



Profuse praise

Actor Alia Bhatt 'spoils' her directors with hardcore professionalism, says filmmaker Vasana Bala

LEISURE | P2



Record homelessness

The number of people in United States experiencing homelessness reaches a new record this year

INTERNATIONAL | P10



Bank fraud

There has been a significant surge in bank fraud cases in the first half this fiscal with 18,461 incidents

BUSINESS | P11



A Reddy show

Nitish Reddy virtually bailed India out with his dogged maiden Test century, severely denting Australia's hopes of winning the match

SPORTS | P12

Afghan forces attack Pak; 19 soldiers dead

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kabul, Dec 28: Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said Saturday that its forces hit several points inside Pakistan in retaliation for deadly airstrikes last week.

A local media outlet shared that 19 Pakistani soldiers were killed in the attack.

Pakistan last Tuesday launched an operation to destroy a training facility and kill insurgents in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province. The strikes killed dozens of people, mostly women and children.

Comments from the Taliban Defence Ministry Saturday, posted on X, said its forces targeted Pakistani points that "served as centres and hideouts for malicious elements and their supporters who organised and coordinated attacks in Afghanistan." Ministry spokesperson Enayatullah Khwarzami gave no further information about the strikes, including how they were carried out and if there were any casualties on either side.

However, a pro-Taliban media outlet, Hurriyat Daily

News, cited ministry sources as saying that the strikes killed 19 Pakistani troops and three Afghan civilians. No one from Pakistan's Foreign Ministry was immediately available for comment.

People celebrated Afghanistan's retaliation in the country's southeastern Khost province, according to the organiser, Rasheedullah Hamdard.

Thousands turned out to show their happiness and assure the Afghan military of their support against Pakistan. Khost neighbours Paktika, which was targeted last week.

"All of them were chanting angry slogans against this action by Pakistan, such as death to Pakistan," Hamdard said. "All Afghans are brothers, so it is necessary that the nation and government show their pride in their blood."

Pakistani officials have accused the Taliban of not doing enough to combat cross-border militant activity, a charge the Taliban government denies, saying it does not allow anyone to carry out attacks against any country from its soil.



FROZEN DAL: A visitor takes pictures at the Dal Lake after the season's first snowfall, in Srinagar, Saturday. Normal life was thrown out of gear in Kashmir during the day as most areas of the Valley received snowfall, disrupting flight and railway operations

Three women Maoists nabbed in Malkangiri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Malkangiri Dec 28: The police Saturday arrested three women Maoists, carrying a total bounty of ₹8 lakh on their heads, in Malkangiri district, officials said.

Identified as Swapna alias Chandrama Khilo, Babita alias Kamala Khilo and Sunita Khilo, the three were arrested in Guma area under the jurisdiction of Chittrakonda police station.

Hailing from Dhakadapadar village in Jodambo police station area in the district, the trio was part of the Andhra Odisha Border Special Zonal Committee (AOBSZC) of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit.

Addressing a joint press conference DIG, South Western Range, Niti Sekhar and Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Bibekananda Sharma said that the three were involved in multiple cases of exchange of fire with security forces.

During the course of interrogation, it was found that they were planning to carry out more attacks on the security forces, they said.

Chandrama was an area committee member who joined the banned outfit in 2018. She was carrying a bounty of ₹4 lakh on her head in Odisha.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



I don't want to waste time reading your records, and you're too humble to tell me everything. So, how do we proceed?

Series mishaps in City leave 7 hurt



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 28: Hundreds of angry locals staged a blockade near XIMB Square here Saturday evening, leaving scores of commuters stranded on the Nandankanan-Jaydev Vihar stretch, after a SUV hit two vehicles. Seven people including a 5-year-old boy sustained injuries in the incident, said Rabinendra Narayan Behera, IIC Maitri Vihar police station.

The IIC said the accused driver has been identified as Subhankant Panda, 45. He was suspected to be under the influence of alcohol while on the wheels. His car (OD 02 BZ 9345) hit a stationary pickup van. As a result, it hit another auto-rickshaw parked nearby leaving a minor boy and six youths from the local slum injured. "They are undergoing treatment at a local hospital. Their condition is stated to be stable," added the officer.

Following the accident, the agitated locals, along with the minor boy's parents, staged a demonstration on road, demanding compensation from the driver. Thousands of commuters left stranded on roads connecting Jaydev Vihar Square, XIMB Square and Nandankanan. Despite immediate deployment of three platoons of police personnel, the tension couldn't be defused for over an hour.

Unseasonal rains claim two more farmer lives

Low pressure-triggered unseasonal rains continue to wreak havoc among the farming community in the state with two more deaths, one in Jajpur and another in Kendrapara, reported Saturday, taking the toll to five. The farmers are succumbing in shock after witnessing their ruined crops. Meanwhile, chorus is growing in the state for waiver of farm loans and purchase of all paddy, irrespective of their quality, from the farmers in the wake of massive damage caused to crops by the unseasonal rains. Addressing the farmers' woes, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi chaired a high-level meeting on crop loss assessment and announced that the affected farmers will be identified by December 30

POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur/Derabish, Dec 28: A farmer collapsed on his farmland and died while another died by suicide Saturday in Jajpur and Kendrapara districts, according to a report.

In the first incident, Maniram Mohanty, 62, at Manitapur in Chikana panchayat of Binjharpur block (Jajpur) collapsed and died after watching his harvested paddy and the rest standing crops lying submerged on the farmland in his village.

Whales, cats acted as spies through ages

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Birmingham, Dec 28: The death of a spy is rarely newsworthy, due to the secrecy surrounding it. But when a white beluga whale suspected of spying for Moscow was found dead in Norwegian waters in September, the animal soon became a minor celebrity.

Hvaldimir (a play on the Norwegian word for whale, hval, and the first name of Russian president) was even given an official autopsy by the Norwegian Directorate of Fisheries.

It had been uncovered as a spy in 2019, and is one in a long line of animals which have been used by the intelligence



His family members said Maniram visited his farmland Friday morning but plunged into distress after watching his harvested paddy and the rest standing paddy crops lying submerged in the rain water stagnating on his farmland. He tried to pick up some of the paddy shoots from the rain water but suddenly collapsed on the spot.

He was taken to the district headquarters hospital (DHH) where doctors declared him brought dead. Maniram was fully dependent on agriculture and had taken up cultivation on his three acre of farmland and two acre as a share-cropper.

Tehsildar Kailash Chandra Mahalik assured to inform the district Collector and take necessary steps to help out the family.

In the second incident, share-cropper Daitari Jena, 74, of Koshida in Khamol pancha-

CM SEEKS CROP LOSS REPORT BY DEC 30

BHUBANESWAR: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Saturday directed Agriculture officials to ensure that all farmers affected by the unseasonal rains get financial assistance and asked them to submit an assessment report by December 30. After receiving the report, the assistance money would be directly credited into the bank accounts of the farmers, he said in a statement. Chairing a high-level meeting to review the situation, Majhi said farmers of the state have sustained losses due to unseasonal rains since December 20. He appealed to farmers to submit to the government the details of their crop damage by December 29. Majhi also directed officials to conduct a massive awareness programme so that all the insured farmers can file claims with the insurance companies about the loss and damage to their crops within the stipulated time frame.

yat under Derabish police limits in Kendrapara first tried to end life December 18 after his crop loss due to unseasonal rain. Family members rushed him first to the DHH and later shifted him to the SCB Medical College and Hospital in Cuttack where he succumbed during treatment Saturday.

Earlier, three farmer deaths in last three days were reported from Ganjam, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur districts.

Manmohan cremated with state honours

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 28: Former prime minister Manmohan Singh was cremated with full state honours here Saturday in the presence of top dignitaries from India and abroad.

Singh's funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter Upinder Singh at the Nigambodh Ghat amid the chanting of religious hymns. The last rites were performed in the presence of President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as also top leaders of the Congress party including Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Mau-

ritius Foreign Minister Dhananjay Ramful were among the foreign dignitaries who paid tributes to Singh, who served as the prime minister from 2004 to 2014.

Singh, 92, died on the night of December 26. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla also paid their last tributes to the former prime minister and laid wreaths on his mortal remains.

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan and chiefs of the tri-services also laid wreaths.

Several chief ministers also attended the last rites of Singh. These included Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Telangana Chief

Minister Revanth Reddy, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, besides Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena.

Former chief ministers Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel were also present, apart from AICC general secretaries K C Venugopal, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Jairam Ramesh, Ran-deep Surjewala and several former Union ministers.

Before the mortal remains of Singh were consigned to flames, the security forces gave a 21-gun salute to the former PM.

Sikh priests and Singh's family members recited verses from the Gurbani before performing his last rites.

Delhi December rains shatter 101-yr record

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 28: Delhi recorded 41.2 mm rain in the past 24 hours till 8.30 am Saturday, marking the highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years, the weather department said.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the capital recorded the highest-ever rainfall on a single day in the month on December 3, 1923, at 75.7 mm. The rains also made December 2024 the fifth-highest in terms of monthly rainfall since records began in 1901, an official from the weather department said.

"The 24-hour cumulative

rainfall ending at 8:30 am today is the second-highest since 1901 at Safdarjung. The monthly rainfall is the fifth-highest. The 24-hour cumulative rainfall refers to the rainfall during the past 24 hours, ending at 8:30 am IST on the given date," the IMD official said.

Meanwhile, Delhi woke up to an overcast sky Saturday, with the weather department forecasting light to moderate rain and issuing a yellow alert for the day. An active western disturbance and its interaction with easterly winds are causing light to moderate rainfall/thunderstorms over North-west, Central India and Delhi-NCR.

Putin apologises over Azerbaijani plane crash



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Moscow, Dec 28: Russian President Vladimir Putin Saturday apologised to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people.

The plane was flying Wednesday from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land. There were 29 survivors.

In an official statement Saturday, the Kremlin said air defence systems were firing near Grozny on Wednesday due to a Ukrainian drone strike, but stopped short of saying one of these hit the plane. Friday, a US official and an Azerbaijani minister made separate statements blaming the crash on an external weapon. P10

leisure



DOWNTON ABBEY 3 MOVIE TO HONOUR MAGGIE SMITH

British legendary actor Dame Maggie Smith will be given a special tribute in the third *Downton Abbey* film, said executive producer Gareth Neame. He confirmed that the film will include a tribute to both the character and to Smith herself.

DUA LIPA'S LATEST RING PICTURES SPARK ENGAGEMENT RUMOURS

Dua Lipa shared festive photos on Instagram featuring a diamond ring on her left ring finger. This has attracted the attention of her fans who are speculating that the English-Albanian singing sensation may now have capped off her engagement with British actor Callum Turner.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
You will be indecisive today, which is not usually the case with you. Ganesha says this could lead you to indulge in speculation, which is not so bad unless you risk all your money in it. Besides, when it comes to matters of the heart, you must exercise a great deal of caution.

TAURUS
All is not likely to go well during this day says Ganesha. Though you will sail smoothly most of the day, problems are very likely to come up. At the professional level you are not likely to face obstacles or difficulties. Your relations with your parents turn awkward and unpleasant. You could be getting into a serious argument with them and thereby displease and disappoint them.

GEMINI
You will be surrounded by conflicts today. However, you will come to realise within a short while the solutions required to troubleshoot your way out of your difficult circumstances. You will desire solitude and peace so much so that you will not find even your family members welcome company, says Ganesha.

CANCER
Today, you will put your heart and soul into whatever task you take up. And, that's a great thing to do, says Ganesha. Don't lose heart though, if despite the best efforts, the results of your efforts are not too forthcoming. Feeling dejected is only going to hamper your progress.

LEO
You need to keep your temper in check and guard against being aggressive today. You need to channelise your energies towards some productive pursuits, otherwise you may make someone the target of your anger. The good thing about the day is you will make satisfactory progress on work related issues.

VIRGO
You are renowned for your leadership qualities and today they will be much appreciated for the way you manage your team. You will get a long-due promotion, and will come in for some extra cash. Ganesha says you received all this by wisely balancing work and home, so be careful not to slip up on this front.

LIBRA
Ganesha says beware of overspending today. Those of you having close ties abroad may find them beneficial. Ganesha says you should always remain optimistic.

SCORPIO
Socially, you enjoy being in limelight as all the eyes are focused on you. However, beware of evil eyes that may not have good intentions towards you. You are a good soul and never hurt anyone. But, at times, it's important to know your foe's weakness to be on the safer side.

SAGITTARIUS
Brace yourselves; the day has a lot of uncertainties today. First being financial. You may have to shell out money for unexpected expenses. But, this may also teach you to be economically independent. Always look at the brighter side, says Ganesha.

CAPRICORN
You will be a live wire, today. With amazing exuberance you have completed mammoth tasks and have spread the energy around. It will give you tremendous job-satisfaction, foresees Ganesha. Everything seems well and good the personal front, too. Spending some quality time your spouse will relax your mind and keep you in an upbeat mood.

AQUARIUS
You are a strong-willed person, and during the toughest of times you remain focused. A constant smile on your face and positive attitude will help you win the hearts and minds of people at work as well as at home. Such a feeling of contentment and happiness motivate you to do your best.

PISCES
Today you will feel like sharing you innermost feelings with those that you are close to. You will find yourself communicating better and this will result in attracting intellectual people towards you. You will get an opportunity to work with very educated and well established people. This will result in personal progress at work, says Ganesha.

ALIA 'SPOILS' HER DIRECTORS

MUMBAI: Filmmaker Vasan Bala, who collaborated with Alia Bhatt in the jailbreak thriller *Jigra*, recently shared his experience working with the *Raazi* actress, emphasising that she spoils her directors.

In an interview with *Mashable India*, Vasan said that every director should get a chance to work with Alia. The filmmaker said, "They will be spoilt and then unki agli film mein band bajegi (They will suffer in their next film)".

Explaining his statement, Vasan shared, "She has no entourage, nothing, she is always ready. Sometimes I didn't even

have to communicate how I want a scene, a gesture from my end would be enough for her to understand what I needed in that shot."

On the work front, Alia has some exciting projects lined up. The actress will be seen in YRF's first female spy film *Alpha* alongside Sharvari. She also has *Love & War* coming up with her husband Ranbir Kapoor and Vicky Kaushal. The film is being directed by filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali. She also has *Brahmastra 2*, by Ayan Mukerji lined up.



MUMBAI: Actress Nimrat Kaur recently reflected on the chapters of 2024 as she prepares to welcome the New Year.

Saturday, the *Airlift* actress shared her photos with the caption, "Bookmarking some chapters from the year gone by. A mix of firsts, memories for a lifetime, and raw adventures. But at their core, all carrying shades of love, wonderment, and pure gratitude. Thank you, 2024, for all things quiet, crazy, still, and hazy..."

In the first video, Nimrat is seen sitting on a plane as she records the clip. In another, she is seen inaugurating a memorial in honour of her father on his 72nd birth anniversary. She is also seen ice skating in a separate video.

Nimrat had earlier shared glimpses from her Christmas celebrations, writing in the caption, "Annual Christmas tradition, walking through Ranwar Village with love and lights all around... Merry Christmas, all." In the images, the Lunchbox actress is seen walking through the lanes of Ranwar Village. The streets were beautifully decorated and illuminated as part of the Christmas celebrations. The actress also took the time to interact with the locals in the village.

On the work front, Nimrat was last

seen in the film *Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video*, where she portrayed the character Bela Barot. Directed by Mikhil Musale, the mystery thriller also stars Radhika Madan, Bhagyashree, and Subodh Bhawe.

Reportedly, she has been cast in a key role in the upcoming film *Sky Force*, starring Akshay Kumar, Ali Khan, and Veer Pahariya.

Nimrat's reflections on 2024



MUMBAI: Actress Parineeti Chopra recently shared her thoughts on the boldness required for a winter evening hair wash, describing it as a special kind of "guts."

Taking to her Instagram story, the *Kesari* actress humorously reflected on the challenge of washing her hair during the chilly evenings, highlighting how the cold weather makes the task daring. Her playful take on the winter hair care routine has resonated with many of her fans. Parineeti posted a monochrome video of herself making goofy faces.

Alongside the clip, she wrote, "Winter evening mai hair wash is a special kind of GUTS."

Recently, the actress has been sharing glimpses from both her personal and professional life. Yesterday, the *Ishaqzaade* actress posted a glimpse of

her video call session with her husband, Raghav Chadha, and described it as a "soul-healing" experience.

Chopra also shared a series of photos reflecting on the whirlwind month of December. In her post, the actress revealed that the month was filled

with intense work, personal moments, and plenty of travel.

On the professional front, the 36-year-old actress was last seen in Imtiaz Ali's directorial *Amar Singh Chamkila* alongside Diljit Dosanjh.

Parineeti displays 'guts'



ABIKA MODEL CONTEST

Ipsita Nanda crowned 'Face of the Year'



BHUBANESWAR: In order to promote Odisha's traditional handlooms and support its weavers, 'Abika' annually organises a calendar model competition. This year, in its 5th season, Ipsita Nanda from Balasore was crowned as the 'Face of the Year-2025'.

The grand finale of 'Abika Calendar-5' competition was held at the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Research Centre Auditorium here. The winner was felicitated with a certificate, prizes, a memento, and a peacock feather by Ollywood actor Sabyasachi Mishra, director and producer Sthitaprajna Pattnayak and writer-publisher Saroj Bal.

In addition, nine participants, namely Sohani Smrutikripa, Sanvi Pani, Sai Priyans Das, Divyanshi Bhukta, Drisana Samantara, Priyam Priyanshi Behera, Saini Sanaya Behera, Sasmita Jena and Srinika Pal were recognised as the 'Face of the Month-2025'.

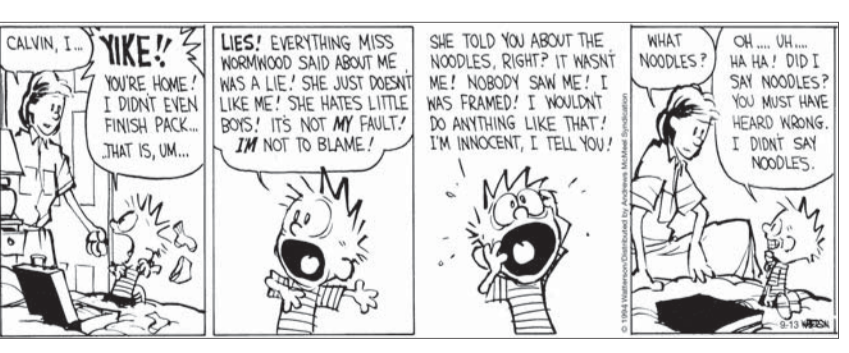
During the event, dignitaries expressed their support for the modernisation of Odisha's handloom sector and praised Abika's initiatives towards achieving it. The programme was hosted by poet, lyricist and playwright Bijay Malla, while Abinash Sahu, the director of 'Abika,' delivered the vote of thanks. The event was coordinated by Satyajit Mishra and Ashish Kumar Mishra.

PNN

PEANUTS



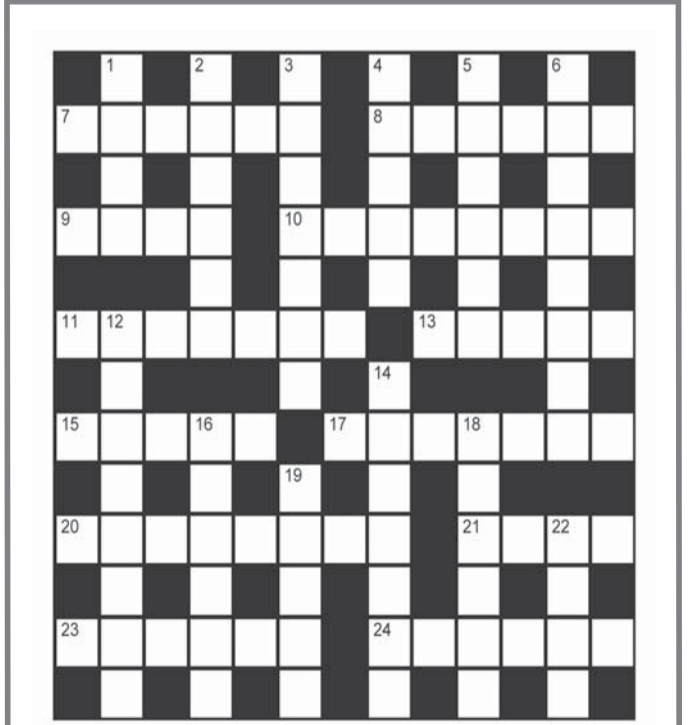
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



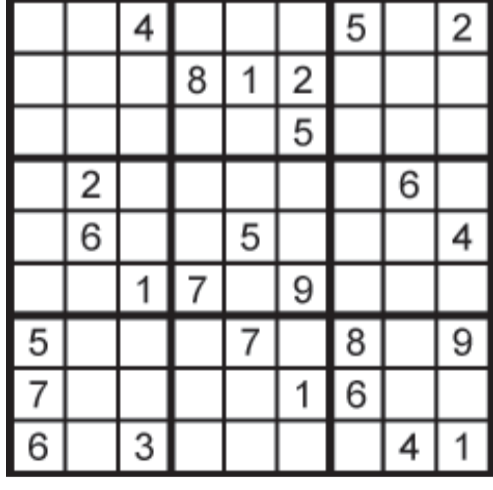
FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Big game fish
 - 8 Young and inexperienced
 - 9 Safecracker
 - 10 Generous gifts
 - 11 Salt shaker?
 - 13 Embankment
 - 15 Loon relative
 - 17 Rifle barrel diameter
 - 20 It flies during a parade
 - 21 Burlap fibre
 - 23 Roman statesman
 - 24 Simon Legree
- Down**
- 1 Narrative
 - 2 Saying
 - 3 Ignite
 - 4 Squash type
 - 5 Alpaca's donation
 - 6 French courtesy title
 - 12 Scornful and mocking
 - 14 Gorge
 - 16 Cushion
 - 18 Wound
 - 19 Posture problem
 - 22 Aquarium

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

Children perform during an event organised by Jay Jagannath Seva Samiti at Bali Yatra Ground in Cuttack, Saturday



downtown

₹1.38CR DIGITAL ARREST

UP woman, son held for duping City elderly

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 28: The Crime Branch of Odisha Police has arrested a woman and her son from Uttar Pradesh in connection with a digital arrest case wherein they duped a Bhubaneswar resident of ₹1.38 crore in May this year, official sources said, Saturday.



NEELAM AGGARWAL



VANSH AGGARWAL

“Neelam Aggarwal and her son Vansh Aggarwal have been taken into custody from Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh December 27. They were part of a wider network of cyber fraudsters,” investigators said.

About the crackdown, the Crime Branch said a senior citizen of Bhubaneswar approached the cyber police station May 22 this year alleging that he received calls from unknown numbers wherein the callers identified themselves as personnel from Fedex courier and Mumbai Cyber Crime.

“The callers claimed that the Bhubaneswar resident could be arrested and jailed for years as his Aadhaar details were found to have been used in money laundering. Calling it a way to evade arrest and settle the case as well as a method of identity verification, the crooks asked the senior citizen to transfer whatever money he has in his

bank accounts to accounts shared by them. They also assured that the entire amount would be transferred back to his account after completion of the verification process,” the investigators said.

“With no way out, the victim transferred around ₹1.38 crore in his and his wife’s accounts to multiple accounts of the fraudsters between May 14 and 18 this year,” they said.

After realising the fraud, the victim lodged a complaint with the cyber police who registered a case (28/2024) under Sections 419, 420, 465, 467, 468, 471, 384, 120-B and 34 of the IPC and 66C and 66D of the IT Act, 2000.

During probe, investigators learnt that ₹1.38 crore was deposited in three bank accounts. “Out of it, ₹1.12 crore was deposited in account of Vansheel Software Private Limited in Ghaziabad whose proprietors were

Neelam and Vansh,” they said.

A Crime Branch team, led by inspector Anila Anand, reached UP and arrested the two from Vijay Nagar police station area and brought them to Odisha on transit remand December 27.

“The duo had created around 13 accounts for siphoning off the defrauded amount. All the accounts were created at different branches of PNB and SBI in Meerut, UP. The accused were previously arrested by Mandir Marg Cyber Crime police station in New Delhi in a similar case this year where they defrauded a man of ₹63 lakh,” the investigators said.

On verification through National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP), it has been ascertained that the duo is involved in more than 15 cases in different states across the country, they added.



TAKING TO STREETS: CPI activists stage a demonstration at Raj Mahal Square in Bhubaneswar, Saturday, demanding immediate compensation for farmers who have incurred crop loss due to the recent unseasonal rainfall

Cong politicising Manmohan funeral: BJP

AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 28: The BJP Saturday accused the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi of “indulging in politics” over the funeral of former prime minister Manmohan Singh and alleged that the party has “insulted” its own leaders, including ex-PM PV Narasimha Rao, in the past.

Addressing a presser here, BJP national spokesperson and Puri MP Sambit Patra also attacked the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha for stating that the Narendra Modi government disrespected Singh by conducting his funeral at Nigam Bodh Ghat, whereas for other former PMs the last rites were performed at sites where memorials could be built later.

Patra also alleged that Congress had ‘insulted’ its leaders – Rao, ex-president Pranab

Mukherjee, first president Rajendra Prasad and former deputy PM Vallabhbhai Patel – in the past.

“Since Manmohan Singh’s death, the Centre has been preparing to construct a memorial for him. A Cabinet meeting was called and a condolence message was issued. It was also decided to pay proper respects to the former PM befitting his stature. The Cabinet has informed Singh’s family and the Congress that a memorial will be built so that everyone can remember his positive contribution. However, time is needed for land acquisition, forming a trust and other formalities. At the same time, cremation should be done as it cannot wait,” Patra said.

The BJP leader alleged that Rahul Gandhi had himself disrespected Singh by publicly tearing down a Cabinet note.

Singh had considered resigning from the post as Sonia Gandhi was ‘running a parallel government’, he claimed.

He alleged that the Congress has a history of insulting prime ministers who were not from the Nehru-Gandhi family.

“Former PM Narasimha Rao’s body was not allowed entry into the Congress headquarters in Delhi on instruction of Sonia Gandhi. The Congress did not allow Rao’s last rites in the national capital, so it was performed in Hyderabad. Some media outlets also reported that some stray dogs were moving around the body of the late prime minister. Such was the audacity of the Congress,” Patra alleged.

He alleged that the Congress did so to protect the Nehru-Gandhi family’s legacy.

Rao was the first non-Gandhi Congress PM who completed a

full five-year term but still the party did not construct a memorial for him despite being in power, he said.

“When BJP came to power, it built a memorial for Rao and also conferred Bharat Ratna on him. The Gandhi family gave Bharat Ratna only to its members,” Patra said.

Patra also mentioned the Congress’s alleged injustice to former president Pranab Mukherjee.

Gandhi, in a post on X, had said, “Dr Manmohan Singh ji has been insulted by the present government by performing his last rites today at Nigam Bodh Ghat. He was the prime minister of India for a decade, and during his tenure, the country became an economic superpower and his policies are still the support of the poor and backward classes of the country.”

Irregularities alleged in new hosp construction

Unholy contractor-official nexus seriously compromising construction quality at Bantilo PHC, allege locals



POST NEWS NETWORK

Astarang, Dec 28: The state government’s ambitious initiative to improve healthcare infrastructure has come under a cloud with allegations of severe irregularities in the construction of a new primary health centre (PHC) building at Bantilo in Puri district.

Despite investment of crores of rupees, concerns over substandard materials and practices have cast a shadow on the quality and durability of the project.

The project, undertaken by the Health and Family Welfare department, includes a doctor’s residence,

staff quarters, and perimeter fencing. However, reports suggest that the construction is advancing at snail’s pace, with accusations of improper practices being levelled against the contractor.

The main allegations include the use of soil instead of prescribed sand for filling, substandard bricks, inadequate steel reinforcement, and poor-quality concrete mixes. Locals fear these violations compromise the building’s structural integrity and long-term durability.

Residents like Abhimanyu Swain and Jitendra Baral have voiced their anguish, accusing departmental engineers of turning a blind

eye to the substandard work. They alleged that the contractor enjoys patronage of officials who are allowing malpractices to go unchecked.

“They used soil for filling the plinth overnight, instead of sand. This will lead to uneven settling in the future,” alleged Swain. Baral added that inferior materials, like low-grade bricks and improperly bound steel rods, are being used blatantly in violation of construction norms.

Meanwhile, the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) acknowledged receiving earlier complaints regarding the use of low-quality bricks. He said the issues had been rectified. He claimed that the present work adheres to prescribed standards.

On the other hand, locals appeared to be in no mood to believe in the official’s claims.

Several intellectuals and residents in the area demanded an investigation by the Vigilance and senior departmental officials into the alleged irregularities. They said only a thorough probe can uncover the suspected nexus between engineers and the contractor, ensuring accountability.

“This is public money meant for strengthening the healthcare system. If corruption compromises the quality of work, the entire purpose of the investment is defeated,” said a local activist.

Cotton Corpn of India CMD meets Singh Deo

Bhubaneswar: Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD) of Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), Lalit Gupta Saturday met Deputy Chief Minister and Agriculture Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo at Lok Seva Bhavan where various issues pertaining to cotton production, procurement and marketing facilities were discussed. Cotton cultivation has been taken up in 2.39 lakh hectares in the state this year, setting a target of producing 40 lakh quintals. The cotton produced in Odisha is stated to be the best in quality and is in high demand in the market. The CCI CMD also discussed the future perspectives of the corporation and the state government.

Fire Services inducts 10 dogs to help in rescue ops



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 28: For the first time in the country, the state Fire and Emergency Services Saturday inducted a team of 10 dogs to raise a dedicated canine squad that would assist its personnel during rescue operations. An official said the squad which will be named K9 features 10 dogs in the initial phase – three Belgian Malinois and seven Labrador Retrievers. The canines have been sourced from Rajasthan’s Dora district.

Fire Officer at Principal Training Centre in Naraj, Satyapir Behera

said the dogs will undergo rigorous training to assist in rescue missions, particularly in locating trapped people under rubble following natural calamities such as earthquakes and landslides, or any tragic mishaps.

“Based on their performance, the dogs will be recognised with ranks, promotions, and medals. This would acknowledge their contribution during rescue missions,” he added.

Behera said the proposal to introduce the K9 squad was mooted in the aftermath of Bahanaga train tragedy in 2023 where it took a three-day arduous search by the Fire personnel to trace bodies. “During such times, trained dogs played a crucial role in locating dead bodies trapped in complex locations,” he added.

Following completion of 54-week training, the dogs will be deployed in several districts across Odisha, such as Balasore, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, and Angul.

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"It is imperative that today's generation remain familiar with the heroes of our freedom struggle"
- Shri Narendra Modi
Hon'ble Prime Minister

You are Cordially invited to the Book Launch
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The Unsung Story of 1857

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Hon'ble Minister of Education,
Government of India

Guest of Honour
Shri Jayanarayan Mishra
Hon'ble MLA, Sambalpur

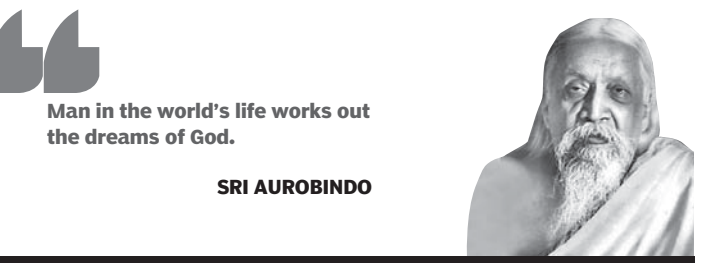
29 December 2024 | Time: 3:30 PM
Tapaswini Hall, Sambalpur, Odisha

CBC 21103/15/0065/2425

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	30.2°	27.8°
Min Temp	14.4°	14.5°
Humidity	81%	84%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST
Mainly clear sky



Man in the world's life works out the dreams of God.
SRI AUROBINDO

Old India Leader

Much has been written and will be written about what Manmohan Singh was. Here are a few lines on what he was not. Manmohan Singh was not a representative of New India. He was a leader from the older idea of India. He stressed inclusion and not division. If he brought up religion in his public speeches, it was not because of an attempt to malign and demonise particular groups and rouse the population against them.

To the new adult of New India, 18 years old and voting today but only 10 in 2014 and steeped in a decade of hate, this may come as a surprise but that was the established template of Indian leadership in the past. Manmohan Singh represented its finest aspects.

Singh was not heroic and not given to bombast. He did not refer to himself in the third person in his speeches. He did not wear suits with his name embroidered on them in gold pinstripes. He did not make much of his humble origins and when they came up he did not put himself and his village life in undivided India on some pedestal.

It is true that he did not flaunt his degrees but that was not because he wanted to hide something. Or that his resume contained fabricated material. There exist scholarships named after him at St John's College in Cambridge University, Nuffield College at Oxford University, where he earned his doctorate, has him on their website. His thesis there was published as a book titled 'India's Export Trends and Prospects for Self-Sustained Growth.'

Because he was steeped in learning and was not temperamental he was not inclined to consider deliberately damaging India's economy. Quite the opposite. He would have been horrified at the idea of intentionally gutting our growth by, for example, removing all currency from circulation on a whim. Gratuitously putting his people through torture was beyond him and he was incapable of actions that forced millions to migrate because of a midnight lockdown.

He was not decisive and not impulsive, which is a synonym for decisiveness — the ability to conclude without deliberation. He was thoughtful and intellectually deep. He was not ignorant of the way in which the world works. In March 2009, the Financial Times sent three editors to interview him. Their first question, which remains relevant today, was: "Do you agree with China on the failures of the global monetary regime and the case for a new reserve asset in place of the dollar?"

His reply, which remains relevant today, was: "Well these are not new issues. I was associated with the first committee of 20 with Paul Volcker in the 1970s. These issues have been discussed many times — moving to a neutral reserve asset. But there are complicated issues. The power to issue money is an indication of the power of a country and no-one gives up power voluntarily."

Manmohan Singh was unable to put party before nation unlike his predecessor. Consider this report published by a weekly magazine on 29 April 2002, titled 'How Vajpayee ended up as the Hindutva choir boy'. It reads: "No sooner had party President Jana Krishnamurthy completed his presidential address than Modi got up and said in his sombre, chaste Hindi: 'Adhyakshji, I want to speak on Gujarat ... From the party's point of view, this is a grave issue. There is a need for a free and frank discussion. To enable this I wish to place my resignation before this body. It is time we decided what direction the party and the country should take from this point onwards.' He didn't need to say more. With one stroke, the Gujarat chief minister had seized the initiative. He galvanised his supporters who now stood up to be counted. Food Minister Shanta Kumar, who had spoken out against Modi and the VHP's extremes, found himself being rebuked and facing a disciplinary committee. He was forced to apologise. Even if the prime minister may have thought Modi's resignation prudent for the sake of both his personal image and the unity of the coalition, there was absolutely no way he could go against the ferocity of the pro-Modi sentiment. He tried shelving the issue for a day but even this was resisted."

This is something for New India to consider when being told today that Singh was weak and unable to resist pressure. How will Singh be remembered by history? Quite warmly, one suspects.

In January 1949, a year after Gandhi had been murdered, George Orwell wrote an essay titled 'Reflections on Gandhi'. He ends it with these lines.

"But if, by 1945, there had grown up in Britain a large body of opinion sympathetic to Indian independence, how far was this due to Gandhi's personal influence? And if, as may happen, India and Britain finally settle down into a decent and friendly relationship, will this be partly because Gandhi, by keeping up his struggle obstinately and without hatred, disinfected the political air? That one even thinks of asking such questions indicates his stature. One may feel, as I do, a sort of aesthetic distaste for Gandhi, one may reject the claims of sainthood made on his behalf (he never made any such claim himself, by the way), one may also reject sainthood as an ideal and therefore feel that Gandhi's basic aims were anti-human and reactionary; but regarded simply as a politician, and compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!"

WISDOM CORNER

A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve, not by the desire to beat others.
AYN RAND

If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees.
KAHLIL GIBRAN

When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves.
VIKTOR E. FRANKL

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1865: Abolitionist crusader William Lloyd Garrison published the last issue of The Liberator.
- 1890: US troops under Colonel James W. Forsyth massacred more than 200 Sioux Indians in the area of Wounded Knee Creek, southwestern South Dakota.

FOCUS SUSTAINABILITY

ENERGY COEXISTENCE



Modernising energy grids to accommodate diverse energy sources and increase efficiency is critical, as is scaling carbon-capture and storage technologies to mitigate emissions



Richard Haass & Carolyn Kissane

THE PARADIGM OF ENERGY COEXISTENCE REQUIRES TARGETED INVESTMENTS AND POLICY REFORMS

Ideas, and the words we use to frame them, matter. For example, as the Cold War wound down, "the end of history" suggested that the disintegration of Soviet communism would leave liberal democracy and market economies unchallengeable. That idea took hold among Western policymakers, leading them to believe they could afford to relax. Three decades later, "the end of history," and the policies that followed from it, appears woefully misguided.

Today, it is "energy transition" that has gained a hold over policymakers. While the term suggests the necessity of shifting from fossil fuels to renewables — a seemingly compelling idea that aligns with climate goals and technological innovation — it inaccurately describes what is happening (and will happen) and has led some governments to adopt costly, counterproductive policies. And it has pitted goals that should be complementary — addressing climate change and promoting energy security — against each other.

To be clear, energy transitions — a move away from one form of energy to another — have occurred throughout history, coinciding with economic changes that created demand for the new energy source. After the Industrial Revolution began, the steam engine, the internal combustion engine, and the rise of manufacturing economies impelled societies to shift from wood to coal and later to oil and gas.

Support for a transition away from fossil fuels reflects concerns about the actual and predicted costs of climate change and the evidence linking the warming of Earth's atmosphere and oceans with the release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (especially methane) emitted by burning coal, oil, and natural gas. The goal of the transition is to achieve

"net zero" emissions (ideally by 2050) by phasing out fossil fuels and replacing them with renewables, including solar, wind, and nuclear power.

This is not occurring. Nor is "de-fossilization." Fossil fuels — oil, gas, and coal — still supply over 80% of global energy. Since 2013, global oil and gas consumption has risen by 14%, owing to a 25% increase in developing economies. Coal consumption remains indispensable in powering China, India, and other developing countries, and reached record highs in 2023. Renewables, while growing rapidly, are not displacing hydrocarbons, at least for now.

The reason is straightforward: energy demand is increasing at an annual rate of 2.3%, and technological advances like hydraulic fracturing (fracking) have made hydrocarbons cheaper and more abundant. The US, already the world's biggest oil producer, will produce even more during Donald Trump's coming presidency, and growing populations and economies in the Global South will sustain robust demand.

Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, electrified transport, and hyperscale data centers, are also driving

energy demand — which renewables alone cannot reliably meet, reinforcing the role of fossil fuels. Fossil fuels likewise remain indispensable for energy-intensive industries like aviation, shipping, and heavy manufacturing. Renewables, while effective for electricity generation, struggle to meet these sectors' needs. Regulatory considerations and politics have also contributed to foiling the energy transition by slowing the permitting process for both nuclear power and wind. And many countries have not overhauled their tax systems to steer consumers and businesses away from fossil fuels.

With the factors undermining the energy transition unlikely to disappear anytime soon, one option is to ignore the evidence and press ahead. This seems to be the preferred approach of many who gather at the annual UN climate-change conferences. In Dubai in late 2023, attendees issued a final agreement (signed by close to 200 governments) explicitly calling for "transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly, and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade."

Europe has committed to do just that, setting ambitious

targets for renewable energy and pricing carbon at levels that made energy and doing business more expensive. The European Green Deal, intended to decouple economic growth from resource use and make Europe the world's first carbon-neutral continent by 2050, instead contributed to a fall in growth. The lack of investment in energy also left much of the continent dangerously dependent on Russian gas. In short, the premature embrace of the energy transition weakened economic performance and energy security alike.

As Thomas Kuhn famously argued in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, dominant intellectual frameworks persist until their limitations become undeniable, paving the way for a new paradigm. The "energy transition" has reached that point. Its absence from the final draft of this year's global climate conference in Baku is telling. A new paradigm is needed: energy coexistence.

Such a paradigm would accept that energy consumption will continue to rise for the foreseeable future, with fossil fuels and renewables both playing a larger role. It is a question not of either/or, but rather both/and — all of the above and more of all — in order to achieve increased security, resilience, and affordability.

The paradigm of energy coexistence requires targeted investments and policy reforms. Modernising energy grids to accommodate diverse energy sources and increase efficiency is critical, as is scaling carbon-capture and storage technologies to mitigate emissions.

Richard Haass is President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations. Carolyn Kissane is Founding Director of the Energy, Climate, and Sustainability Lab at New York University.

SPECTRUM TAXATION

The complex world of GST

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced in India in 2017 with a vision to streamline the country's complex indirect tax structure, eliminate cascading taxes, and create a unified market. However, over six years since its implementation, GST remains a double-edged sword: while it has significantly improved tax compliance and boosted revenue, it has also given rise to challenges that some critics describe as "tax terrorism."

Tax terrorism refers to the perception of excessive, arbitrary, or burdensome taxation policies that create fear and compliance challenges among taxpayers. India's GST structure, with its multiple slabs — 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28% — has become a breeding ground for such issues. Businesses often find themselves grappling with ambiguous categorisations, complex filing requirements, and punitive penalties for even minor errors. Recent GST controversies highlight these concerns.

One of the most debated recent issues revolves around GST rates on popcorn. Salted

popcorn is taxed at 5% because it falls under the category of 'namkeen,' while pre-packaged popcorn is taxed at 12%, and caramelised popcorn, which contains added sugar, is taxed at a steep 18%.

This differentiation, explained by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as being based on the addition of sugar, raises questions about the logic of tax policies. Critics argue that such distinctions create unnecessary complexity for businesses, particularly smaller ones that lack the resources to navigate these technicalities.

Former Infosys CFO Mohandas Pai described these rates as "silly and complex," warning of potential "tax terrorism." His concern echoes that of many business owners who feel burdened by the need to categorise products according to arbitrary rules. Former Chief Economic Advisor Krishnamurthy Subramanian also highlighted the negligible revenue impact of such policies. He noted that even if all popcorn sales in 2025 were taxed at 18%, the revenue would contribute just 0.013% to the total GST collection. This raises an important question:

is the inconvenience caused to businesses and citizens worth such a minimal fiscal gain?

Moreover, such categorisations ignore consumer preferences and market realities. Popcorn, whether salted or caramelised, is fundamentally the same product but taxed differently due to its flavouring. This leads to absurd scenarios where businesses must differentiate between similar products, driving up compliance costs and creating a distorted market landscape. It also risks alienating consumers, who may feel penalised for their choices.

Another area of contention is the recent GST hike on online gaming, which increased to 28%. This move has sparked outcry from industry stakeholders who fear it could stifle a burgeoning sector. Similarly, food delivery platforms like Swiggy and Zomato face GST compliance challenges as they navigate rates for various food items, creating a logistical nightmare for ensuring tax parity across vendors.

The crux of the problem lies in GST's multiplicity of rates and the frequent changes in tax

rules. While the government's intent to make taxation equitable is laudable, the execution often results in confusion and inefficiencies. Businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), bear the brunt of this complexity, with many forced to hire tax consultants or invest heavily in compliance mechanisms.

The GST reform was a monumental step toward creating a unified tax system in India, but its promise remains partially fulfilled. While the government has made efforts to address taxpayers' concerns, instances of perceived tax terrorism continue to undermine confidence in the system. A simplified, transparent, and fair GST structure would not only reduce compliance burdens but also foster a more business-friendly environment, ensuring that the tax regime achieves its intended objectives without alienating taxpayers. The time for comprehensive GST reform is now.

The writer is a postdoctoral researcher, Institute of Energy Policy and Research, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Malaysia.



Malayaranjan Sahoo

THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM LIES IN GST'S MULTIPLICITY OF RATES AND THE FREQUENT CHANGES IN TAX RULES

Weak rupee

Sir, This refers to "Rupee's record fall," Orissa Post, Dec 28. It's a cause of concern that the rupee has crossed the psychological barrier of 85 against the dollar. It is an all-time low after a steady drop for some weeks, and the rupee is unlikely to rise soon. There are situations when a weaker currency does good to the economy and sometimes, conscious policy initiatives are taken towards that. But that is not the case with India now. Both global and domestic factors have contributed to the weakening of the rupee. India's economic growth has fallen to its lowest level in three quarters and merchandise trade deficits has widened. The weaker rupee offers some opportunities. It provides an export advantage and could boost export-oriented industries like textiles. Incentives may be offered to such industries and suitable trade strategies can be formulated in their favour. Meanwhile, domestic manufacturing and productivity should be improved and reliance on imports should be reduced as they will become costlier. But, a weaker rupee fuels inflation as imported goods and services become dearer. RBI interventions and other measures will provide only temporary relief. The lasting solution to rupee depreciation and other global challenges is to strengthen the domestic economy by improving production and increasing exports..
N Sadhasiva Reddy, BANGALORE

Intellectual giant

Sir, In the passing of former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, the nation has lost a political and economic giant, whose intellect, integrity, humility, and vision left an indelible mark on India's political history. As Finance Minister in PV Narasimha Rao's Cabinet, Dr. Singh played a pivotal role in implementing landmark economic reforms that transformed India's financial landscape. His visionary policies paved the way for India's transition from a closed, state-controlled economy to a more open one. This significant shift had far-reaching consequences, including increased foreign investment, rapid economic growth, and India's integration into the global economy. Political leaders are judged not by their charisma, but by their commitment to democratic ethos and values. Needless to say Dr Manmohan Singh was a perfect example of this trait.
Ranganathan Sivakumar, CHENNAI

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



Nat'l conference on materials chemistry kicks off at OUTR



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 28: The Orissa Chemical Society (OCS) inaugurated a three-day National Conference on Advancements in Materials Chemistry at the Odisha University of Technology and Research (OUTR) Saturday.

The inaugural session saw the presence of OCS president Ajaya Kumar Behera and OTR vice-chancellor Bibhuti Bhuvan Biswal as guests of honour.

111 drug samples found 'not of standard quality'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 28: Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) has found 41 drug samples tested in the central drug laboratories in November as 'not of standard quality' (NSQ), official sources said.

Besides, 70 drug samples tested by the state drugs testing laboratories have also been identified as NSQ in November, they said.

"The failure is specific to the drug products of the batch tested by the government laboratory and it does not warrant any concerns on the other drug products available in the market," an official said.

Two drug samples were identified as spurious drugs in November. Out of the two samples, one was picked by Bihar Drugs Control Authority and the other by CDSCO, Ghaziabad, the sources said.

Action to identify NSQ and spurious medicines is taken regularly in collaboration with the state regulators to ensure such drugs are identified and removed from the market, the sources said.



SPRUNGING UP: Workers engage in beautification work of the Rasulagrh overbridge in Bhubaneswar, Saturday ahead of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in January 2025

PIC: BIKASH NAYAK

'Focus on entrepreneurship, innovation'

Addressing the 12th and 13th combined convocation of IIT-Bhubaneswar, the Union Education Minister emphasises students' role in driving Odisha's growth by 2036



Energy Commission chairman Ajit Kumar Mohanty, and Science and Technology Secretary Abhay Karandikar as guests of honour.

IIT-Bhubaneswar director Shreepad Karmalkar presented the institute's annual report and conferred degrees on 1,388 students, including 105 PhDs, 269 MTechs, 197 MScs, 192 dual degrees (BTech & MTech), and 625 BTechs, spanning the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Speaking on the importance of innovation, Sood highlighted the necessity of fostering research and developing a globally competitive ecosystem. He stressed collaboration between academia and industry, a multidisciplinary approach, and investment in state-of-the-art infrastructure.

The event, presided over by Board of Governors chairman Rajendra Prasad Singh, featured principal scientific advisor Ajay Kumar Sood, Atomic

Foundation and its objectives, emphasising its role in advancing cutting-edge research.

Mohanty highlighted the irreplaceable value of human knowledge and skills in an era dominated by artificial intelligence and machine learning. He encouraged the youth to harness their innovative potential for national development, underlining their critical role in shaping India's future.

Karandikar commended IIT Bhubaneswar for its pivotal role in research and innovation, noting India's rise as the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem. He urged the graduates to contribute to making India a global leader in research and entrepreneurship.

Karmalkar shared the institute's journey since its inception in 2008, showcasing its

alignment with the NEP 2020 and the Viksit Bharat @ 2047 vision. He highlighted key milestones in academics, research, and entrepreneurship, emphasising the institute's motto to remain original, open to feedback, and to acknowledge contributions.

Encouraging the graduates, Singh noted the institute's focus on innovation and sustainability. He urged the students to use their skills to find simple solutions to complex problems, leveraging the state-of-the-art facilities provided by IIT Bhubaneswar.

Following the convocation, Minister Pradhan visited the Industry-Academia Research and Innovation Center on Silicon Carbide, interacting with semiconductor researchers. He also toured the Research and Entrepreneurship Park, engaging with start-ups incubated under IIT-Bhubaneswar, reinforcing the institute's commitment to fostering a thriving ecosystem of research and innovation.

The convocation marked a celebration of institute's commitment to academic excellence, innovation, and entrepreneurial growth, inspiring its graduates to shape a brighter future for Odisha and India.

CLASSIFIED AFFIDAVIT

I, Jyashna Behera, W/o - Siba Narayan Behera, resident of Vill - Bhejapat, PO - Damanjodi, PS - Sunabeda, Dist. - Koraput, PIN - 763008, Odisha declare by this Affidavit No. 340 dtd. 21.12.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as JYOSHNA BEHERA for all future purposes.

By virtue of an Affidavit sworn before Notary Public, Cuttack, SL No. - 10,419 I, Brijesh Kumar Nayak, S/o - Fakir Mohan Nayak, At - Dakshinadandi, PO - Madanpur, PS - Rajnagar, Kendrapara - 754246 hereby declare that my son's actual name is Ashutosh Nayak as per his birth certificate. But in Aadhaar Card his name mentioned as Aditya Kumar Nayak. Now onwards my son shall be known as Ashutosh Nayak for all purpose.

I, Prasanta Kumar Parida, Vill - Boitalu patana, PO - Mohanpur, PS - Binjarpur, Dist. - Jajpur, Odisha have changed my name to Prashant Kumar Parida for all purposes.

In the court of Executive Magistrate, Satyabadi, I Kirtimayee, W/o - Ex-Jc-296601K Nb/ Sub Krishna Chandra Das have changed my name from Kirtimayee to Kirtimayee Das on 22.04.2024. Henceforth I shall be known as Kirtimayee Das for all purposes.

Ministers urge public to gift plants this New Year

Bhubaneswar: The state government Ministers Prithviraj Harichandan, Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia, and Suryabanshi Suraj have called on the public to gift plants instead of bouquets this New Year to promote environmental sustainability. The ministers made this appeal at an event organised by Bakul Foundation Saturday, underlining the importance of trees.



Sujit Mahapatra of the Bakul Foundation reflected on the success of the 15-year-old "My Tree Campaign", which has fostered tree plantation as a cultural practice. He highlighted the initiative's reach, encouraging tree gifting at personal and public events like birthdays, weddings, and festivals.

Missing dog returned to family home, rang doorbell



After a nearly weeklong search, Athena found her way home to her Florida family in time for Christmas Eve and even rang the doorbell.

Athena, a 4-year-old German Shepherd and Husky mix, escaped her home in Green Cove Springs, Florida, December 15, prompting a search among the community and nearby towns for her.

Comer panicked. Her family rushed home to find her collar in the crate and no visible opening Athena could have gotten out from. How she escaped remains a mystery.

The next week's events continued to be an "unbelievable" story for Comer, where neighbours and community members from nearby towns would

contact her from her missing dog ads and send any footage or photos where they may have spotted Athena. Based on all the alerts Comer got, it looked like Athena made a nearly 20-mile roundtrip while she was missing.

At every alert, Comer and her family would go to the spot within minutes and search for Athena — to no avail.

"She was the hide-and-seek all time grand champion," Comer said. "With every sighting my heart jumped, and it honestly was excitement and then your heart's crushed because we were always one step behind."

The entire search was a terrifying and scary experience for Comer, who was worried about where her already skittish dog could have gone or could have encountered. That was until 2:30 am Christmas Eve, when she got a Ring video notification from her doorbell and her other dog began barking.

"I was kind of like in a daze, and the dog was barking, and as soon as I heard that ring, I looked at my phone and you could see in the video it was Athena and she was jumping at the door, ringing the doorbell," Comer said.

As soon as Comer opened the door, Athena bolted inside and went to go lick her son's face, who was on the couch half-asleep.

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 28: Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan called on IIT Bhubaneswar and its graduates to champion entrepreneurship and innovation to drive Odisha's development by 2036 and India's progress by 2047.

Addressing the 12th and 13th combined convocation of IIT Bhubaneswar Saturday, Pradhan urged the graduates to transition from job seekers to job creators, aligning with the institute's vision of advancing Industrial Revolution 4.0.

The event, presided over by Board of Governors chairman Rajendra Prasad Singh, featured principal scientific advisor Ajay Kumar Sood, Atomic

Advertisement for Odisha State Lottery (ଝୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ ଶିକ୍ଷା ପୁରସ୍କାର) for the year 2024-25. It lists various prize categories and amounts, including a grand prize of 9098 units. The website https://msp.odisha.gov.in is provided for more details.

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Odisha Police nabs 3 dreaded women Maoists in Malkangiri



PNN & AGENCIES
Bhubaneswar/Malkangiri, Dec 28: Odisha Police Saturday apprehended three notorious women Maoists involved in multiple attacks on security forces. Sources from the Odisha Police headquarters revealed that acting on precise intelligence inputs, the police arrested three hardcore Maoists, including an ACM rank cadre, who carried a combined reward of ₹8 lakh. The arrests took place in Gunthawada village under the Chittrakonda police station in Malkangiri district. Addressing a joint press conference DIG, South Western Range, Niti Sekhar and Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Bibekananda Sharma said that the arrested Maoists, all hailing from Dhakadapadar village

in Jodambo police station area in the district, were involved in several cases of exchange of fire with security forces and other criminal activities. Interrogation of the suspects has revealed that they were planning further subversive activities in the region, including attacks on security forces. One of the arrested Maoists, identified as Swapna alias Chandrama Khilo, joined the Maoist group in 2018 under the Andhra-Odisha Border Special Zonal Committee (AOBSZC) of the banned CPI (Maoist) outfit. She had been working with the AOBSZC Military Platoon in Gumma area of Malkangiri district and carried a cash reward of ₹4 lakh. The second Maoist, Babita alias Kamala Khilo, joined the

group in 2021. She served as a party member in the Uday Protection Team under the AOBSZC and carried a cash reward of ₹2 lakh. The third Maoist, Sunita Khilo, also joined the group in 2021 and worked as a party member in the Uday Protection Team under the AOBSZC. She, too, carried a cash reward of ₹2 lakh. Chandrama Khilo was involved in exchanges of fire in three villages in Malkangiri district, one village in Koraput district, and another in Chhattisgarh. She was also implicated in the burning of houses in Jodamba village under the Jodamba police station in Malkangiri district. Both Kamala Khilo and Sunita Khilo were involved in exchanges of fire in two villages in Malkangiri district and one village in Chhattisgarh. Security forces are working to ascertain their involvement in other criminal cases. Following the arrest of the three Maoists, police have intensified combing operations and intelligence-based operations in Malkangiri, officials said.



DESPERATE BID: Farmers trying to salvage paddy crops lying destroyed on their rainwater filled farmland near Benakantha Bazar in Suniti panchayat of Mahakalapara block in Kendrapara district Saturday

Setbacks galore in tiger relocation project

208 KM COVERED IN 21 DAYS: ZEENAT CHANGES JUNGLES GIVING SLIP TO FOREST OFFICIALS OF 3 STATES

POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, Dec 28: The ambitious tiger relocation project has been riddled with setbacks as hopes of the return of Zeenat and Jamuna to the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) are fading. While Jamuna, which has strayed into Kuldiha reserve sanctuary in Balasore district, is showing no sign of comeback, Zeenat, after escaping from STR is roaming from one forest to another in the neighbouring state of West Bengal. Within 21 days of leaving Similipal, Zeenat has already traveled 208 kilometres. Despite tireless efforts, Forest officials from three states have been unable to capture her. She has managed to give them slip by continuously changing locations. After moving from Jharkhand to the Raikia hills in Bandwan of Purulia district in West Bengal, Zeenat has now moved to Bankura district. Sources said, she was spotted near the Kansai reser-



voir in Mukutmanipur under Ranibandh police limits Saturday morning. Panic gripped people as Zeenat escaped after jumping over the nylon net set up by Forest officials at around 8.30pm Friday. To track the tigress, Forest officials have deployed trackers, drones, night vision devices, and high-resolution cameras and her location is updated every four hours through satellite information. However, no traces of her movement are detected for over 30 minutes at times. Despite the efforts of four

dedicated search teams, no concrete information has been gathered about Zeenat's exact whereabouts. On Saturday morning, she was seen crossing the Kansai river and wandering in the forest near the reservoir. The animal's entry into the jungle has been delayed due to severe cold, preventing access to the water reservoir. If the water reservoir is crossed, there are concerns that it might lead to incursions into the Baramail jungle in south Bankura. Given the current trajectory, it is estimated that within 15 days, the tigress may reach the Sundarbans. Meanwhile, Forest officials following the trail are uncertain about capturing or containing the movement. The two tigresses which have failed to adapt to the weather in Similipal have posed significant challenges for the Forest department. When contacted, former wildlife expert Bhanumitra

Acharya attributed the situation to a lack of foresight and overconfidence among the Forest authorities. Acharya emphasised the necessity of a well-thought-out plan and collaborative discussions to address such issues. Without these, the department risks repeating scenarios like those of Satkosia, where cases of two Royal Bengal Tigers Mahaveer and Sundari raised similar concerns. On the other hand, Forest workers observed Zeenat in the wild after a period of 192 hours. Forest officials fired tranquiliser darts Saturday morning, but it remains unclear whether the dart hit the animal. This is currently under investigation, according to Bidyut Sarkar, a Forest officer from southwestern West Bengal. Speaking on the matter, Chief Wildlife Warden Premkumar Jha stated that efforts are underway to tranquilise Zeenat swiftly and return it to Similipal as soon as possible.

Another involved in int'l cybercrime syndicate held

Around 14 arrests have been made between January and August in 2024 in connection with the racket

POST NEWS NETWORK

Rourkela, Dec 28: With the arrest of yet another suspect from Uttar Pradesh, Rourkela police have made a significant breakthrough in investigation into an international cybercrime syndicate based out of South-East Asian countries and having links to various Asian countries. IG (Western Range) Brijesh Rai, along with SP Nitesh Wadhvani and the investigation team, while briefing the media on the operation said that around 14 arrests have been made between January and August in 2024 in connection with the racket, many of whom were found to be operating out of Cambodia. Probe into the case was ini-



tiated after a senior Central government official reported a fraud of ₹67.7 lakh involving a fake trading app masquerading as the legitimate SEBI-registered entity INDIRA Securities. "This case has far-reaching consequences, encompassing stock market fraud, scams via dating apps, cryptocurrency fraud, human trafficking, and cyber slavery, posing a threat to national security," said the senior officer. The investigation, which began earlier this year, attracted the attention of the Home Ministry and other Central security agencies due

to its international scope. Look Out Circulars were issued against more than 15 people involved in the scam. Based on the LOC, the Odisha Crime Branch and the Uttar Pradesh Police managed to nab a key accused December 28. The accused has worked in multiple roles in Cambodia and India. A major concern for authorities was the fate of over 1,000 Indian nationals who had been trafficked and were trapped in Cambodia, unable to return home as their passports had been seized and they lacked the means to travel back.

Man awarded 10 yrs jail for raping minor

PNN & AGENCIES

Balasore, Dec 28: A court in Balasore district sentenced a man to 10 years Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) for kidnapping and raping a 16-year-old girl in 2016. The judgment was pronounced by Special POSCO Court Judge Ranjan Kumar Sutar Friday, after examining the statements of the minor, 16 witnesses and 19 exhibits,

said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Kumar Panda. The court also imposed a fine of ₹1,500 on the convict, Berial Hasdah (28), he said. According to the prosecution, Hasdah kidnapped the girl in 2016 and took her to his village and raped her. Based on the complaint lodged by the victim's father, a case was registered in Jaleswar police station and the accused was arrested.

Trucker charred to death

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhawanipatna, Dec 28: The driver of a coal-laden truck was charred to death in Kalahandi district Saturday morning after colliding with a stationary rice-laden truck, police said. The deceased was identified as Firoj Jhankar of Deogarh district. The accident took place near Nasigaon village on State Highway-26 under Sadar police limits here when the speeding truck rammed into another filled with rice, which



was parked on the roadside, they said. Both the trucks caught fire after the collision, leading to the death of the driver, a police officer said. Locals rushed to the spot to douse the fire and

launched a rescue operation but by then the driver of the coal-laden truck had already succumbed. Police and fire personnel from Bhawanipatna retrieved the charred remains of the driver of the coal-laden truck. The driver and helper of the rice-filled truck are absconding after the mishap, he said. The reason behind the mishap is yet to be ascertained, police added. A case was registered in this connection and the body sent for post-mortem.

2 arrested for killing mastermind of fake kidnapping plot to grab ransom amount

PNN & AGENCIES

Baripada, Dec 28: Police Saturday forwarded to court two persons after arresting them on the charges of killing the mastermind of a fake kidnapping plot aiming to grab the ransom amount. The accused were identified as Ashish Singh (24) and Karan Singh (22) of Baripada Sadar police station area in Mayurbhanj district. Police sources claimed that the deceased identified as Chandan Kumar Swain was a resident of Marshaghai in Kendrapara district. Chandan, who used to work as a supervisor at the garment factory of his paternal uncle Banshidhar Swain located in Bangalore for the last three years, quit his job December 17 following some disagreement with uncle and job dissatisfaction and returned to Bhubaneswar. Chandan during his stay in Bangalore had befriended the prime accused Ashis who also worked in the same garment factory. As Chandan was badly in need of money, he hatched a plan along with Ashis to extract ransom of ₹50 lakhs from his uncle Banshidhar by staging a fake kidnapping plot of the deceased. Meanwhile, Ashis got displeased with Chandan for insisting on taking the lion's share of the ₹50 lakh for being the mastermind and decided to take away the whole ransom amount by killing him. Chandan reached Mayurbhanj December 21 and Ash-



is killed him by slitting his throat at the embankment of river Budhabalanga at Gumudi, near his native village. Ashis later with the help of Karan buried the half-burnt body of Chandan in the embankment and threw the knife in the river. Ashis later came to Bhubaneswar where he telephoned Deepak Swain (factory owner's son) by using the deceased's SIM card and demanded ₹50 lakh by pretending to be the kidnapper of the deceased as well as himself. A case was filed against an unknown kidnapper December 25 at Kharavel Nagar police station in Bhubaneswar over the complaint of a relative of the deceased. Meanwhile, some locals at Gumudi village in Mayurbhanj December 26 spotted the deceased's hand protruding out of the sand and informed the police who exhumed the body and started investigation of the case. With the help of call detail records of the accused Ashis and other leads fetched during investigation, police nabbed the accused duo.

2 tribals awarded by Manmohan Singh bid tearful adieu

Raila Muduli and Chandra Pradhani of Koraput district said words were not enough to express their grief over the demise of Singh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Koraput, Dec 28: As the nation bid adieu to former prime minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi Saturday, two tribals in the remote Koraput district, who were honoured by him in 2012 for biodiversity conservation, recalled with tears cherished memories with the beloved leader. Raila Muduli, a resident of Boliguda village and Chandra Pradhani of Nuaguda, said words were not enough to express their grief over the demise of Singh. The former PM passed away Thursday night at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences due to age-related medical complications. He was 92. Muduli and Pradhani had received Certificates of Recognition for their contribution to

biodiversity conservation from Singh during the 99th Indian Science Congress held at Bhubaneswar 12 years ago. "I was at a loss for words when I heard about his demise Friday," said Raila, a farmer from the Bhumia tribe. "I remember feeling very nervous that day (in 2012), but receiving the award from the former prime minister was an unforgettable moment. He was gentle and soft-spoken, and encouraged us to work dedicatedly for biodiversity conservation," he said. Pradhani couldn't hold back tears while recalling his brief interaction with Singh. "Sir smiled at me as I received the award and motivated us to continue our efforts in preserving biodiversity. His words will remain an inspiration for years to come,"



he said. "I wish I had more opportunities to meet him," Pradhani said. Prasant Parida, director of the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation in Jeypore, said Koraput was recognised as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the Food and Ag-

riculture Organisation (FAO) in 2012. "Raila and Chandra were instrumental in representing Koraput at the event where the former prime minister acknowledged their community's efforts," said Parida. The mortal remains of Singh were consigned to flames at the Nigambodh Ghat in the national capital Saturday amid the chanting of religious hymns. The funeral pyre was lit by his eldest daughter Upinder Singh. The last rites were performed in the presence of President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, among other top leaders and foreign dignitaries. Considered the architect of India's economic reforms, Singh served as the prime minister for 10 years between 2004 and 2014. A seven-day national mourning is being observed throughout the country as a mark of respect to the former prime minister during which the national flag will be flown at half-mast across the nation, the Union Home Ministry has announced.



We announced Rs 2,100 per month to all eligible women in Delhi under Mahila Samman Yojana and free treatment of the senior citizen under Sanjeevani Yojana, after forming government in Delhi. What are they going to enquire? ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP SUPREMO

2 HELD FOR GRENADE ATTACK ON PS

The Punjab Police has arrested two people for allegedly carrying out a grenade attack on the Islamabad police station in Amritsar recently, officials said Saturday



of the day quote

We are planning for the inauguration of the Phase 1-A of the project by August-September 2025, and the aim is to complete the entire project by 2028. We have completed 65 per cent of the work under phase 1-A

Adequate security personnel have been rushed to the affected areas

The silver jubilee celebration of IFCSAP is a tribute to our rich cultural heritage, reinforcing our traditions, customs, and rituals, which has showcased the unique identity of our indigenous communities and upheld the values of peace and harmony

SHORT TAKES

Drugs seized; five arrested

Guwahati: Drugs worth nearly Rs 6 crore have been seized and five persons apprehended in two separate operations in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. In Guwahati city, Special Task Force (STF) personnel conducted an operation at a hotel in Paltan Bazar Friday night and seized 416 gm of heroin, estimated to be worth Rs 2.75 crore.

Strike paralyses normal life

Imphal: Normal life was affected in the five districts of Imphal Valley Saturday due to a bandh called over the arrest of six armed men and the death of one in a gunfight with the police in Thoubal December 14. Shops and other commercial establishments were closed, while public vehicles remained off the road.

4 killed in separate road accidents

Bhopal: Four men were killed and two others suffered injuries in separate road accidents in Sehore and Katni districts of Madhya Pradesh Saturday, police said. Vinand Gyanchand (20) and his cousin Ajay Ghasiram Verma (25) were crushed to death by a truck when they were returning home in Kothari village of Sehore district, Ashta area Sub Divisional Officer of Police (SDOP) Akash Amalkar told PTI.

Man strangled to death; 5 held

Mumbai: A 50-year-old brother of a civic contractor was allegedly strangled to death during a clash between two families in Mumbai's Kurla area, following which five persons have been arrested, police said Saturday. The incident occurred in Match Factory Lane at Hussaini Compound in Kurla west Friday morning, an official said. The complainant in the case, Ishaq Abbas Beig, is a contractor in the Solid Waste Management Department of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). A local citizen, Rubina, often complained against Beig in the BMC alleging that his employees did not work properly.

Man shot dead

Sasaram (Bihar): A man died while another person was critically injured after being shot by unidentified assailants in Bihar's Rohtas district, police said Saturday. The incident took place between 10.35 pm and 10.45 pm Friday near Kargahar More under the jurisdiction of Town police station, they said.

Farmers call for mega meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Chandigarh, Dec 28: Farmers, on a warpath against the Centre, Saturday called for a "Kisan Mahapanchayat" at the Khanauri protest site January 4.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha had earlier given a call for a Punjab bandh December 30.

The steps come amid the Supreme Court coming down heavily on the Punjab government for not shifting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been fasting for over a month, to a hospital.

SKM (Non-political) leader Kaka Singh Kotra, said the 70-year-old has been on an indefinite hunger strike, which entered its 33rd day Saturday.

"On January 4 at Khanauri, we will hold a big Kisan Mahapanchayat in which farmers from various states will participate," Kotra told reporters at Khanauri protest site.

While Saturday it admonished the Punjab government, the Supreme Court also indicated the possibility that Dallewal may have not been allowed to be taken to a hospital by other farmer leaders.

Responding to it, Dallewal, in a video message, said, "I am sitting on a fast. Who gave this report in the Supreme Court



and who spread this misconception that I have been kept hostage, where did such a thing come from?"

He added, "Seven lakh farmers of this country have committed suicide due to debt. To save farmers is necessary, therefore, I am sitting here, I am not under anyone's pressure."

In his message, Dallewal also said he had written a letter to the Supreme Court, requesting it to direct the Centre to accept the farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of the minimum support price on crops.

Farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar said Dallewal may also speak at the Mahapanchayat.

Dallewal had earlier said he would not break his fast till the government agreed to the farmers' demands.

In an unprecedented hearing Saturday, a vacation bench of

the Punjab government said it is facing huge resistance from the protesting farmers who have encircled Dallewal and are preventing him from being taken to a hospital.

The court also termed the conduct of some farmer leaders accompanying Dallewal surprising and questionable.

Meanwhile, a high-level team of Punjab government officials again called on Dallewal requesting him to accept medical treatment even if he wishes to continue with his fast.

Dallewal has so far refused medical treatment and the state government has formed a team of doctors to monitor his health round-the-clock.

The team which also comprises Deputy Inspector General of Police Mandeep Singh Sidhu told Dallewal that he could choose a place and he would only be given the required medical support.

The farmers have been on a protest with several demands, one of them being a legal guarantee for a minimum support price. Farmers, under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, have been camping at the Shambhu and the Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

The steps come amid the Supreme Court coming down heavily on the Punjab government for not shifting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been fasting for over a month, to a hospital

Justices Surya Kant and Sudhanshu Dhulia gave the Punjab government time till December 31 to persuade Dallewal to shift to a hospital, giving it the liberty to seek logistical support from the Centre, if the situation warrants.

Expressing helplessness,

BPSC exam stalemate continues as students reject offer for talks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Patna, Dec 28: The row over the alleged Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) question paper leak seemed to be heading for an impasse with protesting students on Saturday rejecting the Patna district administration's offer for talks with authorities in the commission and insisting on an appointment with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

In hardening of stance, Patna District Magistrate (DM) Chandrasekhar Singh also said he would not allow the 'Chatra Sansad' (students' congregation), called by Jan Suraj founder Prashant Kishor Sunday and warned of action against coaching institute owners who were found to be involved, in any manner, in the protests henceforth.

Kishor Saturday went to Gardani Bagh where BPSC aspirants have been staging a dharna for the last several days.

Addressing the protesters, Kishor said, "Before coming here, I had a long discussion with people from the education field. I must say that irregularities and paper leaks have now become the norm as far as BPSC exams are concerned. It



can't go on like this... We have to find a solution. That's why we have decided to organise 'Chatra Sansad' near Mahatma Gandhi's statue at Gandhi Maidan in Patna tomorrow to find a solution to this issue."

Speaking to PTI, Patna DM Singh said, "The district administration will not allow students to congregate near the Mahatma Gandhi statue at Gandhi Maidan... it's a restricted area. Other events are also going on there. Adequate security personnel have been deployed in and around Gandhi Maidan. Strict action will be taken against those who try to take law into their hands tomorrow."

Regarding the district administration's offer to protesting students, the DM said, "The protesting aspirants have so far not made their stand clear. Earlier in the day, we gave them an offer for facilitating their meeting with the BPSC authorities so that they could put forth their grievances.

SNIPPETS

ED summons BRS leader KTR

Hyderabad: The Enforcement Directorate has summoned Bharat Rashtia Samithi leader KT Rama Rao and some others for questioning next month in a money laundering case linked to alleged payment irregularities during a Formula-E race held in Hyderabad in February 2023, official sources said Saturday. The federal agency filed an enforcement case information report (ECIR) or FIR last week in the case under various sections of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), taking cognisance of a Telangana Police Anti-corruption Bureau (ACB) complaint.

Clash erupts between PMK patriarch Ramadoss, son

Puducherry: Pattali Makkal Katchi President Anbumani Saturday opposed a decision of his father, party founder S Ramadoss, in a party meeting here Saturday, and the octogenarian leader curtly said those who do not wish to follow his diktats should quit the outfit. When the party patriarch Ramadoss announced that a party member, P Mukunthan, is appointed president of the state youth wing, Anbumani voiced his opposition and a war of words broke out between the father and son at the party's special general council meeting.

Protests at AIIMS Gorakhpur

Gorakhpur (UP): Protests erupted at AIIMS Gorakhpur after an MBBS student accused a security guard of allegedly attempting to sexually assault her on the campus, officials said Saturday. The incident occurred around 9 pm Friday when the student was heading to her hostel near gate number four, police said.



Army personnel inaugurate a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj on the banks of Pangong Tso Lake, in Leh, Ladakh

Sarpanch murder: Huge protest in Beed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Beed, Dec 28: Thousands of people gathered in Maharashtra's Beed city Saturday to protest against the brutal murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh as even MLAs from the ruling coalition demanded the sacking of NCP minister Dhananjay Munde.

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange, former MP Sambhaji Raje Chhatrapati, local BJP MLAs Suresh Dhas, Abhimanyu Pawar; NCP MLA Prakash Solanke and NCP (SP) MLAs Jitendra Awhad and Sandeep Kshirsagar participated in the 'aakrosh morcha' or protest march that culminated in a rally. The protesters demand-

ed arrest of Walmik Karad, an associate of Dhananjay Munde, a politician from Beed district.

Santosh Deshmukh was allegedly abducted and tortured to death December 9. While four persons have been arrested, Opposition leaders claimed in the state legislature during the winter session that Walmik Karad was the

mastermind of the murder. Karad, named as an accused in a related case of extortion but not for the murder, is still at large.

In a related development, social activist Anjali Damania Saturday claimed that she received a call saying that three absconding accused in the case had been murdered. She shared the information with

Beed Police, Damania added. Earlier this week, the activist had alleged that Dhananjay Munde and Karad were joint owners of a tract of land.

At the rally in Beed, Vaibhavi Deshmukh, the daughter of the deceased sarpanch, demanded justice for her father. He lost his life while saving a person from the Dalit community, she said.

J&K: Season's heaviest snowfall disrupts air, rail, road traffic

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 28: Daily life was thrown out of gear in Kashmir as the season's heaviest snowfall hit air, rail and road traffic and disrupted power and water supply Saturday while Uttarakhand shivered due to snow and intermittent rain causing temperatures to dip.

are causing light to moderate rainfall and thunderstorms over northwest and central India, including Delhi-NCR, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

In south Kashmir, heavy to very heavy snowfall was recorded in the plains while central Kashmir's plains received moderate snowfall. The plains of north Kashmir received light to moderate snowfall, officials said.

The Jammu-Srinagar national highway was closed for traffic due to snow. The snow clearance work was hampered due to heavy snowfall at the Navvuy Tunnel, they said.

Stuck in the snow, while many sulked, some chose to ally their hardships by playing cricket inside the out-of-bounds 8.5-kilometre Navyug



Tunnel in Kashmir. The tunnel connects Banihal town in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir with Qazigund in south Kashmir's Anantnag district. Many were forced to spend the night inside their vehicles in the freezing temperature.

In a heartwarming display of Kashmiri hospitality, locals in Gund, on the Srinagar-Sonamarg highway, opened the doors of a mosque to shelter a group of travellers from Punjab stranded due to the heavy snowfall.

In Uttarakhand, most hill districts were in the grip of

severe cold due to continuous snowfall in the upper reaches of the mountains and intermittent light showers, coupled with cool winds sweeping the lower areas. The higher reaches of the hills of Auli, Harshil, Hemkund Sahib, Chopta, Daryara, Lokhandi, Sukki Top, Munsyari and Pithoragarh were blanketed with snow.

The Badrinath national highway was closed between Pandukeshwar and Badrinath because of accumulation of snow, which was being cleared.

Rain affected electricity supply in 10 villages of Nauti area of Karnaprayag. A fault in a 33 kV line disrupted power supply in all villages of Dewal development block. Electricity supply was also disrupted in 20 villages of Dungari area of Tharali development block and 21 villages

in Sankot area of Narayanbagh. In Delhi, the day was overcast and chilly after the city recorded its highest single-day December rainfall in 101 years. The national capital recorded 41.2 mm rain in the 24 hours ended at 8:30 am, causing daytime temperatures to remain below normal.

In Rajasthan, Jhalawar district recorded 86 mm rainfall. Some places in the state's eastern parts, including Dausa and Alwar, reported hailstorms. Dense to very dense fog was recorded in some areas.

Chandigarh -- the common capital of Punjab and Haryana -- recorded a maximum temperature of 15.1 degrees Celsius. In Punjab, Amritsar registered a day temperature of 14.8 degrees Celsius while Ludhiana recorded 15.4 degrees.

international



Their losses are significant, very significant. We see that neither the Russian military nor their North Korean overseers have any interest in ensuring the survival of these North Koreans

OLDEST PEARL HARBOR SURVIVOR DIES AT 105 Warren Upton, the oldest known survivor of the Pearl Harbor attack, has died at the age of 105. He died December 25, 2024, in a hospital in Los Gatos, California, following a bout of pneumonia, according reports

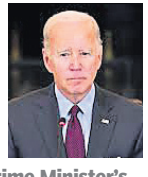


of the day quote

The international situation is extremely difficult at the moment, the American policy in its various aspects is extremely hostile to us today



The unprecedented level of cooperation between the United States and India today would not have been possible without the Prime Minister's (Manmohan Singh) strategic vision and political courage



To give their (youth) opinion on their own future, I think the voting age for them should be fixed at 17 years



Homelessness in US hits new record

23 in every 10,000 without a home in world's biggest economy

Washington, Dec 28: The number of people in the United States experiencing homelessness reached a new record this year, with lingering inflation and high housing prices among likely drivers, a government report said Friday. An estimated 771,480 people were homeless on a single night in January 2024, rising 18 percent from 2023, said the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in an annual assessment. This translates to about 23 in



every 10,000 people in the country, home to the world's biggest economy. The uptick came as households felt the pressure from housing costs, with the median rent for January 2024 being 20 percent higher than that in January 2021, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Apart from housing costs, the

HUD report flagged "stagnating wages among middle- and lower-income households, and the persisting effects of systemic racism" as other factors. Other contributing issues included natural disasters that displaced people, rising immigration and an end to homelessness prevention programs introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic. "While this data is nearly a

Cracks in Trump's political coalition

Online debate over foreign workers in tech shows tensions brewing in MAGA camp



with Trump were doing so to enrich themselves. Much of the debate played out on the social media network X, which Musk owns. Loomer's comments sparked a back-and-forth with venture capitalist and former PayPal executive David Sacks, whom Trump has tapped to be the "White House A.I. and Crypto Czar." Musk and Ramaswamy, whom Trump has tasked with finding ways to cut the federal government, weighed in, defending the tech industry's need to bring in foreign workers. It bloomed into a larger debate with more figures from the hard-right weighing in about the need to hire US workers, whether values in American culture can produce the best engineers, free speech on the internet, the newfound influence tech figures have in Trump's world and what his political movement stands for. Trump has not yet weighed in on the rift, and his presidential transition team did not respond to a message seeking comment. Musk, the world's richest man who has grown remarkably close to the president-elect, was a central figure in the debate, not only for his stature in Trump's movement but his stance on the tech industry's hiring of foreign workers.

West Palm Beach, Dec 28: An online spat between factions of Donald Trump's supporters over immigration and the tech industry has thrown internal divisions in his political movement into public display, previewing the fissures and contradictory views his coalition could bring to the White House. The rift laid bare the tensions between the newest flank of Trump's movement — wealthy members of the tech world including billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and their call for more highly skilled workers in their industry — and people in Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) base who championed his hardline immigration policies. The debate touched off this week when Laura Loomer, a right-wing provocateur with a history of racist and conspiratorial comments, criticized Trump's selection of Sriram Krishnan as an advisor on artificial intelligence policy in his coming administration. Krishnan favors the ability to bring more skilled immigrants into the US. Loomer declared the stance to be "not America First policy" and said the tech executives who have aligned themselves

Israel detains director of one of last working hospitals in north Gaza

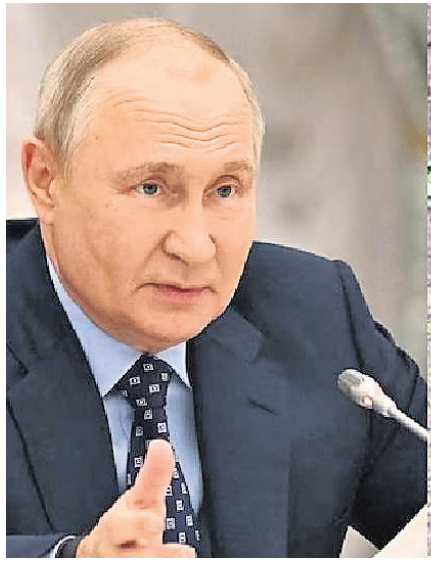
Deir Al-Balah, Dec 28: Israel's army detained the director of one of the last functioning hospitals in northern Gaza as overnight strikes in the enclave killed nine people including children, Palestinian medical officials said, while sirens rang out across Israel. Gaza's Health Ministry said Saturday that Dr Hussam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, was arrested by Israeli forces. The announcement comes a day after Israeli troops stormed the hospital, forcing many staff and patients outside to strip in winter weather, according to the ministry. Israel's nearly 15-month-old campaign of bombardment and offensives has devastated Gaza's health sector. The war has killed more than 45,400 Palestinians, more than half women and children, and wounded more than 108,000 others, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Its count does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

AZERBAIJAN PLANE CRASH

Putin apologises

The Russian prez apologised to Azerbaijani counterpart as the tragic incident that killed 38 occurred in their airspace

Moscow, Dec 28: Russian President Vladimir Putin Saturday apologised to his Azerbaijani counterpart for what he called a "tragic incident" following the crash of an Azerbaijani airliner in Kazakhstan that killed 38 people. The Kremlin said in a statement that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, due to a Ukrainian drone strike as the plane attempted to land Wednesday. It stopped short of saying the plane was shot down by Russian air defences. According to a Kremlin readout of the call, Putin apologised to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev "for the fact that the tragic incident occurred in Russian airspace." The plane was flying from Azerbaijan's capital of Baku to Grozny, when it turned toward Kazakhstan and crashed while making an attempt to land. There were 29 survivors. On Friday, a US official and an Azerbaijani minister made separate statements blaming the crash on an external weapon. Friday's assessments by Rashaan Nabiyev and White House national security spokesman John Kirby echoed those made by outside aviation experts who blamed the crash on Russian air defence systems responding to a Ukrainian attack. Neither Kirby or the Azerbaijani minister directly addressed the statements blaming air defences.



Putin didn't comment on statements from some aviation experts, who pointed out that holes seen in the plane's tail section suggested that it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems

was circling over Grozny. Dmitry Yadrov, head of Russia's civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia, said Friday that as the plane was preparing to land in Grozny in deep fog, Ukrainian drones were targeting the city, prompting authorities to close the area to air traffic. Yadrov said that after the captain made two unsuccessful attempts to land, he was offered other airports but decided to fly to Aktau in Kazakhstan, across the Caspian Sea. He didn't comment on statements from some aviation experts, who pointed out that holes seen in the plane's tail section suggested that it could have come under fire from Russian air defence systems. Earlier this week, Rosaviatsia cited unspecified early evidence as showing that the pilots diverted to Aktau after a bird strike led to an emergency on board. In the days following the crash, Azerbaijan Airlines blamed "physical and technical interference" and announced the suspension of flights to several Russian airports. It didn't say where the interference came from or provide any further details.

SERIES OF IMPEACHMENTS

South Korea's acting president Han Duck-soo impeached as Yoon goes on trial

Seoul, Dec 28: South Korea's parliament impeached acting President Han Duck-soo Friday, less than two weeks after suspending President Yoon Suk Yeol's powers over his short-lived declaration of martial law, plunging the country deeper into political chaos. The impeachment of prime minister Han, the acting president since Yoon was impeached December 14 for declaring martial law December 3, has pushed South Korea's once-vibrant democratic success story into



uncharted territory. Finance Minister Choi Sang-mok, who assumed the position of acting president while the cases of Yoon and Han are considered by the Constitutional Court, convened the National Security Council, spoke with key officials including military leaders and vowed to do everything in his power to stabilize state affairs. The unexpected imposition of martial law and the

Calamities battered Amazon rainforest

Bogota, Dec 28: 2024 was a brutal year for the Amazon rainforest, with rampant wildfires and extreme drought ravaging large parts of a biome that's a critical counterweight to climate change. A warming climate fed drought that in turn fed the worst year for fires since 2005. And those fires contributed to deforestation, with authorities suspecting some fires were set to more easily clear land to run cattle. The Amazon is twice the size of India and sprawls across eight countries and one territory, storing vast amounts of carbon dioxide that would otherwise warm the planet. It has about 20 per cent of the world's fresh water and astounding biodiversity, including 16,000 known tree species.



Humanity's window of opportunity to reverse this trend is shrinking, but still open

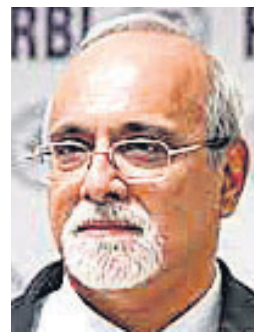
But governments have historically viewed it as an area to be exploited, with little regard for sustainability or the rights of its Indigenous peoples, and experts say exploitation by individuals and organised crime is rising at alarming rates. "The fires and drought experienced in 2024 across the Amazon rainforest could be ominous indicators that we are reaching the long-feared ecological tipping point," said Andrew Miller, advocacy director at Amazon Watch, an organisation that works to protect the rainforest. There were some bright spots. The level of Amazonian forest loss fell in both Brazil and Colombia. And nations gathered for the annual United Nations conference on biodiversity agreed to give Indigenous peoples more say in nature conservation decisions. "If the Amazon rainforest is to avoid the tipping point, Indigenous people will have been a determinant factor," Miller said.

Earlier, Choi had pleaded unsuccessfully with parliament to withdraw the plan to impeach Han, saying it would do serious damage to the economy. Yoon shocked the country and the world with a late-night announcement December 3 that he was imposing martial law to overcome political deadlock and root out "anti-state forces". Within hours, however, 190 lawmakers had defied the cordons of troops and police and voted against Yoon's order. About six hours after his initial decree, Yoon rescinded it. Events since the declaration have sparked South Korea's gravest political crisis since 1987, when protests forced the ruling party of former military generals to accept a direct, popular vote to elect the president.

Chinese espionage: 9th telecom firm hit

Washington: A ninth US telecom firm has been confirmed to have been hacked as part of a sprawling Chinese espionage campaign that gave officials in Beijing access to private texts and phone conversations of an unknown number of Americans, a top White House official has said. Biden administration officials said this month that at least eight telecommunications companies, as well as dozens of nations, had been affected by the Chinese hacking blitz known as Salt Typhoon.

- Ruling party boycotts vote for Han impeachment
- Finance Minister Choi becomes acting president under law
- Won currency at lowest since March 2009
- Constitutional Court to move swiftly in Yoon impeachment trial
- Yoon's removal by court would bring election within 60 days



India looks to be particularly vulnerable to climate change given its geographic location. It is estimated that by the year 2100, climate change could lead to an annual GDP loss of 3 per cent to 10 per cent

M. RAJESHWAR RAO | RBI DEPUTY GOVERNOR

ELECTRONICS SECTOR TO CREATE 12MN JOBS

The electronics sector in the country is projected to create 12 million jobs by 2027 — 3 million direct and 9 million indirect roles, a report by TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship said Saturday. The electronics industry has an ambitious goal of achieving \$500 billion in manufacturing output by 2030. To meet this target, the sector must grow five-fold over the next five years, bridging a \$400 billion production gap.



of the day quote

Fixing the inverted duty structure and revising tariffs that hamper sectoral growth will help make Indian products more globally competitive. Simplifying customs procedures, improving ease of doing business, and fostering innovation are essential to boosting exports

AJAY SRIVASTAVA | GTRI FOUNDER



Awareness of the Lab Grown Diamonds has significantly increased and almost every customer is aware that lab diamonds are absolutely real as they are also made of carbon and identical to mined diamonds

POOJA SHETH MADHAVAN | LIMELIGHT DIAMONDS FOUNDER AND MD



We are evaluating 5 to 6 potential targets in the SaaS FinTech space, including areas like merchant card software, accounts receivables, and FASTag solutions with plans to acquire at least two companies in the upcoming financial year

RAJ NARAYANAM | ZAGGLE FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN



Tariff hike backfires on telcos

Private operators have invested around ₹70,000 crore in telecom infrastructure and radiowave assets this year to expand the coverage of next-generation 5G services



New Delhi, Dec 28: The country's private telecom operators face twin challenges on investment recovery in the New Year — customers leaving their network after tariff hikes and satellite players mainly Elon Musk's Starlink eyeing a chunk of their bread and butter data business.

Private operators have invested around ₹70,000 crore in telecom infrastructure and radiowave assets this year to expand the coverage of next-generation 5G services which is one of the main highlights of 2024 for the sector.

To recover investments and protect margins, private telcos resorted to tariff hikes in mid-year but that move backfired.

Around 2 crore subscribers dropped their connections. Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea jointly lost 2.6 crore customers due to a 10-26 per cent price hike.

Around 68 customers switched to state-run player BSNL which refrained from price hike. The loss-making PSU still offers generation-old 3G service and is on the path of rolling out 4G network across the country. Despite subscriber loss, private players need to recover investment and invest more in 5G to offer new-age services to drive future growth.

According to EY India Markets and Telecom leader Prashant Singhal, the cumulative investment of Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea was around ₹70,200 crore in 2024. Digital Infrastructure Providers Association (DIPA) Director General Manoj Kumar Singh says the telecom infrastructure sector looks at a cumulative investment of ₹92,100 crore to ₹1.41 lakh crore

in 2022-2027 to support the 5G ecosystem.

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also backed telecom operators on the tariff hike issue citing investments made by companies in the network.

The rollout of 5G services in 2024 has paved the way for the adoption of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence which offers huge growth potential.

"5G deployment has been a game-changer. We've witnessed a significant surge in 5G base transceiver stations, rising from 412,214 in December 2023 to 462,854 by November 2024," says DIPA, whose members include Indus Towers and American Tower Corporation.

Impending huge investments in 5G and maintaining healthy margins in the face of

subscriber loss are not the only challenges for private telecom players.

A new threat from satellite broadband service providers is staring at private telcos in the New Year. The satellite broadband sector has seen intense lobbying on the spectrum allocation issue in 2024.

Private telecom operators led by Mukesh Ambani-promoted Jio have been for strongly protesting against the administrative allocation of spectrum to satellite broadband service providers like Elon Musk's Starlink.

Telcos fear that allocation of radiowaves to satellite broadband providers without auction will come at a low price and make a dent in their data subscriber market share.

The government's decision to allocate satcom spectrum without auction also saw political mud-slinging with opposition members equating the move with 2G spectrum case. As per the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG), 2G spectrum allocation caused a notional loss of ₹1.76 lakh crore to the national exchequer.

Scindia said the country cannot forget the "2G scam" — a blot on the country's history. "A scam that not just led to a colossal loss of ₹1,76,645 crore to the exchequer, but also gave government-corporate collaboration its worst name, a.k.a. crony capitalism," he said on X.

2025 to see AI turn into business value

New Delhi, Dec 28: Artificial intelligence (AI) transitioned from a temporary trend to a widespread reality, gaining traction across industries due to its potential to enhance efficiency, generate revenue and create entirely new roles, yet concerns around its use and impact on jobs remained.

Gone are the days when it was merely a buzzword; AI has now become an integral part of business strategy across various sectors. But its full impact on jobs is little known and so is the issue of intellectual property, data ownership and its privacy implications, and liability - who is liable if an accident or mishap occurs due to the use of AI.

As technology becomes increasingly human-like and pervasive, organisations are now striving to unlock business value through innovative methods to engage customers and employees, enhance operational efficiencies, and generate new revenue streams, Wipro CIO Anup Purohit said.

"We are working towards a future where AI is integrated seamlessly into everyday operations beyond the honeymoon period and into a mature phase," he said in an interaction with PTL.

"This growth isn't confined to technology firms; conventional sectors like banking, finance, and healthcare are also progres-

sively integrating AI to improve operational efficiency and boost customer engagement. AI is no longer the flavour of the season but is now the reality at scale. It is gaining momentum across all business domains and sectors. Even those that were traditionally considered laggards like BFSI or healthcare are looking forward to embracing AI. CIOs today are shifting their approach away from POC to executing initiatives at scale ... to turn the GenAI trend into business value by solving real business problems and cutting out the noise while managing costs," Purohit said.

However, Indian enterprises will need to scale AI by expanding the gamut beyond basic virtual assistants and predictive analytics to a combination of AI-tech-based scalable use cases, according to Nasscom.

"With the global AI market valued at approximately USD 235 billion and projected to grow to over USD 631 billion by 2028, AI is redefining industries and economies. The possibilities seem endless, from predictive analytics in agriculture to personalised healthcare solutions. In addition, emerging technologies such as quantum computing and federated learning are poised to redefine the AI landscape and open new frontiers," Tech Mahindra COO Atul Soneja said.

SHORT TAKES

Reliance acquires Karkinos for ₹375cr

New Delhi: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has acquired technology-driven and oncology-focused healthcare platform Karkinos for ₹375 crore, the firm said Saturday. Reliance Strategic Business Ventures (RSBV), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mumbai-listed India's most valuable company, completed the acquisition of Karkinos Healthcare Pvt Ltd with allotment of requisite shares, the firm said in a stock exchange filing. Karkinos was incorporated in India July 24, 2020, and is in the business of providing technology-driven innovative solutions for the early detection, diagnosis, and management of cancer. It had a turnover of about ₹22 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal.

Vodafone Group clears ₹11,650cr dues

New Delhi: UK-based Vodafone Group has cleared dues of around ₹11,650 crore or about 109 million pound that it raised against shares of Vodafone Idea, according to a regulatory filing. Vodafone Group had pledged almost the entire stake in VIL to raise the debt. The pledge was created in favour of HSBC Corporate Trustee Company (UK) for the debt raised by Mauritius and India-based entities of Vodafone Group.

Zydus Wellness arm gets GST demand

New Delhi: Zydus Wellness Ltd on Saturday said its wholly-owned arm has received a GST demand of ₹56.33 crore, along with applicable interest and penalty from the tax authority. Zydus Wellness Products Ltd (ZWPL), a wholly-owned subsidiary company, has received an intimation from the Directorate General of Goods and Services Tax Intelligence, Surat Zonal Unit, alleging GST demand of ₹56.33 crore, along with applicable interest and penalty, Zydus Wellness Ltd said in a regulatory filing. The intimation alleges that the GST was payable in relation to the acquisition of intellectual property rights from Heinz Italia S.P.A. by Heinz India Pvt Ltd, now merged with ZWPL, it added.

Zonal conference of AIPNBOA held

Bhubaneswar: General Conference of the All India Punjab National Bank Officers' Association (AIPNBOA), Bhubaneswar Circle was held in the Auditorium Hall of SOA University, Bhubaneswar. Many officials from various branches under Bhubaneswar circle and a large number of people from other circles of the state attended the meeting. Rajesh Kumar, Zonal Manager, Bhubaneswar Zone, attended the programme as Chief Guest. On this occasion, there was a discussion about the various issues faced by the officials in Bhubaneswar Zone. Com. Bailochan Sahoo, Circle Secretary and AGS of Odisha State Bailochan Sahoo highlighted the various issues of the officers of Bhubaneswar Zone and requested the members to remain united. General Secretary of AIPNBOA Comrade Dillip Saha, Chairman of AIPNBOA, Comrade K. Sreekumar, Circle President (Bhubaneswar) Comrade Roshan Kumar Roy, Chairman of the Reception Committee Comrade Sanjay Kumar Panda, Circle Secretary (Cuttack), Comrade Deepak Kumar Pradhan, Circle Secretary (Berhampur), Comrade P. Santosh Kumar Patra, Circle President (Sambalpur) Comrade Sadananda Behera, Bhubaneswar DGM cum Circle Head Laxmikant Mishra were present on this occasion.



Steel sector eyeing policy to safeguard its interests

New Delhi, Dec 28: Hit hard by surging imports, the Indian steel industry will be keenly eyeing policy initiatives in 2025 to safeguard its interests as it moves ahead with the 300 MnT capacity target amid volatile raw material prices.

Another challenge in front of the industry will be to expedite its efforts to transition to clean manufacturing processes with the government's push to green steel production amid global thrust on cutting greenhouse gas emissions in hard-to-abate sectors.

The government intervention will be essential as the Indian steel industry is in expansion mode to build a manufacturing capacity of 300 MnTPA by 2030 and would need investments worth around ₹10 lakh crore to add the remaining 120 MnT capacity to achieve the target.

According to the Ministry of Steel, India remained a net im-



porter of steel, with imports in April-September FY25 outpacing exports by a wider margin.

In the April-September 2024 period, imports rose over 41 per cent to 4.70 million tonnes (MnT) from 3.33 MnT in the six-month period of the last fiscal. Exports came down by 36 per cent to 2.31 MnT from 3.60 MnT in April-September FY24, official data showed.

On imports, the ministry said there is a growing demand by

industry for protection against cheap imports from China directly or through countries like Vietnam etc.

The global trend also reflects heightened efforts to safeguard domestic industries. The EU has already imposed anti-dumping duties on cold and hot rolled stainless steel, while Brazil, Mexico, and the US have also implemented duties to protect their domestic markets, it added.

On December 2, the steel ministry, in a meeting with the commerce department, proposed a 25 per cent safeguard duty on certain steel products imported into the country. Steel Minister HD Kumaraswamy and Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal were present at the meeting.

The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), under the Commerce Ministry, has also initiated a probe into the alleged increase in imports of certain steel flat products into the country following a complaint from the apex industry body Indian Steel Association (ISA), whose members include Tata Steel, JSW Steel, AMNS India, Jindal Steel and Power and state-owned Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL).

Industry members said out of the total imports of 5.7 MT of steel by India during April-November 2025, about 79 per cent came from China, Japan and Korea alone.

Women mutual fund investors grow 2.5 times in 2024: Report

The mutual fund industry's AUM was ₹68 lakh crore at the end of November 2024

New Delhi, Dec 28: Women investors in the Indian mutual fund (MF) industry, especially from the smaller cities and towns, have grown more than 2.5 times (year-on-year) on average amid the boom in the stock market, a report showed Saturday.



Women's financial inclusion is increasing across urban and emerging regions and tier 4 cities saw a whopping over 140 per cent growth in women's participation in the MF market, according to data shared by on-line brokerage Groww.

"While we had amazing growth across all segments in 2024, two segments stood out. Rise of women investors - number has doubled this year. And the number of portfolios with size greater than 1 crore tripled this year," Lalit Keshre, Co-founder and CEO, Groww, posted on X Saturday.

The women's participation in MFs saw more than 100 per cent growth in Metro, tier 1, 2 and 3 cities.

Among the cities with the highest number of women MF investors are Delhi,

Mumbai and Kolkata (Metro) and Pune, Lucknow, Nagpur, Ahmedabad and Jaipur (Non-Metro).

"Women's SIP contributions are 25 per cent higher than men's, and female SIP investors now make up one in four (compared to one in five last year)," the data showed.

When it comes to monthly SIP contribution, the average ticket size is ₹2,500 (indicating a focus on long-term wealth). Among the women SIP investors, 50 per cent are less than 30 years of age, followed by 33 per cent in the 30-40 year bracket and 17 per cent are age 40 and above.

Meanwhile, the Indian mutual fund industry saw a meteoric rise in 2024, as the

assets under management (AUM) of all MF schemes increased by more than ₹17 lakh crore this year.

According to data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), the mutual fund industry's AUM was ₹68 lakh crore at the end of November 2024, which is ₹17.22 lakh crore or 33 per cent more than the December 2023 figure of ₹50.78 lakh crore.

A record 42,76,207 investors joined the Indian stock market in November, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) data showed. As per a latest SBI Research report, the country is witnessing at least 30 million new demat accounts being opened every year since 2021.

Spending on non-food items up

Consumer spending, which accounts for about 58% of India's economic activity, remains a critical driver of economic growth in Asia's third-largest economy

New Delhi, Dec 28: Indian household spending on non-food items such as transport, garments and entertainment rose in both rural and urban areas in 2023/24 while outlays on staples like wheat and rice dropped, a government report showed Friday.

The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey for 2023/24, conducted from August 2023 to July 2024, showed non-food items accounted for about 53% of per capita spending in rural areas, up from about 47% in 2011/12, and 60% in urban areas, up from about 57%.

The shift in spending patterns is expected to lead to a decrease in the weighting of food items in the consumer price index (CPI), which is used by the central bank to frame monetary policy.

Officials from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation have previously indicated plans to revise the base year for the retail inflation data from 2012 to 2024, incorporating these findings.

Analysts said food is likely

to have a smaller weighting in India's consumer price index in the near future.

The urban-rural monthly per capita consumer spending gap narrowed to 70% in 2023/24 from 84% in 2011/12, the report noted.

In nominal terms, rural consumer spending climbed 9.55% on year to 4,122 rupees (\$48.23) per month in the year through July from 3,773 rupees the previous year, while urban

spending rose 8.31% to 6,996 rupees from 6,459 rupees, the report showed.

Adjusted for inflation, rural spending grew just 3.5%, while urban spending remained subdued due to retail inflation of about 5.5% in the fiscal year that ended in March.

Compared with 2011/12, rural consumer spending rose 45.4%, outpacing the 38.1% increase in urban areas, reflecting a slight convergence in consumption patterns.

Consumer spending, which accounts for about 58% of India's economic activity, remains a critical driver of economic growth in Asia's third-largest economy.



