



## Sharvari in 'Alpha'

Actress Sharvari punches her last working day of 2024 by shooting for her upcoming movie Alpha

LEISURE | P2



## Russia's N-scare

Russia will scrap a moratorium on deployment of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles

INTERNATIONAL | P10



## High attrition

Employee attrition in private sector banks witnesses an increase to about 25 per cent, an RBI report says

BUSINESS | P11



## New chess crown

Grandmaster Koneru Humpy defeats Irene Sukandar of Indonesia to emerge the FIDE World Rapid Chess champion

SPORTS | P12

## Jet shot down by Russia: Azerbaijan

AGENCIES

**Baku, Dec 29:** Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev Sunday said that the Azerbaijani airliner that crashed last week was shot down by Russia, albeit unintentionally, and criticised Moscow for trying to "hush up" the issue for days.

"We can say with complete clarity that the plane was shot down by Russia. (...) We are not saying that it was done intentionally, but it was done," he told Azerbaijani state television.

Aliyev said that the airliner, which crashed Wednesday in Kazakhstan, was hit by fire from the ground over Russia and "rendered uncontrollable by electronic warfare." Aliyev accused Russia of trying to "hush up" the issue for several days, saying he was "upset and surprised" by versions of events put forward by Russian officials.

"Unfortunately, for the first three days we heard nothing from Russia except delirious versions," he said.

The crash killed 38 of 67 people on board. The Kremlin said that air defence systems were firing near Grozny, the regional capital of the Russian republic of Chechnya, where the plane attempted to land, to deflect a Ukrainian drone strike.

Aliyev said Azerbaijan made three demands to Russia in connection with the crash.

"First, the Russian side must apologise to Azerbaijan. Second, it must admit its guilt. Third, punish the guilty, bring them to criminal responsibility and pay compensation to the Azerbaijani state, the injured passengers and crew members," he said.

# 179 killed as Boeing blows up

*As the year draws to an end and the world gears up to ring in the New Year with gusto and enthusiasm, two back-to-back major air tragedies have created a scare among fliers. Barely four days after an Azerbaijan Airlines jet crash-landed near Aktau in Kazakhstan, killing 38 of the 67 passengers, a Boeing 737-800 burst into flames at Muan airport in South Korea, Sunday, killing 179 of the 181 people on board. Billed as the worst plane mishap for any South Korean airline since an accident in 1997 at Guam that killed more than 200 people, Sunday's incident appears to be horrifying as the visuals of the plane erupting into a fireball went viral on social media. Meanwhile, reports also suggest that an Air Canada flight had a rough landing at Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province, though there has been no report of any injury or casualty in that incident*



AGENCIES

**Seoul, Dec 29:** A passenger plane skidded off a runway at a South Korean airport Sunday, slammed into a concrete fence and burst into flames after its front landing gear apparently failed to deploy. All but two of the 181 people on board died in one of the country's worst aviation disasters.

The Jeju Air plane crashed while landing in the town of Muan, about 290 km south of Seoul. The Transport Ministry said the plane was a 15-year-old Boeing 737-800 jet that had arrived from Bangkok and that the crash happened at 9:03 am.

A total of 179 people — 85 women, 84 men and 10 others whose genders weren't immediately identifiable — died in the fire, the South Korean fire agency said. Emergency workers pulled two people, both crew members, to safety. Health officials said they are conscious and not in life-threatening condition.

Among the 177 bodies so far found, officials have so far identified 88 of them, the fire agency said. The passengers were predominantly South Korean, as well as two Thai nationals.

Thailand's Foreign Ministry said its embassy in Seoul received confirmation from South Korean authorities that the two Thai passengers were among the fatalities.

The fire agency deployed 32 fire trucks and several helicopters to contain the blaze. About 1,570 firefighters, police officers, soldiers and other officials were also sent to the site, according to the fire agency and transport ministry.

Footage of the crash aired by South Korean television channels showed the plane skidding across the airstrip at high speed, apparently with its landing gear still closed, overrunning the runway and colliding head-on with a concrete wall on the outskirts of the facility,

triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames. Transport Ministry officials said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird-hit warning shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said. Workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box. P10

## Air Canada flight catches fire

**Ottawa:** An Air Canada flight coming from St John's city on Newfoundland Island had a rough landing at the Halifax airport in Goffs in Nova Scotia province that saw the aircraft skid down the runway and part of it catching fire. A statement issued by the airport said the incident involved Air Canada Flight 2259, which was operated by PAL Airlines, CBC News reported. The incident occurred around 9:30pm local time.

triggering an explosion. Other local TV stations aired footage showing thick plumes of black smoke billowing from the plane, which was engulfed in flames. Transport Ministry officials said their early assessment of communication records show the airport control tower issued a bird-hit warning shortly before it intended to land and gave its pilot permission to land in a different area. The pilot sent out a distress signal shortly before the plane overshot the end of the runway and skidded across a buffer zone before hitting the wall, the officials said. Workers have retrieved the flight data and cockpit voice recorders of the plane's black box. P10

## Release crop loss aid soon: CM to Collectors

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 29:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday visited Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati districts to take stock of the crop damage due to the recent unseasonal rains and directed the District Collectors to release the compensation soon.

Majhi, along with Speaker Surama Padhy and Revenue & Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, first visited a few rain-hit paddy fields under Ranpur block in Nayagarh district and reviewed the situation. He directed the Nayagarh Collector to hold discussions with the farmers affected by the unseasonal rains and take necessary steps to provide compensation as soon as possible.



Majhi and Pujari also checked the damaged paddy crops in the block.

The CM directed the farmers, who have registered for insurance, to report the crop loss by dialing toll-free no-14447, from their registered mobile number.

He later visited Lingipur and Gurandi villages of Uppalada gram panchayat under Goshani block in Gajapati district and discussed with the farmers the losses arising out of the recent unseasonal rains. He assured the farmers that the compensation will be released soon.

## 4 MKCG docs fired on assault charge

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Berhampur, Dec 29:** Authorities of Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati (MKCG) Medical College and Hospital here Sunday terminated four doctors, including an assistant professor and three senior residents from their services, and debarred a second-year postgraduate (PG) resident from the hostel for six months for allegedly assaulting a student December 20, an official said Sunday.

Purushottam Swain, assistant professor of Orthopedics department, Aryan Kumar Mohanty, Chinmay Pradhan, senior residents engaged as contractual doctors in Paediatric department, and Yashwant Veera, a PG senior resident in General Surgery department, have been terminated, while Priyajeet Sahoo, a second-year PG resident in Orthopedics department, has been debarred from the hostel for six months,



the official added.

The action was taken after a decision in the college council meeting December 23 and was directed by the Director of Medical Education and Training (DMET) for disciplinary reasons, said Suchitra Dash, Dean and Principal of the state government-run medical college.

Police have registered a case in the matter after the victim PG student lodged an FIR in Baidyanathpur police station. The victim alleged that he was physically assaulted by his senior on the hostel premises around 12:30am December 20.

## SHORT TAKES

### 4 killed as bus overturns

**Koraput:** Four people were killed and 40 others injured after their bus overturned in hilly Koraput district early Sunday morning, police said. The mishap occurred around 5:30am at Dokrighat near Gupteswar in Boipariguda police station area, they said. The bus was on its way to Gupteswar temple with around 50 devotees from Niali in Cuttack, they added. P5

### 9-day-old 'sold' baby rescued

**Balasore:** Parents of a newborn child who was traced by the police from a Mayurbhanj couple Saturday, claimed that they had 'donated' the nine-day-old infant amid reports of child sale in the district. Based on a complaint, a joint investigation was initiated by the police and the Child Welfare Committee. The baby born to Dharmu Behera and his wife Shantilata was traced to Mayurbhanj's childless couple. P5

## ISRO's mission for space docking today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 29:** The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to launch two satellites Monday night from Sriharikota spaceport to demonstrate docking and undocking of spacecraft in orbit, which will make India the fourth country in the world to achieve the feat.

ISRO's warhorse rocket Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) will place the two satellites - SDX01 and SDX02 - in a 476-km circular orbit and attempt the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDEX) in the first week of January, the space agency officials said.

"This mission will mark India's entry into the exclusive league of nations capable of mastering space docking," Union Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said.

The SpaDEX mission is expected to be a stepping stone for India's future endeavours in space exploration which include getting rocks and soil from the moon on Earth, the proposed Bharatiya Antariksha Station and landing an astronaut on the lunar surface. Only the US, Russia and China have mastered space docking technologies.

"The primary objective of SpaDeX mission is to develop and demonstrate the technology needed for rendezvous, docking, and undocking of two small spacecraft (SDX01, which is the Chaser, and SDX02, the Target) in a low-Earth circular orbit," an ISRO official said.

The secondary objective of the mission includes demonstration of the transfer of electric power between the docked spacecraft, which is essential for future applications such as in-space robotics; composite spacecraft control and others.

## Tigress Zeenat finally captured in Bengal

PNN & AGENCIES

**Kolkata, Dec 29:** Elusive tigress Zeenat, which had strayed from Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Odisha to Bankura in West Bengal, and had kept wildlife officials of both the states on edge for over a week, was finally spotted, tranquillised and captured Sunday afternoon.

According to chief wildlife warden Debal Roy, "The tigress was tranquillised with a single dart shot at 4:09pm, after previous attempts to sedate her had failed. The animal's vital parameters would be examined before deciding her temporary accommodation, he said.

"Zeenat could not be sedated during a previous attempt despite tranquillisers being used early Sunday morning. The operation resumed in the afternoon after veterinarians gave their approval," he said.

Since Saturday night, the tigress had been in Gopalpur forest in Bankura district, where she was surrounded by double



netting, he added. "At 1:20am on Sunday, the

tigress was first tranquillised, but despite repeated doses, she

could not be sedated," Roy said. The operation was paused at 4:30am due to the upper limit on tranquilliser doses. After the tigress had rested and calmed down, the operation resumed, and she was successfully sedated in the afternoon, Roy said.

Zeenat had been relocated from Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) to Similipal last month to introduce new gene pool to the tiger population.

After leaving Similipal, Zeenat ventured through forests in Manbazar and Bandwan before crossing into West Bengal, covering over 120 km

across the borders of West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha.

Despite efforts, the tigress avoided baits in trap-door cages and instead killed domestic goats that strayed into the forest. Surveillance using drones was also conducted, but the dense forests made monitoring challenging.

Officials said Zeenat had been traveling shorter distances in recent days, suggesting she may be settling in the area.

Apprehending that the marauding tigress 'Zeenat' may stray into Rahamada village, flanked by Raikia and Bharadi hills, the West Bengal Forest department had December 25 set up nylon nets on three sides of the village. They had also erected the fences around the houses close to forests.

The nylon net over a 1-sqkm-area was put up to prevent the tigress from entering nearby human settlements. The department had informed local villagers about its presence at the current location for their safety.

# leisure



## BALDONI TO FILE COUNTERSUIT AGAINST BLAKE'S ALLEGATION

Actor and director Justin Baldoni is preparing to file a countersuit against Blake Lively following her recent legal complaint alleging sexual harassment and a smear campaign by him during the production of *It Ends With Us*.

## JAMES GUNN DEFENDS DELAY IN RELEASE OF *THE BATMAN 2*

DC Studios head James Gunn has spoken out in defense of the five-year delay between installments of *The Batman* movie franchise. Gunn argues that lengthy gaps between blockbuster film sequels are not uncommon. The film is now slated to release October 1, 2027.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
 Today, you feel free and liberated! And in that spirit, you want to travel or do things you loved doing as a child. A good time for a family outing, says Ganesh. Keeping in mind your mood, you may even make plans for the future for your near and dear.

**TAURUS**  
 You are likely to stick to basics instead of letting your imagination run wild today, says Ganesh. At work, you may feel some pressure from your peers to do things differently. Think things out and be certain before you take any decision, advises Ganesh.

**GEMINI**  
 You have a certain degree of equanimity when it comes to reacting to praise and criticism. Today, however, you will be emotional, and it won't be too bad. You will get appreciated at work and your liberal show of emotions will only make others like you more. Your colleagues will say three cheers for you. But avoid an emotional outburst as it may turn cheers into jeers.

**CANCER**  
 Today, Cupid will send its arrow right through your heart. You will be trembling with pain – the sweet pain of lust and love. But the overzealous Cupid may not stop at just that. Just to be completely sure, it will virtually do shooting practice at you. You can do nothing but tell your love interest how badly you have been hit.

**LEO**  
 It is good to be impulsive sometimes; but if one were to ask you today, you would be all for a meticulously planned approach to life. So much so that from now on, planning will become almost a part and parcel of your life, predicts Ganesh. So, it is expected that you plan everything to perfection today, although the execution of your plans may be a different story. But you can't do everything, can you? At least the good thing is that you make a great display of your organisational capabilities, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
 You will start the day by scribbling down things to do. But don't just jot them down; instead, set realistic goals and prioritise them. Items you mark highest will demand quick actions, cautions Ganesh.

**LIBRA**  
 It's a spiritual and harmonious mood that grips you today, feels Ganesh. You may want to focus on meditation, as you essentially seek peace. This may have something to do with the fact that at work, your subordinates may attempt to throw around their weight to force you to make drastic changes. But do not let it bother you too much.

**SCORPIO**  
 It is more than likely that you will find yourself in a tricky situation today, says Ganesh. You may start the day feeling lonely and empty but yet, at the same time, you will have some responsibility that will prevent you from showing it. Try to keep your mind off negative thoughts. Work and friends will help you cheer up later in the day.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
 Stay stern, says Ganesh, as it might be necessary to exercise your grit to get the desired results today. Your presence may be dominating at the workplace, but your subordinates will find your manner pleasing as you hold them in awe of you. Do not get carried away by your success or the tables may turn, suggests Ganesh.

**CAPRICORN**  
 You will prioritise your needs, and the most critical would be the need to manage finances to save for the future. Also, the company you choose to keep will reflect the kind of person you are. So, beware of who you befriend, warns Ganesh.

**AQUARIUS**  
 Today, you will have a lot of fun with your siblings! Though generally well-organised and methodical, you will enjoy going with the flow of what your siblings and friends plan for you. Sometimes, spontaneity is a good thing, says Ganesh.

**PISCES**  
 There are indications you will be in hot pursuit of leisure today, says Ganesh. This will probably be in the form of a short trip to recharge your batteries, and is probably fuelled by your satisfaction in the realisation that the role you play within your organisation is consequential, satisfying as well as rewarding.

## Sharvari wraps 2024 with *Alpha*

Mumbai: Actress Sharvari, who rose to prominence with *Munjya*, punched her last working day of 2024 on the sets of her upcoming movie *Alpha*.

Sunday, the actress took to the Stories section of her Instagram, and shared a picture of her harness from the sets of the movie.

She wrote on the picture, "Harnessing my last working day of 2024 energy #Alpha. Grateful for each working day of 24. A year that has particularly been a testing one.. Going to work has been my biggest blessing. has kept me motivated & going".

*Alpha* is produced by Aditya Chopra, and is a part of the YRF spy-universe. It is directed by Shiv Rawail, who is known for the streaming series *The Railway Men* which was also produced by YRF.

It is the first female-led film from the spy-universe, and also stars Alia Bhatt and Anil Kapoor. The film's title was unveiled in a special video by the makers.

The YRF spy includes blockbusters like *Ek Tha Tiger*, *Tiger Zinda Hai*, *War*, *Pathaan* and *Tiger 3*. The films lined up for the spy-universe include *War 2* with Hrithik Roshan and NTR Jr in the lead, *Pathaan 2*, and *Tiger vs Pathaan*. IANS



## Varun talks about coping after heartbreak

Mumbai: Actor Varun Dhawan, who can be seen in the recently released movie *Baby John*, feels that heartbreak is a difficult phase for any man.

The actor recently appeared on Shubhankar Mishra's YouTube channel and spoke about men trying to make sense of heartbreak and coping with it.

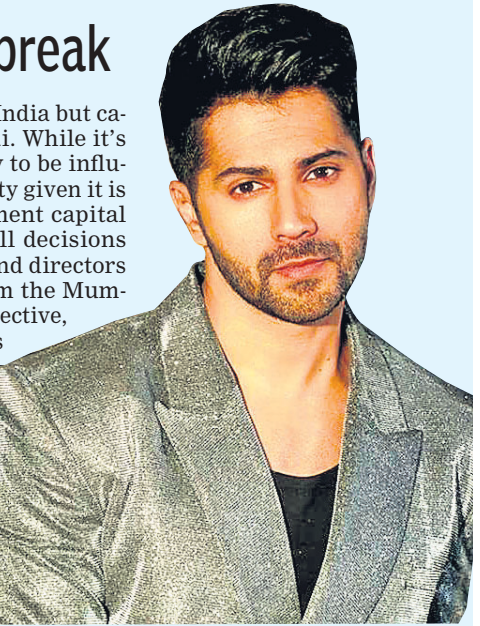
He said, "When a man's heart breaks, the

society doesn't think much about what happens to him. They go through a very bad time. You have to work and do a lot of things".

He further mentioned, "You can't even show it to them. You get shattered from within. You can't show that pain. You have to keep a face and move forward because people expect you to be strong, you can't cry being a boy".

Earlier, Varun spoke about what needs to change in the Hindi film industry. The actor said that Bollywood currently is dominated by people whose think-

ing is not pan-India but caters to Mumbai. While it's relatively easy to be influenced by the city given it is the entertainment capital of India and all decisions of producers and directors may come from the Mumbai based perspective, Varun feels it's important for voices from across India to join Bollywood to render a certain depth in storytelling. IANS



## Nyrraa reveals her New Year plans

Mumbai: Television actress Nyrraa M Banerji is all set to welcome the New Year by spending quality time with her family and friends.

The actress is excited to celebrate New Year's Eve with her loved ones, ushering in 2025 with positivity. Reflecting on the past year and her plans for the upcoming celebration, she shared, "God has been kind, and 2024 has been a great year for me professionally. I only have gratitude to offer to my family, friends, and my legion of fans who have supported me throughout."

Nyrraa added, "My family have played a pivotal role and that's why I would year by spending quality time. Here's wishing Happy New Year as we lot is on the plate now Please continue to and support."

Work-wise, Nyrraa was last seen in the popular reality show "Bigg Boss 18." Referring to her exit as "unfair," the actor stated that it was only in the third week she

started finding her footing in the game. She was working on her strategies but couldn't understand why she was given so little screen time. IANS



## Tamannaah's December bliss

Mumbai: Actress Tamannaah Bhatia is spreading festive cheer this December with her boyfriend, Vijay Varma, close friend Kajal Aggarwal.

The trio is capturing the essence of the season, sharing joyful moments together as they celebrate the end of the year. From fun-filled gatherings to candid snapshots, Tamannaah, Vijay and Kajal are making this December unforgettable.

Sunday, the *Baahubali* actress took to her Instagram stories to give a sneak peek into her fun-filled time with Vijay and close friends, including Kajal.

In the first image, Tamannaah is seen striking a pose with Vijay, Kajal, Nishka Lulla Mehra and others. In the next photo, the *Lust Stories 2* actress is seen smiling as Kajal hugs her from behind. Sharing the image, Bhatia wrote in the caption, "Love you @kajalaggarwal."

Tamannaah, an avid social media user, also posted a video of her peaceful moments, captioning it, "2024, you were kind."

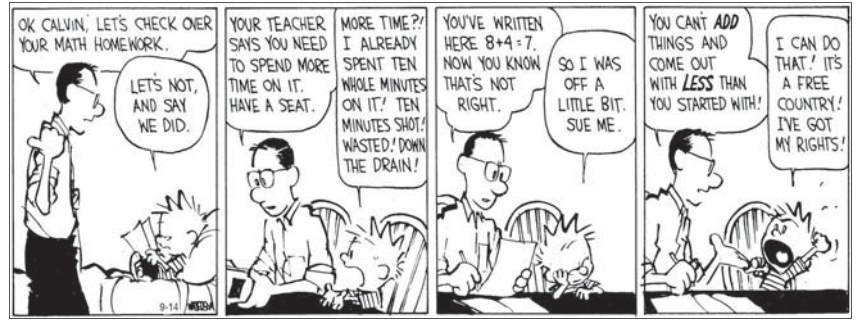
Tamannaah and Vijay recently returned from their romantic getaway in Goa. The actress took to Instagram to share photos and videos from the trip. In one of the clips, the couple is seen playing a video game with their friends.

Sharing the post, the Rebel actress captioned it, "Goa getaway." IANS

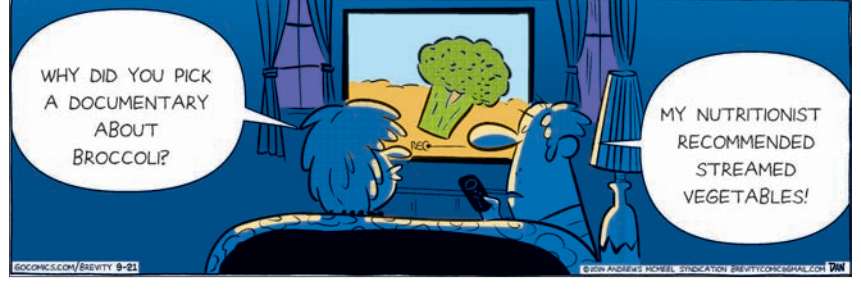
### PEANUTS



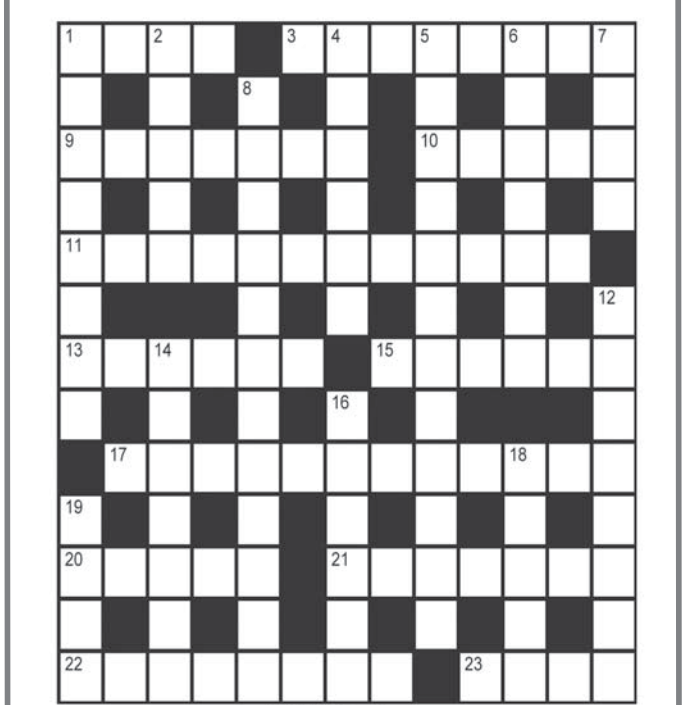
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### BREVITY



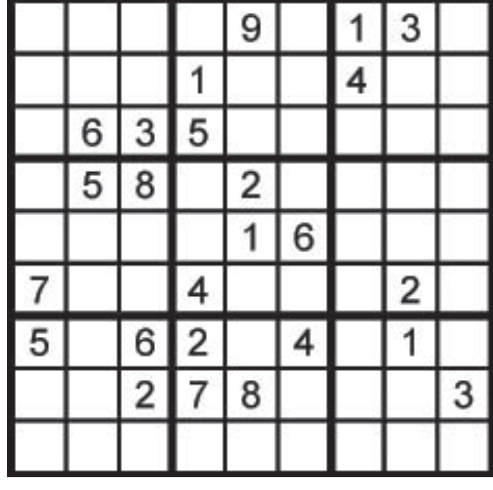
### FUN post CROSSWORD



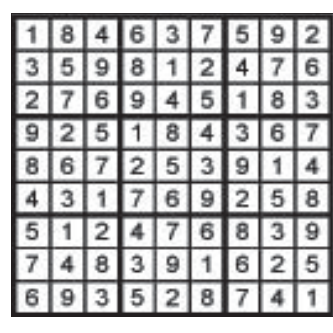
- Across
- 1 Food grain
  - 3 Work force
  - 9 Spitz family member
  - 10 Museum piece
  - 11 Lacking adequate food
  - 13 Aristocrats
  - 15 Rock dove
  - 17 Favourites (5-7)
  - 20 Stench
  - 21 Flooring
  - 22 Slaughter
  - 23 Basilica area
  - Down
  - 1 South Dakota monument
  - 2 Caravan beast
  - 4 Common vipers
  - 5 The flock
  - 6 Blue pike
  - 7 Full-bodied
  - 8 Cause of many doctor visits
  - 12 Liquorice-flavoured liqueur
  - 14 Jumping rodents
  - 16 Appropriate
  - 18 Outfit
  - 19 Lens type

### 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

Young artistes perform at Kalanjali Folk Festival organised by Kalanjali Artistry Trust at Utkal Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Sunday



downtown

'Odisha leads in climate-resilient agriculture'

Principal Secretary, Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Arabinda K Padhee sheds light on the state's vision to transform agriculture into a sustainable and equitable growth driver

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Odisha is emerging as a leader in sustainable agricultural practices with a focus on inclusivity, diversification, and climate resilience, according to Arabinda K Padhee.

Padhee is the Principal Secretary of the department of Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment of the Government of Odisha.

In an interview with PTI, Padhee shed light on the state's comprehensive vision to transform agriculture into a sustainable and equitable growth driver.

"Agriculture contributes 22 per cent to Odisha's Gross Value Added (GVA) and sustains 55-60 per cent of its population, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Yet, with 45-50 per cent of the farmland dependent on rainfall, the state is prioritising region-specific strategies to address these vulnerabilities," he said.

Collaborative efforts with global research organisations, such as the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), are central to this transformation, he added.

On the crop pattern of the state, he said that while paddy remains dominant, the state is actively promoting high-value crops such as vegetables, pulses, oilseeds, and millets, and initiatives like Agri-Production Clusters are fostering diversification.



Additionally, rice-fallow management ensures improved soil fertility and increased farmer incomes by introducing pulses and oilseeds in fallow lands.

As Odisha encounters frequent natural calamities like floods and cyclones, Padhee said that the climate is indeed a significant challenge for us, as between 1972 and 2022, only three years have been free from extreme weather events, including floods, droughts, and cyclones.

"We are focusing on making our agricultural practices climate-resilient. Odisha has introduced submergence-tolerant rice varieties like Swana-Sub1, which can survive up to 12 days of flooding, drought-resistant crops, and salt-tolerant strains," he told PTI.

A dedicated Climate Resilience Cell integrates sustainability into every new project,

positioning the state as a pioneer in adaptive agriculture, he added.

When asked about the state's smallholder farmers, the principal secretary said that with smallholders making up over 92 per cent of Odisha's farmers, collective bargaining through Farmers' Producer Organisations (FPOs) is enhancing market access.

"Digital tools provide crop-specific advice, while initiatives like Mukhyamantri Krushi Udyog Yojana foster rural entrepreneurship. Women farmers are at the forefront, benefitting from higher subsidies, skill development programs, and decision-making roles," he told PTI.

Highlighting the state's traditional crops, Padhee said that Odisha has gained national recognition for reviving traditional crops like millets, known for their resilience and nutritional

value. "We are trying to bring out our forgotten foods of the state. Forgotten foods are those that were hitherto used to be cultivated, but they have gone out of the fields of the farmers. So we are trying to bring such crops into the fold," he said.

Odisha already has a Forgotten Food Policy, and we recently held an international symposium on forgotten foods that highlighted the importance of underutilised crops in addressing food security and environmental sustainability, he added.

"In conclusion, our vision is rooted in inclusivity, sustainability, and resilience," said Padhee. "By leveraging technology, climate-smart practices, and evidence-based policies, we aim to enhance productivity while ensuring equitable growth for smallholders, women, and tribal communities."

Padhee added that Odisha is setting an example for sustainable agricultural development across India with its focus on organic farming, agrobiodiversity, and climate-smart practices.

POLITICKLE By MANJUL



Locals block City road over refusal to hold cricket match

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Agitated over the cancellation of a cricket match, angry locals staged a blockade near Laxmisagar area Sunday afternoon, leaving scores of commuters stranded on the Rasulgargh-Kalpna road for over three hours.

Tourists travelling to Puri and Biju Patnaik International Airport were among the worst affected due to the chaos as the



We have been conducting cricket matches at the location for over a decade now. The school administration's decision to deny permission over flimsy reasons is unjustified, said a protester



Laxmisagar police failed to pacify the crowd.

A source in Laxmisagar police station said trouble started early Sunday morning after the headmaster of Laxmisagar high school denied access to some locals for a cricket match. As the deadlock persisted for a longer duration, the agitated

locals blocked the busy Rasulgargh-Kalpna road. Some agitating locals claimed that the controversy erupted after they objected to the invitation of a BJP leader to the match.

One of the protesters said, "We have been conducting cricket matches at the location for over a decade now. The

Activist advocates indigenous coastal conservation in Odisha

Environmentalism Soumya Ranjan Biswal emphasises the need to restore Odisha's coastal ecosystems and protect indigenous species for long-term ecological resilience

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Environmentalist Soumya Ranjan Biswal has called on Forest, Environment, and Climate Change Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia to adopt an ecosystem-based approach to coastal conservation in the state.

In a social media post addressed to the minister, Biswal criticised the focus on exotic species like Casuarina in coastal plantation drives, which he said harms biodiversity, causes water scarcity, and disrupts ecosystems such as dunes, mudflats, and marshlands. "These practices, pursued in the name of green cover, weaken the resilience of coastal ecology," Biswal stated.

He stressed the need to move beyond increasing forest cover and large flora and fauna, urging a more comprehensive strategy to restore Odisha's unique coastal ecosystems.

A native of Puri district, Biswal is a prominent conservationist. He recently received the

prestigious International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) Impact Award from the U.S. Department of State and the Meridian International Center. The award recognizes his project, "Community-led biodiversity conservation and nature-based solutions education for climate resilience at Devi river mouth in India," which aims to foster lasting local impact.

Selected for its innovation and scalability, the project earned Biswal a USD 5,000 grant. He plans to use the funding to strengthen community-driven efforts for biodiversity conservation.

Since founding the Odisha Paryavaran Sanrakshan Abhiyan in 2014, Biswal has worked tirelessly on marine turtle and mangrove conservation. His dedication underscores the urgency of adopting sustainable practices to protect Odisha's vulnerable coastal ecosystems.

OCA president steps down

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Senior BJD leader Prakash Das has stepped down as the president of the Odisha Cricket Association (OCA) Sunday.

Das, a former MLA from Jajpur district was elected unopposed to the position October 28, 2022. His term, scheduled to end October 2025, has now come to an early conclusion.

Speaking at a press conference Sunday, OCA general secretary Sanjay Behera announced that vice-president Pankaj Mohanty will serve as the interim president until elections are held within 45 days.

Behera mentioned that Das has resigned citing personal reasons. "The election for the position would take place after the upcoming international cricket match," Behera added.

BMC to expand parking for PBD

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: Ahead of the upcoming 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD), the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) is taking significant steps to address the City's parking challenges with a comprehensive framework for the operation, management, and regulation of parking spaces. The initiative is aimed at improving urban mobility and promoting sustainable practices.

The newly-developed parking areas include a 400-meter stretch from the "Old BMC Office to Maa's Maa Road" in the South East Zone, a 700-meter stretch from the Fire Station to Patas Chhak in the South West Zone, and a 650-meter stretch from Stewart School to Jaleswar Temple, also in the South West Zone. Once completed, these spaces will be regulated under the City's parking rules, offering citizens hassle-free parking and smoother city traffic flow.

BMC is also coordinating efforts to relocate street vendors from these areas. Mayor Sulochana Das is personally overseeing the progress, while Commissioner Rajesh Prabhakar Patil has instructed day-wise updates from officers to ensure timely completion.

State govt under fire over Kalinga Stadium parking



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: The BJP dispensation in the state came under severe criticism after two government vehicles were found parked on the running track of Kalinga Stadium here with the Opposition BJD dubbing it a "shameful" activity.

The state government clarified that the two four-wheelers were parked on the athletics track due to "unavoidable circumstances".

The clarification was given by Odisha's Sports Minister Suryabanshi Suraj who stated that two vehicles had to enter the racetrack because of an "emergency" situation.

He was responding to the

allegation made by BJD leader and former sports minister TK Behera.

Taking to X, the BJD leader Saturday claimed, "Athletic track in Kalinga Stadium: During @Naveen\_Odisha's Era, it was a running track of international athletes. Now, it is running track of vehicles belonging to the ruling party leaders. It is outrageously disappointing for all sportspersons and shameful for Odisha. @sports\_odisha @bjd\_odisha."

Behera also tagged a picture of two government cars being parked on the running track of the stadium.

The sports minister alleged that Behera has been vocal and active as the BJD lost power af-

ter 24 years.

"The two vehicles had to be parked on the sports track due to an emergency," Suraj said.

He also said that all visitors, including political leaders and VIPs, normally park their vehicles at the designated area and enter the complex on foot.

"The present incident was due to an emergency," he claimed.

Suraj also said that the cars were parked on the track when it was raining heavily.

"The cars were parked as an emergency arose due to medical requirements," the minister said, adding that he always parks his car at a distance when he enters the area where running tracks are laid.

"I would like to thank the former sports minister (Behera) for having so much interest even after being discharged from the responsibility of the department," Suraj said.

Behera rejected the minister's clarification and said that the people have the right to know the reason for allowing cars to be parked on the athletics track.

₹50L more funds for Dhanu Jatra

In a first for the festival, Dhanu Jatra will be live-streamed at prominent locations across Odisha, including Bhubaneswar, using LED screens

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhubaneswar, Dec 29: In an effort to get international recognition for the annual Dhanu Jatra in Bargarh, the state government Sunday said several measures, including allocation of an additional Rs 50 lakh, were taken by the administration.

"The much-celebrated Dhanu Jatra 2025 will be held in Bargarh district from January 3 to January 13, showcasing Odisha's rich cultural heritage and tradition," state culture minister Surjyabanshi Suraj told reporters here.

Asserting that the state government is taking steps to ensure that the festival gets international recognition, the minister said, "The

government has already allocated Rs 1 crore for the festival and another Rs 50 lakh has been sanctioned for live broadcasting of Dhanu Jatra, creating a dedicated website and



other associated expenses." For the first time, arrangements have been made to live-stream the festival in major locations in the state, including the Capital city, using LED screens, the minister added.

"Around 170 artistes will receive a token honorarium of Rs 10,000 each. Additionally, the National School of Drama will produce a documentary on Dhanu Jatra to showcase its cultural significance," the minister added.

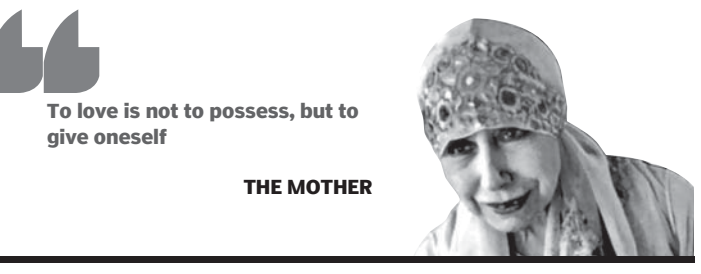
"A dedicated expert committee will be formed to work to-

wards obtaining UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status for Dhanu Jatra. The government is also launching a dedicated website that will provide comprehensive information about the festival, including its history, venues, and real-time GPS-enabled navigation for visitors," he said.

During Dhanu Jatra, Bargarh town transforms into the mythical cities of Mathura and Gopapur, vividly reenacting episodes from Indian mythology, he said.

"The live broadcasting of the festival is timed with Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which will enable a global audience to witness it and understand its cultural essence," the minister added.

Advertisement for Zonal Office, Bhubaneswar Zone, Bank of India, regarding requirements for premises.



To love is not to possess, but to give oneself  
THE MOTHER

# MAGA Meltdown

A rift has emerged among the supporters of US President-elect Donald Trump over the contentious issue of immigration. The faction spearheaded by billionaire Elon Musk and fellow entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy contrasts sharply with Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again) base, which firmly endorses his stringent anti-immigration policies. At the centre of the heated debate that has been raging online over the last few days is Sriram Krishnan, an Indian-born entrepreneur chosen by Trump to be his adviser on artificial intelligence (AI). Krishnan favours getting more skilled immigrants into the US.

The matter escalated when Ramaswamy, appointed by Trump to reduce government spending, asserted that American culture is responsible for US companies opting to hire skilled foreign workers, often through H-1B temporary worker visas. "Our American culture has venerated mediocrity over excellence," Ramaswamy wrote on X. "A culture that celebrates the prom queen over the math olympiad champ, or the jock over the valedictorian-the top student in a class, will not produce the best engineers." Undoubtedly the prom queen is very attractive yet this post invited sharp reactions from Trump's MAGA supporters who are against any sort of immigration. The backlash apparently subdued Ramaswamy who, subsequently, clarified his stand saying that "the H-1B system is badly broken & should be replaced." But it was too late. Many MAGA supporters resorted to outright racist slurs and termed Indians as "invaders" stealing their jobs. It is pertinent to note here that persons of Indian origin (PIOs) in most white collar jobs in the US compete directly with white Americans, unlike other immigrants who mostly get into low-paying blue collar jobs. As a result of this, the unfortunate PIOs often find themselves at the receiving end of backlash from white Americans.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that enables US companies to hire foreign workers for specialised roles that require advanced skills. Technology firms rely heavily on this visa to recruit tens of thousands of employees annually from countries such as India and China. The tech sector has consistently advocated for an increase in H-1B visa quota to draw in the best skilled talent to the US. However, during Trump's first term in 2020, the programme faced restrictions, with the administration contending that it permits companies to substitute American workers with lower-paid foreign labour.

Musk, born in Pretoria, South Africa, is the world's wealthiest man and a close ally of the President-elect. He vehemently supports H-1B visa and has vowed to "go to war" to defend the programme. Musk was once an H-1B visa holder himself and has advocated for the industry's necessity to recruit international talent. "The reason I'm in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H1B," Musk wrote on X (formerly Twitter), the social media platform he owns. He then added, "Take a big step back and F\*\*\* YOURSELF in the face. I will go to war on this issue the likes of which you cannot possibly comprehend." However, critics contend that these visas undermine opportunities for American citizens who could fill those positions. Some conservative voices have called for the programme to be abolished all together.

Amid the simmering row, the President-elect seems to be aligning with Musk and other supporters in the tech industry over the immigration visa issue. In a Saturday interview with the New York Post, Trump expressed his approval of using visas to attract skilled foreign workers to the US. "I've always liked the visas, I have always been in favour of the visas. That's why we have them," he told the newspaper. However, Trump, known for his fickle nature, has in the past criticised the H-1B visas, calling them "very bad" and "unfair" for US workers. His stringent immigration policies, including a commitment to mass deportation, were pivotal to his successful presidential campaign. While he has concentrated on undocumented immigrants entering the US, he has also advocated for restrictions on legal immigration, such as family-based visas. During his 2024 presidential campaign, where immigration became a key issue, Trump stated that undocumented immigrants are "poisoning the blood of our country" and vowed to execute the largest deportation operation in US history. However, in a notable shift from his typical alarmist stance on immigration, Trump stated in a podcast this year that he supports granting automatic green cards to foreign students who graduate from US colleges. These remarks coincided with the emergence of his growing relationship with figures in the tech industry, including Musk and Ramaswamy.

No matter what the outcome of this spat, fact remains that America, the land of opportunities, has always been the land of immigrants. Those who claim to be "natives" of the country themselves have foreign roots. It is meritocracy that has thrived in that country over the centuries and that has made America the world's most powerful nation by attracting top talents in many fields from across the globe. However much people may claim that the next century belongs to China or some other country, fact is behind all modern day tech innovations and inventions have all been the products greatly attributable to the 'American Dream'. That dream will keep the United States of America as the land of opportunities for a long time to come. That is what will attract the best brains from across the world to sail the oceans to reach the shores of America and create new ideas and innovations that the world will need to use.

## WISDOM CORNER

If you are vigilant and make a stern effort to reject every thought when it rises, you will soon find that you are going deeper and deeper into your own inner self, where there is no need for your effort to reject the thoughts  
RAMANA MAHARSHI

Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked, in which you can walk with love and reverence  
HENRY DAVID THOREAU

There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception  
ALDOUS HUXLEY

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

- 1803: The Maratha chief Daulat Rao Sindhia and the British signed the Treaty of Surji-Arjunagao during the Maratha Wars in India.
- 1902: A new southern record was set by Robert Falcon Scott, in company with Ernest Henry Shackleton and E.A. Wilson, as they reached the Ross Ice Shelf at the head of the Ross Sea in Antarctica.
- 1916: Grigori Rasputin was murdered by Russian conservatives—who reportedly poisoned, shot, and then drowned the Siberian mystic—in an effort to halt his influence over Empress Alexandra and the royal family.

## FOCUS HEALTH

# THE HALF PROMISE

Groundbreaking weight-loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy have understandably generated a lot of excitement, bringing hope to the hundreds of millions of people grappling with obesity. When combined with a healthier diet and exercise, these drugs, which work by suppressing appetite, deliver an average 10% reduction in body weight that can be sustained for years.

With more than two-thirds of adults in the United Kingdom and nearly three-quarters in the United States classified as overweight or obese – a health crisis that costs national economies billions of dollars annually – physicians and policymakers could be forgiven for embracing these drugs as a panacea. US President Joe Biden's administration, for example, recently proposed requiring Medicare and Medicaid to cover the costs of weight-loss drugs, offering access to millions of Americans. But addressing obesity requires much more than a technological fix.

To be clear, I am not suggesting these drugs are unnecessary or that medical professionals should avoid prescribing them. But they do not address the problem fueling the global obesity crisis (and contributing to the climate crisis as well): our broken food system. The alarming rise in obesity over the past 30 years is not simply a byproduct of higher living standards or more sedentary lifestyles, though these factors play a pivotal role. The primary factor appears to be the transformation of our food environment, which has fundamentally altered both the types of food we consume and our eating habits.

In recent years, scientists and health experts have increasingly focused on the high-fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) foods driving unhealthy dietary habits. This trend can be attributed to companies



Efforts to expand access to anti-obesity drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy could be a lifesaver for millions of people around the world. But we must not confuse symptoms for the underlying pathology: a dysfunctional food system that is endangering both our health and the planet

reshaping the food system to produce ultra-processed, hyper-palatable, and highly profitable foods. Consequently, people are snacking more, eating larger portions, and preparing fewer meals themselves. In the UK, for example, the snack market has boomed while the time spent preparing meals has sharply declined.

These changes haven't just fueled the rapid increase in HFSS food consumption. They have also led to a surge in meat consumption, especially in Europe and North America, where meat-heavy diets have become all too common.

Beyond the heightened risk of heart disease and related health conditions, excessive meat consumption has had devastating effects on the climate and biodiversity. Research shows that animal-based foods generate twice the greenhouse-gas emissions of plant-based alternatives. Just as health experts urge us to reduce our HFSS intake, climate scientists consistently emphasise the importance of cutting meat and dairy consumption to keep global warming within safe limits.

In an effort to prevent a lasting change in people's eating habits, the meat industry is seeking techno-fixes to cut

GHG emissions. For example, funding for research on cutting farm emissions – such as feed additives designed to reduce methane levels in cows' burps – has increased markedly.

Such solutions are particularly attractive to governments reluctant to introduce measures that influence consumer behaviour. Fearful of opposition from the Big Food lobby and wary of accusations of overreach, policies like sugar taxes or meat taxes are deemed political hot potatoes to be avoided at all costs.

But the overlapping crises our broken food system is fueling – from the billions of dollars spent each year on diet-related health problems to the environmental degradation pushing our planet to its limits – cannot be wished away or fixed with technological band-aids. Instead, what is needed is a major shift in dietary habits toward foods that nourish both people and the environment.

To this end, the EAT-Lancet Commission – comprised of the world's leading nutrition and sustainability experts – advocates a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins while reducing consump-

tion of animal proteins, dairy, and sugars. Taken together, these recommendations offer a clear blueprint for ensuring health and sustainability.

Admittedly, it is unrealistic to expect consumers – conditioned by food environments designed for profit rather than human or environmental health – to drive this transition on their own. With unhealthy foods widely available and aggressively marketed, many consumers often struggle to moderate their food intake and, in some cases, develop addictive behaviours.

Governments and food manufacturers must take proactive measures to reshape these environments, such as expanding initiatives aimed at reducing the consumption of HFSS foods to include meat, thereby encouraging people to eat more plant-based whole foods and meat alternatives.

Another potential solution would be to extend bans on promotional deals for unhealthy foods to cover meat products. Requiring food companies to report on the types of food they sell, including HFSS foods and the ratio of plant-based to animal proteins, would also help. These measures would incentivize businesses to prioritise healthier, more sustainable options over less nutritious ones.

For those trapped in a cycle of poor health, Ozempic and Wegovy could even save lives, and efforts to make these treatments widely available are a welcome step. But it is essential that we recognise that this approach treats the symptoms rather than the underlying pathology. Defusing the time bombs of ill health and environmental catastrophe requires fast, decisive action to remake our dysfunctional food system.

The writer is Interim Executive Director of Madre Brava.  
PROJECT SYNDICATE

## SPECTRUM ECONOMY

# Dilemma between growth & inflation

On 6 December, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) kept its policy repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent for the eleventh consecutive time. In addition, the central bank has cut cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4% from 4.5% in a bid to boost liquidity in the financial system. This move will enable commercial banks to lend more loans and advances to investors, which is expected to spur economic growth.

The rationale behind keeping the policy repo rate unchanged is high headline CPI inflation especially food inflation. Headline CPI inflation surged above the upper tolerance level to 6.2% in October from 5.5% in September. The MPC believes food inflation pressure is likely to continue in Q3 of FY25. High inflation reduces the purchasing power of both rural and urban consumers and may adversely impact private consumption.

The Indian economy has been no exception to the tumultuous global economic conditions marked by rising debt levels, climate shocks, geopolitical

risk, and policy uncertainty, particularly with regard to trade policies. There have been turnaround changes in the capital markets of India after a historic win by Donald Trump in US. There has been massive capital outflow as foreign investors pull out their money from Indian stock market. Further the RBI has sold dollars to prevent steep depreciation of rupee.

On growth front, real GDP showed a lower than expected growth of 5.4% in Q2 of FY25 as private consumption and investment decelerated even while government spending recovered from a contraction in the previous quarter. On the supply side, the growth in GVA during Q2 was aided by resilient services and improving agriculture sector, but weakness in industrial activity – manufacturing, electricity and mining – tempered overall growth.

Looking ahead, robust kharif foodgrain production and good rabi prospects, coupled with an expected pickup in industrial activity and sustained buoyancy in services augur well for private consumption. Investment activity is expected to pick up. Resilient world

trade prospects should provide support to external demand and exports. Headwinds from geopolitical uncertainties, volatility in international commodity prices, and geo-economic fragmentation continue to pose risks to the outlook. Taking all these factors into consideration, the RBI revised its growth projection for the current year to 6.6%, down from the previously projected 7.2%. The MPC also revised its GDP growth estimates for Q3 and Q4 of FY25, reducing the growth forecast to 6.8% from 7.4% for Q3, and to 7.2% from 7.4% for Q4. The projection for Q1 of FY26 has also been revised downward to 6.9% from 7.3%.

The MPC noted that the near-term inflation and growth outcomes in India have turned somewhat adverse since the October policy. Going forward, however, economic activity is set to improve along with rising business and consumer sentiments, as reflected in the RBI's surveys. The recent spike in inflation highlights the continuing risks of multiple and overlapping shocks to the inflation outlook and expectations. Heightened geopolitical uncer-

tainties and financial market volatility add further upside risks to inflation.

Inflation and economic growth are like two sides of the same coin. They are contrary to each other. A developing country like India could not afford low economic growth rate as it is very optimistic to achieve \$5 trillion economy in next 3 years. At the same time, India will not want to linger the current inflation as this would strongly affect the poor and middle income class through high food prices. Furthermore, India's private final consumption expenditure accounted for 60.4% of its nominal GDP in June 2024. If the recent inflation persists for a couple of months, then it would decline the purchasing power of consumers and their consumption demand. India can achieve sustained economic growth through robust private investment and consumption demand. And, consumption demand can only be secured by long-term price stability.

The writer is Lecturer in Economics, SVM Autonomous College, Jagatsinghpur.



Dillip Kumar Muduli

INDIA CAN ACHIEVE SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH ROBUST PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND CONSUMPTION DEMAND

## 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



## Surprising move

Sir, India Post's sudden decision to discontinue with the existing book-post mode of despatching books and printed materials has surprised many. The most affected are among the senders who prefer this postal system for sending the articles at an affordable rate as fixed by the department. The tariffs in this category are much less compared to the slab rates being charged by private courier companies. The department should reconsider scrapping of the popular postal despatch system and restore it in the larger interests of common man..

Sanjib Kumar Das, CUTTACK

## Neuroscience breakthrough

Sir, IIT Madras has etched its name in the annals of scientific excellence by unveiling the most intricate 3D high-resolution images of the human fetal brain. Orchestrated by the illustrious Sudha Gopalakrishnan Brain Centre, this groundbreaking endeavor harnessed state-of-the-art brain mapping technology to meticulously capture 5,132 brain sections at a cellular resolution. The culmination of this monumental effort is the dataset christened DHARANI, a digital treasure trove that now stands as the largest publicly accessible repository of the human fetal brain, heralding a new dawn in neuroscience research. The DHARANI dataset is a marvel of scientific ingenuity, offering gigapixel images of unparalleled precision, with each pixel delineating a neuron in exquisite detail. This unparalleled dataset is freely accessible to researchers across the globe, fostering an unprecedented spirit of collaboration and innovation in the realm of neuroscience. The initiative drew upon the expertise of a multidisciplinary consortium, uniting luminaries from India and esteemed collaborators from Australia, the USA, Romania, and South Africa. With its medical foundation fortified by partnerships with Chennai-based Mediscan Systems and Saveetha Medical College Hospital, this extraordinary undertaking was accomplished at a fraction of the cost incurred by similar ventures in Western nations, an achievement both laudable and inspiring. The DHARANI dataset represents a profound leap forward in the domain of neuroscience, serving as a celestial atlas of the human fetal brain.

Amarjeet Kumar, HAZARIBAGH





# national



It is a matter of immense pride for all of us. The Constitution which its makers gave to us has stood every test of time. It is our guiding light, our guide

## KASHMIR RETURNING TO NORMAL

Life in Kashmir is returning to normal with flight operations resuming and several roads cleared for traffic Sunday as the Jammu and Kashmir government deployed men and machinery to restore services following heavy snowfall that disrupted connectivity the previous day



### of the day note

Even a country like Germany conducts elections using ballot papers. But in India, elections are conducted with EVMs to serve vested interests



Taking the security scenario into account, Bharat is not a very lucky country because our northern border and western border continuously face challenges



Dr Manmohan Singh, a statesman of unparalleled dignity and intellect, deserved much better, both in life and in death. It is deeply disheartening to witness the Congress Party attempting to stir controversy around his final journey, diminishing the solemnity it truly deserved



## DELHI POLLS

# Kejriwal accuses BJP of manipulating electoral roll

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal Sunday accused the BJP of trying to manipulate voter list in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections. Speaking at a press conference alongside Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Kejriwal claimed the BJP was trying to win elections through "unfair means" after failing to present strong candidates or issues. "BJP has already lost the elections. They don't have a chief ministerial face or even proper candidates. They only aim to win through manipulation, but we won't let them succeed," he said in a statement. The former Delhi chief



minister alleged that the BJP had filed 11,000 voter deletion applications in one constituency alone, but the move was halted at the Chief Election Commissioner's intervention. Kejriwal said that a large-scale operation began December 15, with 5,000 voter deletion applications and 7,500 addition requests filed so far in his New Delhi Assembly constituency. He claimed that this could alter 12 per cent of the constituency's votes. The total number of voters in the constituency, he said, is 106,873, as per the voter list published October 29 after the summary revision, which was conducted between August 20 and October 20.



Traffic jam near Solang Nala as tourists rush to Manali after fresh snowfall

PTI PHOTO

## SHORT TAKES

### Satishchandra Pradhan dead

Thane: Former Shiv Sena MP and first mayor of Thane, Satishchandra Pradhan, passed away Sunday at a hospital here due to age-related health issues, his family members said. Pradhan's funeral procession will leave his house Monday morning. The former Rajya Sabha member played a key role in forming the Shiv Sena alongside Bal Thackeray in 1966.

### Boat sinks; none hurt

Mumbai: A fishing boat sank off the coast of Madh Koliwada in Mumbai's Malad area in the early hours of Sunday after it was hit by a cargo ship before being retrieved, though there were no reports of injuries to anyone, a police official said. The boat was retrieved by a group of eight other vessels in the area and brought to the shore, the official added.

### 3.2 magnitude tremor hits Kutch

Ahmedabad: A tremor of 3.2 magnitude jolted Gujarat's Kutch district Sunday morning, the Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) said. There was no report of any casualty or damage to property, the district administration said. The tremor was recorded at 10.06 am with its epicentre located 18 kilometres north-north east of Bhachau, the Gandhinagar-based ISR said.

### Police bust terror module

Chandigarh: In a major breakthrough, Punjab Police has busted another Pakistan's ISI-backed terror module being operated by Babbar Khalsa International (BKI). The module was helmed by foreign-based Harpreet Singh, alias Happy Passia, and Shamsheer, alias Honey, with the arrest of its five members, including mastermind Abhijot Singh, involved in lobbing hand-grenade at two police establishments, said Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav here Sunday.

### Drugs worth ₹15cr seized

Guwahati: In a major drug haul, Yaba tablets worth around Rs 15 crore were seized in Cachar district of Assam and two persons have been arrested, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said Sunday.

# UP: Can rising temple-mosque disputes shape polls in 2027

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Lucknow, Dec 29: Although the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls are due only in 2027, political experts suggest that the increasing number of temple-mosque disputes in the state and the resultant polarisation have started to set the political narrative. Analysts point to the recent bypolls in the state where slogans like "Batenge to Katenge" (divided we perish) played a key role in ensuring Hindu unity. And it is in this backdrop that the experts feel that the intensifying temple-mosque polarisation pitch has its own implications.



Analysts point to the recent bypolls in the state where slogans like "Batenge to Katenge" (divided we perish) played a key role in ensuring Hindu unity

And it is in this backdrop that the experts feel that the intensifying temple-mosque polarisation pitch has its own implications

"During the bypolls, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's 'Batenge to Katenge' slogan was seen as a response to the Samajwadi Party's (SP) attempt to create caste-based mobilisation using the PDA (Backwards, Dalits, Minorities) move. The outcome (of the bypolls) was clearly in favour of the BJP," political analyst Rajeev Ranjan told PTI. Of the nine Assembly seats that went to bypolls in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won seven, while the main Opposition SP secured the two remaining seats. "Recent developments indicate that the process of polarisation may intensify further as 2027 approaches," Ranjan added. Such expert opinions are fuelled by a recent spate of claims --? from the existence

of a Shivling in Varanasi's Gyanvapi mosque to similar assertions in Sambhal, Badaun, Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar and Bulandshahr. In the latest case, a petition was filed in Badaun earlier this month, claiming that a Neelkanth Mahadev temple existed where the Jama Masjid now stands. A local court will hear the maintainability of the plea in January. Meanwhile, violence erupted in November during a court-ordered survey of Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid, leaving four people dead. Hindu groups have

claimed that a Hariharanath temple previously existed where the Mughal-era mosque stands. Political observers feel that such claims may gain currency in the run-up to 2027 polls, impacting the political climate in Uttar Pradesh. Former vice-chancellor of the Lucknow University and social activist Professor Roop Rekha Verma accused the Bharatiya Janata Party-led state government of promoting communal polarisation. Verma argued that after the Opposition's relatively strong performance in the Lok Sabha polls held earlier in the year, the ruling party has intensified its efforts to regain political space. In the general election, the BJP secured 33 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, while its allies Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) and Apna Dal (S) won two seats and one seat respectively. The SP captured 37 seats, while the Congress won six and one seat went to the Azad Samaj Party.

## India to host WAVES Summit in Feb: Modi

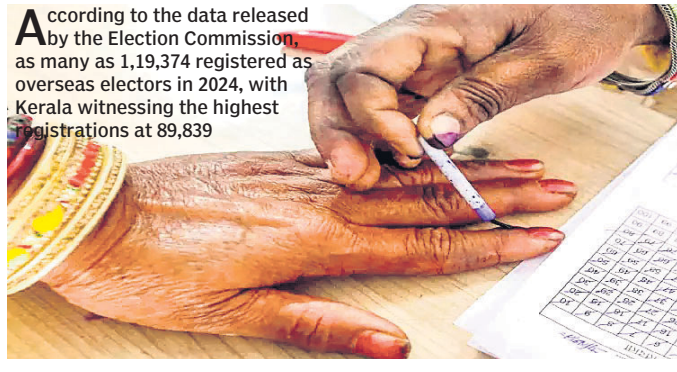
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 29: India will host the World Audio Visual Entertainment Summit (WAVES) for the first time in February next year which will be a global platform for its creative talents, fostering collaborations and showcasing the country's potential as a hub for world-class content creation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke extensively about the WAVES Summit in his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' Radio address Sunday. Comparing the WAVES to global events like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Modi said the leaders from the media and entertainment industry as well as creative minds from across the globe will gather in Delhi for the Summit being held from February 5-9.

"This Summit is an important step towards making India a hub of global content creation," he said. The prime minister emphasised the pivotal role of young creators in the preparations for WAVES, reflecting the dynamic spirit of India's creative community. He expressed pride in the enthusiasm of the country's youth and their contribution to the burgeoning creator economy, a key driver as India advances toward becoming a five trillion dollar economy. "Whether you are a young creator or an established artist, associated with hindi film industry or regional cinema, a professional from the TV industry, an expert in animation, gaming, or an innovator in entertainment technology, I encourage you to be a part of the WAVES Summit," Modi said. He urged all stakeholders in the entertainment and creative industries to actively participate in the WAVES.

## LS POLLS 2024

# Poor electoral participation of overseas Indian voters: EC



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

According to the data released by the Election Commission, as many as 1,19,374 registered as overseas electors in 2024, with Kerala witnessing the highest registrations at 89,839

New Delhi, Dec 29: Overseas Indians showed great enthusiasm in registering as electors, with nearly 1.2 lakh enrolling in the voter list, but a minuscule turned up to exercise their franchise in the Lok Sabha elections this year. According to the data released by the Election Commission, as many as 1,19,374 registered as overseas electors in 2024, with Kerala witnessing the highest registrations at 89,839. In 2019, as many as 99,844 had registered as overseas electors. The poll authority said only 2,958 overseas electors flew down to India to participate in the largest democratic exercise in the world. Of these, an overwhelming 2,670 were from Kerala alone. Several large states such as Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu saw zero turnout of overseas electors. Gujarat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, saw only two out of 885 overseas electors casting their

votes in the Lok Sabha elections. The same was the story in Maharashtra, where only 17 of the 5,097 NRI electors voted. Despite an increase of little over 19,500 registered overseas electors since the 2019 general election, their participation in the latest polls was poor. While NRI voters is a generic term, the EC describes them as overseas electors - Indians living abroad for a variety of reasons and eligible to vote in the Lok Sabha, Assembly and other direct elections. According to the existing electoral law, registered NRI voters have to come to their respective Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies to cast a vote. They have to show their original passport as proof of their identity. Data show that while there were 7,927 registered NRI electors in Andhra Pradesh, only 195 flew down to vote. According to EC, while eligible Indian citizens who enrol in electoral rolls are called electors, those who actually exercise their franchise are described as voters.

## KOTA STORY REMAINS GRIM

# Year of political setbacks and comebacks in Rajasthan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jaipur, Dec 29: First came the setback and then the comeback. That in a nutshell was the BJP story in Rajasthan in 2024. The Congress story could also be told in two halves -- triumphs and then tribulations. Another story that dominated the news cycle in 2024 was students' suicide in Kota. And sadly there was no back-to-life narrative to add in that. The recurring incidents of suicide dealt a body blow to the country's "coaching hub", bringing its economy down from a whopping revenue of Rs 6,500-7000 crore annually to Rs 3,000-3,500 crore. The year began on an uncertain note for Rajasthan -- apprehensions about a first-time MLA-chief minister in Bhajan Lal Sharma; about a fluid political landscape after assembly polls gearing up to face Lok Sabha polls; about the students'

suicide at Kota; and about Model Code of Conduct for LS polls halting development work. Many questioned if the BJP relying on far-less experienced Sharma and moving on from veteran Vasundhara Raje would cost the party, and also the state. There were questions about the Congress too, with murmurs that infighting within the party led to its defeat in the Assembly polls and could harm it in the Lok Sabha elections too. But by the time year ended, most of these questions were answered. Chief Minister Sharma took one decision after the other with conviction and backing of the party high command. Under his leadership, the party won five of the seven seats that voted in bypolls. His government took tough action in paper leak case. In the year's last Cabinet meeting held December 28, the Sharma government decided to

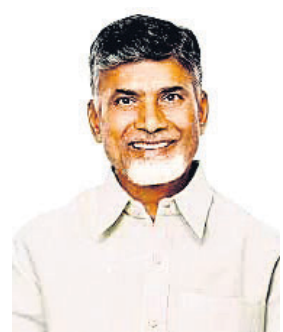


dissolve nine districts formed by the previous Congress dispensation, saying they were neither "practical" nor in "public interest". Three new divisions were also dissolved. The state will now only have seven divisions and 41 districts. Sharma consolidated his position with the organisation of the Rising Rajasthan Summit in December, where an investment of Rs 35 lakh-crore was pledged to the state. The Congress, defeated in the Assembly polls in November 2023, made a comeback in the Lok Sabha polls, winning eight of the 25 seats, and putting a halt on talks of infighting. This was first instance of the Congress winning a Lok Sabha seat in the state since 2014. The BJP went into the elections with confidence but it was restricted to just 14 seats.

Its 2019 LS poll ally RLP went with the Congress under the INDIA bloc. The state also copped some fatal accidents and tragedies in 2024, the deadliest coming the last month. An LPG tanker collided with a truck in the chilling morning of December 20 on the Jaipur-Ajmer highway, sparking a massive fireball that killed 17 people died and destroyed 39 vehicles. The nation was in mourning. People in nearly 20 villages of the Lake city Udaipur remained terrified due to unabated leopard attacks in October. Ten people were killed in leopard attacks in Gogunda and nearby areas. The forest department had to carry out an intense search operation and also take the help of a private shooter to eliminate the leopard. One leopard was shot dead and one was beaten to death by villagers. Other significant incidents included the death of a five-

year-old boy after falling into a borewell in Dausa, a collision between a security vehicle of the CM's cavalcade and a taxi car, leaving its driver and an Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) dead. On the legislative front, the Bhajanlal Chisti dargah was approved the "Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill 2024". The world famous Sufi saint Moinuddin Chisti dargah was in the news in November when a court in Ajmer admitted a petition claiming it was built over a Shiva temple, and issued notices to the Ajmer dargah committee, the Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Archaeology Survey of India. The Lok Sabha polls setback in May-June triggered a mini rebellion in the BJP, with cabinet Minister Kirodi Lal Meena embarrassing the party and the government. He submitted his resignation, but Chief Minister did not accept the resignation.

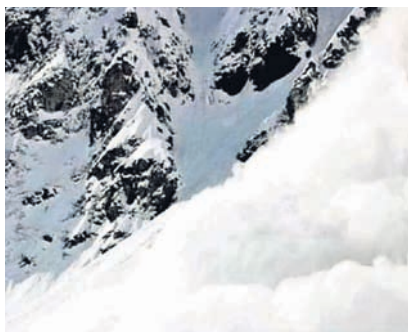
national



Congratulations to Kone-ru Humpy on winning the FIDE Women's World Rapid Chess Championship 2024. Her incredible triumph caps off a phenomenal year for Indian chess!

AVALANCHE WARNING ISSUED FOR CHAMOLI

The Defence Geoinformatics Research Establishment (DGRE), a laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Sunday issued an orange alert for an avalanche at an altitude of over 3,000 metres in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district over the next 24 hours



of the day uote

Himachal Pradesh is a relatively small state with fewer criminal cases, with most cases being related to services and civil matters. I will work collaboratively to resolve cases as quickly as possible

Despite our ideological and political differences with former prime minister Manmohan Singh, he is the most respectful person. Union Home Minister Amit Shah following the wish of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken all possible initiatives to accord full state honour to Singh's funeral

The SUMP, with an estimated installed capacity of 11,000 mw, is not just about generating power, but also about maintaining the natural flow of the Siang river and mitigating potential flood risks from water releases by China

MANMOHAN SINGH FUNERAL

HIMANTA, CONG TRADE BARBS

Dallewal's strike: Farmer leader calls for action

Guwahati, Dec 29: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma Sunday accused the Congress of attempting to stir a controversy over the cremation of former prime minister Manmohan Singh, despite the Centre announcing a "fitting memorial" to honour his legacy. The opposition party hit back at the CM, claiming that Assam government programmes were hosted even when Singh's funeral was underway in New Delhi Saturday, in violation of the seven-day state mourning. Sarma said it was not the first time that the Congress has "shown such disregard - be it towards the legacy of Narasimha Rao or Pranab Mukherjee, the party has, unfortunately, treated its own with indifference". The CM's remarks came after the Congress accused the Centre of insulting Singh, the country's first Sikh prime minister, by performing his last rites at Nigambodh Ghat



ASHES IMMERSSED IN YAMUNA The ashes of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh were immersed in the Yamuna river near the Majnu ka Tila Gurdwara by members of his family following Sikh rituals. The ashes were collected from the Nigambodh Ghat Sunday morning by Singh's family members and later taken to the 'Asth Ghat' on the Yamuna river bank near the gurdwara.

instead of a designated spot that could be turned into his memorial. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had said the BJP-led Centre had "totally insulted" Singh by performing his last rites at Nigambodh Ghat. The BJP maintained that the government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi had allocated space for Singh's memori-

al and also informed his family about it, and accused the Congress of indulging in "cheap politics" over the former PM's cremation. "Dr Manmohan Singh, a statesman of unparalleled dignity and intellect, deserved much better, both in life and in death. It is deeply disheartening to witness the Congress Party attempting to stir controversy around his final journey, diminishing the solemnity it truly deserved." Sarma said in a post on X. The BJP leader said the people of India have bid Singh, who was a Rajya Sabha MP from Assam for over two decades, including during his tenure as PM, a respectful and heartfelt farewell, recognising his invaluable contributions to the nation. "Prime Minister @narendramodi Ji has already announced a fitting memorial to honour his legacy, reflecting the nation's gratitude. Yet, the actions of some, who seek to turn this moment of mourning into an opportunity for political gain, are deeply painful," Sarma said.



Chandigarh, Dec 29: With Jagjit Singh Dallewal's indefinite hunger strike entering its 34th day Sunday, farmer leaders at Khanauri said they have been following the Gandhian way to continue their protest and it is up to the government to decide whether it wants to use force to evict their senior leader. Their statement comes amid the Supreme Court's strong criticism of the Punjab government for not shifting Dallewal to a hospital. The farmers have been protesting at the Punjab-Haryana border to press the Centre for several demands, including a legal guarantee for a minimum support price (MSP) for crops. Recently, a high-level team of Punjab government officials met Dallewal requesting him to accept medical treatment even if he wishes to continue with his fast. Dallewal has so far refused medical treatment. Farmer leader Sunday Abhimanyu Kohar at the Khanauri border protest said, "We want to make it clear that the Centre, right from day one, has

been trying to defame and suppress our agitation." A narrative is being built that farmers are stubborn, whereas it is the Centre that is adopting such an attitude by not paying any attention to the farmers' demands, he said. "We are continuing our agitation by adopting Gandhian principles. Our agitations have proven, that despite enduring so much due to the government's oppression, we have continued to protest in a Gandhian manner," he added. "We are following these principles. Now, it is up to the government and constitutional bodies to decide whether they want to use force to evict Dallewal ji," Kohar said. He further said the farmers wanted to make it clear that whatever situation arises the responsibility will lie with the Centre and the constitutional bodies. "We also want to appeal to the people of the country that the agitation seeking a guarantee for MSP has reached a decisive stage. We are on the threshold of victory... We must take a strong stand. Dallewal has put his life at stake," he said in a statement.

MP: Boy brought out of borewell after rescue ops

Police file case against Priyank Kharge aide

Bhopal, Dec 29: A 10-year-old boy, who fell into a 140-foot borewell in Madhya Pradesh's Guna district, was brought out Sunday after a 16-hour rescue operation and rushed to hospital, officials said. The boy, Sumit Meena, slipped into the open shaft of the borewell at around 5 pm Saturday in Pipliya village under Raghogarh assembly segment, located 50 km from the Guna district headquarters. He was brought out at around 9.30 am Sunday, the officials said. The boy was rushed to a hospital in Raghogarh on life support system, Guna Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Sinha told PTI. Asked whether the child was responsive, the official said doctors would be able to provide information about it. Rescuers worked through the night and dug a parallel pit to reach the boy via a passage between the pit and borewell, Raghogarh Congress MLA Jaivardhan Singh told PTI over phone from the spot. The boy was trapped at a depth of 39 feet in the borewell, which is around 140-feet deep, Guna Collector Satendra Singh said Saturday. The borewell did not strike water, and hence no casing had been put on it, he said. The NDRF team reached there from Bhopal late Saturday evening and helped in the operation. The family members of the boy panicked Saturday evening when they did not see him for a long time. A search was carried out and then they realised he had fallen into the borewell, a local person said.

Kalaburagi (Karnataka), Dec 29: A case has been registered against the close aide of Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge, Raju Kapanur and five others in connection with hatching a conspiracy to kill BJP MLA Basavaraj Mattimadu and other leaders, police said Sunday. The case was registered based on a suicide note by a civil contractor, Sachin Panchal, who had mentioned that the Congress leaders had connived to kill Mattimadu, Siddalinga Swami of Andola

at them to go away as they held them responsible for Panchal's death. Khandre consoled and assured them that action would be taken against the accused persons involved in the death. "The government will ensure that justice is done, and the accused persons are punished. Government is with you," the minister told the inconsolable family members. "I spoke to the family members who complained to me that the police refused to register a case. I have spoken to senior police officials. Action has been taken against a few policemen," he added.

POST OF THE DAY

5 Major Countries with GST: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, India. GST on Health Insurance: Australia: 0%, Canada: 0%, New Zealand: 0%, Singapore: 0%, India: 18%. Who should be blamed? Nehru? @AAPforNewIndia

SHORT TAKES

Retired IPS officer Acharya Kishore dies

Patna: Retired IPS officer Acharya Kishore Kunal died of cardiac arrest in Patna Sunday, his family said. An IPS officer of the 1972 batch, he was the chief of the Bihar State Board of Religious Trust (BSBT) and founder secretary of Patna's Mahavir Mandir Trust, which runs several hospitals in the state. Kunal, 74, suffered cardiac arrest in the early hours and was immediately taken to a hospital where he passed away around 8 am, his family said.

Malayalam actor found dead

Thiruvananthapuram: Well-known film and television actor Dileep Shankar, known for his varied roles in serials, was found dead in a hotel room here, police said Sunday. The 50-year-old actor had checked into the hotel, located in the heart of the city, December 19 for a serial shooting project, police added.

Over 100 booked

Muzaffarnagar (UP): More than 100 people, including a village head, have been booked for an alleged attack on Hindu activists who were protesting against the neglect and poor condition of a cow shelter in the village, police said Sunday. Station House Officer (SHO) Jasvir Singh said that a case has been registered against village head of Badhai Kala, Dharmendra, and over other 100 others. He said the FIR has been lodged under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 191 (rioting), 190 (member of unlawful assembly), 131 (assault or criminal force), 115 (voluntarily causing hurt), 352 (intentional insult to provoke breach of peace).



Devotees show their skills during a 'Ngar Keertan' as part of 'Prakash Parv' (birth anniversary) of Guru Govind Singh in Lucknow

2024 missed the climate moment but all's not lost

New Delhi, Dec 29: 2024 is set to end as the hottest year on record and the first with a global average temperature 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. It will also be remembered as the year developed nations had their last big chance to prevent the world from permanently crossing this critical threshold by funding climate action in the Global South - and they blew it. Relentless warming fuelled record-breaking heatwaves, deadly storms, and floods that devastated lives and homes by the thousands in 2024. Millions were displaced, and all eyes turned to the UN climate conference in Baku, Azerbaijan, hoping for a climate finance package capable of ramping up action in the Global South. A study published in 2023 estimated that developed countries owe around \$170 trillion for their excessive emissions, having consumed 70-90 per cent



of the total carbon budget since the industrial era. Instead, developed countries - mandated under the UN climate regime to finance climate action in developing countries - offered a paltry \$300 billion by 2035, a mere fraction of the trillions needed annually from 2025. Developing countries faced a difficult choice: return to negotiations next year or accept the

weak deal on the table. Fearing an even worse outcome in 2025 with the return of "climate denier" Donald Trump and a US exit from the Paris Agreement, the Global South reluctantly accepted the offer. While political will remains fragmented, science continues to remind the world that it's an emergency. In 2015, countries came together to limit global warm-

ing to "well below 2 degrees Celsius", aiming for 1.5 degrees Celsius. Fast forward, the world has already heated up by 1.3 degrees Celsius since the pre-industrial era, largely due to burning fossil fuels. To limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the UN's climate science body, IPCC, says emissions must peak by 2025 and drop 43 per cent by 2030 and 57 per cent by 2035. Yet, current policies point to a hotter future - around 3 degrees Celsius warming by 2100. Even if every country fulfils its climate promises or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), emissions would only shrink by a weak 5.9 per cent by

RELENTLESS WARMING FUELLED RECORD-BREAKING HEATWAVES, DEADLY STORMS, AND FLOODS THAT DEVASTATED LIVES AND HOMES BY THE THOUSANDS IN 2024. MILLIONS WERE DISPLACED, AND ALL EYES TURNED TO THE UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE IN BAKU, AZERBAIJAN, HOPING FOR A CLIMATE FINANCE PACKAGE CAPABLE OF RAMPING UP ACTION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

4 workers die after inhaling toxic gas at chemical unit

Bharuch (Gujarat), Dec 29: Four workers died Sunday after inhaling toxic fumes following gas leakage at a chemical plant at Dahej in Gujarat's Bharuch district, police said. The victims fell unconscious after inhaling the toxic fumes leaking from a pipe at a production unit of the Gujarat Fluorochemicals Limited (GFL) at around 10 pm Saturday. Dahej police station inspector BM Patidar said. They were rushed to a private hospital in Bharuch. Three of them died at around 3 am Sunday, while another one succumbed at 6 am, the official said. "The incident occurred at around 10 pm when the four workers fell unconscious due to gas leakage from the pipe passing through the ground floor of the company's CMS plant. They were rushed to a private hospital where all four of them died," he said. The bodies were sent for postmortem and further probe into the incident was underway, the official said. The deceased have been identified as Rajesh Kumar (hailing from Gujarat), Mudrika Yadav (belonging to Jharkhand), Sushit Prasad and Mahesh Nandlal (both from Uttar Pradesh), police said. GFL, Dahej, Deputy General Manager Jignesh Parmar told reporters that they will investigate the matter and a compensation of Rs 25 lakh would be paid to the kin of each of the deceased workers. Sub Divisional Magistrate, Bharuch, Manisha Manani said three of the deceased were from other states. "Four persons died due to gas leakage at the GFL plant near Ambeta village. The bodies have been sent to the civil hospital in Bharuch for post-mortem and an investigation is underway," Manani said.





I have many H-1B visas on my properties. I've been a believer in H-1B. I have used it many times. It's a great programme

CHINA UNVEILS WORLD'S FASTEST TRAIN PROTOTYPE China Sunday unveiled an updated model of its high-speed bullet train which its manufacturer claims reached speeds of 450 kmph during the test runs, making it the world's fastest high-speed train



of the day quote

2025 will be an important year regarding Iran's nuclear issue

Holding elections in Syria could take up to four years

Investigations revealed that they ( Rohingya refugees) had deliberately landed here and we consider them as illegal immigrants

WORST AVIATION DISASTER AMID POLITICAL CRISIS

Deadliest airline crash in South Korea's history tests acting president two days into the job

Seoul, Dec 29: When South Korea's acting President Choi Sang-mok arrived at the scene of the deadliest air disaster on the country's soil Sunday, he had been on the job for less than 48 hours.

Each ministry involved in foreign policy, administrative issues or safety has teams reporting to Choi, but Yoon's presidential staff does not, and Choi is operating from a government complex in Seoul rather than any official residence, one official said.



Firefighters carry out extinguishing operations on an aircraft which drove off runway at Muan International Airport in Muan, South Korea

The bewildering turnover at the top of Asia's fourth-largest economy and one of its most vibrant democracies left the government scrambling when Jeju Air flight 7C2216 slammed into a wall at Muan International Airport Sunday, killing 179 of the 181 people on board.

The central disaster control team meetings are minister-level meetings, so the land minister and safety minister report directly to Choi, this official said.

The government would like to offer its sincere condolences to the bereaved families and will do its best to recover from this accident and prevent a recurrence

Yoon unexpectedly declared martial law December 3, only to rescind the order within hours after parliament defied military and police cordons to vote against Yoon.

Uncertainties cloud cause of crash

Uncertainties surround the deadliest crash on South Korean soil, experts said Sunday, questioning initial suggestions that a bird strike might have brought down Jeju Air flight 7C2216.



SHORT TAKES

Belarus leader frees 20 more prisoners

Tallinn: Belarus' authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko pardoned 20 more people that rights activists describe as political prisoners, a statement on the president's website said Saturday.

Choi visited the site a few hours after the crash and declared it a special disaster zone. "The government would like to offer its sincere condolences to the bereaved families and will do its best to recover from this accident and prevent a recurrence," he said.

Behind the scenes, government offices were still figuring out the chain of command and how press statements would be released, a ministry spokesperson and four other officials told Reuters.

159 people in 2022, a fourth official said. The political upheaval in South Korea was sparked

Jeju Air apologises

Jeju Air in a statement expressed its "deep apology" over the crash and said it will do its "utmost to manage the aftermath of the accident."



CONTROVERSIAL POLLS

Kavelashvili named as Georgia's prez in blow to EU aspirations

Georgia's outgoing president and pro-Western parties have boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demand a rerun of the ballot



Tbilisi, Dec 29: Former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili was formally inaugurated as president of Georgia Sunday, cementing the ruling party's grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's EU aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia.

was a symbol as long as there was a president here who was legitimate. I bring legitimacy with me," Zourabichvili told a crowd of supporters outside the palace.

Russia to scrap INF moratorium

Russia's move, long signalled, will kill off all that remains from one of the most significant arms control treaties of the Cold War, amid fears that the world's two biggest nuclear powers could be entering a new arms race together with China



Moscow, Dec 29: Russia will scrap a moratorium on the deployment of intermediate and shorter range nuclear-capable missiles because the United States has deployed such weapons in various regions around the world, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Sunday.

dismissed as a pretext. Russia then imposed a moratorium on its own development of missiles previously banned by the INF treaty - ground-based ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 km to 5,500 km (310 miles to 3,417 miles).

The US has arrogantly ignored the warnings of Russia and China and in practice has moved on to the deployment of weapons of this class in various regions of the world

Gaza captors tortured hostages, including minors

The Israeli report is based on interviews with the medical and welfare teams which treated over 100 Israeli and foreign hostages

Jerusalem, Dec 29: Hostages held in Gaza were subjected to torture, including sexual and psychological abuse, starvation, burns and medical neglect, according to a new report by the Israeli Health Ministry that will be submitted to the United Nations this week.



Minors bound, beaten, branded Women reported sexual assault 100 hostages still held in Gaza

any of the hostages by name or age, to protect their privacy, but some of the descriptions matched those provided by hostages and staff that treated them in interviews with Reuters and other media and a UN report.

TEST FOR TRUMP

NK's Kim vows toughest anti-US policy

The reclusive state has sharply increased the pace of its weapons testing activities to build more reliable nuclear missiles targeting the US and its allies



Seoul, Dec 29: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said he will implement the "toughest" anti-US policy, less than a month before Donald Trump takes office as US president, the country's state media reported Sunday.

port for Russia's war against Ukraine also poses a challenge to efforts to revive diplomacy, experts say.

During a five-day plenary meeting of the ruling Workers' Party that ended Friday, Kim called the US "the most reactionary state that regards anti-communism as its invariable state policy."



