

leisure

FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES
You need to be very cautious today, says Ganesha. The results of a lot of hard work over a long time may be undone by one impulsive decision. After a stressful morning, you could just wish to spend time with children, playing their childish games.

TAURUS
This day, you will be able to express and communicate your ideas and feelings very convincingly, assures Ganesha. All those to who come in contact with you today will be clear, and appreciative about whatever you tell them. At work your superiors are likely to be responsive and helpful. Al said and done, you are not likely to face any difficulties or disappointments today.

GEMINI
Your health interests will take precedence over career, says Ganesha. There are indications that you will spare more time working out at a gym. Those in the field of marketing and advertising will have a fabulous time. A good marketing strategy will bring maximum profits with minimum efforts.

CANCER
Your way of talk today will be such that it can cause misunderstanding. In a fit of emotion, you will take a hasty decision. You will regret the same in future, but you will also get a chance to rectify the same. So, says Ganesha, do not take a any ad hoc or temporary decision but a firm decision.

LEO
You will be busy on the work front today. It is a good day for those who are self-employed. Housewives will remain extremely busy with household matters. You will be able to work according to your desire though, says Ganesha.

VIRGO
Close members of your family and friends will take up most of your time today. Students will have to pay more attention to studies as exams are upcoming, and they will have to learn to balance study and free time. Ganesha says today is a good time to buy property. All in all, it is a day when you can afford to relax and let your mind pursue its interests.

LIBRA
You may not have been crowned 'Employee Of The Month', but do not let that distract you from the fact that today, you are the brightest star in office. Be prepared to get some special treatment at work, as your bosses shower praise on you. Apart from that, a lot of tangible and intangible benefits await you.

SCORPIO
"It's a dream come true," you may utter these words in surprise today, feels Ganesha. Your palatial home is ready or you may just get the keys of your much desired vehicle. You may have an extended celebration by receiving or giving gifts to your closed ones. However, make sure you do not make a hole in your pocket.

SAGITTARIUS
Your business may bring you faster growth rates than bacteria today. Moreover, banking transactions will fetch returns exceeding your expectation. Management institutes will value your expertise and experience, predicts Ganesha. All in all, a day when progressions are on the rise.

CAPRICORN
At times you are very direct in your approach and often end up hurting your near ones badly. Today, you'll bandage some old wounds and make efforts to restore old relationships, says Ganesha. But, your struggle to improve rapport may not be as successful as you want it to be.

AQUARIUS
The cupid may strike you today! The singles may feel the energy and excitement of budding romance. Equally blissful day for the married couples, too, as they will spend quality time with each other. Go down the memory lane, go through some photo albums and cherish those long lost moments, says Ganesha.

PISCES
Unexpected expenses are likely to crop up today. There are strong indications that you will set out upon a journey or a picnic to some nearby place, without too much prior planning. However, the journey will be comfortable and your travel plans will go off without a hitch. Even if you don't undertake any travel today, you will find yourself poring over the memories of your earlier sojourns, says Ganesha.



EMILIA HAD BREAKDOWN AFTER GAME OF THRONES

English actress Emilia Clarke had a full mental breakdown after *Game of Thrones* ended and she had time to process the previous decade. The 39-year-old shot to fame playing Daenerys Targaryen in the fantasy drama series from 2011 to 2019.

LAWRENCE: I IDENTIFY AS A STAY-AT-HOME MOM

Actress Jennifer Lawrence said she is only busy during the hectic press tours for her movies, and for the rest of her time, she enjoys a quiet life. Speaking on the Smartless podcast, Lawrence said: "That's me. I identify as a stay-at-home mom. But I am obviously working.



Sonal calls out targeted negativity

Mumbai: In today's social media-driven landscape, public perception can be easily influenced by manufactured narratives, often unrelated to an actor's work or performance. Sonal expressed disappointment over how such tactics are being used to undermine peers instead of encouraging healthy competition.

"These paid PR attacks on actors need to stop. It's getting out of hand now. All this negative PR is unnecessary and toxic. You can't look good by making someone look bad. Why can't we just be happy for each other?" Sonal said, adding that actors work hard and deserve a more supportive professional environment.

Her comments follow similar remarks made recently by actresses Tara Sutaria and Taapsee Pannu, who also spoke about facing negative PR campaigns. Together, these statements have drawn attention to the less-discussed aspects of publicity strategies within the industry.

While competition remains an inherent part of the film business, many believe that persistent trolling and paid negativity only weaken the creative ecosystem. Beyond affecting public image, such practices can also take a toll on mental well-being and divert attention away from an actor's actual work.

Sonal Chauhan, who has projects lined up including *Mirzapur: The Film*, emphasized the need for kindness and mutual respect within the industry.

AGENCIES



Mumbai: After her breakup with actor Arjun Kapoor, Malaika Arora has frequently found herself in the spotlight after being spotted with a mystery man, sparking speculation about her love life on social media. Now, Malaika has addressed the buzz.

Recently, Malaika joined an episode of *The Namrata Zakaria Show* on YouTube where she spoke about the chatter around having a mystery man in her life.

The 52-year-old mentioned that her relationships have always been spoken about and have always made headlines.

When the host asked about her being spotted with a mystery man, post her breakup with Arjun, Malaika shared, "People like talking. If you are spotted with somebody, you go out, and it becomes a huge discussion. I don't really want to give chatter unnecessarily, too much of fuel. I don't want to do that because it really doesn't serve any purpose. Trust me, every time I have stepped out, even if it's a longtime friend, a gay friend, a married friend, an old friend, a manager or anybody, I am immediately linked to that person. We laughed and joked about it. My mother calls me and asks, 'Who is this now, baby? Who are they talking about?' It has just become laughable."

AGENCIES

Malaika reacts to dating rumours



Elnaaz's note on faith, humanity

Mumbai: Iran-born Indian Actress Elnaaz Norouzi has shared a strong message on faith, humanity, and the misuse of religion, saying that belief should never be confused with extremism or oppression.

In a note she penned on Instagram, Elnaaz said one can be Muslim and still reject radical Islamism, adding that faith and extremism are not the same.

She wrote: "A small reminder for anyone who needs to hear it: You can be Muslim and still reject radical Islamism. Faith and extremism are not the same thing. I was born Muslim, and I will never support tyranny or injustice done in the name of religion."

The actress emphasised that being a believer does not mean pretending one's community is perfect, but having the courage to call out what is wrong.

"Being a believer doesn't mean pretending your community is perfect, it means being honest enough to call out what's wrong," she wrote.

Stressing that humanity matters above all else, Elnaaz said she has met both good and bad people across all faiths, and that the actions of a few should not define an entire religion.

"Here's what matters – HUMANITY I don't care if you're Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Hindu... I've met incredible people across all faiths, and I've also met bad people across all faiths. The bad ones don't make the entire religion bad," she added.

IAN5



Akshaye's Dakait to return in Dhurandhar 2

Mumbai: Bollywood actor Akshaye Khanna is riding high on success after his recent release, *Dhurandhar*. His portrayal of Rehman Dakait struck a chord with audiences, with many viewers even believing that he overshadowed the film's protagonist, Ranveer Singh. Ever since, fans have been eager to know whether Akshaye will return in the sequel, and if reports are to be believed, the actor is indeed set to be a part of it.

According to a report in Filmfare, the makers of *Dhurandhar 2* already have the sequel in place and are currently fine-tuning it, with Akshaye set to return.



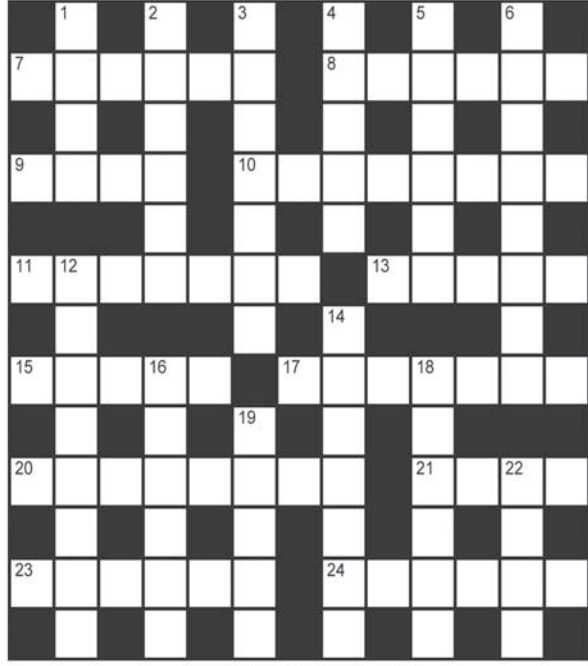
Sources confirmed to the publication that Akshaye Khanna will be back on set for a short one-week shoot, aimed at expanding his character's backstory and adding more layers to his role in the next chapter of the franchise.

In *Dhurandhar*, Akshaye plays Pakistani gangster Rehman Dakait. His brief, impromptu dance to Flipperachi's Fa9La in the film went viral on social media, with fans and content creators enthusiastically recreating the moment. Several clips featuring Akshaye's performance also flooded the internet, earning him renewed popularity and widespread appreciation.

AGENCIES

FUN post

CROSSWORD



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Across

- 7 Type of bath or gum
8 Companion
9 Christiania, now
10 Colourful gem (4,4)
11 Garnish
13 Cut off
15 Like some jokes
17 First light

- 20 Kind of shotgun (5-3)
21 Mount Olympus dwellers
23 Shoat
24 They provide zest

Down

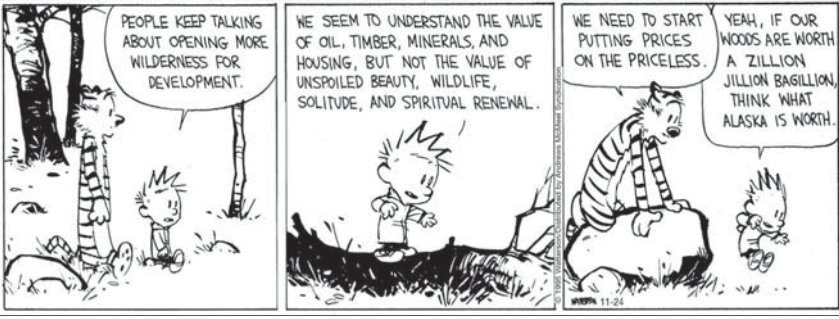
- 1 Washouts
2 Loathes
3 Circular

- 4 Winter warmer
5 Take your pick
6 They're found on a beach
12 Fragrant
14 Bison
16 Seamstress's need
18 Time in power
19 Words to remember
22 Family rooms

PEANUTS



CALVIN AND HOBBS

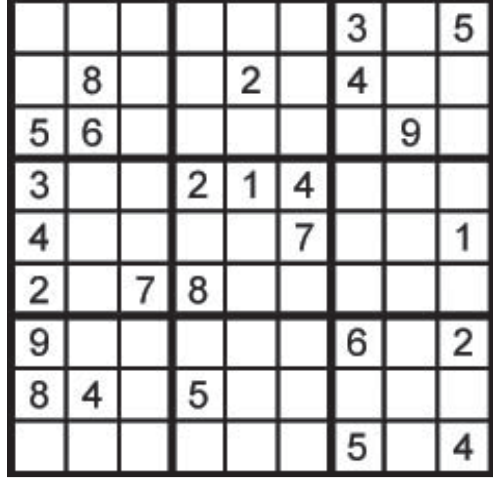


BREVITY



SUDOKU

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

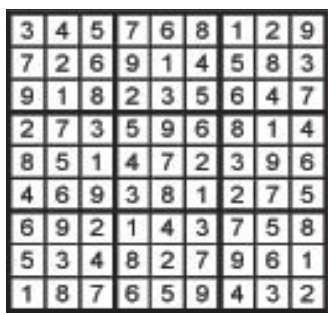


SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Incentives for Ama Bus staff from Jan 26



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: During a high-level committee meeting on Ama Bus operations Wednesday, officials approved an incentive scheme for bus captains and guides, set to roll out from January 26.

Under the scheme, incentives will be disbursed quarterly based on comprehensive evaluations of safe driving practices and overall performance.

Chaired by Housing and Urban Development Principal Secretary Usha Padhee, the meeting focused on strengthening road safety, enhancing passenger convenience, and improving driver skill development and welfare.

Officials informed the committee that Ama Bus vehicle speeds were closely monitored during the first two weeks of January and no cases of speed violations were reported. The meeting also discussed improving bus accommodation and management at bus stops.

The committee laid special emphasis on ensuring the safety of road users, particularly in view of increasing heavy vehicle traffic. Passenger-friendly services and systematic monitoring of bus operations were also reviewed.

To strengthen driver training, e-buses will be provided to the Institute of Driving Training and Research (IDTR). Drivers will be able to undergo practical driving training

daily within the training premises. For this purpose, multi-charging infrastructure is planned at Chhatia, Bepampur, and Bonai (Sundargarh), which will also provide charging facilities for private EVs and government vehicles. The public will be able to access four-wheeler EV charging facilities at these locations.

Public participation in Ama Bus route planning and services will commence from February, allowing citizens to share suggestions and feedback on route changes through social media platforms.

The duration of driver training programmes has been extended from three days to five days, enabling more extensive heavy motor vehicle driving practice. Enhanced focus will be placed on psychometric tests, inhibitors, lane discipline, and self-assessment. Additionally, simulators will be introduced in training schools for specialised e-bus driving training. In line with passenger safety and environmental sustainability, 30 old BPTCL buses that have completed over 1.5 lakh kilometers will be scrapped. In their place, small e-buses will be introduced in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack to improve last-mile connectivity.

Transport Commissioner Amitabh Thakur, CRUT Managing Director Sanjay Biswal, DCP, Commissionerate Police, and Traffic DCP were present at the meeting.

2nd Patha Utsav of yr January 18

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: The Capital City is set to come alive this Sunday (January 18) as the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) prepares to host the second Patha Utsav of the year on the Baramunda-Jagamara New Road.

In preparation for the event, a high-level meeting was recently held under the chairpersonship of BMC Mayor Sulochana Das. The meeting was attended by Cultural Standing Committee Chairman Ramchandra Ranasingh, member Mihir Kumar Rout, Additional Commissioner Ratnakar Sahoo, Kailash Chandra Das, and other senior officials of the corporation.

Officials unanimously agreed that the upcoming Patha Utsav would be more vibrant and engaging than the first edition held earlier this winter at Master Canteen. This time, several new games and cultural activities will be introduced, with a special focus on children's entertainment.

Renowned playback singers Diptirekha Padhi and Jayashree Dhal will headline the musical performances, promising to captivate youth and music lovers alike. Another major attraction will be two separate "Bhubaneswar's Got Talent" stages, aimed at showcasing the City's hidden talents. A second stage featuring DJ music will keep the audience grooving throughout the morning.

Man posing as doctor cheats woman of ₹22.70 lakh

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: Pahal police Wednesday arrested a man for allegedly cheating a woman of ₹22.70 lakh by posing as a doctor and luring her with a false promise of marriage.

The accused has been identified as Ranjib Kumar Pradhan, who impersonated himself as Dr Prakash Pradhan.

According to police sources, the complainant came in contact with Ranjib in 2021 through a matrimonial platform after

Khurda, Jan 14: The Khurda Excise team Wednesday seized 115 grams of brown sugar and 140 kg of ganja in separate raids at different locations, leading to the arrest of two smugglers.

In the first case, the District Mobile Unit of Khurda Excise conducted a raid between 7 am and 12.15 pm at Gurujanga Road near the Nagamata Mansa Devi Temple.

During the operation, the team seized 115 grams of brown sugar along with a scooter. The accused, identified as Trinath Behera (36), absconded from the spot, while Upendra Bhoi (56) was arrested by the team.

In another major seizure, the Khurda Excise Station, acting on a reliable tip-off, intercepted



a vehicle near the roadside before the Malipada NH-16 flyover under Jankia police station limits. During the search, the excise team recovered and seized 140 kg of ganja from the vehicle and arrested Susanta Kumar Sa-

hoo (39) on smuggling charges.

The accused were booked under provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985. Further investigation is underway in both cases to ascer-

Khurda Excise's District Mobile Unit raided Gurujanga Road near the Nagamata Mansa Devi Temple, seizing 115 grams of brown sugar and a scooter

Acting on a tip-off, Khurda Excise intercepted a vehicle near the Malipada NH-16 flyover under Jankia police limits, seizing 140 kg of ganja and arresting Susanta Kumar Sahoo (39)

The accused were booked under the NDPS Act, 1985, and further investigation is underway to trace the source and network involved in the smuggling

tain the source and network involved in the contraband smuggling.



TALENT SPOTLIGHT: Children perform at the annual day function of Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir in Puri, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

Youth held for extortion threat to woman vendor

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: Police have arrested a 27-year-old man for threatening and attempting to extort money from a woman street vendor in the IG Park Lane area, Capital police said Wednesday.

According to the complaint, the accused, identified as Suresh Behera, used to park his motorcycle near her roadside stall and demand ₹100 per month illegally, threatening her with dire consequences. When the vendor refused, he verbally abused her. Suresh later returned armed with a sharp weapon and again threatened her over the extortion demand.

During investigation, police found sufficient evidence that the accused had criminally intimidated the complainant while demanding extortion money. Acting on reliable information, Suresh was arrested on January 13.

He reportedly confessed to his involvement in the offence. Based on his disclosure, police seized a sharp weapon (about 45 cm long and 7.4 cm wide) and the motorcycle used in the crime. Suresh was forwarded to court following his arrest, and further investigation is underway.

CLASSIFIED LOST

I, Sri Mohan Kumar Dash, S/o Ashok Dash, At-Dash Colony, Ward No. - 10, PS/Dist. - Bargarh, I have lost my original money receipt of Rs.95828 issued by the TPWODL authority and my consumer number - 512001111628. If any person found it, kindly deposit the same at TPWODL office, Bargarh.

First preparatory meet for Rath Yatra 2026 held

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: The state government has started preparations for the Rath Yatra seven months in advance to ensure zero-error arrangements for the mega festival, which saw three deaths due to a stampede in 2025, officials said Wednesday.

Chief Secretary Anu Garg chaired a preparatory meeting Tuesday evening and asked officials to learn from last year's lapses and make preparations on how to avoid them in the

next festival.

"I have urged all the departments to identify errors from the Rath Yatra of previous years and implement corrective measures. Seven months are left for the mega event, during which one can make error-free planning," she told reporters.

The meeting was attended by DGP YB Khurania, DG of Fire Services Sudhansu Sarangi, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Hemant Sharma, Shree Jagannath Temple Administration's Chief Administrator Arabinda Padhee, Puri Collector



Dibyajyoti Parida and Puri SP Prateek Singh, among others.

As per practice, the Chief Secretary holds a state-level preparatory meeting for the festival four months ahead of

the event. This year, Rath Yatra will be held July 16.

Asked why the meeting was held so early this time, she said, "We do not want to take any chance. Every department

ECoR launches innovative refreshment system

Waltair Division launches India's first onboard tea & coffee vending system, serving hotter, tastier, and hygienic drinks with hassle-free operation for vendors



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: In a significant step towards enhancing passenger comfort, hygiene and service quality, East Coast Railway (ECoR) Waltair Division's DRM Lalit Bohra launched an innovative tea and coffee vending initiative on trains. This new system (gadget), first-of-its-kind, aims to provide passengers with tastier, hotter and more hygienic beverages while ensuring ease of operation for vendors.

Traditionally, tea and coffee were carried in open buckets or cans held by hand, which

was often unappealing and raised hygiene concerns. Under the new initiative, vendors are equipped with a specially designed wearable gadget featuring an insulated thermos container.

Tea and coffee packets are neatly stored in one pouch, while disposable cups are kept in another, leaving both hands of the vendor free for smooth movement and safe service.

The gadget also includes a dedicated pocket for safe disposal of used sachets and waste generated during vending, making the process cleaner and more environment-friendly.

To further enhance passenger convenience, a QR code has been integrated into the gadget, enabling digital payments and ensuring a completely hassle-free experience.

The new system not only looks appealing but is also highly hygienic, as the equipment cannot be placed on the floor, seats or other unhygienic surfaces, which was common in earlier practices.

The insulated container helps in maintaining higher temperature for longer duration, thereby preserving the taste and quality of tea, coffee, soup, milk and noodles being

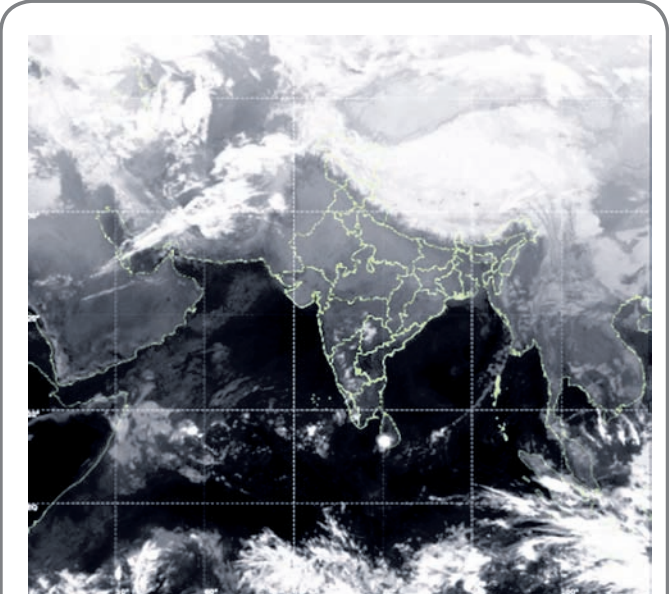
served. Speaking on the occasion, Bohra stated that this initiative is being introduced as a pilot project on the AP Express on the auspicious occasion of Bhogi-Sankranti, when the entire state of Andhra Pradesh is in a festive mood. "Passenger feedback will be closely monitored and, based on responses, further improvements will be made before extending the system to more trains," he added.

He also emphasised that this initiative will positively impact passengers' perception by offering them tastier and more hygienic refreshments. The ergonomic design of the gadget also reduces the physical load on vendors and enables them to move easily from one coach to another.

Under the pilot project, each insulated container can have a capacity of 5 litre and can serve approximately 35 passengers at a time. Once refilled, the vendor can conveniently serve an entire coach in one round.

Building on the success and positive feedback of the onboard vending system, Waltair Division plans to extend the initiative to platform vending as well.

| MARKET WATCH | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------|-------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| CURRENCY | | BOURSES | | COMMODITIES | |
| INDEX | VARIATION | INDEX | VARIATION | INDEX | VARIATION |
| DOLLAR | 90.41 ▲ 0.14 | SENSEX | 83382.71 ▼ 66.70 | GOLD | ₹142,971 ▲ ₹730 |
| EURO | 105.34 ▼ 0.02 | NIFTY | 25665.60 ▼ 244.98 | SILVER | ₹289,051 ▲ ₹13,864 |



| WEATHER | | | |
|----------|-------|-------|--|
| | BBSR | CTC | FORECAST |
| Max Temp | 28.2° | 26.4° | Cold wave condition likely to prevail over Bhubaneswar and its neighbourhood area. |
| Min Temp | 12.1° | 11.4° | |
| Humidity | 82% | 82% | |
| Rainfall | Nil | Nil | |

POST NEWS NETWORK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DOCTORS' METHODS



HOLY DIP: Over 1 crore devotees took holy bath at the confluence of Ganga river and Bay of Bengal at Sagar Island in South 24 Pargana district of West Bengal, adjoining Bhograj in Balasore, on the occasion of Makar Sankranti Wednesday.

DWARKA PRASAD PATNAIK, OP

POST NEWS NETWORK



POST NEWS NETWORK

A photograph of four elderly women standing in a row outdoors. From left to right: the first woman wears a grey and black patterned shawl over a maroon top; the second woman wears a light green shawl over a pink top and holds a white rectangular document; the third woman wears a bright yellow-green shawl over a grey top; and the fourth woman wears a yellow shawl over a yellow top. They are all looking towards the camera. The background shows a simple building with a doorway and some foliage.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

POST NEWS NETWORK



EAST COAST RAILWAY

Tender No. MCSW-Sanitation-25-26-25

NAME OF WORK : SANITATION AND GUARDING OF TRAINING CENTRE CUM INSPECTION BUNGALOW, SUB-ORDINATE REST HOUSE & PREMISES INCLUDING GYMNASIUM, CLEANING OF TOILETS, COMMON AREAS, SSE CHAMBERS & ADJACENT COMMON AREAS IN WORKSHOP COMPLEX AND CLEANING OF TOILETS, COMMON AREAS, ROOMS & CHAMBERS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDING AT CARRIAGE REPAIR WORKSHOP, MANCHESWAR.

Advertised Value : ₹ 1,38,93,597.21

EMD : ₹ 2,19,500/-, Cost of Tender

Document : ₹ 5,000/-, Period of Completion : 36 Months.

Bidding Start Date : 16.01.2026.

Tender Closing Date and Time : At 1500 Hrs. of 30.01.2026.

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Complete information including e-tender documents and corrigendum is available in website www.ireps.gov.in

Dy. Chief Mechanical Engineer (POH),
PR-1005/O/25-26 CRW/Mancheswar



Sports Authority of India (SAI), an autonomous organization under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, invites applications from the eligible, qualified, and motivated Indian Citizens for engagement to the **01 posts of Senior Lead (Sports Science) on contract basis** for a maximum period of 04 years.

FOCUS LABOUR RIGHTS

FROM LAW TO CODE



While economic growth is essential, the Constitution does not permit growth at the cost of dignity, security and collective rights of workers

This conceptual background is essential to understand the implications of India's labour law overhaul. Historically, Indian labour laws were not merely regulatory instruments; they were expressions of constitutional commitment to social and economic justice under Articles 14, 19, 21, 23 and the Directive Principles of State Policy. Laws such as the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, the Minimum Wages Act, 1948 and the Factories Act, 1948 emerged from decades of struggle, judicial refinement and tripartite consensus involving workers, employers and the State.

The consolidation of 29 such laws into four Labour Codes — on Wages, Industrial Relations, Social Security, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions — has been officially justified on grounds of simplification, ease of doing business and uniformity. However, codification in this context has not been a neutral exercise of organisation; it has significantly altered substantive rights, enforcement mechanisms and power balances, often to the detriment of workers.

The most troubling aspect of the new regime lies in its implementation philosophy. Unlike earlier labour laws that prioritised protection, the codes emphasise flexibility, employer discretion and executive rule-making. The Industrial Relations Code, for instance, raised the threshold for mandatory government approval for layoffs, retrenchment and closure from 100 to 300 workers. While

presented as an administrative reform, this change effectively removes job security for a vast segment of the organised workforce. The Supreme Court in Workmen of Meenakshi Mills v. Meenakshi Mills Ltd. (1992) had earlier upheld prior restrictions precisely because sudden unemployment threatens the right to livelihood under Article 21. The new code departs from this constitutional sensitivity.

Equally problematic is the dilution of collective bargaining rights. By tightening conditions for legal strikes and increasing procedural barriers, the Industrial Relations Code weakens trade unions' negotiating power.

The Code on Wages, while projecting universal minimum wages, leaves critical determinations to executive notifications. Without strong enforcement machinery and independent wage boards, minimum wages risk becoming not a living wage but a statutory formality. Past judicial interventions, such as in People's Union for Democratic Rights v. Union of India (1982), treated payment below minimum wage as forced labour under Article 23. The present code, however, weakens inspection systems and replaces them with "facilitation" models, undermining deterrence against wage violations.

The Code on Social Security is often cited as progressive for extending coverage to gig and platform workers. In practice, however, it creates entitlements without enforceable guaran-

tees. Benefits are dependent on schemes yet to be notified, budgetary discretion and employer contributions that remain undefined. The Supreme Court in LIC of India v. Consumer Education and Research Centre (1995) held that social security is an intrinsic part of the right to life. A framework that promises inclusion without legal certainty risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.

Perhaps the most significant concern is the method of enforcement. The labour inspector, once a watchdog against exploitation, has been transformed into a "facilitator," reducing the likelihood of surprise inspections and criminal accountability. This administrative softening contrasts sharply with judicial observations in M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu (1996), where strict enforcement was deemed essential to prevent labour abuse.

Another serious issue is federal unevenness. Labour being a concurrent subject, the effectiveness of the codes depends on state-level rules. This has resulted in fragmented and delayed implementation, legal uncertainty and differential standards across states. Workers' rights, which should be uniform and fundamental, now vary based on administrative readiness and political priorities.

Ultimately, the transformation of labour laws into codes reflects a deeper ideological shift. Codification has been used not merely to consolidate but to recalibrate labour relations in favour of capital mobility and investment competitiveness. While economic growth is essential, the Constitution does not permit growth at the cost of dignity, security and collective rights of workers.

The true test of the new Labour Codes will not be in their textual elegance but in whether courts, governments and society can restore the constitutional spirit that once defined India's labour law regime.

The writer is a service union representative and columnist.



Bruhaspati Samal

UNLIKE EARLIER LABOUR LAWS THAT PRIORITISED PROTECTION, THE CODES EMPHASISE FLEXIBILITY, EMPLOYER DISCRETION AND EXECUTIVE RULE-MAKING

In legal discourse, the terms law and code are often loosely used, yet they embody fundamentally different ideas with far-reaching consequences for governance and social justice. This distinction becomes critically important when examining India's recent transition from a protective, welfare-oriented labour law regime to a consolidated framework of four Labour Codes.

In its classical sense, law is a broad and evolving concept. Jurists have defined law in multiple ways, but a commonly accepted understanding is found in Salmond's definition: law is "the body of principles recognised and applied by the State in the administration of justice." Similarly, the Supreme Court in State of Madras v. VG Row (1952) observed that law is not merely a set of rules but a mechanism to balance individual liberty with social order under constitutional values. Law thus includes statutes, constitutional provisions, judicial precedents, customs, conventions and principles of natural justice.

A code, on the other hand, is a specific legislative technique. Black's Law Dictionary defines a code as "a systematic collection, compendium, or revision of laws, rules, or regulations that relate to a particular subject." The Supreme Court echoed this understanding in RS Nayak v. AR Antulay (1984), where it described a code as a "complete and exhaustive statement of law on a subject, intended to replace scattered enactments." Therefore, while law is organic and multi-sourced, a code is rigidly statutory, structured and intended to standardise application.

Judicial practice illustrates this distinction clearly. In Joseph Shine v. Union of India (2018), the Supreme Court struck down Section 497 of the IPC, holding that even a comprehensive code must yield to constitutional morality and fundamental rights. This reaffirmed that codes do not exist in isolation; they are subordinate to constitutional law and judicial interpretation.



Dhurjati Mukherjee

WATER CONTAMINATION IN INDIA HAS HIGH ECONOMIC COSTS, DUE TO THE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF IT

The recent deaths of over 16 persons (with unofficial estimates suggesting the number could be as high as 20), coupled with an outbreak of diseases and the hospitalisation of hundreds in Indore—one of the nation's most reputedly clean cities—underscore significant concerns regarding drinking water contamination and the response by state and municipal authorities. A recent report from the Union government, conducted under the Jal Jeevan Mission, revealed that 38.7% of drinking water samples from rural areas in Madhya Pradesh were deemed non-potable, highlighting ongoing risks within village water supply systems.

Another report by the MP State Pollution Control Board had cautioned mixing of sewage with drinking water sources in Bhagirathpura, one of the hotspots along with 58 other spots in Indore way back in 2016-17. Sadly, such assessments are not seriously taken. There are now reports of sewage contamination of drinking water in Gandhinagar in

Gujarat and Bangalore which are reportedly grappling with a similar public health scare.

Additionally, a report of the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) has noted that many states, especially Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, face widespread contamination. It pointed out that arsenic contamination is a major concern in the Ganges and Brahmaputra river basins and despite various studies is largely prevalent in West Bengal, Bihar and Odisha and very little has been done to counter such contamination in an effective manner. Uranium contamination, though less widespread, has been sporadically detected in parts of Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.

The highest uranium concentration was observed in Punjab, where over half of the samples exceeded the limit, followed by Haryana, Karnataka and UP. Discharge of untreated industrial waste, excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, improper waste disposal and sew-

age leakage in urban areas and over-extraction in groundwater may be listed as key factors for groundwater quality decline.

If even warnings do not matter and if a minimum need of potable water cannot be supplied to suburbs of a big city, one may imagine the situation in remote and backward areas of the country. It is indeed tragic that after over 75 years of Independence, safe and potable water cannot be supplied throughout the length and breadth of the country though we now claim to have emerged as the fourth largest economy.

As per as per government figures under Jal Jeevan Mission, 81% of rural households have tap water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission, as of mid-2025. Though the figures may not be realistic, the problem lies in the quality of water. It has repeatedly been stressed that there is an urgent need to invent a low-cost spectrometer that measures TDS, heavy metals, nitrates, phosphates and microbial indicators. Whether AI can help in this regard is not known but it

is understood that experiments to this effect are being carried out by various research institutions. This is necessary as clean water must be made available at around ₹5 per 20 litres per family as the supply system may not be dependable.

It is a well-known fact that water contamination in India has high economic costs, due to the health and environmental impacts of it. The cost of environmental degradation due to water contamination is estimated to be \$80 billion a year, whereas the health costs are estimated to be \$6.7-8.7 billion per year.

Protocols for monitoring water quality are largely absent in much of the country, raising concerns about the effectiveness of state pollution control boards and municipal bodies in providing safe drinking water. Most citizens rely on municipal supplies and lack resources to regularly purify their water, so ensuring free potable water should be a top priority for any government. The big question is how soon will the ruling elite recognise the urgency? INFA

To hope for a true change of human life without a change of human nature is an irrational and unspiritual proposition.

SRI AUROBINDO



Amateur Diplomats

Many elements of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's recent meeting with US President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago were disconcerting, if not depressing. For starters, no American official met the Ukrainian head of state upon his arrival in Miami, which stands in stark contrast to the pomp and circumstance lavished on Russian President Vladimir Putin in Anchorage, Alaska, last August.

But even more disturbing was the complete absence of trained and experienced diplomats on the American side of the negotiating table. Instead, there were White House Chief of Staff Susie Wiles and her deputy, Steve Witkoff, a real-estate developer with long-standing connections to Russia, and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

Amid all the damage Trump has done in the first year of his second term, the destruction of America's diplomatic capacity has received relatively little attention. But alongside the gutting of the public-health system and the wanton abandonment of clean energy, it may prove to be the most consequential.

Of course, US presidents are entitled to appoint ambassadors to their liking, and many have chosen generous campaign donors. But these postings are always to less important capitals, where appointees perhaps can get away with a ludicrous lack of knowledge about their brief (something that Senator John McCain memorably exposed during Barack Obama's presidency).

But, as is so often the case, Trump's conduct is in a category of its own. The nepotism on display during his second presidency is shameless. Hence, he appointed Kushner's father, a convicted felon, as ambassador to France; and he named his son's former girlfriend as ambassador to Greece (whose citizens she once derided as "freeloaders").

Then there is the designation of completely unqualified figures to pursue missions that are not just sensitive but outright offensive. Trump's effort to "acquire" Greenland, a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, is being led by the governor of Louisiana, adding insult to injury against a NATO ally. Other important posts have been left vacant, the size of the National Security Council has been halved, and the apparent lack of preparation for the day after the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro attests to the absence of a deliberative process, poor coordination, and a shortage of qualified personnel.

The gutting of US diplomatic capacity is partly the result of a misguided drive for efficiency (reprising the failed effort by Trump's first-term secretary of state, the hapless former Exxon executive Rex Tillerson). But it is also a consequence of sheer inattention, which has resulted in a lack of coordination and chaos reminiscent of the first Trump administration.

This has not been lost on US adversaries. They are taking advantage of the situation, with some even de facto determining the composition of US diplomatic teams. As a Wall Street Journal investigation showed, the Trump administration has allowed its own special envoy for Ukraine and Russia to be completely sidelined in favour of Witkoff. (Moreover, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, eager to assert a larger international role for the Kingdom, apparently played an instrumental role in arranging Putin's preferred outcome.)

In theory, relying on fresh faces and an unorthodox approach could be defensible. Those unencumbered by conventional wisdom may be able to find compromises by "thinking outside the box." Trump himself clearly believes that knowing nothing about a conflict is the easiest way to solve it. But this ignorance-is-strength strategy has yet to yield stable results.

Any hope that the US itself would derive benefits from becoming more unpredictable has been dashed, not least because Trump and the loyalists he sends out into the world are utterly predictable. They have openly declared a desire to pursue financially advantageous "deals," which implies that geopolitical or strategic concerns have been deprioritized. In every possible way, starting with "pausing" the enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the Trump administration has signalled that the US is not only open for business but happy to accept bribes.

From this perspective, the road to lasting peace is paved with mutually beneficial business opportunities. While ostensibly committed to "liberalism," the Trumpists actually exhibit a naive, canonically liberal belief in what eighteenth-century thinkers called *doux commerce* ("gentle commerce"). But as Germany learned the hard way when it relied on trade ties to transform Russia for the better, the supposed benefits of interdependence will not materialize if one party has other priorities. The war on diplomats is part of a long-standing campaign against professionalism. While Trump's MAGA movement stokes resentment against "the elite," not everyone who is powerful is included under that label. MAGA supporters have no problem with billionaires dominating Trump's cabinet — only with those who claim authority on the basis of specialized training and education. In short: unelected bureaucrats bad; unelected real-estate developers good.

By creating the impression that professionals look down on ordinary folks and fail to see solutions that anyone with common sense could figure out, MAGA channels America's long-standing tradition of anti-intellectualism. In the process, Trump is making the United States poorer, weaker, and more manipulable on the world stage. While one can certainly find grounds to criticize the vaunted "liberal international order," at least it recognized that there is real global demand for common rules and stability.

Trump, now engaged in a brazenly neo-imperialist project in Venezuela, has handed China a golden opportunity to portray itself as the guarantor of such stability. China can also present itself as offering the kind of expertise that Trump has wantonly destroyed (even if its soft power is not anywhere close to that of the US). As with many other hallmarks of Trump 2.0, the gutting of American diplomacy will lead future historians to ask why the US decided to throw so much away, so swiftly and so senselessly.

The writer is Professor of Politics at Princeton University.

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WISDOM CORNER

Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.

MARIE CURIE

All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

LEO TOLSTOY

Our virtues and our failings are inseparable, like force and matter. When they separate, man is no more.

NIKOLA TESLA

Letters

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

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Asymmetrical expectations

Sir, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's visit to India, his first in Asia, signals Europe's renewed courtship of New Delhi amid a global churn. With Germany anchoring the European Union's economy, the visit was clearly about preparing ground for the long-pending EU-India free trade agreement and broader strategic alignment. Yet, the outcomes — Joint Declarations of Interest and MoUs — underline a familiar pattern: ambition racing ahead of execution. While defence industrial cooperation and investment pitches are welcome, nudging India to reduce ties with Russia betrays a selective realism, especially when Germany's own trade dependence on China remains deep. Strategic convergence cannot be built on asymmetrical expectations. Equally, unresolved humanitarian issues such as the Ariha Shah case dilute the moral high ground Europe often claims. Engagement is promising, but credibility demands consistency — in geopolitics and principles alike.

Gopalaswamy J, CHENNAI

Lifestyle diseases

Sir, Growing obesity is a major cause of concern now a days. Pizzas, burgers, sandwiches and momos have replaced our traditional food. Junk food is high in salt and low in fibre. It aids obesity. Regular intake of junk food causes mental health issues and bodily diseases. Many employees of IT and other industries are afflicted with obesity. Gone are those days when we ate home cooked foods and drank revitalizing beverages. In today's fast moving world nobody has time to cook. The result is obvious. Diabetes, high blood pressure, fatty liver and high cholesterol are becoming all too common due to growing obesity among the population. An obese body is prone to heart attack and brain stroke. Obesity is the mother of all diseases. However, obesity is a lifestyle disease. Regular exercise can ward off obesity. Meditation, moderate eating, and breathing exercises can go a long way in preventing obesity. With these approaches, obesity can be overcome.

Prabhudutt Dash, BHUBANESWAR

Art should be used to fight those trying to destroy peace: Pinarayi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thirissur(Kerala), Jan 14: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan Wednesday said art should not just bring pleasure, it should awaken people to the “burning experiences of life” and fight against those who try to destroy peace and happiness in the name of religion.

Vijayan was speaking after inaugurating the 64th Kerala School Kalolsavam (art festival) here where around 14,000 students will participate in 249 events at 24 venues, named after flowers, in Thirissur, which is considered as cultural capital of the state.

The CM said that in the past, various art forms were confined to a particular caste or religion due to the feudal system and social evils like untouchability prevalent at that time.

“With the end of feudalism and the birth of a new era based on democracy and secularism, the nature of arts changed. All arts became everyone’s. Art brought secularism and democracy to life. School art festivals played a vital role in it,” he said.

Referring to Kalamandalam Hyderali, a great singer from Thirissur district, the CM said that the artist had faced some “unfortunate experiences” on account of his religion.



“Being humiliated for being born in a different religion cannot be accepted in a democratic society,” Vijayan said, addressing a gathering of students, parents and dignitaries, including Union Minister of State for Petroleum, Natural Gas and Tourism Suresh Gopi.

In his speech, the CM said that a broad mind to assimilate the experiences of people of other religions is what “makes us civilised and cultured”.

But now, there were some people who were trying to confine art within a particular religion, he said.

Such persons contend that Muslims should not learn ‘Bharatanatyam’ and Hindus should not participate in ‘Op-pana’, to create problems, he added.

“Even children’s Christmas carols were attacked in the

country. In some places, Christmas holidays were abolished. Communalists will always try to create riots anywhere in the name of religion. Things are reaching a point where even characters in films are not allowed to be named Janaki, Sita, etc. Art is also a good weapon to fight against such rioters who destroy peace and happiness,” he said.

Such moves should be blown to the wind by the new generation who should present the arts without looking at caste or religion, the CM said.

“May you be able to reject all divisive ideas that divide people and uphold art that unites minds. Let that be the message of this school art festival,” he said. Subsequently, in an apparent response to the CM’s remarks, Gopi, in his brief speech, said he was not going to reply to the “political statements” in order to “uphold the importance and dignity of the event”.

“There are clear answers to those remarks and people are aware of the same,” he added.

In his speech, the CM also said that when the art festival first commenced in 1956, it was called a youth festival and there were only 200 participants.

“The purpose of art is to make good human beings. That art should not be used for anything else,” he added.

‘CONNECT TO WORK’ SCHEME Kerala approves revised guidelines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Thiruvananthapuram, Jan 14: The Kerala Cabinet Wednesday approved revised guidelines for the ‘connect to work’ scheme, aimed at improving youth employment prospects through skill development and financial support.

Under the revised norms, applicants must be permanent residents of the state, aged between 18 and 30 years, with an annual family income not exceeding Rs 5 lakh, a CMO statement said.

Eligible candidates should either be undergoing skill training at recognised government, public sector or private institutions, universities, and deemed universities, or preparing for competitive examinations conducted by the UPSC, Kerala PSC, Staff Selection Commission, armed forces, banks, railways, and other central and state recruitment agencies. Chaired by CM Pinarayi Vijayan, the cabinet also decided that scholarships will be provided to the first five lakh eligible applicants.

Beneficiaries will receive a monthly scholarship of Rs 1,000 for 12 months, transferred directly to their bank accounts through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system. The scheme will be implemented through the Employment Department, and applications can be submitted via the portal eemployment.kerala.gov.in.

MP govt orders premature release of 87 life convicts on Republic Day

AGENCIES

Bhopal, Jan 14: In a major decision ahead of the 77th Republic Day, the Madhya Pradesh (MP) government has approved the premature release of 87 life-term convicts from prisons across the state.

The Jail department issued the order in line with guidelines under a directive dated May 27, 2025, after a detailed review of 481 cases.

According to an official statement, district-level committees examined each case based on legal provisions, case background and relevant facts. Of the total reviewed, 394 convicts were found ineligible for early release.

The decision has been taken under Sections 432, 433 and 433(A) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, which empower the state to remit or commute sentences under specific conditions.

Authorities clarified that the releases will be subject to strict safeguards.

Prisoners with pending appeals in the High Court or the Supreme Court will only be eligible if their cases are resolved by January 26, 2026.

Those with fines must pay them or serve additional time, while convicts with sentences remaining in other cases will have to complete those before release.

Individuals facing pending trials will continue as un-



Officials said rejections were primarily in cases where convicts had not completed 20 years of imprisonment, including remissions, as required under state policy

convicts had not completed 20 years of imprisonment, including remissions, as required under state policy.

The move, timed with Republic Day, is part of an annual gesture aimed at promoting rehabilitation and reducing prison overcrowding, while ensuring public safety through case-by-case scrutiny.

Prison reform advocates have welcomed the decision, describing it as consistent with humanitarian principles. However, they stressed the importance of monitoring post-release behaviour to ensure reintegration into society.

With MP’s prisons housing thousands of inmates, such initiatives reflect the government’s effort to balance justice with mercy. The releases are scheduled to take place January 26, symbolising hope, renewal and the spirit of freedom on Republic Day.

KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE

Bose Krishnamachari steps down

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: Eminent artist and co-founder of Kochi-Muziris Biennale Bose Krishnamachari Wednesday said he is stepping down as the president of the biennale and as a member of the board of trustees of the Kochi Biennale Foundation, citing “personal and family reasons”.

He said that as the foundation is in a “strong place” and future editions “already gaining momentum”, it is the right time to return to his own artistic practice.

Earlier Wednesday, foundation’s chairperson Venu V released a statement announcing Krishnamachari’s resignation from the foundation and the biennale.

“I wanted to share this with you personally. After much reflection and discussion over the past few weeks, I have decided to step down as President of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Kochi Biennale Foundation,” Krishnamachari said in a statement.

Thousands offer prayers at Sabarimala on Makaravilakku

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Pathanamthitta (Kerala), Jan 14: Thousands of devotees thronged the hill shrine of Lord Ayyappa here Wednesday to witness the ‘Makaravilakku’, marking the climax of the annual two-month-long pilgrimage season, amid heavy rush.

Clad in black attire and carrying the traditional ‘irumudi kettu’ on their heads, pilgrims waited for hours along the forest pathways and temple precincts to have darshan of the deity on the auspicious day.

Undeterred by the crowd, devotees continuously chanted the ‘Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa’ mantras as they moved slowly towards the sanctum sanctorum. In the evening, the sacred ornaments known as ‘thiruvabharanam’ were brought to the hill temple from the Pandalam palace, around 85 km away, in a ceremonial procession that began two days earlier.

State Devaswom Minister V N Vasavan, Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president K Jayakumar and other officials concerned received the procession bringing the sacred jewels.

The jewels were later re-

ceived by the temple tantr (chief priest) and ‘melsanthi’ (head priest) at the ‘Sannidhanam’ (temple complex).

After the holy jewels reached the shrine, the idol of Lord Ayyappa was adorned with the ornaments, following which ‘deeparadhana’ (aarati) was performed and the temple doors were opened for devotees to have darshan. Chants and hymns reverberated across the temple complex as pilgrims struggled hard to catch a glimpse of the deity decorated with the sacred jewels.

Some minutes after the aarati, the ‘makara jyothi’, regarded by devotees as a divine light, appeared on the eastern horizon above Ponnambalamedu, a hillock located about eight km from the shrine, triggering loud chants of devotion.

Thousands of pilgrims gathered at various viewpoints in and around Sabarimala to witness the celestial event.

The state government and the TDB, which manages the shrine, had made extensive arrangements for crowd control and the safety of devotees across the temple complex and surrounding areas.



People take a holy dip in the Narmada river on the occasion of ‘Makar Sankranti’ festival, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

Saksham Anganwadis transforming early childhood

AGENCIES

Neemuch, Jan 14: The Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan initiative, launched under the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is emerging as a transformative step in the field of women and child development. It is fast turning traditional Anganwadi centres into modern, vibrant hubs of learning, nutrition, and care.

Anganwadi centres under the scheme are being upgraded beyond their “conventional role of nutrition distribution”. They are now being developed as well-equipped centres that are offering a blend of education, health, and recreation. Facilities such as LED televisions, RO water filters, modern teaching aids, toys, hygienic meal arrangements, and nutrition gardens are being provided, aimed at ensuring a child-friendly and engaging environment. This initiative has significantly contributed to the holistic development of children while also enhancing awareness among mothers regarding nutrition and health.

In Neemuch district, 58 Anganwadi centres have already been developed as Saksham Anganwadis. These centres offer smart learning, clean



drinking water, and nutritious meals, creating a sense of trust and confidence among families. The smiling faces of children and the growing sense of security among mothers of the kids bear testimony to the success of the scheme. The initiative reflects a strong commitment to nurturing not only today’s children but also the future of the nation.

As part of this effort, Anganwadi Centre No. 4 in Gram Panchayat Bharbhadiya and the Anganwadi Centre in Gram Panchayat Girdoda have also been up-

graded under the scheme.

According to officials, children at these centres are benefiting from digital learning through LED TVs, along with educational materials and play equipment. These items support their overall development. Nutrition exhibitions are regularly organised at the centres. At the same time, the first and third Tuesdays of every month are observed as Mangal Diwas, featuring ‘Goddh Bharai’ programmes for pregnant women and ‘Suposhan Diwas’ activities.

Children attending the An-

ganwadi centres are receiving early education in an engaging, play-based manner, ensuring their all-around development. Pregnant women are provided with nutritious food, timely vaccination, and health guidance. These ceremonies are also organised at the centres to promote maternal health and community participation.

Speaking on the initiative, Neemuch District Programme Officer (Women and Child Development) Ankita Pandya said that under the Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 schemes, special attention is

In Neemuch district, 58 Anganwadi centres have already been developed as Saksham Anganwadis. These centres offer smart learning, clean drinking water, and nutritious meals, creating a sense of trust and confidence among families

being given to the upgradation of Anganwadi centres and child nutrition. She informed that 58 Anganwadi centres have already been developed in the first phase, with 268 more selected for the second phase. Facilities such as electricity, toilets, drinking water, TV installation, nutrition gardens, rainwater harvesting, and toys for children have been ensured. She added that special focus is being laid on the nutrition of pregnant women and malnourished children, with four Mangal Diwas events organised every month as community celebrations.

Discussion on book about Babur cancelled at BLF; writer protests

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Jan 14: Architect-turned-writer Aaabbas Maldahiyar Wednesday took to X to lament the cancellation of a discussion on his book about Mughal Emperor Babur at the Bhopal Literature and Art Festival (BLF).

Police apprehended that right-wing organisations would oppose the event and there would be vandalism, claimed the organisers of the festival which was held from January 9 to 11.

Posting on X an open letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maldahiyar said a session on his book ‘Babur: The Quest for Hindustan’ was cancelled after a newspaper wrongly accused him of trying to glorify Babur.

“On the basis of these baseless accusations, some so-called Hindu organisations issued serious threats, which included threats to burn my book and damage bookstores,” he said.

Maldahiyar told PTI over phone from Bengaluru that it was unfortunate that without reading the book, ‘Swadesh’ newspaper published a story

which led to the cancellation of the event.

The newspaper, however, claimed that they were not against the writer or the book, but considered Babur to be “irrelevant”.

According to Maldahiyar, he sent a clarification to the newspaper which was not published. Subsequently, the organisers arranged a session on ‘Ancient Architecture’, he said. Swadesh editor Atul Tare told PTI that they had no objection to the book or the author.

“What is or is not there in the book, is not an issue for us. Our protest is that Ram Mandir is already established. The flag has been hoisted. And this year, as Modi ji says, is for taking forward positive issues. This is the 150th year of Vande Mataram. It is the centenary year of the Sangh. So there should be many positive issues,” said Tare.

“We have raised questions on the relevance of that issue for us and also on the entire working system of BLF. And you must have seen that the trustees of Bharat Bhavan and many senior writers also expressed their views on the same lines,” he said.

Mamata Banerjee seems to be at her wits' end. The time given to Mamata Banerjee vide the defamation notice on my behalf has now expired, and being in a fix has prevented her from replying

SUVENDU ADHIKARI |

OPPOSITION LEADER, WEST BENGAL

The BJP has nurtured a poisonous weed in Maharashtra. Vigilant citizens must recognise it and uproot it in the forthcoming municipal elections. This devious politics would turn Maharashtra into another Bihar

HARSHWARDHAN SAPKAL |

CONGRESS PRESIDENT, MAHARASHTRA

The state government will formulate a nutrition policy for the state to ensure availability of nutritious food for all vulnerable groups, including children, adolescent girls, and expectant and lactating mothers

SUKHINDER SINGH SUKHU |

CHIEF MINISTER, HIMACHAL PRADESH

POST OF THE DAY

A law should be passed in Parliament that mandates the following: All MPs, MLAs, judges, ministers, IAS, IPS, and other government officials must receive treatment only in government hospitals. No one should be allowed to seek treatment in private hospitals or travel abroad for medical care. them experience the healthcare infrastructure they have built for the common people.

@RajeshwariRW

SHORT TAKES

Misri meets senior leader of CPC

New Delhi: India Wednesday underlined the need to take "positive steps" to create the right environment for improving ties with China as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri hosted Sun Haiyan, a senior leader of the Communist Party of China (CPC), focusing on initiatives to rebuild the relations. Sun, the vice minister of the CPC's international department, is currently on a visit to India to explore ways to improve relations between the two countries. In the meeting, Misri emphasised the importance of increasing understanding between the people of the two countries in order to rebuild ties and in this context, highlighted the need to "take positive steps to create the right environment for improved bilateral relations," the external affairs ministry said in a readout. The discussions between Misri and Sun covered the progress in stabilising and rebuilding bilateral ties, with the priority on business and people-centric engagements, and ways to take forward bilateral engagement in 2026, it said.

Rakesh Aggarwal appointed NIA chief

New Delhi: Counter-terrorism expert Rakesh Aggarwal was Wednesday appointed as the new director general of the National Investigation Agency (NIA), the country's anti-terror agency. Aggarwal, a 1994-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer of Himachal Pradesh cadre, is currently working as special director general in the anti-terror agency. He was also holding the additional charge of the post of DG, NIA, after the premature repatriation of Sadanand Vasant Date to Maharashtra last month.

Goa has recorded a crime detection rate of 86 per cent, which is the highest in the country

PRAMOD SAWANT |

CHIEF MINISTER, GOA

MUMBAI ARTIST FINALIST FOR \$1MN GLOBAL TEACHER PRIZE

Rouble Nagi, an art and social science teacher based in Mumbai, was named a top 10 finalist for the 1-million-dollar Global Teacher Prize 2026 in London Wednesday. Nagi works on education in slums and rural communities across India as founder of the Rouble Nagi Art Foundation and Missal India



UAPA CASE

Delhi court convicts Kashmiri separatist Asiya Andrabi

Andrabi, the founder of the all-women separatist group DeM in 1987, was arrested in April 2018 and charges were framed against her under the UAPA for allegedly conspiring to commit terrorist acts, being members of a terrorist organisation, and providing support to such groups

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: In a significant development, a special court here Wednesday convicted Kashmiri separatist Asiya Andrabi and two others for offences including conspiracy to wage war against the country and being members of a terrorist organisation under stringent anti-terror law UAPA.

Andrabi, the founder of the all-women separatist group Dukhtaraan-e-Millat (DeM) in 1987, was arrested in April 2018 and charges were framed against her under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for allegedly conspiring to commit terrorist acts, being members of a terrorist organisation, and providing support to such groups.

Additional Sessions Judge Chander Jit Singh, as the special National Investigation Agency (NIA) judge, had heard the case against Andrabi and her two associates - Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen.

The special judge found them guilty of offences under UAPA sections 18 (punishment for conspiracy) and 38 (offence relating to membership of a terrorist organisation) Wednesday.

The court also convicted the three under IPC sections 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups), 153B (imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration), 121-



A (conspiracy to wage war against Government of India), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief).

The accused were physically present in the packed courtroom in the afternoon amid tight security for pronouncement of the judgement.

The court has now listed the case January 17 for hearing arguments on the quantum of sentence which may exceed imprisonment for life for the offences under the stringent provisions of the anti-terror law.

Andrabi and her two associates were formally charged with multiple offences under the stringent UAPA and the IPC in February 2021.

It was alleged that they plotted to wage war against the country, besides conspiring to carry out terror-related activities. In April 2018, on

directions of the Union Home Ministry, the NIA registered a case against them as well as the DeM.

According to the FIR, the "central government has received information that Aasiya Andrabi and her associates namely Sofi Fehmeeda and Nahida Nasreen are actively running a terrorist organisation named as 'Dukhtaran-E-Millat' (DeM) which is proscribed under the First Schedule to the UAPA".

"They are using various media platforms to spread insurrectionary imputations and hateful speeches that endanger the integrity, security and sovereignty of India. The DEM through Aasiya Andrabi openly advocates secession of Jammu and Kashmir from the Union of India and has also called for Jihad and use of violence against India," the FIR alleged.

WATER CONTAMINATION

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Indore, Jan 14: An audit report has been submitted to the Indore administration on the deaths of 21 persons in Bhagirathpura, with findings suggesting 15 of the fatalities may be linked to a recent outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea in the area, according to sources. Five new cases of diarrhoea, linked to drinking contaminated water in the Bhagirathpura area of Indore, the country's cleanest city, were found Tuesday, a Madhya Pradesh health department official said.

Indore Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO) Dr Madhav Prasad Hasani said the new diarrhoea patients from Bhagirathpura visited the outpatient department (OPD) of health centres, where they were treated. The local administration has

NEET PG-2025 cutoffs lowered after two rounds of counselling

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: With over 18,000 postgraduate medical seats across the country remaining vacant, the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences (NBEMS) has revised the qualifying percentiles for NEET-PG 2025 admissions, reducing it to zero percentile from 40 percentile for reserved categories.

According to the notice published by NBEMS Tuesday, the NEET PG cutoff for the general category has been reduced to seven percentile from 50.

The decision follows the completion of round two counselling. Official sources said the revision aims to ensure optimal utilisation of available seats, which are vital for expanding India's pool of trained medical specialists. Leaving such seats vacant undermines efforts to improve healthcare delivery and results in the loss of valuable educational resources, the sources said. NEET-PG serves as a ranking mechanism to facilitate transparent, merit-based allocation of seats through centralised counselling.

The previous percentile thresholds had restricted the pool of eligible candidates despite the availability of seats.

Listing the key highlights, official sources said the admissions remain strictly merit-based, determined by NEET-PG rank and candidate preferences.

Allotments will be made only through authorised counselling mechanisms and no direct or discretionary admissions are permitted. Inter-se merit and choice-based allocation will continue to guide seat distribution, the sources said.

The sources said there will be no dilution of academic standards and that the revised percentile merely expands eligibility among already-qualified MBBS doctors.

Looking forward to working closely with New Delhi: Gor



Gor, the 27th US ambassador to India, said it was an honour for him to serve in India at a time of such promise and opportunity in the US-India relationship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: US Ambassador Sergio Gor Wednesday said he was looking forward to working closely with New Delhi to advance shared priorities in areas of defence, trade, technology and critical minerals and to strengthen the overall partnership, as he presented his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu.

Gor, the 27th US ambassador to India, said it was an honour for him to "serve in India at a time of such promise and opportunity in the US-India relationship". He made the remarks after presenting his credentials along with the envoys of Austria and Trinidad and Tobago at an official ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"It is an honour to present my credentials to Indian President Murmu and to serve in India at a time of such promise and opportunity in the US-India relationship," he said.

"I look forward to working closely with the Government of India and the Indian people to advance our shared priorities in defence, trade, technology, and critical minerals, and to

further strengthen the partnership between our two great democracies," he added.

Prior to assuming his duties in New Delhi, Gor, 38, was assistant to the US President and Director of Presidential Personnel in the White House.

He arrived in New Delhi January 9 amid an unprecedented estrangement in ties between the two countries. The India-US ties have been reeling under severe stress after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent including a 25 per cent additional duty for India's purchase of Russian crude oil.

Apart from the tariff, the relations witnessed a downturn on a number of other issues that included Trump's claim of ending the India-Pakistan conflict in May last year and Washington's new immigration policy. In an address at the US embassy, Gor said Monday that no country is as essential as India to the United States.

"You and I have an incredible once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to redefine diplomacy. What it can accomplish could be the most consequential global partnership of this century," Gor had said.

Audit indicates 15 deaths linked to diarrhoea outbreak in Indore



so far confirmed the deaths of six persons due to vomiting and diarrhoea caused by drinking contaminated water. However, local residents claimed 23 patients, including a six-month-old child, have died so far due to the outbreak.

Meanwhile, a committee from the government-run

Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Medical College here has submitted an 'audit' report to the administration on the deaths of 21 persons in Bhagirathpura.

Sources familiar with the contents of the report Tuesday said 15 of these deaths may be linked to the vomiting and diarrhoea outbreak in some way.

"A committee of senior doctors from the college was formed to analyse the causes of the deaths in Bhagirathpura. This committee has submitted its report," District Magistrate Shivam Verma told reporters on Tuesday. Verma, however, did not provide specific details about the 'death audit' report.

He said some fatalities in Bhagirathpura were likely due to vomiting and diarrhoea caused by unclean drinking water, but the deaths of some patients were unrelated to the outbreak.

The committee could not reach at any conclusion regarding the actual cause of death in some other cases, said the senior bureaucrat.

He said the district administration has so far provided financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh each to 18 affected families in Bhagirathpura.

INDIAN RAILWAYS' UNIQUE INITIATIVE

Indian Railways has long been the social and economic lifeline of the nation. As it evolves with high-speed technology and advanced safety, it is also redefining the passenger experience. A unique new initiative—serving authentic regional cuisines on Vande Bharat trains—is transforming rail travel from a mere commute into a rich cultural celebration. By integrating local flavors into the onboard menu, Indian Railways is paying a delicious tribute to India's heritage while prioritizing passenger comfort and quality.

From 'travel' to 'experiential journey'

Modern travelers seek more than just punctual arrivals; they value the quality of the time spent in transit. Recognizing this, Indian Railways has introduced traditional meals that allow passengers to explore the distinctive flavors of various states without leaving their seats. This shift marks the transition of

A taste of regional cuisines on Vande Bharat trains



the railways into a "thought center" focused on holistic passenger satisfaction and cultural immersion.

A Symbol Of Unity In Diversity

India's strength lies in its diversity of language, attire, and especially

food. The Vande Bharat Express has become a platform where these diverse identities meet. From the spicy aromatic dishes of the South to the subtle, mountain-grown flavors of the North, the menu represents a "Mini India." On the Rourkela-Howrah

route, passengers can relish Kosha Paneer, while the Howrah-Puri route features Aloo Potoi Bhaja, connecting travelers to Bengal's traditional kitchens. From Bihar, the famous Champaran Paneer and Champaran Chicken bring the rustic, earthy aroma of rural traditions to the tracks.

The Nagpur-Secunderabad route serves Kanda Poha, a staple Maharashtrian breakfast. Simultaneously, the bold spices of Andhra Pradesh are showcased through Andhra Kodi Kura. On the CSMT-Madgaon line, Masala Upma offers a healthy, light alternative for coastal travelers.

Gujarat's balanced flavors shine with Methi Thepla and Masala Lauki on the Sabarmati-Veraval route. Meanwhile, Odisha's comforting home-style cooking is represented by Aloo Phoolgobi on the Puri-bound trains.

The Thiruvananthapuram routes offer a grand Keralaite feast, including Appam, Kadala Curry, and the

sweet Palada Payasam, providing a complete immersion into the state's coconut-rich culinary legacy.

In the North, the Katra-Srinagar route introduces passengers to Dogri Ambal Kaddu and Kashmiri Tamatar Chaman, finishing with the iconic Kesar Phirni.

Strengthening The Local Economy

Beyond the palate, this initiative serves a greater economic purpose. By sourcing local ingredients and employing traditional cooking techniques, Indian Railways is championing the "Vocal for Local" movement. This creates a robust supply chain that benefits regional farmers, local chefs, and small-scale entrepreneurs, ensuring that the progress of the railways translates into prosperity for the community.

Through this culinary revolution, the Vande Bharat Express is not just moving people across distances—it is bringing the heart of India to their plates.

of the day


quote

We all want peace for Ukraine, and for that Ukraine must be in a position of strength. With the military assistance, Ukraine can stand strong against Russia, and at the same time it can integrate more closely into Europe's defence industrial base



URSULA VON DER LEYEN | PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Our trading partners are increasingly diversified, and our risk-resilience has significantly strengthened



WANG JUN | VICE-MINISTER OF THE GENERAL ADMINISTRATION OF CUSTOMS, CHINA

I have been informed this morning that X is acting to ensure full compliance with UK law



KEIR STARMER | PM, UK

SHORT TAKES

3 Indians charged over elderly couple's murder

Ottawa: The trial began Monday for three Indian-origin men accused of killing an elderly couple in Canada's British Columbia in 2022, Canadian media reports said. The couple - Arnold and Joanne De Jong - were found dead in their house on May 9, 2022. The accused men were identified as Gurkaran Singh, Abhijeet Singh, and Khushveer Singh Toor. On Monday, a court in British Columbia's Abbotsford heard that the accused had previously done work for Arnold and Joanne De Jong through a cleaning company. The court heard that Arnold and Joanne were unreachable by phone the morning after a family gathering in their house on May 8, 2022, prompting one of their sons-in-law to check on them. The prosecution alleged that Gurkaran, Abhijeet, and Khushveer were motivated by debt, financial pressure, and greed, and hence they carried out the murder.

10 Indian fishermen arrested by SL Navy

Colombo: The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 10 Indian fishermen and seized their trawler for allegedly fishing in the island nation's territorial waters. The arrests were made Monday in the northern sea area off Delft Island, the Navy said in a statement. The 10 Indian fishermen and their seized trawler were handed over to the Fisheries Inspector of Myliddy, Jaffna, for legal proceedings, it said. The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters. In 2025, the Sri Lankan Navy apprehended 346 Indian fishermen for alleged poaching and seized 44 trawlers, according to the statement.

PALAK PANEER, PREJUDICE

Washington, Jan 14: Two Indian PhD students at the University of Colorado Boulder have won a Rs 1.8 crore (\$200,000) civil rights settlement following a discrimination dispute that stemmed from an incident involving Indian food. The case dates back to September 2023, when Aditya Prakash, 34, was allegedly asked by a university staff member not to heat his lunch—palak paneer—in a departmental microwave, citing its “pungent smell.” According to multiple reports, when confronted, Prakash responded briefly, say-

Indian Sikh woman who married Pak man held, sent to shelter home



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lahore, Jan 14: An Indian Sikh woman, who contracted marriage with a local Muslim during a visit to Pakistan in November, was arrested and sent to a government-run shelter home in Lahore, a Punjab government source said Wednesday. Sarabjeet Kaur, 48, was among 2,000 Sikh pilgrims who had entered Pakistan via Wagah border from India in November last year to attend the festivities related to the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak. The pilgrims returned home after a few days, but Kaur went missing. A senior police officer in Lahore later said that Kaur contracted marriage with Nasir Hussain of Sheikhpura district, some 50 kms from Lahore, a day after she arrived in Pakistan on November 4. Later, Kaur and Hussain filed a petition in the Lahore High Court complaining that the police had conducted an illegal raid at their house in Farooqabad, Sheikhpura, and pressured them to end the marriage. Lahore High Court Justice Farooq Haider ordered the police to stop harassing the couple. "Instead of following the court order, the Punjab police apprehended the couple and sent Ms Kaur to Darul Aman (government-run shelter home) in Lahore," the source in the Punjab government told PTI. He said the authorities want to deport Kaur while her husband is in police custody facing a case.

Nepali Congress party splits, Gagan elected new president



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kathmandu, Jan 14: The Nepali Congress party on Wednesday formally split as negotiations between the two factions, led by general secretaries Gagan Thapa and Bishwo Prakash Sharma, and party president Sher Bahadur Deuba, failed to reach an agreement. Thapa, 49, was unanimously elected as the president of the Nepali Congress party at the Special General Convention. The oldest and largest party of the country finally split after the last minute call by Thapa and Sharma for Deuba to resign from the post of party president was rejected. The general secretary duo asked Deuba to quit the top post and not contest the upcoming

ing he was heating his food and would leave immediately. The incident escalated after Prakash raised concerns about what he described as discriminatory treatment. He and his partner, Urmi Bhattacheryya, 35, subsequently filed a civil lawsuit in the United States District Court for Colorado, alleging retaliation by the university. In the complaint, Prakash said he was repeatedly summoned to meetings with senior faculty and accused of making staff “feel unsafe.” Bhattacheryya claimed she was removed from her teaching assistant position without explanation

Iran warns of retaliation if US strikes

Death toll in crackdown goes over 2,500

REUTERS

Dubai, Jan 14: The United States is withdrawing some personnel from bases in the Middle East, a US official said Wednesday, after a senior Iranian official said Tehran had warned neighbours it would hit American bases if Washington strikes. With Iran's leadership trying to put down the worst domestic unrest the Islamic Republic has ever faced, Tehran is seeking to deter US President Donald Trump's repeated threats to intervene on behalf of anti-government protesters. A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the United States was with-

drawing some personnel from key bases in the region as a precaution given heightened regional tensions. Three diplomats said some personnel had already been advised to leave the main US air base in the region in Qatar, although there were no immediate signs of a large-scale evacuation of troops, as took place in the hours before an Iranian missile attack last year. Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene in support of protesters in Iran, where thousands of people have been reported killed in a crackdown on the protests against clerical rule. Iran and its Western foes have both described the unrest, which began two weeks

US withdrawing personnel from bases in Middle East as precaution
Israeli assessment sees US intervening, timing and scope unclear
Protests have posed biggest challenge to authorities in years

Iran signals fast trials, executions for protesters

The head of Iran's judiciary signalled Wednesday there would be fast trials and executions ahead for those detained in nationwide protests despite a warning from US President Donald Trump. The comments from Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei come as activists had warned hangings of those detained could come soon. Already, a bloody security force crackdown on the demonstrations has killed at least 2,571, the US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported. That figure dwarfs the death toll from any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalls the chaos surrounding the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Trump repeatedly has warned that the United States may take military action over the killing of peaceful protesters, just months after it bombed Iranian nuclear sites during a 12-day war launched by Israel against the Islamic Republic in June. Meanwhile Wednesday, Iran held a mass funeral of some 100 security force members killed in the demonstrations after authorities earlier said it would be 300. Tens of thousands of mourners attended, holding Iranian flags and photos of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The caskets, covered in Iranian flags, stood stacked at least three high. Red and white roses and framed photographs of people who were killed covered them. People elsewhere remained fearful in the streets. Plainclothes security forces still milled around some neighbourhoods, though anti-riot police and members of the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's all-volunteer Basij force appeared to have been sent back to their barracks. The Human Rights Activists News Agency said 2,403 of the dead were protesters and 147 were government-affiliated. Twelve children were killed, along with nine civilians it said were not taking part in protests. More than 18,100 people have been detained, the group said.



The three diplomats told Reuters that some personnel had been advised to leave the US military's Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar by Wednesday evening. One of the diplomats described the move as a "posture change" rather than an "ordered evacuation". There was no sign of troops being moved off the base to a nearby soccer stadium and shopping mall, as took place last June in the



ROUSING WELCOME: Traditionally-built stitched ship INSV Kaundinya, sails into the shores of Muscat on Wednesday after a 17-day maiden overseas voyage, from India to Oman

CLIMATE CRISIS

REUTERS

Brussels, Jan 14: Last year was among the planet's three warmest on record, the World Meteorological Organization said Wednesday, as EU scientists also confirmed average temperatures have now exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming for the longest since records began.

2025 among world's three hottest years

The WMO, which consolidates eight climate datasets from around the world, said six of them - including the European Union's European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) and the British national weather service - had ranked 2025 as the third warmest, while two placed it as the second warmest in the 176-year record. The US National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration also confirmed in data released on Wednesday that 2025 was the third-warmest year in its global temperature record, which dates back to 1850. All eight datasets confirmed that the last three years were the planet's three hottest since records began, the WMO said. The warmest year on record was 2024.

US freezes visas for 75 countries

NEW YORK: The Trump administration Wednesday announced pausing immigrant visa processing for individuals from 75 countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Russia, as part of increasing crackdown on foreigners likely to rely on public benefits in the US. "The State Department will pause immigrant visa processing from 75 countries whose migrants take welfare from the American people at unacceptable rates," the State Department said. "The Trump administration will PAUSE immigrant visa processing from 75 countries until the US can ensure that incoming immigrants will not become a public charge or extract wealth from American taxpayers. AMERICA FIRST," the White House said in a post on X.

1st time in 50 yrs, US migration in negative

HOUSTON: The United States recorded negative net migration in 2025 for the first time in at least half a century, driven mainly by a sharp decline in new arrivals following the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, according to a report. The Brookings Institution in a report released Tuesday estimates net migration ranged from a loss of about 295,000 people to near zero for the year. While the administration stepped up removals, the report said the decline was largely due to fewer entries rather than deportations alone. The slowdown reflects tighter visa approvals and longer processing times affecting students and skilled professionals from countries, including India, the largest source of international students and a major contributor to the US technology workforce.

POST-WAR GAZA LEADERSHIP

US President Donald Trump is expected to push ahead with his phased plan for Gaza's future by announcing the administration that will run the war-ravaged Palestinian territory, sources said



WORLD ON EDGE



ago as demonstrations against dire economic conditions and rapidly escalated in recent days, as the most violent since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that installed Iran's system of clerical rule.

An Iranian official has said more than 2,000 people have died. A rights group put the toll at more than 2,600. Iran "had never faced this volume of destruction", Armed Forces Chief of Staff Abdolrahim Mousavi said Wednesday, blaming foreign enemies. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot described "the most violent repression in Iran's contemporary history".

ISRAELI ASSESSMENT SAYS TRUMP HAS DECIDED TO INTERVENE

According to an Israeli assessment, Trump has decided to intervene, although the scope and timing of this action remains unclear, an Israeli official said. The three diplomats told Reuters that some personnel had been advised to leave the US military's Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar by Wednesday evening. One of the diplomats described the move as a "posture change" rather than an "ordered evacuation". There was no sign of troops being moved off the base to a nearby soccer stadium and shopping mall, as took place last June in the

PTI PHOTO

of the day

Quote

India should take the next leap in promoting green technologies after it marked a record-breaking year in its clean energy journey in 2025, with non-fossil fuel installed capacity rising to 266.78 GW

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE | CH DIRECTOR GENERAL

Clients increasingly view Infosys as their AI partner with demonstrated expertise, innovation capabilities and strong delivery credentials. This has helped them unlock business potential and enhanced value realisation

SALIL PAREKH | INFOSYS CEO AND MD

2025 has been a year of purposeful and broad-based progress for us. What stands out is that our performance is rooted in consistent execution and long-term road map for India

PYUSH ARORA | MD AND CEO, SKODA AUTO VOLKSWAGEN INDIA

SHORT TAKES

India to grow at 7.2%: World Bank

New Delhi: The World Bank has raised India's GDP growth forecast to 7.2 per cent for the current fiscal, up by 0.9 percentage points from its June projections, on the back of robust domestic demand and tax reforms. In its flagship report "Global Economic Prospects", the World Bank also said growth in India is projected to slow to 6.5 per cent in 2026-27. The projection is based on the assumption that the 50-per cent import tariffs by the US remain in place throughout the forecast horizon. "Even so, India is expected to maintain the fastest growth rate among the world's largest economies," the report said.

Curtains on 10-min delivery

New Delhi: After Blinkit, major quick commerce players Zepto, Swiggy Instamart, and Flipkart Minutes have dropped their '10-minute' delivery branding following pressure from the government and labour rights groups over the welfare and safety of delivery partners. The move comes after Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, in a meeting last week, urged quick commerce firms to prioritise worker safety by removing rigid 10-minute deadlines. It was being said that such hyper-fast delivery promises place undue stress on riders, potentially compromising their road safety. Quick commerce firms could not be immediately contacted for comments.

RBI nod to Japan's SMBC to set up wholly owned subsidiary

Mumbai: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Wednesday said it has granted "in-principle" approval to Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC), Japan, for setting up a wholly owned subsidiary in India. SMBC is currently carrying on banking business in India in branch mode through its four branches in New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Bengaluru. "The in-principle approval has been granted to the bank for setting up a wholly owned subsidiary (WOS) through conversion of its existing branches in India," the RBI said in a statement. The central bank further said it will consider granting a licence for commencement of banking business in the wholly owned subsidiary to SMBC on being satisfied that the bank has complied with the requisite conditions laid down by the RBI as part of 'in-principle' approval. In 2025, SMBC acquired 24.22 per cent stake in private sector lender YES Bank, to become its largest shareholder, while SBI continues to hold a significant stake of over 10 per cent.



You want to be on the edge of the latest technology. If I can bring that (upgrade) platform to home appliances and TV, that will enable consumers to recoup on the resale value and move to the latest technology

JB PARK | SAMSUNG SOUTHWEST ASIA PRESIDENT AND CEO

India's trade deficit with China surges to \$116bn

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beijing, Jan 14: India's exports to China posted a USD 5.5 billion increase compared to last year bucking the declining trend even as the trade deficit hit a record USD 116.12 billion, as per the annual trade data released by Chinese customs here Wednesday.

Bilateral trade, too, surged to an all time high to USD 155.62 in 2025, according to the data.

Indian exports to China which over the years struggled to make headway climbed to USD 19.75 billion between January and December last year, posting a 9.7 per cent increase, amounting to USD 5.5 billion, according to the data.

At the same time, Chinese exports to India increased 12.8 per cent to USD 135.87 billion last year.

While trade is picking up from both countries, the total bilateral trade surged to a record high of USD 155.62 billion in 2025, the year in which both countries faced US President Donald Trump's tariff hikes.

he trade deficit -- a constant problem in India-China trade -- touched a record high of USD 116.12 billion, crossing the USD 100-billion for the second time since 2023.

In 2024, the trade deficit was USD 99.21 billion with China's exports totalling to USD 113.45 billion, and India's outbound shipments to China stagnating at USD 14.25 billion.

China's annual trade data covers from January to December while India releases



its figures from March to April.

Observers said the USD 5.5 billion increase in Indian exports, though modest, is significant, pointing to a structural shift with items such as oil meals, marine products, telecom instruments and spices, making headway into the tough Chinese market, which is struggling to expand its domestic consumption.

Also, India over the years has been demanding China to open its IT, pharma, and agricultural produce, which are India's strong areas.

China's overall global trade continues to grow, defying trade tensions with the US.

Customs data showed that the surplus surged to a record of almost USD 1.2 trillion in 2025 an increase of 20 per cent compared to 2024, with exports at USD 3.77 trillion and imports at USD 2.58 trillion.

The growth in China's ex-ports despite Trump tariff hike

was attributed to Beijing's diversification strategy.

Wang Jun, vice-minister of the General Administration of Customs, attributed China's robust export performance last year -- in the face of trade headwinds -- to supportive policies and the country's industrial depth.

"Our trading partners are increasingly diversified, and our risk-resilience has significantly strengthened," he told Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

Gary Ng, senior Asia-Pacific economist at French investment bank Natixis, noted that trade tensions remained, and external demand might not be as strong this year as in 2025, as most central banks no longer have much room for further rate cuts.

"I think Chinese exports will continue to grow in 2026, but at a slightly slower pace," Ng told the newspaper.

Rupee falls 11 paise to close at 90.34 against dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 14: The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day 11 paise lower at 90.34 against the US dollar Wednesday, as the likely central bank intervention was negated by a strong dollar, foreign outflows from capital markets, and elevated crude oil prices.

Forex traders said the rupee is likely to trade with a negative bias on risk aversion in global markets and geopolitical tensions, however, rising odds of a rate cut amid softening inflation and any intervention by the central bank may support the rupee at lower levels.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.26 and touched the intra-day low of 90.38 and a high of 89.94 against the greenback. The currency finally ended the session at 90.34 against the dollar, down 11 paise from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee declined 6 paise to close at 90.23 against the US dollar.

"Indian rupee gained in early trade on likely central bank intervention. However, a strong dollar, FII outflows and a late fall in the domestic markets capped sharp gains," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Mirae Asset ShareKhan.

Choudhary further added that "we expect the rupee to trade with negative bias on risk aversion in global markets and geopolitical tensions".

Traders now focus on the US Supreme Court ruling later in the day on the legality of the Liberation Day tariffs. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 89.95 to 90.50, he said.

Silver zooms by ₹15,000 to hit ₹2.86 lakh/kg



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: Silver prices zoomed by Rs 15,000 to a fresh record of Rs 2,86,000 per kg in the national capital Wednesday, while gold also climbed to touch a lifetime high of Rs 1,46,500 per 10 grams, tracking strong global trends.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver prices extended their blistering rally for the fourth consecutive day by jumping Rs 15,000, or 5.5 per cent, to touch a new peak of Rs 2,86,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) up from Tuesday's close of Rs 2,71,000 per kg.

With the latest rise, the metal had appreciated by Rs 42,500, or 17.45 per cent, over the past four sessions from Rs 2,43,500 per kg on January 8.

Traders said silver continued to outperform gold in terms of returns. During the calendar year, the metal has rallied nearly 20 per cent, gaining Rs 47,000 from Rs 2,39,000 per kg recorded on December 31, 2025.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also climbed by Rs 1,500 to

scale yet another peak of Rs 1,46,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 1,45,000 per 10 grams in the previous session.

In the past four sessions, the precious yellow metal prices have risen Rs 6,000, or 4.3 per cent, from Rs 1,40,500 per 10 grams on January 8.

So far this year, gold prices have gained Rs 8,800, or 6.4 per cent, from Rs 1,37,700 per 10 grams recorded on December 31, 2025.

The domestic bullion rally mirrors sharp gains in the overseas markets.

Spot silver breached USD 91 per ounce-mark for the first time, surging more than 5 per cent to a record of USD 91.56 per ounce while gold advanced by 1.14 per cent, to a fresh record of USD 4,640.13 per ounce.

"Persistent geopolitical unrest across the globe and a weak dollar index boosted safe-haven demand, while softer inflation data increased expectations of an interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve, underpinning safe-haven appeal," an expert said.

Stock markets extend losses for 2nd day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 14: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined Wednesday, extending their previous day's losses, due to weakness in IT, consumption, and select banking blue-chip stocks amid escalating geopolitical tensions. Besides, persistent foreign fund outflows and fresh tariff-related uncertainties also unnerved investors, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 244.98 points, or 0.29 per cent, to settle at 83,382.71. During the day, it fell 442.49 points or 0.52 per cent to 83,185.20. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 66.70 points, or 0.26 per cent, to 25,665.60. Selective buying in markets and investors' interest in metals, commodities, and energy stocks provided limited support to indices. "Indian benchmark indices ended the session with marginal losses amid heightened volatility. The market witnessed selling pressure in the second half of the day, largely driven by continued FII outflows and uncertainty surrounding the US trade deal, which kept investor sentiment cautious," according to Bajaj Broking Research.

From the 30-Sensex firms, Tata Consultancy Services, Asian Paints, Maruti, Sun Pharma, Hindustan Unilever, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank and Larsen & Toubro were among the biggest laggards.

On the other hand, Tata Steel, NTPC, Axis Bank and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers. Investors remained hesitant amid mixed global cues and lingering geopolitical concerns. Overall sentiment was cautious to negative, with consolidation likely to persist as traders weigh FII outflows, global tariff pressures, and near-term technical supports, said Aakash Shah, Technical Research Analyst at Choice Equity Broking Private Limited.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.25 per cent, and the midcap index went up by 0.16 per cent.

Gupta Event Management to host 2nd Furniture, Interior & Lifestyle Expo-2026



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: Gupta Event Management Pvt. Ltd. announced the 2nd Furniture, Interior & Lifestyle Expo-2026, scheduled to be held from January 16 to January 26 at Club Town Ground, here.

The 11-day expo promises to bring together global craftsmanship, contemporary design, and lifestyle essentials under one roof.

Addressing a press meet, Payal Acharya Gupta, Director, Gupta Event Management Pvt. Ltd., said the expo has been planned keeping the on-going wedding season in mind.

"Furniture and lifestyle products play a crucial role during the wedding season. This expo will offer a wide range of furniture, including

customised varieties, along with lifestyle products essential for both men and women," she said.

She said that exhibitors from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, UAE, Thailand, Korea, and other countries will participate, with France joining as an exclusive international exhibitor this year.

The expo will feature over 1,00,000 products from 10 countries and 22 Indian states, ranging from Irani carpets and Kashmiri furniture to modern interior solutions and Korean fashion, blending traditional craftsmanship with modern luxury.

Sujeet Kumar Gupta, Managing Director, and Rashmi Ranjan Kanungo, Advisor, were also present at the press meet.

Home loan growth broadens beyond metros: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: Home loan demand is moving away from core metropolitan markets, with Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities emerging as the dominant contributors to growth in 2025, a report said.

Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities recorded an 81 per cent year-on-year growth in home loan volumes in 2025, significantly higher than the 52 per cent growth seen in Tier-1 cities, fintech-led mortgage distribution platforms Urban Money said in a report.

"This sharp expansion has increased the contribution of Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets to 64 per cent of total home loan volumes in 2025, compared to 60 per cent in 2024, highlighting a structurally broader and more



distributed housing finance cycle," it said.

The findings indicate that housing demand growth is no longer concentrated within a few large metros or premium price segments, it said.

Instead, it said, improving infrastructure connectivity,

expansion of employment hubs and sustained availability of mid-income housing are driving stronger homeownership demand across emerging cities, it said.

As affordability pressures persist in core metros, a growing share of aspiration-

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: Wholesale price inflation increased for the second month in a row, rising 0.83 per cent in December 2025, driven by an uptick in prices of food, non-food articles, and manufactured items on a month-on-month basis, government data showed Wednesday.

After witnessing a deflationary trend in the previous two months, the wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation returned to positive in December. In November and October, the pace of price rise was negative at (-) 0.32 per cent and (-) 1.02 per cent, respectively.

In contrast, WPI inflation was 2.57 per cent in December 2024.

"Positive rate of inflation in December 2025 is primarily due to an increase in prices of other manufacturing, minerals, manufacture of machinery and equipment, manufacture of food products, and textiles, etc," the industry ministry said in a statement.

According to WPI data, deflation in food articles was 0.43 per cent in December, as against



4.16 per cent in November.

In vegetables, deflation was 3.50 per cent in December, compared to 20.23 per cent in November. Barclays India Chief Economist Aastha Gudwani said narrowing deflation in "food articles" and a rise in inflation in "manufacturing products" drove the increase in the headline WPI inflation in December. "We expect modest increases in WPI inflation to continue".

In case of manufactured products, WPI inflation inched up to 1.82 per cent from 1.33 per cent in November 2025.

The non-food articles category showed an inflation of 2.95 per cent in December, against 2.27 per cent in November.

al homebuyers is entering the market through smaller cities and peripheral urban corridors, it said.

The report highlighted strong borrower activity across several Tier-2 and Tier-3 markets, including Chandigarh, Jaipur, Surat, Madurai and Palwal, which recorded significant increases in loan creation during the year.

The scale and consistency of growth across these cities reflect deeper penetration of formal housing finance beyond India's largest urban centres, it said.

Urban Money co-founder Amit Prakash said, "India's housing finance market is becoming more broad-based and structurally balanced. The current growth cycle is being

driven by steady expansion in first-time and mid-income homeownership across a wider set of cities."

While premium borrowing remains limited to a few high-income markets, the larger momentum is clearly affordability-led, supported by infrastructure development and rising aspirations beyond core city centres, he said, adding that this distributed demand base strengthens the long-term stability of the housing finance ecosystem.

Although emerging cities are driving volume growth, premiumisation remains concentrated in a few high-income markets. Mumbai, Gurugram and Hyderabad recorded close to 20 per cent year-on-year growth in average loan ticket sizes, it said.

Mitchell, Young outshine KL

Mitchell, Young help New Zealand level ODI series with India



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Rajkot, Jan 14: Indian spinners were out-bowled on home turf once again and KL Rahul's unbeaten ton was eclipsed by Daryl Mitchell's splendid 131 not out as New Zealand levelled the three-match series 1-1 with a seven-wicket win in the second ODI here Wednesday.

New Zealand not only adapted but also executed better than India on a sluggish wicket here at the Niranjan Shah Stadium to keep the hosts to 284/7 despite Rahul's 91-ball 112 not out (9 fours, 1 six), and overhauled the target in 47.3 overs to end at 286 for three.

The series-deciding third ODI will be played in Indore on Sunday.

Young and Mitchell, among the architects of New Zealand's 3-0 Test series win over India on their previous visit, batted with poise and control even as the asking rate hovered over six an over.

They cruised at a little above five during their second-wicket association which consumed 152 balls for 162 runs, and there wasn't any late hiccup to pre-

New Zealand had seized control with discipline and some stroke of luck as India had slipped from 99 for one to 118 for four before the halfway mark.

The other major contribution from captain Shubman Gill (56 off 53), who collected his second half-century in as many games.

A mishit each proved to be costly for the Indian leadership pair of Gill and Shreyas Iyer (8). Gill had adjusted well to the nature of the pitch to gain pace, striking nine fours and a six over fine leg with a short-arm jab.

However, silence befell on the festive crowd at the Niranjan Shah Stadium when an innocuous delivery outside the off-stump took a thick inside edge and left Virat Kohli's (23) middle stump flattened.

Kohli had begun with a first-ball four but regular wickets at the other end perhaps affected the rhythm with which he has been batting of late, as he had tried to guide the ball behind the wickets but played it on.

BRIEF SCORES

India: 284 for 7 in 50 overs. (KL Rahul 112 not out, S Gill 56; Kristian Clarke 3/56) lost to New Zealand: 286 for 3 in 47.3 overs. (D Mitchell 131 not out, W Young 87; P Krishna 1/49) by seven-wickets

ODI rankings: Kohli reclaims top spot after 5 yrs

Indian batting stalwart Virat Kohli regained the No 1 position, dethroning his teammate Rohit Sharma, who slipped to the No 3 spot in the latest men's rankings, following India's four-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first ODI. Kohli's score of 93 off 91 balls helped the hosts complete the chase, bringing him closer to India legend Sachin Tendulkar and moving him into second place on the all-time men's international run-scoring list. The 37-year-old batting stalwart has returned to the top of the batting charts for the first time since July 2021, after his performance helped India chase down New Zealand's 300-run target in Vadodara.

vent a turnaround.

Young's (87 from 98 balls; 7 fours) solidity in the middle was complemented by the adroitness of Mitchell, who brought out almost all kinds of sweep shots to notch up his third ton against India and overall eighth, finishing at 131 not out from 117 balls (11 fours, 2 sixes).

Earlier, KL Rahul held a faltering innings together on a sluggish surface with a gutsy hundred.

Rahul produced a gritty unbeaten 112 off 92 balls which included 11 fours and two sixes, forging vital partnerships in the second half and snatching control from the Kiwis who had ran through India's formidable batting line-up earlier.



TOP OF THE TABLE

HIL: Kalinga Lancers continue winning run



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ranchi, Jan 14: Alexander Hendrickx found the net to help Vedanta Kalinga Lancers register a 1-0 win against Hyderabad Toofans and maintain their unbeaten run in the Men's Hockey India League here Wednesday.

There was little to separate the two sides in the opening quarter with both teams having four circle entries in the first fifteen minutes.

While Toofans had more of the possession, it was the Lancers who registered the only attempt on target as they threatened to make inroads with swift counter attacks.

Liam Henderson had the opportunity to give his side an early lead, but he was denied by Jean-Paul Danneberg, keeping the teams at level terms at the end of the first quarter.

There was more attacking impetus from both teams to

begin the second quarter as they made inroads, earning a penalty corner each. Keeping the lion's share of possession, the Toofans upped the ante significantly with 12 circle entries compared to Lancers' seven circle entries.

Despite Toofans dominating possession, it was the Lancers who came closest to opening the scoring with Liam Henderson's powerful attempt that hit the post. However, neither side could break the deadlock in what was an engaging first half.

Lancers got the opening goal of the game against the rest of play after Hendrickx (40') converted his dragflick from a penalty corner, scoring his fifth goal of the season to give his side the lead.

The Lancers managed to see out the game rather comfortably with the Toofans failing to register an attempt on goal in the last fifteen minutes.

Chess Mahakumbh int'l conference unveiled by Vishy

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 14: The International Conference on Social and Educational Chess under the banner of Chess Mahakumbh was inaugurated at KIIT University Wednesday, heralding the beginning of a first-of-its-kind mega chess conclave in India.

Organised from January 14 to 16 with the support of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) and the All India Chess Federation (AICF), the conference brought global focus to the role of chess as a tool for education and social transformation.

The inaugural day also witnessed the launch of key chess infrastructure and initiatives at KIIT, including the International Chess Hall and the Viswanathan Anand Chess Academy, further strengthening the university's long-standing commitment to



promoting chess at both grassroots and international levels.

The event drew an impressive lineup of global chess administrators and legends, including

FIDE President and former Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Arkady Dvorkovich, FIDE Vice President and five-time World Champion Viswanathan Anand, FIDE Deputy Chair and former Finance Minister of Latvia Dana Reizniece, AICF President

Nitin Narang, AICF Secretary Dev Patel, and FIDE Event Commission Member Ranjan Mohanty, among others.

Addressing a press conference on the sidelines of the inauguration, Viswanathan Anand, in his address, said he was delighted to return to Bhubaneswar and praised KIIT's consistent recognition at national platforms for institutional support to sports.

He underlined that chess was a powerful educational tool, noting that students who regularly played chess often performed better academically.

FIDE President Arkady Dvorkovich thanked KIIT and KISS Founder Achyuta Samanta for his passion and unwavering commitment towards the promotion of chess. He said the game helped develop critical life skills and cognitive

Gopichand-led panel backs coaches' authority

The report calls India's coaching ecosystem fragmented, inconsistent, and "heavily dependent on individual effort rather than institutional strength"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: India's coaching ecosystem is fragmented, inconsistent, and heavily reliant on individual effort rather than institutional strength, says a Sports Ministry-appointed Task force led by Pullela Gopichand that has advocated primacy to coaches' authority over athlete "discomfort" when "training becomes difficult".

The 43-page report has suggested several remedies to fix the system that seeks international excellence, but given



that it was designed decades ago "cannot deliver the scale, quality, and speed required today." It has therefore proposed a three-tier system overseen by a certification board and a Government-funded Target Olympic Podium Scheme for coaches similar to what is in operation for athletes.

The nine-member panel headed by Gopichand, who is

also the national badminton coach, stresses on the need to move away from "borrowed solutions", an apparent reference to the trend of hiring foreign coaches across disciplines.

"If we aspire to become a consistent global sporting force, we must stop avoiding the complexity of the task. Building our own knowledge, our own expertise, and our own systems is the only way to ensure continuity, self-reliance, and long-term growth," the panel states.

"...our aspirations and our current institutional capabilities operate on completely different parameters. This gap is not a criticism -- it is a recognition that India has entered a new era of sport, and we must create an ecosystem that is aligned with that future," it adds.

"A proliferation of courses, universities, international certifications, and private training programs, while well

intentioned, has created confusion rather than clarity," the report says.

Tucked under the sub-head 'Balancing Art and Science of Coaching', the report touches upon the delicate balance that defines a coach-athlete relationship. Gopichand, who is known to be a tough taskmaster, has often spoken about the need for trust to be the foundation of this partnership. And his philosophy echoes in the recommendations.

"Every improvement lies at the edge of discomfort, and at times, a coach may unintentionally push slightly beyond what is optimal," the report says.

Acknowledging that there is no perfect formula that is universally accepted by every athlete, the panel says emphasis therefore should be on the overall direction of a coach's vision.

INDIA OPEN

SINDHU CRASHES OUT



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 14: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu was knocked out of India Open but Kidambi Srikanth and HS Prannoy progressed to the second round on a mixed day for the hosts at the \$950,000 Super 750 badminton tournament, here Wednesday.

Sindhu, who reached the semifinals of Malaysia Super 1000 last week, couldn't maintain the pressure after narrowly pocketing the opening game to eventually go down 22-20 12-21 15-21 to Vietnam's Thuy Linh Nguyen in 68 minutes.

"I don't think it was my day, she isn't an easy opponent. At this level, everyone plays well and you can't expect easy points or easy wins. She has good strokes, you had to keep the tempo and keep the shuttle in play. Small mistakes in those moments become decisive," Sindhu said after her exit.

Earlier, former world No 1 Srikanth had to dig deep to outlast fellow Indian Tharun Manneapalli 15-21, 21-6, 21-19, while Malvika Bansod, returning from an injury layoff, displayed patience and defensive solidity to beat Chinese Taipei's Pai Yu Po 21-18, 21-19.

Prannoy, who received a last-minute entry in the tournament, made it count as he outwitted last year's runner-up

I definitely need to be more consistent. Giving away easy or consecutive points is something I have to stop. That's the main takeaway for me

PV SINDHU

Lee Cheuk Yiu 22-20 21-18 to advance to the second round. He will next face eighth seed and former world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore.

Amid scrutiny, monkey spotted in stands

A monkey was spotted in one of the spectator galleries at the ongoing India Open badminton tournament Wednesday, adding to the embattled organisers' woes who declared the incident as "unfortunate". The monkey drew considerable attention from fans inside the stadium and on social media. However, it did not disrupt any match or training session, much to the relief to the organisers, who are already facing sustained criticism over playing conditions. "BAI and the venue staff have been working at the stadium continuously for the last 20 days, and this is the first time such an incident has been observed. It is unfortunate, and it is possible that a door may have been inadvertently left open," Badminton Association of India secretary Sanjay Mishra said in a statement. "We are taking all necessary steps to ensure that doors remain securely closed. The stadium is surrounded by significant greenery, which is a natural part of the environment, and we continue to work closely with the authorities to maintain a safe and controlled playing atmosphere." The issue gained traction online after a photographer shared images of the monkey on Instagram. Concerns deepened later when Korean men's doubles player Kang Min Hyuk uploaded a video showing a monkey inside the KD Jadhav Indoor Hall, the tournament's designated training venue. The incident followed criticism on the opening day from Danish player Mia Blichfeldt, who had described the surroundings at the Indira Gandhi Stadium complex as "unhealthy".

Delhi not the place to host badminton: World No 3 Anders Antonsen withdraws

Four-time world championship medallist shuttler Anders Antonsen of Denmark revealed that his withdrawal from the BWF India Open for the third year in a row is due to Delhi's "extreme pollution". "Many are curious as to why I have pulled out of the India Open for the third consecutive year. Due to the extreme pollution in Delhi at the moment, I don't think it's a place to host a badminton tournament," Antonsen shared on Instagram. The 28-year-old further expressed his hopes for improved conditions when the venue hosts the BWF Badminton World Championships in August. He stated, "Crossing my fingers that it will be better in the summer when the World Championship takes place in Delhi." Antonsen, who last competed at the India Open in 2023, where he was eliminated in the second round, also said his withdrawal has resulted in a USD 5,000 fine imposed by the Badminton World Federation. "As a result, BWF once again has fined me \$5000," he concluded. Antonsen's withdrawal came less than a day after his compatriot, Mia Blichfeldt, complained about hygiene conditions at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium. BAI, however, rejected the allegations by the World No 20 Dane, stating that her comments concerned general playing conditions and were not related to the playing arena for the BWF World Tour Super 750 event. Notably, Blichfeldt had also made similar allegations about the India Open last year, blaming the dense smog in India and bird droppings inside the stadium for the illness she developed after the event.

abilities that were difficult to acquire through other means, making it a strong instrument for knowledge-building and personal growth.

Samanta described the occasion as historic, saying chess and Viswanathan Anand were inseparable. He expressed pride that such a prestigious global conference was being hosted in Odisha for the first time and noted that over 5,000 students and players were participating, along with delegates from more than 40 countries.

The Chess Mahakumbh conference saw participation from eminent chess personalities from over 40 countries, along with 80 leading Indian players, and was expected to engage around 5,200 participants, including over 5,000 players from India, making it one of the largest chess-centric academic and social gatherings ever held in the country.

India face USA as U-19 WC begins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bulawayo (Zimbabwe), Jan 14: Favourites India will look to flaunt their superabundance of talent as they begin the quest for a record-extending sixth Under-19 World Cup title with what is expected to be a rather easy outing against USA in the ICC showpiece beginning here Thursday.

Champions in five of the 16 editions, India are by far the most dominant team in the history of the competition, which started back in 1988 with Australia emerging winners in the inaugural event.

Having missed out on the last edition in 2024, when they lost to Australia in the summit showdown, India, who have won the trophy in 2000, 2008, 2012 and 2022 besides 2018, will be keen to add a sixth title to their tally this time around.