment of CCTV surveillance at mandis, mobile applications for mandi nodal

officers, and online tracking of vehicles transporting paddy from mandis to millers’ depots. To address grievances and delays, a 24-hour call centre (help centre) has been set up for urgent action and feedback. At present, 1,418 millers are engaged across districts for paddy procurement, Garg was informed.

With procurement volumes rising, discussions were held on the need for additional smart warehouses to address storage constraints. Currently, about 4,000 paddy procurement centres are operating with the involvement of 2,600 primary agricultural cooperative societies, over 400 women self-help groups, and various Pani Panchayats. The state is utilising 162 government warehouses with a total storage capacity of 6.5 lakh metric tonne.

On the public distribution front, officials said that more than 11,700 fair price shops are functioning across Odisha. Under the National Food Security Act and the State Food Security Scheme, ration rice is being distributed to 3,27,83,673 beneficiaries, with 96 per cent e-KYC coverage already completed.

Expressing satisfaction over the modernisation of procurement and PDS operations, Chief Secretary reiterated the importance of timely lifting of paddy from mandis, adequate facilities for farmers, hassle-free payment of dues and robust system management and directed officials to regularly monitor the call centre and control room to ensure swift grievance redressal and smooth implementation of welfare measures.



IN MOVE: Artists perform Odissi at 7th Natya Shastra Nrutya Utsav at Soochana Bhawan in Bhubaneswar Sunday

PICT: BIKASH NAYAK

Swachh Sathis to get special incentive: BMC

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Swachh Sathis who achieve 90 per cent collection of user fees will receive special incentive of ₹5,000, announced Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Mayor Sulochana Das recently.

While extending New Year greetings to the Swachh Sathis at a meeting, the Mayor advised them to ensure the collection of user fees from permanent residents, traders, commercial establishments, educational institutions, various organisations and indus-



tries fixed by BMC in 2018.

After the meeting concluded, Swachh Sathis attended a training session on the same

Committee chairman Biranchi Narayan Mahasupakar, Taxation Standing Committee Chairman Rajkishore Das, Grievance Standing Committee chairperson Binayini Jena, Additional Commissioner Ratnakar Sahu and Deputy Commissioner (Sanitation) N Ganesh Babu among others.

At the meeting, Swachh Sathis were also made aware about Swachh Survekshan 2026. “Work diligently so that in the current year, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation secures a place among the top three cleanest cities in the country,” Das advised.

Ban firecrackers to check air pollution: Maneka Gandhi



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Former union minister Maneka Gandhi Sunday advocated a nationwide ban on the sale and use of firecrackers in the country to check air pollution.

Speaking to media persons here on the sidelines of an event, Gandhi said the prime reason behind the air pollution in New Delhi has been the bursting of firecrackers.

“If you will burst firecrackers worth ₹800 crore in two nights, then what will happen to the air? There should be a nation-

wide ban on firecrackers,” she said.

Those who burst firecrackers should be branded as “anti-national” because everyone is suffering from their activities.

Instead of expecting everything from the government, people should also initiate a movement to check air pollution, she said.

Commenting on cow smuggling, Gandhi said, “Lakhs of cows are being smuggled from Odisha and Bihar to Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. It is our responsibility to stop it. Not a single cow should go to a slaughterhouse.”

Criticising the BJP-led central government, she said, “When the BJP came to power, I was hopeful that it would stop beef export because it was there in their manifesto. But, unfortunately, it has not yet stopped. We cannot allow things to happen just for the sake of employment.”

On the Supreme Court’s recent order on stray dogs, the animal rights activist said, “I feel very sad because the apex court is meant to be the last institution we respect and if they lose the respect of the people, we hurt ourselves.”

DAV Unit VIII hosts SIP AGC state finals

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: The state finals of 10th edition of the SIP Arithmetic Genius Contest (AGC) was held at Unit VIII DAV Public School here Sunday, marking a significant milestone with participation of more than 800 children from 34 schools across Odisha.

Orissa POST and **Dharitri** Sales and Marketing head Baroda Mohanty and SIP Abacus state head Sunil Nayak attended the event as guest of honours and felicitated the winners.

In the preliminary round, 20,000 students attended the competition across the state, among which, 10,000 students were selected for second round. After completion of second round, 800 students were selected to compete in the state round.

SIP AGC is an annual competition designed to inspire a love for arithmetics among young learners and to create awareness about the importance of skill development. This year, at all India level, the contest witnessed a record-breaking participation of over 8 lakh students, representing over 1,900 schools across 23 states.



SIP AGC is an annual competition designed to inspire love for arithmetics among young learners and to create awareness about the importance of skill development

Cash prizes, trophies, and certificates were awarded to the winners in each class. Position holders from each class in the state round finals have qualified for the national round.

Divyanshi Sarangi of Class I, DAV Kalinga Nagar was selected as champion, whereas Roman Khan from ODM Kids World was selected as champion from Class II. Similarly, Shoolin Sekhar Routray from DAV Chandrasekharpur in Class III, Ayushman Behera from DAV Pokhariput in Class

IV and Priyanshi Subudhi from DAV Kalinga Nagar in Class V received the first positions, entering into national finals.

SIP Abacus India is a leading skill development programme for children aged 6 to 12 years, designed to enhance arithmetic ability, concentration, memory, and overall intelligence. With over 1050 franchisee centres in India and presence in 11 countries globally, SIP Abacus has empowered over a million children to excel academically and personally.

VIG SLEUTHS NAB CRRI IIC ACCEPTING ₹40K BRIBE



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Odisha Vigilance Sunday arrested CRRI Police Station, Cuttack Inspector In-Charge (IIC) Bijay Kumar Barik while accepting ₹40,000 as bribe from a licensed liquor vendor.

According to sources, Barik was taking the bribe in exchange for allowing the liquor

business to run smoothly. Vigilance officials seized the amount from his possession at Rajmahal Square here.

Following the confiscation, the Vigilance team subsequently conducted simultaneous searches at two locations linked to the accused. At his Unit-I government quarter here, Vigilance officials recovered ₹4,96,120 in cash.

Besides, the investigating team has located a triple storeyed building at Sisupalgarh and a newly constructed double storeyed building at Barik’s native place in Kendrapara. During the search, officials also recovered costly watches from his possession.

Barik was booked under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018 and forwarded to the court Sunday.

AAPI to host GHS 2026 in KIMS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI) will host the Global Healthcare Summit (GHS) 2026 at Kalinga Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS) here from January 9 to 11, bringing together eminent physicians, researchers, healthcare leaders, and innovators from India and the United States to a single platform.

The summit underscores AAPI’s continued mission to advance global health, strengthen India-US healthcare collaborations, and promote excellence in medical education, research and clinical care.

GHS 2026 will be organised around a forward-looking theme, centered on technology, innovation, and global health capacity building. The comprehensive academic agenda will feature cutting-edge Continuing Medical Education (CME) sessions, AI-driven clinical insights, advanced surgical demonstrations, hands-on workshops, public health initiatives, and dedicated platforms for medical students and residents, informed AAPI GHS president Dr Amit Chakrabarty and Odisha Physicians of America Pres-

ident Dr Atasu Nayak in a press conference here Sunday.

Major highlights of the summit includes state-of-the-art robotic surgery presentations, a high-impact plenary session on the role of AI in global medical practice, and emergency and resuscitation workshops using advanced SimMan3G+ simulation technology.

Specialty-focused forums will cover critical areas such as diabetes and obesity, tuberculosis, critical care medicine, and metabolic syndrome. In line with its commitment to holistic and evidence-based healthcare, the summit will also feature dedicated tracks on Ayurveda, integrative medicine, yoga, and meditation.

Extending its impact beyond academic discourse, AAPI GHS 2026 will place strong emphasis on community health initiatives. These include a mass hands-only CPR programme, aiming to train 1,200-1,500 participants, HPV awareness and vaccination drives, and the AAPI stem cell registry drive.

The summit will also host a special CME on ‘Women in Healthcare: Challenges’, highlighting leadership development, professional growth, and gender equity in medicine.

Waltair Division to undergo safety modernisation work

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: East Coast Railway (ECOR) announced temporary regulation of train services in the Waltair Division during January 2026 to facilitate safety-related modernisation and maintenance work. The move is aimed at enhancing passenger safety and ensuring the long-term reliability of railway infrastructure. Owing to this work, several passenger and express trains will be affected through cancellations, rescheduling and short-termination or short-origination on different dates.

According to the railway authorities, Visakhapatnam-Raipur-Visakhapatnam Passenger (58528/58527), Visakhapatnam-Koraput-Visakhapatnam Passenger (58537/58538) and Visakhapatnam-Koraput Inter-



city Express (18512) will remain cancelled January 5, 12 and 19. Similarly, Koraput-Visakhapatnam Intercity Express (18511) will remain cancelled January 6, 13 and 20. In addition, Jagdalpur-Howrah Samaleswari Express (18006) will be rescheduled and depart Jagdalpur two hours later than its normal schedule January 19. The regulation will also involve short-termination of certain trains. Guntur-Rayagada Express (17243) will be short-terminated at Vizianagaram January 4, 11 and 18. Durg-Visakhapatnam Vande Bharat Express (20829) will be short-terminated at Rayagada January 5,

12 and 19, while Sambalpur-Rayagada Intercity Express (18301) will be short-terminated at Muniguda January 19.

Few trains under ECoR will short-originate from intermediate stations. Rayagada-Guntur Express (17244) will originate from Vizianagaram instead of Rayagada January 5, 12 and 19. Visakhapatnam-Durg Vande Bharat Express (20830) will originate from Rayagada on the same dates, and Rayagada-Sambalpur Intercity Express (18302) will originate from Muniguda January 19.

Passengers have been advised to take note of these temporary changes and plan their journeys accordingly. Updated information regarding train services will be available through official railway enquiry systems and other authorised communication channels of the Railways.

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC	FORECAST
Max Temp	29.0°	25.8°	Dense fog very likely to occur
Min Temp	14.8°	13.4°	
Humidity	96%	96%	
Rainfall	Nil	Nil	

Encroachment alters river courses, blocks drainage in Paradip



POST NEWS NETWORK

Paradip, Jan 4: Rampant encroachment on government land has altered natural river courses and obstructed drainage systems in parts of Paradip, triggering public concern and calls for immediate action.

The state government has reiterated its resolve to remove illegal encroachment from public land. Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari recently warned that people who have constructed houses or other structures on government land must dismantle them immediately. Failing that, he said, the administration will carry out eviction drives and recover the entire cost from the encroachers.

However, residents allege that the local administration has remained largely inactive despite the government's directive. Encroachment continues unchecked, they said, severely obstructing natural water flow and drainage, particularly during the monsoon.

People have demanded that the revenue minister personally intervene to ensure the immediate eviction of illegal structures from encroached government land to restore drainage channels.

Paradip Port construction began in 1962. At the time, the region stretching from Paradip to Kujang had around 57 rivers, streams and natural water channels. Over the years, rapid industrial growth and expanding human settlements have led to large-scale encroachment, significantly altering the area's hydrology, locals said.

Several rivers have disappeared over the past 50 years, and many of those still visible are gradually being buried owing to encroachment, residents alleged. As a result, rainwater drainage has been severely disrupted in seven panchayats, in-

cluding Paradipgarh.

Traditional fishermen's associations, villagers and other organisations have repeatedly complained to the Jagatsinghpur district administration, alleging large-scale encroachment on river channels. The latest complaint relates to the filling up of a creek at Udayabat mouza on the outskirts of Paradip, where house construction has led to the emergence of a colony. Hundreds of farmers have submitted complaints over the issue.

Farmers Surendra Barik and Padana Mangaraj stated in their petitions that plot nos-1307 and 1309 of Udayabat mouza are part of the creek. Tehsil records identify the land as a natural drain since the 1930 settlement. However, for the past six months, several people have allegedly been carrying out construction activities on the channel land.

They further alleged that some individuals have changed the land classification of river areas and sold them after registering cases at the Kujang tehsil office, including case numbers -7/99 and 174/2008. Similar alterations of river courses have taken place at multiple locations, leading to settlements and aggravating drainage woes.

Residents said land prices along the national and state highways between Paradip and Kujang have surged sharply. Land is now being traded at over Rs 2 crore per acre. Udayabat resident Harekrushna Sahu said that taking advantage of the price rise, influential persons allegedly acquired such land through manipulative methods and administrative loopholes.

Kujang tehsildar Swarup Nandan Behera said an administrative inquiry is underway into the complaints and assured that encroachments on government land would be cleared.

Cong leader Adhir meets Bengali migrant workers

Expressing concern over 'parallel policing', Chowdhury assured the migrant workers that the Congress was with them

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sambalpur, Jan 4: Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury Sunday met migrant workers from West Bengal in Sambalpur and expressed concern over 'parallel policing' in some states where Bengali labourers were allegedly being asked by private persons to provide their identity proof, urging law enforcement agencies to stop the practice.

Chowdhury, a five-time former MP from Baharampur Lok Sabha constituency in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, also assured the migrant workers that the Congress was with them.

"I met some Bengali migrant workers here and told them that Congress is with them. I also informed them that the matter has been taken up with Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Chowdhury told reporters.

He expressed concern over the killing of 30-year-old Jewel Rana, a Bengali-speaking migrant worker from Murshidabad's Jangipur, in Sambal-



pur last month following an altercation over a 'bidi'. It was also alleged that the assailants had asked Rana to show his Aadhaar card suspecting him to be a Bangladeshi infiltrator, a charge denied by the local police.

"There is a parallel policing system in some states, as private persons are asking migrant workers to show their identity proof. This must be stopped, and the police should ensure that no one is harassed by the goons because of their suspicion that a migrant worker might be a Bangladeshi infiltrator," Chowdhury said.

The former Congress leader in the Lok Sabha said that he has raised the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Chowdhury also said that he was planning to bring the matter to the notice of President Droupadi Murmu, who hails from Odisha, Sambalpur MP and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

"I will fight for the safety of Bengali migrant workers working in different states," the Congress leader said.

He also met local Congress leaders and urged them to remain alert to prevent such in-

cidents in future.

Chowdhury also met Northern Range Inspector General Himanshu Kumar Lal and Sambalpur Superintendent of Police Mukesh Kumar Bhamoo during his one-day visit to Sambalpur.

The local police have taken prompt action and arrested the accused persons within six hours of the incident. The police will also file a chargesheet very soon and ensure that the accused are punished, Lal told reporters after meeting Chowdhury.

Lal said that the police have been working with the policy of 'zero tolerance' for such incidents and conducting regular patrolling in vulnerable areas.

The police have also launched an awareness campaign, urging them not to take the law into their hands, he said. Accompanied by some Congress leaders from neighbouring West Bengal, where Assembly elections are due this year, Chowdhury visited Dhanipali in Ainthapali police station area and met some Ben-

gali-speaking migrant workers.

They also visited the place where Rana was hacked to death December 24 last year.

During his interaction with the migrant workers, Chowdhury enquired about their well-being and asked them not to worry about their safety in Odisha. Chowdhury said that the people of West Bengal and Odisha have centuries-old cordial relations.

Thousands of workers from West Bengal work in Odisha and vice-versa, he said.

However, now the situation is taking a negative turn in the name of Bangladeshi infiltration. Migrant workers from West Bengal are being subjected to atrocities, violence, and murders. This is not acceptable to both states, he said.

The Congress leader said that migrant workers move to other states seeking livelihood and their intention should not be suspected.

Please do not consider all Bengali-speaking people as Bangladeshi, he added.

Newlywed woman found hanging, kin allege dowry killing

Umerkote: A 25-year-old newly married woman was found hanging at her in-laws' house in Nabarangpur district Sunday morning, with her family alleging that she was killed over dowry. The deceased, Sanjana Mistry, was married to Anupam Chand of the DNK area under Umerkote police limits. Police recovered her body early Sunday. While her in-laws claimed she died by suicide, Sanjana's father, Prabhas Kumar Mistry, lodged a complaint accusing her husband and in-laws of murder for dowry. According to the complaint, Sanjana married Anupam July 15, 2024, as per Bengali customs. She hailed from Chhatabeda village near Raighar and was employed as a schoolteacher. Prabhas alleged that within days of their marriage, Sanjana was subjected to mental harassment over a demand for a car. He further claimed that Sanjana was threatened with death if the demand was not met. She reportedly called a relative Saturday night saying she was being harassed and asked to be taken back to her parental home. The family members planned to visit her Sunday, but were informed early in the morning that she committed suicide. Police detained Sanjana's husband for questioning and registered a case (2/26) at Umerkote police station. A forensic team from Nabarangpur district examined the scene. The father-in-law denied the allegations, claiming the couple shared a good relationship. Police said further investigation is underway.



CULTURE FEST: Artistes perform traditional Ghudka dance at a procession ahead of the start of Lok Mahotsav-2026 in Sambalpur Sunday. The Lok Mahotsav is jointly organised by Odia Language, Literature and Culture department and Zilla Sanskrutik Parishad of Sambalpur

OP PHOTO

30 injured as minibus, pickup van collide

Digapahandi: As many as 30 passengers were injured, seven of them critically, after a passenger minibus collided head-on with a dry-fish laden pickup van near Jhatipitia village on the Digapahandi-Chikiti main road in Ganjam district Sunday morning. The injured include two children aged four and seven years. The seven critically injured were shifted to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur after administration of first aid at Digapahandi. Sources said that the minibus, carrying about 40 passengers from Digapahandi to Chikiti, collided with the pickup van coming from Chikiti. The impact caused the pickup van to overturn on the road. Fire services personnel and police rushed to the spot, rescued the injured persons and admitted them to the Digapahandi Community Health Centre. After preliminary treatment, they were referred to Berhampur for advanced care.

RTO holds breathalyser tests on 'Ama Bus' drivers

Berhampur: Ganjam transport department jumped into action mode and conducted breathalyser tests on the drivers of 'Ama Bus' service run by CRUT (Capital Region Urban Transport) in Berhampur Sunday. Documents related to the buses were also verified by the authorities, Ganjam RTO Debasis Swain informed. Acting on the orders of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and the State Transport Authority, an enforcement squad, led by Swain along with Junior MVI Tarakanta Nanda and other officials, cracked down on drunken driving through breathalyser tests in Haldiapadar bus terminal near Berhampur. The inspection was conducted in the wake of death of a person in an accident involving 'Ama Bus' at Rupali Square in Bhubaneswar Saturday. RTO Swain further informed that the checking of drunken driving, vehicle fitness and other parameters for all the vehicles including the CRUT buses and drivers shall be intensified in the coming days.

Affected villagers seek 0.01 pc equity at Aditya Alumina meet

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rayagada, Jan 4: Residents displaced for Aditya Alumina Refinery demanded a 0.01 per cent equity stake in the company and compensation at four times the prevailing market rate during a meeting held Saturday at the Rayagada Sub-Collector's conference hall.

The meeting, chaired by Sub-Collector Ramesh Jena, was attended by company officials and villagers from Podapadi, Puhundi, Anthuguda and Kadapadar villages in Kashipur block. The affected residents presented a charter of demands and sought immediate convening of a Rehabilitation and Periphery Development Advisory Committee (RPDAC) meeting. The key demands included

DP (displaced persons) status for 34 families of Puhundi mouza and for Nuasahi, compensation at four times the land's market value as per the 2013 Industrial Policy to original landowners, and permanent jobs for local youth, which is 90 per cent in unskilled categories and 75 per cent in skilled categories.

They also sought allocation of 30 per cent of company work to local contractors, assignment of transportation work to DP and PAP (Project Affected Persons) beneficiaries, establishment of an engineering college for higher education, and a 100-bed medical facility to provide quality health care in the area.

Residents also demanded that Kadampada village be granted full DP status, citing the min-



ing road and mining belt that pass through the village. They further called for the inclusion of local residents Akhil Jhodia, Gangadhar Raj, Rabi Majhi and Lalita Naik as members of the RPDAC committee, and demanded the appointment of an Odia CEO in the company.

To ensure the economic security of both the present and future generations, the villagers demanded allocation of a 0.01 per cent equity stake

in the company. It was stated that some local residents have already been provided employment and company authorities have been directed to continue offering jobs in the coming days.

The Sub-Collector said all necessary assistance would be provided to displaced families. Officials from Aditya Alumina, including HR Head Deepak Mohanty and CSR and R&R Head Tanmay Mohanty, attended the meeting.

Sources said that land was acquired in 2006 from the villages of Kansariguda, Podapadi, Puhundi, Anthuguda and Kadapadar villages in Kashipur block of Rayagada district for setting up the Aditya Alumina Refinery of the Aditya Birla Group. Landown-

ers were paid compensation based on the prevailing land value at the time.

At a meeting of the state-level RPDC, November 4, 2014, the then revenue divisional commissioner, the minister for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, and the then Laxmipur MLA directed the Aditya Alumina management to expedite work and make the project operational. However, the refinery remained non-functional until 2023.

Under the state's 2006 and 2013 industrial policies, if a company fails to become operational within five years of land acquisition, the land is to be returned to the original owners and reacquired afresh. Instead of returning the land,

the company began construction work at the site in 2023, residents alleged.

Citing lack of employment, prolonged economic losses and inactivity after giving up their land, local residents opposed the project and demanded compensation in line with current norms. They have also been pressing for another RPDAC meeting. Villagers alleged that both the district administration and company authorities ignored their repeated demands.

In December, landowners staged a sit-in protest in front of the company. During the protest, Sub-Collector Ramesh Chandra Jena had assured them that a meeting would be convened to address their grievances, residents said.

2 men arrested for series of burglaries

Bhajanagar: Police arrested two men in connection with a series of thefts from locked houses in Bhajanagar and recovered stolen property, including foreign currency, gold ornaments and household items worth several lakhs of rupees. The arrested accused have been identified as Ballia Nayak of Baunsalundi village and Gobinda Pradhan of Khurda area. Bhajanagar SDPO Deepak Kumar Mishra said at a press conference Sunday that police recovered jewellery, foreign currency, two LPG cylinders, a television set and other stolen articles, which were later returned to their owners. IIC Jibananda Jena was present during the presser. The case came to light after S Rahul Patra of Satyasai Temple Fourth Lane lodged a complaint. Patra and his family members had gone to their native village after locking their house. On their return December 29, they found the house broken into and valuables stolen. Police registered a case and launched an investigation.

Wild boar killed by bomb bait; 3 held

Bhajanagar: Three poachers were arrested for killing a wild boar using a crude bomb as bait near Kandhasahi on the Belaguntha Road under the Ghumusar North Forest Range in Ganjam district, police said Sunday. The accused were apprehended from the spot and later handed over to the forest department along with the carcass of the wild boar. Forest officials conducted a post-mortem examination on the animal and launched an investigation into the incident. According to preliminary findings, the accused had planted a crude explosive wrapped with meat along the banks of the Loharakhandi river to hunt wild boars. Mistaking the bait for food, a boar consumed it, triggering an explosion that tore apart its mouth and killed it on the spot. Police said the suspects were preparing to butcher the animal when a tip-off prompted officers to conduct a raid. Three persons were arrested in connection with the illegal hunting activity.

Khariar King Jitamitra Prasad Singh Deo passes away

POST NEWS NETWORK

Khariar, Jan 4: Khariar King Dr Jitamitra Prasad Singh Deo, a noted historian, archaeologist and researcher, passed away Sunday in his palace at Khariar town under Nuapada district. He was 80.

Singh Deo complained of chest pain shortly after lunch around 1pm Sunday and died a while later at the royal residence. His wife, Queen Rajashree Devi, was by his side.

Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo expressed his deep condolences on the sad demise of the Khariar King.

Born August 29, 1946 in Khariar, Singh Deo completed

higher education at Ravenshaw College in Cuttack. He was widely respected as a historian and lover of literature. Through extensive research, he brought several historical sites of Nuapada district to public attention.

Singh Deo authored 19 books on history and archaeology, contributing significantly to the documentation and preservation of the region's heritage.

He authored several notable works, including Prehistoric Rock Art of Yogimath, Cultural Profile of South Kosala, History of the Chauhan Dynasty Rule of Patna State (Odisha), Jagannath Culture from Upper Mahanadi to Lower Mahanadi, Ghatghumra Rock Art Copper



Plates, Sarbhauriya Dynasty, Classical Stone Seals of the Panduvamsi Dynasty, The Originity of the Jagannath Deity, Tantric Art of Odisha, Character Assassination in Modern History and Odisha.

In recognition of his extensive research and scholarly con-

tributions, Sambalpur University and Sri Venkateswara Vedic University, Tirupati, conferred honorary doctorates on him. He also served as president of the Khadial Sahitya Samiti.

Following the death of Khariar King Anup Singh Deo, Jitamitra was formally crowned in 2004. He is survived by two sons Crown Prince Devdev Singh Deo, Prince Ambarish Singh Deo and a daughter, Princess Srikala Devi. According to a statement issued by the royal palace, the coronation of Crown Prince Devdev Singh Deo will be held at 10am Monday. The last rites of Jitamitra Singh Deo will be performed afterward at the Nehena ghat riverbank.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The State Environment Impact Assessment Authority(SEIAA), Odisha has awarded Environment Clearance to **M/S. Tolarapasi Road Metal Quarry(Auctioner-Ajit Sahoo)** annual lifting capacity 20,030 CUM, environment clearance for mining exavation located in Mouza-Tolarapasi, Tahasil-Gondia, Dist-Dhenkanal, Odisha. Environment clearance **Identification No-EC25CO108OR53883N, vide File No-546882/425-MINB2/08-2025, dtd. 29.12.2025** are available for reference with SEIAA, Odisha and the **Odisha State Pollution Control Board(OSPCB)** and may also be accessed on the official website of the board and on the Parivesh Portal(www.parivesh.nic.in).



Delhi: Human rabies to be declared notifiable disease



The move comes amid a row over the Supreme Court's order on handling stray dogs after it took cognisance of reports on stray dog attacks on people and rabies-related deaths

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: The Delhi Government is all set to declare Human Rabies as a Notifiable Disease in the national capital under the Epidemic Diseases Act in an effort to strengthen surveillance and ensure timely treatment. “This is an important step toward our goal of zero human deaths from rabies in Delhi,” said Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh. On notification, all government and private health facilities, including medical colleges and individual practitioners, will be required to report suspected, probable, and confirmed cases of human rabies to the concerned health authorities, said an official statement. The move aims to

strengthen disease surveillance, ensure timely reporting of cases, and enable swift public health action to prevent the spread of rabies, it said, adding the government is also further strengthening rabies vaccination facilities for humans as well as dogs and other animals. The Delhi Government is in the process of finalising the State Action Plan for Rabies Elimination (SAPRE) in coordination with local bodies, the Animal Husbandry Department and other stakeholders. The move comes amid a row over the Supreme Court's order on handling stray dogs after it took cognisance of reports on stray dog attacks on people and rabies-related deaths. The apex court in November directed the removal of all

stray dogs from railway stations, schools, hospitals, bus stops and other public areas, and their relocation to “designated shelters” after due sterilisation and vaccination in accordance with the Animal Birth Control Rules. However, dog lovers, experts and activists are opposing it, saying the “unscientific” approach will weaken rabies-control efforts, destabilise urban ecosystems and disproportionately affect low-income and underserved communities. “Declaring rabies as a notifiable disease is a key step toward achieving the goal of zero human deaths due to dog-mediated rabies. The government is also further strengthening Rabies vaccination facilities for humans as well as dogs and other animals,” the official statement said. To ensure accessible treatment across the city, anti-rabies vaccine (ARV) is currently being provided at 59 health facilities across all 11 districts of Delhi, while anti-rabies serum (RIG) is available at 33 designated health facilities and hospitals in the national capital. Mandatory notification will help authorities track disease trends, improve coordination between human and animal health systems, and implement targeted preventive measures in high-risk areas. The proposed notification will come into force immediately after issuance and will remain applicable until further orders. Detailed guidelines for reporting and coordination will be shared with all concerned departments and health institutions.



People carry a boat on a horse cart on a cold winter morning, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

PTI PHOTO

UP govt launches its first Braille library in Lucknow

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Jan 4: The Uttar Pradesh government Sunday launched the state's first Braille library with a collection of more than 4,000 books, an official statement said. Launched at the Dr Shakuntala Mishra National Rehabilitation University (DSMNRU), the initiative is in line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's policy of inclusive education and empowerment for

persons with disabilities. The library has been set up on the first floor of the Swami Vivekananda Central Library on the university campus, and Vice-Chancellor Acharya Sanjay Singh inaugurated the facility as the chief guest, the statement said. Earlier, he paid floral tributes to the statue of Louis Braille, the pioneer of the Braille script, at the university premises on the occasion of his birth anniversary. Addressing the gathering,

Singh urged students with visual impairment to become self-reliant and directed the university administration to provide them with modern computer training. He said the Braille script is a powerful medium of education for persons with visual impairment, helping them connect with the mainstream of society. According to the statement, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Backwards Classes Welfare and Divyangjan Em-

powerment Narendra Kashyap said the library houses more than 4,000 National Education Policy (NEP)-based academic books published by the university's Braille press, covering 54 undergraduate and postgraduate courses. He further said this is the first university in the state to develop a well-organised Braille library section with such a large collection. A reading room with seating capacity for more than 150 students has also been set up, he added.

Cold conditions intensify across UP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Jan 4: Cold conditions intensified across Uttar Pradesh over the past 24 hours following a sharp fall of 3-6 degrees Celsius in minimum temperatures, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said Sunday. The significant drop in night temperatures has been attributed to the passage of an active western disturbance affecting western India, after which cold and dry north-westerly winds from hill regions swept across the state. As a result, minimum temperatures in the central parts of Uttar Pradesh fell by 3-6 degrees Celsius, leading to a marked increase in cold conditions. The IMD said minimum temperatures may fall slightly further in other parts of the state during the next 24-48 hours, after which the decline is expected to halt and a gradual rise may begin under the influence of the next western disturbance. Daytime conditions also remained harsh in several areas due to strong cold winds blowing at speeds of 15-20 kmph, persistent fog and lack of clear skies, leading to cold day con-

ditions at isolated places. Dense to very dense fog is likely at a few places over eastern Uttar Pradesh, while dense fog is expected at isolated locations in western parts of the state. Temperatures are expected to remain below normal for the next few days due to fog and cold winds. The IMD noted that the fall in minimum temperatures was most pronounced over central Uttar Pradesh, where the dissipation of an elevated layer of fog on Saturday afternoon led to enhanced radiational cooling. In Lucknow, the minimum temperature settled at 6.0 degrees Celsius, 1.8 degrees below normal, while the maximum temperature was recorded at 16.9 degrees Celsius, 3.2 degrees below normal. Relative humidity ranged between 55 and 91 per cent, and no rainfall was recorded. According to the forecast, Lucknow and adjoining areas are likely to witness moderate fog during late night and morning hours, with mainly clear skies later in the day. The maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to hover around 17 and 8 degrees Celsius, respectively.

STRAY DOGS ISSUE

Protest at Jantar Mantar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: Dog lovers, experts and activists gathered for a demonstration at the Jantar Mantar here over the Supreme Court's recent order to remove street dogs from public spaces, demanding an evidence-based, lawful and humane policy on stray dogs. Ahead of the apex court's next hearing on the matter January 7, the protesters, gathered under the banner 'Do or Die', called for an immediate stay on the mass removal and confinement orders of community dogs. The demonstrators held placards saying 'Pollution hatao, pashu nahi', 'Jeev nahi toh jeevan nahi, and 'Stop the massacre, every life matters'. Simultaneously demonstrations took place in over 50 cities across the country, including in Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Trivandrum, the statement read. On November 7, 2025, the Supreme Court ordered to remove all stray dogs from



railway stations, schools, hospitals, bus stops and other public areas, and relocate them to a “designated shelter” after due sterilisation and vaccination in accordance with the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules. The protesters, in a statement, asserted that public-health experts, veterinarians and scientists have expressed concern over the unscientific approach to mass removal and confinement of stray dogs. These actions will weaken rabies-control efforts, destabilise urban ecosystems, and disproportionately affect low-income and underserved communities, they said. The mobilisation follows weeks of misinformation and

alarmist media reporting that influenced public narrative and policy response before verified facts were examined, the statement read. According to experts, Animal Birth Control with Anti-Rabies Vaccination (ABC-ARV/CNVR) has never been implemented at the scale required for epidemiological impact in most states. Affidavits submitted by state governments show coverage levels far below global benchmarks. Characterising this as “failure of ABC” is therefore misleading; what has failed is implementation, not the policy or the science behind it, the experts said in the statement. Meanwhile, over 2,000 citizens from across India, including prominent figures such as Mira Nair, Swara Bhaskar, Mark Tully, and Dadi Padamjee, signed an open letter along with doctors, public-health experts, veterinarians, scientists, animal-behaviour specialists, environmentalists, journalists and caregivers, flagging urgent concerns about the proposed mega-shelter model, it read.

NGOs intensify rescue drives for the homeless



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: From late-night rescue drives and distribution of sleeping bags to the homeless, to medical care for elderly people enduring joint ache, NGOs in Delhi have stepped up coordinated efforts to protect vulnerable residents as severe cold conditions persist in the capital. Several Delhi-based NGOs are working round-the-clock to rescue people sleeping in the open, coordinating with government rescue vans and arranging shelter, warm clothing and medical support for the vulnerable population. According to Centre for Holistic Development (CHD), one such organisation, more than 2,000 homeless persons have been rescued so far this winter. “We have rescued over 2,000 people, distributed sleeping bags and coordinated closely with government vans to bring people to safer locations. We are also strengthening the infrastructure of existing shelters and identifying abandoned buildings where people can be temporarily housed,” said Sunil Kumar Adelia, Executive Director, CHD. Apart from rescue and shelter, NGOs have also expanded health-related interventions, particularly for the elderly who suffer increased joint pain and mobility issues during winter. Delhi-based NGO Sewa Bhawan said it is providing physiotherapy support and

medicines to senior citizens living on the streets and in temporary shelters. Another Delhi-based NGO Wishes and Blessings, has launched its annual winter relief initiative, ‘6 Weeks of Warmth’, aimed at providing sustained assistance to vulnerable groups across the city. The programme, which began December 15, focuses on homeless individuals, daily wage workers, elderly persons and families living in unsafe conditions, it said. Under the initiative, volunteers are distributing blankets, shawls, sweaters, caps, socks and other winter essentials at multiple locations in Delhi, particularly during night hours when temperatures drop sharply. Other organisations have also increased outreach in vulnerable areas such as footpaths, flyovers and construction sites. Delhi-based Raahgiri Foundation said it has intensified night patrols to identify people sleeping in the open and persuade them to move to shelters. The capital Sunday recorded a minimum temperature of 7.4 degrees Celsius, 0.5 notches above the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). A cold wave is expected to affect isolated places in the city till January 6, it said. A cold wave is declared when the minimum temperature drops by 4.5 degrees Celsius to 6.5 degrees Celsius below the average temperature.

MAGH MELA

Pilgrims gather at Sangam for holy dip in icy Ganga

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Prayagraj (UP), Jan 4: Braving the bitter cold, devotees thronged the Sangam Sunday for a holy dip in the Ganga during the ongoing Magh Mela. Amid rows of tents, fluttering saffron pennants, and devotional music emanating from loudspeakers, devotees streamed into the Mela ground. Some arrived on two-wheelers, taking their vehicles up to the waterfront before they descended into the river for a dip. Others arrived from far and wide, lugging their bags with one hand while they clutched their children with the other. The Akshayvat Marg on the Mela premises, one of the major thoroughfares leading to the holy river, saw a steady stream of pilgrims. Ashutosh Varshney, who had set up his camp near the Sangam, said there has been a rush of devotees since early morning. While the devotees took a dip in frigid Ganga waters and



offered prayer, security personnel and divers kept a close watch. Safety announcements constantly emanated from the public address system. ‘Kalpavasi’ also took the ritual dips Sunday. During the month-long ‘kalpavas’, devotees bathe in the Ganga twice

daily and eat one meal a day, spending their time in meditation and worship of their chosen deity. ‘Kalpavas’, believed to absolve people of their sins, began on ‘Paush Purnima’ (Saturday). Acharya Rajendra Mishra, president of the Triveni San-

gam Aarti Seva Samiti, said approximately 5 lakh devotees are observing ‘kalpavas’. Chanting hymns and carrying their belongings in small bundles, pilgrims walked towards the Sangam for the holy dip, while others were seen performing ritual worship in the

tents where they were put up. Additional District Magistrate (Magh Mela) Dayanand Prasad said for the first time, a separate township has been established for the pilgrims and ‘kalpavasis’ in the Magh Mela area. This township, spread over 950 bighas, has been named Prayagwal, and is located opposite the Nagvasuki Temple. Ten bathing ghats have been constructed over an area of 10,000 square feet at the Magh Mela, and nine pontoon bridges have been built, the official added. The Magh Mela began at the Sangam on Saturday with lakhs of devotees converging on the riverbanks in the early hours to take a holy dip on the occasion of ‘Paush Purnima’. Besides ‘Paush Purnima’, the auspicious bathing occasions include Makar Sankranti (January 14), Mauni Amavasya (January 18), Basant Panchami (January 23), Maghi Purnima (February 1) and Mahashivratri (February 15).

WINTER IN DELHI

of the day

quote

Our government lodged a strong protest with North Korea and strongly condemned it

SHINJIRO KOIZUMI | DEFENSE MINISTER, JAPAN

This action shows our UK leadership, and determination to stand shoulder to shoulder with our allies, to stamp out any resurgence of IS and its violent ideologies in the Middle East

JOHN HEALEY | DEFENSE SECRETARY, UK

I'm not thrilled with Putin. He's killing too many people

DONALD TRUMP | PRESIDENT, USA

SHORT TAKES

Britain, France strike Syria ISIS arms bunker

Damascus: British and French warplanes carried out an airstrike in central Syria on an underground facility where members of the Islamic State group are suspected to have stored weapons and explosives, the British defence ministry said Sunday. The strikes occurred Saturday evening on the structure in the mountains just north of the historic town of Palmyra in the country's Homs province, the ministry's statement said. Britain and France are part of the US-led coalition that has been fighting IS militants for more than a decade. The ministry said the British military used Typhoon FGR4 fighter jets supported by a Voyager refuelling tanker and were joined by French aircraft in the joint strike. The British air force used Paveway IV guided bombs to target a number of access tunnels down to the facility, the statement said, adding that while a detailed assessment is now underway, initial indications are "that the target was engaged successfully."

Italy's airport chaos strands thousands

Milan: The Italian airport of Bergamo Orio-al-Serio, a Ryanair hub for flights to Milan, halted flights Saturday evening due to technical issues with the landing guidance system and poor visibility, leaving thousands stranded overnight. SACBO, the company that operates the airport, said in a statement the technical problem was solved around midnight, but a warning on the airport's website said "flights may be delayed or cancelled". The incident led to the cancellation of 26 departing flights with 6 diverted to other airports and 7 rescheduled for Sunday, local media said. Thousands spent the night at the airport, with images showing people sleeping on the floor and baggage check-in belts.

Boat capsize kills 25; 14 missing

Maiduguri: At least 25 people have died and 14 others remain missing after a boat carrying dozens of passengers capsized in Yobe State, northeastern Nigeria, officials said Sunday. The accident occurred just before 8 p.m. local time (1900 GMT) Saturday when the large canoe, which had departed Adiyani village in northwestern Jigawa State, overturned en route to Garbi in Yobe State. The vessel was carrying 52 passengers, according to Mohammed Goje, head of the Yobe State Emergency Management Agency. "It was a market day, and the victims were returning home after trading. If the driver survives, he will be prosecuted for negligence," said Lawan Adam, the state police spokesperson.

MADURO OPERATION

While many Western nations oppose Maduro and say he stole the 2024 election, there were many calls for the US to respect international law and resolve the crisis diplomatically

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Caracas (Venezuela), Jan 4: A tense calm hangs over Venezuela after the US military operation that deposed President Nicolas Maduro, who was brought to New York to face criminal charges. President Donald Trump said the US would "run" the South American country and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other nations. Maduro and his wife landed late Saturday afternoon at a small airport in New York. The couple face US charges of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy. Legal experts raised questions about the lawfulness of the operation, which was done without congressional approval. The image of the 63-year-old Maduro blindfolded and handcuffed en route to the US has stunned Venezuelans and was Washington's most controversial intervention in Latin America since the invasion of Panama 37 years ago. Maduro, who wished his captors a "Happy New Year" on arrival, is due to appear in a Manhattan court Monday.

'THERE IS FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY'

At home, his allies were still in charge and have denounced



- US plucks Maduro from Caracas in extraordinary raid
- Trump says US to control Venezuela until transition
- Maduro allies say he has been kidnapped, demand his release
- 'Happy New Year,' says detained Maduro in New York
- Venezuelans fret over future as Maduro loyalists stay in charge

their leader's "kidnapping" as part of an imperialist oil grab. Streets were far quieter than usual Sunday as Venezuelans anxiously discussed what would come next. Some stocked up on essentials but many simply hunkered indoors. "I've just taken the dog out and it feels like an abandoned city, people are shut inside," said Alejandra Palencia, 35, a psychologist in the city of Maracay. "There is fear and uncertainty." With memories of painful US interventions in Iraq,

Afghanistan and elsewhere, many world leaders were staggered at Trump's move, even though Maduro's standing was low given his autocratic rule and substantial evidence of vote-rigging. Trump said the US would for now manage the South American nation of about 30 million people plus its oil reserves, the largest in the world. But he gave few details of how. "We will run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," he told a press conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort, hailing the extraordinary extraction of Maduro just as he was at the door of a safe room. To the disappointment of Venezuela's opposition and diaspora, Trump has given short shrift to the idea of 58-year-old opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado taking over, saying she lacked support. Machado was banned from standing in Venezuela's 2024 election and has said her ally Edmundo Gonzalez, 76, who

overwhelmingly won that vote according to the opposition and some international observers,

should now take the presidency. Once one of the most prosperous nations in Latin America, Venezuela's economy nosedived further under Maduro, sending about one in five Venezuelans abroad in one of the world's biggest exoduses.

'ONLY ONE PRESIDENT: MADURO', SAYS INTERIM PRESIDENT

Trump says Maduro masterminded the flow of drugs into the US and was illegitimately in power due to vote-rigging. He denies those claims. "There is only one president in Venezuela, and his name is Nicolas Maduro," said Delcy Rodriguez, who took over Venezuela's interim presidency, in a defiant message to the U.S. despite Trump's assertions she was open to working with them. "We will never again be a colony of any empire."

Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, who is close to the military, urged Venezuelans to stand firm and emphasized Trump's repeated comments about sharing in oil prosperity. "We are outraged because in the end everything was revealed — it was revealed that they only want our oil," Cabello said in audio shared by the ruling Socialist Party. US Special Forces swooped in on helicopters to seize Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, under darkness in the early hours of Saturday after strikes on military installations in Caracas and elsewhere. There were also questions over the legality of seizing a foreign head of state. Democrats said they were misled at recent Congress briefings and demanded a plan for what is to follow.



LONG RECORD OF US-LED REGIME CHANGES AND THEIR FALLOUT

The United States is not new to the practice of interfering in the domestic politics of independent and sovereign nations. Washington has been responsible for the forced removal of roughly 35 foreign leaders over the past 120 years—nearly a third of all such interventions globally in that period. Around one-third of all forced regime changes worldwide are followed by civil war within a decade. For a president who has consistently contrasted himself with the Republican “neoconservatives” of the late 20th century, Donald Trump's foreign policy has developed striking similarities with that of his predecessors. In 1983, under former President Ronald Reagan, the US invaded Grenada, claiming that the government at that time was illegitimate, a claim Trump has also made with respect to Maduro. In 1989, former President George HW Bush invaded Panama to depose dictator Manuel Noriega who, like Maduro, was wanted on US drug-trafficking charges. In that case, the US installed Noriega's replacement. In Guatemala alone, Washington helped oust three leaders in a single year, triggering decades of instability and violence. In Iraq, US troops toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003 with similar speed. Washington promised a democratic transformation, but a prolonged insurgency, sectarian civil war, regional destabilisation, and the rise of the so-called Islamic State-outcomes that continue to shape the Middle East today. In late 2001, US-backed forces swept into Kabul, ending the Taliban's rule in a matter of weeks. A new Afghan leader, Hamid Karzai, was installed with American backing. President George W Bush spoke confidently of democracy taking root in Central Asia. Two decades later, the Taliban returned to power almost as swiftly as they had been removed.



Gunmen kill over 30 in Nigeria

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Minna, Jan 4: At least 30 villagers have been killed while several others were abducted by gunmen who raided a village in northern Nigeria's Niger state, police said Sunday, the latest in a cycle of deadly violence in the conflict-hit region.



The gunmen stormed the Kasuwan-Daji village in Niger state's Borgu local government area Saturday evening and opened fire on residents. They also razed down the local market and several houses, Niger state police spokesman Wasiu Abiodun said in a statement.

At least two residents put the death toll at 37 and said it could be much higher, as some people remained missing as of Sunday. Residents also said security forces are yet to arrive in the area, contradicting the police's claim that they have deployed officers to search for those kidnapped. Such attacks are common in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, where dozens of rogue gangs seeking control often target remote communities with limited security and government presence. Saturday's attack in Kasuwan-Daji village happened near the Papiri community, where more than 300 schoolchildren and their teachers were kidnapped from a Catholic school in November. The attackers who raided Kasuwan-Daji arrived from the National Park Forest along Kabe district, according to the police, pointing to a usual trend where abandoned expansive forest reserves act as hideouts for armed gangs.

SK prez's China visit irks NK

North Korea launches ballistic missiles toward sea

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seoul, Jan 4: North Korea launched multiple ballistic missiles toward its eastern waters Sunday, its neighbours said, just hours before South Korea's president left for China for talks expected to cover North Korea's nuclear program. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it detected several ballistic missile launches from North Korea's capital region around 7:50 am. It said the missiles flew about 900 kilometres (560 miles) and that South Korea and US authorities were analysing details of the launches. South Korea's Defence Ministry noted the launches violated UN Security Council resolutions that ban any ballistic activities by North Korea. It urged North Korea to cease



provocative actions immediately and respond to South Korea's push to restart talks and restore peace on the Korean Peninsula. Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi said that at least two missile launches by North Korea have been confirmed. "They are a serious problem, threatening the peace and security of our nation, the region and the world," Koizumi told reporters. The launches were the latest weapons demonstration by North Korea in recent weeks.

Economic collapse intensifies pressure on Iran's rulers

FRESH PROTESTS NOW SHAKING IRAN AS TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH OVER ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dubai, Jan 4: Widening protests in Iran sparked by the Islamic Republic's ailing economy are putting new pressure on its theocracy. Tehran is still reeling from a 12-day war launched by Israel in June that saw the United States bomb nuclear sites in Iran. Economic pressure, intensified in September by the return of United Nations sanctions on the country over its atomic programme, has put Iran's rial currency into a free fall, now trading at some 1.4 million to \$1. Meanwhile, Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" — a coalition of countries and militant groups backed by Tehran — has been decimated in the years since the start of the

Israel-Hamas war in 2023. A new threat by US President Donald Trump warning Iran that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," the US "will come to their rescue" has taken on new meaning after American troops captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, a longtime ally of Tehran.

How widespread the protests are

Demonstrations have reached over 170 locations in 25 of Iran's 31 provinces, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported early Sunday. The death toll had reached at least 15 killed, it added, with more than 580 arrests. The group, which relies on an activist network inside of Iran for its reporting, has been accurate in past unrest.



Understanding the scale of the protests has been difficult. Iranian state media has provided little information about the demonstrations. Online videos offer only brief, shaky glimpses of people in the streets or the

sound of gunfire. Journalists in general in Iran also face limits on reporting such as requiring permission to travel around the country, as well as the threat of harassment or arrest by authorities. But the protests do not ap-

pear to be stopping, even after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Saturday said "rioters must be put in their place."

Why the demonstrations started

The collapse of the rial has led to a widening economic crisis in Iran. Prices are up on meat, rice and other staples of the Iranian dinner table. The nation has been struggling with an annual inflation rate of some 40 per cent. In December, Iran introduced a new pricing tier for its nationally subsidised gasoline, raising the price of some of the world's cheapest gas and further pressuring the population. Tehran may seek steeper price increases in the future, as the government now will review prices every three months.

B'desh nabs three in connection with death of Hindu businessman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Jan 4: Three persons were arrested Sunday in the case of hacking and burning to death a Hindu businessman in Shariatpur district of Bangladesh, local media reports said. Khokon Chandra Das, 50, was assaulted near Kaurbhanga Bazar in Damudya in Shariatpur district, about 100 kilometres south of Dhaka, Wednesday night. He died Saturday. Prothom Alo newspaper said a team of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) arrested the three accused Sunday morning from Kishoreganj, about 100 kilometres northeast of Dhaka. The arrested were identified as Damudyar Sohag Khan, 27, Rabbi Molya, 21, and Palash Sardar, 25. RAB Madaripur Camp Company Commander Superintendent of Police Mir Monir Hossain told Prothom Alo that the accused were being brought to Madaripur camp from Kishoreganj. Madaripur is about 20-odd kilometres away from Shariatpur. Das, who ran a medicine shop and mobile banking business, was travelling in an autorickshaw when the attackers intercepted the vehicle and allegedly beat him up, hacked him with sharp weapons and then poured petrol on his head before setting him on fire, media reports had said Thursday. In a bid to save himself, Das jumped into a roadside pond as locals raised an alarm. The attackers fled the scene, police said, adding that he was rescued by locals, taken to Shariatpur Sadar Hospital, and then referred to Dhaka due to the severity of his injuries. Das' was the fifth death of a person from Hindu community since December and radical groups in Bangladesh are visibly trying to intimidate the minority faiths, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council spokesman Kajol Debnath said after his death Saturday.

business

of the day quote

In the top-end EV, the price sensitivity is a bit lower compared to what you see in the entry segment. The degrowth in the luxury EV is more driven from entry level

SANTOSH IYER | MD AND CEO, MERCEDES-BENZ

Market's focus is set to shift toward the Q3 earnings season, with traders likely to build positions selectively ahead of results from key index heavyweights. Domestically, Services and Composite PMI data will provide further insights into business momentum and employment trends

PONMUDI R | CEO, ENRICH MONEY

If India is to become a developed economy by 2047, infrastructure has a lot of role to play, and I think the government is seized of this. I am hopeful that they will allocate adequate resources in the budget to be able to do that

R SHANKAR RAMAN | CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, LARSEN AND TOUBRO

SHORT TAKES

Mcap of 7 of top-10 firms rises ₹1.23L-cr

New Delhi: The combined market capitalisation of seven of the top-10 most-valued firms surged ₹1,23,724.19 crore last week, in line with an optimistic trend in equities, with Reliance Industries stealing the limelight with the biggest jump in its valuation. Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 720.56 points, or 0.84 per cent. From the top-10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, and Bajaj Finance faced erosion from their valuation. The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped ₹45,266.12 crore to ₹21,54,978.60 crore. State Bank of India added ₹30,414.89 crore, taking its valuation to ₹9,22,461.77 crore. Larsen & Toubro's valuation surged ₹16,204.34 crore to ₹5,72,640.56 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever climbed ₹14,626.21 crore to ₹5,51,637.04 crore. Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued firm followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, TCS, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, and Hindustan Unilever.

Coal import rises in Nov, likely to drop

New Delhi: India's coal imports, which jumped 28.1 per cent in November, is expected to see a decline in the coming months on account of increased availability of domestic resources. Imports in November rose to 25.07 million tonne (MT) as against 19.57 MT imported in November 2024, according to data compiled by mjunction services ltd, a B2B e-commerce platform and joint venture of SAIL and Tata Steel. Of the total imports in November 2025, non-coking coal import stood at 14.28 MT, higher than 12.32 MT imported in November last fiscal year. Coking coal import stood at 6.51 MT, compared to 4.25 MT recorded for the same month last financial year. Coal import in the April-November period of the ongoing financial year also increased to 186.16 MT, over 182.02 MT in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. In 2024-25, CIL produced 781.1 MT coal, nearly 7 per cent below the company's target for the financial year. CIL's coal production target for FY25 was 838 MT.



India faces negligible impact, as trade with Venezuela has collapsed under sanctions, with crude imports down 81.3 per cent in FY2025 and overall bilateral trade remaining marginal

AJAY SRIVASTAVA | FOUNDER, GTRI

ONGC BEGINS CCS PILOT

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) plans to store captured carbon dioxide in depleted wells at Gujarat's Gandhar oilfield, marking the company's first full-scale Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) pilot and a major step in its decarbonisation strategy. The pilot will use two abandoned onshore wells to inject around 100 tonnes of CO2 per day into subsurface hydrocarbon reservoirs, officials said



Venezuela oil reset may aid India

US control of Venezuelan oil may unlock \$1bn stuck dues for India, lift output

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: A US-led takeover or restructuring of Venezuela's oil sector could deliver a direct benefit to India, potentially unlocking close to \$1 billion in long-pending dues while accelerating the revival of crude production from fields it operates in the sanctions-hit Latin American nation, analysts and industry sources said.

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping US sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020.

Its flagship overseas producer, ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL), jointly operates the San Cristobal oilfield in eastern Venezuela, but output has been severely curtailed as US restrictions blocked access to critical technology, equipment, and services - leaving commercially viable reserves effectively stranded.

Venezuela has failed to pay OVL \$536 million in dividends due on its 40 per cent stake in the field up to 2014, and a near-equivalent amount for the subsequent period for which Caracas has refused to permit audits, effectively freezing settlement of the claims.

Sanctions could be eased after a dramatic US operation removed President Nicolas Maduro and placed the country's vast



Venezuela is known to have the world's largest proven crude oil reserves of approximately 303 billion barrels. That accounts for roughly 17% of all global oil reserves

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping US sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020

oil reserves under American oversight, analysts and energy executives said.

Once sanctions are eased, OVL can move rigs and other equipment from places, such as its parent ONGC's oil fields in Gujarat, to San Cristobal to revive output that has plummeted to 5,000-10,000 barrels per day, officials in the know of the matter said.

The onshore field can produce 80,000-1,00,000 bpd with more wells and better equipment, they said, adding that San Cristobal needs rigs similar to those operating in Gujarat, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) owns many such rigs.

US control of the Venezuelan

oil sector also means exports to the world would start soon, and OVL can recoup its past \$1 billion dues from San Cristobal from such revenues, they said.

In fact, OVL had sought a 'specific licence' sanctions waiver, similar to one Office of the Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) had granted to Chevron to operate the oilfield and export oil from it. OVL and other Indian firms can also take more fields in Venezuela and revive production from the Carabobo-1 Area - another Venezuelan heavy oilfield with Indian interest. OVL holds 11 per cent interest in Carabobo-1, while Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL)

hold 3.5 per cent stake each.

Venezuelan national oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PdVSA) is the majority stakeholder in both San Cristobal and Carabobo-1.

Post the US action, PdVSA may undergo restructuring, analysts said. In the worst-case scenario, its stake can be taken over by a US company or any new entity that Washington may erect.

OVL and other international companies - Repsol of Spain has 11 per cent stake in Carabobo-1 - are most certainly likely to continue in the projects with their holdings, analysts said.

US President Donald Trump has already stated that, as part of the takeover, major US oil companies would return to Venezuela, which has the world's largest oil reserves, and refurbish badly degraded oil infrastructure.

Analysts said the US cannot replace all the international companies and will need firms

GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTY

Gold, silver brace for swings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 4: Gold and silver prices are likely to witness sharp swings next week as traders weigh key economic data and brace for heightened geopolitical uncertainty after US forces captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, analysts said.

Investors will focus on key US data points, including ISM Manufacturing, December ADP employment numbers, and the unemployment rate, along with comments from a slew of Federal Reserve officials that could provide cues on the central bank's monetary policy outlook and near-term direction for bullion prices, they added.

"Gold prices are likely to remain volatile in the week ahead as there are bullish as well as bearish factors at play,"



Gold prices are likely to remain volatile in the week ahead as there are bullish as well as bearish factors at play

PRATHAMESH MALLYA | CVP - RESEARCH, NON - AGRI COMMODITIES AND CURRENCIES, ANGEL ONE

Prathamesh Mallya, DVP - Research, Non - Agri Commodities and Currencies, Angel One, said.

According to experts, commodities markets are expected to see aggressive trading Monday, reflecting volatile geopolitics after the US captured Ven-

If sanctions are eased - as seen in past geopolitical episodes, such as Panama in 1990, when aid and trade restrictions were lifted shortly after the removal of General Manuel Noriega - trade flows can resume rapidly. Under such circumstances, Venezuelan barrels could again return to Indian refineries

NIKHIL DUBEY | SENIOR RESEARCH ANALYST, KPRL

like OVL not just for their expertise but also for the market they bring in.

India will be a key buyer of Venezuelan crude once the Latin American country is able to restore its lost glory with help from the US and other companies.

Before 2019, Venezuela exported 707 million barrels of crude oil a year, with the US absorbing about 32 per cent and China and India 35 per cent. By 2025, exports have declined to 352 million barrels a year, with China taking 45 per cent and unknown others 31 per cent.

With its own oil and gas production and Venezuelan output, the US will no longer be dependent on any other part of the world for its energy needs. Its dependence on China, however, continues for non-energy items, but Trump is trying to cut even that through his tariffs and encouraging local production, he said. For India, the world's third-largest oil importer, renewed Venezuelan exports would offer a strategic alternative to Middle Eastern crude, reduce exposure to geopolitical shocks, and strengthen its hand in price negotiations.

ezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife in a military operation Saturday, accusing them of drug trafficking.

After hitting record highs in late December, gold prices retreated in the past week. On the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), the yellow metal futures slumped by ₹4,112, or 2.94 per cent.

The metal had surged to hit a record high of ₹1,40,444 per 10 grams before slipping more than 3 per cent to settle at ₹1,35,761 per 10 grams Friday. Silver prices, too, mirrored the precious metal's volatility. On the MCX, the white metal depreciated by ₹3,471, or 1.45 per cent, during the week.

After touching a record of ₹2,54,174 per kilogram, silver prices tumbled by ₹17,858, or 7.02 per cent, to finish at ₹2,36,316 per kg Friday.

OPEC+ keeps output steady amid turmoil among members

REUTERS

Dubai, Jan 4: OPEC+ kept oil output unchanged Sunday after avoiding discussions of the multiple political crises affecting the producer group's members, from the Middle East as well as Russia, Iran and Venezuela.

Sunday's meeting of eight members of OPEC+, which pumps about half the world's oil, came after oil prices fell more than 18% in 2025 — their steepest yearly drop since 2020 — amid growing oversupply concerns.

Tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE flared last month over a decade-long conflict in Yemen, when a UAE-aligned group seized territory from the Saudi-backed government. The crisis triggered the biggest split in decades between the former close allies.

And Saturday, the United States captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, and US President Donald Trump said Washington would take control of the country until a transition to a new administration becomes possible, without saying how this would be achieved.

"Right now, oil markets are being driven less by supply-demand fundamentals and more by political uncertainty," said Jorge Leon, head of geopolitical analysis at Rystad Energy and a former OPEC official. "And OPEC+ is clearly prioritising stability over action."

The eight OPEC+ members - Saudi Arabia, Russia, the UAE, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Iraq, Algeria and Oman - raised oil output targets by around 2.9 million barrels per day in 2025, equal to almost 3% of world oil demand to regain market share.

The eight members agreed in November to pause output hikes for January, February and March due to relatively low demand in the northern hemisphere winter. Sunday's brief online meeting affirmed that policy and did not discuss Venezuela, one OPEC+ delegate said.

The eight countries will next meet February 1, OPEC+ said.

OPEC has in the past managed to overcome many internal rifts, such as over the Iran-Iraq War, by prioritising market management over political disputes. Yet the group is facing other crises, with Russian oil exports falling due to US sanctions over its war in Ukraine, and Iran facing protests and US threats of intervention. Denmark's Orsted said Friday it was challenging the US government's suspension of the lease for its Revolution Wind joint venture.

Analysts said it is unlikely to see any meaningful boost to crude output for years, even if US oil majors do invest the billions of dollars in the country that Trump promised.

Musk's Grok AI floods X with sexualized photos of women, minors

AI-powered programs that digitally undress women - sometimes called "nudifiers" - have been around for years, but until now they were largely confined to the darker corners of the internet, such as niche websites or Telegram channels, and typically required a certain level of effort or payment

REUTERS

Washington, Jan 4: Julie Yukari, a musician based in Rio de Janeiro, posted a photo taken by her fiancé to the social media site X just before midnight on New Year's Eve showing her in a red dress snuggling in bed with her black cat, Nori.

The next day, somewhere among the hundreds of likes attached to the picture, she saw notifications that users were asking Grok, X's built-in artificial intelligence chatbot, to digitally strip her down to a bikini.

The 31-year-old did not think much of it, she told Reuters, figuring there was no way the bot would comply with such requests.

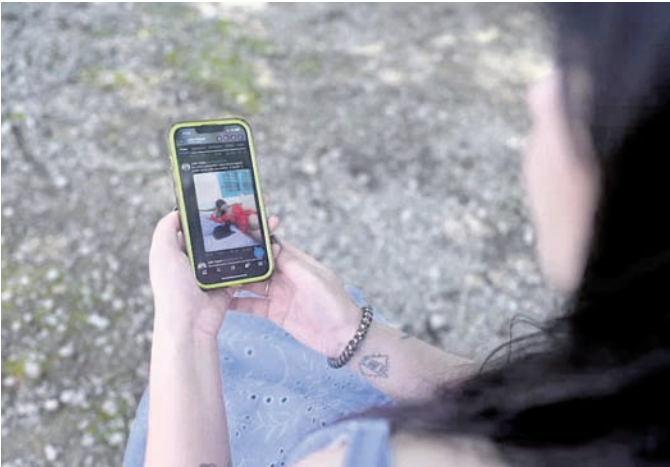
She was wrong. Soon, Grok-generated pictures of her, nearly naked, were circulating across the Elon Musk-owned platform. "I was naive," Yukari said.

Yukari's experience is being repeated across X, a Reuters analysis has found. Reuters has also identified several cases where Grok created sexualized images of children.

The flood of nearly nude images of real people has rung alarm bells internationally.

Ministers in France have reported X to prosecutors and regulators over the disturbing images, saying in a statement on Friday the "sexual and sexist" content was "manifestly illegal." India's IT ministry said in a letter to X's local unit that the platform failed to prevent Grok's misuse by generating and circulating obscene and sexually explicit content.

Grok's mass digital undressing spree appears to have kicked off over the past couple of days, according to successfully completed clothes-removal requests posted by Grok and complaints from female users reviewed by Reuters. Musk appeared to poke fun at the



controversy earlier on Friday, posting laugh-cry emojis in response to AI edits of famous people - including himself - in bikinis.

When one X user said their social media feed resembled a bar packed with bikini-clad women, Musk replied, in part, with another laugh-cry emoji.

A review of public requests

Musk warns Grok misuse consequences

Microblogging site X owner Elon Musk Saturday said people using the platform's AI services Grok to make illegal content will face the same consequences as those uploading illegal content. The statement from Musk comes a day after Ministry of Electronics and IT directed X to immediately remove all vulgar, obscene and unlawful content, especially generated by AI app Grok, or face action under the law. "Anyone using Grok to make illegal content will suffer the same consequences as if they upload illegal content," Musk said on X in response to a post on "inappropriate images". The post said, "Some people are saying Grok is creating inappropriate images. But that's like blaming a pen for writing something bad. A pen doesn't decide what gets written. The person holding it does. Grok works the same way. What you get depends a lot on what you put in. Think about it." Meity has directed X to take action against offending content, users and accounts.

in one case - a monkey was targeted in the requests.

Experts who have followed the development of X's policies around AI-generated explicit content told Reuters that the company had ignored warnings from civil society and child safety groups - including a letter sent last year, opens new tab warning that xAI was only one small step away from unleashing "a torrent of obviously nonconsensual deepfakes."

Dani Pinter, the chief legal officer and director of the Law Center for the National Center on Sexual Exploitation, said X failed to pull abusive images from its AI training material and should have banned users requesting illegal content.

"This was an entirely predictable and avoidable atrocity," Pinter said.

T20 WORLD CUP

B'desh snubs India over security

Day after Rahman's release from IPL, BCB wants T20 World Cup games to be shifted out of India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Jan 4: The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Sunday decided against sending its national team to India for the T20 World Cup next month citing security concerns and government advice, following IPL franchise KKR's decision to release pacer Mustafizur Rahman on BCCI's instruction.

Although the BCCI did not explicitly cite the current relations between the two countries for its decision to seek Rahman's release Saturday, it did say that the move was triggered by what's been happening all around.

Rahman's dramatic ouster from the IPL prompted the BCB to call an emergency meeting Saturday night and a day later, it announced the Board of Directors met again and decided that the national team will not travel to India for the T20 World Cup beginning February 7.

"The Board reviewed the situation in detail, taking into account developments over the last 24 hours and expressed deep concern over the overall circumstances surrounding the participation of the Bangladesh National Team in matches scheduled to be played in India," said the BCB in a statement.

"Following a thorough assessment of the prevailing situation and the growing concerns regarding the safety and security of the Bangladesh contingent in India and considering the advice from the Bangladesh Government, the Board of Directors



resolved that the Bangladesh National Team will not travel to India for the tournament under the current conditions."

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will need to address the issue as Bangladesh are scheduled to play all four of their leagues games in India.

Like the arrangement with Pakistan, Bangladesh wants all of their matches to be shifted to Sri Lanka, the co-host of the tournament.

"In light of this decision, the BCB has formally requested the International Cricket Council (ICC), as the event authority, to consider relocating all of Bangladesh matches to a venue outside India (co host Sri Lanka)," read the statement further.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board looks forward to the ICC's understanding of the situation and an urgent response on this matter."

Even before the BCB issued a statement, government advisor Asif Nazrul declared in a Facebook post that the board has taken the call not send its team to India.

"Bangladesh will not go to India to play World Cup. Bangladesh Cricket Board has taken this decision today. We welcome this decision taken in the context of the violent communal policy of the Cricket Board of India," read a translated version of his post in Bengali.

Following the BCB emergency meeting, Nazrul instructed the board to ask Jay Shah-led ICC to shift Bangladesh's four league games -- three in Kolkata and one in Mumbai -- to Sri Lanka.

"As the adviser in charge of the Ministry of Sports, I have instructed the Cricket Control Board to put the entire matter in writing and explain it to the ICC," Nazrul wrote in Bengali on his Facebook page.

"The board must make it clear that if a Bangladeshi cricketer, despite being under contract, cannot play in India, then the Bangladesh national team cannot feel safe travelling to India to play the World Cup.

"I have also directed the board to formally request that Bangladesh's World Cup matches be held in Sri Lanka instead,"

he further wrote.

The Shah Rukh Khan co-owned IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) released the Bangladesh left-arm pacer, who was bought for Rs 9.20 crore after a bidding war at last month's auctions in Abu Dhabi, following BCCI's diktat.

The Indo-Bangladesh relationship has plunged into chaos after the ouster of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India in August last year following anti-government protests.

She was sentenced to death in absentia by a tribunal for her alleged role in a deadly crackdown during the agitation in which several students were killed. Hindus have been targeted for violent attacks since Hasina's ouster.

IPL broadcast to be suspended?

Nazrul also said that he has requested the adviser for Bangladesh's Information and Broadcasting Ministry (I&B) to ensure that broadcast of IPL in Bangladesh is suspended.

"I have requested the adviser for Information and Broadcasting to ensure that the broadcast of the IPL in Bangladesh is also suspended.

"Under no circumstances will we tolerate any insult to Bangladeshi cricket, cricketers, or Bangladesh itself. The days of servitude are over," he said.

There is a bit of disbelief in the BCB corridors that things took such a turn after India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar attended former PM Khaleda Zia's funeral in Dhaka.

"The BCB announced the schedule for India's tour of Bangladesh because there was a sense of positivity but now we need to get an official confirmation from the Indian board as to why Mustafizur's contract was cancelled," a BCB source told.

HOCKEY INDIA LEAGUE

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers start campaign in style



The team secures 4-2 win against Ranchi Royals

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

Chennai, Jan 4: Vedanta Kalinga Lancers claimed a 4-2 victory over Ranchi Royals in the Men's Hockey India League (HIL) at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium Sunday. Alexander Hendrickx (7, 28') and Gursahibjit Singh (16', 26') scored the goals for Vedanta Kalinga Lancers while Tom Boon (1') and Mandeep Singh (9') were the goalscorers for Ranchi Royals.

The Royals won an early penalty corner as Tom Boon (1') made the most of the opportunity, slotting the ball into the net with a powerful dragflick.

Ranchi Royals dominated possession early on, but Vedanta Kalinga Lancers were quick to adapt as they improved and won a penalty corner in the sev-

enth minute. Belgian drag-flick specialist Alexander Hendrickx (7') stepped up and delivered the equaliser with a perfect flick past the goalkeeper.

Two minutes later, Ranchi Royals claimed the lead again as Vishnukant Singh played an incisive first-time pass into the circle for Mandeep Singh (9') who did well to win the ball in a tight position and score his goal. In the 13th minute, Vedanta Kalinga Lancers played an interesting variation in search of an equaliser from a penalty corner but Rosan Kujur's attempt narrowly missed the target.

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers began the second quarter strong with a crucial field goal. Craig Marias showed great skill inside the circle as his pass set up Gursahibjit Singh (16') perfectly for a diving finish into the goal.

The Lancers struck again in the 26th minute as Dilpreet Singh did well to protect the ball inside the circle and play it to Gursahibjit Singh (26'), who

was in the perfect position to poach the ball. Two minutes later, Vedanta Kalinga Lancers further increased their advantage as Alexander Hendrickx (28') converted another penalty corner to end the first half in a comfortable position.

In the 42nd minute, Ranchi Royals won three consecutive penalty corners but the Lancers did brilliantly to deny them on all three occasions. Vedanta Kalinga Lancers were awarded a penalty corner at the other end of the pitch as Cooper Burns tried to find a goal but was denied by a crucial save by Royals' goalkeeper Suraj Karkera.

The final quarter saw a very tight contest between the two teams as Ranchi Royals pushed ahead in search of goals but Vedanta Kalinga Lancers were solid with their defending and hardly made any errors at the back to claim a victory and begin their Men's HIL campaign on a positive note.

FINAL ASHES TEST

Root, Brook guide England to 211 before bad light stops play

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Sydney, Jan 4: Joe Root and Harry Brook shared a 154-run partnership to guide England to 211-3 before bad light stopped play on Day 1 of the final Ashes test, which featured an emotional on-field tribute for the Bondi terror victims and first responders.

Root and Brook joined when the tourists were at a perilous 57-3 Sunday and rallied England through the middle session before bad light and rain stopped play just before tea and prevented the match from resuming after the interval.

At stumps Root was unbeaten on 72 and Brook was 78 not out, sharing England's best partnership of the five-test series. Australia has already retained the Ashes with wins in the first three tests.



The duo raised their half-centuries within the same over that their stand hit triple figures as England took control on a pitch that didn't appear to offer too much assistance for Australia's bowlers.

Root made his 67th test fifty off 65 balls with seven boundaries, while Brook completed his 15th half-century from 63 balls in more streaky fashion, with some big shots narrowly avoiding the catching fielders and frustrating the hosts. In a rarity at a sporting event in Australia, police with long-arm rifles, mounted police and riot squad officers were on patrol as part of heightened security measures at the sold-out match following the antisemitic terror attack which killed 15 people at nearby Bondi Beach three weeks ago.

Before play commenced, victims of the shootings, first responders and community members were honored with an on-field tribute, including a guard of honor and a standing ovation from the capacity crowd.

2nd Khelo India Beach Games: Odisha eves eye title defence



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 4: Odisha Women beach football team is all set to participate in the 2nd Khelo India Beach Games - 2026 to be held at Daman and Diu from January 5.

The team travelled to Daman and Diu Saturday to participate in the event. A 12-member squad has been selected to represent the Odisha team in the aforementioned championship.

In the inaugural edition of the Khelo India Beach Games, the Odisha women's beach football team made history by winning the championship. In a thrilling final, the team defeated Gujarat 3-2, with captain Jasoda Mun-

day scoring two crucial goals to lead her team to victory.

Odisha is set to become a major hub for beach sports, particularly volleyball, in the coming years. The Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) announced the events that will be hosted in Bhubaneswar in partnership with the KIIT & KISS institutions.

The state will host the prestigious international FIVB Beach Pro Tour for three consecutive years- 2026, 2027, 2028 and will also organize FIVB Beach Volleyball Challenger Trophy, featuring participation from 40 countries, in late February or early March 2026 in Bhubaneswar.

ELITE BOXING NATIONALS

Chaos, delays mar opening day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Greater Noida, Jan 4: The country's boxers were left anxiously waiting for hours as chaos marred the opening day of the senior boxing National Championships, which was delayed by more than four hours due to "logistical" issues here Sunday.

The tournament, meant to mark a landmark moment with the men's and women's national championships being staged together for the first time, was scheduled to begin at 2pm at the Gautam Buddha University. Instead, confusion and prolonged waiting defined the day.

The competition rings themselves were not ready. Three rings were scheduled to be in place, but only one was assembled by around 4pm and even that had to be reassembled due to a technical issue.

The first of the 80 bouts -- 38 women's and 42 men's -- finally got underway at 6:30 pm with the men's competition.

While, the women pugilists were left waiting even longer as



there was still no word till 8pm as to when their bouts would begin and the third ring was yet to be assembled.

"The delay was because of certain logistical issues," Boxing Federation of India secretary general Pramod Kumar told PTI. While the BFI maintained that the delay was due to logistical hurdles, sources familiar with the matter said it was a due to payment related issues.

"The vendor had not been paid. Work only began after the payment finally went through. There were no sponsors for the tournament either," a source said. Reigning 48kg world cham-

pion Meenakshi Hooda, scheduled to fight in the opening bout in the women's section, was seen curled up on a yoga mat inside the hall late afternoon, conserving energy while waiting for word on when she would fight.

As the hours dragged on with no communication from organisers, she eventually left the stadium at 7pm. Several other boxers tried to kill time, some plugged on their headphones, others paced the hall as hours ticked by with no announcement.

Coaches warned that the prolonged delay could increase risk of injury as recovery would be hampered.

Modi reaffirms India's 2036 Olympic vision

PM INAUGURATES 72ND SENIOR NATIONAL VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Varanasi, Jan 4: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday asserted that India is preparing with full strength to host the 2036 Olympic Games, and declared his government was committed to providing "more and more players greater opportunities to compete" by hosting mega sporting events in the country.

Addressing the inaugural function of the 72nd Senior National Volleyball Championship, being held here, via video conference, Modi said, the government was making every possible effort to provide exposure to budding athletes to take up Olympic sports, and schemes like Khelo India were proving a game-changer in harnessing talent.

"The 2030 Commonwealth Games will be held in India,



and the country is making strong efforts to host the 2036 Olympics, with the aim of giving more and more players greater opportunities to compete," said Modi.

"Through the Khelo India campaign, hundreds of youth have had the chance to advance to the national level," added Modi.

Noting that initiatives like the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPs) were transforming the sports ecosystem

in India, with efforts focused on building strong infrastructure, funding mechanisms, and providing young athletes with global exposure, he said that the country's growing clout in sport could be gauged from the fact that India had hosted 20 top-notch international competition in the last 10 years.

"India has hosted more than 20 major international events across several cities, including the FIFA Under-17 World Cup, Hockey World Cup, and major

chess tournaments."

Recalling the time when the government and society were indifferent towards sports, he said the past decade had brought about a massive change in the mindset of the country.

"The government has significantly increased the sports budget, and today India's sports model has become athlete-centric, with focus on talent identification, scientific training, nutrition, and transparent selection, ensuring that the interests of players are prioritised at every level," he said. "Today the nation is riding on the 'reform express', with every sector and every development destination connected to it, and sports being one of them," he said.

"India's progress is not limited to the economic front but is also reflected in the confidence seen on the sports field. India's

performance across various sports has consistently improved since 2014," he added.

Elaborating on the reforms his government had undertaken in the sports, the PM said the National Sports Governance Act and the Khelo Bharat Policy 2025 will provide opportunities to the right talent and increase transparency in sports organisations.

He emphasized that these provisions will allow the youth to advance simultaneously in both sports and education.

The PM expressed happiness that Varanasi had come up as a major sporting destination, saying that securing a place on the country's sporting map through the National Volleyball Competition was highly significant for the city.

The tournament, being held from January 4 to 11, will witness the participation of more

than 1,000 players, representing 58 teams, from across the country.

"Hosting the National Volleyball Tournament in Varanasi underscores the growing emphasis on strengthening sports infrastructure and promoting athletic development in the city."

Drawing parallels between volleyball and the country's growth, the PM said "I see so many parallels between India's development story and volleyball."

"Volleyball teaches us that no victory is achieved alone. Our success depends on our co-ordination, our trust, and our team's readiness. Everyone has a role to play, a responsibility to fulfill. And we only succeed when everyone performs their role diligently and seriously. Our country is also progressing in the same way."