HERE . NOW

OrissaPOST

Rani's inspiration

Rani Mukerji opens up about her journey with the Mardaani franchise and the inspiration behind her fearless character

LEISURE | P2

Trade truce

Canada and China strike an initial trade deal that will slash tariffs on electric vehicles and canola

INTERNATIONAL | P10

Silver shoots up

Silver price extends its record-setting rally for the sixth straight day by rising ₹3,600 to ₹2,92,600 per kg in the national capital

BUSINESS | P11

Rugby fever

The 10th Sub-Junior National Rugby Sevens Championship delivers a thrilling opening day at the Kalinga Stadium

SPORTS | P12

VOLUME 15, ISSUE 287 | www.orissapost.com BHUBANESWAR | SATURDAY | JANUARY 17, 2026 12 PAGES | ₹5.00

Mahayuti's big win in Maha civic elections

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 16: Breaking the nearly three-decade-old dominance of the undivided Shiv Sena, the BJP Friday emerged as the single largest party in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) elections, and also triumphed in Pune, where it made mincemeat of the alliance of NCP factions led by Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar.

The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance is set to come to power in 25 of the 29 municipal corporations, including Mumbai, where elections were held January 15, Maharashtra Chief Minister Fadnavis said, addressing jubilant party workers in south Mumbai in the evening.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the voters over the emphatic victory of BJP and allies in the civic polls.

"Thank you Maharashtra! The dynamic people of the state bless the NDA's agenda of pro-people good governance," Modi posted on X.

The BJP-led alliance was set to surpass the 114-seat majority mark in the 227-member BMC, which is India's richest civic body, whose budget for 2025-26 is a whopping ₹74,427 crore.

Counting of votes was held Friday, a day after the polling saw a 54.77 per cent turnout.

The State Election Commission is yet to release an official statement on all the results. An official said the final results may be announced late in the night. Coupled with a decent performance by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, the BJP is now in the driver's seat to govern the cash-rich Mumbai civic body. MORE P9

ISLAND ON EDGE: Military vessel HDMS Ejnar Mikkelsen of the Royal Danish Navy patrols near Nuuk, Greenland. Troops from several European countries continued to arrive in Greenland in a show of support for Denmark as talks between Denmark, Greenland and the US highlighted "fundamental disagreement" over the future of the Arctic island AP/PTI

Tariffs on nations not backing US on Greenland: Trump

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Copenhagen, Jan 16: US President Donald Trump suggested Friday that he may punish countries with tariffs if they don't back the US controlling Greenland, a message that came as a Congressional delegation met Danish and Greenlandic lawmakers in Copenhagen and sought to lower tensions.

Trump for months has insisted that the US should control Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of NATO ally Denmark, and said earlier this week that anything less than the Arctic island being in US hands would be "unacceptable."

"I may put a tariff on countries if they don't go along with Greenland," he said Friday, without providing details. "We need Greenland for national security." He had not previously mentioned using tariffs to try to force the issue.

Earlier this week, the foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland met in Washington this week with US Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. That encounter didn't resolve the deep differences, but did produce an agreement to set up a working group - on whose purpose Denmark and the White House then offered sharply diverging public views.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL

Thanks to all the vikas in Amrit Kaal, even we can now participate in international sports events

Compulsory retirement for non-performing lecturers

The Odisha government's directive to identify non-performing lecturers for possible compulsory premature retirement reflects a long-overdue attempt to restore accountability in state-run higher education institutions. Authorities have been instructed to examine service records and performance appraisal reports and submit well-reasoned proposals, strictly following service rules and principles of natural justice. The move is aimed at maintaining academic standards and administrative efficiency. Institutions have been asked to submit compliance reports to the department by January 31 for further government review

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The Odisha government has asked the authorities of state-run universities and colleges to identify non-performing teachers for compulsory premature retirement and submit compliance reports by January 31, an official said Friday.

In a letter to the registrars

of universities issued January 13, principals of degree colleges and higher secondary schools, the higher education department has directed them to identify the non-performing teachers for action as decided by the state government to initiate action against inefficient and corrupt employees, the official said.

The letter said that the authorities need to review the efficiencies of the teachers and find out inefficient and non-performing staff. "This is being done in the interest of maintaining academic standards and administrative efficiency," the letter said.

"All concerned authorities are requested to carefully examine the service records, performance appraisal reports, integrity status, and overall conduct of college teachers working under the administrative control of Higher Education Department and identify such cases which may warrant consideration for compulsory premature retirement, strictly in accordance with the provisions of the relevant service rules and government guidelines in force," the letter said.

The letter also emphasised that the proposal, if any, should be well-reasoned, supported by records, and duly vetted at the appropriate level, ensuring that the principles of natural justice and applicable rules are strictly adhered to.

"The compliance report may be submitted to the department by January 31, positively, for further examination at the government level. This matter may be treated as most urgent and important," the letter said. P4

₹ crashes 44 paise to settle at 90.78/$

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 16: The rupee tumbled for the third straight session, losing 44 paise to settle near its lowest level at 90.78 against the US dollar Friday, on strong dollar demand and persistent foreign fund outflows.

Forex traders said lingering concerns over US-India trade negotiations and geopolitical tensions further dented investor sentiment.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.37 and touched an intraday low of 90.89 against the greenback. It ended the session at 90.78 against the greenback, down 44 paise from Wednesday's close.

The domestic foreign exchange market was closed on Thursday due to the Mumbai municipal corporation elections. The rupee marked its third straight session of decline, during which it has fallen 61 paise.

On Wednesday, it fell 11 paise to close at 90.34 against the US dollar, after declining 6 paise on Tuesday.

The Indian currency recorded its lowest closing level of 90.93 on December 16, when it also saw its lifetime low of 91.14 in intraday trade.

BALASORE MOB LYNCHING: 3 HELD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Balasore, Jan 16: Odisha Police arrested three persons in Balasore district and launched a manhunt to nab others allegedly involved in the lynching of a man suspected of cattle smuggling, an officer said Friday.

The incident has triggered sharp political reactions, with leaders of Opposition parties blaming the state government for what they described as a rise in cases of "religious intolerance."

Stating that the incident had taken place Wednesday, Balasore Sadar sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Subhranshu Sekhar Nayak said initially a complaint was lodged regarding a road accident.

Later, the victim's brother in a written complaint alleged that Sk Makandar Mohammad of Astia died due to mob attack. Two FIRs were registered at Balasore Sadar police station, he said.

"We have arrested three persons, and they were forwarded to judicial custody Thursday. Police have launched a search operation to arrest others involved in the mob attack," the

SDPO told PTI.

The accused were booked under Section 103(2) (murder committed by a mob) of the BNS.

Reacting to the incident, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, who is on a two-day tour to the state, said, "BJP's agenda is communal. It takes the communal route whenever it weakens or fails to deliver on its election manifesto commitments."

OPCC president Bhakta Charan Das in an X post said, "The brutal lynching of a 35-year-old Muslim man by cow vigilantes in Balasore over cattle transportation is a grave collapse of law and order in Odisha. No allegation can ever legitimise mob rule or vigilante justice. Taking a life in the name of suspicion is a crime, not justice. Govt must ensure strict accountability and urgently reaffirm the rule of law."

2 labourers killed as boulders fall in illegal quarry

PNN & AGENCIES

Malkangiri, Jan 16: Two labourers were killed, and another was injured when boulders fell on them while digging soil at an illegal stone quarry in Malkangiri district Friday, police said.

The incident took place at a stone quarry near the Tarini Temple. The deceased were identified as Tuna Gadba (21) of Satyamguda village and Mitu Madhi (31) of Champakhari village.

Another worker, Bijay Rao of Champaghari village, also sustained serious injury. He was undergoing treatment at the government hospital, said Malkangiri Model Police Station IIC Regan Kindo. While Tuna Gadba died on the spot, Madhi succumbed to injuries at the district headquarters hospital.

Co-workers said that the trio was engaged in digging soil and loading the excavated soil in a tractor when the stones fell on them. Locals rescued the trapped workers.

Trump accepts Nobel medal from Venezuelan Oppn leader

REUTERS

Washington, Jan 16: Venezuelan Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado gave her Nobel Peace Prize medal to US President Donald Trump during a White House meeting, in a bid to influence his efforts to shape her country's political future.

A White House official confirmed that Trump intends to keep the medal.

"It was my Great Honour to meet Maria Corina Machado, of Venezuela, today. She is a wonderful woman who has been through so much. Maria presented me with her Nobel Peace Prize for the work I have done. Such a wonderful gesture of mutual respect. Thank you Maria!" Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

"To President Donald J Trump - In gratitude for your extraordinary leadership in promoting peace through strength, advancing diplomacy and defending liberty and prosperity," a message accompanying the medal said.

During the visit, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump had looked forward to meeting Machado, but stood by his "realistic" assessment that she did not currently have the support needed to lead the country in the short term.

Machado, who fled the South American nation in a daring seaborne escape in December, is competing for Trump's ear with members of Venezuela's government and seeking to ensure she has a role in governing the nation going forward.

After the United States captured Maduro in a snatch-and-grab operation this month, opposition figures, members of Venezuela's diaspora and politicians throughout the US and Latin America expressed hope for Venezuela to begin a process of democratization.

Democratic Senator Chris Murphy, one of the senators who met with Machado, said the Opposition leader had told senators that repression in Venezuela was no different now than under Maduro.

Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodriguez is a "smooth operator" who was growing more entrenched by the day thanks to Trump's support, he said. "I hope elections happen, but I'm skeptical," said Murphy, of Connecticut.

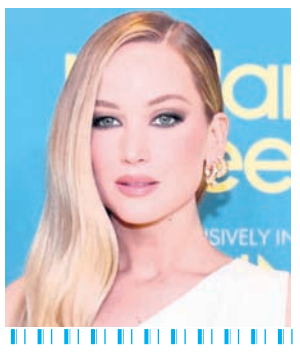
Trump has said he is focused on securing U.S. access to the country's oil and economically rebuilding Venezuela.

Trump has on several occasions praised Rodriguez, Maduro's second-in-command, who became Venezuela's leader upon his capture. In an interview with Reuters Wednesday, Trump said, "She's been very good to deal with."

Can a Nobel Prize be shared or transferred?

Regardless of the optics of Machado's gesture, Nobel authorities are clear that a prize cannot be transferred, split, or reassigned. Once announced, the decision is final. The Nobel Foundation's statutes provide no mechanism for changing laureates, sharing awards retroactively, or revoking a prize, even amid later controversy. "Once a Nobel Prize is announced, it cannot be revoked, shared, or transferred to others. The decision is final and stands for all time," the Nobel Peace Center said January 15.

leisure

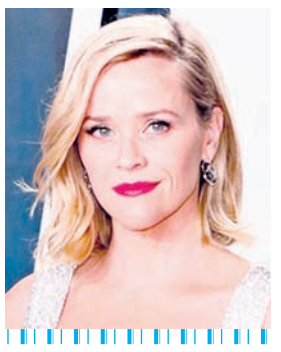


LAWRENCE BLAMES INTERNET FOR LOSING SHARON TATE ROLE

Oscar-winning actor Jennifer Lawrence recalled how she missed being part of Quentin Tarantino's film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* as trolls thought she wasn't "pretty enough" to essay the role of late actor Sharon Tate

WITHERSPOON ISSUES URGENT SCAM ALERT

Reese Witherspoon warned her followers about a scammer posing as her on various social media platforms. In a heartfelt Tik-Tok video, the actress opened up about the alerts she'd been receiving nonstop in the past day where the scammer was operating under her handle on the platforms



FORTUNE FORECAST

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FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181*

ARIES

You may be impetuous today, which may lead to unforeseen results. You may be in a hurry and complete work which has been pending for a long time. You will find the time to make long-term plans. Ganesha says you will rectify your past mistakes.

TAURUS

This is, health wise a bad day for you. Ganesha urges you to take special care and not to do anything that invites illness or discomfort. The least you can do is to ensure that you do not over exert or get into situations that generate tension and anxiety. Be careful about the food you eat.

GEMINI

Interactions with member of the opposite sex may yield positive and pleasurable results today. Public servants will get the much-needed encouragement and moral support from bosses and family members. In academics, you will be able to solve whatever problem you set your mind to.

CANCER

Today, you are likely to remain open-minded while dealing with others. However, it doesn't mean that you will always be soft on others. Later in the day, your approach may be different and stubborn. In the evening, you will enjoy the company of family and friends.

LEO

You will be in a very good mood today. You will inspire others to achieve substantial things in life. While you have been looking to take on an extremely challenging project, you have been unable to find the right opening so far. You ought to start such projects today, says Ganesha.

VIRGO

If being humanitarian needed a definite physical form, you are most likely to be nominated. Such is the mix of values and practicality today, says Ganesha. Devise strategies to achieve more productivity. See the bigger picture, says Ganesha. This is not difficult considering you have a broad vision – with or without the glasses.

LIBRA

Wedding bells are ringing, and you are about to get very lucky! Ganesha foresees a plethora of marriage proposals coming your way on this day full of special occasions, as you turn up your charisma and sweep the enthralled opposite sex off their feet with your charm.

SCORPIO

A happening day where a lot may happen today, suggests Ganesha. Grey hairs will teach valuable lessons, so keep your ears open to bosses and elders. Seniors will extend their best possible cooperation to you.

SAGITTARIUS

The pressing needs of your loved ones call for extra attention today. You may have a few family friends over for lunch or dinner, and end up chatting a good deal with them. Ganesha says an intimate tête-à-tête with your better half would fare you well.

CAPRICORN

Money will flow in from various quarters today, but it will also find its way out of your pockets. Keep a tab on your income and more on your expenses, says Ganesha. Situation at work may get a little trying, but you will overcome all problems by means of your innate and acquired skills, and past experience.

AQUARIUS

Most of the time it is your way or no other way, especially when you charging towards your goal. Today, you will push your limits to achieve what you have desired. You are talented, hard working, creative, and icing on the cake is your luck which is favouring you big time.

PISCES

For those in the creative, marketing or advertising fields, today will likely bring about an important milestone on their path to progress, says Ganesha. Your creativity and ingenuity will be at their peak. Remembering that confidence is the key to success will keep you from shying away from challenges, which when surmounted will bring you substantial gains.

'I've seen how lonely courage can be'

Mumbai: Veteran Bollywood star Rani Mukerji, who has clocked three decades in the journey of acting, opened up about her journey with the *Mardaani* franchise and the inspiration behind her fearless character, Shivani Shivaji Roy.

Reflecting on the challenges and dedication of those in uniform, Rani said, "Shivani Shivaji Roy is not a character I switch off when the camera cuts. I carry her with me. Because through her, I've seen what it really means to serve. I've seen how lonely courage can be".

She added: "I have immense respect for the cops of our country who show up every day — quietly, without complaints, without medals, serving our country and protecting us silently. *Mardaani* franchise is my salute to them and I feel so happy and proud to see the people of my country pour so much love for the police force."

With the love pouring in for her work in the third installment of *Mardaani*, she dedicates this moment to the Indian police force by saying, "To my brothers and sisters in the police force, especially the women, who are judged more, questioned more, and still stand taller than fear, this film exists because of you."

IANS

Lisa on walking away from fame

Mumbai: Known for working in films such as *Kasoor*, *Bollywood/Hollywood* and *Water*, actress Lisa Ray reflected on a defining phase of her life when she chose to step away from mainstream cinema in India at the height of her career in 2001, sharing that the decision helped her rediscover depth, meaning and her true self.

Lisa took to Instagram, where she shared a reel featuring various scenes from the films she had done. The video clip had the acoustic version of *Girls Like You* playing in the background.

"In 2001, I walked away from fame in India. Not because the work wasn't coming — it was. I had successful films behind me, many offers ahead of me, and a very clear sense of how I was being seen: model, too pretty, not gritty enough. My voice. My personality. Flattened."

After stepping away, Lisa says she "chose the long road."

"I moved to London to study acting in ways that felt aligned. I lived at Balliol College, Oxford, immersing myself in Shakespeare and poetry. I wandered the V&A. I studied Buddhism and yoga (the irony is not lost on me, I was only exposed to yoga once I left Bombay) I built a life rooted in learning, spirit, and curiosity — not visibility," she added. It was after this pause that she returned to cinema through independent films, often made on shoestring budgets but driven by faith and optimism rather than commerce.

IANS

Ananya gets nostalgic

Mumbai: Actress Ananya Panday took a nostalgic trip down memory lane as she revisited moments from 2016.

Sharing a throwback post on Instagram, the actress reflected on how that year shaped her journey, from sweet childhood memories with Shah Rukh Khan's son AbRam to tying rakhi to her star brother Ahaan Panday and holding a film's clapboard, calling 2016 a time she holds close to her heart.

The actress shared more pictures of herself in a bikini, using iconic 2016 snapchat filters, winning medals in school and posing with Shanaya Kapoor and Suhana Khan.

"2016 was really it man," she wrote as the caption.

The daughter of actor Chunky Panday, made her debut three years later in 2019 with Karan Johar's *Student Of The Year 2*, standalone sequel to the 2012 film *Student of the Year*, the film also stars Tiger Shroff, Tara Sutaria and Aditya Seal.

She was then seen in *Pati Patni Aur Woh*, *Dream Girl 2*, *Gehraiyaan* *Kho Gaye Hum Kahan*, *CTRL* and *Kesari Chapter 2*.

She made her series debut with *Call Me Bae* directed by Colin D'Cunha. It also includes Vir Das, Gurfateh Pirzada, Varun Sood, Vihaan Samat, Muskkaan Jaferi, Niharika Lyra Dutt, Lisa Mishra and Mini Mathur.

She was last seen in *Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri*, a romantic comedy film directed by Sameer Vidwans.

IANS

Dhanush, Mrunal to tie knot on V-Day!

Mumbai: Rumours surrounding Dhanush and Mrunal Thakur's personal lives have recently set social media abuzz, with reports claiming that the two actors, who are allegedly in a long-term relationship, are planning to tie the knot soon. According to the buzz, the the couple is planning to exchange vows on Valentine's Day, February 14 this year, and described as a highly intimate ceremony with only close family members and a few friends in attendance. The speculation quickly grabbed attention across the Tamil, Telugu and Hindi film industries, leaving fans surprised and curious about the alleged development.

However, another report has dismissed these claims, calling them "completely fake and baseless" and urging people not to believe the rumours. As of now, neither Dhanush nor Mrunal has issued any official statement or shared updates regarding the matter.

Speculation about a possible romance between the two has been circulating for some time. The rumours gained momentum in August 2025 after they were spotted together at the premiere of Mrunal's film *Son Of Sardaar 2*. Earlier, Mrunal's presence at the wrap-up party of Dhanush's film *Tere Ishq Mein* had also sparked curiosity. Further fuelling the chatter, Mrunal follows Dhanush's sisters, Dr Karthika Karthik and Vimala Geetha, on social media.

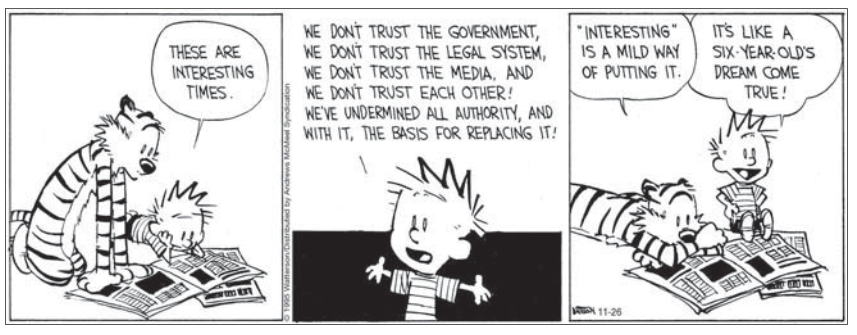
On the work front, Dhanush is busy with *D53* and *D54*, the latter titled *Kara*. Mrunal is currently working on *Do Deewane Seher Mein*, *Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai* and *Pooja Meri Jaan*.

AGENCIES

FUN post

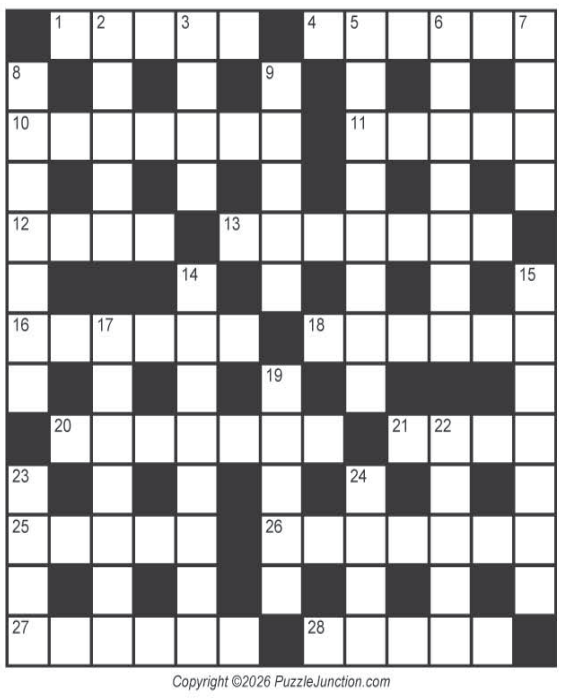
PEANUTS

CALVIN AND HOBBES



BREVITY

CROSSWORD



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Across

1 Winter warmer
4 Tropical fruit
10 Vulgar
11 Designer's concern
12 River of Hades
13 Matured
16 Tease
18 Edge tool
20 Rapacity
21 Wide-eyed
25 Native New Zealander
26 Slippery
27 Step down
28 Merry

Down

2 Tasteless
3 Glorify
5 Gallery
6 Antediluvian
7 Ambience
8 Gastronomic delight
9 Certain singers
14 Coquetry
15 Hound dogs
17 Jealous
19 Largish combo
22 Cookbook direction
23 Poet Khayyám
24 Martial art

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

SUDOKU

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

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

SUDOKU

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

MUSICAL EVENT

Rajarani Music Festival kicks off in Bhubaneswar, Friday, with artistes performing soulful classical music on stage, enthralling the audience

No suspected Nipah case in state: Min

Districts bordering West Bengal on high alert

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: There are no suspected Nipah virus cases in state, said Health and Family Welfare (H&FW) Minister Mukesh Mahaling Friday, while chairing a high-level review meeting following detection of such cases in West Bengal.

The meeting was attended by Health department Commissioner-cum-Secretary Ashwathi S, Public Health Director Nilakantha Mishra, Health Services Director Pradeep Kumar Guru, and Medical Education and Training Director of Santosh Kumar Mishra.

Keeping in mind the development in West Bengal, the Odisha government has issued an alert for districts bordering the state.

At the meeting, the authorities concerned were instructed to promptly investigate and report any suspected cases of Nipah virus, while ensuring hospitals are equipped with sufficient medicines, PPE kits, and medical equipment.

> ASSURING THAT ODISHA IS MAINTAINING FULL VIGILANCE AND CLOSELY MONITORING THE SITUATION, H&FW MINISTER MUKESH MAHALING URGED THE PUBLIC NOT TO PANIC. HE ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC AWARENESS
>
> AUTHORITIES CONCERNED WERE INSTRUCTED TO PROMPTLY INVESTIGATE AND REPORT ANY SUSPECTED CASES OF NIPAH VIRUS, WHILE ENSURING HOSPITALS ARE EQUIPPED WITH SUFFICIENT MEDICINES, PPE KITS, AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

Mahaling emphasised that at present, no suspected Nipah virus cases have been reported in Odisha. He assured that the state is maintaining full vigilance and closely monitoring the situation.

"The Health and Family Welfare department is fully prepared," the Minister said and urged the public not to panic.

Mahaling also highlighted the importance of public awareness.

The meeting focused on the state's current situation, vigilance measures, disease surveillance, sample testing, isolation protocols, and treatment facilities.

Surya Nagar Carnival 2026 kicks off today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The much-awaited Surya Nagar Carnival 2026 is set to kick off at Surya Nagar Park here Saturday, promising two days of vibrant community celebration, entertainment, and togetherness.

Scheduled from 10:00am to 9:00pm, the carnival, hosted by the Surya Nagar Citizens' Forum, aims to offer residents of Bhubaneswar a perfect weekend getaway filled with joy, recreation, and shared experience for people of all ages.

A free health check-up camp will be organised to promote wellness and community care. For children, a specially designed, fun-filled game zone will offer exciting and safe activities, while families can explore a variety of exhibits and display stalls showcasing products, crafts, and lifestyle offerings.

> Scheduled from 10:00am to 9:00pm, the carnival aims to offer residents of Bhubaneswar a perfect weekend getaway filled with joy, recreation, and shared experience for people of all ages

Food lovers are in for a treat, with an array of stalls serving mouth-watering dishes and refreshing beverages.

A major highlight of the carnival will be its packed entertainment line-up. The stage will come alive with musical performances by Rockstar Anshuman, Md. Abid & Group, and Modern Beats, along with dance performances, cultural acts, and vibrant stage shows. Popular comedian Junior Papu will bring laughter to the audience with a special stand-up comedy show.

Envisioned as a unique, community-led initiative, the carnival is among the first large-scale events in the City to be organised by a resident welfare association.

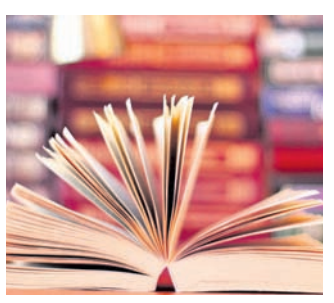
SHOW STOPPER: Models set the ramp on fire with their cat walk at Sisir Saras in Bhubaneswar, Friday PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

55 new NCERT textbooks in state schools from 2026–27

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The state government will introduce 55 NCERT textbooks across all schools from 2026–27 academic year, reflecting the Odisha's culture, heritage, and educational needs, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said Friday.

Speaking at a meeting on curriculum reform and textbook development, Pradhan advised District Education Officers (DEOs) to raise awareness and generate excitement among students and parents about the new textbooks.



To ensure smooth implementation, 1,000 Master Resource Persons have been trained across four zones of the state. These experts will, in turn, train over 1.66 lakh primary teachers under the Mass Education and Tribal Welfare departments. Pradhan emphasised the importance of curriculum development and capacity-building of these resource persons to achieve a successful rollout.

School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond stated that under National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Odisha has translated and contextualised the 55 new NCERT textbooks.

To promote holistic development, Gond said the state is also introducing textbooks in three new subjects: Arts Education, Physical Education & Wellness, and Vocational Education.

Gond stressed that these reforms go beyond textbooks, representing a collective commitment to children's future and Odisha's progress.

Pradhan further suggested implementing mother-tongue-based education up to Class V, prioritising students' nutrition, and strengthening the PM Poshan Scheme. He also recommended expanding the 10-day 'Bagless School' initiative for Classes VI to X, in line with the NEP, to enhance foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) and develop a "Skilled India".

Pact for making Bhubaneswar 'rabies-free city'

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Mission Rabies, India – Worldwide Veterinary Service and OUAT's College of Veterinary Science and Animal Husbandry (CVSAH) have inked a pact for a technical and scientific collaboration that aims at making Bhubaneswar a 'rabies-free city', official sources said Friday.

The pact establishes a collaboration focused on planning, implementation, technical advisory support, scientific validation and capacity building required for effective rabies prevention and control within the BMC jurisdiction.

Under the terms, the partnership will strengthen rabies prevention, surveillance, diagnostics and response mechanisms through structured, evidence-based interventions. The Rabies Control Programme includes mass vaccination of dogs and rapid disease response activities, supported by data-driven planning, monitoring and mobile-based application tools.

Mission Rabies, India – Worldwide Veterinary Service will act as the technical partner and strategic advisor, providing expertise in surveillance, education, mobile app development and substantial logistical support for field operations. CVSAH will facilitate scientific support, academic collaboration and the participation of veterinary interns in the programme.

The initiative also places strong emphasis on capacity building of BMC personnel through training, development of standard operating procedures and support for field operations. In addition, information, education and communication activities will be undertaken to raise public awareness about rabies prevention and responsible animal care.

Officials stated that the collaboration aims to establish a sustainable, coordinated and evidence-based framework for public health protection while ensuring animal welfare.

The pact is non-commercial in nature, with no financial remuneration involved, reflecting a shared commitment by all partners to eliminate rabies as a public health threat in the City.

6 semi-automatic pistols seized; 1 held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The police seized six semi-automatic pistols from a person here in the City during an operation conducted in the early hours of Friday, a police officer said.

Acting on a tip-off, the special crime unit of Bhubaneswar-Cuttack Commissionerate Police conducted the raid in Chandaka police station area around 2 am Friday and confiscated six semi-automatic pistols along with 10 rounds of live ammunition, said Police Commissioner S Dev Datta Singh.

The police arrested an accused, Manoj Kumar Mallick from Jajpur district, for his alleged involvement in illegal firearm trade, he said.

"Our drive to crack down on illegal firearms trade is underway. During the last six months, we have seized 34 firearms," he said.

Due to continuous seizure of firearms, firing incidents in the twin cities have been almost stopped, Singh added.

"The confiscation of a significant cache of weapons and the apprehension of key suspects mark important progress in our ongoing efforts to protect the community. We remain resolute in our mission to dismantle criminal networks and hold perpetrators accountable," said another police officer.

Further investigation continues to trace the supply chain, uncover financial backers, and identify any broader networks involved, the officer said.

IN SYNC: Artistes perform Odissi during an event organised by Natsutra Research Public Charitable Trust at Sarala Bhawan in Bhubaneswar, Friday PIC: RAJKISHORE MOHANTY

E&IT dept trains senior govt officials in AI

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: In a significant step towards leveraging emerging technologies for efficient governance, the Odisha Electronics & Information Technology (E&IT) Department, conducted a specialized AI sensitisation and capacity-building workshop for Director-level officers across government departments. The program was organized through the Odisha Computer Application Centre (OCAC).

The workshop was inaugurated by Principal Secretary of the E&IT Department Vishal Dev, who emphasised the state's forward-looking approach to technology adoption. "AI is no longer a futuristic concept, but a present-day necessity for efficient governance. The next decade will be defined by intelligence. By equipping our officials with the right tools, we are ensuring that the Odisha AI Mission translates into faster, more transparent, and citizen-centric governance," he said.

The intensive workshop aimed to demystify AI concepts and provide hands-on experience in practical applications within the government ecosystem. Key areas covered included drafting and communication, search tools, Chat with PDF, deep research, and data analysis. Participants also engaged in interactive breakout sessions to test approaches for implementing AI-driven solutions in their departments.

Parida focus on better facilities at City's heritage, religious sites

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida Friday directed officials to ensure improved sanitation, water maintenance, and tourist facilities at the City's key heritage and religious sites, including Kedar Gouri, Khandagiri, Kapileshwar, and Mukteshwar.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at Lok Seva Bhavan here, Parida, who also holds the Tourism portfolio, emphasised the need for a comprehensive cleanliness and awareness campaign. She urged the departments concerned to allocate adequate funds so that heritage conservation, tourism promotion, and environmental sustainability go hand in hand.

Key discussions included scientific waste management on temple premises, desilting and rejuvenation of water bodies, drainage improvement, and maintenance of water sources.

Officials were directed to conduct site inspections and prepare a detailed action plan for drainage, pumping, and maintenance works under the supervision of temple trusts and local authorities, with support from technical teams.

Parida highlighted the importance of close coordination among the Tourism department, Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC), Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Endowment department, and the local administration. The Tourism Minister also directed officials to ensure improved sanitation, water quality, and regular upkeep of monuments. Priority cleaning and pumping operations will be undertaken wherever necessary, she said.

In a bid to enhance visitor experience, the meeting, chaired by Parida, directed officials to deploy trained guides to share historical and cultural insights, ensure proper functioning of interpretation centres, and install ramps and universal accessibility facilities at all sites in the future.

Tourism department Commissioner-cum-Secretary Balwant Singh, Endowment Commissioner Lalatendu Jena, Tourism department Director Deepankar Mohapatra Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) department Additional Secretary Satrughna Kar, BMC Commissioner Chanchal Rana, Khurda Collector Amrit Ruturaj, Sub-Collector Manoranjan Sahu, Ekamra-Bhubaneswar MLA Babu Singh and representatives from ASI (Bhubaneswar Circle) were among those who attended the review meeting.

Forced retirements may leave classrooms empty

Experts warned that granting local authorities the power to prepare lists of non-performing teachers could lead to favouritism and political interference

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The state government's directive to identify non-performing teachers for compulsory premature retirement has sparked concern among educationists and academics, who warn that the move could worsen the situation as there is acute shortage of qualified faculty in state-run universities and colleges.

The Higher Education department Friday asked institutional heads to review service records, performance appraisal reports, integrity status, and overall conduct of teachers and submit compliance reports by January 31. The government said the exercise aims to improve academic standards and administrative efficiency.

However, experts see the other way round as they raised questions about the lack of clearly defined criteria for determining "non-performance."

Educationist Prasanna Kumar Bisoi said, "Decisions of such gravity should not be taken in haste. A proper and transparent examination must be conducted before taking such a decision, ensuring that teachers are evaluated fairly and objectively."

Academic expert Naba Kishore Pujari described the policy as paradoxical, noting that while the government seeks to retire experienced teachers for alleged non-performance, it continues to rely on retired educators to fill vacancies in aided colleges. He warned that granting local authorities the power to prepare lists of non-performing teachers could lead to favouritism and political interference.

He pointed out that teachers, particularly in rural and underfunded institutions, are often burdened with non-academic duties such as election work, administrative responsibilities, and data-related tasks, which adversely affect classroom performance. Penalising teachers without addressing these systemic issues, they argue, would be unjust.

Faculty members also expressed apprehension that compulsory retirement could demoralise teachers who have dedicated decades to the profession. Sabyasachi Nayak, an assistant professor at Utkal University, said improper implementation of the decision could harm both teachers' careers and institutional stability.

Students, too, expressed cautious support coupled with concerns over fairness. Anandita Mishra, a student of BJB College, said while action against genuinely inefficient teachers is necessary, the process must be impartial. "Performance evaluation should be done by independent experts who have no personal or professional relationship with the teachers concerned," she said.

NIC bags award for DEPMOS project

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: National Informatics Centre (NIC) of Odisha has been honoured with Digital Initiative for Ensuring Rural Connectivity and Digital Services Award for Directorate of Export Promotion and Marketing Online Services (DEPMOS) project.

The award was presented Friday at 6th Digital Transformation Summit and Awards held at Hotel EROS, Nehru Palace, New Delhi. NIC Odisha IT Director Mohammed Mojibullah Khan and deputy director Sudhansu Kumar Mahapatra and EP&M Director Sanjay Kumar Mishra received this award.

TAKING TO STREETS: Members of Sanyukt Kishan Morcha and joint forums of central trade unions stage a dhdarna at Lower PMG in Bhubaneswar, Friday, to press for scrapping of VBG RAM G scheme, repeal of new Labour Code and withdrawal of Electricity Amendment Bill and Seeds Bill, among other demands OP PHOTO

Akhilesh lauds Naveen, BJD's devpt record

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav Friday praised BJD chief Naveen Patnaik, saying development achieved during the regional party's rule was clearly visible.

Yadav, who is on a two-day visit to the state, met the five-time chief minister at his residence here and said, "Patnaik Ji is a very senior leader. He and his father (Biju Patnaik) have made significant contributions towards the development of Odisha."

The SP chief added that Patnaik had worked consistently to improve the lives and livelihoods of the poor.

"The transformation achieved during Patnaik's tenure is clearly visible," he said.

Drawing a parallel between his party and the BJD, Yadav said, "Neta Ji (my father, Mulayam Singh Yadav) and Patnaik's father Biju Patnaik were very close. Today, both of us are fighting against the BJP."

Declining to make any political comment on possibility of his party's alliance with BJD, Yadav said, "The meeting is purely a courtesy call. He is a very senior leader of the country."

Asked about Patnaik's health condition, Yadav said, "He is quite healthy and talked to us in a usual manner. There should be no politics."

Taking to X, Yadav said, "A cordial meeting today in Bhubaneswar with Shri Naveen Patnaik ji, the former Chief Minister and pioneer of transformation in Odisha."

During the meeting, Yadav honoured him with a shawl.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters, Yadav attacked the BJP for what he called its "divisive politics" and alleged that the ruling party uses data-driven strategies and central agencies to defeat political opponents.

"There is a lot to learn from the BJP because it runs itself politically in a very professional manner. It is not a political party in the traditional sense. Have you ever heard of a political party stealing data?" he told reporters. Alleging that BJP adopts communal agenda, Yadav said, "Whenever the party feels weak or unable to fulfill the promises made in its manifesto, it takes the communal route."

BJD supremo suspends two more for anti-party activities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: BJD president Naveen Patnaik Friday suspended two more frontline leaders for alleged "anti-party activities", sending a clear message to party members to maintain discipline and unity.

The suspended leaders are Nalini Prabha Jena, president of the zilla parishad in Jajpur district, and Ganeswar Baral, vice-president of the party's Jajpur district unit.

The moves came a day after two MLAs, Arvind Mohapatra (Patkura in Kendrapara district) and Sanatan Mahakud (Champua of Keonjhar distrioct) were also suspended for anti-party activities.

These suspensions followed Patnaik's three rounds of meetings with party MLAs since January 12. So far he has met 29 legislators.

While Mahakud is a two-time MLA and Odisha's wealthiest legislator, Mohapatra is a new entrant in politics and made his debut 18 months ago.

Both the MLAs rejected the allegations against them.

"I have not received any show-cause notice before being suspended from the party. I reject the allegations made against me. I will be happy, if the party gives evidence on the charges against me," Mohapatra said. In a related development, Patnaik announced names of 126 block presidents and 41 nagar presidents under 15 organisational districts of the party.

These 15 organisational districts are Boudh, Baragarh, Cuttack, Deogarh, Gajapati, Jagatsinghpur, Jharsuguda, Kandhamal, Koraput, Nayagarh, Nuapada, Rourkela, Rayagada, Sundargarh and Subarnpur, an official release of the party said.

The BJD had earlier announced the block and nagar presidents of nine organisational districts. With Friday's declaration, the party has completed the announcement of block and nagar presidents for all 24 organisational districts.

Scientists build affordable DNA analysis system

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The Capital city marked an important milestone in Indian science Friday on the occasion of National Startup Day, with the launch of GelGenius, India's first fully integrated agarose gel electrophoresis system, unveiled at department of Bio technology (DBT)-Institute of Life Sciences (ILS) bioincubator.

The device was developed under the leadership of ILS scientist Amaresh Panda. Designed and manufactured in City, GelGenius reflects the spirit of make-in-India and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' in the life sciences sector.

An electrophoresis system is a lab setup using an electric current to separate molecules like DNA, RNA, or proteins in a gel (agarose/polyacrylamide) based on their size, shape, and electrical charge, moving them from a negative to a positive electrode. Smaller, lighter molecules travel faster through the gel's pores, creating distinct bands that reveal sample composition and are vital in diagnostics, forensics, and research.

Traditional electrophoresis requires multiple instruments and involves safety risks due to UV light. GelGenius simplifies this process by combining agarose heating, gel casting, electrophoresis, visualisation, and documentation into a single compact unit.

"Our aim was to make molecular biology affordable and accessible for students and institutions with limited resources," said Panda. With GelGenius, students can learn DNA analysis without depending on expensive laboratory setups, he added.

The system uses safe blue-light technology instead of UV light, making it safer for users. Its all-in-one design saves laboratory space and reduces equipment costs, especially for schools and colleges.

Calling it a proud achievement for Odisha, ILS director Debasis Dash said the innovation shows how indigenous technology can replace costly imported lab instruments.

With GelGenius, the startup aims to support hands-on learning and inspire the next generation of Indian scientists.

SSU launches FEKS

POST NEWS NETWORK

Cuttack, Jan 16: Sri Sri University (SSU) Friday marked a significant academic milestone with the launch of Faculty of Eastern Knowledge Systems (FEKS), a pioneering initiative dedicated to the study and advancement of eastern intellectual and civilisational traditions. The initiative reflects a growing global reassessment of ancient eastern knowledge systems and their relevance in addressing contemporary social, ethical and psychological challenges.

Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, FEKS aims to provide structured academic engagement with India's traditional knowledge frameworks. The faculty will offer undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral and post-doctoral programmes across eight major domains, including 'Niti Shastra', 'Darshan Shastra', 'Jyotish' or 'Khagol Shastra', 'Bharatiya Manav Vigyan', 'Vyakaran Shastra', 'Shilpa' and 'Vaastu Shastra', 'Samagra Swasthya', and 'Natya Shastra'.

University officials noted that the initiative is designed to create a strong ecosystem for research, innovation and interdisciplinary scholarship rooted in eastern wisdom traditions.

HE dept hosts 2-day innovation & startup competition in City

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: Over 72 students from 14 universities across the state are taking part in the two-day state-level innovation and startup competition, jointly organised by Higher Education (HE) department, and Odisha State Higher Education Council at Rama Devi Women's University (RDWU) here.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Mukesh Mahaling graced the inaugural ceremony Friday as the chief guest. The minister visited exhibition stalls and interacted with the students in detail regarding their innovative ideas and research initiatives.

Addressing the gathering, Mahaling said that the competition organised by HE department is playing a significant role in nurturing creativity among students and strengthening the startup ecosystem in the state. He emphasised that such initiatives encourage students to move beyond textbook-based learning and engage in advanced research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to societal development.

SSEPD dept inks pact to strengthen PwIDs

A Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) comprising representatives from SSEPD and NIEPID will be constituted to review progress, monitor outcomes and guide implementation

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) Friday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (NIEPID) to strengthen early identification, education, capacity building, and community awareness for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwIDs) across the state.

The MoU was signed with an objective to establish a structured collaboration for implementing NIEPID-developed curriculum frameworks in special schools operating under the Grant-in-Aid fold of the SSEPD department. The partnership aims to enhance quality of educational and developmental services for children with intellectual disabilities through expert support, training, and continuous monitoring.

Under the MoU, both institutions will work jointly in areas including early identification and intervention, capacity building of special educators, caregivers and frontline workers, curriculum implementation, research, documentation, and community awareness to promote inclusion and reduce stigma. As part of the collaboration, training programmes, development of resource materials, digital learning content, and expert monitoring will be undertaken. Joint research initiatives and publication of best practices and policy briefs are also envisaged.

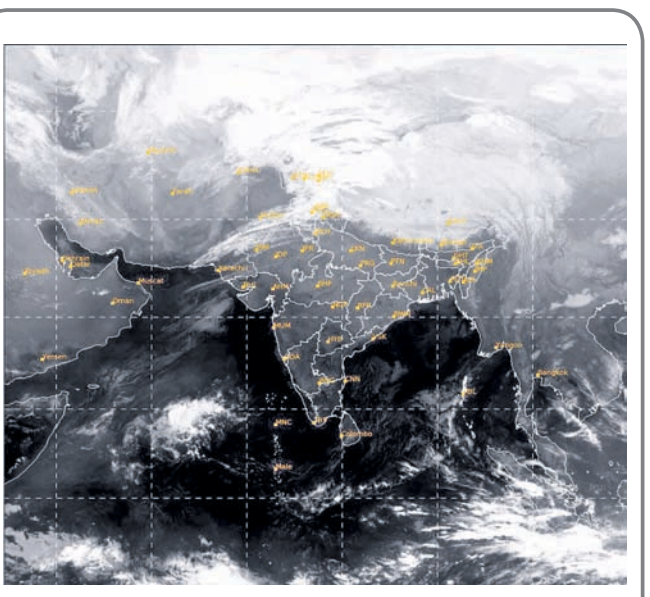
A Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) comprising representatives from SSEPD and NIEPID will be constituted to review progress, monitor outcomes and guide implementation. The MoU will remain in force for a period of three years, from January 16, 2026 to January 15, 2029, and may be extended upon mutual consent.

This strategic partnership marks a significant step towards strengthening inclusive education and empowerment initiatives for persons with intellectual disabilities in Odisha, in alignment with the state government's commitment to social inclusion and equitable development.

During the signing ceremony, Additional Secretary Bhaskar Raito, and SSEPD deputy secretaries Sannyasi Kumar Behera and Basanta Kumar Behera along with NIEPID representative Ganesh Shergar were present on the occasion.

MARKET WATCH

CURRENCY INDEX	VARIATION	BOURSES INDEX	VARIATION	COMMODITIES INDEX	VARIATION
DOLLAR 90.83	▲ 0.41	SENSEX 83570.35	▲ 187.64	GOLD ₹142,640	▼ ₹481
EURO 105.68	▲ 0.32	NIFTY 25694.35	▲ 28.75	SILVER ₹288,646	▼ ₹2931



WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	28.4°	27.2°
Min Temp	10.5°	10.9°
Humidity	82%	64%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST

Fog or mist in the morning and mainly clear sky later

Normalcy returns to Sundargarh town

PROHIBITORY ORDER LIFTED, INTERNET SERVICE RESUMES

PNN & AGENCIES

Sundargarh/Rourkela, Jan 16: Normalcy returned to Sundargarh town Friday, a day after a clash between two groups left at least 12 people injured including police personnel, as authorities lifted prohibitory orders and restored internet services, officials said.

The district administration had imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and suspended internet services for 24 hours till 6pm Friday following Thursday's violence in the Regent Market area. Educational institutions and commercial establishments were also ordered shut Friday as a precaution.

The clash occurred around 2:30pm Thursday after an argument between two groups over alleged sale of beef escalated into violence. Both sides allegedly used sharp weapons and hurled stones, officials said.

No fresh incidents of violence have been reported since 5pm Thursday, police said.

"All restrictions have been lifted after reviewing the situation. Internet services have also been restored," Sundargarh District Collector Subhankar Mohapatra said after a peace committee meeting Friday. The meeting was attended by representatives of both communities, senior district officials and police officers.

A peace committee meeting underway, Friday

OP PHOTO

A deserted street in Sundargarh town, Friday

Schools and other educational institutions in the town will reopen Saturday, Mohapatra said, adding that police deployment will continue overnight to maintain law and order.

Police have so far detained two people in connection with the violence, and raids are ongoing based on CCTV footage to identify and arrest others involved, Deputy Inspector General of Police (Western Range) Brijesh Rai said. Authorities have identified about a dozen suspects.

Security has been tightened across Sundargarh town, with an additional nine platoons of armed police deployed. Total police deployment now stands at 19 platoons, Rai said. Security agencies have also been placed on alert in nearby Rourkela and Rajgangpur.

All schools, colleges, markets and public transport in the Sundargarh municipality area remained shut Friday as a safety measure. Medical stores, milk vans and other emergency services were exempted from the closure.

Any kind of public gathering, rallies or protests have been banned, officials said.

Sundargarh Superintendent of Police Amrit Pal Kaur said the situation was under control and security personnel were deployed at all sensitive locations to instill confidence among residents. Authorities have appealed to the public to maintain peace and not be influenced by rumours.

Probe ordered into 'abuse' of Hatadihi BDO

POST NEWS NETWORK

Hatadihi, Jan 16: Keonjhar District Collector Vishal Singh Friday said he has ordered an inquiry into the alleged verbal abuse of Hatadihi Block Development Officer (BDO) Ranjan Parida by Block Chairperson Sabitri Sethi.

The Collector said the Chief District Officer (CDO) of the Zilla Parishad has been asked to examine the incident and submit a report, based on which further action will be taken. He added that he has discussed the matter with the CDO.

Attempts to contact CDO Kumar Nagabhushan for his response failed as he did not answer phone calls.

The incident came to light after a viral video on social media showed the block chairperson abusing and pointing her finger at the BDO.

Following this, block employees held an emergency meeting Monday and resolved to launch a ceasework strike if the district administration failed to act within seven days.

"Four days have passed, but no information regarding action has been communicated so far," BDO Parida said.

Sabitri Sethi is the wife of Anandapur BJD MLA Abhimanyu Sethi, who was reportedly present during the incident.

ILLEGAL MINING OF MINOR MINERALS

ED raids homes of BJD leader, businessmen

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Jan 16: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Friday conducted simultaneous raids at over 20 locations across Ganjam district, targeting the residences and offices of a Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leader and several businessmen.

More than five ED teams carried out searches in Berhampur city, Kanisi, Sheragada and Aska areas. During the raids, officials seized cash and several documents, including bundles of currency found in an almirah at one of the premises.

Officials said the searches were linked to illegal mining of minor minerals, such as sand and black stone, and suspected large-scale financial transactions. The searches were being carried out at properties of mafias and their business partners under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

In Sheragada, which falls under the Hinjili Assembly constituency, the ED searched the residence of BJD leader Hrushikesh Padhi. Simultaneous searches were also conducted at the Ambika Nagar residence of his son, Sachin Padhi. The Padhis are known contractors, sources said.

Raids were also conducted at two houses in Kanisi area. In Aska block, ED officials searched the residence of the sarpanch of Kharia panchayat. The sarpanch's husband is reportedly engaged in the sand business.

Large amounts of cash, over ₹2 crore in value, stored in an almirah were recovered from the office of a sand trader

In another operation, the ED raided the office of a sand trader located in Umanagar area of Lanjipalli in Berhampur. Large amounts of cash, over ₹2 crore in value, stored in an almirah were recovered from the premises, sources said.

The exact figure of the cash seized and other details will be disclosed after completion of the operation, an official said.

The raids triggered anxiety among business circles in the district, with discussions rife about intensified scrutiny of alleged illegal financial dealings.

Bomb bait: Injured jumbo dies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Angul, Jan 16: A male wild elephant died after consuming some suspected explosive material in Angul district, a forest official said Friday.

The elephant had sustained serious injury in its mouth after consuming suspected explosive material. It was five years old and was first spotted in a forest area in the Bantala forest range in Angul district January 13.

The animal was moving with a herd of 51 elephants. However, it got detached from the group as it became weak due to serious injury in its mouth, Angul DFO Nitish Kumar told PTI.

After monitoring the movement of the sub-adult elephant, it was put under treatment by a dedicated team of veterinary doctors January 15, he said.

For its further treatment, the animal was shifted to Kapilash Elephant Rescue Centre. However, the animal died while being taken to the rescue centre, Kumar said.

It was suspected that the elephant got injured after eating some crude bomb or explosive material put by some miscreants. The exact reason behind the injury of the jumbo can be ascertained by the treating veterinary team, the DFO said.

"We have conducted a post-mortem of the wild animal. Its body will be disposed of following due procedure. An investigation has been launched to nab the persons behind the death of the jumbo," Kumar said.

EXPLOSIVE BAITS, FIREARMS SEIZED IN ANGUL VILLAGE

POST NEWS NETWORK

Angul, Jan 16: Forest officials of the Jarapada forest range seized explosive baits, firearms and other illegal materials during a raid at Durgapur village under the Katada-II Beat of Balipata forest section Friday afternoon.

Acting on reliable intelligence, a team led by the Jarapada range officer conducted the operation at about 4.30pm and recovered eight hand bait bombs, two old country-made guns, 62 rounds of small ammunition, one 7-inch and one 4-inch lead, three gajabadi, 50 grams of potash, one catapult, two bore snares, 100 grams of gun powder, one gram of mani chula and a plastic bag.

The accused, Dillip Naik, 42, son of Pandab Naik of Durgapur village under Jarapada police station in Angul district, was arrested and brought to the Jarapada Range Office.

During interrogation, Naik confessed to his involvement in UDC No. 14J of 2025–26 related to the killing of a wild boar by using bait bombs in the forest area of Naupada village. The case has since been converted into OR Case No. 9J of 2025–26 under Balipata section of Jarapada range, and further legal action is under way.

The raid was carried out by a forest team comprising Range Officer Madhaba Chandra Naik, Foresters Basanta Garnaik, Bibhuti Garnaik and Ritarani Sethi, along with forest guards and members of the Elephant Squad.

Forest officials lauded the efforts of the field staff, describing them as "green warriors" for their commitment to wildlife protection.

Teacher injured in knife attack

Koksara: A teacher was seriously injured after being attacked with a sharp weapon inside a school under Koksara PS limits in Kalahandi Friday. Police said the incident took place at Pipalpada Government Primary School while midday meals were being served. The accused, Bhaskar Bag, 32, allegedly entered the school premises and attacked teacher Risiraj Meher with a knife. Bag is the husband of Madhuri Bag, a cook engaged at the school. The motive behind the attack is yet to be determined. The injured teacher sustained severe injuries to his hand. After being alerted, police detained the accused and registered a case (9/26).

Labourer killed in worksite brawl

POST NEWS NETWORK

Karlamunda, Jan 16: The body of a labourer was recovered Thursday night from a construction site near Takarumal market ground under Karlamunda block in Kalahandi district, triggering allegations of murder by the victim's family.

The deceased was identified as Rasik Chhatar, 40, a resident of Telipali village under S. Rampur police station limits in Subarnapur district.

Family members of the deceased lodged a complaint at M. Rampur police station, suspecting that Rasik was murdered. According to the complaint, construction work of a paddy procurement yard was underway at the site through a contractor engaged by the RMC.

Rasik Chhatar, who was employed as a labourer at the site, allegedly had an argument with another worker, Rasik Bhoi, 50, a resident of Khemesara under Barpali police station in Bargarh district. The dispute reportedly escalated, following which Rasik Bhoi allegedly assaulted Chhatar, leading to his death.

M. Rampur police station officer-in-charge Chittaranjan Pradhani said a case had been registered and the accused had been detained for questioning. Further investigation is underway, he added.

Female elephant found dead

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, Jan 16: A female elephant was found dead in the Asanakura area under Thakurmunda range of Similipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj district, forest officials said Friday.

The carcass of the elephant, estimated to be around 60 years old, was spotted January 14 evening during routine patrolling by forest personnel. The information was confirmed by Field Director, STR and Regional Chief Wildlife Warden Dr Prakash Chand Gogineni.

A post-mortem was conducted January 15. While the exact cause of death is yet to be ascertained, forest officials suspect the elephant may have died due to old age.

Officials also noted that cold conditions prevailing in Similipal forests could be affecting wildlife. The temperature in the reserve has reportedly been fluctuating between minus 1 and 1 degree Celsius in recent days, leading to increased cold stress among wild animals.

Further investigation is underway to find out any other possible causes of death, officials said.

FMU inaugurates sanitary pad making unit

Balasore: The Fakir Mohan University (FMU) here Thursday inaugurated a sanitary pad manufacturing unit 'Kaalika' at its Nuapadhi Campus, marking a significant step towards women's health, empowerment and self-reliance. The initiative is the first of its kind among universities in Odisha. The unit has been set up under the Fakir Mohan University–Technology Business Incubator (FMU-TBI) with financial support from Emami Paper Mills Limited and technical assistance from Prasanta Enterprises, Jharsuguda. The unit was inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor Prof. Santosh Kumar Tripathy in the presence of PG Council Chairman Prof. Bhaskar Behera, Emami Paper Mills Senior President Asish Abinash Gupta, AGM Dr. Manoj Padhi, and noted social entrepreneur and "Pad-Girl of Odisha" Payal Patel. Speaking on the occasion, the dignitaries highlighted the need for affordable and accessible menstrual hygiene products, particularly for women in rural and semi-urban areas. The project aligns with the national goals of Skill India and Atmanirbhar Bharat. In its initial phase, sanitary pads produced at 'Kaalika' will be distributed free among university students and adopted villages, along with awareness programmes on menstrual hygiene. The initiative aims to generate skill-based employment for women while promoting dignity, health and sustainable community development.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS (ELECTRICAL) DIVISION, SAMBALPUR
At-Sakhipada, Dist: Sambalpur, Pin-768001, Email:eerwelectricaldivn.sambalpur@gmail.com
No.O-2070:
1st Corrigendum to EE/RWELECT/SBP/28/2025-26
No.97/ Dated 13.01.2026
Office Order
This is to certify that Bid Identification No.EE/RWELECT/SBP/28/2025-26 (Sl.No-3&6) and tender ID No.2025_CERWI_123879_1 & 2025_CERWI_123883_1 is hereby cancelled due to single bidder tender.
Sd./- Executive Engineer
R.W.Electrical Division, Sambalpur
OIPR-

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, DASPALLA
Tender Call Notice
E-mail : nacdaspalla@gmail.com
Letter No.66/Dt.08.01.2026
Bid Identification No. NAC-Daspalla-(SAN)-2025-26
No.C-2110 : The Executive Officer, NAC, Daspalla, Dist - Nayagarh inviting percentage rate bid in online mode for the works as detailed in the table from eligible bidders for Sanitation Works.

1.	Nature of Work	:	Sanitation Work of Daspalla NAC
2.	No. of Work	:	1 No.
3.	Tender Cost	:	To be remitted online through a process as mentioned in DTCN.
4.	Available of Bid document in the website	:	From Dt.12.01.2026 10.00 A.M. to Dt.21.01.2026 up to 5.00 P.M.
5.	Date and time of opening of Technical Bid	:	Dt.22.01.2026 at 11.00 A.M. till completion
6.	Date & time of opening of Financial Bid	:	Dt.30.01.2026 at 11.00 A.M.
7.	The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the Website : https://tenderodisha.gov.in. Any Addendum / Corrigendum / Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.		

Sd./- Executive Officer,
Notified Area Council, Daspalla
OIPR-

EAST COAST RAILWAY
File No. DRM/Engg/KUR/25-26/E-Tender/102 Dt.: 09.01.2026
(1) Tender No. eTender-EastKUR-331-2025, Dt.: 05.01.2026
Description: EXECUTION OF THROUGH RAIL RENEWAL FOR A LENGTH OF 5.54 KMS. IN DIFFERENT PATCHES UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF SENIOR DIVISIONAL ENGINEER (EAST) OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹ 60.03 Lakhs, EMD: ₹1,20,100/-.
(2) Tender No. e-tender-eastkur-333-2025, Dt.: 05.01.2026
Description: PROPOSED REPAIR OF MINOR RCC BOX BRIDGES DUE TO OCCURRING OF SAG IN HARIDASPUR-PARADEEP SECTION UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF ASSISTANT DIVISIONAL ENGINEER-II-CUTTACK OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹ 385.21 Lakhs, EMD: ₹3,42,600/-.
(3) Tender No. eTender-TMKUR-334-2025, Dt.: 06.01.2026
Description: PROCUREMENT OF SPARES AND INSTALLATION IN SQRS-45&46 DURING IOH AT IOHD/KHURDA ROAD OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION.
Approx cost of the work: ₹ 33.25 Lakhs, EMD: ₹66,500/-.
Completion period: 03 months (for Sl. No. 1), 12 months (for Sl. No. 2) & 01 month (for Sl. No. 3).
Tender closing date & time: at 1500 hrs. of 28.01.2026 (for all tenders).
No manual offers sent by Post/Courier/Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website www.ireps.gov.in
Note: The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 10 (Ten) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/corrigenda issued for this tender.
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg), Khurda Road
PR-1017/Q/25-26

PUBLIC NOTICE: LOST OF ID CARD
PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to bring to the notice of the General Public that one ID Card of Mr. Dibyajyoti Biswal issued by ICICI Bank Ltd. having ID Card No. 2525298 has been found missing and/or lost on 06.01.2026. Anyone, who finds the said ID Card, is requested to return the said ID Card to the Manager, Debt Services & Management Group, ICICI Bank Limited, Bhubaneswar.
Therefore, all the customers of ICICI Bank Limited are hereby notified not to make any payment to any unauthorised person holding the said ID Card No. 2525298.
Please take further notice that anybody making payment to any person holding the said ID Card shall do so at his/her own costs, risk and peril and ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any payment.
Date:16.01.2026
Place: Cuttack
Sd./- For ICICI Bank Limited

EAST COAST RAILWAY
e-Tender No. 59-SBP-TRD-OT-2025-26, Dated : 09.01.2026
NAME OF WORK : REPLACEMENT OF COMPOSITE INSULATOR BY PORCELAIN INSULATOR IN MUNIGUDA-SINGAPUR ROAD (EX) SECTION UNDER SAMBALPUR DIVISION.
Approx. Cost : ₹ 1,89,07,433.60, EMD : ₹ 2,44,500/-, Completion Period : 12 Months.
Tender Closing Date and Time : At 1530 Hrs. on 02.02.2026.
No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.
Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-tender is available in website : www.ireps.gov.in
Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / corrigenda issued for this tender. The tenderers/bidders must have Class-III Digital Signature Certificate and must be registered on IREPS Portal. Only registered tenderer/ bidder can participate on e-tendering.
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD), Sambalpur
PR-1016/Q/25-26

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION, MOHANA
No.O-2004
E-mail : rwdmohana@gmail.com
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement
Identification No. Online Tender 12/MOHANA/2025-26
1. Name of the work : Road works, 2. Total No. Work : 14 (Fourteen) Nos., 3. Estimated cost : 10.59 Lakhs to 49.99 Lakhs, 04. Class of contractor :As per Annexure, 5. Period of Completion : As per Annexure, 6. Other details :

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	No. of Works	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding		Last Date & Time of seeking Tender Clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender
			From	To		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Executive Engineer, Rural Works Division, Mohana	Online Tender 12/ MOHANA/ 2025-26	14 (Fourteen) Nos.	19.01.2026 from 11.00 A.M.	28.01.2026 upto 5.00 P.M.	27.01.2026 upto 5.00 P.M.	29.01.2026 at 11.00 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the website: www.tenderodisha.gov.in.
Sd./- Executive Engineer
R.W. Division, Mohana
OIPR-

बैंक ऑफ़ बड़ौदा Bank of Baroda
Bisra Road Branch, 408, Bisra Road, Near Hotel Radhika, PO: Rourkela, Dist.: Sundergarh, Odisha-769001, Email: vjrour@bankofbaroda.com, Phone: 0661-2512782
DEMAND CUM REPOSSESSION NOTICE
Bank of Baroda has granted the following credit facilities to the below mentioned borrowers pursuant to acceptance of the sanction letter and Loan documents executed including Hypothecation Agreement. However, despite the previous notices as per the dates mentioned below, the borrowers have failed to repay the overdue amount, resulting in default the accounts have been classified as a Non-Performing Asset (NPA) in terms of RBI guidelines.
The borrwers are required to pay the total dues + Unapplied Interest + Charges if any, within 30 days from the receipt of this notice. If payment is not made within the said period, bank will be entitled to repossess the hypothecated movable assets detail of which is provided hereunder and take other necessary actions in respect of hypothecated assets, including selling the assets to recover the outstanding amount. Any remaining balance will lead to further legal proceedings.
Below the details of credit facilities and the outstanding amount with Hypothecated Movable Assets / Vehicles

Sl. No.	Name & Address of Borrowers / Account No.	Nature of Facility / Amount Sactioned / Loan Document Date	Total Dues as on Date	Date of NPA / Date of Previous Notice	Vehicle Details: Make / Model / Regd. No. / Engine No. / Chasis No.
1.	Mrs. B Sivakumari, W/o: B Basudeb, G-49, Sector-2, Rourkela, Odisha - 769006 / 78320600001970	Car Loan / Rs.9,00,000.00 / 05.04.2025	Rs.8,93,266.00 as on 03.12.2025	08.09.2025 / 05.08.2025	MARUTI SUZUKI / ERTIGA SMT HYBR / OD14AH8909 / K15CN9743406 / MA3BNC72SSC996701
2.	Mrs. Priya Khan, W/o: Sadab Khan, Noor Masjid Gali, Anand Bhawan Lane, Rourkela, Odisha 769001 / 78320600001586 / 78320600001833	Car Loan / Rs.9,80,000.00 / PL / Rs.2,50,000.00 / 04.10.2023	Rs.10,01,727.48 as on 03.12.2025	08.10.2025 / 01.09.2025 & 27.09.2025	MARUTI SUZUKI / ERTIGA SMT HYBR / OD14AD5219 / K15CN724908 / MA3BNC72SPJ677345

Place: Rourkela, Date: 16.01.2026
Chief Manager & Authorised Officer, Bank of Baroda

> The Divine Truth is greater than any religion or creed or scripture or idea or philosophy
>
> SRI AUROBINDO

Raisina Exodus

For decades, Raisina Hill was not just a location but a metaphor. North and South Block symbolised where power resided, where files gathered momentum, and where governance unfolded through proximity as much as procedure. That geography is now being deliberately dismantled as key ministries relocate to the newly constructed Kartavya Bhawan complexes along Kartavya Path.

The shift of nine ministries and departments—including Defence, Law and Justice, Agriculture, Education, Information and Broadcasting, Chemicals and Fertilisers, and the CBI—is not a routine administrative reshuffle. It reflects a conscious reordering of the spatial logic of governance. As the Central Vista shapes up, the daily business of the state is being pulled away from colonial-era icons into a consolidated, purpose-built Secretariat, while North and South Blocks are repositioned as heritage structures and museums.

Modern infrastructure, shared facilities, energy savings, and co-location are expected to improve coordination and reduce the operational clutter created by decades of scattered offices across Delhi. The argument is sensible and long overdue.

Yet power in babudom has never been purely architectural. It thrives on proximity, habit, and informal networks. The old Raisina ecosystem worked not because of grandeur but because of density. Relocation disrupts those rhythms, creating new patterns of access and influence that will inevitably favour those quick to adapt to the new geography.

This makes the move as symbolic as it is functional. It reflects a broader attempt to redefine where authority is seen to operate, aligning governance with a reimagined Central Vista that privileges modernity over inherited legacy.

This is not a cosmetic exercise but a recalibration of how the Indian state organises itself, signals power and conducts governance. For babus, where one sits still shapes how one matters.

Trump's man in Delhi

BABUDOM BYTES
Dilip Cherian

The arrival of Sergio Gor in New Delhi comes at an awkward moment in Indo-US ties, certainly not at a high point but near a fresh low. Trump's second term has stripped the relationship of its diplomatic cushioning. Stiff tariffs overshadow ties, trade frictions are sharper, and the old comfort of "strategic partnership" is being stress-tested almost weekly.

Gor is no conventional envoy sent to smooth edges. He is Trump's insider — political, transactional, and perfectly aligned with a White House that sees diplomacy as leverage, not reassurance. That matters because India is no longer dealing with a friendly but demanding partner; it is dealing with a sceptical one that believes pressure works. And often, it does.

For India, this changes the playbook. The mandarins in MEA and babus in the Commerce, Finance and Defence ministries can no longer assume policy continuity or goodwill as a default setting. Washington's moves are now driven less by long-term strategy and more by domestic politics and deal optics. One tweet or one off-the-cuff remark can undo months of hard work.

Trade is where the pain is most visible. Tariffs and hard bargaining have replaced the earlier rhetoric of convergence. Indian negotiators must now plan for sharper scenarios, faster coordination and credible fallback options beyond the US market.

There's also a strategic irritant: Gor's wider regional remit revives the risk of India being viewed through a South Asia lens rather than as a distinct Indo-Pacific power. That distinction will need constant reinforcement. For India, this is no longer relationship management; it's damage control mixed with opportunity. If India adapts quickly and strategically, volatility can be managed. If it clings to old assumptions, it will spend Trump's second term permanently on the back foot.

When PSU chiefs start looking over the fence

The latest buzz from the Ministry of Steel's corridors is equal parts intrigue and frustration: Amarendu Prakash, the Chairman & Managing Director of Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), may have submitted his resignation, and might be eyeing a senior role at a global steel giant. However, nobody in the ministry will publicly acknowledge it, and that is precisely the problem.

Prakash isn't some mid-level bean counter. He's a seasoned technocrat with deep roots in steel production and decades of experience in the sector. His leadership was supposed to anchor SAIL through a delicate phase of expansion and policy navigation. Instead, we're left with silence, speculation and whispers – the worst possible currency in administrative governance.

If these rumours are true, it may signal something bigger, that the flight of talent from the public sector to private players isn't just a headline, but a trend. And it shouldn't surprise anyone. When top leaders find better opportunities elsewhere, and when ministries respond with tight-lipped bureaucracy rather than clarity, it tells markets, PSUs and even foreign investors that India's leadership pipeline is volatile.

Worse still, the timing couldn't be more awkward. Critical decisions around key appointments and oversight are in the queue, and the ministry looks like it's stuck between denials and rumour control.

Share a babu experience! Follow dilipthecherian@twitter.com. Let's multiply the effect

WISDOM CORNER

> No legacy is so rich as honesty.
>
> WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

> Let's forget today who is friend or foe, and hold each other in caring embrace.
>
> KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM

> Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.
>
> KHALIL GIBRAN

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- **1706:** Author, inventor, and diplomat Benjamin Franklin—who, as one of the foremost Founding Fathers, helped draft the Declaration of Independence—was born.
- **1917:** The United States purchased three of the Virgin Islands—St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix—from Denmark for $25 million.
- **1942:** American professional boxer Muhammad Ali was born in Louisville, Kentucky.
- **1953:** The Chevrolet Corvette was first unveiled to the public. At the New York stop of the General Motors Motorama traveling auto show, more than 45,000 Americans ogled the new concept car—so many that police had to step in to control the crowd.
- **1995:** A large-scale earthquake struck the Osaka-Kobe (Hanshin) metropolitan area, killing an estimated 6,400 people and causing major damage.

FOCUS INFRASTRUCTURE

UNLOCK DIGITAL BENEFITS

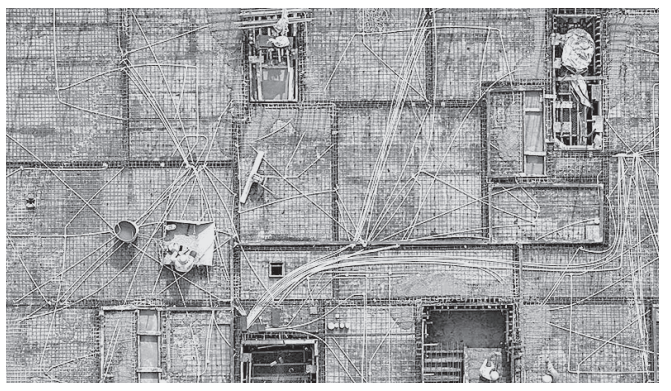
Bertrand Badré & Saurabh Mishra

THE COUNTRIES THAT ALIGN THEIR CLIMATE COMMITMENTS, INDUSTRIAL POLICIES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINES WITH CREDIBLE, DATA-DRIVEN INTELLIGENCE WILL SET THE RULES OF THE GAME FOR EVERYONE

Infrastructure investment is booming. Around the world, governments are pouring trillions of dollars into roads, power grids, data centers, water systems, and housing, with many responding to intensifying climate shocks and the growing need for adaptation. Yet the construction industry – the single largest force physically reshaping the planet – is among the last major sectors to unlock all the benefits that digital technology offers. As a result, it accounts for about 21% of greenhouse-gas emissions, produces half of global landfill waste, and overspends by $1.6 trillion a year.

This must change, and AI may offer the solutions that the industry needs. But that will require fully leveraging the potential of institutional collaboration and human networks. While generative AI can write code or summarize documents, building real-world assets like bridges and power grids requires what we might call "cognitive infrastructure": difficult-to-access data, human expertise, domain knowledge, and institutions through which to deploy new tools for planning and delivery. Like electricity without a power grid, AI without this foundation will remain a source of untapped potential.

What would leveraging AI look like in practice? For starters, it would require unlocking and integrating siloed data from thousands of stakeholders, including construction firms, suppliers, government ministries, multilateral agencies, and financiers. It would also involve codifying domain knowledge from past project cycles to understand why delays happen, how risks compound, and where capacity breaks down; and building intelligent digital agents that understand infrastructure-specific workflows (contracting, procurement, permitting, and budgeting). But most importantly, it would demand institutional collaboration. We do not need static roadmaps, but rather dynamic, evolving feedback mechanisms. AIs for infrastructure would learn from every project and apply lessons across organizations.



The contest is not only over whose capital builds the next generation of ports, grids, and railways, but whose data, standards, and AI systems will guide those investments

The opportunity to improve how we build things comes just as the geopolitics of infrastructure is shifting. As President Donald Trump seeks to reverse all his predecessor's clean-energy policies, others are filling the leadership vacuum the United States has created. China, for example, has reoriented its Belt and Road Initiative toward "green, high-quality" development, pairing massive overseas transportation and energy investments with climate-resilience projects at home.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia, long synonymous with hydrocarbons, has launched a "green initiative" to funnel tens of billions of dollars toward solar and wind projects, green-finance frameworks, and new public-private partnerships. And India has already hit its target of committing 50% of its installed power capacity to non-fossil sources. It has also launched a National Green Hydrogen Mission, targeting annual production of five million tons by 2030, and has used global platforms such as the G20 and the United Nations Climate Change Conference to champion climate-resilient infrastructure and "green development pacts."

The result is a fragmented map. While the world's largest historical emitter is doubling down on fossil-fuel exports, emerging and middle-income economies are increasingly presenting themselves as voices of climate responsibility. In this new landscape, the contest is not only over whose capital builds the next generation of ports, grids, and railways, but whose data, standards, and AI systems will guide those investments.

The next leader in infrastructure will focus on three immediate priorities. The first is to make the most of available data. Infrastructure know-how tends to be buried in PDFs, contracts, and permit files. Governments, banks, and companies must uncover this hidden history to help all stakeholders avoid past mistakes and navigate new policy settings when governments abruptly rewrite the rules (as the US has done).

The second priority is to build AI tools for this specific purpose. What we need is not a generic chatbot, but models trained on materials science, logistics, and local regulations. An AI that understands why projects fail can make success more likely.

Lastly, we must do a better job of sharing knowledge across borders. Instead of having each institution reinvent the wheel, we need a shared knowledge base so that lessons from a dam in India or a metro in Paris can improve projects everywhere.

Over the next decade, infrastructure will define not just climate adaptation, but global competitiveness. It is the muscle of the real economy. The countries that align their climate commitments, industrial policies, and infrastructure pipelines with credible, data-driven intelligence will set the rules of the game for everyone. Those that weaponize uncertainty, or treat sustainable infrastructure as an afterthought, will find their influence eroding.

AI should not be seen as a centralized oracle or as an abstract mind in the cloud. Its real uses lie in targeted applications to connect real-world projects, institutional workflows, and human networks. That is the kind of intelligence that will build not just better roads and resilient grids, but also more effective and efficient systems and organizations.

Bertrand Badré is a former managing director of the World Bank, while Saurabh Mishra is a former director of Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence

©PROJECT SYNDICATE

SPECTRUM DIPLOMACY

Strengthening India-Germany, EU ties

DK Giri

GERMAN CHANCELLOR FRIEDRICH MERZ SUGGESTED THAT INDIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION COULD BE CONCLUDING THE FTA BY THE END OF JANUARY

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz two-day visit to India marked a significant milestone in the bilateral relations. Accompanied by 23 CEOs of German companies from various sectors, Merz landed in Ahmedabad on 12 January. Having spent a full day in multiple events, in the company of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Chancellor flew to Bengaluru. The intent and composition of the delegation was reflected in signing number of MoUs and Joint Declaration of Intents which aimed at strengthening economic, technological and security cooperation between the two countries.

For Chancellor Merz, it was his first trip to India and Asia as the Head of the German Government. Merz chose India for his first Asian trip as Chancellor, indicating a shift in strategy among European leaders, who previously focused on China. New Delhi is also preparing to receive the EU leaders as the guests in the ensuing Republic Day parade. Soon after, the French President Emmanuel Macron is visiting India.

The New Year seems to be starting with bonhomie between Indian and the European leadership. German Chancellor suggested that India and the EU could be concluding the FTA by the end of January. Germany being the largest economy in the Union, Merz's voice carries considerable weight. The strategic shift in German foreign and trade policy could be detected in Chancellor's poignant remarks that the world is experiencing "a renaissance of unfortunate protectionism" that harms Germany and India. He did not name any country, but the reference was obvious.

While the United States has imposed heavy tariff on trading partners, China introduced export controls on minerals used in auto manufacturing causing months of supply chain disruption last year. This has badly affected German car makers. Germany has signalled diversification of its trade and search for alternatives to Chinese exports and market. More than once, the German leadership have revealed their preference for India as a democratic alternative to Chinese authoritarian state.

That said, Germany has not been able to divert its trade away from China with its bilateral trade pegged at 287b USD in 2024-25, compared to 50b USD with India in the same year. The delay in German disinvestment from China and in deepening trade and economic ties with India may be attributed to the strategic divergence between India and Europe that includes Germany on the war in Ukraine.

However, Germany is yet to take a concrete call on its attitude towards China, if Bonn wants to have strategic partnership with New Delhi. The geo-political approach has to be matched with trade and economic strategy.

The visit underscores the growing importance of India-Germany relations with Germany emerging as India's strategic and trade partner. Strengthened bilateralism between India and Germany automatically leads to deepening India-EU ties. Faced with the capricious US trade and security policies, mainly diluting NATO and the traditional trade ties with Europe, Germany and European Union are looking for new partners. While China remained for a long time the strongest trade partner of Germany and the EU, this may no longer be the case for at least two reasons, one, the growing trade and strategic rivalry between the US and China, and the 'systemic threat' posed by Beijing.

Germany and the EU will have no other option than giving up their China obsession while correspondingly reducing their trade with the country. In that scenario, India emerges as the strongest candidate for an alternative to China.

In India-EU exchanges in the past, China was the elephant in the room, but now it is Russia, and US as well. So, the eyes of the world powers will be focused on the India-EU Summit later this month. New Delhi is certainly bracing up for it and should not let this opportunity slip out of hand.

The writer is a Professor of Practice, NIIS Group of Institutions.

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Letters
TO THE EDITOR

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

OrissaPOST
B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

Non-transferable Nobel

Sir, President Trump's acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize medal from Venezuelan laureate María Corina Machado has attracted widespread global criticism. Although Machado praised Trump's assertive approach to peace, the gesture has been viewed as deeply political, especially given the Venezuelan context. The Nobel Peace Prize is non-transferable, and its symbolic use in this manner has raised concerns about damaging the award's long-term credibility. Critics argue that Trump's claimed peace efforts have often coincided with heightened conflicts rather than their resolution. Additionally, many world leaders have remained silent on the issue, reportedly wary of antagonising Trump due to his aggressive use of tariffs as a pressure tool, which has already caused economic harm to several nations, even as watchdog groups warn that such theatrics could permanently dilute the Nobel's moral authority.

RS Narula, PATIALA

Human life important

Sir, The traditional bull-taming sport Jallikattu has come to stay with the Tamils specifically around Madurai and Trichy during the Pongal season. In fact history says that the youth who could tame the bull brought up by the rich people became eligible to marry the rich man's daughter. And now it has become a cultural extravaganza with the award of cars, motor bikes and other prizes to the winner. There is no second opinion that cultural heritage must be preserved but at the same time human life is more important. There is also the hue and cry from the Blue Cross Society in favour of the tortured bulls. Stronger rules and regulations are very essential to safeguard the life of the youth as well as the bull. Last year it was reported that seven people died and more than 400 were wounded. The youth, mostly unemployed, participate in Jallikattu. Instead of cars and bikes the winners might be given employment opportunities. Training centers on how to tame the bull may be established just like those existing in certain foreign countries for their own style of bull-taming.

Rajakumar Arulanandham, TIRUNELVELI (TN)

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
FOREST, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE DEPARTMENT

No. FE-DIV-FLD-0028-2023- 36749/FE&CC, Bhubaneswar, dated the 23 DEC 2025
10F (Cons) 20/2023

ORDER

Sub: Proposal for seeking prior approval of the Central Government under Section 2 (1) (ii) of Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd. for non-forestry use of 66.242 ha (including 2.09 ha safety zone) of forest land for Mining of Iron Ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh Odisha- regarding.

WHEREAS, M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd, 503, 5th Floor, Greenland Appts, BLDG No.3, JB Nagar, Andheri East, Mumbai-400059, Maharashtra/ Vice President, 1st Floor, Shyam Residency, Flat No.101, Near Jharpada Jail, Bhubaneswar-751006 had applied for diversion of 66.242 ha of forest land (including 2.09 ha of Safety Zone) in respect of Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh District Odisha by M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd.

And whereas, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India, New Delhi had accorded '**in-principle**' approval under Section-2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd, for non-forestry use of 66.242 ha (including 2.09 ha Safety zone) of forest land for Mining of Iron Ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh Odisha, subject to fulfilment of the conditions as laid down therein vide letter No.8-14/2023-FC dtd.21.12.2023 **(Annexure-I)**.

And whereas, the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India, New Delhi in consideration of the compliance of the conditions of the 'in-principle' approval, have granted "**final approval**" under Section-2 (1) (ii) of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd, for non-forestry use of 66.242 ha (including 2.09 ha Safety zone) of forest land for Mining of Iron Ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh Odisha, subject to fulfilment of the conditions as stipulated therein vide letter No.8-14/2023-FC dtd.05.10.2025 **(Annexure-II)**.

Now, therefore, the Government of Odisha, do hereby allow for non-forestry use of 66.242 ha (including 2.09 ha Safety zone) of forest land for Mining of Iron Ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh Odisha in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd., as per approved land schedule.

The Collector, Sundargarh & Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division, as the case may be are hereby authorized to handover the forest land coming within their jurisdiction, as has been finally diverted after necessary compliance following due procedure of law. Before handing over the diverted forest land to the user agency, it shall be ensured that Net Present Value of the forest land for this project for which approval has been obtained shall be deposited in full, at applicable rates.

The Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division are also directed to monitor compliance to the conditions stipulated for such diversion in the respective forest/ wildlife clearance order and to report violations, if any, to the Nodal Officer, O/o Principal Chief Conservator Forests & HoFF, Odisha and to the Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department.

Execution of project activities will be subject to availability of all other statutory clearances required under relevant Acts/ Rules for this project, deposit of requisite funds and compliance of Court's order, if any.

By order of the Governor
Sd./- (Lingaraj Otta)
OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36750/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests & HoFF, Odisha for kind information and necessary follow up action.

Appropriate instruction to the Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division, Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division and user agency may be imparted for required follow up action at their end. It may be ensured by the Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division that Net Present Value of the forest land involved in this project of the user agency is deposited by them in appropriate head in full, at applicable rates. The user agency may also be instructed to furnish compliance to the conditions of forest/ wildlife clearance pertaining to the project in every quarter to the Divisional Forest Officer, Bonia Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division for facilitating monitoring of compliances.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36751/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to the Asst. Inspector General of Forests, Government of India, MoEF&CC (FC Division), Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, Jor Bagh Road, Aliganj, New Delhi, Pin-110003/ Deputy Director General of Forests (Central), MoEF&CC, Government of India, Regional Office, A/3, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar- 23 for kind information and necessary follow up action in compliance to the order of Hon'ble NGT dtd.07.11.2012 in Appeal No.07/2012 communicated by the MoEF, Government of India vide their letter F. No.7-23/2012- FC dtd.24.07.2013.

Memo No. 36752/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) & Chief Wildlife Warden, Odisha/ Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (FD&NO, FC Act), O/o PCCF & HoFF, Odisha for information and necessary action.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36753/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to the Regional Chief Conservator of Forests, Rourkela Circle/ Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division/ Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division for information and immediate necessary compliance.

It may be ensured by the Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division that Net Present Value of the forest land involved in this project of the user agency shall be deposited by them in full, at applicable rates in appropriate head before handing over of the forest land to the user agency. Besides, funds, if any, due to be deposited by the user agency for this project shall also be deposited by the project proponent before the forest land is handed over to them. The user agency may also be instructed to furnish compliance to the conditions of forest/ wildlife clearance pertaining to the project in every quarter to the Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division for facilitating monitoring of compliances by them.

The Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division are also instructed to ensure that the directions given to the user agency are executed immediately.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36754/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to Steel & Mines Department/ Revenue & Disaster Management Department/ Director, Environment-cum-Special Secretary to Government, FE&CC Department/ Director of Mines, Odisha/ Collector, Sundargarh for information and necessary follow up action.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36755/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd, 503, 5th Floor, Greenland Appts, BLDG No.3, JB Nagar, Andheri East, Mumbai-400059, Maharashtra/ Vice President, 1st Floor, Shyam Residency, Flat No.101, Near Jharpada Jail, Bhubaneswar-751006 for information and immediate necessary action.

The user agency is asked to take following actions immediately as per orders of Hon'ble National Green Tribunal dtd. 07.11.2012 in Appeal No.07/2012 communicated by the MoEF, Government of India vide their letter F. No.7-23/2012-FC dtd.24.07.2013.

i. ***They shall publish the entire forest clearance granted in verbatim along with conditions and safeguards imposed by the Central Government in Stage-I/II forest clearance in two widely circulated daily newspapers, one in vernacular language and the other in English language so as to make people aware of the permission granted to the Project for use of forest land for non-forest purposes.***
ii. ***They shall submit the copies of forest clearance orders granted by the Central Government/State Government to the Heads of local bodies, Panchayats and Municipal bodies along with the relevant offices of the State Government, who in turn, shall display the same for 30 days from date of receipt.***
iii. ***Detailed action taken in compliance to the above order of State Government shall be intimated to the DFO, Bonai/ DFO, Rourkela/ RCCF, Rourkela Circle/ PCCF & HoFF, Odisha/ Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department for reference.***

Besides the above, the user agency is also asked to deposit Net Present Value of forest land for this project in full, if not deposited yet, at applicable rates. Requisite funds due for deposit by the user agency on account of this project shall also be deposited under appropriate head.

The user agency shall furnish compliances to the conditions prescribed in the forest/wildlife clearance order to the Divisional Forest Officer, Bonai Forest Division and Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division in every quarter, for the purpose of monitoring by him.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36756 /FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to the Head, State Portal, I.T. Centre, Odisha Secretariat, Bhubaneswar for information and necessary action. He is requested to upload this order along with its enclosures in the website of Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department immediately for information of all concerned. This is required in compliance to order of Hon'ble National Green Tribunal dtd.07.11.2012 in Appeal No.7/2012. Hence this may be done unfailingly.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Memo No. 36757/FE&CC **Date 23 DEC 2025**

Copy along with copy of the Annexures forwarded to the Deputy Secretary to Government, Office Establishment Section, Forest, Environment & Climate Change Department for information and necessary action with reference to their letter No.12939/F&E dtd.16.07.2016.

Sd./- OSD-cum-Special Secretary to Government

Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

(Forest Conservation Division)
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, Jor Bagh Road, Aliganj, New Delhi - 110003

Dated: 21st December, 2023

To
The Addl. Chief Secretary (Forests),
Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar.

Sub: Proposal for seeking prior approval of the Central Government under Section 2 (ii) of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd. for non-forestry use of 66.242 (including 2.09 ha safety zone) ha of forest land for Mining of iron ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldini and Sanua under Bonal Forest Division of Sundargarh District of Odisha (Online proposal No. FP/OR/ MIN/153549/2022).

Madam/Sir,

I am directed to refer to the State Government of Odisha's letter No. FE-DIV-FLD-0028-2023-10F (Cons) 20/2023- 5713/FE&CC dated 28.03.2023, and additional information submitted vide No. 13392/9F(MG)-12/2023 dated 04.07.2023 and 22593/9F (MG)- 12/2023 dated 18.11.2023 on the above subject seeking prior approval of the Central Government in accordance with Section-2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. The proposal was considered by the Advisory Committee (AC) in its meeting held on 29.11.2023 and to say that the proposal has been examined by the Advisory Committee constituted by the Central Government under Section - 3 of the aforesaid Act.

2. After careful examination of the proposal of the State Government and on the basis of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, and approval of the same by the competent authority of the MoEF&CC, New Delhi, the Central Government hereby accords '**in-principle**' approval under Section - 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd. for non-forestry use of 66.242 (including 2.09 ha safety zone) ha of forest land for Mining of iron ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldini and Sanua under Bonal Forest Division of Sundargarh District of Odishasubject to fulfilment of the following conditions:

1. Legal status of the diverted forest land shall remain unchanged;
2. **Compensatory Afforestation:**
   a. The User Agency shall transfer the cost of raising and maintaining the compensatory afforestation as per the approved CA Scheme at the current wage rate in consultation with State Forest Department in the account of CAMPA of the concerned State through online portal;
   b. The land identified for raising Compensatory Afforestation shall be notified by the State Government as RF under Section-4 or PF under Section-29 of the Indian Forest Act. 1927 or under the relevant Section (s) of the local Forest Act, as the case may be, before the Stage-II approval;
   c. The cost of survey, demarcation and erection of permanent pillars, if required on the identified CA land, shall be deposited in advance with the Forest Department by the user agency. The CA will be maintained for 10 years. The scheme may include afforestation of indigenous species with appropriate provision for anticipated cost increase for works scheduled for subsequent years;
   d. The compensatory afforestation over non-forest land, equal in extent to the forest land being diverted i.e. 66.242 ha, shall be raised by the State Forest Department at the project cost within three years from the date of grant of Stage - II approval;
   e. Afforestation on degraded forest land to be selected elsewhere, measuring one and a half times the area under safety zone, shall also be done at the project cost under the supervisions of the State Forest Department and afforestation will be done within three years from the date of Stage-II clearance and maintained thereafter in accordance with the approved Plan in consultation with the State Forest Department;
   f. User agency either himself or through the State Forest Department shall undertake gap planting and soil & moisture conservation activities to restock and rejuvenate the degraded open forests (having crown density less than 0.40), if any, located in the area within 100 meter from outer perimeter of the mining lease. The plan for plantation and SMC activities will be prepared and submitted to MoEF &CC before Stage-II Clearance;
   g. 25% of the CA cost additionally will be spent towards soil and moisture conservation activities in the proposed CA area as per site requirement and deposited in CAF;
3. **NPV:**
   a. The User Agency shall transfer the funds towards the cost of Net Present Value (NPV) of the forest land being diverted under this proposal from the User Agency as per the orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India dated 28.03.2008, 24.04.2008 and 09.05.2008 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 202/1995 and the guidelines issued by this Ministry vide its letter No. 5-3/2007-FC dated 06.01.2022 read with 22.03.2022 through online portal of CAMPA account of the State Concerned;
   b. At the time of payment of the Net Present Value (NPV) at the present rate, the user agency shall furnish an undertaking to pay the additional amount of NPV, if so determined, as per the final decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India;
4. *The CA area has been provided over 64.152 ha NFL; therefore, the State Govt. shall ensure that the equivalent non-forest land to the extent of the forest land being diverted will be provided. Details of the NFL along with the KML will be provided a the time of the submission of the compliance of the Stage-I.*
5. *Transportation of ore shall be as per the recommendation in the report submitted by CSIR-NEERI;*
6. *A holistic transportation plan shall be prepared by the State Govt. aiming to have minimum impact in the landscape. The same shall be implemented. Transportation of ore should be as far as possible through common conveyor belt, slurry pipeline, railways, etc. Transportation of ore through road should be minimized in a time bound manner;*
7. *An Oversight Committee shall be constituted under the Chairmanship of the DDGF (Central) RO Bhubaneswar for 10 years who will monitor and review the compliance of the conditions stipulated in the approval for these five* ***mines [namely- 1. Netrabandha Pahar iron Ore Block (area 112.621 ha, 2. Netrabandha Pahar (West) area 66.242 ha), 3. Laserda Pacheri Manganese & Iron Ore Block (area 94.351 ha), 4. Kalmang West (Northern Part) Block for Iron Ore Mines Iron Ore Block (Area 42.608 ha) and 5. Guali Opencast Iron Ore Mines (area 194.683 ha)]*** *twice a year and submit their yearly report to this Ministry in the month of December. This Oversight Committee shall consist following members and logistics of this Committee shall be borne by State Government at the cost of UAs:*
   a. *DDGF (Central) – Regional Office Bhubaneswar- Chairman.*
   b. *One Representative from IIFM Bhopal.*
   c. *One Representative from WII Dehradun.*
   d. *One Representative from ICFRE.*
   e. *One Representative from NEERI.*
   f. *One expert in Geology.*
   g. Two other experts nominated by MoEF&CC.

   The recommendation made by the said committee shall be considered by the Ministry and if agreed the same shall be binding on the UAs;
8. *Integrated Regional Wildlife Conservation Plan shall be prepared for 10 years covering the forest Division of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Keonjhar Districts at the cost of UA. The works shall be executed as per APO and the regional plan shall have site/species specific wildlife sub plans/prescriptions;*
9. *A Bio-diversity Conservation Plan for this entire landscape shall also be prepared by the State Govt at the cost of UA;*
10. *Soil and moisture conservation measures shall be undertaken in and around 10 KM radius of the mining lease areas at project cost;*
11. The conditions stipulated in EC should be strictly implemented and monitored;
12. Compensatory levies to be realized from the User Agency under the project shall be transferred/ deposited, through e-challan, in to the account of CAMPA pertaining to the State concerned through e-portal (https:// parivesh.nic.in/);
13. The KML files of diverted area, the CA areas, the proposed SMC treatment area and the WLMP area shall be uploaded on the e-Green watch portal with all requisite details prior to Stage-II approval;
14. Following activities, as per approved plan / schemes, shall be undertaken in the lease area by the User Agency under the supervision of the State Forest Department. Approved scheme/plan shall be submitted to the Ministry along with compliance of Stage-I approval:
   a. Mitigative measures to minimize soil erosion and choking of stream shall be implemented within a period of three years with effect from the issue of Stage-II clearance in accordance with the approved Plan in consultation with the State Forest Department;
   b. Planting of adequate drought hardy plant species and sowing of seeds, in the appropriate area within the mining lease to arrest soil erosion in accordance with the approved scheme;
   c. Construction of check dams, retention /toe walls to arrest sliding down of the excavated material along the contour in accordance with the approved scheme;
   d. Stabilize the overburden dumps by appropriate grading/benching, in accordance with the approved scheme, so as to ensure that angles of repose at any given place is less than 28o; and
15. **Safety Zone Management:** Following activities, at project cost, shall be undertaken by the user agency for the management of safety zone as per relevant guidelines issued by the Ministry's guidelines:
   a. User agency shall ensure demarcation of safety zone (7.5-meter strip all along the inner boundary of the mining lease area), and its fencing, protection and regeneration by erecting adequate number of 6 feet high RCC boundary pillars inscribed with DGPS coordinates with barbed wire fencing and deploying adequate number of watchers under the supervision of the. State Forest Department;
   b. Boundary of the safety zone of the mining lease, adjacent to habitation/ roads, should be properly fenced by the user agency;
   c. Safety zone shall be maintained as green belt around mining lease and to ensure dense canopy in the area, regeneration shall be taken up in this area by the user agency at project cost under the supervision of the State Forest Department;
   d. The State Government and the user agency shall ensure that safety zone is maintained as per the prescribed norms;
16. No damage shall be caused to the top-soil and the user agency will follow the top soil management plan;
17. The User Agency shall prepare a list of existing village tanks and other water bodies with GPS co-ordinates located within five km from the mine lease boundary. This list is to be duly verified by the concerned Divisional Forest Officer. The User Agency shall regularly undertake desilting of these village tanks and other water bodies so as to mitigate the impact of siltation of such tanks/water bodies. A detailed approved plan for desilting of identified ponds and water bodies to be prepared in consultation with forest department and shall be submitted to MoEF & CC before Stage-II approval;
18. The cost of felling of trees shall be deposited by the User Agency with the State Forest Department;
19. Trees should be felled in phased manner as per the requirement in the approved Mining Plan with prior permission of concerned DFO;
20. The User Agency shall undertake that afforestation of the non-mineralized virgin forest land within the mining area shall be taken up at project cost;
21. The user agency shall explore the possibility of translocation of maximum number of trees identified to be felled and shall ensure that any tree felling shall be done only when it is unavoidable and that too under strict supervision of the State Forest Department.
22. A site-specific Wildlife Management Plan shall be prepared by the State Government in consultation with the PCCF (Wildlife) for the protection and conservation of wildlife of the area. A copy of approved Plan shall be submitted to the Ministry along with the compliance of Stage-I approval. Entire cost of implementation of the provisions of the Wildlife Management Plan shall be deposited into the account of CAMPA of the State;
23. State Government shall complete settlement of rights, in term of the Scheduled Tribes and Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, if any, on the forest land to be diverted and submit the documentary evidence, along with compliance of Stage-I approval, as prescribed by this Ministry's letter No. 11-9/1998-FC (Pt.) dated 03.08.2009 read with 05.07.2013, in support thereof;
24. The User Agency shall undertake that user agency and the State Forest Department shall create and maintain from funds to be provided by the user agency alternate habitat/ home for the avifauna, whose nesting trees are to be cleared in this project as per the plan duly approved by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and the Chief Wildlife Warden Odisha. Bird nests artificially made out of eco-friendly materials shall be used in the area, including forest area and human settlements, adjoining the forest area being diverted for the project;
25. The User Agency shall undertake that the project authority needs to take up works for construction and cleaning of garland drains, stabilizing retaining walls, proper terracing of OB dumps and checking gully formation resulting in soil erosion;
26. The User Agency shall undertake that plants which are having lowest translocation factor can be preferred under afforestation on the OB dumps and fruit trees to be avoided in planting during biological stabilization of OB dumps;
27. The User Agency shall undertake that prevention of fall of wild animals into mining pit by fencing the open pit area;
28. The User Agency shall undertake that the angle of repose in OB dumps to be maintained to ensure stability and safety;
29. The User Agency shall undertake that vetiver grass can be planted at the lower reaches of the dump to bind the soil and prevent soil erosion giving better stability to the dump;
30. The User Agency shall undertake mining in a phased manner after taking due care for reclamation of the mined over area. The concurrent reclamation plan as per the approved mining plan shall be executed by the User Agency from the very first year, and an annual report on implementation thereof shall be submitted to the Nodal Officer, Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, in the concerned State Government and the concerned Regional Office of the Ministry. If it is found from the annual report that the activities indicated in the concurrent reclamation plan are not being executed by the User Agency, the Nodal Officer or the concern Addl. Principle Chief Conservator of Forests (Central) may direct that the mining activities shall remain suspended till such time, such reclamation activities area satisfactorily executed;
31. The User Agency shall comply with the Hon'ble Supreme Court order on re-grassing, and re-grass the mining area and any other areas which may have been disturbed due to mining to restore them to a condition which is fit for growth of fodder, flora, fauna, etc. in a timely manner;
32. Period of diversion of the said forest land under this approval shall be for a period co-terminus with the period of the mining lease proposed to be granted under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, as amended and the Rules framed there-under;
33. The User Agency shall obtain the Environment Clearance as per the provisions of the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, if required;
34. No labour camp shall be established on the forest land and the User Agency shall provide fuels preferably alternate fuels to the labourers and the staff working at the site so as to avoid any damage and pressure on the nearby forest areas;
35. The boundary of the diverted forest land, mining lease and safety zone, as applicable, shall be demarcated on ground at the project cost, by erecting four feet high reinforced cement concrete pillars, each inscribed with its serial number, distance from pillar to pillar and GPS coordinates;
36. The layout plan of the mining plan/ proposal shall not be changed without the prior approval of the Central Government and the forest land shall not be used for any purpose other than that specified in the proposal;
37. The forest land proposed to be diverted shall under no circumstances be transferred to any other agency, department or person without prior approval of the Central Government;
38. No damage to the flora and fauna of the adjoining area shall be caused;
39. Any other condition that the concerned Regional Office of this Ministry may stipulate with the approval of competent authority in the interest of conservation, protection and development of forests & wildlife; and
40. The user agency shall comply with all the provisions of the all Acts, Rules, Regulations, Guidelines, Hon'ble Court Order (s) and NGT Order (s) pertaining to this project, if any, for the time being in force, as applicable to the project.
41. Violation of any of these conditions will amount to violation of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and action would be taken as prescribed in para 1.21 of Chapter 1 of the Handbook of comprehensive guidelines of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 as issued by this Ministry's letter No. 5-2/2017-FC dated 28.03.2019.
42. The User Agency shall submit the annual self -compliance report in respect of the above stated conditions to the State Government, concerned Regional Office and to this Ministry by the end of March every year regularly;
43. The compliance report shall be uploaded on **e-portal** (https://parivesh.nic.in/).

3. After receipt of the compliance report on fulfilment of the conditions mentioned above, the proposal shall be considered for final approval under Section-2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. Transfer of forest land shall not be affected till final approval is granted by the Central Government in this regard.

Yours Sincerely,
Sd./- (Charan Jeet Singh), Scientist 'D'

Copy to:
1. PCCF (HoFF), State Forest Department, Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar
2. PCCF & Nodal Officer (FCA), O/o PCCF, State Forest Department, Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar
3. DDGF (Central), Regional Office of MoEF&CC at Bhubaneswar.
4. User Agency.
5. Monitoring Cell, FC Division, MoEF&CC, New Delhi
6. Guard File.

Government of India
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

(Forest Conservation Division)
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, Jor Bagh Road, Aliganj, New Delhi - 110003

Dated: 05-10-2025

To
The Addl. Chief Secretary (Forests),
Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar.

Sub: Proposal for seeking prior approval of the Central Government under Section 2 (1) (ii) of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd, for non-forestry use of 66.242 ha. (including 2.09 ha. safety zone) of forest land for Mining of Iron Ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh Odisha - regarding.

Madam/Sir,

I am directed to refer to the Government of Odisha's letter No. FE-DIV-FLD- 0028-2023-10F (Cons) 20/2023- 5713/FE&CC dated 28.03.2023 on the above subject seeking prior approval of the Central Government under Section 2 of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980. After careful examination of the proposal by the Advisory Committee, constituted under Section-3 of the said Adhiniyam, 'in-principle' approval to the proposal under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 was granted vide this Ministry's letter of even number dated 21.12.2023 subject to fulfillment of certain conditions prescribed therein. The State Government has furnished compliance report in respect of the conditions stipulated in the in- principle approval and has requested the Central Government to grant final approval.

2. In this connection, I am directed to say that on the basis of the compliance report furnished by the State Government vide letter no. 17522/9F (MG) -12/2023 dated 20.08.2025 [uploaded on PARIVESH portal on 06.09.2025], 'final' approval of Central Government under Section 2 (1) (ii) of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 is hereby accorded in favour of M/s Raga Tradecon Pvt. Ltd, for non-forestry use of 66.242 ha. (including 2.09 ha. safety zone) of forest land for Mining of Iron Ore within Netrabandha Pahar (West) Iron Ore Block in villages Baldihi and Sanua under Bonai Forest Division of Sundargarh Odisha subject to fulfillment of the following conditions:

1. Legal status of the diverted forest land shall remain unchanged;
2. The State Government shall ensure that the non-forest land identified for raising compensatory afforestation i.e. 66.25 ha. which has already been mutated and transferred in favour of State Forest Department shall be notified as PF under Section-29 of the Indian Forest Act. 1927 or under the relevant Section (s) of the local Forest Act, as the case may be before handing over the forest land to the User Agency;
3. The State Government shall ensure that the compensatory afforestation shall be raised as per the approved plan, and the work of the afforestation shall start within two years from the date of issue of diversion order of the forest land;
4. The State Govt. shall ensure that Additional Compensatory Afforestation shall be carried out on the degraded forest land over 73.462 ha identified in Mahulpada RF under Kuliposh Range of Bonai Forest Division in order to accommodate the balance 41,502 nos. of seedlings and the work of the afforestation shall start within two years from the date of issue of diversion order of the forest land;
5. The State Government shall ensure the afforestation on degraded forest land over an area measuring one and a half times the area under safety zone as per the approved scheme;
6. The State Government shall ensure that the User agency either himself or through the State Forest Department shall undertake gap planting and soil and moisture conservation activities to restock and rejuvenate the degraded open forests (having crown density less than 0.40), if any, located in the area within 100 meter from outer perimeter of the mining lease;
7. The user agency shall pay the additional amount of NPV, if so determined, as per the final decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India;
8. Compensatory levies, if any, realized in future under the extant project, shall be transferred/ deposited, through e-payment module on PARIVESH portal (https://parivesh.nic.in/), into the account of CAMPA of the State concerned, managed by the National Authority (CAMPA);
9. *The State Government shall ensure that the transportation of ore will be as per the recommendation in the report submitted by CSIR-NEERI;*
10. *The State Government shall ensure the implementation of approved holistic transportation plan. Transportation of ore should be as far as possible through common conveyor belt, slurry pipeline, railways, etc. Transportation of ore through road should be minimized in a time bound manner;*
11. *The State Government shall ensure that the user agency would follow the recommendation if any made by the oversight committee constituted under the Chairmanship of the DDGF (Central) RO Bhubaneswar for 10 years who will monitor and review the compliance of the conditions stipulated in the approval;*
12. *The provisions of the approved Integrated Regional Wildlife Management Plan shall be implemented by the State Forest Department from the cost realized from the user agency on pro rata basis;*
13. *The State Government shall ensure the implementation of approved Bio-diversity Conservation Plan for entire landscape;*
14. ***The Biodiversity Conservation plan has been prepared by the IIFM Bhopal for entire landscape of Netrabandha Pahar. The State Govt. shall ensure that proportionate cost of implementation of the plan shall be deposited by the User Agency in CAMPA Account before handing over the forest land to the User Agency;***
15. *The State Government shall ensure the implementation of Soil and moisture conservation measures shall be undertaken in and around 10 KM radius of the mining lease areas;*
16. The State Govt. shall ensure that the KML files of diverted area, the CA areas, the proposed SMC treatment area and the WLMP area shall be uploaded on the e-Green watch portal along with all other requisite details before handing over the forest land to the UA;
17. The State Government shall ensure that the conditions stipulated in EC should be strictly implemented and monitored;
18. Following activities, as per approved plan / schemes, shall be implemented in the lease area by the User Agency under the supervision of the State Forest Department:
   i. Mitigation measures to minimize soil erosion and choking of stream, shall be implemented within a period of two years with effect from the date of issue of order of diversion of forest land, in accordance with the approved Plan in consultation with the State Forest Department;
   ii. Planting of adequate drought hardy plant species and sowing of seeds, in the appropriate area within the mining lease to arrest soil erosion in accordance with the approved scheme;
   iii. Construction of check dams, retention /toe walls to arrest sliding down of the excavated material along the contour in accordance with the approved scheme;
   iv. Stabilize the overburden dumps by appropriate grading/benching, in accordance with the approved scheme, so as to ensure that angles of repose at any given place is less than 280; and
   v. No damage shall be caused to the top-soil and the user agency will follow the top soil management plan.
19. Safety Zone Management: Following activities, at project cost, shall be undertaken by the user agency for the management of safety zone as per relevant guidelines issued by the Ministry's guidelines:
   i. User agency shall ensure demarcation of safety zone (7.5 meter strip all along the inner boundary of the mining lease area), and its fencing, protection and regeneration by erecting adequate number of 6 feet high RCC boundary pillars inscribed with DGPS coordinates with barbed wire fencing and deploying adequate number of watchers under the supervision of the State Forest Department;
   ii. Boundary of the safety zone of the mining lease, adjacent to habitation/ roads, should be properly fenced by the user agency;
   iii. Safety zone shall be maintained as green belt around mining lease and to ensure dense canopy in the area, regeneration shall be taken up in this area by the user agency at project cost under the supervision of the State Forest Department;
   iv. The State Government and the user agency shall ensure that safety zone is maintained as per the prescribed norms.
20. No damage shall be caused to the top-soil and the user agency will follow the top soil management plan;
21. The User Agency shall regularly undertake desilting of village tanks and other water bodies, located within five km from the mine lease boundary, as per plan submitted along with the compliance of 'in-principle' approval, so as to mitigate the impact of project on such tanks/water bodies.
22. The cost of felling of trees shall be deposited by the User Agency with the State Forest Department;
23. The State Government shall ensure that the trees should be felled in phased manner as per the requirement in the approved Mining Plan with prior permission of concerned DFO;
24. The User Agency shall undertake that afforestation of the non-mineralized virgin forest land within the mining area shall be taken up at project cost;
25. The user agency shall explore the possibility of translocation of maximum number of trees identified to be felled and shall ensure that any tree felling shall be done only when it is unavoidable and that too under strict supervision of the State Forest Department;
26. The provisions of the approved Site-Specific Wildlife Management Plan shall be implemented by the State Forest Department from the cost realized from the user agency on pro rata basis;
27. The User Agency shall undertake that the project authority needs to take up works for construction and cleaning of garland drains, stabilizing retaining walls, proper terracing of OB dumps and checking gully formation resulting in soil erosion;
28. The User Agency shall undertake that plants which are having lowest translocation factor can be preferred under afforestation on the OB dumps and fruit trees to be avoided in planting during biological stabilization of OB dumps;
29. The User Agency shall undertake that prevention of fall of wild animals into mining pit by fencing the open pit area;
30. The User Agency shall undertake that the angle of repose in OB dumps to be maintained to ensure stability and safety;
31. The User Agency shall undertake that vetiver grass can be planted at the lower reaches of the dump to bind the soil and prevent soil erosion giving better stability to the dump;
32. The User Agency shall undertake mining in a phased manner after taking due care for reclamation of the mined over area. The concurrent reclamation plan as per the approved mining plan shall be executed by the User Agency from the very first year, and an annual report on implementation thereof shall be submitted to the Nodal Officer, Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, in the concerned State Government and the concerned Regional Office of the Ministry. If it is found from the annual report that the activities indicated in the concurrent reclamation plan are not being executed by the User Agency, the Nodal Officer or the concern Addl. Principle Chief Conservator of Forests (Central) may direct that the mining activities shall remain suspended till such time, such reclamation activities area satisfactorily executed;
33. The User Agency shall comply with the Hon'ble Supreme Court order on re-grassing, and re-grass the mining area and any other areas which may have been disturbed due to mining to restore them to a condition which is fit for growth of fodder, flora, fauna, etc. in a timely manner;
34. Period of diversion of the said forest land under this approval shall be for a period co-terminus with the period of the mining lease proposed to be granted under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, as amended and the Rules framed there-under;
35. The User Agency shall obtain the Environment Clearance as per the provisions of the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986, if required;
36. No labour camp shall be established on the forest land and the User Agency shall provide fuels preferably alternate fuels to the labourers and the staff working at the site so as to avoid any damage and pressure on the nearby forest areas;
37. The boundary of the diverted forest land, mining lease and safety zone, as applicable, shall be demarcated on ground at the project cost, by erecting four feet high reinforced cement concrete pillars, each inscribed with its serial number, distance from pillar to pillar and GPS coordinates;
38. The layout plan of the proposal shall not be changed without the prior approval of the Central Government and the forest land shall not be used for any purpose other than that specified in the proposal except the change in land use allowed on the forest land vide Ministry's guideline dated 26.12.2024;
39. The forest land proposed to be diverted shall under no circumstances be transferred to any other agency, department or person without prior approval of the Central Government;
40. No damage to the flora and fauna of the adjoining area shall be caused;
41. Any other condition that the concerned Regional Office of this Ministry may stipulate with the approval of competent authority in the interest of conservation, protection and development of forests & wildlife;
42. The user agency shall comply all the provisions of the all Acts, Rules, Regulations, Guidelines, Hon'ble Court Order (s) and NGT Order (s) pertaining to this project, if any, for the time being in force, as applicable to the project;
43. Violation of any of these conditions will amount to violation of Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 and action would be taken as prescribed in para 1.16 of Chapter 1 of the Consolidated Guidelines and Clarifications on Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 198 as issued by this Ministry's letter dated 29.12.2023;
44. The User Agency shall submit the annual self -compliance report in respect of the above stated conditions to the State Government, concerned Regional Office and to this Ministry by the end of March every year regularly; and
45. The State Government and user agency shall ensure compliance to all conditions stipulated in the 'in-principle' approval letter dated 21.12.2023 for which undertakings have been obtained from the user agency;
46. As per Sub-rule 7 of Rule 11 of Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023 the State Govt. after receiving the 'Final' approval of the Central Government under sub-section (1) of section 2 of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 and after fulfilment and compliance of the provisions of all other Acts and rules made thereunder, as applicable including ensuring settlement of rights under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (2 of 2007), shall issue order for diversion of the forest land.

Yours faithfully,
Sd./- (S.Sundar)
Assistant Inspector General of Forests

1. The PCCF (HoFF), Department of Forest, Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar.
2. The DDGF (Central), Regional Office of MoEF&CC at Bhubaneswar.
3. The Nodal Officer (FCA), Department of Forest, Government of Odisha, Bhubaneswar.
4. User Agency
5. Monitoring Cell, FC Division, MoEF&CC, New Delhi for uploading on PARIVESH portal.

national

The only movement working for the people of Tamil Nadu is the AIADMK started by MGR

EDAPPADI K PALANISWAMI | AIADMK GENERAL SECRETARY

WATER MASTER MACHINE TO CLEAN NAJAFGARH DRAIN

The Delhi government Friday deployed a new water master machine in the Najafgarh drain to treat its water before entering the Yamuna, officials said

Quote of the day

I am introducing three people here on stage. They are alive but CEC Gyanesh Kumar cannot see these citizens. I believe he should be called Vanish Kumar. For polling officials like Kumar, cataract surgery needs to be performed so that they can clearly see these alive voters

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | TRINAMOOL CONGRESS NATIONAL GENERAL SECY

Every political party wants representation. I think there is nothing wrong in the Congress cadres asking for it so that they can help the people of Tamil Nadu. Whatever happens in future, the BJP and the NDA will never find a foothold in Tamil Nadu politics

SACHIN PILOT | SENIOR CONG LEADER

I extend my greetings to devotees on the occasion of Prabala Teerdham being held at Jaganna Thota in Konaseema. The state government has accorded a state festival status to the 476-year-old distinguished Jaganna Thota Prabala Teerdham

N CHANDRABABU NAIDU | AP CM

SHORT TAKES

Missing teen found dead in Kerala

Malappuram: A 16-year-old girl who had been reported missing was found dead at an isolated location here Friday, and police suspect it to be a murder. Police have taken a minor boy, who was reportedly close to the girl, into custody for questioning. According to police, the girl went missing from the Karuvarakundu area Thursday after leaving her house for school in the morning. In the evening, when her mother contacted her by phone, the girl answered and said she would return home soon.

Four drown in sea off Nellore

Isekapalli (Andhra Pradesh): Four people drowned after venturing into the Bay of Bengal here in Nellore district Friday, police said. According to police, the incident occurred around noon when a group of six people entered the water. "Six people went into the sea near Isekapalli village. Two minors and two adults drowned, and their bodies were later recovered," the official told PTI. Police rushed to the spot after receiving information and retrieved the bodies from the sea

21-year-old stabbed to death; eight held

New Delhi: A 21-year-old man was stabbed to death allegedly after he tried to intervene in a dispute involving his friend and a group of youths over an issue linked to a girl in Delhi's Jaitpur area, an official said Friday. According to the police, the incident occurred late Thursday night when the victims went to meet another group for a reconciliation meeting following a dispute over social media posts.

IndiGo's Mumbai-Krabi flight delayed over 3 hrs

Mumbai: A Krabi-bound IndiGo flight from Mumbai was delayed for more than three hours, leading to heated altercations between the crew members and the passengers. The airlines cited multiple reasons behind the delay in takeoff and said two passengers behaved "inappropriately", while fliers, who had boarded the flight, alleged that there was no communication to them from the airline.

ED attaches Al Falah assets, chargesheets chairman Siddique

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

- Chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui was arrested by the ED in November on money laundering charges linked to cheating with students of the educational institutions run by his trust (Al Falah Charitable)
- It was claimed by the agency that the educational institutes did not have the required valid accreditation for teaching

New Delhi, Jan 16: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Friday said it has attached the land and building of Haryana-based Al Falah University, worth about Rs 140 crore, that came under the radar of the security agencies following the November 10 Red Fort area blast, and filed a charge sheet against Al Falah Group chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui and his charitable trust.

The 54-acres land of the university based in Dhauj area of Faridabad, its buildings including those belonging to various schools and departments apart from student hostels have been attached as part of a provisional order issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), they said.

The value of these properties is Rs 139.97 crore, it said in a statement. PTI had first reported early this week that the ED may attach these properties, owned by the Al Falah Trust, categorising them as "proceeds of crime".

The ED said a charge sheet has also been filed against Siddiqui and the Al Falah Charitable Trust before a special PMLA court located in Delhi.

The two entities have been arraigned as accused and the ED has sought their prosecution under the anti-money laundering law, officials said.

Siddiqui was arrested by the ED in November on money laundering charges linked to cheating with students of the educational institutions run by his trust (Al Falah Charitable).

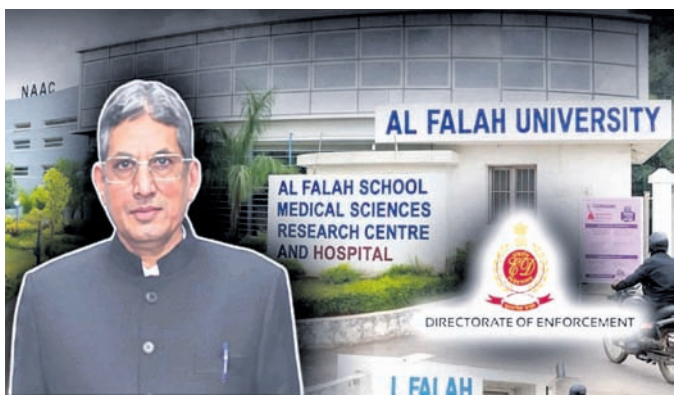
It was claimed by the agency that the educational institutes did not have the required valid accreditation for teaching.

The trust, according to the ED, routed more than Rs 110 crore to family-controlled firms of Siddiqui. He is currently lodged in jail under judicial custody. "Active role of Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui has been found during investigation.

"He exercised dominant control over Al-Falah Charitable Trust, Al-Falah University (including Al-Falah School of Medical Sciences and Research Centre) and related entities, and is found to be a key beneficiary of the unlawful proceeds," the agency said.

An attachment is done under the PMLA to ensure that the proceeds of crime are not dissipated, sold off or transacted.

Officials had said that a government-appointed receiver can be restituted or vested with the administration of the University campus after the provisional attachment attains finality. This way, the education of the students will not suffer even as the criminal action and prosecution may continue, the officials had said.



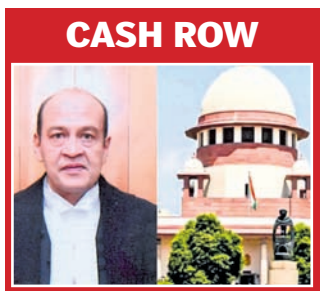
Participants try to subdue a bull during 'Jallikattu', a bull-taming sport, on the occasion of 'Mattu Pongal', at an arena at Suriyur, in Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin Friday flagged off the event at the Manjamalai Riverbed in Palalmedu, near Madurai

PTI PHOTO

SC rejects Justice Varma's plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CASH ROW



New Delhi, Jan 16: The Supreme Court Friday dismissed a plea by Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma challenging the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision to admit a motion seeking his removal and legality of the parliamentary panel probing corruption charges against him.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and SC Sharma, which had reserved its decision January 8 on Varma's plea, pronounced the verdict.

On January 8, the top court said if the vice president can exercise the functions of the president in the absence of the president, then why cannot the Rajya Sabha deputy chairman exercise the functions of the chairman in the absence of the chairman.

The remarks were made by the bench which refused to agree with the submission made on behalf of Justice Varma that the deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha had no power to reject a motion and, under the Judges (Inquiry) Act of 1968, only the Speaker and the chairman have the power to accept or reject a motion against a judge.

Justice Varma was repatriated from the Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court after burnt wads of currency notes were found at his official residence in New Delhi March 14.

The top court had earlier orally observed that there was no bar under the Judges Inquiry Act on Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla setting up an inquiry committee to probe corruption charges against Varma after a similar motion was rejected in the Rajya Sabha. The then chief justice of India Sanjiv Khanna had initiated an in-house inquiry and constituted a three-member committee comprising Punjab and Haryana High Court Chief Justice Sheel Nagu, Himachal Pradesh High Court Chief Justice G S Sandhawalia and Karnataka High Court Justice Anu Sivaraman.

After Justice Varma declined to resign, the then CJI forwarded the report and the judge's response to the President and the prime minister, setting the stage for impeachment proceedings.

Subsequently, Birla admitted a multi-party motion for Justice Varma's removal August 12 and constituted a three-member inquiry committee comprising Supreme Court judge Justice Aravind Kumar, Madras High Court Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava, and senior advocate B V Acharya.

GRAP 3 CURBS ENFORCED IN DELHI-NCR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 2: The Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas or CAQM Friday invoked GRAP curbs after the air quality showed an increasing trend, according to officials.

The air quality index (AQI) in Delhi, which was 343 at 4 PM Thursday, rose to 354 at 4 PM Friday, the officials said.

"Further, forecasts for weather and meteorological conditions by the IMD/IITM indicate that due to slow wind speed, stable atmosphere, unfavourable weather parameters and meteorological conditions and lack of dispersal of pollutants, Delhi's average AQI is likely to breach the 400-mark and enter the 'severe' category in the coming days," a senior official said.

"Keeping in view the prevailing trend of air quality, AQI forecasts and to prevent further deterioration, the CAQM sub-committee on GRAP (Graded Response Action Plan) today took the call to invoke all actions as envisaged under Stage-III of extant GRAP with immediate effect in the entire NCR as a proactive measure," the official said.

While GRAP 3 restrictions were revoked January 2 after the air quality improved, several preventive and control measures under GRAP 1 and 2 continue across the NCR.

GRAP, which is implemented in Delhi-NCR, categorises air quality into four stages -- 'poor' (AQI 201-300), 'very poor' (AQI 301-400), 'severe' (AQI 401-450) and 'severe plus' (AQI above 450).

Unfavourable meteorological conditions, along with vehicular emissions, stubble burning, firecrackers and other local pollution sources often push the air quality in Delhi-NCR to hazardous levels during the winter season.

MEA: India remains engaged with the US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

CHABAHAR PORT PROJECT

- India is a major partner in development of the Chabahar port, located in the Sistan-Balochistan province Iran's southern coast
- In September last year, the US imposed crippling economic sanctions on Iran but had granted India a six-month exemption from the punitive measures on the Chabahar port project
- The waiver will come to an end April 26

New Delhi, Jan 16: India is mulling various options on its engagement in the development of the strategically-located Chabahar port in Iran against the backdrop of the Trump administration threatening a 25 per cent additional tariff on countries doing business with Tehran.

India is a major partner in development of the Chabahar port, located in the Sistan-Balochistan province Iran's southern coast. In September last year, the US imposed crippling economic sanctions on Iran but had granted India a six-month exemption from the punitive measures on the Chabahar port project. The waiver will come to an end April 26.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on Friday said New India is engaged with the US on the issue.

His remarks in answering a question came amid reports that New Delhi is looking at withdrawing from it in view of fresh American tariffs on nations having trade relations with Iran.

"As you are aware, on October 28, the US Department of Treasury had issued a letter outlining the guidance on the conditional sanctions waiver valid till April 26, 2026. We remain engaged with the US side in working out this arrangement," Jaiswal said.

Jaiswal also mentioned India's long-standing relations with Iran and said New Delhi is closely following the evolving situation in the country. Iran has been witnessing massive anti-government protests in which over 2,500 people were killed.

Bengal: Protest erupts over migrant's death

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Kolkata, Jan 16: A wave of violent protests over the death of a migrant worker in Jharkhand brought parts of West Bengal's Murshidabad district to a standstill Friday, as angry locals blocked railway tracks and National Highway-12 for hours, leaving thousands of passengers stranded and disrupting vehicular movement on the arterial road, police said.

Tensions flared as sections of the mob vandalised a traffic kiosk and damaged a police vehicle during clashes with the police. Brickbatting left at least 12 people injured, several of them media personnel.

A woman journalist from a Bengali news channel was allegedly assaulted by unruly protesters while covering the agitation, drawing sharp condemnation from media bodies.

Another journalist sustained serious injuries and was admitted to Murshidabad Medical College and Hospital.

The flashpoint was the death of 36-year-old Alauddin Sheikh, a resident of Sujapur Kumarpur gram panchayat area of Beldanga in the minority-dominated Murshidabad district, whose body was recovered from his rented accommodation in Jharkhand, where he worked as a scrap dealer.

Boards barring non-Hindus at Har ki Pauri surface

The Ganga Sabha, the organisation that manages and maintains Har Ki Pauri and the surrounding ghats, has put up these signs on all entry points to the area, including on bridge railings and pillars

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

HARIDWAR KUMBH

Haridwar, Jan 16: Amid demands to declare the Haridwar Kumbh area in Uttarakhand a Hindu zone and restrict entry to non-Hindus at all religious places and Ganga ghats within it, signs reading 'Non-Hindu prohibited area' were put up at Har Ki Pauri Friday.

The Ganga Sabha, the organisation that manages and maintains Har Ki Pauri and the surrounding ghats, has put up these signs on all entry points to the area, including on bridge railings and pillars.

However, the main bathing ghat of Har Ki Pauri and the surrounding area are already restricted for non-Hindus according to the Haridwar Municipal Act of 1916.

These signs were put up after a video went viral three days ago showing two young men wearing Kandura (traditional Arab attire) roaming in the Har Ki Pauri area. However, it was later revealed that these two young men were Hindus and had come to make a video for their YouTube channel.

The Sabha has demanded that all religious places, temples, and Ganga ghats in the entire Haridwar Kumbh area be restricted for non-Hindus before the 'Ardh Kumbh' next year, a demand that the Uttarakhand government is also seriously considering.

Following the Kandura incident, the Sabha had also appealed to officials of government departments, other organisations, and media houses not to appoint their non-Hindu employees in this area. They stated that this was necessary to maintain the sanctity and purity of the area.

Regarding the installation of the new signs, Ganga Sabha president Nitin Gautam told PTI, "According to the Haridwar Municipal Bylaws of 1916, the entry of non-Hindus into the Har Ki Pauri area is completely prohibited. This sign has been put up to inform everyone about this bylaw."

He said that this step has been taken to publicly share information about the law and traditions, so that the sanctity of the pilgrimage site is maintained and no confusion or controversy arises. Haridwar Municipal Commissioner Nandan Kumar also stated that the 1916 bylaws prohibit the entry of non-Hindus into the Har Ki Pauri area.

national

Thank you Maharashtra! The dynamic people of the state bless the NDA's agenda of pro-people good governance

NARENDRA MODI | PRIME MINISTER

SC SEEKS KARISMA'S REPLY ON DIVORCE SETTLEMENT COPY PLEA

The Supreme Court Friday sought the response of Karisma Kapoor on a plea of Priya Sachdev Kapur seeking a certified copy of the divorce settlement arrived at in 2016 in the top court between her late husband Sunjay Kapur and the Bollywood actor

Quote of the day

Many people ask me why I meet Narendra Modi frequently. He is not my relative, and we do not have any personal relationship, but he is the Prime Minister of the country. An airport can come up only with the PM's approval. Big industries will come, and funds will be allocated

A REVANTH REDDY | TELANGANA CM

Facilities in government hospitals will also be enhanced further. The policy will also ban private practice by government doctors in the state

NITISH KUMAR | BIHAR CM

Our special strategic and global partnership is on an upward trajectory and holds immense potential for shaping the world order and de-risking the international economy

S JAISHANKAR | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

X POST OF THE DAY

Earn ₹30L -Govt takes ₹5.7L as income tax
Spend your post-tax money-Govt takes GST + cess again
Fuel, roads, tolls, fines - tax on tax on tax This isn't nation building, This is legalised double (triple) taxation. Middle class earns -Govt collects. Middle class spends - Govt collects again. Middle class asks questions -Govt lectures.
Stop squeezing honest taxpayers like ATMs. Enough is enough.

@venkat_fin9

SHORT TAKES

SC stays HC verdict disqualifying Mukul

New Delhi: In a major reprieve to veteran politician Mukul Roy, the Supreme Court stayed the Calcutta High Court verdict disqualifying him as an MLA of the West Bengal assembly after he defected to ruling Trinamool Congress party from the BJP. The high court, November 13, 2025, had disqualified Roy under the anti-defection law for switching over to the ruling TMC, after having been elected on a BJP ticket in the 2021 elections. On Friday, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi passed the interim order while issuing notice on a petition filed by Roy's son Subhranshu Roy, challenging the high court's decision.

J&K: 3 terrorist hideouts busted

Jammu: Security forces have busted three terrorist hideouts in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, officials said. The hideouts were busted as part of anti-terror operations in Billawar, during which two encounters took place with terrorists, who, however, managed to escape under the cover of darkness.

Ex-Air Force staff sentenced to 20 yrs

Dehradun: A court in Dehradun has sentenced a former Air Force personnel to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for raping his minor daughter. In its judgment delivered Wednesday, the court made strong observations, stating that the father, whose responsibility was to protect his daughter, had instead destroyed her physical and mental health, and no leniency could be shown towards such a criminal.

MAHARASHTRA POLLS

Fragmented Oppn hands BJP its first shot at BMC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 16: Multi-cornered contests, deep divisions within the Opposition MVA, reflected in the Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) fighting separately and lack of a robust plan among its rivals helped the BJP in Mumbai polls as it looks poised to rule India's richest civic body for the first time.

The Bharatiya Janata Party Friday won the municipal corporations of Navi Mumbai and Jalgaon while the Congress emerged as the single largest party in Bhiwandi and Kolhapur as the results of 11 of the 29 civic bodies were declared.

As per trends telecast by TV news channels Friday evening for 210 of the total 227 seats in the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the BJP was leading in 90 seats followed by Shiv Sena (28), Shiv Sena-UBT (57), MNS (9), Congress (15), NCP (3) and others 8.

The BJP contested the January 15 polls in an alliance with the Shiv Sena led by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, while Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), headed by Uddhav and Raj Thackeray, respectively, had a pre-poll pact.

The Congress, part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) along with Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) at the state level, tied with the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) and Rashtriya Samaj Paksh (RSP).

The underwhelming performance of the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress has dealt a severe blow to the MVA, exposing deep organizational weaknesses and raising questions about the Opposition bloc's ability to challenge the BJP-led ruling dispensation in Maharashtra.

Political observers pointed out that internal contradictions within the MVA, ideological differences between Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT), personality clashes, and lack of coordinated strategy have undermined the alliance's effectiveness in the polls. The split in the original Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), coupled with the Congress's decision to contest independently, effectively diluted anti-BJP vote share across nearly 200 wards.

The poor showing of the Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) in Mumbai, once considered their stronghold, marks a significant political setback for both parties. For Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena (UBT), the outcome represents nothing short of a political disaster. The loss of Mumbai, the city that was the launchpad of the original Shiv Sena movement and remained under the party's control for over two decades, symbolizes the dramatic decline in the outfit since the 2022 split.

BJP workers celebrate a party's candidate's victory PTI PHOTO

Lankesh murder accused wins

Jalna: Shrikant Pangarkar, an accused in the 2017 killing of journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh, Friday won as a corporator from the Jalna Municipal Corporation in Maharashtra. Pangarkar had contested as an Independent candidate from electoral ward No. 13. He defeated his nearest rival, Raosaheb Dhoble of the BJP. Pangarkar secured 2,661 votes, while Dhoble polled 2,477 votes, a poll official said. Gauri Lankesh was shot dead outside her residence in Bengaluru on September 5, 2017. The killing had triggered widespread outrage.

Poll pact fails to work for Thackerays

Mumbai: The tactical alliance between the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) may not have aided the Thackeray cousins to win the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, but the pact helped them keep intact their traditional strongholds. The Shiv Sena (UBT)-MNS combine has managed to take decisive lead in Marathi speakers' strongholds in civic wards spread across assembly segments of Mahim, Sewree, Worli in the island city, besides Bhandup and Vikhroli in eastern suburbs.

EC 'gaslighting' citizens: Rahul

New Delhi: Amid the row over the quality of 'indelible' ink used in marker pens in Maharashtra civic polls, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Friday asserted that "vote chori is an anti-national act" and accused the Election Commission of gaslighting citizens. Gandhi shared on X a media report on the row which stated that "opposition, voters cry foul over fading ink markers". "Election commission gaslighting citizens is how trust has collapsed in our democracy. Vote Chori is an anti-national act," Gandhi said in his post on X.

₹1,621-cr illicit funds routed via mule a/cs in Punjab & Sind Bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 16: The CBI has registered two separate FIRs against former branch heads of Punjab & Sind Bank in Sri Ganganagar and others for allegedly opening mule accounts which were used to conceal and layer funds over ₹1,621 crore generated from cybercrime and other illicit activities, officials said Friday.

The agency has taken action on the basis of its preliminary enquiry, which exposed 13 mule accounts in the bank's Government Girls Senior Secondary School branch in Rajasthan's Sriganganagar and four such accounts in the main branch of the bank in the district through which ₹1,621 crore of illicit funds generated through cyber crimes and other frauds were laundered, they said.

The agency has booked former chief manager and head of the main branch, Aman Anand, and that of the Government Girls Senior Secondary School branch, Vikas Wadhwa, besides a number of other entities in the case, including the companies and individuals who facilitated the opening. The agency found that several individuals arranged forged and fabricated KYC documents, false rent agreements and other fabricated supporting documents used for opening these accounts.

Kashmiris raise pro-Iran slogans

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Jan 16: Amid the deadly protests challenging Iran's theocracy and threats by the US to intervene militarily in the country, peaceful demonstrations were taken out at several places in Kashmir in support of the Islamic Republic after the congregational prayers on Friday, officials said.

Several Shia-dominated areas in Srinagar, Pulwama and Budgam witnessed the demonstrations as the agitators raised slogans in favour of Iran and against the US and Israel, they said. The demonstrations remained peaceful, the officials said.

On Thursday, activists claimed that the bloody crackdown by the authorities in Iran has killed at least 2,637 people, a week after shutting Iran off from the world following nationwide protests challenging the country's theocracy.

In Srinagar, rallies were taken out near the Nehru Park in Hassanabad and the Gund Hassi Bhat localities of the city to express solidarity with Iran and its Supreme Leader, Syed Ali Khamenei.

The protesters voiced their support and condemned what they termed "external pressure" and "interference" against Iran.

Carrying placards and banners, the agitators raised slogans in favour of Iran and its leadership, and against the US and Israel. Similar protests were witnessed at the Main Chowk in Budgam in central Kashmir and the Gangoo area in south Kashmir's Pulwama district.

India to ease rules to boost foreign investment in defence firms: Sources

REUTERS

New Delhi, Jan 16: India plans to make it much easier for foreign firms to invest in defence companies, two government sources with knowledge of the matter said - a move that would align with efforts to boost domestic manufacturing after last year's conflict with Pakistan.

The cap on foreign direct investment in defence firms with existing licences under the so-called automatic route, where government approval is not required, is set to be raised to 74% from 49%, the sources said.

Presently, foreign investors can only own 74% of an Indian defence business under the automatic route when the companies are seeking new licenses.

The government is also in discussions about dropping a condition that stipulates foreign investment beyond 74% is only allowed if it results in access to modern technology - wording that has been criticised by experts as vague and ambiguous.

MOVE WOULD ALLOW FOREIGN FIRMS TO TAKE MAJORITY STAKES

The planned easing of these rules, which has not been previously reported, is aimed at encouraging companies from defence partner nations to take majority stakes in Indian ventures, said the sources who were not authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified.

The reforms could be enacted in the next couple of months, they added.

Another condition set to be dropped is a requirement for fully export-oriented defence manufacturers to set up domestic maintenance and support facilities, the sources said.

This condition compelled companies to first set up a base for maintenance activities, which can now be outsourced by the export-oriented units, making it easier for them to attract foreign investment, said Amit Cowshish, a former defence ministry official.

Santragachi–Tambaram train to boost East–South connectivity

The Santragachi–Tambaram Amrit Bharat Express will strengthen East–South rail connectivity by linking West Bengal with Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. Starting from Santragachi near Kolkata, the train will connect major coastal and industrial regions along the eastern corridor with Chennai's suburban hub of Tambaram, improving long-distance mobility for passengers across four states and supporting national economic integration.

The train will benefit the districts of Howrah and Paschim Medinipur in West Bengal; Baleshwar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Cuttack, Khordha, and Ganjam in Odisha; Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Guntur, Prakasam, and SPSR Nellore in Andhra Pradesh; and Chennai and Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. Improved connectivity across these districts will enhance access to education, healthcare, markets, and major urban centres along the route.

The route passes close to several well-known tourist and cultural destinations, such as the Jagannath Temple—one of the Char Dham pilgrimage sites—the Konark Sun Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Shore Temple, another UNESCO World Heritage Site near Chennai. By connecting major pilgrimage centres, heritage sites, and coastal cities, the Santragachi–Tambaram Amrit Bharat Express is expected to boost tourism, support local businesses, encourage regional trade, and improve employment mobility. Overall, the train will contribute to balanced economic growth while bringing distant regions of eastern and southern India closer together through reliable rail connectivity. AGENCIES

PM to visit West Bengal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate and lay the foundation stone for various rail and road projects worth over ₹3,250 crore in Malda 17 January. The Prime Minister will also flag off India's first Vande Bharat Sleeper Train between Howrah and Guwahati (Kamakhya). The fully air-conditioned Vande Bharat Sleeper Train will offer a modern, comfortable, and affordable long-distance travel experience. In addition, the Prime Minister will inaugurate, lay the foundation stone, and flag off various development projects worth more than ₹830 crore at Singur in Hooghly district. He will also lay the foundation stone of the Extended Port Gate System at Balagarh, aimed at boosting inland water transport and enhancing regional connectivity.

SNIPPETS

Government blocks 242 illegal betting, gambling website links

New Delhi: The government Friday blocked links to 242 illegal betting and gambling websites, according to official sources. The order follows the government's ban on real money gaming apps in August last year. "Government of India today (Friday) blocked 242 illegal betting and gambling website links. So far, over 7,800 illegal betting and gambling websites have been taken down, with a significant increase in enforcement actions after the passage of the Online Gaming Act," sources said.

Northern states battle intense cold, fog

New Delhi: Intense cold persisted in northern India as several places besides Kashmir, where the night temperatures remained sub-zero, witnessed mercury plummeting to as low as 0.9 degrees Celsius with a thick blanket of fog engulfing major cities in the early hours of Friday. Haryana and Punjab reeled under intense chill. Bhiwani in Haryana was the coldest place in the state with a low of 1.5 degrees Celsius, while Ballowal Saunkhri in Punjab's SBS Nagar district recorded a low of 0.9 degrees Celsius.

Bhairav Battalion to make R-Day Parade debut

Besides, the flypast at the ceremonial event will showcase Rafale, Su-30, P8I, MiG-29, Apache, LCH (Light Combat Helicopter), ALH (Advanced Light Helicopter), Mi-17 helicopters in different formations and transport aircraft C-130 and C-295

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 16: The newly raised Bhairav light commando battalion will make its Republic Day Parade debut this January 26 while key Army assets including indigenous platforms accompanied with personnel will roll down the Kartavya Path in a "phased battle array formation", senior officials said on Friday.

Besides, the flypast at the ceremonial event will showcase Rafale, Su-30, P8I, MiG-29, Apache, LCH (Light Combat Helicopter), ALH (Advanced Light Helicopter), Mi-17 helicopters in different formations and transport aircraft C-130 and C-295, they said.

Defence Secretary R K Singh, in a press briefing at South Block, shared the broader contours of the 77th Republic Day celebrations that will see many firsts this time.

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and President of the European Council, Antonio Costa, will be the chief guests at the parade.

Asked the reason for the indigenously built LCA Tejas not being featured in the parade and if the recent crash of a Tejas aircraft in November during a demonstration display at the Dubai Air Show was a factor, he said some of the best platforms of the Indian forces are being showcased. Some platforms have been included while some have not, but there is "no particular reason", the defence secretary said.

The Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, made by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), met with an accident during the aerial display at the Dubai Air Show killing its pilot. The first accident involving a Tejas had occurred in Jaisalmer in Rajasthan in March 2024, but the pilot had ejected safely.

The sesquicentenary of 'Vande Mataram' will be the dominant theme at this year's Republic Day Parade, as enclosure backdrops on the Kartavya Path (earlier Rajpath) here will bear old paintings illustrating the opening stanzas of the National Song and floral artworks at the main stage will pay homage to its composer Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

In a departure from traditional practice, 'VVIP' and other labels, used earlier for enclosures at the parade venue, will not be used. Instead, all enclosures have been named after Indian rivers, the senior officials of the defence ministry said. These names will include prominent rivers of India such as Ganga, Yamuna and Narmada, another senior official said after the briefing.

international

When leaders run roughshod over international law - when they pick and choose which rules to follow - they are not only undermining global order, they are setting a perilous precedent

ANTONIO GUTERRES | SECRETARY-GENERAL, UN

X GOES DOWN GLOBALLY

X was down for tens of thousands of users worldwide Friday, according to outage tracking website Downdetector.com. There were more than 41,000 reports of issues with the social media platform as of 10:35 a.m. ET in the United States, according to Downdetector, which tracks outages by collating status reports from a number of sources

Quote of the day

The world in general is experiencing a phase of disorder, disorder in the sense that the norms of the old order are breaking

BERNARDO AREVALO | PRESIDENT, GUATEMALA

To our partners in the diplomatic community and foreigners residing here in Tanzania, I express my sincere sympathy for the uncertainty, service restrictions and internet shutdowns you experienced

SAMIA SULUHU HASSAN | PRESIDENT, TANZANIA

We want a country where everyone lives together in brotherhood and harmony. We also want a good economy and a life filled with enjoyment and happiness

ANURA KUMARA DISSANAYAKE | PRESIDENT, SRI LANKA

SHORT TAKES

CIA director meets with Venezuela's Rodriguez

Caracas: CIA Director John Ratcliffe met Venezuela's interim leader in Caracas to discuss cooperation, a US official said Friday, in the most senior known visit by a US official since the United States toppled President Nicolas Maduro this month. Ratcliffe met Thursday with Delcy Rodriguez at the direction of President Donald Trump, "to deliver the message that the United States looks forward to an improved working relationship," the official said. They discussed intelligence cooperation, economic stability and the need to ensure Venezuela was no longer a "safe haven for America's adversaries, especially narco-traffickers".

SK court sentences Yoon to 5 years in prison

Seoul: A South Korean court sentenced former President Yoon Suk Yeol to five years in prison Friday in the first verdict from eight criminal trials over the martial law debacle that forced him out of office and other allegations. Yoon was impeached, arrested and dismissed as president after his short-lived imposition of martial law in December 2024 triggered huge public protests calling for his ouster. The most significant criminal charge against him alleges that his martial law enforcement amounted to a rebellion, and the independent counsel has requested the death sentence in the case that is to be decided in a ruling next month. In Friday's case, the Seoul Central District Court sentenced Yoon for defying attempts to detain him, fabricating the martial law proclamation and sidestepping a legally mandated full Cabinet meeting.

Cubans rally against US 'imperialists'

Havana: Thousands of Cubans gathered before the US embassy in Havana at daybreak Friday to protest against what they denounced as US aggression in the region following the capture of Venezuelan leader Nicola Maduro, a Cuban ally. Tension between the two longtime rivals has spiked since the US attack on Venezuela, which resulted in the deaths of 32 Cuban military and intelligence officers believed to be defending Maduro were killed, marking the first clashes between US and Cuban forces in decades. Cubans bundled in hats and jackets gathered on the capital's Malecon waterfront boulevard waving Cuban and Venezuelan flags under gray skies as blustery winds and waves buffeted the coast.

Iran protests ease after deadly crackdown

REUTERS

Dubai, Jan 16: Iran's deadly crackdown appears to have broadly quelled protests for now, according to a rights group and residents, as state media reported more arrests Friday in the shadow of repeated US threats to intervene if the killing continues.

Fears of a US attack have retreated since Wednesday, when President Donald Trump said he'd been told killings in Iran were easing.

US allies, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, conducted intense diplomacy with Washington this week to prevent a US strike, warning of repercussions for the wider region that would ultimately impact the United States, a Gulf official said.

The White House said Thursday that Trump and his team have warned Tehran there would be "grave consequences" if there was further bloodshed.

Trump understands that 800 scheduled executions were halted, White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt added, saying the president was keeping "all of his options on the table".

More accounts of the violence have been spreading after a communications blackout was lifted earlier this week.

One woman in Tehran told Reuters by phone that her daughter was killed Friday after joining a demonstration near their home. "She was 15 years old. She was not a terrorist, not a rioter. Basij forces followed her as she was trying to return home," she said, referring to a branch of the security forces often used to quell unrest.

The protests erupted December 28 over soaring inflation in Iran, where the economy has been crippled by sanctions, before spiralling into one of the biggest challenges yet to the clerical establishment that has run Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

David Barnea, the director of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, was in the US Friday for talks on Iran, according to a source familiar with the matter who said that the Israeli spy chief was expected to meet White House envoy Steve Witkoff.

The United States is expected to send additional offensive and defensive capabilities to the region, but the exact make-up of those forces and the timing of their arrival was still unclear, a US official said speaking on condition of anonymity.

US THREATS OF INTERVENTION RECEDE AFTER IRAN CRACKDOWN EASES

HEAVY SECURITY PRESENCE REPORTED IN TEHRAN AND OTHER CITIES

SPORADIC UNREST CONTINUES, WITH REPORTS OF VIOLENCE AND ARRESTS

PUTIN CALLS ISRAELI AND IRANIAN LEADERS

PUTIN CALLS NETANYAHU, PEZESHKIAN

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the situation in Iran in separate calls Friday with Netanyahu and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, and said that Moscow was willing to mediate in the region, the Kremlin said.

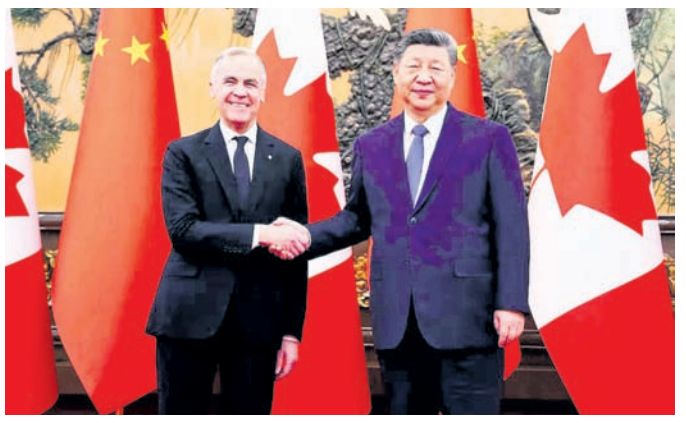
Pezeshkian told Putin that the United States and Israel had played a direct role in the unrest, Iranian state media reported.

Iranian authorities have accused foreign enemies of fomenting protests and arming people they have identified as terrorists for targeting security forces and carrying out attacks.

HRANA has reported that more than 19,000 people have been arrested, but the state-affiliated Tasnim news outlet said 3,000 people had been detained.

Tasnim also reported what it described as the arrest of a large number of leaders of recent riots in the western province of Kermanshah, and the arrest of five people accused of vandalising a gas station and a base belonging to the Basij in the southeastern city of Kerman.

Canada, China slash EV, canola tariffs in reset of ties



REUTERS

Beijing, Jan 16: Canada and China have struck an initial trade deal that will slash tariffs on electric vehicles and canola, Prime Minister Mark Carney said Friday, as both nations promised to tear down trade barriers while forging new strategic ties.

The first Canadian prime minister to visit China since 2017, Carney is seeking to rebuild ties with his country's second-largest trading partner after the United States following months of diplomatic efforts.

Canada will initially allow in up to 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles at a tariff of 6.1% on most-favoured nation terms, Carney said after talks with Chinese leaders including President Xi Jinping. He did not specify a time period.

That compares with the 100% tariff on Chinese electric vehicles imposed by the government of former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2024, following similar US penalties. In 2023, China exported 41,678 EVs to Canada.

"This is a return to levels prior to recent trade frictions, but under an agreement that promises much more for Canadians," Carney told reporters in Beijing.

Trudeau had justified his tariff on the grounds that there was an unfair global market edge for Chinese manufacturers benefiting from state subsidies, a scenario that was threatening to Canada's domestic industry.

"For Canada to build its own competitive EV sector, we will need to learn from innovative partners, access their supply chains, and increase local demand," Carney said.

He pointed to a stronger partnership with China in clean energy storage and production, driving new investments.

Carney said he expected the EV pact would drive "considerable" Chinese investment into Canada's auto sector, create good careers in Canada and speed it towards a net zero future.

CANADA TO ALLOW CHINESE EV IMPORTS AT 6.1% TARIFF, CARNEY SAYS

SAYS CANADA EXPECTS CHINA TO LOWER CANOLA TARIFF

CANADA WELCOMES FURTHER CHINESE INVESTMENT

Taiwan hails 'best' trade deal with US, as China protests

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Taipei (Taiwan), Jan 16: Taiwan's premier Friday hailed a new trade deal with the United States as the "best tariff deal" enjoyed by countries with trade surpluses with Washington, as meanwhile a Chinese official in Beijing condemned the accord.

The agreement cuts US tariffs on Taiwanese goods to 15 per cent in exchange for $250 billion in new investments in the US tech industry. It is comparable to deals with the European Union and Japan worked out after President Donald Trump proposed sweeping tariffs for many US trading partners.

"For the time being, we obtained the best tariff deal enjoyed by the countries with trade surplus with the US," said Taiwan Premier Cho Jung-tai. "This also shows that the US sees Taiwan as an important strategic partner."

"Our goal is to lower mutual tariffs" Cho said. "Therefore, according to the results of the negotiations, Taiwan has successfully obtained 15 per cent in tariffs with no added fees. This is the same tariff imposed on Japan, Korea and the European Union." Trump initially had set the tariff at 32 per cent on Taiwanese goods but later changed it to 20 per cent.

China claims independently governed Taiwan as its territory, and in Beijing, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson slammed the agreement when asked at a routine news briefing.

Residents evacuate from the scene amid a fire at Guryong village, the last shantytown in the Gangnam district, in Seoul, South Korea

REUTERS

Seven killed in Uganda clashes as Museveni dominates poll results

REUTERS

Kampala, Jan 16: At least seven people were killed in violence overnight in central Uganda, police said Friday, following national elections that looked set to extend veteran President Yoweri Museveni's rule into a fifth decade.

Results announced by the electoral commission showed Museveni with over 75% of votes in Thursday's presidential election, based on tallies from 59% of polling stations. His main challenger, popular singer Bobi Wine, trailed on about 21% and the remaining votes were split among six other candidates.

After a campaign marred by clashes at opposition rallies and what the United Nations said was widespread repression and intimidation, voting passed peacefully Thursday.

But violence broke out overnight in the town of Butambala, about 55 km (35 miles) southwest of the capital Kampala, according to a police spokesperson and a member of parliament from the area, who gave differing accounts of events.

Local police spokesperson Lydia Tumushabe said machete-wielding opposition "goons" organised by local MP Muwanga Kivumbi attacked a police station and vote-tallying centre.

Myanmar denies Rohingya genocide claims

REUTERS

The Hague, Jan 16: Myanmar told the United Nations' top court Friday that Gambia had not proven its accusation that the Myanmar government had committed genocide against the minority Muslim Rohingya, part of a hearing on the landmark case.

Gambia, which is predominantly Muslim, brought the case before the International Court of Justice in 2019. The West African country told the court Monday that Myanmar's authorities had targeted the Rohingya for destruction, allegations Myanmar rejected.

"Gambia has failed to meet its burden of proof. This case will be decided on proven fact not unsubstantiated allegations," Ko Ko Hlaing, a representative of the Myanmar government, told the ICJ, which is also known as the World Court.

Myanmar's armed forces launched an offensive in 2017 that forced at least 730,000 Rohingya from their homes and into neighbouring Bangladesh, where they recounted killings, mass rape and arson. A UN fact-finding mission concluded the 2017 military offensive had included "genocidal acts".

Myanmar has denied genocide and Ko Ko Hlaing told judges the offensive was a legitimate counter-terrorism campaign in response to attacks by Muslim militants. He added the UN fact-finding mission was not objective or reliable.

Lawyers for Gambia had argued that it would be unreasonable for judges to conclude that Myanmar's attack on thousands of Rohingya civilians, including women, children and the elderly, as well as burning their villages was done just to combat terrorism.

They said the pattern of conduct during the crackdown indicated the genocidal intent legally needed to determine genocide was committed.

Ko Ko Hlaing stressed that his government was committed to returning and resettling Rohingya refugees from the camps in Bangladesh but said those efforts were thwarted by elements beyond its control like the Covid-19 pandemic, a cyclone and political instability.

"Myanmar's commitment and constant efforts since 2017 contradict Gambia's narrative that Myanmar's intention is to destroy or forcibly deport this population," he said.

Israel sees spike in PTSD, suicide among troops as war persists

Gazans are suffering 'a volcano' of psychological trauma, with large numbers now seeking treatment, and children suffering symptoms such as night terrors and an inability to focus

REUTERS

Jerusalem, Jan 16: Israel is grappling with a dramatic increase in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide among its troops after its two-year assault on Gaza, precipitated by the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on southern Israel.

Recent reports by the Defence Ministry and by health providers have detailed the military's mental health crisis, which comes as fighting persists in Gaza and Lebanon and as tensions flare with Iran.

The Gaza war quickly expanded with cross-border fire between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and saw hundreds of thousands of soldiers and reservists deployed across both fronts in some of the heaviest fighting in the country's history.

Israeli forces have killed more than 71,000 Palestinians in Gaza and 4,400 in southern Lebanon, according to Gazan and Lebanese officials, and Israel says more than 1,100 service members have been killed since October 7.

The war has left much of Gaza destroyed and its 2 million people overwhelmingly lack proper shelter, food or access to medical and health services.

Palestinian mental health specialists have said Gazans are suffering "a volcano" of psychological trauma, with large numbers now seeking treatment, and children suffering symptoms such as night terrors and an inability to focus.

PTSD CASES AMONG ISRAELI SOLDIERS UP 40% SINCE 2023

Israeli studies show the war has taken its toll on the mental health of soldiers carrying out Israel's stated war aims of eliminating Hamas in Gaza, retrieving hostages there and disarming Hezbollah.

Some soldiers who came under attack when their military bases were invaded by Hamas October 7 are also struggling.

Israel's Defence Ministry says it has recorded a nearly 40% increase in PTSD cases amongst its soldiers since September 2023, and predicts the figure will increase by 180% by 2028. Of the 22,300 troops or personnel being treated for war wounds, 60% suffer from post-trauma, the ministry says.

It has expanded the health care provided to those dealing with mental health issues, expanded the budget, and said there was an increase of about 50% in the use of alternative treatments.

The country's second-largest healthcare provider, Maccabi, said in its 2025 annual report that 39% of Israeli military personnel under its treatment had sought mental health support while 26% had voiced concerns about depression.

MORAL INJURY OVER DEATHS OF INNOCENTS

Ronen Sidi, a clinical psychologist who directs combat veteran research at Emek Medical Center in northern Israel, said soldiers were generally grappling with two different sources of trauma.

One source was related to "deep experiences of fear" and "being afraid to die" while deployed in Gaza and Lebanon and even while at home in Israel. Many witnessed the Hamas assault on southern Israel - in which the militants also took around 250 hostages back into Gaza - and its aftermath firsthand.

Sidi said the second source is from moral injury, or the damage done to a person's conscience or moral compass from something they did.

UNTREATED TRAUMA

A soldier seeking state support for their mental health must appear before a defence ministry assessment committee which determines the severity of their case and grants them official recognition. That process can take months and can deter soldiers from seeking help, some trauma professionals say.

Israel's Defence Ministry says it provides some immediate help to soldiers once they start the evaluation process and has increased this effort since the war began.

PTSD CASES AMONG ISRAELI SOLDIERS UP BY ALMOST 40% S INCE 2023

SOLDIERS GRAPPLING WITH FEAR OF DEATH AND MORAL INJURY OVER ACCIDENTAL KILLING OF INNOCENTS, SAYS CLINICAL EXPERT

business

I have done seven deals so far. All with developed economies. This (India and EU) one will be the mother of all

PIYUSH GOYAL | COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER

MARUTI BEGINS VICTORIS EXPORTS

Maruti Suzuki India Friday said it has started shipments of its mid-size sports utility vehicle Victoris to overseas markets. Over 450 vehicles have set sail from Mundra and Pipavav ports for global markets, the country's largest carmaker said in a statement. The SUV will be globally sold as 'Across' and is expected to be sold in around 100 countries and regions, including Latin America, Middle East and Africa, it added

Quote of the day

As we approach the Union Budget 2026, this reform signals a strong commitment to 'Ease of Doing Business' by turning post offices into a potential gateway for global commerce, ensuring India's 'Viksit Bharat' journey is inclusive and digitally driven

SAURABH AGARWAL | TAX PARTNER, EY INDIA

MSMEs contribute 30.1 per cent to GDP, account for 45.79 per cent of India's exports and employ nearly 290 million people; disruptions in export markets or tightening trade rules pose serious risks to jobs and income stability

RUMKI MAJUMDAR | ECONOMIST, DELOITTE

BSNL is proud to support the Indian Navy's satcom modernisation by providing advanced connectivity solutions through our partnership with Viasat. This upgrade reflects BSNL's ongoing commitment to enabling India's strategic communication needs with resilient and secure infrastructure

ROBERT RAVI | CHAIRMAN AND MD, BSNL

Q3 RESULTS

New Labour Codes drag Wipro's profit

New Delhi: IT services major Wipro Friday reported a 7 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to ₹3,119 crore in the third quarter of FY26, weighed by a one-time provisional impact of ₹302.8 crore due to the implementation of new Labour Codes. The Bangalore-headquartered company had posted a net profit of ₹3,353.8 crore in the year-ago period. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, Wipro's profit fell 3.9 per cent while revenue rose 3.7 per cent.

Retail weakness weighs on Reliance

Mumbai: Reliance Industries Ltd Friday reported almost a flat net profit of ₹18,645 crore for the third quarter, as weakness in its retail business offset gains in other segments. The country's largest conglomerate saw muted earnings growth in the retail business on GST rate rationalisation, even as its energy and digital businesses provided support. Its net profit of ₹18,645 crore in October-December - the third quarter of the current 2025-26 fiscal year - compared to ₹18,540 crore a year back.

Central Bank zooms as bad loans drop

New Delhi: State-owned Central Bank of India has posted a 32 per cent jump in profit at ₹1,263 crore in the third quarter ended December 2025, aided by improvement in bad loans. The Mumbai-based bank had earned a net profit of ₹959 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Total income increased to ₹10,969 crore during the quarter under review against ₹9,739 crore in the same period of last year, Central Bank of India said.

Tech Mahindra profit up 14% to ₹1,122cr

Mumbai: IT services company Tech Mahindra Friday reported a 14.11 per cent jump in profit to ₹1,122 crore in the December quarter. The Mahindra group company had reported a net profit of ₹983.2 crore in the year-ago period, and ₹1,194 crore in the preceding September quarter.

Silver defies gravity

Amid geopolitical tensions, silver remains resilient on the back of persistent industrial offtake, shrugging off weak global trends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 16: Silver price extended its record-setting rally for the sixth straight day by rising ₹3,600 to ₹2,92,600 per kg in the national capital Friday amid sustained buying by stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

However, gold of 99.9 per cent purity retreated from its all-time high level and declined by ₹1,100 to ₹1,46,200 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from ₹1,47,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.

- The white metal hits another record of ₹2.92 lakh/kg in Delhi
- It has climbed 20.16%, or ₹49,100, rising for sixth straight day
- Silver pips gold for 2nd year in a row, delivering 22.4% returns

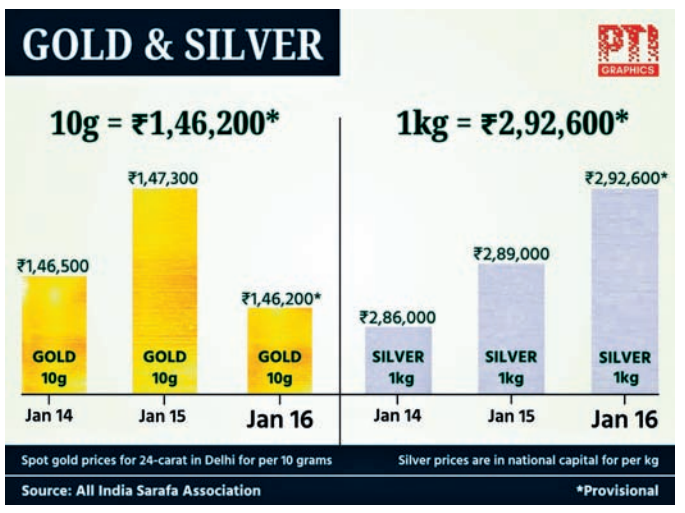
Silver had closed at ₹2,89,000 per kilogram Thursday.

The white metal has now climbed 20.16 per cent, or ₹49,100, in just six sessions, up from ₹2,43,500 per kilogram January 8.

Silver continues to outpace gold for the second consecutive year, delivering 22.4 per cent returns.

Meanwhile, spot gold and silver extended their decline for the second straight day in the international markets, with prices dipping amid a stronger US dollar and fading geopolitical risk premium after reduced tensions in the Middle East.

Spot gold fell by $12.46, or 0.27 per cent, to $4,603.51 per ounce.



We remain constructive on the medium to long-term outlook, especially for silver, citing ongoing supply deficits and accelerating industrial consumption as factors that could drive prices to fresh highs despite short-term volatility

GAURAV GARG | RESEARCH ANALYST, LEMONN MARKETS DESK

"Spot gold is trading 0.25 per cent down at around $4,606 per ounce. The yellow metal is under pressure as the US strike on Iran has been averted," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities, Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

Spot silver fell 2.26 per cent, or $2.08, to $90.33 per ounce Friday.

In the previous session, the white metal had increased to a fresh record of $93.57 per ounce before plunging nearly 8 per cent to an intraday low of $86.30 per ounce after the US administration refrained from imposing an import tax on silver and other critical metals.

The metal had settled at $92.34 per ounce Thursday.

"Precious metals eased on Friday after touching record highs earlier in the week, pressured by a firm US dollar and reduced expectations of an imminent Federal Reserve interest rate cut," Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

He added that underlying fundamentals remain supportive for the precious metals, with gold benefiting from persistent global economic uncertainty and central bank buying, while silver continues to draw strength from industrial demand, particularly from the green energy and electronics sectors.

However, strong US jobs data boosted the dollar, triggering near-term profit-taking across precious metals, Garg said.

EPFO members can withdraw EPF money through UPI by April

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 16: EPFO subscribers will be able to withdraw their employees' provident fund (EPF) directly to their bank accounts through UPI payment gateway by April this year, a top source has said.

The labour ministry is working on a project where a certain proportion of the EPF will be frozen, and a large chunk will be available for withdrawal through their bank account using Unified Payment Interface (UPI), the source told PTI.

He explained that the subscribers will be able to see the eligible EPF balance available for transferring into their seeded bank accounts.

They will be allowed to use their linked UPI pin for completing the transaction to ensure a secure transfer of money into their bank accounts.

Once the money is transferred into bank accounts, the members can use the money the way they want, like making payments electronically or withdrawing through bank ATMs using debit cards.

The source stated that the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is trying to resolve software glitches for the smooth implementation of this system, which will benefit around eight crore members.

Presently, the members of EPFO have to apply for withdrawal claims to access their EPF money, which is time-consuming.

Under the auto-settlement mode, the withdrawal claims are settled electronically without manual intervention within three days of filing the application form.

CHOPPY SESSION

D-St rebounds led by heavyweights

Market benchmarks bounce back after two-day slump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 16: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back Friday after a two-day decline, supported by buying in market heavyweights Infosys, HDFC Bank and TCS shares, shrugging off US tariff woes amid mixed global trends.

However, a depreciating rupee, spike in international crude prices and unrelenting foreign fund outflows capped the gains, traders said.

In a choppy session, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 187.64 points, or 0.23 per cent, to settle at 83,570.35. During the day, it jumped 752.26 points, or 0.90 per cent, to 84,134.97.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rose 28.75 points, or 0.11 per cent, to 25,694.35. In a holiday-shortened week, the BSE benchmark dipped 5.89 points, and the Nifty went up by 11.05 points.

"Market sentiment was supported by earnings-related optimism, though mixed global cues continued to cap aggressive positioning. The earnings upgrade from Infosys helped improve risk appetite and brought some stability after recent uncertainty. At the same time, concerns around a weaker rupee and ongoing global trade-related issues remained on participants' radar. Overall participation stayed selective and stock-specific, reflecting continued caution amid geopolitical and macroeconomic uncertainties," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. From the 30-Sensex firms, Infosys jumped 5.67 per cent after the Bengaluru-headquartered firm saw its revenue from operations grow by 8.9 per cent to ₹45,479 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal from ₹41,764 crore in the year-ago period. It has raised its revenue growth guidance for FY26 to 3-3.5 per cent in constant currency from 2-3 per cent earlier. Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement and HDFC Bank were also among the gainers.

In contrast, Eternal, Asian Paints, Bharat Electronics, Sun Pharma and Maruti were among the laggards.

On the geopolitical front, tensions between the US and Iran eased slightly after reports that the US informed Tehran it would not imminently attack, following diplomatic pressure.

In a holiday-shortened week, the BSE benchmark dipped 5.89 points, and the Nifty went up by 11.05 points

February 1 Budget turns Sunday into trading day

Leading stock bourses NSE and BSE Friday said they will conduct live trading Sunday, February 1, when Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget. In a circular issued to investors, the NSE said it will be conducting a live trading session February 1 as per the standard timings "on account of the presentation of the Union Budget". As per the NSE circular, the pre-open market will start at 9 am and end at 9.08 am, and the normal market will function between 9.15 am and 3.30 pm. Its rival BSE also put up a similar circular for investors. February 1 is declared as a "special trading day by the exchange", the BSE notice said, adding that markets shall remain open for regular trading hours.

Forex kitty surges to $687.19 billion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Jan 16: India's forex reserves increased by $392 million to $687.19 billion during the week ended January 9, the Reserve Bank of India said Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall kitty had dropped by $9.809 billion to $686.80 billion.

For the week ended January 9, foreign currency assets, a major component of reserves, decreased by $1.124 billion to 4550.866 billion, the central bank's data showed.

Value of the gold reserves jumped by $1.568 billion to $112.83 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by $39 million to $18.739 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was down by $13 million to $4.758 billion in the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data.

Bank of Baroda brings bob Central Government Employees Salary Account under DFS Initiative

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: Bank of Baroda, one of India's leading public sector banks, has launched the bob Central Government Employees Salary Account, as part of the Department of Financial Services (DFS) initiative to offer a special Salary Account Package for Central Government employees. Unveiled by the DFS Secretary, M Nagaraju, the salary account package is a single-window banking solution offering enhanced salary account features, extensive insurance coverage and premium card benefits for Central Government employees. Speaking on the occasion, Debadatta Chand, Managing Director & CEO, Bank of Baroda said, "Bank of Baroda is pleased to launch this composite Salary Account Package, designed to empower Central Government employees. It seamlessly integrates savings, loans and comprehensive protection benefits to deliver convenience, financial security and peace of mind across all cadres of Central Government employees." The bob Central Government Employees Salary Account offers numerous benefits such as: Instant inbuilt overdraft up to 3 Lakh, Lifetime Free Premium Debit and Credit Cards, Free Personal Accident Cover up to 1.5 Crore, Free Life Insurance Cover up to 15 Lakh, Up to 100% processing fees waiver on Retail Loan, Interest rate concession on Retail Loan, Up to 60% discount on locker charges and Unlimited free services (RTGS/NEFT/IMPS, Cheque Books and SMS Alerts).

E-commerce giants fined over illegal walkie-talkie sales

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 16: The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has initiated suo motu action against e-commerce platforms for listing and selling unauthorised walkie-talkies in violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and telecom laws, issuing final orders against eight entities and imposing penalties totalling ₹44 lakh.

Notices were issued to 13 e-commerce entities -- Chimiya, JioMart, Talk Pro, Meesho, MaskMan Toys, TradeIndia, Antriksh Technologies, Vardaanmart, IndiaMart, Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook Marketplace), Flipkart, Krishna Mart, and Amazon, following the identification of over 16,970 non-compliant product listings across platforms.

The CCPA found that platforms were facilitating the sale of Personal Mobile Radios (PMRs) operating outside the license-exempt frequency band, without Equipment Type Approval (ETA) certification or proper disclosure of licensing requirements.

The authority imposed penalties of ₹10 lakh each on Meesho, Meta Platforms Inc. (Facebook Marketplace), Flipkart, and Amazon, and ₹1 lakh each on Chimiya, JioMart, Talk Pro, and MaskMan Toys for violations of consumer rights, misleading advertisements, and unfair trade practices, Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare told PTI.

Meesho, Meta, Chimiya, JioMart, and Talk Pro have paid their penalties. Payment from the remaining platforms is awaited, she added.

Under existing regulations, license exemption applies only to PMRs operating strictly in the 446.0-446.2 MHz band. Rule 5 of the Use of Low Power and Very Low Power Short Range Radio Frequency Devices Rules, 2018, mandates that manufacturers and sellers must obtain ETA before import, sale, or operation of such devices.

FUNDING WINTER

Fintech sector raises $2.4bn in 2025, ranks third globally

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 16: India's fintech sector raised a total of $2.4 billion in 2025, marking a 2 per cent increase from $2.3 billion in 2024, and ranked third globally behind the US and the UK, a report said Friday.

The report from market intelligence platform Tracxn said that early-stage funding showed a huge surge to $1.2 billion in 2025, up 78 per cent from $667 million in 2024 and up 56 per cent from $762 million in 2023.

The funding trends varied across stages, with seed-stage funding at $177 million, down 40 per cent from $295 million in 2024 and 30 per cent from $253 million in 2023, the report said.

Late-stage funding fell to $1 billion in 2025, marking a 26 per cent decline from $1.4 billion in both 2024 and 2023, the report said.

In 2025, the fintech sector witnessed four $100 million-plus rounds, led by a brokerage and finance platform, the report said.

In 2025, India's fintech sector recorded 22 acquisitions, a 21 per cent decline compared to 28 acquisitions in 2024 and a 31 per cent drop from 32 acquisitions in 2023.

On exits, the sector recorded four IPOs in 2025, marking a 50 per cent drop from eight in 2024.

In 2025, fintech sector witnessed four $100 million-plus rounds, led by a brokerage and finance platform

India's fintech sector recorded 22 acquisitions last year, a 21% decline compared to 28 acquisitions in 2024 and a 31% drop from 32 acquisitions in 2023

On exits, the sector recorded four IPOs in 2025, marking a 50 per cent drop from eight in 2024

India's fintech ecosystem continues to demonstrate resilience amid a period of funding moderation. While overall investments have seen a dip, the consistent activity at the early stage and the emergence of new unicorns highlight sustained investor confidence in the sector's long-term potential

NEHA SINGH | CO-FOUNDER, TRACXN

There were three unicorns created in 2025, marking a 50 per cent increase over two unicorns in 2024 and a 200 per cent rise compared to one unicorn in 2023, the report said.

Bangalore maintained its dominance as the premier hub, accounting for 42 per cent of all funding seen by fintech firms in India, followed by Mumbai at 29 per cent.

It's difficult to see how World C'ships could be held here: Mia

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 16: A day after her Round of 16 exit from the BWF India Open badminton tournament, Danish woman shuttler Mia Blitchfeldt once again expressed her disappointment over hygiene conditions at the Indira Gandhi Sports Complex, stating that before coming to India she had mentally prepared herself for "the worst" and added it is "very difficult to see how a World Championship could be held here."

On the opening day of the tournament, which is being held as a test event ahead of the BWF World Championships in August, Mia criticised the hygiene conditions at the new venue of Indira Gandhi Stadium, calling it "dirty and unhealthy". Before leaving for home Friday, Blitchfeldt once again criticised the conditions at the tournament on social media by posting a picture of bird droppings on the badminton court.

"The past few days in India have been tough - tougher than I honestly expected. I had mentally prepared myself for "the worst" once again, but the conditions surrounding us are simply unacceptable and highly unprofessional. We are here to perform and to stay focused on our preparations, both on and off the court. Unfortunately, under these circumstances, it becomes extremely difficult

BWF INDIA OPEN EMBARRASSMENT

to focus solely on competing and delivering our best performance," she said.

"Everyone is stressed and frustrated by the conditions we are being met with at a World Tour Super 750 event. At first, you try to laugh it off, but in the end, it is neither funny nor fair to the players or anyone participating in this event," she wrote in an Instagram post.

A match between India's HS Prannoy and Singapore's Loh Kean Yew was halted twice after bird droppings fell from the ceiling onto Court 1 Thursday. This incident occurred after a monkey was spotted roaming freely in the stands, not far from the players' practice area. Stray dogs were spotted inside the premises Friday. While no biting incident was reported, the presence of an MCD dog-catching van stationed at the venue underlined the seriousness of the situation.

Blitchfeldt further said, "I am glad that this issue is finally receiving the attention it deserves, and I truly hope for better conditions for us players in the future if we are to continue competing in India."

The BWF Super 750 tournament serves as a dress rehearsal for the prestigious BWF World Championships 2026. It will be India's second hosting of the Badminton World Championships since 2009, when it was held at Hyderabad's Gachibowli Indoor Stadium.

Lakshya bows out after gritty battle

Lakshya Sen fought through a bruising three-game contest but fell short in the decisive moments to go down in three games against Chinese Taipei's world No 12 Lin Chun-Yi in men's singles quarterfinals as the home challenge ended at the India Open Super 750 Friday. The 24-year-old from Almora squandered late momentum to lose 21-17 13-21 18-21 to Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi in a high-intensity men's singles quarterfinal. The contest was a high-quality battle marked by long rallies and sharp exchanges at the net, with both players testing each other's patience and precision over three draining games.

ICC officials to visit Bangladesh to resolve T20 WC imbroglio

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dubai, Jan 16: A two-member team of the ICC will land in Dhaka Saturday to resolve the deadlock surrounding Bangladesh's participation in next month's T20 World Cup in India, hoping to allay their security concerns having already indicated that a change of venue is impractical.

Bangladesh has been asking the global governing body to relocate its World Cup matches, scheduled to be held in Kolkata and Mumbai, on the pretext of a perceived security threat to its players.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) raised this demand after national team pacer Mustafizur Rahman was abruptly delinked from his IPL contract with the Kolkata Knight Riders following a BCCI directive.

Bangladesh is scheduled to face Nepal in their final Group C match at the Wankhede Stadium February 17. But the board informed the ICC that remarks by a few Indian politicians from Mumbai could be considered as a threat to its players' security.

The BCB source indicated that the possibility of moving the matches to a different Indian city, possibly to the southern parts, or to Sri Lanka will be pondered over in the parley, which might take place at the Sher-e-Bangla stadium in Dhaka.

Rugby fever returns to Kalinga Stadium

Host Odisha produced one of the biggest results of the day, overpowering Uttarakhand 68-0 to reach the quarterfinals on opening day of 10th Sub-Junior National Rugby Sevens Championship

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The 10th Sub-Junior National Rugby Sevens Championship delivered a thrilling opening day at the Kalinga Stadium Friday, as the girls' Under-15 competition produced high-scoring contests, emerging stories, and a strong display of India's youth rugby depth.

Across a full day of group-stage and pre-quarterfinal & placing action involving 24 teams, the championship witnessed over a 1000 points in 36 matches, reflecting the attacking intent, athleticism, and growing technical confidence of India's next generation of women rugby players.

The championship was formally inaugurated by Suryabanshi Suraj, Minister - Sports and Youth Services, Government of Odisha, in the presence of senior officials from Rugby India, the Department of Sports & Youth Services (DSYS), Government of Odisha, and the Odisha Rugby Football Association (ORFA). The Minister and dignitaries met and greeted the players ahead of the day's fixtures and officially declared the competition open, offering encouragement to the young athletes at the start of their national journey.

The group stage saw several traditionally strong teams assert early control. Hosts Odisha impressed on home turf in Pool D, recording emphatic wins over Uttar Pradesh (35-0) and Rajasthan (28-0), drawing strong support from the stands at the Kalinga Stadium.

Defending champions Maharashtra, underlined their title credentials in Pool A with commanding victories over Assam (33-0) and Jammu & Kashmir (40-0). Last year's runners-up - Bihar were equally dominant in Pool B, registering the biggest winning margins of the group stage with wins against Jharkhand (67-0) and Manipur (64-0).

Strong group-stage performances were also recorded by Delhi, West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, Chandigarh, Gujarat, and Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, setting up a competitive pre-quarterfinal round.

A notable feature of the opening day was the presence of senior and former players from several states serving as coaches, managers, and support staff. Many of these experienced athletes worked closely with their Under-15 squads, guiding young players through match preparation, recovery routines, and on-field decision-making; reinforcing the championship's role as a learning-focused platform within India's rugby pathway.

The evening session saw decisive pre-quarterfinal encounters as teams battled for quarterfinal berths. Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (DNHDD) and Chandigarh emerged as the standout stories of the day, both securing historic maiden quarterfinal berths.

With the quarterfinal lineup now confirmed, the championship moves into a decisive phase as the country's most promising Under-15 players continue their national journey at the Kalinga Stadium.

The competition now moves into the quarterfinal stage Saturday at the Kalinga Stadium, with Quarterfinal 1 between DNHDD and Bihar at 9:00 AM, Quarterfinal 2 featuring Chandigarh against Rajasthan at 9:20 AM, Quarterfinal 3 seeing Karnataka take on Odisha at 9:40 AM, and Quarterfinal 4 between West Bengal and Maharashtra at 10:00 AM.

The Sub-Junior National Rugby Sevens Championship remains a cornerstone of India's rugby development system, providing structured exposure to national competition under a modifiedcontact format that prioritises safety, skill development, and confidence-building.

The tournament is being organised by Rugby India in collaboration with the Government of Odisha, the Department of Sports & Youth Services (DSYS), and the Odisha Rugby Football Association (ORFA).

ISL CRISIS FC Goa players accept pay cut

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Jan 16: FC Goa players, including India captain Sandesh Jhingan, and support staff have accepted pay cut for the truncated Indian Super League (ISL) season beginning February 14, the club said, terming their decision as a "selfless" act.

The Goan club said in a Thursday night statement on 'X' that it had "honest and difficult conversations" with the players and support staff about the challenges ahead in view of the turmoil in Indian football.

"In a moment of real uncertainty for Indian football, our club had honest and difficult conversations about the challenges we are facing. What followed was something that made us incredibly proud," the statement said.

"Our First Team players and Technical Staff stepped forward, stood together, and chose to support the club by agreeing to reduce their remuneration during this period. This was not an easy decision. It was a selfless one."

The AIFF Super Cup champion team said it was "deeply humbled by this gesture and immensely grateful for the unity, character, and commitment shown by the group."

"These moments remind us that this club is more than results on the pitch, it is about people, belief, and standing together when it matters most. Thank you for fighting for the badge. Thank you for believing in the journey. We move forward together."

FC Goa have some other India players like Udanta Singh and Boris Singh in their roster.

Earlier this month, another ISL side Bengaluru FC's owner Parth Jindal had called on the players to "make sacrifices" in view of the "financial burden" the club will shoulder to participate in the delayed ISL, saying without their support, the franchise may have to "shut shop for good".

ISL 2025-26 was thrown into disarray after its earlier organiser and the AIFF's former commercial partner FSDL ended the Master Rights Agreement (MRA) with the national federation December 8 last following disagreement between the two parties regarding its renewal.

Foreign player exodus continues

Meanwhile, the foreign player exodus from the clubs continued in the last 48 hours.

Spanish forward Iker Guarrotxena was the latest FC Goa player to leave the club for Indonesian side Persijap Jepara. Other Spanish players David Timor and Borja Herrera had already left the club.

Foreign players who have left various ISL clubs in the past two days include Spaniards Chema Nunez (NorthEast United), Jon Toral (Mumbai City FC) and Juan Rodriguez (Kerala Blasters), as well as Japanese Hiroshi Ibusuki (East Bengal).

Earlier this month, East Bengal's Moroccan forward Hamid Ahadad and Mumbai City FC's Spanish centre-back Tiri left their respective clubs.

U-19 WC: India start favourites vs B'desh

Bulawayo: Seeking to continue their confident start to the tournament, a well-balanced India will begin as firm favourites despite facing a tricky Bangladesh in their second match of the ICC U-19 World Cup here Saturday. Five-time champions India started their campaign on expected lines, registering a six-wicket win over USA after bundling the opponents out for a paltry 107 in a rain-hit match, with right-arm pacer Henil Patel returning exceptional figures of 5/16 in seven overs and the other bowlers also doing a fine job.

Tough test awaits Indian Grandmasters

Wijk Aan Zee: World Champion D Gukesh will aim for consistency after a largely forgettable 2025 season when he makes a fresh start at the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament, taking on World Cup winner Javokhir Sindarov of Uzbekistan in the first round here Saturday. It will be a test of time for the Indian Grandmasters in the youngest ever field of the world's oldest running elite tournament.

HOCKEY INDIA LEAGUE

Bhubaneswar leg kicks off today

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: Odisha gears up for ten days of world-class hockey and electrifying action as the final leg of the Men's Hero Hockey India League 2026 is set to kick off at Kalinga Stadium Saturday here.

In a press conference held Friday, the captains of the teams addressed the mediapersons and shared their thoughts on the scope of HIL to produce young talents of the game.

Vedanta Kalinga Lancers captain Arthur Van Doren said hockey in India is an experience in itself because of the world-class stadiums and the love for the game in the country. The team is leading the points table in its first phase in Chennai and would hope to continue the fine form on home soil.

Meanwhile, the SG Pipers have already booked their final spot in the women's HIL as table toppers. They secured their final berth in the women's tournament after the Soorma Hockey Club defeated the Ranchi Royals Monday.

Hockey India League (HIL) Governing Committee chairperson Dilip Tirkey said recently, "As the Hockey India League returns to the hockey hub of India in Bhubaneswar, there is certainly a lot of excitement among hockey fans in the region to come watch their favourite stars live in action. To encourage more fans to come to the stadium and enjoy the thrilling matches, Hockey India has made the tickets free of cost. I believe this will encourage more fans from across Odisha to come to Bhubaneswar and watch some exciting hockey."

F1 2026: Red Bull unveils new livery

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

New Delhi, Jan 16: Red Bull Racing have revealed their new livery for the Formula 1 2026 season in an event held in Michigan Central Station.

The Milton Keynes-based team revealed their new design with a sparkling reveal in Detroit, the home of Ford, with whom they are collaborating to build their first-ever Formula 1 Power Unit.

Red Bull pilot Martin Sonka pulled off an incredible feat by tearing the sheet off the vehicle with his plane.

When the energy drink company initially entered the sport in 2005, they used a gloss finish, which is what their new livery represents.

The team claimed that the "heritage white base" of the RB22's 2026 design will "provide more depth and clarity and allow the iconic sun and bull logo to pop."

This season, Isack Hadjar, who leaves sister team Racing Bulls, will join four-time world champi- on Max Verstappen. Red Bull, which last won the Teams' Championship in 2023, will be hoping to win the World Championship again.

Verstappen will switch to racing under the number 3 (his favourite number) for the 2026 season, rather than 33, taking the number previously used by former team mate Daniel Ricciardo.

Red Bull rallied to finish third in the Teams' Championship, and Verstappen put on a spectacular comeback to contend for the drivers' title right up until the penultimate race in Abu Dhabi 2024 season.

Hadjar, his teammate, will continue to run the number six after joining Red Bull following just one season with Racing Bulls. Pierre Wache will oversee the technical team, while Laurent Mekies, who succeeded Christian Horner as Team Principal halfway through the previous season, will be in charge.

Odisha Open Int'l Grandmasters Chess Festival commences

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Jan 16: The 16th Odisha Open International Grandmasters Chess Festival 2026 is being organized by the All Odisha Chess Association (AOCA) in association with the E-Sports Association of Odisha (ESPOA) under the aegis of the All India Chess Federation (AICF). The prestigious tournament is being held at Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (SOA) University, Bhubaneswar, from January 16 to January 24, 2026.

A total of 1,053 players from fourteen countries are participating in this mega event across four categories — Category A (221 players), Category B (261), Category C (310), and Category D (261). The championship has created history in Odisha by registering one of the highest-ever participation in a chess tournament in the state.

Five-time Commonwealth Champion Grandmaster Abhijit Gupta is the top seed of the event. The tournament features a strong international field with ten Grandmasters and nineteen International Masters from fourteen countries.

As per the schedule, the A Category will continue till January 24, B Category from January 16 to 19, C Category from January 21 to 24, while the D Category, a Blitz event, will be held on January 20.

The tournament carries a total prize fund of Rs 45 lakh, distributed across all four categories. It is one of the biggest International Grandmaster Open tournaments in India.

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