



Preity's proposition

Actor Preity Zinta feels that like Italy, India should also have more harsh punishments for the crime of rape

LEISURE | P2



Mass graves exposed

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are estimated to have been killed since 2011 under toppled leader Bashar al-Assad

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Equities bleed

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stay on the backfoot for the third straight session Wednesday

BUSINESS | P11



Ashwin retires

India's premier off-spinner R Ashwin stuns the cricketing world by bidding adieu to his international career in the middle of the ongoing Test series

SPORTS | P12

Musk says Starlink inactive in India as 2nd device seized

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 18: Elon Musk said Starlink satellite internet is inactive in India, in his first comments since authorities seized two of the company's devices in recent weeks, one in an armed conflict zone in ethnic violence-hit Manipur and another in a drug smuggling bust.

Starlink is seeking approval in India to provide satellite broadband services and the Musk-owned company is trying to address any potential security concerns as part of the process.

Musk wrote on X late Tuesday that "Starlink satellite beams are turned off over India" and were "never on in the first place." He was responding to a post from the Indian Army about a search operation December 13 at Keirao Khunou in Imphal East district of Manipur, the northeastern state where a communal conflict has raged since early last year.

The post included photos of seized weapons and a satellite dish and receiver with a Starlink logo. Two military officers familiar with the search operation, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the device with the Starlink logo was being used by a militant group.



They said the device was likely smuggled through the porous border with neighbouring civil war-torn Myanmar, where use of Starlink devices by rebel groups has been documented in media reports although the company does not operate in Myanmar either.

Earlier this month, Indian police sent a legal demand to Starlink seeking purchase details of a device found when they caught smugglers at sea with \$4.2 billion worth of methamphetamine, one of the biggest such Indian seizures. The police suspect the smugglers were using the internet device to navigate.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Our constitution gives us the freedom of speech—to say any half-truth or mistruth and then debate it endlessly



TAKING TO TRACKS: Farmers block railway tracks as part of their statewide 'Rail Roko' protest to press the Centre for various demands including a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP), on the outskirts of Amritsar, Wednesday

PTI PHOTO

13 killed as Navy boat rams into tourist ferry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 18: Thirteen persons died and 99 others were rescued after a Navy craft crashed into a ferry off the Mumbai coast Wednesday, the Navy said.

At about 4pm, a Navy craft undergoing engine trials lost control and collided with passenger ferry Neel Kamal off Karanja near Mumbai, the Navy said in a statement.

The ferry was carrying passengers from the Gateway of India to Elephanta Island, a popular tourist destination. "Search and Rescue efforts were immediately launched by the Navy in coordination with the Coast Guard and Marine Police. Four naval helicopters, 11 naval craft, one Coast Guard boat and three Marine Police boats were involved in the rescue efforts," the Navy said.

"The survivors picked up by Navy and civil craft in the area have been transferred to jetties and hospitals in the vicinity. So far 99 survivors have been rescued," it added. The accident led to the loss of 13 lives, including a Navy personnel and two from the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) on board



the Naval craft, the Navy said.

According to the Mumbai police, the deceased included seven men, four women and two children. Accounting of all personnel is in progress along with SAR efforts in the area, it said. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters in Nagpur that 101 persons have been rescued.

"Deeply saddened by the loss of precious lives in the collision between passenger ferry and Indian Navy craft in Mumbai Harbour. Injured personnel, including naval personnel & civilians from both vessels, are receiving urgent medical care," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh posted on X.

Fadnavis declared financial assistance of ₹5 lakh to the kin of victims of the "extremely unfortunate" tragedy from the

CM's Relief Fund.

Meanwhile, an FIR under relevant sections of the new criminal code BNS was registered at the Colaba police station in south Mumbai against the Navy speed boat driver and others responsible for the tragedy, an official said. The FIR was filed on a complaint lodged by survivor Natharam Chaudhary (22), a resident of Mumbai's Sakinaka area, he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the loss of lives in the mishap and announced an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh for the next of kin of each deceased.

This was the second accident involving the Navy in less than a month. On November 21, INS Karanj, a submarine, collided with a fishing vessel, FV Marthoma, in the Arabian Sea off the Goa coast, killing two persons.

ATROCITIES AGAINST SCs

Parl panel flags states' lapses

PNN & AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 18: A parliamentary panel has raised concerns over the failure of several states, including Odisha, to establish the necessary mechanisms to effectively address cases of atrocities against Scheduled Castes (SCs).

Highlighting persistent systemic gaps, the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment recommended that the Central government should actively pursue the state

governments to implement and strengthen the machinery required under the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

In its report tabled in Lok Sabha Wednesday, the committee noted that despite the absence of financial constraints at the Central level, many states were not utilising available funds or taking necessary actions to address these issues.

The committee underscored

that tackling atrocities against SCs requires sincere and coordinated efforts by state governments, supported by Central resources.

States like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Odisha were singled out for consistently lagging in fund utilisation and achieving implementation targets. The report also emphasised broader challenges in the implementation of welfare schemes under the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Akademi accolade for Baishnab Samal



Bhubaneswar: Odia litterateur Baishnab Charan Samal is among the 21 recipients of the annual Sahitya

Akademi Awards, the organisation announced Wednesday.

Recommended by jury members in 21 languages, the awards recognise works in different categories, including novels, short stories, poetry, essays and plays. Popular for his essays in Odia, Samal will receive the prestigious award for his book 'Bhuti Bhakti Bibhuti'. The awardees will receive a plaque, a shawl and an amount of ₹1 lakh in an award ceremony March 8, 2025.

Shah in soup over Ambedkar remark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: The Opposition Wednesday seized on Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks on BR Ambedkar to corner the government, and demanded his resignation for what they called was an insult to the architect of the Constitution.

The attack from virtually all opposition parties, including Congress, TMC, DMK, RJD, Left parties and Shiv Sena-UBT, led to adjournment of both Houses of Parliament and prompted the BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to come out in stout defence of Shah.

Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Derek O'Brien submitted a notice to move a privilege motion against Shah in the Rajya Sabha where the Home Minister had said Tuesday evening that Congress leaders would have got a place in heaven had they chanted the name of God rather than following the fashion of repeating Ambedkar's name.

The hullabaloo in Parliament also spilled on to the streets of the national capital and places as far as Maharashtra, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. In Delhi, AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal led hundreds of supporters to gather outside BJP office and protest noisily amid slogans "Amit Shah maafi mango, Amit Shah sharm karo".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi, TMC supremo

Congress distorted my statement: HM

Home Minister Amit Shah Wednesday accused the Congress of twisting facts and distorting his comments on BR Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha, asserting that it launched the malicious campaign after the discussion on Constitution established the opposition party as being anti-Ambedkar and anti-reservation. Addressing a press conference, Shah said the Congress was left with no answer following the discussion in Parliament. The party, he added, has adopted the tactic of misrepresenting and distorting statements, including those of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and then creating an uproar to mislead people.

Mamata Banerjee, DMK chief MK Stalin, Shiv Sena-UBT chief Uddhav Thackeray and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav were among those who slammed Shah for his remarks. "Abhi ek fashion ho gaya hai - Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar, Ambedkar. Itna naam agar bhagwan ka lete to saat jannon tak swarg mil jata," Shah had said. Shah also said the BJP is happy that the Congress is taking Ambedkar's name but the party should also speak about its real sentiments towards him.

Kharge said if Prime Minister Narendra Modi had any respect for Ambedkar, he should sack the home minister today itself in case he does not quit on his own.

Stuck in space, Sunita's return delayed further

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cape Canaveral, Dec 18: NASA's two stuck astronauts just got their space mission extended again. That means they won't be back on Earth until spring, 10 months after rocketing into orbit on Boeing's Starliner capsule.

NASA announced the latest delay in Indian-origin Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore's homecoming Tuesday.

The two test pilots planned on being away just a week or so when they blasted off June 5 on Boeing's first astronaut flight to the International Space Station. Their mission grew from



Sunita Williams wearing Santa hat in the ISS's Columbus Laboratory module as the crew plans to enjoy special meals and connect with family via video calls celebrating Christmas

eight days to eight months after NASA decided to send the company's problem-plagued Starliner capsule back empty in September.

Now the pair won't return until the end of March or even April because of a delay in launching their replacements, according to NASA. A fresh crew needs to launch before Wilmore and Williams can return and the next mission has been bumped more than a month, according to the space agency.

NASA's next crew of four was supposed to launch in February, followed by Wilmore and Williams' return home by the end of that month alongside two

other astronauts. But SpaceX needs more time to prepare the brand new capsule for liftoff. That launch is now scheduled for no earlier than late March.

NASA said it considered using a different SpaceX capsule to fly up the replacement crew in order to keep the flights on schedule. But it decided the best option was to wait for the new capsule to transport the next crew.

NASA prefers to have overlapping crews at the space station for a smoother transition, according to officials.

Most space station missions last six months, with a few reaching a full year.

leisure

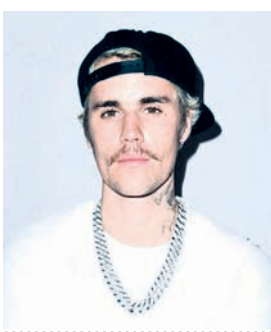


CRUISE FETED WITH US NAVY'S HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD

Hollywood star Tom Cruise has been feted with the US Navy's highest civilian honour for his 'outstanding contributions' to the military with his work on screen. It was with the 1986's blockbuster *Top Gun*, Cruise shot to fame, and the film's record-breaking success spiked military enlistment.

BIEBER 'STUNG' BY GOMEZ'S ENGAGEMENT TO BLANCO

Singer-songwriter Justin Bieber apparently seems to be 'stung' by the news of his first love, actress-singer Selena Gomez's engagement to American record producer and songwriter Benny Blanco.



FORTUNE FORECAST

GaneshaSpeaks.com
 accuracy • reliability • trust
 FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

ARIES
 An enterprising day. The stars say you may visit an ancient place. A museum, perhaps, or a historical place. But your health may require some attention, says Ganesha. If so, it's a good idea to spend an evening by yourself.

TAURUS
 It will be a thought-provoking day with tidbits of success and rewards scattered here and there, says Ganesha. If you feel you got the short end of the stick, do not let it affect your morale. Every sunrise comes with a different promise and today is not the end of the world. There are strong indications that planetary movements will change things for the better from tomorrow, says Ganesha.

GEMINI
 Today, you will have the required intentions and courage to propose your sweetheart. You will be dressed to kill, or rather to marry. You will make a favourable impression with the way you'll look tonight. You will be an open book to your future partner, which is likely to work in your favour.

CANCER
 Though your thoughts and views may be quite radical, you will be largely restrained while acting on them, portends Ganesha. You will have no problems starting a new venture or love affair, and taking the required action to keep them afloat.

LEO
 'One small drop at a time fills an ocean over time'. Remember this lesson, says Ganesha, and continue to concentrate your efforts on your goal without losing heart. There may be times when you sit back and think twice, but know that all it takes is a small effort and that is what shall enable you to reach the zenith.

VIRGO
 Meticulous as you are, hopefully you won't grudge the extra quota of domestic responsibilities that comes your way today. But then, since the work is in a more than satisfactory state, some added issues on the home front won't hurt either. Your subordinates will offer the best of their support, and you shall feel contented at the end of the day.

LIBRA
 You will be very unpredictable today, and your mercurial tendencies will remain till the evening. After that, be prepared to get a pleasant surprise. Just bear in mind that being prepared is always a good idea, since you never know when the perfect moment arrives. But everything considered, all Ganesha has to say is, "Stop worrying and start living!"

SCORPIO
 Today, the sugar and spice of work and home are delicately balanced to bring out the best in you, says Ganesha. You may spend a lot of your time brainstorming at your desk. In the evening, however, mental exercises will be substituted for pleasure and fun with friends and family.

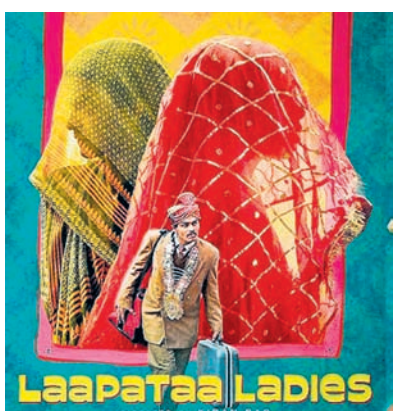
SAGITTARIUS
 Time to open up that can of confetti at the workplace today. Success never smelled sweeter. But you may bleed on the purchase front, says Ganesha, as in your revelry, you may just unknowingly end up shelling an extra buck or two on ordinary items.

CAPRICORN
 The day will be a maze of complex problems and situations, but you will find your way out in no time, says Ganesha. At work, you may love to play the leader, but that makes you accountable, for both the good as well as the poor performance of your subordinates. In all likelihood, you may be held responsible for the poor performance of your team members.

AQUARIUS
 Today is an auspicious day, particularly for astrologers, healers, spiritual guides and gurus, says Ganesha. One will think twice before challenging you today. Greed is not a word in your dictionary, and today, you are even more inspired to work for humanity.

PISCES
 The focus is firmly on career advancement today. Business deals, which have been a long time in the making, will finally come through. Those pursuing a profession can expect pay rises or promotions. Make sure your skills are up to the mark to be able to tackle your new responsibilities satisfactorily, says Ganesha.

Laapataa Ladies out of Oscars race



MUMBAI: *Laapataa Ladies*, India's official entry to Oscars 2025 crashed out of the race Wednesday, when the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) announced its shortlist for the Best International Feature Film category. Directed by Kiran Rao, the film is a quirky comedy set in rural India and revolves around the chaos that ensues after two young brides go missing on a train journey. The film was unable to capture the attention of the Academy voters and earn a spot on the shortlist. After the movie failed to make the cut, film enthusiasts and fans took to their social media handles to reignite the debate surrounding the selection process and slam India's Oscar selection committee for snubbing Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light*. The film which was allegedly snubbed as it was 'not Indian enough', had netizens slamming the 'missed opportunity' at scoring a win at the awards show.

"We're choosing wrong movies year after year as we live in a Mainstream Bollywood bubble"
 RICKY KEJ | GRAMMY WINNER

Social media platforms were flooded with angry reactions from fans, with many arguing that *All We Imagine As Light* had a stronger chance of breaking through at the Oscars due to its universal themes and nuanced storytelling. Among celebrities, Grammy winner Ricky Kej took to his handle to tweet, "So, the @TheAcademy Oscars shortlist is out. #LaapataaLadies is a very well made, entertaining movie (I enjoyed it), but was absolutely the wrong choice to represent India for the best #InternationalFeatureFilm category. As expected, it lost. When are we going to realize.. year after year.. we are choosing the wrong films. There are so many excellent movies made, and we should be winning the #InternationalFeatureFilm category every year! Unfortunately we live in a 'Mainstream Bollywood' bubble, where we cannot look beyond films that we ourselves find entertaining. "Instead we should just look for good films made by film-makers who are uncompromising in their art.. low budget or big budget.. star or no star.. just great artistic cinema." AGENCIES

Hopes alive with Guneet's Anuja

MUMBAI: While *Laapataa Ladies* is out of the Oscars race, India's hopes are very much alive with the film *Anuja* produced by Guneet Monga Kapoor. The live-action short film has been shortlisted in the Best Live Action Short Film category. Guneet boasts of an excellent track record at the Oscars as her earlier production *Period. End of Sentence* won the Oscar for Best Documentary Short Subject at the 91st Academy Awards in 2019. She followed it up with *The Elephant Whisperers* which clinched the Oscar for Best Documentary Short Film in 2023. Anuja tells the story of a 9-year-old girl, who works alongside her older sister, Palak, in a garment factory in New Delhi. When a teacher shows up at the factory, promising Anuja a rare chance to attend an elite boarding school, Anuja finds herself faced with a decision that will determine her fate and that of her sister. Reacting to the news, Guneet said in a statement, "Being shortlisted for the Oscars is a moment of immense pride. *Anuja* is a deeply personal story of two sisters navigating through life, celebrating the unwavering hope and resilience of the human spirit." IANS



Rashmika's philosophy on relationship

Ranbir Kapoor, and Vijay Deverakonda, Rashmika shared her philosophy on maintaining healthy relationships in the industry. "One thing I have learned in life is, everyone has their battles to fight, so don't be another battle for them to fight with. I don't want to be a battle in their life, but rather a good experience," she said. Rashmika added that her co-stars have always been supportive, saying, "If I pick up the phone and say I need them, I know they got my back. That's the kind of relationship I have with them." Expressing her admiration for her directors' approach to portraying women in their films, she stated, "What I have seen in Sandeep Reddy Vanga (*Animal*) and Sukumar sir (*Pushpa* franchise) is their utmost respect towards a woman. They don't look at women as creatures who need help, they think that women are powerful. It comes through their craft." On the professional front, Rashmika Mandanna is gearing up for her next project, *Sikandar*, alongside Salman Khan. AGENCIES



HYDERABAD: Rashmika Mandanna, who has delivered one of the biggest hits of Indian cinema with *Pushpa 2: The Rule*, recently opened up about her philosophy on relationship. When asked about her bond with co-stars like Allu Arjun,



Preity seeks harsh punishment for sexual offenders

MUMBAI: Actress Preity Zinta feels that like Italy, India should also have more harsh punishments for the crime of rape. On Wednesday, the actress took to her X and re-shared a tweet from the official handle of BRICS News. The tweet read, "Italy moves toward legalizing chemical castration for rap*st and pe*ophiles. Do you agree with this?" Responding to the same, the actress wrote, "What a fantastic move! Hope @mygovindia also does sometime similar. What do you think folks? It's high time there is zero tolerance for such crimes." BRICS is an intergovernmental organization comprising nine countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. Earlier, the actress had shared a post on social media which has caused an uproar on the Internet. The actress took to her X, formerly Twitter, and wrote, "Support the country you live in or live in the country you support. #ThoughtForTheDay". While the actress didn't take any names, people on the Internet feel that the actress made a snarky remark on Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh or politician Priyanka Gandhi. IANS

PEANUTS



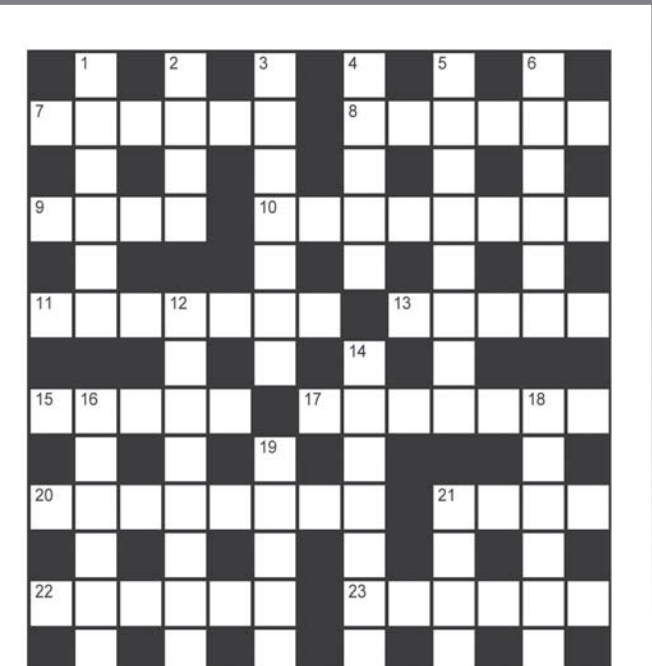
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



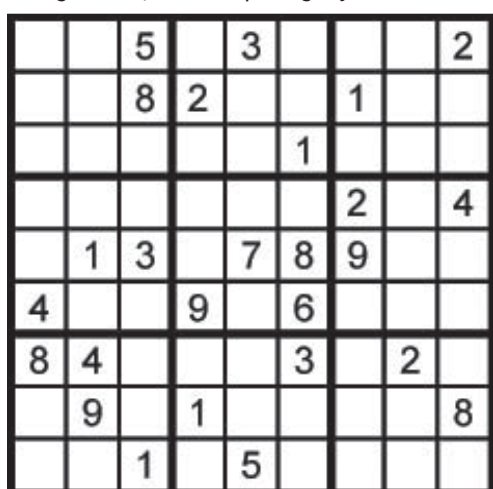
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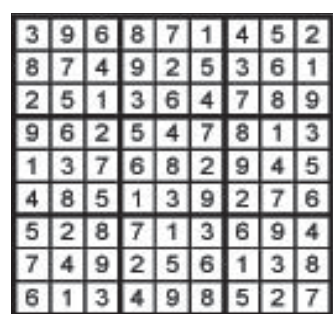
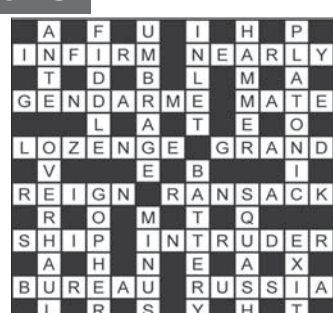
- Across**
- 7 Georgetown locale
 - 8 Mason's tool
 - 9 Hard strong durable wood
 - 10 Benny Hill was one
 - 11 Polish folk dance
 - 13 Salad oil holder
 - 15 Destitute
 - 17 An Irish girl
 - 20 Caffè latte
 - 21 Shirking working
 - 22 Furrow
 - 23 Amulets
 - 5 Hogwash
 - 6 Treat with carbon dioxide
 - 12 Betting choice, at times
 - 14 Oujda locale
 - 16 Guarantee
 - 18 Skin disease
 - 19 Theatre employee
 - 21 Bound

SUDOKU

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



SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

Bribery: CBI court's bail to 3

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: A special CBI court here Wednesday granted conditional bail to three persons arrested in connection with a bribery case in the state.

The court granted bail to Chanchal Mukherjee, group general manager of the CPSU Bridge and Roof Company (India) Limited, and contractors Santosh Moharana and Debadutta Mohapatra.

The bail was granted by the court on the production of a bond of ₹ lakh and two sureties each, said advocate Subham Satpathy, one of the lawyers engaged by the accused.

While granting bail, the court put a condition that the accused cannot leave Bhubaneswar without its permission. They will also not attempt to tamper with evidence and will cooperate with the investigation.

The CBI had December 7 arrested the trio and seized ₹10 lakh from a car outside a hotel in the City. According to the CBI, the accused were involved in corrupt and illegal activities related to awarding work orders and clearing bills in exchange for bribes. Later,



the CBI interrogated the trio after taking them on remand in two phases, for eight days.

Following the arrest and during the course of the investigation, the CBI also summoned several people, including senior IAS officer Bishnupada Sethi.

Meanwhile, the state government said it has taken all steps that were required and would take further steps on the basis of the findings of the CBI into alleged involvement of Sethi in the case. The state government Tuesday transferred and appointed Sethi as the officer on special duty (OSD) in the General Administration and Public Grievance (GA&PG) department, after the CBI issued a summons to him in the bribery case.

Sethi, a 1995-batch IAS officer, was the principal secretary of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward

Classes Welfare departments. He also had additional charge as principal secretary of Odia Language, Literature and Culture department. Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo, while replying to reporters' queries, said, "We've taken all steps that were required. He (Sethi) has been summoned by the CBI and he will tell whatever there is to the agency. When the final report (of the investigation) comes out, the state government will take steps accordingly."

A day-long wait by reporters near the CBI office here turned futile as Sethi did not turn up to record his statement in the alleged bribery case. The CBI had December 10 issued a summons to Sethi asking him to depose before the CBI investigating officer December 11 at its Bhubaneswar office.

Though Sethi did not turn up, the CBI has grilled three drivers working in separate government departments and engaged in duty of Sethi.

Several attempts to get a statement from Sethi also failed to yield any result as he did not respond to calls or messages. The CBI also remained tight-lipped on its next move in the event Sethi did not cooperate with the investigation.

Cyber fraud: Cuttack bizman loses ₹40L

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Cuttack, Dec 18: A businessman in the Silver City was duped of ₹40 lakh by cyber fraudsters posing as senior officials of a private car manufacturing company, a police officer said Wednesday.

The victim filed a complaint with cyber police, who have registered a case and launched an investigation, the officer added.

According to police, the businessman intended to open a car showroom in Sambalpur and contacted the company officials for guidance. They directed him to submit the required documents on their official website.

However, the businessman mistakenly logged into a fake website and ended up depositing ₹40.20 lakh into two different bank accounts. When the fraudsters demanded more money but failed to show up for a field visit, the victim realised he had been cheated, police said.

Preliminary investigations by the cyber police revealed that the bank accounts involved are based in New Delhi. Further investigation is underway, police added.



BATTLING BLAZE: Fire Services personnel try to contain blaze that engulfed a factory at Mangala Haat in Puri, Wednesday
PIC: YAGNESWAR MOHANTY

BJD's demo in City against price rise Jan 6

PNN & AGENCIES

Raise voice against BJP's anti-people policies, Naveen tells party workers

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: Ahead of BJD's 28th foundation day December 26, its chief Naveen Patnaik Wednesday urged members to remain dedicated to serving the people of Odisha, while the party announced a mass demonstration in Bhubaneswar January 6 to highlight the price rise of essential commodities and other issues.

Patnaik asked party supporters to 'raise voice against the BJP government's anti-people policies' and also highlight the impact of high inflation, which hits the poor and middle class.

"The party leaders and workers need to create awareness among people on the state BJP government's failure in checking price rise of essential commodities and in fulfilling the promises made to the people," the BJD president said.

In an open letter to all the party functionaries, Patnaik said the BJD's 28th foundation

day will be observed in all the Assembly constituencies.

Noting that the regional party is totally dedicated to the service of people of Odisha for 27 years, Patnaik said though the BJP formed the government in the state people have given maximum votes to the BJD.

"As a responsible Opposition party, BJD will raise the people's voice in different forums," he said, adding that the party works for the betterment of all sections of society on the ideology and policies of Biju Patnaik.

Extending New Year wishes to people, he said the BJD will reach out to all and work with dedication all along 2025.

The BJD was founded December 26, 1997, and was named after

its legendary leader Biju Patnaik, father of Naveen Patnaik. Addressing a press conference here, senior BJD leader Debi Prasad Mishra said the BJD will hit the streets over price rise of all essential commodities and inflation January 6. Taking a swipe at the BJP's slogan of 'double-engine sarkar', the BJD leader said it is rather a 'double failure government' in the state and the Centre.

BJD's convener of the programme implementation committee, Sanjay Dasburma, said the party will organise a mass demonstration programme in Bhubaneswar January 6. "Over 5,000 party members are expected to participate in the demonstration, which will focus on addressing key issues faced by the people of Odisha, particularly price hike," he said.

Biju Mahila Janata Dal convenor Snehangini Chhuria spoke about the hardships faced by women, particularly those struggling to manage their households amid skyrocketing prices.

3-DAY SARGIFUL-2024 KICKS OFF IN CITY

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Minister Rabi Narayan Naik inaugurated Sargiful-2024, a three-day annual event aimed at showcasing the talent and creativity of students from the ST and SC communities, at Adivasi Ground here Wednesday.

Addressing the ST and SC students at the state-level festival being organised by ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare department, Naik said, "Tribals



are nature worshippers. Over time, the tribal community used the Sargiful or sal flower as food, and later began worshipping it."

"Our children have the skills and potential to represent the

state and the main objective of organising this festival is to showcase their inherent talents, qualities, and creativity," said Naik, who belongs to a tribal community. Naik also honoured several

students with ₹5,000 cash prizes, certificates, and books.

The awardees included Mili Tudu from Jagatsinghpur, Suprabha Naik, Mahesh Mahar, Nandini Naik, Chumki Naik and Lovely Naik from Kalahandi, Krishna Tudu from Khurda, Suneli Pradhan from Sambalpur, Rashmita Bhatra from Nabarangpur and Kabita Gamang from Gajapati.

Naik inaugurated a state-level science exhibition wherein workshops will be held on topics like ocean ecosystem conservation, eco-friendly environments, AI and space research.



सत्यमेव जयते
Government Of India



Accurate data is the backbone of informed decision-making

Let us strengthen the National Statistical System

NSO, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation conducts **Annual Survey of Industries (ASI)**

Key Outcomes of ASI

- Production, Output, Input and Value added by factories
- Number of Workers, their salaries & wages in factories
- Investment in plant, machinery, and equipment in factories
- Performance of various industries



All Sample factories/units are requested to co-operate with the enumerators of National Statistics Office (NSO) and provide accurate data

Identity of the factories/units participating in the survey is kept confidential in all reports/microdata of MoSPI

For ASI reports of NSO, MoSPI, please visit www.mospi.gov.in, microdata available at <https://microdata.gov.in/nada43/index.php/home>

www.mospi.gov.in @GoIStats /GoIStats Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Ministry of Statistics & PI

Man gets 4-year jail for sexually abusing daughter

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: A POCSO court here Wednesday awarded four years of jail term to a 40-year-old man after holding him guilty of sexually abusing his minor daughter under Banapur police limits in 2021.

The court also slapped a penalty of ₹5,000 on the convict, Gayadhar Swain. Failure to pay the penalty would entail an additional six-month jail term, the court ordered.

Swain, who worked as a plumber in Surat, used to visit his home under Banapur police limits on several occasions, special public prosecutor (SPP) Subrat Priyadarshi said.

"The minor girl was sleeping in the bedroom January 7, 2021 night when Swain sexually abused her. The girl screamed following which her mother came to her rescue," the SPP said. The next day, the girl's mother approached the Banapur police which registered a case and nabbed Swain.

Panel urges timely action on minority welfare schemes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: A parliamentary panel has urged the Ministry of Minority Affairs to expedite approvals and streamline processes to ensure effective implementation of welfare schemes for minority communities.

The Committee also expressed concern over the surrender of ₹2,064.95 crore in unspent funds during 2023-24. It recommended that states and Union Territories (UTs) adhere to timelines for completing procedural requirements and proposed penal provisions for delays.

The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment tabled its report in Lok Sabha Wednesday, highlighting both achievements and challenges in executing initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK), scholarship programmes and skill development schemes.

It underscored the need for immediate action to overcome procedural delays that have previously led to under-utilisation of funds.

The Committee noted that the pre-matric, post-matric and merit-cum-means scholarship schemes have been pending approval since 2021-22.

These programmes have historically benefited over 8.12 crore students, comprising 34.75 per cent of the minority

population. The Committee recommended swift approvals to prevent disruption in educational support for minority students. It also called for harmonisation of these schemes with similar initiatives under other ministries to ensure consistency and efficiency.

Observing that several schemes lacked physical targets, the panel recommended that annual goals be established to assess their success. This would help identify the percentage of the minority population benefitting and guide appropriate budget allocations.

PMJVK, which received ₹910 crore for 2024-25, aims to improve infrastructure in minority-concentrated areas.

The Committee stressed the need for better compliance with procedural guidelines and faster fund disbursement to avoid project delays. It suggested improved monitoring and data collection on project approvals and completion rates to ensure the scheme's effectiveness.

In addition to scholarships, the Committee urged the ministry to explore new initiatives such as residential education, free coaching and overseas study support tailored for minority communities.

Chairperson PC Mohan, in the report, emphasised the importance of accountability and timely action.



PROUD MOMENT: Rama Devi Women's University students carry a 108-ft monumental National Flag for installation on university premises in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

108-FT NATIONAL FLAG UNVEILED AT RDWU

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: A 108-foot monumental National Flag, installed by the Flag Foundation of India, was inaugurated at Rama Devi Women's University (RDWU) in Bhubaneswar Wednesday, marking a moment of national pride and patriotism.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo and Assembly Speaker Surama Padhy, while Naveen Jindal, the three-time Member of Parlia-

ment, Chairman of Jindal Steel and Power (JSP), and President of the Flag Foundation of India, joined the event virtually. Maj Gen Ashim Kohli (Retd.), CEO of the Flag Foundation of India, and university vice-chancellor Aprajita Chowdhury were also present.

Singh Deo praised the towering flag, calling it a symbol of unity, pride, and respect for the nation. Positioned prominently on the university campus, the flag is set to become an inspiring landmark for students, faculty, and the broader

Bhubaneswar community. He also lauded the Flag Foundation of India, under Jindal's leadership, for installing monumental national flags across the country and spreading patriotism. He thanked Jindal for his decade-long legal battle that secured the right to hoist the national flag year-round with dignity.

Speaking virtually, Jindal emphasised the flag's significance in uniting the nation and inspiring patriotism. "The National Flag represents our collective spirit. It is a source

of pride for every Indian, and we are honored to be part of this initiative," he said.

Speaker Padhy also commended the efforts of the Flag Foundation of India and Jindal's contributions to the country's development. The event saw enthusiastic participation from students, faculty, and dignitaries, all united in celebrating this momentous occasion. This marks the 158th monumental national flag installed by the Flag Foundation of India, and the eighth in Odisha.

CLASSIFIED LOST

Original D No.- 10501602078, dtd. 07.06.2016 of Mouza-Banamaliprasad lost anywhere on 09.10.2024 when going to Xerox to Mahisapat Chhaka. Anybody found please contact-9437287539. Laxmidhar Das

I, Sri Ramesh Chandra Khandai, S/o - Ratnakar Khandai have lost sale deed 1087/12.03.1993 and corresponding ROR (Khata No. - 375/44, Plot No. - 58/1063) of Mouza : Kantilo, Keshpur and Dist - Cuttack somewhere one the way from my village to Pattamundai. The lost report has been reported at Pattamundai P.S. on dtd. 16.11.24 vide GD No. - 14 dt. 16.11.24 I want to sale this property and the buyer wish to create mortgage on the said property for availing home loan from State Bank of India, Home Loan Centre, Cuttack. Please return the original document to SBI, HLC, Cuttack or contact mobile number - 9938388510

AFFIDAVIT

I, Khusbu Agrawal, W/o. Sumit Agrawal, R/o. P.O./P.S.-Loisingha, Dist.- Balangir, Pin-767020, Odisha declare by this affidavit No.7714 dt. 17.12.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as KHUSBOO AGRAWAL for all future purposes.

I, Sauria Agrawal, S/o. Late Ghanashyam Das Agrawal, R/o. P.O./P.S. Loisingha, Dist.- Balangir, Pin-767020, Odisha declare by this affidavit No.7715 dt.17.12.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as SAUNRIA AGRAWAL for all future purposes.

TPSODL's 'Adhikaar' for community upliftment

The flagship initiative focuses on last-mile access, empowering marginalised populations through enrolment camps and documentation support

POST NEWS NETWORK

Berhampur, Dec 18: In a significant step towards community empowerment, TP Southern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) has recently introduced its flagship initiative, the 'Adhikaar' project, aimed at enhancing access to government welfare schemes in 50 villages of Koraput district.

The project focuses on empowering rural, marginalised, and economically disadvantaged communities, especially the elderly, by connecting them to welfare programmes at both



Central and state levels.

The initiative addresses the challenges of accessing government schemes, enabling beneficiaries—many of whom are dependent on agriculture—to understand their rights and secure essential services.

Central to the programme is the Adhikaar Soochna Kendra in Boipariguda, which acts as a hub for welfare schemes such as the National Social As-

sistance Programme (NSAP), Madhu Babu Pension Yojana (MBPY), CM Kisan, PM Kisan, and Subhadra Yojana. The centre simplifies application processes, assists with identity documentation, and ensures compliance with government requirements.

Malati Harijan, a woman farmer who enrolled in the Krushak Odisha and CM Kisan Schemes with the centre's help, expressed her gratitude,

saying, "The TPSODL team guided me through the application process. I am truly thankful to them."

The initiative also includes regular enrolment camps across remote areas, ensuring widespread accessibility. Recognising the critical role of identity verification, it prioritises documentation services such as Aadhaar and PAN Card facilitation.

"Through the Adhikaar initiative, we are committed to uplifting the socio-economic conditions of the communities we serve. This is not just a programme but a pledge to build an equitable and inclusive future," said TPSODL CEO Amit Kumar Garg.

With its comprehensive approach and focus on last-mile connectivity, the Adhikaar project is making a tangible impact, transforming lives in the region by bridging the gap between government schemes and the people who need them most.

IQEMS organises 15th Nat'l Safety Conclave



RESHMI YADAV, OP

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: The 15th edition of the National Safety Conclave on the theme 'Vision Zero Harm by Adopting Digital Technology', organised by the Institute of Quality and Environment Management Services (IQEMS) was inaugurated here Wednesday by Kingdom of Lesotho High Commissioner Lebohlang Valentine Mochaba.

The conclave was organised in collaboration with the Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad and HR Solution, with support from the Minis-

try of Labour and Employment, Central government and state government.

Joining the conclave as chief guest, Mochaba emphasised the importance of safety in state's mineral-rich industries and said, "Odisha, like the Kingdom of Lesotho, is rich in minerals, and this directly influences the economy. With new industrial policies, Odisha is set to become a preferred investment destination. It is crucial to create awareness to reduce accidents and injuries in mining, industry, and construction sectors," stated Mochaba.

Exploring Odia cuisine's cultural & economic aspects

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 18: The fifth edition of Odisha Manaska, organised by All Things Odisha at the Safe Odisha for Her (SFH) headquarters, recently held a thought-provoking discussion on the theme "Beyond the Plate: Exploring the Cultural, Socio-economic Dimensions of Odia Food."

The event featured prominent panelists, including right-to-food activist Sameet Panda, food critic and author Ritu Pattnaik, food researcher Sweta Biswal, and tribal food consultant and MasterChef India Season 8 contestant Madhusmita Soren. Together, they delved into the cultural, nutritional, and socio-economic aspects of Odia cuisine, emphasising its role as a symbol of identity and cultural pride.

Sameet highlighted the socio-political implications of

food, focusing on malnutrition in Odisha, where over 50 per cent of women are anaemic. "Cuisine evolves from abundance, but for many, food is still about sustenance and survival," he said.

He underscored the importance of welfare programs like the Public Distribution System (PDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) in combating systemic inequality.

He also pointed out the nutritional imbalance in typical Odia diets. "An over-reliance on carbohydrates, with insufficient protein and fat, results in unhealthy individuals who cannot contribute effectively to society's prosperity," he explained, urging efforts to promote balanced nutrition across the state.

Ritu, author of a book documenting over 250 traditional Odia recipes, discussed the deep connection between food



and culture. "Food is the identity of a community, reflecting its geography and cultural attributes," she said, sharing personal anecdotes to illustrate her points.

She lamented the gradual loss of traditional recipes due to modern food trends. "Authenticity must be preserved. Our cuisine is not just about

flavour—it embodies history, stories, and identity," she emphasised. Madhusmita spoke about her efforts to popularise tribal food through festivals and events. "We need to take our cuisine beyond Odisha, just as we embrace food from other regions," she said. Highlighting her tribal roots, she shared how

her experiences with discrimination inspired her to showcase Santhali cuisine. "Promoting tribal dishes is about more than taste; it's about breaking stereotypes," she added.

Sweta, author of Beyond Dalama, stressed the need for greater representation of Odisha's diverse regional cuisines. "While Dalma is often seen as the face of Odia food, the rich culinary traditions of Western Odisha and other regions deserve equal recognition," she said. She advocated for better branding and marketing to position Odia food as healthy and unique.

The panelists proposed strategies to make Odia cuisine more aspirational, such as documenting recipes, conducting workshops, and promoting healthier combinations of dishes. They called for collaborative efforts to pass culinary traditions to future generations.

WEATHER table with columns for BBSR, CTC, Max Temp, Min Temp, Humidity, Rainfall, and FORECAST.

MARKET WATCH table with columns for INDEX, VARIATION, SENSEX, NIFTY, DOLLAR, EURO, GOLD, SILVER.

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Cold storage woes cripple agriculture

Kaptipada IIC attacked by sand smugglers

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kendrapara, Dec 18: Lack of cold storage units has significantly impacted the agrarian prosperity of this district while the infrastructure bottleneck has forced the people to rely on imports from neighbouring states throughout the year. The absence of cold storage facilities has also rendered the Potato Mission initiative of the state government ineffective.



REPRESENTATIVE PICTURE

units are crucial for sustaining the agricultural economy.

The gravity of the problem can be gauged from the fact that only 49 out of 129 cold stores in the state's 314 blocks are operational. The infrastructure crunch is severely affecting the state's agricultural economy, said sources.

In Kendrapara, industrialist Rabi Sahu had built a cold

storage at Shyamasundarpur in 1985 with a bank loan. It was operating for nearly 15 years but later it was shut down due to pending electricity bills. The cold store had initially provided stimulus to potato cultivation in the district, but after its closure, the cultivation declined.

Currently, local agricultural produce cannot be preserved,

The gravity of the problem can be gauged from the fact that only 49 out of 129 cold stores in the state's 314 blocks are operational

resulting in year-round dependence on vegetables imported from other states to meet the district's demands. Vegetables like potatoes, onions and bananas are being imported, which are often toxic, but consumers are forced to purchase them. If cold storage facilities were established, small agro industries like tomato sauce and potato chips manufacturing units could also thrive.

Despite government incentives, high electricity bills remain a major hurdle for sus-

tenance of the cold stores that are essential for ensuring fair prices for farmers' produce. Subsidies and streamlined processes, such as single-window clearance for loans, can encourage industrialists to invest in cold storage facilities. This will not only support the district's agricultural development but also help maintain economic stability, said the intellectuals.

Kendrapara additional district magistrate Nilu Mahapatra assured that the RMC cold storage would soon become operational. Currently, the government is providing 55 per cent (approximately ₹2.20 crore) subsidy for private cold storage projects. Two entrepreneurs in the district have already been approved for constructing cold storage facilities. Additionally, efforts are underway to promote small-scale refrigeration units at the panchayat level.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Udala, Dec 18: Inspector-in-charge (IIC) of Kaptipada police station Prakash Kumar Rath sustained injuries after he was allegedly attacked by sand smugglers in Mayurbhanj district Wednesday.

The miscreants also vandalised the police van by pelting stones at the vehicle. A case was registered at Kaptipada police station and police teams conducted raids at various locations to nab the accused persons. The incident occurred when a joint team of revenue officials led by Kaptipada tehsildar and officials from Kaptipada police station conducted raids at various places to curb illegal sand mining and smuggling. The team found huge stock of sand at one place and questioned the villagers about its source. Meanwhile, the IIC was taken aback when around six persons



including a man named Ghera and his wife launched an attack on him. Rath was rushed to Kaptipada hospital where he was administered preliminary treatment. Later, he joined duty at the police station.

Alarmed over the development, a joint meeting comprising officials of minor minerals department, Kaptipada tehsildar, transport department and police was held at the police station and one platoon of police force was deployed at the village to avoid any law and order situation. Later, police seized 20 tractor loads of sand extracted from nearby Sone river which the miscreants had stored in the village.



POWER TEST: A boy participates in a discus throw event at the three-day annual sports meet of Janardan Government High School at Sendhatira in Bant block of Bhadrak district Wednesday

Jilted lover torches girlfriend's house

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhadrak, Dec 18: A youth allegedly set his girlfriend's house on fire after she refused his marriage proposal in Bhadrak district, police said Wednesday.

The incident took place at Anandpur village under Dhamnagar block of the district. The accused, identified as Jyoti Ranjan Das (28), a resident of Vidyaadharpur village under Chudakuti Panchayat, has been absconding since the incident, police said and added that nobody was injured in the incident.

Jyoti was in a relationship with a woman from Gopal Sahi under Anandpur Panchayat. He had been persistently pressuring her to marry him and allegedly threatened to leak pictures of their private moments if she did not agree, the victim alleged. The woman lodged a complaint with Dhamnagar police, stating that Jyoti had also issued death threats and tried to coerce her into meeting him multiple times.

The situation took a dangerous turn when Jyoti allegedly set her house on fire. The fire destroyed five sheds and re-

duced all valuables, including gold jewelry, furniture, rice, and important documents, to ashes, she claimed. Property worth ₹15 lakh were destroyed in the fire, she added.

Following the complaint, Dhamnagar police registered a case and began an investigation. However, the accused fled the area, prompting the woman and her family to demand his immediate arrest.

"The accused is a threat to our safety. If not apprehended soon, he might commit further heinous acts," the victim told reporters.

PACS employees stage protest

POST NEWS NETWORK

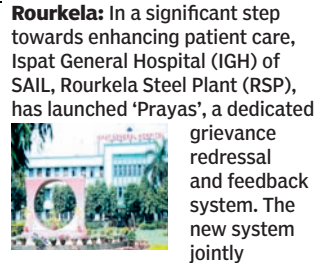
Chhatrapur, Dec 18: Employees of Aska Primary Agriculture Cooperative Society (PACS) of Aska Central Cooperative Bank staged a dharna in front of Ganjam Collectorate here Wednesday. The employees alleged irregularities in payment of their salaries and pending appraisal of their services.



The reports of the schemes launched by the Union and the state governments are maintained meticulously in computerised databases by the PACS employees. The employees, however, alleged that even though they work rigorously to ensure that the database remains error free, they are underpaid. Sometimes, there is delay in payment of their salaries, the said. Moreover, the employees claimed that their prayers before the higher-ups for service promotions go unheard.

Hence, they are left with no other alternatives but to sit on dharna with a hope that the district administration would consider their demands.

IGH launches 'Prayas'



Rourkela: In a significant step towards enhancing patient care, Ispat General Hospital (IGH) of SAIL, Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP), has launched 'Prayas', a dedicated grievance redressal and feedback system. The new system jointly developed by IGH and C & IT department is available in the IGH Care application which is integrated with HMIS of IGH. The initiative aims to streamline the resolution of patient concerns and improve healthcare services. 'Prayas' becomes available upon a patient's admission to IGH. By using IGH Care app, patients can access an additional window where they can select their grievance category and provide a detailed description. Once submitted, the grievance is automatically routed to the Head of Medical Services and the relevant HoD via HMIS and SMS. The concerned HoDs and department in-charges are tasked with promptly addressing and resolving the issue facilitating accountability and swift action.

PARAB: Vedanta stall showcases tribal arts

POST NEWS NETWORK

Koraput, Dec 18: Vedanta Aluminium, India's largest aluminium producer, has extended its support to "PARAB-2024", the annual tribal and folk festival that celebrates the rich cultural tapestry of tribal-dominated Koraput district. The aluminium major has put up stalls featuring tribal arts, including Saura arts and Dhokra products, said a released issued by the company.

While the gala tribal fair was inaugurated by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, this vibrant event drew thousands of audience as it served a lively showcase of the tribal art, culture, music, and dance that define the region's heritage.

Inaugurating the annual festival, the Chief Minister commended the invaluable contributions of tribal culture to the state's identity. The CM not only highlighted Odisha's rich cultural wealth



that resonates on the global stage, but also unveiled a series of exhibition stalls offering visitors an immersive experience of tribal artistry, traditions and heritage.

Vedanta has set up a stall featuring tribal art, including Saura arts and Dhokra products crafted by the talented tribal artisans of Kalahandi's Lanjigarh.

These art forms, which were on the verge of extinction, were revived and nurtured through the company's community development initiatives aimed at empowering local artisans and preserving traditional

crafts, the release said.

Speaking on the initiative, Sunil Gupta, COO of Vedanta Aluminium, said, "At Vedanta Aluminium, we are committed to promoting Odisha's rich cultural heritage. Supporting festivals like PARAB not only promotes traditional art forms, but also strengthens community ties and fosters pride in our diverse cultural legacy."

In his reactions, Raju Mohanty, a resident of Koraput district, said, "PARAB is an annual festival that we look forward to every year. I deeply appreciate Vedanta for extending its support for local cultural initiatives and encouraging the local community to share our rich art and culture with the world."

Notably, Vedanta has provided critical infrastructure support to the festival, reinforcing its continued commitment to the socio-economic development of the local community and the preservation of grassroots art and culture.

Zeenat fear looms over Jharkhand villages

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, Dec 18: Tigress Zeenat, which migrated from Similipal National Park to Rajabasa and Chiabandi forests in Jharkhand, has spread fear among the nearby villagers as it has been roaming in the forests for the past 10 days and has preyed upon a bull recently.

Startled by her presence, villagers of the bordering areas of Jharkhand have fled the forests and have since avoided outdoor activities. Anganwadi centres in the area have remained closed for 10 days as locals prefer to stay indoors. Eyewitnesses reported seeing Zeenat feeding on the bull's carcass. When forest officials arrived at the scene, the tigress disappeared into the dense forests, making her movements difficult to track in the rugged terrain.

Reports indicate that Zeenat crossed Similipal's boundaries December 9, entering



Jharkhand's Chakulia range. She has been sighted in Rajabasa and Chiabandi forests, where villagers, alarmed by her growls, abandoned their cattle-grazing activities. Following the bull's killing, Zeenat disappeared into the forests up on spotting forest officials.

Zeenat and another tigress, Jamuna, were relocated to Similipal as part of a conservation project. Experts believe that the tigresses may have struggled to adapt to their new environment, possibly due to

encounters with elephants. According to environmentalist Sanjukta Basa, "The tigresses might have felt threatened which prompted them to leave Similipal in search of new territories."

While Zeenat now roams in Jharkhand's rura forests, Jamuna has reportedly migrated to Kuldih Wildlife Sanctuary in Balasore district. The lack of prey in these areas, coupled with increasing unrest among local villagers, has led experts to recommend tranquilising

Zeenat and relocating her to a safer habitat. Basa warned that without timely intervention, both the tigresses and local communities could face adverse consequences.

Critics have pointed out significant flaws in the relocation process. They argue that the absence of acclimatisation enclosures before the release of the tigresses into Similipal contributed to their failure to adapt to the new habitat. Former wildlife conservationist Bhanumitra Acharya stated that the tigresses should have been kept in acclimatisation enclosures for two to three months to familiarise themselves with the new environment and prey base.

Forest officials are currently tracking the tigresses using radio collars. However, the effectiveness of the relocation mission, intended to improve genetic diversity among Similipal's tigers, has come under scrutiny.

Principal Chief Conserva-

tor of Forests (PCCF) Prem Kumar Jha described the migration as a natural process, expressing hope that both tigresses would eventually

return to Similipal. Nonetheless, wildlife enthusiasts have criticised the handling of the relocation effort, calling for better planning and execution in future conservation initiatives.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION : RAYAGADA
e-mail ID : rw_rayagada@yahoo.co.in
No. 4320 // Date : 18.12.2024

1st Corrigendum

No.O-908 : In continuation to this office Bid Identification No. EERWRGD-Online-04/2024-25 invited vide this office letter No. 4005 dated 04.12.2024 partial modification of TCN has been made as follows.

Sl. No.	Item	Time Schedule as per Original TCN	Time Schedule as per corrigendum notice
1	Availability of tender online for bidding	11.12.2024 at 11.00 A.M. to 20.12.2024 upto 5.00 P.M.	21.12.2024 at 11.00 A.M. to 31.12.2024 upto 5.00 P.M.
2	Date & Time of opening of tender	20.12.2024 at 5.30 P.M.	31.12.2024 at 5.30 P.M.

All other terms and conditions remain unchanged.
Sd/- Executive Engineer
Rural Works Division, Rayagada
OIPR-25072/11/0008/2425

The Odisha Small Industries Corporation Ltd.
(A Government of Odisha Undertaking)
(An ISO:9001:2008 certified Govt. Company)
Industrial Estate, Madhupatna, Cuttack-753010, Odisha
Tel.No.-0671-2341204, 2342816, Fax:0671-2341875/2342561
e-mail:osicltd@gmail.com, osicmd@gmail.com
website:osicltd.in
No.CAD-1935: OSIC GST No.21AAACO2101M121

e-Procurement Notice for Building Works

Tender Notice No.3678 Date:13.12.2024
Identification No. Online Building OSIC/Constr./2024-25/014

(A) 1. Name of the Work: a. Construction of Operation-cum-Security room for new automate gate at P.P. Unit main gate.
b. Installation of air tight UPVC window at the backside of the main building.
c. Installation of air tight UPVC window in the Administrative Main Building.
2.Total No. of Works: 01 No.
3. Estimated Cost : Rs.11,28,453/- (Approx.)
4. Class of Contractor :
i) D & C Class as per eligibility criteria online
5. Period of Completion: i) Three Calendar Months
(B) Other details:

Procurement Online	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender on-line for bidding		Date & Time of opening of tender in O/o MD, OSIC Ltd, Cuttack
		From	To	
MD, OSIC Ltd., Cuttack	014 of 2024-25	20.12.2024	09.01.2025	10.01.2025 at 11.00 AM

Further details can be seen from the website
www.tendersodisha.gov.in / www.osicltd.in
Any amendment, corrigendum, cancellation or re-tender may please be referred to the website.
Sd/- General Manager (O)
OSIC Ltd., Cuttack
OIPR-14073/11/0022/2425

Bank of India
Zonal Office : Bhubaneswar Zone, 1/1D, Star House, Jayadev Vihar, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751015, Ph.: 0674-2362249

AUCTION SALE OF VEHICLE

Sl. No.	Branch Name	Name of the Borrower	Vehicle Details	Reserve Price / Bid Increment Amount
1.	BIJU PATNAIK PARK BRANCH	Mrs Priyanka Priyadarshini Jena	Citroen C3, 1.2 Petrol Regd. No.- OD 02 CD 9394 Date of Purchase- 24.11.2022	Rs.5,41,000/- Rs.5,000/-

DATE OF AUCTION: 09.01.2025 from 11.30 A.M. to 12.30 P.M., Auction Venue: M/s City Investigation & Detective, Santoshi Maa Mandir Backside, Patrapada, Bhubaneswar, Contact: 8908502936

Parking Yard Address: M/s City Investigation & Detective, Santoshi Maa Mandir Backside, Patrapada, Bhubaneswar .

Terms & Conditions: Interested bidders can inspect the vehicle after obtaining prior appointment from the Concerned Authority at the parking yard as mentioned above. The bidders are informed to be present at the venue positively. The successful bidder has to deposit 25% of bid amount as upfront amount and the balance amount within 7days from the date of auction, failing which the money deposited by the successful bidder would be forfeited. The cost of transfer of ownership & statutory dues/all misc. charges, if any is to be borne by the successful purchaser. Vehicle will be auctioned on "AS IS WHERE IS & AS IS WHAT IS" basis. However the Bank reserves the right to accept /reject/cancel the auction sale process of the vehicle at its own discretion at any point of time. Auction will be done through offline mode. For further information regarding Inspection & Details of the Vehicle contact at Ph. No.: Biju Pattnaik Park Branch - 9439532767, ZO.- 837911737, Parking Yard: 8908502936 .

Place : Bhubaneswar, Date : 18.12.2024
Zonal Manager, Bank of India

“Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break a dead resistance in the mortal’s heart.”
SRI AUROBINDO

Central Bank Toolkit

Central banks around the world responded to the inflationary period following COVID-19 by raising interest rates. Now that inflation seems to be largely under control, monetary policymakers must begin preparing for the next crisis by expanding their toolkit. This is particularly important because we may soon return to the situation of the 2010s, when nominal interest rates were close to zero, and central banks were unable to stimulate demand by cutting them. Policymakers ended up using “unconventional” tools – notably quantitative easing – which were later found to have limited effects on aggregate demand and to have inflated asset prices, thereby contributing to financial volatility and rising inequality.

To avoid falling into this trap again, central banks should prepare – both legally and operationally – to carry out direct transfers to households when conventional monetary policy fails. This approach has been shown to be sufficiently potent to stimulate demand and fight recessions even in a liquidity trap, when interest rates can go no lower. That said, it must be used carefully.

The idea of direct transfers is hardly new. But until recently, economists have dismissed it for the wrong reasons. The textbook argument against these payments is that when interest rates are at zero, money creation should not have a stimulus effect because households would simply sit on excess liquidity. The income bump from such assistance, the thinking goes, would lead to a negligible increase in consumption.

But our recent research contradicts this view. Using new microeconomic data and evaluation techniques, we estimated that stimulus payments would increase consumption even when interest rates are close to zero. This is bolstered by research on sizable lottery prizes and America’s 2008 stimulus package, which show that households spend a large portion of unanticipated windfalls.

Many of our colleagues would say that conducting financial transfers to households is fiscal policy, not monetary policy. To be sure, fiscal authorities have traditionally managed stimulus programmes during a downturn. But such measures significantly increase public debt, which monetary authorities counteract by purchasing government bonds.

Central banks effectively fund the government’s direct transfers, so it is our view that they should supervise them, too – at least some of the time. Monetary policymakers can act faster and are less likely to overshoot, given their inflation mandate. Politicians, on the other hand, may be tempted to launch aggressive stimulus policies that could prove difficult to reverse.

All monetary policy is redistributive. But direct transfers make it easier for central banks to avoid undesirable distributional effects, in contrast to quantitative easing, which favours wealthy households that own assets. Even changes in interest rates have an unequal impact, because they primarily affect households seeking a mortgage. With transfers set to be the same for all households, everyone would “win” equally.

Of course, if monetary authorities began to distribute stimulus payments, they might face mounting political pressure to do so. This tool should therefore be used sparingly, after conventional monetary policy has proven ineffective, and only by a central bank that is independent, and whose independence is not threatened. This important restriction could be codified in a central bank’s mandate to ensure that direct transfers are a last resort.

A useful analogy is to think of a central bank’s stimulus payments as analgesics, which temporarily manage pain, rather than treating the underlying ailment, but can cause heightened tolerance and dependence if overused. Similarly, direct transfers can provide immediate short-term relief by increasing demand when needed most, but they could spiral out of control if used excessively – for example, even outside major crises. Just as it makes no sense to ban painkillers despite the risk of abuse, it makes no sense to forswear a monetary-policy tool because it must be employed with caution.

So, how would a central bank go about using this tool? To start, it should create a reserve account, with an associated payment card, for each citizen. The central bank would “lend” at zero interest in perpetuity to these individuals, crediting their accounts. The transaction’s irreversibility would constitute a credible commitment to higher inflation and would thus raise inflation expectations.

To increase the demand response, the payment could be time-limited: recipients would have a few weeks to spend down the account, or else lose the remaining balance. Our experiment demonstrated that this approach results in higher spending than a standard transfer without an expiry date, boosting aggregate demand by twice as much. Payment cards with expiry dates have already been used on a large scale – with tens of millions of recipients – in several places, including South Korea, Hong Kong, and Northern Ireland. Now it is time for central banks to figure out how to incorporate them into their toolkit before the next big crisis strikes.

Johannes Boehm is Professor of Economics at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Xavier Jaravel is Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics. ©PROJECT SYNDICATE

WISDOM CORNER

“One of the great cosmic laws, I think, is that whatever we hold in our thought will come true in our experience. When we hold something, anything, in our thought, then somehow coincidence leads us in the direction that we’ve been wishing to lead ourselves.”
RICHARD BACH

“In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.”
ALBERT SCHWEITZER

“Learning is the beginning of wealth. Learning is the beginning of health. Learning is the beginning of spirituality. Searching and learning is where the miracle process all begins.”
JIM ROHN

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

1777: During the American Revolution, General George Washington led 11,000 regulars to take up winter quarters at Valley Forge on the west bank of the Schuylkill River, 22 miles (35 km) northwest of Philadelphia.

1843: English author Charles Dickens published A Christmas Carol, which became one of the outstanding Christmas stories of modern literature.

FOCUS AIR POLLUTION

REAL TIME CHECKS MUST

Air pollution in the country has emerged as a public health catastrophe, costing India over a million lives and 1.6 to 1.8% of GDP annually. Research from various organisations, including the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) outlined vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, crop burning and construction dust as the major contributors to such pollution. With the onset of winter, the problem becomes severe despite the country having adopted ‘clean air’ programmes.

India has a target of 40% reduction of PM2.5 levels by 2026, but scientists believe this is unlikely to be achieved. According to IQ Air data, 42 of the top 50 most polluted cities were in India. This is because there is no seriousness in tackling the problem. Of course, the government takes the biggest share of the blame, and quite justifiably so, but it is by no means the only stakeholder that is complicit.

India’s transportation sector accounts for 2.9 billion tonnes of CO2 emissions, demanding a structured policy to bring this down. And while EV sales surged 42% in 2024, there is need to give a boost, especially in cities with more incentives for public transport. As regards industry, which contributes 30-35% of India’s CO2 emissions, leniency by states due to unholy nexus with political leaders needs to be effectively tackled. Those violating environmental rules and regulations need to be hauled up.

Despite the Environment Ministry introducing emission standards, the Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) system has been quite slow. As of this August, only 39 units across the country installed the system whereas work is yet to be completed in 220-odd units. Most thermal power plants unfortu-



India has a target of 40 per cent reduction of PM2.5 levels by 2026, but scientists believe this is unlikely to be achieved

nately got leniency, polluting neighbourhoods.

Experts estimated that FGD can reduce the concentration of SO2 by 55% within a 80-km radius and sulphate aerosols by 30% up to 100 km. However, FGD involved significant costs i.e. ₹1 to ₹2 crore per megawatt in addition to ₹0.5-0.6 per unit to its generation. Besides, methane is a powerful greenhouse gas and the second-largest contributor to climate warming after CO2.

Another major source of pollution is agriculture, and livestock, where ruminants produce methane in the course of digesting food and the other area is paddy rice. The next source is waste and landfills, where organic matter like food waste and plant debris result in a lot of methane production. In the global scenario, the most significant is the Global Methane Pledge (GMP), put forth by the European Union and the US and 159 countries have signed this Pledge.

Among metros, the national capital, Delhi, has been grappling with severe air pollution. Experts indicated that the situation is like what Beijing had faced around 2013. That very year in March, the then Chinese premier pledged to fight pollution and accordingly by 2023, pollution levels were drastically brought down. It

is worth mentioning that both capitals sit on basins close to mountain ranges, which prevent easy dispersal of pollutants. As a result, winter conditions such as calm winds, temperature inversion, humidity and lack of rain cause massive spikes in pollution.

India launched the National Clean Air Policy (NCAP) rather late in 2019, with a modest target of reducing particulate matter by 20-30% over 2017 levels in five years across 121 cities. The NCAP target has since been revised to a 40% reduction by 2026, but experts believe it is rather optimistic and unlikely to be reached.

As regards other cities, Indore in Madhya Pradesh is said to be the cleanest with better air quality in the country, though it reported a 21% rise in the level of particulate matter, PM10 in 2023-24 compared to 2017-18. The city joined 30 others including Navi Mumbai, Vizag, Guwahati, Chandigarh and many others that reported increase in PM10. On the air quality front, Vizag reported 58% p increase (second worst in the list of 31) in the level of PM10 in FY24 compared to FY18. However, big metros like Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore and Chennai have shown some improvement but still are not good enough to meet the annual

average acceptable limit.

Over the years, clean technologies have been introduced at a cost of thousands of crores with refinery upgrades alone costing ₹35,000 crore. One key improvement is BS-VI compliant fuel with its negligible sulphur content. BS-III norms mandated sulphur limits of 150 parts per million (ppm) for petrol and 350 ppm for diesel while BS-IV reduced both by 50 ppm and 10 ppm. However, this relates mainly to the transportation sector whereas not much has changed in strictly enforcing environmental regulations.

Meanwhile, there has been global pressure on India to phase out coal in stages and this needs consideration. In the agriculture sector, stubble burning must be curbed and perhaps technology from countries such as Argentina and Brazil could be inducted.

Innovative financing models like green bonds may be garnered to support public transport and urban greening. It is heartening to note that the World Bank has committed \$1.5 billion for the Indo-Gangetic plain states for better air management. Forestry is another area that needs to be encouraged but the government is not quite serious on it. Finally, it goes without saying the clean air, apart from being a crucial environmental issue has to be viewed as an economic asset for social well-being.

The challenge of tackling air quality is undoubtedly daunting. Environmental rules need to be strictly enforced. Leniency shown to air polluting industries needs to be done away with. Changes need to be brought into transportation sector, not just in big cities but across country. The government must meet targets, or at least make genuine effort. Passing the buck will only cause more harm.

INFA

SPECTRUM DISPUTE REDRESS

Maintaining neutrality of arbitrators

On 8 November, the Supreme Court issued a historic decision in Central Organisation for Railway Electrification vs. M/s ECI-SPIC-SMO-MCML (JV) regarding the unilateral appointment of arbitrators. A five-judge bench considered whether an arbitration clause that allows one party to create a panel of arbitrators from which the other party selects complies to the principle of impartiality under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act of 1996 (Arbitration Act). This decision has major consequences for party autonomy and equality in arbitration agreements, ultimately emphasising the idea that party autonomy in arbitration is contingent on fairness and impartiality.

Not only the public sector organisations, even some private financial institutions are found to have an arbitration clause in the agreements between them and the parties enabling them to appoint an arbitrator of their choice from among the panel maintained by them.

Arbitration is a private a process by which parties settle their disputes through the intervention of a third person, known as arbitrator gov-

erned by the Arbitration and Conciliation Act of 1996. The mounting pendency on courts, increasing demand for speedy disposal, required faith in the judiciary for fair and cost-effective dispute resolution systems demanded by international investors prompted the central government to pay special attention to bringing in changes in arbitration approaches, institutionalisation of arbitration and establishment of the Indian International Arbitration Centre (IIAC), Delhi. The government envisions an environment conducive to doing business in the country, as well as reducing the burden of civil and commercial disputes on courts, as the National Judicial Data Grid shows that 1.08 crore civil cases and 3.36 crore criminal cases are pending in Indian courts, for justice taking anywhere from one day to over thirty years.

The Expert Committee on Arbitration Law, led by Dr. TK Vishwanathan, a former law secretary, was established by the Government of India on 12 June, 2023, to examine and recommend reforms to the Arbitration & Conciliation Act, 1996. The committee’s report, submitted on 7 February, 2024,

recommends implementing systems for faster resolution of arbitration matters and amending the Act. Earlier, on 17 July, 2017, the High-Level Committee on Arbitration, chaired by Justice BN Srikrishna Retired Judge, Supreme Court, submitted a report recommending the institutionalisation of arbitration in India and making India a hub for international arbitration. Both reports strongly recommended that judicial intervention in arbitration be kept to a minimum.

The government is planning to bring in some more amendments to the Arbitration Act with a view to easing out the arbitration process.

The Act and proposed amendments already recommend that arbitration institutions be recognised by the Arbitration Council of India (ACI). However, designation by courts following ACI recognition dilutes ACI’s authority resulting in duplication of work, and invites unnecessary judicial intervention. The already functioning arbitration institutions in the country are extending their services to the satisfaction of many clients.

Therefore, the designation clause after recognition by the

ACI requires a revisit and warrants removal from the Act. Every state has a high court, and each court has its own administrative system, no matter how efficient it is. The institutions must work tirelessly to become recognised and designated by the courts. As a result, a single statutory authority, such as the ACI, is adequate to govern the formation and operation of arbitration institutions.

The proposed amendments must clarify the procedure of appointing arbitrators and classify it into three modalities. One is the process of appointing arbitrators by the parties themselves, rather than from a panel maintained by one interested party, followed by the appointment of arbitrators by neutral arbitration organisations, and ultimately by the courts if the other two fail.

Allowing neutral arbitration institutions to appoint and administer arbitrators will help to address the challenges of unilateral arbitrator appointment by interested organisations and reduce the additional burden on courts to appoint arbitrators.

The writer is a former senior advisor, UNDP



P Madhava Rao

A SINGLE STATUTORY AUTHORITY, SUCH AS THE ACI, IS ADEQUATE TO GOVERN THE FORMATION AND OPERATION OF ARBITRATION INSTITUTIONS

Ashwin’s googly

Sir, Veteran and star cricketer Ravichandran Ashwin’s retirement announcement from all the three formats of the game has come as a shocker. Having so far played just one game at Adelaide in the ongoing BGT series against Australia, where India lost, Ashwin might have felt dejected and dispirited, and must have sensed that his chances of playing in the remainder of the series were slim. Perhaps, this must have forced him to take the tough call impromptu. The right-arm off-spinner, and the ‘carrom ball’ specialist, who made his India debut in November 2011 against the West Indies, has finished his illustrious career with 537 Test wickets – the second best by an Indian bowler after the legendary Anil Kumble. Ashwin’s contribution to the world of cricket will always be remembered and something that can never be replaced. Amidst a tinge of sadness in the wake of his surprise retirement announcement, his cricket fans in Chennai and other parts of India will have the consolation of watching him in action in the Indian Premier League 2025, proudly donning the yellow jersey again for the Chennai Super Kings after a decade.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

Safety concern

Sir, This refers to “Justice delayed, justice denied: Rahul slams BJP,” OrissaPOST, December 18. If there is an element of truth in the allegation of Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, the Uttar Pradesh High Court, in the fitness of things may take suo motu cognisance in the matter and direct the UP police to take such steps necessary for cancellation of bail of the accused persons for their gross misuse. The credibility of the UP government is surely at stake for it has allegedly failed and neglected to provide justice to the Hathras rape victim’s family, despite clear assurance. If the victim’s family is held hostage by the accused persons, I can only guess how fragile is the safety of woman in UP.

Arun Gupta, KOLKATA

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

GEORGIA TRAGEDY

Victims took loans to go abroad

Mufti raises concern over developmental projects

Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs had said the initial inspection found no signs of injury or violence, all victims died from carbon monoxide poisoning

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Dec 18: Many among the 11 Indian nationals who were found dead at a restaurant in Georgia's mountain resort of Gudauri last week, had taken loans or debts to move abroad.

The victims were employees of an Indian restaurant named Haveli in Gudauri. The majority of the Indians, who died in the incident, hailed from Punjab.

Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs had said the initial inspection found no signs of injury or violence. All victims died from carbon monoxide poisoning, local media reported, citing police.

Thirty-five-year old Sandeep Singh, who also lost his life in this incident, was the sole breadwinner of the family.

Hailing from Tarn Taran, he had moved to Georgia a year ago to earn the livelihood of his family.

His father Balwant Singh said he had taken a loan of Rs 6 lakh to send his son to Georgia.

Sandeep's wife Baljit Kaur said she spoke to her husband a week back.

She said with his death, the family is left with no source of income here. Sandeep is survived by his father, wife and

eight-year-old daughter.

Twenty-four-old Gagandeep Singh, who hailed from Ghal Kalan village in Moga, had gone to Georgia four months ago.

His father Gurmukh Singh, a labourer, had taken a debt to send him to Georgia.

He said he spoke to his son December 12 and inquired about his health.

We want from the government that Gagandeep's mortal remains to be brought back to India, said one of his relatives.

Ravinder Kumar (45) last called up his family in Kot Ramdass in Jalandhar for the last time December 13. His wife Kanchan, who is yet to come to terms, said, "He called up Friday and spoke to the children. He told them there was a big storm and poles were uprooted. He promised to call again in the morning. But that call never came."

The family came to know about his death Sunday.

"My son turned seven years December 1. His father never saw him in person. He went abroad about eight years ago," said Kanchan.

The grief-stricken families of the deceased have appealed to the Centre and the Punjab government to take necessary steps in getting back the bod-



ies for the last rites.

The Indian mission in Tbilisi had said that it was saddened to learn of the unfortunate passing of the 11 Indian nationals and extended its deepest condolences to their families.

Varinder Singh (33), who hailed from Patiala, was also among 11 Indians who died in Georgia. One of his family members said Singh had gone to Georgia one-and-a-half-years ago.

He said they came to know about his death through a

phone call.

"We want his body to be brought back," he said. Varinder is survived by his wife and a five-year-old daughter.

Amrinder Kaur, who hailed from Mehman village in Patiala, was also one of the victims.

According to her family members, Kaur (32) had moved to Georgia in 2015 in pursuit of green pastures. She had called her family members December 12 and told them that there was a snow-

storm in the area, which led to a power outage.

Ravinder Singh and his wife Gurbinder Kaur, hailing from Sunam in Sangrur, were also among the deceased.

One of their relatives said they had gone to Georgia this March this year.

"They were working in an Indian restaurant there. I got a call about their death," he said. Among the deceased was Khanna's Sameer Kumar who had moved to Georgia around six months.

Mufti, a former chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, raised an alarm over three projects -- Rajouri-Baramulla highway, ring road from Galander to Ganderbal and the expansion of railway line



affected in these projects.

"It creates a doubt that their (government's) hearts have not been satisfied by the destruction of J&K that they have caused and so they are now after our lands," she alleged.

The PDP chief said there are apprehensions that this unplanned development can cause disasters like what were witnessed in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Joshimath.

The PDP chief said she was not against development but development should not come at the cost of the environment, scenic beauty and agricultural land. She also raised concern over establishing satellite townships in the valley, asking the government to reveal who are the beneficiaries of such flats.

"We request the chief minister (Omar Abdullah), we will not talk about Article 370 and other big issues even as they have 50 MLAs, but this is a housing and urban development department issue which is under him. There should be no impact on the environment."

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Dec 18: People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti Wednesday expressed concern over the ecological impact of some developmental projects in Kashmir, saying development should not come at the cost of environment and resources.

Mufti, a former chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, raised an alarm over three projects -- Rajouri-Baramulla highway, ring road from Galander to Ganderbal and the expansion of railway line.

"Our land, forests and our resources are in danger. Lakhs of kanals of our agricultural land and lakhs of trees in our forests are getting affected due to those projects," the PDP president said at a press conference here.

She said the agricultural land in most of the districts in the Kashmir valley is getting

Kashmir remains in grip of severe cold conditions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Srinagar, Dec 18: There was a slight improvement in the intense cold conditions in Kashmir as the minimum temperature rose across the valley, but continued to settle below the freezing point, officials said here Wednesday.

Srinagar city recorded a minimum temperature of minus 4.5 degrees Celsius slightly up from minus 5.3 degrees Celsius the previous night, the officials said.

They said the intense cold conditions over the past few days led to the freezing of the fringes of several water bodies, including the Dal Lake here, while water supply lines in many areas of the city here and elsewhere in the valley were also frozen due to the cold.

The famous ski-resort of Gulmarg recorded a low of minus 5 degrees Celsius, a degree down from the night before.

Tourist resort Pahalgam, which also serves as one of the

base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a low of minus 5.8 degrees Celsius which was slightly up from the previous night's minus 5 degrees Celsius.

Konibal, a sleepy hamlet on the outskirts of Pampore town, was the coldest place in the valley as mercury settled at the low of minus 6.5 degrees Celsius.

The minimum temperature in Qazigund -- the gateway to Kashmir -- was minus 5 degrees Celsius, Kupwara in north Kashmir minus 4.4 degrees, and Kokernag in south Kashmir minus 2.8 degrees.

The Met office has forecast mainly dry weather till December 26 with possibility of light snowfall in higher reaches of the valley on the night of December 21-22.

However, the minimum temperature is forecast to fall further in the valley and there will be a cold wave over many stations during the next few days, it said.



TRAIN MOVEMENT HIT IN PUNJAB

Farmers squat on tracks as part of Rail Roko protest

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ludhiana/Hoshiarpur, Dec 18: Train services in Punjab were affected as farmers squatted on rail tracks at more than 50 places Wednesday as part of their three-hour 'Rail Roko' protest to press the Centre to accept their various demands, including a legally binding minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

The call for the 'rail roko' was given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha.

Kisan Mazdoor Morcha leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said farmers blocked rail tracks at many places from 12 noon to 3 pm as both state and central governments had deliberately adopted an indifferent approach towards them.

According to railway authorities of the Ferozepur division, 12 trains were cancelled, two each were short-terminated and short-originated and 34 trains were delayed because of farmers' protest at 52 places.

Among the trains cancelled were Jalandhar to Phyllaur in Jalandhar; Tanda, Dasuya, Mahilpur in Hoshiarpur; Makhu, Talwandi Bhai in Ferozepur; Sahnewal in Ludhiana; Shambhu in Patiala; Mohali; Sunam and Lehra in Sangrur; Rampura Phul in Bathinda and Devidaspura in Amritsar.

The Humsafar Express from Jammu to Sealdah, Da-



The call for the 'rail roko' was given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha

dian and Batala in Gurdaspur; Phyllaur in Jalandhar; Tanda, Dasuya, Mahilpur in Hoshiarpur; Makhu, Talwandi Bhai in Ferozepur; Sahnewal in Ludhiana; Shambhu in Patiala; Mohali; Sunam and Lehra in Sangrur; Rampura Phul in Bathinda and Devidaspura in Amritsar.

The Humsafar Express from Jammu to Sealdah, Da-

dar Express from Amritsar to Mumbai and Shan-e-Punjab Express from New Delhi to Amritsar were halted at different platforms of the Ludhiana railway station.

The Shatabdi Express coming from New Delhi for Amritsar was halted at Khanna railway station.

Due to the rail blockade, a train from Jammu to Ahmed-

abad was halted at Mukerian Railway Station.

Deepak Singh (25), a resident of Tarn Taran who was travelling with his wife, two children, and brother after visiting the Dera Baba Gur Bar Bhag Singh shrine in Una (Himachal Pradesh), was among the passengers who faced inconvenience due to the rail traffic disruption. He said that he had been waiting for over two hours at Hoshiarpur railway station for the train to Jalandhar.

Manoj Yadav (35), a mason

from Chhattisgarh, currently residing in Narain Nagar, Hoshiarpur, also shared his ordeal. He was travelling with his wife and two children to Chhattisgarh. Given the long distance, he said that trains were the only suitable option for their journey, leaving them with no choice but to wait for the protest to end.

In Amritsar, farmers blocked the Amritsar-Delhi rail track as they squatted on the track at Devidaspura village near the Manawala railway station.

Punjab Governor gives call for mass campaign to create drug-free state

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Ludhiana, Dec 18: Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria has called upon the people to launch a mass campaign to rid the state of the menace of drugs.

At a meeting with people from various faiths and heads of educational institutions at the Punjab Agricultural University here, Kataria said Punjab is the land of great gurus and martyrs who made immense sacrifices for the nation.

"Therefore, it is our duty to contribute to the fight against drugs and restore Punjab's pristine glory by carrying out a mass awareness drive against narcotics," Kataria said, according to an official statement.

Soliciting everyone's support and involvement in the



anti-drug campaign, the governor said a 10-day walkathon will be organised to spread the message of eradicating drugs to every household in January, the statement said.

The governor also emphasised that women have to play a significant role in this mis-

sion by guiding their children towards the morally right path, as he gave a clarion call to the people of Punjab to actively join the anti-drug movement.

The governor also said the fight against drugs cannot be limited to government efforts alone. "When people come together in the spirit of mutual understanding and responsibility to strengthen the hands of the government, the success of such campaigns becomes more certain," he said.

"While the law is taking its course, everyone should join this mission to create a drug-free future for upcoming generations. By eliminating drug addiction, Punjab cannot only emerge stronger, but can also play a significant role in building a developed India," he added.

Shutdown in Katra to protest Vaishno Devi ropeway project

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Katra/Jammu, Dec 18: Jammu and Kashmir's Katra, the base camp for the Vaishno Devi pilgrimage, observed a shutdown Wednesday in protest against the proposed Rs 250-crore ropeway project connecting Tarakote Marg to Sanji Chhat, which leads to the cave shrine in Reasi district.

Alleging that the ropeway would destroy the livelihoods of local business owners, the Mata Vaishno Devi Sangharsh Samiti, which claims to represent shopkeepers, pony operators and palanquin owners, led a protest march in the town and demanded that the project be scrapped.

Last month, the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board decided to install the ropeway to facilitate access to the temple for senior citizens, children



and others who find it difficult to climb the 13-km-long track to the cave shrine.

Wednesday's shutdown disrupted normal life in the town, resulting in reduced vehicular traffic on the roads.

A large rally, backed by various organisations, was held by the Samiti from the Shalimar Park to oppose the ropeway proj-

ect. Carrying placards and wearing black armbands, protestors raised slogans against the shrine board and the project.

"The Sangharsh Samiti is fighting for our rights as the board is out to snatch the bread and butter of over 60,000 families. Everyone -- hoteliers, shopkeepers, pony operators, labourers and transporters

has come out to the streets against the ropeway project. We want the project to be shelved," Bhopinder Singh Jamwal, president of the Vaishno Devi Trek Mazdoor Union, told reporters.

He added that all political parties and social organisations in Jammu and Kashmir have extended their support to the protest. "We will fight for our rights. We will not tolerate this," Jamwal asserted.

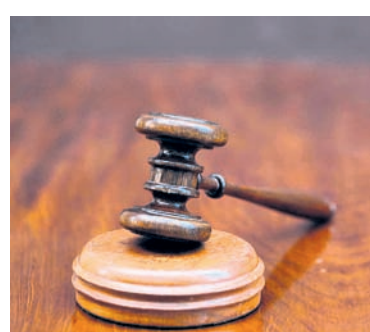
The leaders of the group announced that five of its members would observe a hunger strike during the day to press for a written assurance from the lieutenant governor or the home minister that the ropeway project would be scrapped. Former minister Jugal Kishore Sharma, who also joined the rally, said the government had failed to fulfil its commitment to resolve the issue by December 15.



Pleased to speak to FM @ gidonsaar of Israel today. Appreciate his briefing on the ongoing developments in the region. Also discussed our bilateral relations and efforts to strengthen them

PITIBLE: APEX COURT ON MEAGRE PENSION OF RETIRED HC JUDGES

The Supreme Court Wednesday lamented the meagre pension, ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹15,000, being given to some retired high court judges and termed it "pitiable"



of the day uote

One gets rights by taking the name of Ambedkar ji. Taking the name of Ambedkar ji is a symbol of human dignity. Ambedkar ji's name is a symbol of self-respect of crores of Dalits and deprived people

Congress should say why Ambedkar had to resign from the Nehru cabinet. Nehru insulted him that he had to resign... they made him lose Lok Sabha elections

In Rajya Sabha, Amit Shah Ji said that taking the name of Babasaheb Ambedkar Ji has become a fashion. This is a direct insult to the Dalits of the country and Babasaheb

LS proceedings adjourned for day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day Wednesday amid noisy protests by Opposition members seeking an apology from Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks which they claimed were an insult to B R Ambedkar.

When the House reconvened at 2 pm, the protests continued. Soon ministers and MPs tabled parliamentary documents amid the din. Following which P C Mohan, who was chairing the proceedings, adjourned the House for the day. When the House was adjourned for the day, most Opposition members excluding those from the TMC were on their feet raising slogan of 'Jai Bheem' and seeking an apology from Shah.

Most Congress members were in the Well raising slogans. Earlier, the House was adjourned till 2 pm as Congress members trooped into the Well displaying posters of Ambedkar and sought an apology from Shah for his remarks during a discussion in the Rajya Sabha Tuesday. Some members of INDIA bloc were also in the Well of the House. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi was present in the House along with his sibling Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Members of other Opposition parties, including from Trinamool Congress, stood at their seats in support of the Congress. Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal countered the Congress, saying the party has always insulted Ambedkar and ensured his defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

India, China to maintain peace at borders

The two sides agreed to hold a new round of Special Representatives' meetings in India next year, and the specific time will be determined through diplomatic channels

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



der situation and agreed to further refine the management and control rules in the border area, strengthen confidence-building measures, and achieve sustainable peace and tranquillity on the border, it said.

The two sides agreed to continue to strengthen cross-border exchanges and cooperation, and promote the resumption of Indian pilgrims' pilgrimage to Tibet, China, cross-border river cooperation and Nathula border trade, it said.

Both sides also agreed to further strengthen the Special Representatives' mechanism, bolster diplomatic and military negotiation coordination and cooperation, and requiring the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on China-India Border Affairs (WMCC) to do a good job in the follow-up implementation of the decisions reached special representatives' meeting, it said. In addition, the two sides also had an extensive and in-depth exchange of views on bilateral, international and regional issues of common concern, emphasising the importance of a stable, predictable and good China-India relationship to in-

ternational and regional peace and stability, it said.

Wang said that leaders of the two countries insisted on viewing China-India relations from a strategic height and long-term perspective, and clarified the direction for the restoration and development of China-India relations at a critical moment, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a separate press release.

Looking back on the ups and downs of China-India relations over the past 70 years, the most valuable experience accumulated by both sides is to adhere to the strategic guidance of the leaders of the two countries on bilateral relations, to establish a correct understanding of each other, to adhere to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and to properly handle differences through dialogue and consultation, it said.

As two major developing countries in the world, representatives of emerging economies and important members of the global South, the healthy and stable development of China-India relations is in line with the fundamental interests of more than 2.8 billion people in the two countries and the

historical trend of the global South's outstanding growth, it added. Wang stressed that today's special representative meeting is a timely and powerful measure to implement the consensus of the leaders of the two countries.

According to the release, the two sides should put the border issue in an "appropriate position" in bilateral relations, jointly maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas, and promote China-India relations to return to the track of healthy and stable development as soon as possible.

After the talks, Doval called on Chinese Vice President Han Zheng.

Han said that China and India, as ancient oriental civilizations and emerging major powers, adhere to independence, solidarity and cooperation, which is of global influence and strategic significance.

Doval, who is heading the Indian delegation, arrived here Tuesday to take part in the 23rd round of the Special Representatives talks. The last meeting was held in 2019 in Delhi.

The talks, the first structured dialogue after the relations were frozen for over four years due to the military standoff at Eastern Ladakh took place following the agreement on disengagement and patrolling October 21.

Following the agreement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met at Kazan in Russia on the sidelines of the BRICS and endorsed the agreement.

Kallakurichi hooch tragedy to be probed by CBI, says top court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: The Central Bureau of Investigation will be probing the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy in which 67 people died after consuming illicit liquor, the Supreme Court has said while junking the appeal of the Tamil Nadu government against the Madras High Court judgement on the issue.

The high court, November 20, had ordered a CBI probe into Tamil Nadu's most devastating incident linked to the consumption of spurious liquor. "Having heard the advocate general appearing for the petitioners and having gone through the materials on record, we see no good reason to interfere with the very well-reasoned judgment of the high court," the bench said. The high court passed the order November 20 on the petitions filed by AIADMK legal wing secretary and former MLA I S Inbadurai, president of Advocates Forum for Social Justice K Balu, and two others, seeking a CBI probe into the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy.

The HC bench had said, "In view of the foregoing discussion, with specific reference to the authoritative pronouncements of the Supreme Court in the matter of transfer of cases to the CBI, this court is of the prima facie view that this Kallakurichi hooch tragedy case is one of the rarest of rare cases which warrants a fair and impartial investigation by the CBI."

SHORT TAKES

Government amends aircraft security rules

New Delhi: Against the backdrop of the recent spate of hoax bomb calls targeting airlines, the government has amended the aircraft security rules whereby perpetrators can face penalties and could even be barred from flying. The civil aviation ministry has amended the Aircraft (Security) Rules, 2023.

Elderly couple dead in fire

New Delhi: An elderly couple died after a fire broke out at their home in southwest Delhi's Safdarjung Enclave Wednesday morning, a Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official said. He said the deceased have been identified as Govind Ram Nagpal (80) and his wife Sheela Nagpal (78). "We received a call regarding a fire at 6.02 am from Safdarjung Enclave. The fire was on the second floor of a house. Three fire tenders were rushed to the site," DFS chief Atul Garg said.

ED records Mallika Sherawat's statement

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate has recorded the statement of actor Mallika Sherawat and a TV actor in a money laundering probe against a betting website, owned by some Pakistani nationals, that also "illegally" broadcast Men's T20 World Cup matches, official sources said Wednesday.

Shia body appears before Waqf panel

New Delhi: Representatives of the All India Shia Personal Law Board Wednesday shared their views on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill with a joint parliamentary committee scrutinising the draft law. Sources said the Board was opposed to several provisions of the Bill but added that its members were not much prepared to offer their opinion on its different aspects and reply comprehensively to the queries of parliamentarians.

Car accident death toll rises to three

Pune: The death toll in a road accident involving two trainee pilots in Pune district rose to three after their 21-year-old woman batch-mate succumbed to her injuries, police said Wednesday. Cheshta Bishnoi died during treatment at a private hospital in Pune on Tuesday evening. Her family members have donated her organs, police said.

SIMULTANEOUS POLLS

Anurag, Priyanka in Parliament panel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: Former Union ministers Anurag Thakur and P P Chaudhary from the BJP, and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of the Congress are set to be among the 21 Lok Sabha members, who will be part of the joint committee of Parliament that will scrutinise two Bills on simultaneous elections.



The Lok Sabha's list of business for Thursday included the names of 21 MPs to be part of the committee, a motion on whose constitution will be moved by Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal.

Meghwal is also set to propose that the committee will submit its report on the first day of last week of the next session. Former Union minister Parshottambhai Rupala, Bhartruhari Mahtab, Anil Baluni, C M Ramesh, Bansuri Swaraj, Vishnu Dayal Ram and Sam-

bit Patra are among the BJP's Lok Sabha members to be part of the panel.

Chaudhary, a former minister of state for law, is being seen as the likely chairperson of the committee, sources said, adding that Thakur is also a contender. Speaker Om Birla will take the final call according to the rules, they said. Manish Tewari and Sukhdeo Bhagat of the Congress, Shrikant Shinde of the Shiv Sena, Dharmendra Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, Kalyan Banerjee of the TMC, T M Selvaganapathi of the DMK, G M Harish Bhalayogi of the TDP, Supriya Sule of the NCP (Sharad Pawar), Chandan Chauhan of the RLD and Balashowry Vallabhaneni of the Jana Sena Party are other Lok Sabha members.

The Rajya Sabha will name its 10 members for the committee in a separate communication. Among the Lok Sabha members proposed to be on the committee, 14 are from the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, including 10 from the BJP.

A number of Opposition parties have already submitted the names of their representatives from the Rajya Sabha for the committee, sources said.



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi with AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal and party leader Manish Sisodia during a protest against Union Home Minister Amit Shah regarding his remarks on B R Ambedkar in the Parliament, in New Delhi

2 IRS officers among 7 held by CBI

New Delhi: The CBI has arrested seven people, including two officers of the Indian Revenue Service posted at the Santacruz Electronics Export Processing Zone in Mumbai, in connection with an alleged bribery racket, officials said Wednesday. In an operation that started Tuesday, the CBI arrested the IRS officers -- Joint Development Commissioner CPS Chauhan and Deputy Development Commissioner Prasad Varwankar -- besides five other people, including two assistant development commissioners for allegedly favouring a group of middlemen in return for illicit monetary favours, they said.

SC grants time to Yasin Malik, 5 others to respond to CBI plea

New Delhi: The Supreme Court Wednesday gave six accused two weeks to respond to the CBI's plea to transfer the trial in the 1989 Rubaiya Sayeed kidnapping and the 1990 Srinagar shootout cases from Jammu to New Delhi. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Manmohan took note of the fact that the six accused have not filed their replies to the Central Bureau of Investigation's plea and asked them to do the needful in two weeks.

Kejriwal promises Sanjeevani Yojana

New Delhi: AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday announced that 'Sanjivni Yojna' would be launched for free treatment of people aged above 60 years if his party returns to power in Delhi, in an apparent move to counter BJP's criticism of the AAP government "blocking" the Centre's Ayushman Bharat scheme in the city. Assembly polls in Delhi are due in February next year.

Law on trees for saving, not felling them: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: The Supreme Court Wednesday observed the laws on trees are for saving and not cutting them and said it would pass orders on tree census and steps to save them in Delhi.

A bench comprising Justices A S Oka and Manmohan was hearing issues related to the unauthorised felling of trees and the strict implementation of provisions of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act and other state laws.

The issues stem from a PIL of environmentalist MC Mehta filed in 1985. The bench had recently criticised the Delhi gov-



ernment for the lack of progress in taking steps to enhance the green cover and said it would appoint an external agency to suggest measures for its enhancement.

"All the Trees Acts are for saving the trees, not cutting,

The bench had recently criticised the Delhi government for the lack of progress in taking steps to enhance the green cover and said it would appoint an external agency to suggest measures for its enhancement

The bench mulled directing the tree authority to take assistance of the Forest Survey of India to carry out tree census and said it would also deal with issue of infrastructure to authorities to take measures.

"We will look into the aspect of working of officers of tree authorities as to what steps they are taking for conservation of trees. There cannot be indis-

criminate orders passed by tree officers. Suppose there is an application for felling 25 trees, the tree officer cannot pass orders alone. There has to be a team of experts which will consider it as well. These experts can also oversee tree census," it said.

Senior advocate Gopal Sanakaranarayanan, appearing for a litigant, suggested the name of former Delhi High Court judge

Justice Najmi Waziri to head the committee of experts.

"Please don't appoint the honourable retired judges in this because this is not a one time issue," said additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Centre. The bench would also deal with the felling of the number of trees for felling with requisite permission.

On the point of tree census, the court noted it had to be carried out by the tree authority under the prescribed law. It said the forest department along with the Forest Survey of India could undertake the tree census with experts overseeing it.

national



Amit Shah's remarks on Dr Ambedkar show the party's (BJP's) arrogance and have exposed its true face

18 OTT PLATFORMS BLOCKED: GOVT Government blocked 18 OTT platforms this year for publishing obscene and vulgar content, Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L Murugan told the Lok Sabha Wednesday



of the day quote

Instead of using Dr BR Ambedkar as a tool for their political benefits, the BJP, the Congress and their allies must truly respect and honour his legacy



MAYAWATI | BSP PRESIDENT

If temples have been built on Waqf properties then we will not remove them. I am making it very clear. In case any notice has been issued, they (notices) will be withdrawn



SIDDARAMAIAH | K'TAKA CM

It is every-one's responsibility to maintain balance and patience to ensure the smooth functioning of the world order. In Indian culture, there has always been a tradition of returning to nature. In today's terms, this can be described as 'giving back'



MOHAN BHAGWAT | RSS CHIEF

Court doors always open to suggestion, demand: SC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: The Punjab government Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that though meetings were held with Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast at Khanauri border, and other farmers, they had refused to interact with its high-powered committee.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan was informed by Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh that the committee invited the protesting farmers December 17, but they declined to engage in a dialogue.

Singh said the state government was trying to persuade the farmers on a daily basis but suggested their demands could be directly submitted to court. "We clarify that court's doors are always open to any suggestion or demand by farmers directly or through their authorised representative," the top court said. The bench took note of Dallewal's health

and asked the Punjab government to extend medical aid to him without any further delay. The Punjab AG submitted the state authorities and a Centre's representative met Dallewal and took stock of his health, but he refused to undergo medical tests. The top court suggested against any laxity in taking care of Dallewal's health for he needed to be "hale and hearty". "Do not delay it. He is a public personality, a non-political leader of the masses. He represents farmers' interests. As an elected government and constitutional organ, you would not like to invite this blame that because of something has happened," the bench observed.

The matter has been posted for hearing December 19. Observing protesting farmers should adopt the Gandhian way, the top court had ordered immediate medical aid to Dallewal, whose health is deteriorating owing to his indefinite fast for over a fort-

night at a Punjab-Haryana border. The apex court had said a high-powered committee constituted by it, which was stated to be doing a good job, would talk to the protesting farmers and make recommendations to the court which eventually be put to the stakeholders for a decision.

Dallewal has been on an indefinite fast at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana since November 26 to press the Centre into accepting the agitating farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) on crops. Farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by the security forces.

The Haryana government set up the barricades on the Ambala-New Delhi National Highway in February after it was announced that the farmers would march to Delhi in support of their demands, including legal guarantee of MSP for their produce. In its interim report, a Supreme Court-appointed panel on farmers' grievances listed reasons for agrarian distress which among others include stagnant yield, rising costs and debts and inadequate marketing system.

The high-powered committee, constituted September 2 under former Punjab and Haryana High Court judge Nawab Singh to resolve the grievances of farmers agitating at the Shambhu border, suggested solutions including examining the possibility of giving legal sanctity to MSP and offering direct income support.

Congress worker dies during protest



The Opposition party was protesting against the UP government over issues like farmer distress, unemployment, inflation, privatisation and law and order

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Dec 18: The Congress' Uttar Pradesh chief Ajay Rai and state incharge Avinash Pande among others leaders and workers were Wednesday detained as they tried to leave the party office here for their planned siege of the state Assembly during the ongoing Winter Session.

A Congress worker also died during the protest with Rai claiming the death was due to "police brutality" while a senior police officer said he was brought dead to the hospital with no injury marks on body.

"We will throw out the Yogi government from power in 2027," Rai told reporters from a bus after police detained him amid heightened security measures in the state capital to thwart the Congress protest. Barricades were set up around the Assembly premises to prevent Congress workers from reaching the protest site, while route diversions severely

impacted traffic movement in the heart of the city.

The police citing curbs under Section 163 (power to issue an order in urgent cases of nuisance or apprehended danger) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that are in place in Lucknow, did not allow party workers to move ahead from the party Mall Avenue office.

The workers who came out of the office tried to break the barricades and move towards the Assembly but their bid was foiled by the heavy police force deployed there. Rai also tried to scale a barricade and briefly fainted on the road after which he was helped by party workers to regain consciousness. Police said 28-year-old Prabhat Pandey, a native of Gorakhpur, was brought dead to the hospital from Congress office.

Rai on X said: "This incident is extremely sad and condemnable. Our Congress family is hurt and angry by this accident. We will not tolerate this incident at all."

Rai, Pande and other leaders were earlier seen outside the party office addressing workers, but they were restrained by the police as they tried to head for the siege.

The action continued outside the office for about four hours after which the police detained the leaders.

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to address UN on World Meditation Day

AGENCIES

Bangalore, Dec 18: Global spiritual leader and humanitarian Sri Sri Ravi Shankar will guide a live world meditation December 21, following the unanimous adoption of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution declaring 21 December as the World Meditation Day. This historic event establishes an annual global celebration of meditation, recognising its transformative benefits for mental and physical health, as well as its power to foster peace and unity.

Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in New York is marking the first-ever World Meditation Day at the United Nations headquarters December 20. The commemorative event at the United Nations will feature a keynote address by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. This momentous occasion, themed "Meditation for Global Peace and Harmony," would mark the First World Meditation Day.



"The recognition of meditation by the United Nations is a profound step forward," said Ravi Shankar. "Meditation nurtures the soul, calms the mind, and offers a solution to modern challenges," he added.

Cong worker dies of 'tear gas smoke' during protest



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Guwahati, Dec 18: A Congress worker was killed and several others were injured in tear gas shell smoke during a protest Wednesday against a range of issues, including unrest in Manipur and bribery charges against Adani Group, the party claimed.

A senior police officer, however, said the exact reason for the death will be known after the post-mortem examination report comes, and denied that anyone was injured in the incident.

Police and Congress supporters were engaged in a scuffle, in which Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah and former Rajya Sabha MP Ripun Bora fell on the ground, and were detained.

They were released later. Congress Legal Cell member Advocate Mridul Islam (45) felt suffocated when a tear gas cell fell near him, party spokesperson Bedabrat Bora claimed.

POST OF THE DAY



HISTORIC! Arvind Kejriwal announces that if AAP wins Delhi, Healthcare of every senior citizen over the age of 60 will be free in both government and private hospitals. First of its kind announcement in the country. This is a game changer.

@RoshanKrRaii

SHORT TAKES

Out on bail, rape accused kills victim

Unnao (UP): A 27-year-old man accused of raping his sister-in-law has been arrested after a brief encounter for allegedly killing her and trying to burn her body in Uttar Pradesh's Unnao district, police said Wednesday. Asiwani police station SHO Ajay Kumar Singh said Rohit, who is out on bail, murdered his 40-year-old sister-in-law on Monday night and attempted to burn her body in a field 50-metre from her house.

PM Modi to visit Kuwait Dec 21-22

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Kuwait Saturday on a two-day trip to further strengthen "multifaceted" ties between India and the Gulf nation. It will be the first visit to Kuwait by an Indian prime minister in over four decades. Modi is paying the visit at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

Fire breaks out in Udaan Bhawan

New Delhi: A fire broke out at the Udaan Bhawan office complex near Safdarjung airport in south Delhi Wednesday, an official from the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said. No injuries have been reported in the incident so far, they added. Udaan Bhawan houses multiple offices of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

ED arrests Kolkata industrialist

Kolkata: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) Wednesday arrested industrialist and owner of Concast Steel and Power Limited, Sanjay Sureka, in connection with a bank fraud case in neighbouring Jharkhand, an official said.

SNIPPETS

Manipur Cong holds 'Raj Bhavan march'

Imphal: A 15-member Congress delegation Wednesday called on Manipur Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at Raj Bhavan here and sought his intervention to restore peace in the ethnic violence-hit state, a party leader said. The state Congress also conducted a "Raj Bhavan march" as part of the party's nationwide programme against alleged "misrule" of the BJP-led Centre. Congress workers were stopped by security forces from marching towards the Raj Bhavan and engaged in a scuffle. Several Congress activists were injured after Rapid Action Force personnel baton-charged them.

Delhi's air quality nears 'severe plus'

New Delhi: Pollution levels in Delhi remained hazardous Wednesday as the air quality index rose to 448 at 6 pm, nearing the 'severe plus' category, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Of the 36 monitoring stations in the city, 32 recorded AQI in the 'severe plus' category, while the readings surpassing 480 at several locations, creating an extremely hazardous environment for residents. The remaining stations reported 'severe' air quality.

2 monkeypox cases reported in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram: Two cases of Monkeypox (Mpox) have been reported in Kerala, state Health Minister Veena George said Wednesday. Two men, who recently returned to Kerala from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), tested positive for the disease, the minister said. One of the men, a resident of Wayanad district, was initially found to be infected, while the second individual, from Kannur, tested positive later, according to her statement. Both patients are currently undergoing treatment at Pariyaram Medical College in Kannur.



Hamida Bano, an Indian woman who was living in Pakistan for the last 22 years, at her residence after returning to India via the Attari-Wagah Border in Mumbai. Bano was fraudulently taken to Pakistan by a travel agent with the promise of a job in Dubai

PTI PHOTO

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES

Govt plans to make agri residue burning punishable

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: The government plans to make open burning of agricultural waste punishable with a heavy fine and empower sanitation workers to impose penalties on individuals and establishments for unsegregated waste.

It is also focusing on improving waste management practices in rural areas, creating a robust monitoring system, and addressing legacy waste.

According to the draft Solid Waste Management Rules 2024 issued December 9, the local body will be required to ensure there are no instances of "burning of agriculture and horticulture waste and levy heavy

penalty on persons involved". Objections and suggestions from stakeholders have been invited. The rules will come into force October 1 next year. The Centre last month doubled the fine for farmers burning crop residue in view of poor air quality in the Delhi-NCR region in winter months.

Farmers with less than two acres of land now have to pay environmental compensation of ₹5,000, up from ₹2,500. And those with land between two and five acres are fined ₹10,000 instead of ₹5,000.

Unfavourable meteorological conditions combined with vehicular emissions, paddy-straw burning, firecrackers, and other local pollution sources contrib-



ute to hazardous air quality levels in Delhi-NCR during late autumn and winters. Major factors behind stubble burning include the paddy-wheat cropping sys-

tem, cultivation of long-duration paddy varieties, mechanised harvesting that leaves standing crop stubble in the field, labour scarcity, and the lack of a viable

The Centre last month doubled the fine for farmers burning crop residue in view of poor air quality in the Delhi-NCR region in winter months

market for crop residue. Studies estimate that during peak burning periods, farm fires contribute up to 30 per cent of PM levels in the Delhi-NCR region and surrounding areas.

government seeks to "empower safai karamcharis to levy fines/penalty on unsegregated waste and to re-

fuse collection". The draft rules require waste to be segregated into four distinct categories: wet waste, dry waste, sanitary waste (such as diapers and sanitary napkins), and special care waste (including hazardous materials).

In contrast, the 2016 rules only required segregation into three streams - biodegradable, non-biodegradable, and hazardous.

According to the draft rules, local bodies will be required to implement digital tracking systems and geo-tag waste management facilities. They will be responsible for developing and maintaining online portals for reporting waste management data.

international



Folks have said to me that they're not sure whether they have the strength, much less the desire, to stay in the fight. But let me be very clear. No one can walk away. We must stay in the fight. Every one of us

KAMALA HARRIS | VICE PRESIDENT, US

WORLD'S OLDEST SUNDAY NEWSPAPER SOLD

The owner of Britain's Guardian newspaper confirmed Wednesday that it has sold the Observer, the world's oldest Sunday newspaper, to Tortoise Media for an undisclosed fee



of the day quote

We continue to be very ambitious about the US-India relationship. We've had very high-level engagement over the course of the last several months with the QUAD summit in Delaware, and we are anticipating a high-level engagement in the last few weeks of the Biden administration

KURT CAMPBELL | DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE, US

We have been able to raise the tax threshold of pay as you earn (PAYE tax) so that those who have bigger incomes pay more while those who earn pay less

ANURA KUMARA DISSANAYAKE | PRESIDENT, SRI LANKA

Europe needs to find the leverage to act. If Europe cannot exert leverage on a country of 3.7 million, how can it expect to compete with the giants of the 21st century

SALOME ZOURABICHVILI | PRESIDENT, GEORGIA

SHORT TAKES

Unpaid taxes: Tate told to pay \$2.5 mn

London: A British court ruled Wednesday that police can seize more than 2 million pounds (\$2.5 million) to cover years of unpaid taxes from influencer Andrew Tate and his brother Tristan. The Devon and Cornwall Police force went to court to claim the money, held in seven frozen bank accounts, from the Tates and a woman identified only as J. At Westminster Magistrates' Court, chief magistrate Paul Goldspring ruled that financial transactions by the brothers, including transferring almost USD 12 million into an account in the name of J, were a "straightforward cheat" of the tax authorities. A lawyer for the force said that the Tates were "serial" tax evaders who failed to pay any tax on 21 million pounds in revenue from their online businesses, including War Room, Hustlers' University, Cobra Tate and OnlyFans, between 2014 and 2022.

Vanuatu quake: 14 dead, hundreds hurt

Wellington: A magnitude 7.3 earthquake that struck off Vanuatu killed at least 14 people, injured hundreds more and caused widespread damage across the South Pacific island nation, officials said Wednesday, with the figure expected to rise. Frantic rescue efforts began after the quake hit early Tuesday afternoon, and rescuers worked through the night to reach people yelling for help from under the rubble, with some dramatically rescued and others still trapped. A near total telecommunications collapse meant little was known about conditions outside the largest city and people struggled to contact the missing.

Boat capsizes in Congo, 25 dead

Kinshasa(Congo): An overcrowded boat capsized on a river in central Congo Tuesday, killing at least 25 people, including children, and leaving dozens missing, officials and local residents said. The vessel was believed to have more than 100 passengers on board after leaving from the town of Inongo, northeast of the capital of Kinshasa. It capsized a few hundred metres (yards) into the journey along the Fimi River, the latest such tragedy to strike Congo. A search was underway for the missing hours later Tuesday as concerns rose that the death toll could be far higher.

'MACHINERY OF DEATH' UNDER ASSAD

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are estimated to have been killed since 2011, when Assad's crackdown on protests against him spiralled into a full-scale war

REUTERS

Qutayfah, Syria, Dec 18:

An international war crimes prosecutor said Tuesday that evidence emerging from mass grave sites in Syria has exposed a state-run "machinery of death" under toppled leader Bashar al-Assad in which he estimated more than 100,000 people were tortured and murdered since 2013.

Speaking after visiting two mass grave sites in the towns of Qutayfah and Najha near Damascus, former US war crimes ambassador at large Stephen Rapp told Reuters, "We certainly have more than 100,000 people that were disappeared into and tortured to death in this machine." "I don't have much doubt about those kinds of numbers given what we've seen in these mass graves."

"We really haven't seen anything quite like this since the Nazis," said Rapp, who led prosecutions at the Rwanda and Sierra Leone war crimes tribunals and is working with Syrian civil society to document war crimes evidence and

Mass graves unearthed



is helping to prepare for any eventual trials.

"From the secret police who disappeared people from their streets and homes, to the jailers and interrogators who starved and tortured them to death, to the truck drivers and bulldozer drivers who hid their bodies, thousands of people were working in this system of killing," Rapp said.

"We are talking about a system of state terror, which became a machinery of death." Hundreds of thousands of Syrians are estimated to have been killed since 2011, when Assad's crackdown on protests against him spiralled into a full-scale war.

Both Assad and his father Hafez, who preceded him as president and died in 2000, have long been accused by rights groups and governments of

I don't have much doubt about those kinds of numbers given what we've seen in these mass graves. We really haven't seen anything quite like this since the Nazis

STEPHEN RAPP | FORMER US WAR CRIMES AMBASSADOR

INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON MISSING PERSONS SAYS 150,000 CONSIDERED MISSING

ASSAD ALWAYS DENIED GOVERNMENT COMMITTED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

widespread extrajudicial killings, including mass executions within the country's prison system and using chemical weapons against the Syrian people. Assad, who fled to Moscow, had repeatedly denied that his government committed human rights violations and painted his detractors as extremists.

The International Commission on Missing Persons in The Hague separately said it had received data indicating there may be as many as 66, as yet unverified, mass grave sites

in Syria. More than 150,000 people are considered missing, according to international and Syrian organisations, including the United Nations and the Syrian Network for Human Rights, it said.

Commission head Kathryne Bomberger told Reuters its portal for reporting the missing was now "exploding" with new contacts from families. By comparison, roughly 40,000 people went missing during the Balkan wars of the 1990s. The commission called for sites to be protected so that

evidence was preserved for potential trials, but the mass grave sites were easily accessible Tuesday.

SATELLITE IMAGERY

Satellite imagery analysed by Reuters showed large-scale digging began at the location between 2012 and 2014 and continued up until 2022. Multiple satellite images taken by Maxar during that time showed a digger and large trenches visible at the site, along with three or four large trucks.

Details of Syria's mass graves first emerged during German court hearings and US congressional testimony in 2021 and 2023. A man identified only as "the grave digger" testified repeatedly as a witness about his work at the Najha and Qutayfah sites during the German trial of Syrian government officials.

While working in cemeteries around Damascus at the end of 2011, two intelligence officers showed up at his office and ordered him and his colleagues to transport and bury corpses. He testified that he rode in a van adorned with pictures of Assad and drove to the sites several times a week between 2011 and 2018, followed by large refrigeration trucks filled with bodies.

"Every week, twice a week, three trailer trucks arrived, packed with 300 to 600 bodies of victims of torture, starvation, and execution from military hospitals and intelligence branches around Damascus," he told Congress in a written statement.

Suspect detained over killing of top Russian general

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Moscow, Dec 18: Russia's security service said Wednesday that it has detained a suspect in the killing of a senior general in Moscow.

The suspect was described as an Uzbek citizen recruited by Ukrainian intelligence services.

Lt Gen Igor Kirillov was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service levelled criminal charges against him. His assistant also died in the attack. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.



Russia's Federal Security Service, or FSB, didn't name the suspect, but said he was born in 1995. According to a statement by the FSB, the suspect said himself that he was recruited by Ukrainian special services. AP can't confirm the conditions under which the suspect spoke to the security services.

The FSB said the suspect had been promised a reward of USD 100,000 and permission to move to a European Union country in exchange for killing Kirillov.

Israeli military orders another Gaza evacuation



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jerusalem, Dec 18: The Israeli military Wednesday ordered another evacuation in central Gaza ahead of an offensive in the area, even as Israel and the militant group Hamas appeared to inch closer to a ceasefire in the 14-month war.

"This is an advance warning ahead of an offensive," Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee posted on X. The order included four residential block areas in the urban refugee camp of Bureij, where Adraee claimed that Palestinian militants fired rockets toward Israel.

He asked the residents to move to a "humanitarian zone" in the Muwasi area. The Israeli media have issued frequent evacuation orders for different parts of Gaza throughout the war, displacing more than 90% of the population, most of them multiple times. Israeli President Isaac Herzog said

he will meet Wednesday with US President-elect Donald Trump's Mideast envoy, Adam Boehler, at his home in Jerusalem. Boehler, a former aid to Jared Kushner, met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this week.

Talks to broker the ceasefire and hostage release deal have restarted after a months long pause. The deal on the table includes a six week pause in fighting in which Hamas would release 30 hostages, including three of four dual Israeli-US citizens, in exchange for Israel releasing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Trump has said he wants a quick end to the war.

Israeli bombardment and offensives in Gaza have killed more than 45,000 Palestinians over the past 14 months, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The ministry's tally does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, but it says more than half the dead were women and children.

Biden administration reshapes H-1B visa rule

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Washington, Dec 18: The outgoing Biden administration has relaxed rules for H-1B visas that will make it easier for American companies to hire foreign workers with special skills and facilitate a smoother transition from F-1 student visas to H-1B visas, a move that is likely to benefit thousands of Indian tech professionals.

The most sought-after H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The rule, announced by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Tuesday, aims to provide greater flexibility to employers and workers by modernising the definition and criteria for special positions and non-profit and governmental research organisations that are exempt from the annual statutory limit on H-1B visas.

The changes will help US employers hire as per their business needs and remain competitive in the global marketplace, an official release said.

'MOST WANTED' LIST OF INDIA'S NIA

B'desh HC reduces ULFA leader's death sentence

Baruah, who is believed to be living in China, was sentenced to death after a trial in absentia in 2014 in a 2004 arms smuggling case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Dec 18: A Bangladeshi High Court Wednesday commuted the death sentence of ULFA leader Paresh Baruah to life imprisonment and acquitted a former junior minister and five others in a 2004 case of attempted smuggling of weapons to the separatist outfit in northeast India.

Baruah, who is believed to be living in China, was sentenced to death after a trial in absentia in 2014. His name also figures in the 'most wanted' list of India's National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Ten truckloads of weapons were seized in April 2004 despite alleged efforts of certain "influential quarters" for its safe passage to United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) hideouts in northeastern India through



Chattogram, which was then spelled as 'Chittagong'.

The seized weapons included over 27,000 grenades, 150 rocket launchers, over 11 lakh ammunition, 1,100 sub machine guns and 11.41 million bullets.

The two-member High Court bench reduced Baruah's death sentence to life imprisonment, said a government attorney at the bench.

The High Court bench comprising Justice Mostafa Zaman Islam and Justice Nasrin Akhtar acquitted former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar and six others, who were handed down capital punishment following the death reference hearing, he added.

The five others to escape the gallows are former director general of forces Intelligence (DGFI) retired major general Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury, former managing director of a state-run fertilizer plant (CUFL) Mohsin Talukder, its general manager Enamul Hoque, former additional secretary of industries ministry Nurul Amin and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Motiur Rahman Nizami.

The plant site was said to have been used for trans-shipment of weapons for ULFA.

Former chief of Bangladesh's National Security Intelligence ex-brigadier general Abdur Rahim, a former DGFI director as well, was also sentenced to death but he died a normal death in prison as the appeal and death hearing process was underway.

Nizami, a former minister in the past Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-Jamaat alliance government, however, was hanged several years ago on charges of crimes against humanity during Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War siding with the Pakistani troops while his party was opposed to the country's independence.

Xi visits Macao to mark 25 years of Chinese rule

Since the 1999 handover from Portugal to China, Macao has transformed from a monopoly-driven casino hub into the world's biggest gambling centre that's been flooded by tourists, mainly from mainland China

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Macao, Dec 18: Chinese President Xi Jinping Wednesday began a three-day visit to Macao to mark the 25th anniversary of the casino city's return to Chinese rule.

Xi and his wife, Peng Liyuan, were welcomed at the airport by a lavish ceremony



with lion and dragon dances. Xi told reporters that Macao, a former Portuguese colony of 687,000 people, is "the pearl in the motherland's palm."

"I believe that as long as we fully leverage the institutional advantages of one country, two systems,' dare to strive hard, and have the courage to innovate, Macao will certainly cre-

ate an even better tomorrow," he said.

Like neighbouring financial hub Hong Kong, Beijing has ruled Macao under the "one country, two systems" principle that allows the cities to retain their own Western-style legal and economic systems. Macao is the only city in China where casino gambling is legal.

Since the 1999 handover from Portugal to China, Macao has transformed from a monopoly-driven casino hub into the world's biggest gambling centre that's been flooded by tourists, mainly from mainland China.

Over the years, violent crimes linked to organised crime were brought to heel. Older residents generally considered their fortunes have improved under Chinese rule, pointing to better welfare and annual cash handouts backed by huge gaming tax reserves.

But following huge anti-government protests in 2019 in nearby Hong Kong, authorities have further tightened control in the city although political activism there did not pose the same threat to Beijing.

A vigil commemorating China's bloody 1989 military crackdown on the Tianan-

Xi visits Macao to mark 25 years of Beijing's rule

Xi will attend inauguration of Macao's new chief executive

Expected to push for further diversification of Macao's economy

men Square pro-democracy protests was banned. Pro-democracy figures were barred from joining the legislative election in 2021. Last year, the city toughened its national security law and vocal political dissent has largely been silenced.

China's leadership is more concerned about diversifying Macao's economy, which has been heavily reliant on the gaming and tourism sectors.

Its incoming leader Sam Hou Fai, who was elected by about 400 Beijing loyalists in October, said the economic

diversification is a key issue. The former top judge promised to accelerate plans to boost tourism and other sectors such as traditional medicines, finance, tech, exhibitions and commerce.

However, the city remains reliant on the gambling industry for revenues to support welfare programs and other goals laid out by Beijing, analysts say. Xi will attend the inauguration ceremony of the new government Friday and is expected to lay out his expectations for the city.

China has helped promote Macao's development by designating a special zone on neighboring Hengqin island in Zhuhai city that Macao and mainland Chinese authorities will jointly run.

Security has tightened during Xi's visit, including a ban on flying drones between December 14-22.

Business



Another slab in GST, in the name of luxury and sin goods is primarily a bad idea, which will defeat the very efficiency principle of taxation. Already, a need is being felt among economists that the present number of slabs should be reduced, and the highest 28 per cent slab be abolished

ASHWANI MAHAJAN | CO-CONVENOR, SJM

AIRTEL'S REMOTE EXPANSION

Bharti Airtel has become the first private telecom operator to launch mobile services in around seven border villages of Kupwara, Baramulla and Bandipore districts of Jammu and Kashmir, the company said Wednesday. Under the Vibrant Village Programme, Airtel has connected villages such as Kachhal, Balbir, Razdan Pass, Taya Top, Ustad, Kathi, and Cheema to the rest of the country



of the day **note**

Deeper integration into global value chains, enhanced digital trade infrastructure and a focus on building the competitiveness of MSMEs will help India more than double its share in global trade from the present 2 per cent

SANJAY BUDHIA | CHAIRMAN, CII NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON EXIM



While 2024 had started off on a strong note, geopolitical tensions, uncertainty over US elections outcome, and inflation weighed on the markets, as did the bid-ask spread between seller expectations and buyer valuations

VIVEK SONI | PARTNER, PE/VC



The decline in cotton exports is mainly due to a decline in production following lower acreage this year. The acreage for cotton crop has shrunk 35 per cent in the north cotton growing region (Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan) and by 15 per cent in Gujarat. This is going to keep the cotton prices steady compared to the global markets

ATUL GANATRA | PRESIDENT, CAI



SHORT TAKES

ESIC new members addition rises 3%

New Delhi: Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) registered a 3 per cent growth in new subscribers enrolments at 17.80 lakh in October compared year ago, according to payroll data released Wednesday. As many as 21,588 new establishments have been brought under the social security ambit of the ESIC (Employees' State Insurance) Scheme in October 2024 thus ensuring social security for more workers, a labour ministry statement said.

Pawan Hans secures mega deal from ONGC

Mumbai: State-owned helicopter services operator Pawan Hans Wednesday said it has secured a 10-year contract worth over ₹2,000 crore to provide four helicopters to ONGC for transporting its personnel to off-shore duty locations. Under the contract bagged through competitive global bidding, Pawan Hans will deploy four HAL-manufactured Dhruva NG helicopters for ONGC off-shore operations, the company said.

TRUMP 2.0

Trade troubles lurk

D-St extends losses into third session

Trump threatens to impose reciprocal tariffs on India

BSE SENSEX DECEMBER 18, 2024

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: Imposing reciprocal duties violates global trade rules but one has to follow a "wait and watch" approach to US President-elect Donald Trump's remarks on imposing reciprocal tariffs, a senior official said Wednesday.

US President-elect Donald Trump has said that India charges a lot of tariffs, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products.

Trump made these remarks Tuesday and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

"It will be very difficult to decipher from one or two sentences which Mr Trump makes but if I understood from what he was saying. His main intent is that reciprocity will matter in future. So if you are putting a tax on Harley-Davidson (bikes) we will also put a tax on your motorbike exports. So from that point of view, this will be in clear violation of the WTO (World Trade Organization) norms but there are instances when Mr Trump has used measures like Section 232 of the Tariff Act which allows the US to take unilateral measures against countries on national security grounds. So one will have to wait and watch and see," Director General of Foreign Trade (DGF) Santosh Kumar Sarangi said here at CII's export competitiveness event.

He said that there are many areas where India has tariff



peaks but the country does not necessarily export those to the US. For example, India has high customs duties on a number of agri goods but they are not necessarily exported to America.

"So if the US uses reciprocity and imposes taxes on that, it will not harm us in a major way but there could be a few items where this reciprocal principle thing might impact us," he said.

Further, he added, "So one has to wait and watch, how it is panning out and the fine print of this will be available only after they undergo a process like they have a process like they have a process where the US-TR (US Trade Representative) examines, investigates and recommends an action. Before guessing the impact, one will have to wait and watch as to which are the kind of products

India must be prepared to navigate potential challenges in the Trump era and not be caught off guard

AJAY SRIVASTAVA | FOUNDER, GTRI

that they are looking at."

The US was the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at \$77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at \$42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

In FY2024, India's top exports to the US included medicines (\$8 billion), Garments and Made-ups (\$7.5 billion), Cut and Polished Diamonds (\$5.6 billion), Smartphones (\$5.6 billion), Solar Cells (\$1.9 billion), Shrimps (\$1.7 billion), Gold Jewellery (\$3.3 billion), Auto Parts (\$2.1 billion), Steel (\$475 million), and Articles of Steel (\$2.8 billion).

Commenting on the Trump remarks, think tank GTRI said while Indian tariffs comply with WTO rules, the proposed Trump tariffs would violate them.

"Even though Trump's claims about Indian tariffs may be overstated, India can seize this

In 2019, Trump repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on American products. He has criticised India's "big tariffs" on American paper products and the iconic Harley-Davidson bikes

moment to strategically review its tariff structure. India's average tariff stands at 17 per cent, significantly higher than the USA's 3.3 per cent, but comparable to countries like South Korea (13.4 per cent) and China (7.5 per cent)," Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said that if Trump proceeds with unilateral tariffs against India, he will be violating the US commitments at the WTO on tariffs.

In this case, India should be ready to respond decisively, he said.

In 2018, when the US imposed tariffs on Indian steel and aluminium, India retaliated by increasing tariffs on 29 specific American products. This well-calibrated response ensured that India collected equivalent revenue from US imports, demonstrating its ability to safeguard trade interests while maintaining a balanced approach.



Stock	Change	Stock	Change
RELIANCE	+0.64%	TATA MOTORS	-3.03%
SUN PHARMA	+0.63%	POWER GRID	-3.56%
TCS	+0.55%	NTPC	-2.09%
TECH MAHINDRA	+0.50%	JSW STEEL	-2.02%
HCL TECH	+0.40%	ADANI PORTS	-1.79%

Benchmarks hit by foreign fund outflows; all eyes on US Fed's decision

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 18: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed on the back foot for the third straight session Wednesday as investors offloaded utility, capital goods and metal stocks amid foreign fund outflows.

Besides, investor sentiment remained subdued ahead of the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's policy meeting, scheduled for Wednesday, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 502.25 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 80,182.20, taking its downtrend to the third day. During the day, it tanked 634.38 points or 0.78 per cent to 80,050.07.

As many as 2,563 stocks declined while 1,442 advanced and 94 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty declined

137.15 points or 0.56 per cent to 24,198.85.

"The near-term market construct has turned weak, with FIIs turning sellers on rallies. Yesterday's massive FII sell figure of ₹6,410 crore in the cash market indicates that more selling is in store on market bounces. The focus of global markets today will be the Fed decision expected tonight. A 25 bps rate cut is priced in by the market. So, the attention will be on the Fed commentary," VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Tata Motors, Power Grid, NTPC, Adani Ports, JSW Steel, ICICI Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Bajaj Finance were the main laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹6,409.86 crore Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Falling for the second day in a row, the BSE benchmark tanked 1,064.12 points or 1.30 per cent to settle at 80,684.45 on Tuesday. The Nifty tumbled 332.25 points or 1.35 per cent to 24,336.

₹ lingers at lifetime low

Rupee falls 3 paise to close at all-time low of 84.94 against US dollar



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 18: The rupee dropped 3 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.94 against the US dollar Wednesday, as traders await cues from the US Fed on the interest rate front.

Forex traders said dollar demand from importers as well as foreign banks, foreign fund outflows and a muted trend in domestic equities further dented investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.92 against the greenback, and touched 84.95 during intra-day trade. The unit finally ended the session lower by 3 paise at an all-time low closing level of 84.94 against the dollar. On Tuesday, the rupee revisited

its all-time low closing level of 84.91 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on weak domestic markets and concerns over slowdown in the economy. A strong US dollar and FII outflows may further weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary -- Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. "USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.75 to 85.20," he added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.04 per cent at 107.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.60 per cent to \$73.63 per barrel in futures trade.

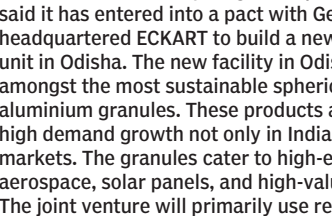
BIZ BUZZ

IMFA inks JV with JSW Green Energy



Bhubaneswar: Indian Metals & Ferro Alloys Ltd (IMFA), country's leading fully integrated producer of ferro chrome, announced a joint venture with JSW Green Energy to source renewable energy for its smelting operations. IMFA has signed a binding term sheet with JSW Green Energy One Ltd and JSW Green Energy Seven Ltd, and will invest ₹83.26 crore in a hybrid project that combines 50 MW AC solar and 100 MW wind for a total contracted capacity of 70 MW. The company will subsequently sign a power purchase agreement (PPA) as a captive consumer which will be valid for 25 years. Binoy Agarwalla, Vice President & Head - Power Business Unit said: "As a pioneer in the ferro alloys industry with backward integration into captive power, renewable energy is a key aspect of reducing our carbon footprint. By combining solar and wind power, we are taking a proactive step towards a green future and aligning with the global trend of sustainability." IMFA is putting up a 100,000 tonne per annum greenfield facility at Kalinganagar to augment its ferro chrome production in line with increasing demand.

Germany-based ECKART to set up Odisha unit



New Delhi: Metal recycling startup Runaya Wednesday said it has entered into a pact with Germany-headquartered ECKART to build a new aluminium powder unit in Odisha. The new facility in Odisha will produce amongst the most sustainable spherical atomised aluminium granules. These products are witnessing high demand growth not only in India but also in global markets. The granules cater to high-end applications in aerospace, solar panels, and high-value effect pigments. The joint venture will primarily use recycled aluminium and renewable energy sources for its production. This joint venture will serve Indian and global growth markets and leverage the country's position as a global hub for low-cost, cutting-edge manufacturing solutions. Runaya and ECKART have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to manufacture high-quality aluminium pigments, the company said in a statement.

Federal Bank inaugurates new branch in Cuttack



Bhubaneswar: Federal Bank has inaugurated its second branch in Cuttack, located in the Choudhury Bazar area. The branch was officially inaugurated by Sofia Firdous, MLA, Barabati Constituency, Cuttack, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The ceremony also saw the presence of distinguished guests including Baisampayan Kar, Retired District Judge from Odisha Superior Judicial Services, and Sabitri Devi Sharma, a prominent social worker, who joined as Guest of Honour. Senior bank officials, including Sabu RS, Senior Vice President & Zonal Head, Kolkata Zone, and Manoj Kumar Mahapatra, Deputy Vice President & Regional Head, Bhubaneswar Region, were also present during the event. With the inauguration of this new branch, Federal Bank aims to expand its reach and continue offering quality banking services to a wider audience in the region. The bank's expansion aligns with its strategy to provide better access to banking services for the masses.

Indian economy to grow 6.6% in FY26: Ind-Ra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) Wednesday projected the Indian economy to grow at 6.6 per cent in 2025-26, up from 6.4 per cent in the current fiscal year.

Ind-Ra believes investments will be a key growth driver for the Indian economy in FY26, like in FY22 and FY24.

The GDP growth till FY24 was impacted by the aftereffects of Covid-19, even the base effect impacted the quarterly GDP growth.

While the June quarter GDP growth of FY25 was impacted by the combination of a strong base effect and the general elections in May 2024, the growth in the July-September period witnessed the extended impact of weak private sector capex.

Ind-Ra believes that the Indian economy is facing monetary, fiscal, and external tightening.



While it expects monetary conditions to ease now, the fiscal and external tightening is expected to continue in FY26 as well, the agency said.

"Nonetheless, the FY26 GDP growth is expected to be same as India's best decadal growth (FY11-FY20)," says Devendra Kumar Pant, Chief Economist

and Head Public Finance, Ind-Ra.

Ind-Ra's said growth and inflation forecast could, however, be affected by any tariff war, and any capital outflow, if the dollar continues to strengthen.

Ind-Ra expects the retail inflation in FY26 to average at 4.4 per cent, lower than FY25

The Indian economy has experienced a cyclical growth slowdown in the past three quarters, which it expects to reverse from the December quarter

forecast of 4.9 per cent.

"The timing of rate cut would depend on how the forthcoming data -- arithmetic of the FY26 Union Budget, inflation trajectory and evolving domestic and global landscape -- gels with the RBI's flexible inflation targeting approach," Ind-Ra said.

Merchandise trade account is expected to remain in deficit of \$308 billion in FY26 (FY25: \$277.4 billion, FY24: \$244.9 billion), Ind-Ra said.

MARKET DEBUT

Mobikwik surges 86%, valued at \$474mn



Mumbai: Shares of India's Mobikwik soared 86% in their trading debut Wednesday, valuing the financial technology firm at about \$474 million, as investors bet on its prospects in a booming online payments market. The stock is currently trading at ₹518. It listed at ₹440 on the National Stock Exchange, nearly 58% above its offer price of ₹279. Investors had flocked to Mobikwik's \$67 million IPO last week, placing orders for about 120 times the shares on offer in one of the most heavily subscribed issues since late September. Mobikwik is the latest among a rising number of Indian firms to go public in a red-hot IPO market, where more than 300 companies have raised \$17.50 billion so far this year, more than double the amount raised in the same period in 2023.

Vishal Mega Mart jumps 41% to \$5.8bn



Mumbai: Shares of India's Vishal Mega Mart surged 41% in debut trade Wednesday, giving the budget retailer a valuation of \$5.8 billion as investors bet on the company's growth prospects and resilience to challenges faced by larger rivals. The stock, which listed at ₹104 on the National Stock Exchange, rose to ₹110.03. It had an offer price of ₹78. Vishal Mega Mart, which sells clothes for as low as ₹99 (just over \$1) and groceries, is a relatively small part of India's \$600 billion grocery and supermarket industry, which is dominated by Reliance Retail, DMart and Tata Group's Star Bazaar. The company has 70% of its stores in smaller cities where quick commerce is nascent, and also benefits from a rising number of customers in these cities who want to upgrade to branded products.

Net direct tax kitty grows 16.45% YoY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 18: Net direct tax collection grew 16.45 per cent year-on-year to over ₹15.82 lakh crore till December 17 this fiscal, buoyed by higher advance tax mop-up, government data showed.

Advance tax collection during the period rose 21 per cent to ₹7.56 lakh crore.

The collection includes corporate tax of over ₹7.42 lakh crore and non-corporate tax mop-up of ₹7.97 lakh crore.

Securities Transaction Tax (STT) of ₹40,114 crore was collected between April 1-December 17 of current fiscal year.

Gross direct tax collection, which includes corporate, personal income tax and STT stood at over ₹19.21 lakh crore, a 20.32 per cent growth over the collection in April 1-December 17, 2023.

THINKING CRICKETER

SAKYASEN MITTRA, OP

He had made up his mind to retire after India's win against Australia in Perth. However, Ravichandran Ashwin did not do so due to the persuasion of skipper Rohit Sharma. The latter had told the spinner that he may be needed for the pink ball Test in Adelaide. So Ashwin just postponed his decision for a brief while. But the 'thinking' cricketer that he is, Ashwin realised that the time has come for him to bid adieu to national aspirations. Ashwin also understood that India's next home series is quite far off... sometime after India's tour of England when he will be close to 40. Understanding that he is not indispensable any more for any of India's away series, Ashwin, who is now 39, decided to bid adieu.

And he did so gracefully. Probably he could have stayed on for the Melbourne and Sydney Tests where pitches tend to help spinners, but then there was also this realisation that the Indian team management now prefers batting all-rounders than those who bowl well and can bat a bit. This prompted him to hang up his boots.

But then how does one define Ashwin. The legendary cricket writer Sir Neville Cardus had once said 'scoreboard is a donkey'. So it would be wrong to judge Ashwin by statistics alone. Yes, stats are a part of the iconic status which Ashwin have achieved. But then there is this 'thinking' aspect which really makes Ashwin stand out.

Here was a cricketer who was constantly innovating and changing. As a bowler, Ashwin was constantly adding to his armoury. He developed the 'away floater' which EAS Prasanna bowled so successfully, then came the 'doosra' and finally Ashwin added the carom ball to his repertoire. He used the crease well and at times bowled from two steps behind the umpire to puzzle the batters. He even bowled genuine leg-breaks and once even used the bouncer against a stubborn Australian batter. But what made him stand out was his ability to come out with new tricks in the constantly innovating world cricket. It helped him hold on to his place for 16 years... no easy feat.

Look at his batting exploits too. Ashwin has six Test centuries under his belt, and in fact is among the 11 cricketers to have achieved the distinction of scoring 3,000-plus runs and picking up 300 wickets in Tests. The two other Indians to have achieved the feat are Kapil Dev and Ravindra Jadeja. He is the 76th cricketer to have played in more than 100 Tests, 13th among Indians and the first from Tamil Nadu. But the man that he is, these are just figures to Ashwin. A few months back, Ashwin had said in an interview that he enjoys Test cricket as it 'gives him a high'. He couldn't have been closer to the truth.

Ashwin's departure from the Indian team was as un-dramatic as his bowling. He would quietly eat up a batter, slowly snaring him into a trap before the victim surrendered. His departure was equally dramatically un-dramatic. Dramatic because the announcement was sudden, un-dramatic simply because of the matter-of-fact way that he announced his retirement.

"This will be my last day as an Indian cricketer in all formats at the international level," Ashwin said with Rohit by his side. "I do feel there's a bit of punch left in me as a cricketer, but I would like to express that and probably showcase that in club-level cricket, but this will be the last day (for India). He also said he would return to India immediately.

"I've had a lot of fun. I must say I have created a lot of memories alongside Rohit and several of my other teammates, even though I have lost some of them from the India team over the last few years. We're the last bunch of OGs, if we can say that, left out in the dressing room, and I will be marking this as my date of having played at this level," Ashwin stated.

"Obviously there are a lot of people to thank, but I would be failing in my duties if I didn't thank the BCCI and fellow teammates. Several of them. I want to name a few of them. All the coaches who have been part of the journey. Most importantly, Rohit, Virat (Kohli), Ajinkya (Rahane) and (Cheteshwar) Pujara, who have taken those splendid catches around the bat to give

You can play T20, you can play ODIs, but there is nothing close to playing a Test match for your country. If you have won a hard-fought Test match, I don't think there is any better feeling. You can actually be high on a Test match - that's how good it is

RAVICHANDRAN ASHWIN

me the number of wickets I've managed to get over the years. But sorry, I won't be taking any questions. I am not in an emotional state of mind to answer any questions," he signed off.

Typical of the man... straight from the heart, yet blunt and brusque. There will not be another like him.



Tributes pour in

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Dec 18: Luminaries from the world of cricket doffed their hats Wednesday to 'all-time great' Ravichandran Ashwin after he announced his international retirement. Here's what they had to say on various social media platforms.

Sachin Tendulkar: From perfecting the carrom ball to contributing crucial runs, you always found a way to win. Your journey shows that true greatness lies in never being afraid to experiment and evolve. Your legacy will inspire one and all.

Virat Kohli: I've played with you for 14 years and when you told me today you're retiring, it made me a bit emotional and the flashbacks of all those years playing together came to me. I've enjoyed every bit of the journey with you Ash, your skill and match-winning contributions to Indian cricket are second to none.

Anil Kumble: Your journey has been nothing short of extraordinary! With over 700 international wickets and a keen cricketing mind, you are one of the finest to have

graced the field. Congratulations on a stellar career, and here's to an even brighter future off the field!

Roger Binny (BCCI president): From being a prodigious talent to becoming one of the greatest off-spinners in cricketing history, his achievements are a source of immense pride. He redefined spin bowling and always sought to stay ahead of the curve. Ashwin is a perfect role model for young cricketers.

Gautam Gambhir: The privilege of seeing you grow from a young bowler to a legend of modern cricket is something that I wouldn't trade for the world! I know that generations of bowlers to come will say that I became a bowler coz of Ashwin! U will be missed brother.

Ravi Shastri: Hey Ash, congratulations on a magnificent career, old boy. You were an invaluable asset during my tenure as coach and enriched the game immensely with your skill and craft. God bless.

Ajinkya Rahane: Standing at slip was never a dull moment with you bowling, every ball felt like a chance waiting

to happen. All the best for your next chapter!

Virender Sehwag: Congratulations @ashwinravi99 on a magnificent career. You were a genuine match-winner and to finish as the second highest wicket taker for us in Test cricket is a monumental achievement.

Cheteshwar Pujara: Your dedication and contribution to Indian cricket, consistently over a long period of time, will be etched in history, as one of the best to have represented the country! Over the years, we have shared countless memories on and off the field; and your decision today suddenly brings a lump in the throat...

Harbhajan Singh: Your ambition as a Test cricketer was admirable. Well done for being the flag-bearer of Indian spin for more than a decade. Be very proud of your achievements and hopefully see you more often now.

Dinesh Karthik: A GOAT retires. Well done on what's been an outstanding career. Proud to have played with you and definitely the greatest ever to have played from TAMIL NADU.

Pat Cummins: He's obviously been a fantastic player all around the world - there aren't that many finger spinners that have that kind of longevity. He'll go down as one of the greats.

FIGURES TO HAIL



765 international wickets: Ashwin's career tally is the second most by an Indian. Anil Kumble leads the list with 953

537 Test wickets: Only Indian after Kumble to have taken 500 or more Test wickets

302 bowled-LBW dismissals: Ashwin is one of three bowlers to record more than 300 bowled-lbw dismissals in international cricket, behind Muttiah Muralidaran's 336 and James Anderson's 320.

37 Test five-wicket hauls: Ashwin holds the record for most Test five-wicket hauls in an innings by an Indian.

11 Player of the Series awards: Ashwin holds the record for most Player of the Series in the history of men's Test cricket.

5 wicket haul and century in the same Test: Ashwin is one of just four Indians - the others being Vinoo Mankad, Polly Umrigar and Ravindra Jadeja to have taken a fiver and scored a century in the same Test. He has done it four times, which is the most by any Indian and the second most by any player after Ian Botham's five.

3K runs and over 300 wickets: Second Indian to have achieved the distinction in Tests after Kapil Dev. Jadeja has recently joined the club.

Vinicius Jr, Bonmati win FIFA best player of the year awards



Doha, Dec 18: Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior finally got his hands on a big global player award Tuesday.

Vinicius was named the men's player of the year at the FIFA's 'The Best' awards, where Barcelona playmaker Aitana Bonmati continued to clean up in the prizes for women's soccer.

The 24-year-old Vinicius was so disappointed to lose out to Manchester City midfielder Rodri for the Ballon d'Or in October that he and his Madrid team snubbed the ceremony in Paris in protest.

This time Rodri ended up second to Vinicius by five points. The Brazil forward was at the FIFA ceremony to collect his award having travelled to Doha Monday with Madrid for the Intercontinental Cup final



against Pachuca.

"I don't even know where to begin," Vinicius said in Portuguese. "It was so far away that it seemed impossible to get here. I was a kid who only played football barefoot on the streets of São Gonçalo, close to poverty and crime. Getting here is something very important to me. I'm doing it for many children who think that everything is impossible and who think they can't get here."

Bonmati won the award for best women's player of the year making it back-to-back prizes at FIFA's version of the older and more prestigious Ballon d'Or prize.

The 26-year-old Spain midfielder has won the Ballon d'Or for two straight years, and won the Spanish league, Spanish cup and Champions League with Barcelona in 2024.

Marta first recipient of Marta Award

Doha: Marta won the inaugural FIFA award for the best goal in women's soccer - named after the Brazil great. The 38-year-old was given the Marta Award at FIFA's "The Best" awards Tuesday for her goal for Brazil in an international friendly against Jamaica in June. Prior to this year, the Puskas award covered all of soccer but it was decided to award it to the best goal in the men's game - won this year by Manchester United forward Alejandro Garnacho - and create the new 'Marta Award' for the women's game. "To compete against so many great players - we had some fantastic goals," she said. "It's been a wonderful season, too. But I'm even happier to receive an award that bears my name; this is undoubtedly the greatest honor." Marta is widely regarded as the greatest female soccer player of all time and had won the award for the women's player of the year on a record six occasions. She scored a record 119 goals for Brazil in 185 appearances for her country, spanning six World Cups and six Olympics, before retiring from international soccer after the Paris Games - where Brazil lost to the United States in the final.



THIRD INDIA-AUSTRALIA TEST ENDS IN A DRAW

RAIN PLAYS SPOILSPORT AGAIN

The absorbing series is nicely poised going into the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Brisbane, Dec 18: India escaped with a crucial draw in the weather-hit third Test against Australia after intermittent rain wiped out majority of play on day five, leaving the five-match series tantalisingly locked at 1-1.

Resuming the day at 252 for nine, India batted for 24 balls and were all out for 260 in their first innings.

With limited time left in the day to force a result after majority of the morning session was rained out, the Australian batters came out all guns blazing and stuttered to 89 for seven in 18 overs before making a brave declaration, giving India at least 54 overs to chase down 275.

Bad light and rain forced an early tea break soon after with India at 8 for no loss in 2.1 overs. The rain got heavier as the time passed and no play was possible thereafter.

India would have fancied chasing 275 on day five but weather helped them immensely in the game controlled by Australia.



Jasprit Bumrah (3/18) was brilliant as usual in the second innings with Mohammed Siraj (2/36) and Akash Deep (2/28) offering good support.

Australia's approach in the second essay was brave and questionable at the same time. Nathan McSwainey (1) and Marnus Labuschagne (4) went after balls outside the off-stump and perished while Usman Khawaja (8) and Mitchell Marsh (2) fell to good deliveries.

Wickets falling in a heap did not impact Australia's approach as they kept going for the big hits. Skipper Cummins chipped in with two sixes and as many

With just two matches remaining in the ongoing WTC cycle, India faces a near-impossible task to secure a spot in the final

fours before the declaration.

In the morning session, lightening and subsequent rain allowed only 24 balls to be bowled.

The warning of severe weather was flashed on the digital scoreboard at the Gabba shortly after India were bowled out for

260 in their first innings, handing Australia a lead of 185 runs.

Akash Deep (31) was the last man out, stumped off a Travis Head delivery, bringing an end to a 47-run stand with Jasprit Bumrah (10 not out). The duo had done well to avoid the follow-on on day four.

Players were asked to remain in the dressing room and fans were requested to take shelter away from the fence after the visitors were all out. The forecast was largely clear for Brisbane from Thursday onwards but the entire game has been adversely impacted by bad weather with rain forcing multiple stoppages for four out of five days.

Major concerns

Going into the fourth Test beginning December 26, India have major concerns in both batting and bowling department which they must address.

Barring KL Rahul, who has been India's stand-out batter on the tour, the star-studded line-up has not found a way to negotiate the threats posed by the Australian pace attack.

Skipper Rohit Sharma has been woefully short of runs and after the hundred in Perth, superstar Virat Kohli has struggled with ball outside the off-stump.