



## Beware of impersonation/parcel scams!



Beware of audio/video calls from **CYBERCRIMINALS** posing as officials from RBI/Banks/ Government Agencies/Courier Companies **THREATENING** with Legal Action or **Asking for Immediate Transfer of Money** or **Freezing or Blocking** your bank accounts or debit/credit cards.



### DON'Ts

- Don't panic - fraudsters may trap you
- Don't share any personal/financial information
- Don't click on unknown links for making payments



### DO's

- Always verify the genuineness of the caller/fund request
- Immediately report to [cybercrime.gov.in](https://cybercrime.gov.in) or call **1930** for help



For more details, visit <https://rbikehtahai.rbi.org.in/fraud>  
For feedback, write to [rbikehtahai@rbi.org.in](mailto:rbikehtahai@rbi.org.in)



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### Sharvari's woes

Actor Sharvari seeks tips from netizens as she is suffering from sleep disorders

LEISURE



### Insurgency in Syria

Syrian military says rebels have entered large parts of Aleppo during an offensive in which dozens of soldiers were killed

INTERNATIONAL | P8



### Rising volatility

The flip in positioning of derivatives traders in Indian stocks indicates that they expect volatility to pick up

BUSINESS | P9



### Sindhu, Sen in finals

PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen make it to women's and men's singles finals, respectively, at Syed Modi Int'l Super 300 tournament

SPORTS | BACK PAGE



**HIGH-LEVEL MEET:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing the All India Conference of Director Generals/ Inspector Generals of Police -2024 in Bhubaneswar, Saturday, while Union Home Minister Amit Shah looks on

## DGP/IGP MEET PM discusses policing, security

**Bhubaneswar, Nov 30:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussed Saturday various subjects on policing and security with top police officers of the country here. Around 250 officers in the rank of DGP and IGP are physically attending the 59th DGPs/IGPs conference being held here, while more than 200 others are participating in it virtually.

"Had a productive first day at the DGP/IGP Conference in Bhubaneswar. Discussed various subjects on policing and security," Modi wrote on X.

The Prime Minister's Office Friday said the three-day conference would include deliberations on critical components of national security, including counter-terrorism, left-wing extremism, coastal security, new criminal laws and narcotics.

Its deliberations include formulation and sharing of professional practices and processes in tackling challenges relating to crime control and law-and-order management, besides internal security threats.

"The prime minister not only listens attentively to all contributions but also fosters an environment of open and informal discussions, allowing for the emergence of new ideas.

"This year, some unique features have also been added to the conference. The entire day is being effectively utilised starting from yoga session, business session, break-out sessions and thematic dining tables," the PMO said in a statement. The conference provides a platform for senior police officers to freely discuss and debate diverse national security-related issues besides various operational, infrastructural and welfare-related problems faced by police.



**IRREGULAR by MANJUL**

# BPIA Pannun's latest target

*Khalistani separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun is at it again. While the 59th DGP-IGP conference, attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was underway, Pannun issued a fresh threat asking people to avoid Biju Patnaik International Airport December 1 as the facility is on his target. The threat came via an e-mail to a local journalist, leaving security officials in a tizzy. A couple of days ago, ahead of the national-level event, Pannun dubbed Bhubaneswar a "Terror City" claiming "Modi-Shah-Doval evil axis" had put it under threat with their participation*



A sniffer dog checks an unclaimed bag at Biju Patnaik International Airport in Bhubaneswar, Saturday

**Bhubaneswar, Nov 30:** Fear and suspicion gripped the Capital City Saturday morning after Khalistani separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun sent a threat mail to City-based journalist Akshay Sahoo, exhorting his followers to disrupt the All India DGP/IGP conference. In his latest threat, Pannun

warned to disrupt flight services in the City, asking people to stop flying from and to Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA). Reportedly, the threat has arrived two days after the first one, in which, Pannun referred Bhubaneswar as "Terror City", and said "Modi-Shah-Doval evil

axis' had brought the biggest security threat to the City. In this earlier threat, he called upon his supporters to take cover in temples and hotels in the City to disrupt the event. In a media presser, journalist Sahoo said he received the mail, with an audio clip attached, Saturday 9:04 am. The

sender claimed himself to be Pannun. He shared the mail's content, which said, "Hindu terrorist Modi has turned Bhubaneswar into a terror City. Pro-Khalistan Sikhs are ready to die for the freedom of Punjab. Indian police chiefs, are you willing to sacrifice your life to defend the territorial integrity

of India?"

The mail further announced a reward of ₹25 lakhs for Khalistani supporters, who would raise 'Khalistan Flag' near Lok Seva Bhawan.

In a thinly veiled warning for a military attack, the mail had declared 'December 1' as 'D-Day'

Few minutes after the news spread, senior Crime Branch officials reached the office complex of Sahoo and launched a probe into the incident.

"The investigation of the matter is underway. Nothing has been ruled out yet. The IP address of the sender is being analysed to get more details," said an official.

Later in the day, the City came under high-alert after a suspicious bag, with no owner, was traced by the CISF security personnel in Terminal-1 of BPIA.

However, to the relief of passengers, the authorities ruled out any security threat after a thorough investigation.

## First phase of Bhubaneswar Metro by Dec '27

DEBADURLLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Nov 30:** The first-phase of Bhubaneswar Metro project, encompassing a total of 26 kilometers under 20 stations, would be completed by the end of December, 2027, said Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha MP Aparajita Sarangi Saturday, while adding that 13 trains will run in first-phase, with three coaches in each, showcasing the rich art and heritage of the state.

Sarangi, who attended the review meeting of the project Saturday, said the first phase would be poised to handle a daily ridership of 95,000 commuters. For which, three stations will be built in Bhubaneswar-Ekamra constituency, four in Bhubaneswar-Central constituency, 10 in Bhubaneswar-North Constituency, and three in Cuttack area.

Notably, the City's first Metro project is executed with a joint-partnership between Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and Bhubaneswar Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL), with majority of the cost to be borne by the state government. The 26-km metro rail would connect Bhubaneswar Airport to Trisulia Square, which will include stations such as Capital Hospital, Babuji Nagar, Bhubaneswar Railway Station, and Ram Mandir Square.

## 4 run over by speeding truck in Mayurbhanj

PNN & AGENCIES

**Baripada, Nov 30:** At least four people were killed and three sustained critical injuries in road accidents under Tiring and Bahalda police limits in Mayurbhanj district Saturday, police said.

The deceased were identified as Dharmapada Patanda of Badadalima village, auto driver Dhanaram Marandi, a couple Laxman Soren and his wife Pana Soren of Bahalda police limits. Three others sustained critical injuries and admitted to the PRM Medical College and Hospital for treatment.

A Rairangpur bound speeding truck from Tatanagar first hit three persons at Badadalima Chhak killing one person and causing grievous injuries to two others. While fleeing

away from the accident site, the truck dashed against an auto-rickshaw at Bagbeda, the police said.

A couple travelling in the autorickshaw and the driver of the three-wheeler died. Another passenger also sustained critical injuries, they said. Later, the truck skidded off the highway and overturned.

The police are investigating the matter and efforts are underway to track the truck, they said. The mishap sparked tension among the residents as over 500 irate people staged a road blockade demanding compensation to the deceased family. They relented after Rairangpur ASP Narayan Nayak, SDPO Gokulananda Sahu and other officials rushed to the spot and held talks with the agitators.

## 'No more request to WB for tuber supply'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Nov 30:** State Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra Saturday alleged that the Mamata Banerjee government is playing politics over the supply of potatoes and that the state government would not request West Bengal to restore supply of the tuber.

Due to restrictions imposed by the West Bengal government, potato-laden trucks have not been allowed to cross the border since Wednesday night. Many of these vehicles have also returned to their origin points, officials here said.

Speaking to media persons about the potato crisis, Patra said, "The West Bengal government is playing politics, for which, they restricted supply of potato to Odisha while sometimes they allow it. But, this time, we are not going to

request them to supply potato to Odisha."

However, if West Bengal sends potatoes on its own, Odisha will accept it, he added.

Patra said, "We are not going to have any talks with Mamata Banerjee government for potatoes. She has already stated in the media that her government will not send potatoes to Odisha so there is no point in talking to her."

It is not proper to restrict the supply of vegetables or goods to any state because all states are under one country and everyone should live together, he pointed out.

"West Bengal

gal is also depending on other states for fish and other items. If desired, Odisha can also stop the goods vehicles at its border. But, we are not going to do so," the minister said.

"We have made arrangements for the supply of adequate potatoes to consumers in the state. Potatoes have started arriving in the state from Uttar Pradesh. Besides, the tuber can also be brought from Punjab," added the minister.

The consumers will have to bear an additional burden of ₹2 per kg for potatoes brought from UP, he said.

Patra said that the Odisha government has chalked out an action plan to make the state self-reliant in potato production in next two years.

Due to the restriction imposed by West Bengal, the retail price of the vegetable has increased in local markets in Odisha.





# Potato Mission hits roadblock

## Farmers struggle to get potato seeds amid high demand

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Mahakalapara, Nov 30:** In the wake of frequent disturbances in supply of potatoes from neighbouring West Bengal, the state government is weighing its options to procure the essential tuber from other states. At this juncture, the state's ability to fulfil its own needs by becoming self-sufficient in potato production assumes much importance. However, not much progress has been made in this regard.

Under 'Potato Mission', the state government has been promoting potato cultivation among rural farmers by ensuring the availability of high-quality seeds through its horticulture initiative 'Udyan Krushi Yojana'. The goal is to empower farmers to grow their own produce during periods of market shortages. Subsidised fertilizers, pesticides, and agricultural implements are also being provided to support this effort.

However, these people-oriented government schemes are yet to fully benefit the farmers. In Kendrapara district's Mahakalapara block, farmers eager to grow potatoes face a lack of access to seeds. Forced to procure seeds from the market at exorbitant prices, they also have to prepare their fields at a much higher cost.

In recent years, Odisha has faced recurring potato shortages, making it heavily reliant on



West Bengal. Last year, a surplus harvest in West Bengal led to a temporary halt in potato transportation to Odisha giving way to a severe crisis. The state government had to turn to Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Bihar to import potatoes and stabilise the market. Later, negotiations between the Odisha and West Bengal governments restored the supply, but not for long. The neighbouring state has again halted and returned truck-loads of the tuber in recent days.

In Gokhakhati village of the Barakandha panchayat, block-level officials report that many potato farmers are facing challenges due to the unavailability of certified potato seeds. According to potato farmer Adhikari Swain, the farmers have been forced to buy seeds from open markets at inflated prices. Several farmers have alleged that genuine potato seeds have not reached them.

The Horticulture and Agri-

## West Bengal potato traders warn strike

**Bhograi:** Following West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's abrupt decision to impose restrictions on potato supply to Odisha and other states, the Pragatishil Alu Byabsayee Samiti in the neighbouring state has warned of a statewide strike starting Tuesday. The decision was taken in an emergency meeting of traders Saturday afternoon at Tarakeswar. Hooghly to discuss future strategies. They criticised the Bengal government for failing to address traders' concerns before suddenly halting potato exports to other states. West Bengal currently has 485 cold storage facilities housing 7 lakh metric tonne of potatoes. However, traders fear substantial losses as stored potatoes risk rotting if not dispatched within a month. The association's state president, Lali Mukherjee, expressed concerns about the financial impact on potato traders.

culture department informed that 273 bags (each weighing 50 kgs) of potato seeds have been distributed to 91 farmers across 12 panchayats in the block, including Sumiti, Badidihi, Kebi, Dandua, Deulapada, Rajagarh, Barakandha, Karanj, Badakula, Ameipal, Mahakalapara, Ramanagar, and Alailo.

When questioned, Block Horticulture Officer Sourabh Mohapatra clarified that 273 bags of potato seeds were distributed in the first phase. An additional 200 bags are required, and those will be distributed among farmers in the second phase as soon as they arrive, he added.

# 2 ARRESTED FOR KILLING LEOPARD



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Phulbani, Nov 30:** Two persons were arrested for allegedly killing a leopard in a forest in Kandhamal district, officials said Saturday.

The leopard was killed about a fortnight ago in the Kalinga forest in the G Udaygiri range, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Prafulla Patel said. The leopard hide, a country-made gun and a dragger were seized from those arrested, he said.

The accused were identified as Bhabani Shankar Pradhan (23) and Pramod Pradhan (55), he added.

Bhabani was arrested with the leopard skin, and Pramod was arrested from his house in Pukulingia village with the loaded gun.

Both have been hunting wild animals in the Kalinga forest for a long time, the officer said.

Forest officials were patrolling the Kaliga forest at around 3am November 28 when they noticed Bhabani standing suspiciously near a road close to the Linga Chhak.

Upon questioning, Pradhan could not provide satisfactory answers, raising suspicions. The authorities carried out a search, leading to the discovery of a leopard skin stashed in his possession.

Following their arrest, Bhabani and Pramod were forwarded to court, while four others are still at large.

The authorities are actively pursuing leads to apprehend the remaining suspects involved in the crime.

# Elephant found dead on farmland

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Keonjhar, Nov 30:** Forest officials Saturday recovered the carcass of a mahna (male Asian elephant without tusks) from a farmland near Kantalai village under Telkoi forest range in Keonjhar Forest Division.

A team of veterinarians conducted a post-mortem of the carcass and Forest officials launched an investiga-

tion into the jumbo death. Circumstantial evidences and injuries found on the carcass indicated that the elephant aged within 10 might have died during infighting, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Dhanraj HD said.

Sources said two herds of around 54 elephants were roaming in the area for long. The herds had a fight near Kantalai village Friday night and the villagers

spotted the carcass lying on a paddy field Saturday morning.

Forest officials rushed to the spot and seized the carcass. The actual reason behind the jumbo death can be ascertained only after the post-mortem report is available, the DFO added. Notably, three elephants have died during last few months in Telkoi forest range area.

# JSW Foundation distributes mosquito nets to slum dwellers



**Barbil:** To prevent the spread of dengue and malaria, the JSW Foundation has initiated the distribution of mosquito nets in all slums within the direct impact zones (DIZ) of its mines in Keonjhar district. The distribution of nets commenced in Barbil Ward No. 15 and was later expanded to various DIZ locations. Earlier, fogging was also conducted in and around the slum area. The foundation undertook this mission following a request from the Barbil Municipal Corporation. Mosquito nets were also distributed in Loidapada panchayat in Nuagaon DIZ with the help of the sarpanch.

Additionally, with the help of SEVA Group, JSW foundation distributed the nets to underprivileged beneficiaries at SEVA office. It was informed that all together 2,000 mosquito nets will be distributed in the DIZs in the upcoming days.

वस्त्र मंत्रालय  
**MINISTRY OF TEXTILES**

राष्ट्रीय परीक्षा एजेंसी  
**National Testing Agency**

राष्ट्रीय फैशन प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान  
निष्ठ अधिनियम 2006 द्वारा शामिल एक मौखिक संस्थान  
**NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FASHION TECHNOLOGY**  
A Statutory Institute Governed by the NIFT Act 2006

# NIFT ADMISSIONS 2025

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Postgraduate Programmes  
Doctoral Programmes

## REGISTRATION OPEN

LAST DATE FOR REGISTRATION  
**6<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

ENTRANCE EXAM FOR UG/PG  
**9<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

APPLY ONLINE AT  
<https://nift.ac.in>

<https://exams.nta.ac.in/NIFT/>

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## SWOSTI PREMIUM BEACH RESORTS, PURI

### READY TO WELCOME GUESTS

**Redefining Hospitality with Innovation & Elegance**  
Swosti Group proudly announces the grand opening of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts in Puri, a landmark addition to Odisha's luxury hospitality sector. This grand opening marks a significant step in establishing Odisha as a premier destination for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE), blending the state's rich cultural heritage with world-class amenities.

**Versatile Banquet Facilities**  
The resort is strategically designed to serve as a premier MICE destination, featuring state-of-the-art facilities that cater to large-scale conferences, corporate events, and elaborate wedding ceremonies. With expansive

culture, incorporating the intricate patterns of Sambalpur and Ikat fabrics. This seamless blend of cultural inspiration and modern luxury creates an ambiance that is both sophisticated and authentic.

**Elegant Accommodations**  
Guests can choose from 125 elegantly designed luxury rooms, including suites that boast sophisticated decor, state-of-the-art technology and stunning views of Puri's Golden Beach. Each room

pool, games room and a dedicated kids' zone, ensuring entertainment for all ages.

**Commitment to Sustainability**  
The Resort is committed to sustainability, incorporating eco-friendly practices such as energy-efficient systems, water conservation initiatives and the use of locally sourced materials. These efforts reflect the Group's dedication to minimizing its ecological footprint while delivering a luxurious experience.

of Puri with modern comforts and conveniences. The Resort is now open for bookings, inviting guests to experience the perfect blend of Odisha's cultural richness and world-class luxury.

**Culinary Excellence & Wellness**  
Swosti Premium Beach Resorts offers an exceptional culinary experience, with menus curated by expert chefs. Guests can indulge in a wide range of multi-cuisine dishes and buffets at the Beach Hut, a restaurant that offers breathtaking panoramic views of the ocean. The resort also emphasizes wellness, featuring a state-of-the-art fitness centre and the luxurious Ekayaa Spa, where guests can enjoy rejuvenating

is meticulously designed to provide a perfect balance of comfort and luxury, ensuring a memorable stay for every guest.

**Swosti Group: A Legacy of Hospitality**  
Since its inception in 1984, Swosti Group has been a pioneer in the hospitality industry, renowned for its commitment to excellence. The Group's portfolio includes Swosti Grand and Swosti Premium in Bhubaneswar, Gopalpur Palm Resort at Gopalpur-on-Sea and Swosti Chilika Resort. The Group's success is further supported by Swosti Travels, Odisha's largest inbound tour operator and the Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies (SIMSS), which plays a vital role in training the next generation

**Inauguration Ceremony**  
The resort was officially inaugurated by Sri Dharmendra Pradhan, Hon'ble Minister of Education, Government of India, along with other prominent dignitaries on 25th August 2024. Their presence underscored the importance of this development for the state, which promises to elevate Puri's status as a top destination for both leisure and business travellers.

**Next-Gen Resort Experiences**  
Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Puri, is the latest addition to Swosti Group's portfolio of luxury properties, now open for bookings. Situated in the sacred city of Sri Jagannath Dham, this resort is designed to offer an unparalleled luxury experience, combining the spiritual and cultural richness

open-air landscaped lawns and a modern convention hall spanning 6,000 square feet, the resort offers versatile spaces to accommodate diverse events and gatherings.

**Interweaving Odisha's Architectural Splendor & World-Class Amenities**  
The design and architecture of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts are deeply rooted in Odisha's rich cultural heritage. The interiors draw inspiration from the elegant swipes and shapes of Odissi and Mahari dance forms, beautifully reflected in the resort's chandeliers. The ceilings, inspired by the ancient Boita boats of Kalinga, feature graceful curved designs that evoke the region's maritime legacy. Even the staff uniforms are crafted with a nod to Odisha's traditional weaving

treatments in a serene setting. Additional leisure amenities include a swimming

of hospitality professionals.

**J K Mohanty, MHCIMA CMD - Swosti Group**

**ODISHA**  
INDIA'S BEST KEPT SECRET.

# 35<sup>th</sup> KONARK FESTIVAL

OPEN AIR AUDITORIUM  
KONARK, ODISHA, INDIA

1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024  
6.00 pm to 8.30 pm

**1 December**

**ODISSI**  
Utkal Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Bhubaneswar

**KATHAK**  
Malti Shyam & Group  
New Delhi

**4 December**

**KUCHIPUDI**  
Deepika Reddy & Group  
Deepanjali, Hyderabad

**ODISSI**  
Bichitrnanda Swain & Group, Rudrakshya Foundation  
Bhubaneswar

**2 December**

**MANIPURI**  
Priti Patel & Group  
Anjika-Center for Manipuri Dance, Kolkata

**ODISSI**  
Aloka Kanungo & Group  
Shinjan Nrityalaya  
Kolkata

**5 December**

**ODISSI**  
Dona Ganguly & Group  
Diksha Manjari, Kolkata

**BHARATNATYAM**  
Geeta Chandran & Group  
Natya Vriksha Dance Collective, New Delhi

**3 December**

**ODISSI**  
Arnab Bandyopadhyay & Group  
Darpani, Kolkata

**MOHINIYATTAM**  
Sunanda Nair & Group  
USA

**Live** Telecast  
in DD Bharati  
and Live streaming in  
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info@odishatourism.gov.in

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OIPR-37001/13/0012/2425









# national



The BJP's promises during the elections are forgotten once in power, leaving fundamental issues unresolved

MAYAWATI | BSP PRESIDENT

## BREAST CANCER HELPLINE

Recognizing the critical need for awareness and early intervention, a team of oncologists under the Cancer Mukta Bharat campaign have launched India's first 24x7 free of cost Pink Breast Cancer helpline number to encourage women to take first step towards breast cancer early detection and treatment



### of the day quote

If the President doesn't give assent to the Aparajita Bill, I will bring a private member's Bill

ABHISHEK BANERJEE | TMC NATIONAL GENERAL SECY

Eight days have passed since results were declared but Maharashtra has not been able to get a CM. The caretaker CM (Eknath Shinde) has gone to his village. Why is this happening?...The results are unnatural and against the wishes of people. There are agitations all over the state

SANJAY RAUT | SHIV SENA (UBT) LEADER

It's fine that India is the fifth largest global economy. It's an accomplishment. We are the third largest purchasing power. But our objective is to be a developed nation and to be a developed nation, we have challenges and those challenges are the income of our people has to rise eightfold

JAGDEEP DHANKHAR | VICE PRESIDENT

UP, Bihar, Jharkhand combined has few private sector jobs than Mumbai. People don't care. Economy is not even a concern while voting. Once the government is elected, the people who voted, migrate to other states for actual jobs. What scares me is: this model is already proven that to win votes, you don't need good economics. And, is now being adopted at scale across India.

@Akshat\_World

## POST OF THE DAY

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## SHORT TAKES

**Three Delhi Police personnel held by CBI**  
New Delhi: The CBI has arrested three Delhi Police personnel for allegedly receiving a bribe of ₹1 lakh to allow an illegal betting racket (satta) to operate, officials said Saturday. Sub-Inspector Sudip Punia, Head Constable Ajay Kumar and Constable Rambir, all posted at the Raghuraj Nagar police chowki in the Khyala police station, allegedly demanded ₹2.5 lakh from the complainant for letting her continue betting (satta) activities.

**Six Naxals held in Chhattisgarh**  
Bijapur: Six lower-rung Naxalites were arrested in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh Saturday, leading to the seizure of explosives, police said. They were apprehended by the 196th battalion of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the 205th battalion of CRPF's elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) unit and local police during an area domination operation in Galgam, Nadpalli and Futapalli forest areas, an official said.

**Private car plunges into Chenab; 1 dead**  
Jammu: A woman was killed and two other passengers are missing after a private car skidded off the road and rolled down into Chenab river in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district Saturday, officials said. The accident took place near Khandote village around 8.30 am and a joint rescue operation by the police, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and local volunteers is on to trace out the missing persons, the officials said.

# Fadnavis frontrunner for CM post

While there was no announcement yet on who would be the Chief Minister, BJP sources said Devendra Fadnavis, who has been Chief Minister twice and was deputy CM in the last Eknath Shinde-led government, was the frontrunner for the post



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Nov 30:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the swearing-in of the new Mahayuti government in Maharashtra December 5 evening as BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis emerged as the frontrunner for the post of Chief Minister.

The oath-taking ceremony will take place at 5 pm at Azad Maidan in south Mumbai, state BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule said. While there was no announcement yet on who would be the Chief Minister, BJP sources said Devendra Fadnavis, who has been Chief Minister twice and was deputy CM in the last Eknath Shinde-led government, was the frontrunner for the post.

Shinde, who is holding the charge as caretaker chief minister and who headed to his native village Dare in Satara district a day before amid

speculation that he was not happy with the way the new government was shaping up, has taken ill, an aide said. He was running temperature of 105 degree F, the aide said. The swearing-in ceremony will take place at 5 pm at the Azad Maidan ground, said Bawankule in a post on X. PM Modi will attend the ceremony, he added.

Speaking to reporters in Pune earlier in the day, NCP chief Ajit Pawar said the chief minister will be from the BJP, while there will be deputy CMs from the two allies -- his party and the Shiv Sena. Pawar was a deputy CM in the last government. Talking about Shinde's illness, Shiv Sena leader Shambhuraj Desai, who hails from Satara district, told

reporters that Shinde and other party leaders returned from Delhi early Friday morning after meeting the top BJP leaders, and Shinde has had cough and cold since then. "Exertion affected him, so we advised him to take rest," said Desai.

Sanjay Shirsat, a Shiv Sena leader close to Shinde, said his party must get the home portfolio. Speaking to PTI, Shirsat also claimed that attempts were made to sideline Shinde. Meanwhile, a BJP leader said a meeting will be held on December 2 to elect the BJP legislature party leader. Fadnavis was likely to get the CM post this time, he added.

Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena and who was Chief Minister since June 2022, attended a meeting of the ruling alliance leaders with senior BJP leader Amit Shah in Delhi Thursday night. Before that, he had made it clear that any decision on the Chief Minister's post by the top BJP leadership would be acceptable to him. Shinde is under pressure from a group of Shiv Sena leaders who think he should not become a deputy CM, having been the chief minister for more than two years. Another group of party leaders insists that he must be part of the new government.

MAHA CM SWEARING-IN DEC 5

## RAINS LASH TN, PONDY; 'FENGAL' MAKES LANDFALL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, Nov 30:** Cyclone Fengal-triggered heavy rains accompanied by gusty winds lashed northern Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Pondicherry Saturday, prompting a shutdown of the Chennai airport, and inundated many parts of the city but there were no immediate reports of a major damage, the government said.

The cyclonic storm made a landfall close to the Pondicherry union territory area. Steady rains pounded Chennai, its nearby districts and Pondicherry affecting public transport, including bus, train and flight services and people from vulnerable areas were moved to safe shelters by authorities. From afternoon onwards, there were intermittent rains in most areas and by nightfall, it ceased.

Tamil Nadu Minister for Revenue and Disaster Management, KKSSR Ramachandran informed there was no immediate reports of a major damage in the aftermath of the cyclone and said related details could be known possibly by Sunday. Three persons were electrocuted in different rain-related incidents in Chennai.

The minister also indicated the cyclone did not leave the kind of impact anticipated by the authorities. Hospitals and houses were inundated in Chennai and its neighbourhoods while people used



flyovers and spaces beneath them as parking lots to avoid a repeat of what was endured during the 2015 floods.

Rainwater entered the premises of two state-run hospitals at Chromepet, a general hospital and a facility for thoracic medicine, both of which are located side by side and frequented by people. Water was close to the level of one's ankle even inside the hospital, leaving health care seekers and doctors in a tight spot. Police and local authorities placed sandbags at entry points and said all steps were being taken to address the issue.

Operations at the Chennai airport were hit following the cyclone. Officials announced suspension of operations till 4 am Sunday following inundation of two runways and a taxiway after heavy rains and the 'adverse weather condition' due to cyclone Fengal.

## 'Petition against Shamsi mosque non-maintainable'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Budaun (UP), Nov 30:** yet another controversy over religious structures, the management committee of the Shamsi Shahi mosque Saturday told a court here that a petition from a Hindu outfit which claimed that it was the site of an ancient Neelkanth Mahadev mandir was not maintainable.

The Masjid Intezamia Committee of Shamsi Shahi mosque and Waqf Board completed their arguments before the fast track court which will now hear December 5 the matter which first came up in 2022.

The development comes close on the heels of the violence in the neighbouring Sambhal district where five people were killed and several people, including police personnel, were injured November 24 during violent protest against a court ordered survey of a mosque which the petitioners claimed was built after destroying an old temple.

In the Budaun case, the then convener of Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, Mukesh Patel, had filed the petition seeking permission to worship there claiming that it was a temple.

The Shamsi Shahi Masjid, which is built on an elevated area called Sotha Mohalla, is considered to be the highest structure in Budaun town.



Students raise slogans during a protest against the 'National Education Policy (NEP) 2020' organised by the All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO), at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi

## EC invites Cong to discuss concerns over Maha election

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Nov 30:** The Election Commission Saturday asserted that all poll procedures it followed in Maharashtra were transparent and assured that it would review all legitimate concerns flagged by the Congress, which alleged serious inconsistencies.

In its interim response to the party, the poll authority invited a Congress delegation December 3 to discuss concerns expressed

by it. The Congress Friday raised with the Election Commission "serious and grave inconsistencies" which it said were being revealed in the data relating to the polling and counting processes for the recently-concluded Maharashtra Assembly polls and sought an in-person hearing to present relevant evidence.

Responding to the issue regarding the voter turnout data, the EC asserted that there was no discrepancy in it and the data was available

with all candidates polling station-wise and is verifiable. The gap in the 5 pm polling data and the final voter turnout was due to procedural priorities, as presiding officers perform multiple statutory duties near the close of polling before updating the voter turnout data. As an additional disclosure measure, an EC press note at around 11:45 pm was introduced during the 2024 Lok Sabha election and followed subsequently during all Assembly polls thereafter, the poll body told the Congress.

# Cops detain pregnant woman, HC terms it 'abuse of authority'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, Nov 30:** The Allahabad High Court has come down heavily on the Uttar Pradesh Police for "unlawfully detaining" a pregnant woman accompanied by her two-year-old child for over six hours to record her statement in a kidnapping case filed by her family, terming it "abuse of authority" and "torture".

It directed the police to pay ₹1 lakh to the eight-month pregnant woman and instructed the state government to issue guidelines for police to handle cases involving women more carefully.

The woman's family had lodged a complaint with the Agra Police, claiming she was kidnapped in August 2021 while

on her way to appear for an exam. An FIR was lodged but investigation into the case did not see much progress.

During the hearing of a habeas corpus petition filed by the woman's husband, their counsels Raghvendra P Singh and Mohd Sheraj refuted the kidnapping charge, saying she got married and has been living with her husband in Lucknow. The petitioner's counsels told the Lucknow Bench of the high court that Sub-Inspector Anurag Kumar of the Agra Police had taken the eight-month pregnant woman accompanied by her two-year-old child in custody November 29 in Lucknow to record her statement in the kidnapping case.

They claimed the investigating officer neither brought



the case diary nor checked the woman's age before detaining her at the Chinahat Police Station in Lucknow for over six hours.

In its ruling, the bench of Justice Attau Rahman Masoodi and

Justice Subhash Vidyarthi expressed grave concern over the violation of the woman's rights and noted that the "investigating officer failed to apply his mind to the allegations in the FIR". "The manner in which

**Allahabad HC directed the police to pay ₹1 lakh to the eight-month pregnant woman and instructed the state government to issue guidelines for police to handle cases involving women more carefully**

police duties were carried out was far from the process of law and amounts to abuse of authority," the bench remarked. The bench ordered that the woman be immediately released, tak-

en back to her home in Lucknow and handed over to her husband in the presence of her legal counsel.

It also directed the Uttar Pradesh Police chief to initiate disciplinary proceedings against the officer involved and submit a report to the court within three months. The high court bench underlined that the woman, being in an advanced stage of pregnancy and accompanied by her child, should never have been subjected to police custody.

It sought an affidavit from the state within 10 days, outlining the steps taken to comply with the ruling and emphasised that this case should serve as a reminder to police authorities to act with greater sensitivity in matters involving women.

# international



**The Democratic People's Republic of Korea government, army and people will invariably support the policy of the Russian Federation to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity from the imperialists' moves for hegemony**  
KIM JONG UN | LEADER, NORTH KOREA

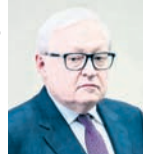
## 'MAHARAJA' MAKES WAVES IN CHINA

Tamil movie 'Maharaja', the first Indian film to be released in China after the last month's accord to normalise ties between the two countries ending the standoff in eastern Ladakh, has earned around Rs 16 crore on the first day of its release Friday



### of the day quote

This possible resumption of nuclear weapons tests by Moscow is a question at hand. And without anticipating anything, let me simply say that the situation is quite difficult. It is constantly being considered in all its components and in all its aspects



SERGEI RYABKOV | DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER, RUSSIA

The better the Polish border is guarded, the more difficult it is to access for those with bad intentions. Everything we are doing here (expanding the East Shield) is to deter and discourage a potential aggressor



DONALD TUSK | PM, POLAND

Bushra Bibi, unfamiliar with such a massive gathering, reportedly expressed concern, saying, 'Who will go there now' (referring to protest locations offered by Pak govt), and insisted on continuing the march towards D-Chowk. What happened later, she fled from the scene



KHAWAJA ASIF | DEFENCE MINISTER, PAKISTAN

### SHORT TAKES

#### PIO sentenced to life imprisonment in UK

**London:** An Indian-origin man who brutally beat up his girlfriend to death at his home in East Midlands region of England, has been sentenced to life imprisonment by a UK court. Police described it as a case of domestic abuse and said it is vital anyone suffering gets the support they need to put a stop before it is too late. Raj Sidpara, a 50-year-old resident of Leicester, was convicted last week of the murder of Tarnjeet Riaz, also known as Tarnjeet Chagger, following a trial at Leicester Crown Court. On Friday, Sidpara was handed a life sentence with a minimum term of 21 years behind bars before being considered for parole, according to Leicestershire Police.

#### Russia, China hold joint air patrol

**Moscow:** Russian and Chinese strategic bombers conducted a joint air patrol over the Sea of Japan, East China Sea, and western Pacific Ocean, Russian Defence Ministry said on Saturday. Russian Tu-95 S and Chinese H-6K strategic bombers conducted an eight-hour patrol accompanied by fighter jets from both countries. The Russian aircraft took off from and landed at an airfield in China. The Russian ministry said that the flights did not violate the airspace of any foreign country and was not directed against any specific nations.

# Syrian rebels sweep into Aleppo

Insurgents launched a major offensive on Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city, breaching its western edge for the first time since 2016

REUTERS

**Amman, Nov 30:** The Syrian army said Saturday dozens of its soldiers had been killed in a major attack by rebels who swept into the city of Aleppo in the northwest, forcing the army to redeploy in the biggest challenge to President Bashar al-Assad in years.

The surprise attack led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has jolted the frontlines of the Syrian civil war that have largely been frozen since 2020, reviving fighting in a corner of the fractured country near the Turkish border. The army said it was preparing a counteroffensive to restore state authority.

Acknowledging the rebel advance, the Syrian army command said insurgents had entered large parts of Aleppo, which had been under full state control since government forces backed by Russia and Iran drove rebels out eight years ago.

Images from Aleppo showed a group of rebel fighters gathered in the city's Saadallah al-Jabiri Square after entering the city overnight, a billboard of Assad looming behind them.

"I am the son of Aleppo, and was displaced from it eight years ago, in 2016. Thank God we just returned. It is an indescribable feeling," said Ali Jumbaa, a rebel fighter, television footage showed.

The Syrian military command said militants had attacked in large numbers and from multiple directions, prompting "our armed forces to carry out a redeployment operation aimed at strengthening the defence lines in order to absorb the attack, preserve the lives of civilians and soldiers, and prepare for a counterattack".

The army said bombardment



ALEPPO ASSAULT IS BIGGEST CHALLENGE TO ASSAD IN YEARS

SYRIAN ARMY COMMAND VOWS TO RESTORE CONTROL OVER ALEPPO

It says dozens of soldiers killed during insurgent attack

RUSSIAN, SYRIAN WARPLANES CARRY OUT AIRSTRIKES, SOURCES SAY

We are in favour of the Syrian authorities bringing order to the area and restoring constitutional order as soon as possible  
DIMITRY PESKOV | KREMLIN SPOKESMAN

had stopped the insurgents from establishing fixed positions. It promised to "expel them and restore the control of the state over the entire city and its countryside".

Two rebel sources said the insurgents had also captured the city of Mara'at al Numan in Idlib province, bringing all of that province under their control, in what would be another significant blow to Assad.

The fighting revives the long-simmering Syrian conflict as the wider region is roiled by wars in Gaza and Lebanon, where a truce between Israel and the Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah took effect Wednesday.

The attack was launched from insurgent-held areas of northwestern Syria that remain outside Assad's grasp.

Two Syrian military sources said that Russian and Syrian

warplanes targeted insurgents in an Aleppo suburb Saturday.

Speaking Friday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow regarded the rebel attack as a violation of Syria's sovereignty. "We are in favour of the Syrian authorities bringing order to the area and restoring constitutional order as soon as possible," he said.

The Syrian Civil Defense, a rescue service operating in opposition-held parts of Syria, said in a post on X that Syrian government and Russian aircraft carried out airstrikes on residential neighbourhoods, a gas station and a school in rebel-held Idlib, killing four civilians and wounding six others.

The two Syrian military sources said Russia has promised Damascus extra military aid that would start arriving in the next 72 hours. Authorities closed Aleppo airport and roads

The opposition fighters have said the campaign was in response to stepped-up strikes in recent weeks against civilians by the Russian and Syrian air forces on areas of Idlib province

to the city, the two military sources and a third army source said.

The Syrian army has been told to follow "safe withdrawal" orders from the rebels had entered, the three military sources said.

Iran's allies in the region have suffered a series of blows at the hands of Israel as the Gaza war has expanded through the Middle East.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, in a phone call with his Syrian counterpart Friday, accused the United States and Israel of being behind the insurgent attack.

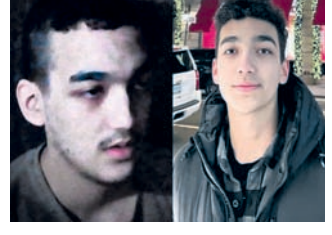
The opposition fighters have said the campaign was in response to stepped-up strikes in recent weeks against civilians by the Russian and Syrian air forces on areas of Idlib province, and to preempt any attacks by the Syrian army.

Opposition sources in touch with Turkish intelligence said Turkey, which supports the rebels, had given a green light to the offensive.

# Hamas publishes video of US-Israeli hostage in Gaza

REUTERS

**Jerusalem, Nov 30:** Palestinian militant group Hamas published a video of an Israeli-American hostage Saturday, in which he pleads for US President-elect Donald Trump to secure his release from captivity.



The family of hostage soldier Edan Alexander, 20, declined to comment but permitted the 3-1/2 minute video to be published. Alexander was abducted to Gaza during the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas on southern Israel.

The video shows a pale-looking Alexander sitting in a dark space against a wall, identifying himself, addressing his family, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Trump. It is unclear whether his statement was scripted by his captors.

Netanyahu said in a statement that the video was cruel psychological warfare and that he had told Alexander's family in a phone call that Israel was working tirelessly to bring the hostages home.

Around half of the 101 foreign and Israeli hostages still held incommunicado in Gaza are believed to still be alive.

Hamas leaders were expected to arrive in Cairo Saturday for ceasefire talks with Egyptian officials to explore ways to reach a deal that could secure the release of hostages in return for Palestinian prisoners.



Police block demonstrators during a rally outside the parliament's building to protest the government's decision to suspend negotiations on joining the European Union for four years in Tbilisi, Georgia

## Tariffs threat: Trudeau meets Trump in Florida

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**West Palm Beach, Nov 30:** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Saturday he had an "excellent conversation" with Donald Trump at his Mar-a-Lago club after the President-elect's threat to impose significant tariffs on two of America's leading trade partners raised alarms in Ottawa and Mexico City.

It was unclear, as Trudeau headed back to Canada from Florida, whether the conversation had alleviated Trump's concerns.

A person familiar with the details of the leaders' hastily arranged meeting Friday night said it was a "positive wide-ranging dinner that lasted three hours." The official, who was not authorised to discuss the matter publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said topics included trade, border security, fentanyl, defence, Ukraine, NATO, China, the Mideast and pipelines, as well as the the Group of Seven (G7) meeting in Canada next year.

The Republican President-elect has threatened to impose tariffs on products from Canada and Mexico if the countries don't stop what he called the flow of drugs and migrants across their borders. He said he would impose a 25 per cent tax on all products entering the US from Canada and Mexico as one of his first executive orders when he takes office in January.

As he was leaving his West Palm Beach hotel, Trudeau stopped briefly to answer a reporter's question about the dinner meeting, saying it was "an excellent conversation." Trump's transition team did not respond to questions about what the leaders had discussed.

Trump, during his first term as President, once called Trudeau "weak" and "dishonest," but it was the Prime Minister who was the first G7 leader to visit Trump since the November 5 election.

# How funeral wreaths sent by K-pop fans became public menace

The often elaborate wreaths, which cost between \$70 and \$170, have become an increasingly common symbol of the extreme parasocial relationships between idols and fans

Earlier this year, one of South Korea's biggest entertainment companies, SM Entertainment, found the plaza outside their headquarters in Seoul filled with hundreds of funeral wreaths. Sent by fans of one of the K-pop groups the company manages, the floral tributes lined the street not in mourning, but as a form of protest at the return of a boy band member they deemed controversial.

Once a solemn symbol of mourning, funeral wreaths have taken on a new role in South Korea, as a symbol of protest.

being used as a form of protest first in 2006, after residents who opposed the development of a lake park in South Chungcheong Province sent them to local government offices. Similar protests in 2021 over the death of 16-month-old Jung-in, who was fatally abused by her adoptive parents, brought widespread attention to the systemic negligence in South Korea's adoption process, prompting national outrage and demands for reform.

However, what began as a form of protest aimed at holding government institutions and public servants accountable has now devolved into a tool for K-pop fans to target



young artists for personal choices, turning what was once a means of demanding justice into a weapon for enforcing toxic fandom standards and engaging in public shaming.

RIIZE, a boy band managed by SM Entertainment, was embroiled in controversy after private photos of member Seung-han which showed him kissing an unidentified woman in a bed and smoking a cigarette were

leaked in August 2023. Seung-han was put on an indefinite hiatus following outrage by some fans at what they considered inappropriate behaviour for a K-pop idol.

In October this year, SM Entertainment's announcement that Seung-han would be returning to the band was met with disapproval by fans, who chose to flood the company's headquarters with funeral wreaths

carrying messages for the 21-year-old to leave the group. According to Korean media, over 1,000 funeral wreaths were sent, with messages reading, "Who Are You, Hong Seung-han?" and "Seung-han, Leave".

The often elaborate wreaths, which cost between \$70 and \$170 (£55 and £134), have become an increasingly common symbol of the extreme parasocial relationships between idols and fans that entertainment companies in South Korea heavily promote.

Shortly after the wreaths started to arrive, Park Jae-hyung, a former member of the South Korean rock band Day6, called them "attempted murder", echoing many others who described the wreaths addressed to individuals as bullying.

"The funeral flowers were disgusting. The same people who sent them will be the first ones online mourning the trag-

ic outcome they fought for. God forbid tragedy occurs but I've been on that side before and it was close. I can't imagine the trauma it would cause someone that young," he posted.

"Anyone involved in the flowers should be tried for attempted murder because that is what that was."

Hybe, the multinational entertainment company that manages some of the biggest bands in Korea, including BTS, Seventeen, New Jeans, and Le Sserafim, saw funeral wreaths several times in 2024.

South Korean police have begun to treat the wreaths as symbolic expressions of outrage, routinely classifying them as public civil protests. In some cases, authorities are allowed to and even expected to ensure these displays are protected, since they are considered a legal form of protest under South Korea's public demonstration laws.



**“We are planning to establish equipment by De Beers that will be something like a diamond clinic or a diamond lab, which will enable customers to be able to validate the quality of their diamonds, in a phased manne**

**AJOY CHAWLA** | CEO, JEWELLERY DIVISION, TITAN COMPANY

## HOUSE PRICE INDEX RISES 4.3 PC IN Q2: RBI DATA

All-India House Price Index (HPI) increased 4.3 per cent annually in the second quarter of the 2024-25 fiscal year as compared to 3.3 per cent growth in the previous quarter and 3.5 per cent growth a year ago, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).



### of the day quote

**“The risk of outliving one's savings is one of the biggest concerns that individuals face during their lifetime. The solution lies in starting retirement planning early to harness the power of compounding**



**VISHAL SUBHARWAL** | GROUP HEAD STRATEGY & CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, HDFC LIFE

**From the enormity of the ocean to the infinite vastness of space, the potential and benefit of India-Italy partnership is immense**



**SARBANANDA SONOWAL** | UNION MINISTER

**Our target audience is incredibly broad, encompassing sewing enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels, from beginners picking up a needle for the first time to seasoned professionals**



**RAKESH KHANNA** | SINGER INDIA VICE-CHAIRMAN AND MD

## Derivatives data signals rising volatility in stocks

REUTERS

**Mumbai, Nov 30:** The flip in the positioning of a large swathe of derivatives traders in Indian stocks indicates that they expect volatility to pick up in December as the market oscillates in a wider range, according to three brokerages.

The benchmark Nifty 50 has tumbled 8.1% since hitting an all-time high in late September on relentless foreign outflows and moderating earnings growth.

The Nifty's trading range dropped from about 1,834 points in October to 1,274 in November, while volatility inched up to 15 from 12 over the two months, a gradual rise after hovering around 13 for four months.

The trading range will widen to about 1,500 points in December, while the rise in volatility picks up pace, according to Nuvama Alternative and Quantitative Research, Motilal Oswal and IIFL Securities.

Their estimate is based on how traders repositioned their expiring monthly derivatives series on Thursday, which caused the Nifty to slide about 1.5%, the most in any session since early October.

Investors have to close or roll over their futures and options contracts as they expire each month and their fresh positions give cues to the potential trajectory of the market.



High net-worth individuals (HNI) and retail clients raised their single-stock future longs and trimmed longs in the Nifty index in the November series, according to the brokerages.

In contrast, they had added Nifty longs in six of the last nine monthly series, with the exceptions during the mid-year national elections when investors typically prioritise safety.

The flip this time also indicates caution and shows traders now prefer to pick individual stocks rather than back the market via the benchmark index, the three brokerages said.

Even foreign institutional investors (FIIs) reduced their Nifty shorts and added

single-stock future longs, the data showed.

Retail traders and FIIs account for about 90% of all derivatives trading.

Moreover, the market-wide open interest (OI) -- the total number of active unsettled contracts in futures markets -- has risen in the past month, indicating rising trading activity.

That, coupled with the caution indicated via the derivatives positioning, could lead to higher volatility, according to Abhilash Pagaria, head of Nuvama Alternative.

The markets will take time to recover from the recent sell-off as they remain overvalued, according to equity analysts in a recent Reuters poll.

## Demand for retail space in malls, high streets up: Report



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Nov 30:** Leasing of retail space in shopping malls and prominent high streets rose nearly 5 per cent during January-September this year across eight major cities, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

Real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield data showed that the absorption or leasing of retail space in Grade-A malls and main high streets across the top eight cities stood at 5.53 million square feet during January-September 2024 against 5.29 million square feet in the corresponding period of the preceding year.

These eight cities are -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad.

Saurabh Shatdal, Managing Director (Capital Markets) and

Head-Retail-India, Cushman & Wakefield, said, "India's retail real estate growth remains intact as can be observed from the strong leasing numbers, both in malls and main streets".

Increasing discretionary spending and evolving consumer preferences are driving demand for premium retail spaces, he added.

Shatdal, however, said India would need to accelerate the development of quality retail spaces across major cities to unlock even greater transaction volumes, as it remains highly attractive to global retailers looking to expand their footprint.

Commenting on the data, Akash Nagpal, VP-Leasing of realty firm Trehan Iris, said this growth reflects a strong rebound and a renewed sense of confidence in the retail sector.

## FMCG players hike soap prices by 7-8%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Nov 30:** Leading FMCG makers such as HUL and Wipro have hiked soap prices by around 7-8 per cent to offset the impact of a surge in palm oil prices, a key raw material for the product.

Companies such as HUL and Tata Consumer have also increased prices of tea recently due to a decline in production caused by erratic weather conditions. During the earning calls for the September quarter, several listed players hinted at a price increase in soaps in the current quarter to safeguard their margins, as they were facing a rise the prices of commodity inputs such as palm oil, coffee and cocoa.

"The prices of palm oil derivatives, a key raw material in soap manufacturing, have risen significantly -- 30 per cent plus increase since the start of this year," Wipro Consumer Care Chief Executive Neeraj Khatri told PTI.

"In response, all major players in the industry have implemented price hikes of approximately 7-8 per cent to partially offset the increase. Our pricing adjustments are aligned with these market trends," he said.

Wipro Consumer Care, part



of Azim Premji-led Wipro Enterprises, owns brands like Santoor and Chandrika in the soap category.

Market leader HUL has also increased prices of tea and skin cleansing products, which comprise its soap business under brands such as Dove, Lux, Lifebuoy, Liril, Pears, Rexona etc.

"The overall commodity atmosphere is benign, except for tea and crude palm oil which are witnessing inflation. Consequently, we have taken selective price increases in tea and skin cleansing. While making any price changes, we always ensure that we maintain a competitive price-value equation," said a company spokesperson.

Palm oil prices have gone up by around 35-40 per cent since mid-September because of the

increase in import duty as well as a rise in global prices.

Palm oil is mainly imported from Indonesia and Malaysia. Currently, palm oil is priced at nearly Rs 1,370 per 10 kg.

Prices of Lux soap (pack of 5 soaps) have gone up to Rs 155 from Rs 145, and of Lifebuoy (pack of 5 soaps) to Rs 165 from Rs 155. Similarly, prices of Pears (pack of 4 soaps) have gone up to Rs 162 from the previous Rs 149.

Besides, prices of other personal care products from HUL have also gone up, according to a distributor.

According to Nuvama Institutional Equities Executive Director (Research) Abneesh Roy, after HUL, now most other players would also take a price hike.

"In FMCG generally everyone follows market leader, so

gradually all players will take a price hike," he said.

Last week, Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) Managing Director & CEO Sunil D'Souza in an interview with PTI said that the company has increased prices by about 25-30 per cent in segments such as tea in phases and has not passed on the burden to consumers in one go.

It had gone for a gradual price hike as it wanted to continue the momentum on the volume side.

"We don't want a demand shock coming in. So we have to be comparative. We have to make sure the category continues to be chugging along. So we have translated bit by bit, and we will be taking gradual price increases," he said.

In the quarterly earnings statement, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL) flagged a rising trend in prices of palm oil and its derivatives which have increased in high double-digits since the start of the year.

Hinting towards a judicious hike, the maker of Cinthol and Godrej No. 1 soaps had said the GCPL management has decided not to pass on the entire cost increase to consumers and hence pricing growth will lag the increase in input prices.

## India plans to expand EV manufacturing incentives

REUTERS

**New Delhi, Nov 30:** India plans to expand electric vehicle incentives to automakers building models at existing factories in the country, instead of limiting the benefits to automakers willing to build new plants, a person with direct knowledge of the matter said.

India's EV policy, which is still being finalised, was originally designed to encourage Tesla to enter the market and manufacture locally but the U.S. automaker backed off from those plans earlier this year.

Other foreign automakers have shown interest in making EVs in India at existing and new factories, according to minutes of a meeting with India's ministry of heavy industries that was seen by Reuters. It is hoped that changes to the policy will encourage EV investment from the likes



of Toyota and Hyundai, the source said.

Under the policy announced in March, an automaker investing at least \$500 million to manufacture EVs in India with 50% of components sourced locally is entitled to a huge cut on im-

port taxes - a drop to 15% from as high as 100% for up to 8,000 electric cars per year.

The government will now also consider EV investments at existing factories that currently build gasoline-engine and hybrid cars, said the source who was not

authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified.

The electric models must, however, be built on a separate production line and meet the local sourcing criteria, the source said.

In the case of a new factory, in-

vestment in machinery and tools to build EVs will be counted in full towards the \$500 million requirement even if the equipment is also used to manufacture other types of cars, he said.

To ensure automakers are treated fairly, the government will set a minimum EV revenue target for a plant or a production line which must be met to qualify for the scheme, he said.

He added that the policy would be finalised by March.

According to the minutes of the meeting, Toyota officials asked if the EV policy would allow for investing in a separate assembly line within a plant that produces multiple powertrains. It also sought to understand if the manufacturing and installation of charging stations would be counted as part of the \$500 million investment requirement.

Toyota and the heavy industries ministry did not re-

spond to Reuters requests for comment.

Hyundai asked if money spent on research and development could be counted as part of the \$500 million investment requirement, the minutes showed. The source said it would not be counted.

Hyundai Motor India is awaiting the rollout of the final policy and guidelines, a spokesperson said.

Volkswagen's India unit wanted more leeway with the investment timeframe. It asked if 75% of the \$500 million could be invested in the first three years of the five-year scheme, instead of 100% as currently required. It also sought to understand if investments by suppliers would qualify, the minutes showed.

Volkswagen said it was studying the latest EV policy "in detail" and would evaluate a way forward accordingly.

