

## Odia varsity launch

CM Naveen Patnaik will inaugurate Odia University in the last week of January 2024, 5T Chairman Kartik Pandian says

DOWNTOWN | P3

## Bloody battle on

14 Israeli soldiers have been killed in the Gaza Strip over the weekend in some of the bloodiest days since the start of the ground offensive

INTERNATIONAL | P10

## FPIs raining money

Foreign portfolio investors have injected over ₹57,300cr into the equity markets in December, highest monthly inflow by them in a year

BUSINESS | P11

## Eves script history

India record maiden Test victory over venerable Australia with eight-wicket win in one-off Women's Test Sunday

SPORTS | P12



**MOURNING THE DEPARTED:** Security personnel stand guard as people offer funeral prayers for retired police officer and local 'muezzin' Mohammad Shafi Mir, who was killed by terrorists while giving a call for 'azaan' from a mosque at Gantamulla area of Baramulla district of North Kashmir, Sunday

## ■ ALL 25 INDIANS SAFE ONBOARD MV SAI BABA

# Houthis target another India bound oil tanker in Red Sea

Iran-backed Houthi rebels have stepped up attacks on ships in the Red Sea amid the Israel-Hamas conflict

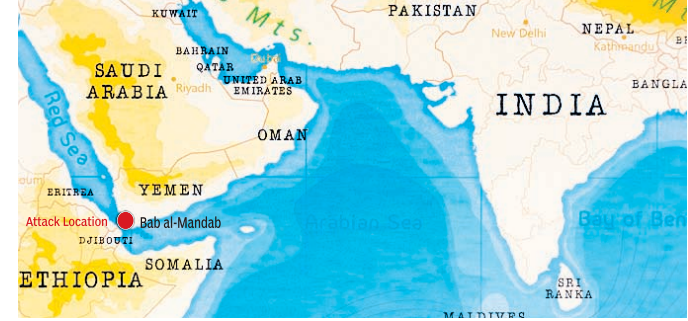
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: A Gabon-flagged commercial crude oil tanker with 25 Indian crew members reportedly came under a drone attack in the Southern Red Sea but no one was injured, Indian officials and the US military said Sunday.

The US Central Command said the vessel, MV Sai Baba, was targeted by a drone launched by Houthi militants in the Southern Red Sea Saturday.

The US military's statement on the attack came a day after merchant vessel MV Chem Pluto, with around 20 Indian crew members, was hit by a suspected drone about 217 nautical miles off the Porbandar coast in the Arabian sea.

All 25 crew members of MV Sai Baba are learnt to be Indians,



said an Indian military official. There were no reports of any casualties.

The official said MV Sai Baba is a Gabon-flagged vessel and it had received a certification from the Indian register of shipping.

The US Central Command described the vessel as an Indian-flagged tanker. The vessel was reportedly on its way to India. The officials said the Indian Navy is closely monitoring the situation.

In a post on 'X', the US Central Command mentioned the attack on MV Sai Baba along with a similar strike targeting another vessel Saturday.

The MV BLAAMANEN, a

Norwegian-flagged, owned, and operated chemical tanker, reported a near miss of a Houthi one-way attack drone with no injuries or damage reported, it said.

A second vessel, the MV SAIBABA, a Gabon-owned, Indian-flagged crude oil tanker, reported that it was hit by a one-way attack drone with no injuries reported, it added.

The fresh attack came against the backdrop of Iran-backed Houthi rebels stepping up attacks on ships in the Red Sea amid the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The US Central Command is one of key unified combatant commands of the US.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Looks like one of your opponents is planning to contest against you in elections...he's distributing 'revadis'

## WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	27.6°C	26.6°C
Min Temp	16.0°C	15.1°C
Humidity	81%	85%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

## FORECAST

FOG/MIST IN THE MORNING



# Centre suspends WFI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 24: The Sports Ministry Sunday suspended the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), three days after it elected new office bearers, for not following the provisions of its own constitution while taking decisions and also asked IOA to constitute an ad-hoc panel to manage the affairs of the sports body.

In suspending the WFI, the government cited its "hasty announcement" of organising the U-15 and U-20 nationals without following due procedure and not giving sufficient notice to wrestlers for preparations.

Hours after getting elected as WFI President Thursday, Sanjay Singh had announced that age group national championships will be held from December 28 in Gonda, UP. The ministry felt the new WFI body was working under the complete control of its former office-bearers, which was not in conformity with the National Sports Code.

Soon after WFI's suspension, BJP chief JP Nadda called Brij



## BRIJ BHUSHAN RETIRES

After his meeting with Nadda, Brij Bhushan announced that he won't be involved in the running of WFI anymore. "I served wrestling for 12 years, good or bad only time will tell. I have taken retirement from wrestling. I am breaking my relationship with the sport," he said. "Now whatever decision has to be taken, whether to liaise with the government or handling the legal processes, those decisions will be taken by the elected members. The Lok Sabha elections are round the corner and I have to move ahead," he added.

Bhushan Sharan Singh for a meeting after which the former WFI boss announced that he was taking retirement from the sport. The new body has not followed

the WFI constitution. The Federation stands suspended till further orders. WFI will not be taking care of day to day activities of wrestling. They need to follow the due process and the rules, a sports ministry official told PTI.

The source explained further the reasons for WFI's suspension. This announcement is hasty, without giving sufficient notice to wrestlers who are to take part in the said nationals and without following the provisions of the constitution of WFI.

Such decisions are to be taken by Executive Committee, before which agendas are required to be placed for consideration. As per Article XI of the WFI constitution under the Heading 'Notices and Quorum for Meetings', minimum notice period for EC meeting is 15 clear days and quorum is of 1/3rd of representatives.

Even for Emergency EC meeting, minimum notice period is seven clear days with quorum requirement of 1/3rd of representatives.

“It is the first step towards something good happening. I hope the government understands more the cause we were fighting for. If a woman federation president is there, it will be better for the safety of women wrestlers”

SAKSHI MALIK

Now that I have returned it, I am not going to take it back. The honour of our sisters and daughters is bigger than any award. All of you have seen what is happening. I will think about taking it back only after justice is delivered. The matter is in court and we are waiting for justice

BAJRANG PUNIA

## ■ IED BLAST DURING COMBING OPS

# 2 SOG jawans injured

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 24: Two jawans of the Special Operations Group (SOG) of Odisha Police were injured when an improvised explosive device (IED) planted by Maoists exploded in a forest in Kandhamal district during a combing operation Sunday, an officer said.

The IED fixed on a tree was planted by the Maoists and it exploded after the SOG jawans accidentally touched it, the officer said.

“The explosion took place at around 10am in the forest area under Tumudibandh police station limits in the district while combing operation by the SOG jawans was underway in the area,” Kandhamal SP Suwendu Kumar Patra told PTI over the phone.

Both the SOG jawans are out of danger, he said, adding that one jawan, who got an injury in his eye, is being shifted to AIIMS Bhubaneswar after preliminary treatment at Balikud hospital. Another jawan got splinter



injuries on his hand and he has been shifted to Kandhamal District Headquarters Hospital, Phulbani after first aid, the SP said.

The injured jawans were identified as Prashant Jena and Amiya Ranjan Das.

Patra said that there are no inputs regarding the casualties among the ultras.

It seems that Maoists may be there. So, the combing operation, which has been underway since Friday, has been further intensified following the incident, Patra added.

# No offence under SC/ST Act if abuse is not in public: HC



AGENCIES

Lucknow, Dec 24: The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has set aside the criminal proceedings against the owner of a school under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, observing that a person can be subjected to trial under the Act only if the utterances are made at a "place within a public view".

Passing the order on an educationist's plea challenging criminal proceedings against him for allegedly hurling casteist abuse at a student's father, Justice Shamim Ahmed observed, "The verbal abuse by utterance of caste name of a member of Scheduled Caste or Scheduled

Tribes would not be an offence under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act) if such incident takes place within a house where no outsider is present."

The court said that a person can be subjected to trial for the offence under Section 3(1)(s) of the SC/ST Act, only if utterances by him were made in any "place within a public view".

The court made the observations while quashing a case against a school owner who was accused by a parent of failing his son and other students in Class XII examination.

The complainant alleged that the accused and his associates offered ₹5 lakh to him to withdraw the protest. He claimed that the accused also abused him by uttering the name of his caste.

The bench, however, said that the accused had not abused the complainant in public view and noted that the complainant had not stated anything about the nature of the abuse.

## ■ CELEBRATIONS HALTED DUE TO ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR

# On Christmas Eve, Bethlehem resembles a ghost town

Under a banner that read "Bethlehem's Christmas bells ring for a cease-fire in Gaza", a few teenagers offered small inflatable Santas, but no one was buying

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bethlehem (West Bank), Dec 24: The normally bustling biblical birthplace of Jesus resembled a ghost town Sunday, as Christmas Eve celebrations in Bethlehem were called off due to the Israel-Hamas war.

The festive lights and Christmas tree that normally decorate Manger Square were missing, as were the throngs of foreign tourists and jubilant youth marching bands that gather in the West Bank town each year to mark the holiday. Dozens of Palestinian security forces patrolled the empty square.

"This year, without the Christmas tree and without lights, there's just darkness," said Brother John Vinh, a Franciscan monk from Vietnam who has lived in Jerusalem for six years.

He said he always comes to Bethlehem to mark Christmas, but this year was especially sobering, as he gazed at a nativity scene in Manger Square with a baby Jesus wrapped in a white shroud, reminiscent of the thousands of children killed in the fighting in Gaza.

Barbed wire surrounded the scene, the grey rubble reflecting none of the joyous lights and bursts of colour that normally fill the square during the Christmas season.

The cancellation of Christmas festivities is a severe blow to the town's economy. Tourism accounts for an estimated 70% of Bethlehem's income — almost all of that during the Christmas season.

With many major airlines cancelling flights to Israel, few for-



eigners are visiting. Local officials say over 70 hotels in Bethlehem have been forced to close, leaving thousands of people unemployed.

Gift shops were slow to open on Christmas Eve, although a few did once the rain had stopped pouring down. There were few visitors, however.

"We can't justify putting out a tree and celebrating as normal, when some people (in Gaza)

don't even have houses to go to," said Ala'a Salameh, one of the owners of Aftem Restaurant, a family-owned falafel restaurant just steps from the square.

Salameh said Christmas Eve is usually the busiest day of the year. "Normally, you can't find a single chair to sit, we're full from morning till midnight," said Salameh. This year, just one table was taken, by journalists taking a

break from the rain.

Under a banner that read "Bethlehem's Christmas bells ring for a cease-fire in Gaza," a few teenagers offered small inflatable Santas, but no one was buying. Instead of their traditional musical march through the streets of Bethlehem, young scouts stood silently with flags. A group of local students unfurled a massive Palestinian flag as they stood in silence.

"Our message every year on Christmas is one of peace and love, but this year it's a message of sadness, grief and anger in front of the international community with what is happening and going on in the Gaza Strip," Bethlehem's mayor, Hana Haniyeh, said in an address to the crowd.

Over 20,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 50,000 wounded during Israel's air and ground offensive against Gaza's Hamas rulers, according to health officials there, while some 85% of the territory's 2.3 million residents have been displaced.

**FORTUNE FORECAST**  
 GaneshaSpeaks.com  
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 FOR ASTROLOGY DIAL 55181

**ARIES**  
 If you are involved in monetary matters, today you will find yourself weighing the benefits. A loan that you have applied for may be sanctioned. Look at a range of choices, says Ganesha, and you will end up feeling very happy about it.

**TAURUS**  
 Today you are going to focus on enhancing your looks and appearances, says Ganesha. Instead of trying to seek satisfaction from within yourself you will be flaunting your fine clothes, your hairstyles. A visit to a beauty parlour cannot be ruled out. Your new looks will make you tremendously confident and impressive and will make others see you in a new light. Have no fears. You have a great day ahead.

**GEMINI**  
 The day promises sensitivity and compassion for you, predicts Ganesha. You may plan a trip with your family members. You may also invest your money in various financial companies, as securing the future of your family will be foremost on your mind. Moreover, you will also save some hefty amount to meet future needs.

**CANCER**  
 It is high time that you dedicated yourself to your work. If you are looking to try new things, today may not be a very good day to do so. Stick to doing things the way you have been doing them so far, advises Ganesha. All you need is a little attitude adjustment.

**LEO**  
 A challenging day awaits you. You will face some tensions and problems, however this doesn't mean you will not be able to complete all your work successfully. Your personal life will proceed as usual, however expectations from you at the work-front will increase.

**VIRGO**  
 Children will be a source of a lot of appreciation today, in and out of the classroom. Your logical abilities will become stronger. Ganesha advises you to stay peaceful, flow with the tide and enjoy yourself, regardless of what happens in the day.

**LIBRA**  
 Ganesha says today is a fortunate day for starting new work. You will win the hearts of everyone with your amazing charm. Your house and its arty interior decoration will impress people

**SCORPIO**  
 Do your deeds and don't expect returns is what Indian mythology has taught us since time immemorial. Now, it's time to implement it, especially at work. You may have to wait a little longer in terms of your business and joint venture. However, don't lose hope as the fruits of patience are sweet.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
 Good Samaritans around you may give unsolicited, but valuable advice. Take it as a hint, and consider it for your betterment. Take your decision after following the advice, and this may definitely yield benefits, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
 Not everyday is the same day. And, today is one of those days when you feel extremely confused, feels Ganesha. While you won't be able to get rid of negative emotions, your hard work will be paid off and lay a strong foundation for future. You'll not understand whether to feel good about your achievements or experience sadness of confusion. Ganesha throws light on your path and advises you to keep a calm head over your shoulders.

**AQUARIUS**  
 There are no short-cuts to success. You know this very well and work you socks off to get what you want. Colleagues, friends and family - all of them will acknowledge and appreciate your efforts and achievements. Though you will be apprehensive about it, you will have to take some risks to bring the desired change in your life, says Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
 Interactions with those of the opposite sex will mark your day. It is also a good day to strike up friendship with those of the opposite sex. For those in love, today is a good day to spend time with your partner. For those looking for love, now is the best time to pop the question to that special someone you've secretly admired for long, says Ganesha.

The Bakul Foundation, known for showcasing the power of volunteerism, has planned to conduct storytelling sessions and activities like the distribution of plants by Santa Claus to celebrate an eco-friendly Christmas, says head of the organisation Sujit Mohapatra

**UNBRIDLED REVELRY**

**BAKUL'S ECO-FRIENDLY CELEBRATION**

While Christmas is all about light, glamour, cake, and prayers for others, city-based Bakul Foundation, like other festivals, celebrates the occasion with its distinct manner. Bakul, an organisation that showcases the power of volunteerism, is celebrating the magic of Christmas through the power of storytelling. Storytelling, carols, and crafts is being organised at Bakul Library in Satyanagar, Bhubaneswar, said its founder, Sujit Mohapatra. Explaining their eco-friendly celebration, Mohapatra added, "From the beginning, we have been promoting storytelling as a gift for the new generation, and we think telling tales by Santa Claus is a great gift. So, we have arranged a storytelling session on Christmas Eve." Also on Christmas Day, the Foundation has arranged a procession from the local church where Santa will distribute trees.



STORYTELLING SESSION AT BAKUL LIBRARY



**CHRISTMAS FEVER GRIPS CITY**

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar:** Christmas is that day of the year when people in the Christian community across the world celebrate the birth day of Jesus Christ. But of late, the celebration has gone beyond religious observance to become a phenomenon in Indian culture, characterised by joy and generosity. While the entire nation is set to celebrate the occasion, back home, preparations are in full swing in Capital City Bhubaneswar, to celebrate Christmas as well as the New Year with all the fun and grandeur. City hotels are ready with multiple events for revellers, such as star performances, magic shows, lucky draw contests, and many more.

Churches in the City are also decked up to celebrate



CHRISTMAS TREE AT ESPLANADE MALL

Nayapalli, flooded with Christmas decorative items such as Christmas Trees, Santa Claus clothes, and hats of all sizes, among others.

Denizens were seen making a beeline to buy their favourite items. This apart, many sellers from neighbouring states have set up their own small shops to make a fast buck. While small cakes are disappearing fast from the shops, many hotels have prepared special Christmas cakes and are holding cake-mixing sessions to mark the occasion.

Special arrangements have been made at the Esplanade Mall in the Rasulgarh area to celebrate Christmas. A 50ft tall Christmas Tree, reported to be the largest one in Bhubaneswar, is getting all the attention. The authorities, to build up festive spirit, are organising special programmes every day, which will continue till the New Year.



**Facts you may not know**

As the year draws to an end, millions of people around the world look forward to sparkling decorations, colourful lights, delicious food, jolly music, and exciting gifts. But how much do we know about this super-fun holiday? It's time to find out some interesting facts about the festival

**No Christmas, Jesus in Jingle Bells**

We all love to sing along to Jingle Bells, but have you ever noticed that the song doesn't have the word Christmas in it? Or Jesus or Santa Claus? That's because it wasn't originally a Christmas song! In fact, the jolly anthem was written in 1850, entitled One Horse Open Sleigh, for the American holiday, Thanksgiving!

**Ban on Christmas celebration**

Imagine if there was no Christmas. Does it feel quite strange? Sad, perhaps? Well, believe it or not, in 1644, Christmas celebrations were made illegal in England, and soon after, in the English colonies in America, too! But some people still celebrated in secret, however, until Christmas was once again legal... almost 20 years later.

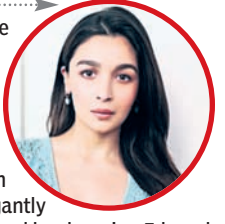
**Norway's gift**

Every year, Norway sends a beautiful home-grown Christmas tree to London, where it is decorated with lights in Trafalgar Square. Standing a towering 20 metres tall, the terrific tree is a gift to say thank you for the help the UK gave Norway during World War II. What a tree-mendous gift!

**Celebs ring in the festive season**

As Christmas approaches, celebrities are getting into the holiday mood. Some are embarking on trips to exotic destinations, while others are embellishing their homes with seasonal decor, reveling in the joyous occasion with their loved ones. Let's take a glimpse into how various personalities are gearing up for the festive season

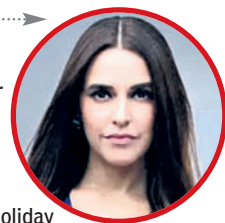
**ALIA BHATT**  
 Actress Alia Bhatt celebrated a unique Christmas by playfully engaging with her cat, Edward. She shared festive pictures on Instagram, showcasing a beautifully adorned Christmas tree with ornaments like baubles, stars, and candy canes. Alia extended warm wishes to her fans while dressed elegantly in a white pantsuit. One picture featured her hugging Edward, captioned "Meowy Christmas."



**PARINEETI CHOPRA**  
 Actress Parineeti Chopra is celebrating Christmas with husband Raghav Chaddha in London. She shared a festive photo on Instagram, expressing joy in the winter atmosphere. Parineeti also documented her preparations on Instagram Stories, posting images of a decorated Christmas tree, toys, cookies, and buns. In one post, she affectionately referred to her husband as her "Santa for life." The couple is enjoying holiday festivities in the picturesque London setting.



**NEHA DHUPIA**  
 Actress Neha Dhupia took to her platforms to share pictures of a heartwarming evening spent with her husband, Angad Bedi, and their children. The power couple, Neha Dhupia and Angad Bedi showcased their beautiful family moments at Jio World, capturing the essence of the holiday season. Neha accompanied the pictures with a caption that simply stated, "This is the season." The shared images and videos portray Neha Dhupia and Angad Bedi in a blissful celebration with their kids, radiating joy and warmth.



**KAREENA KAPOOR**  
 Actress Kareena Kapoor, along with her husband Saif Ali Khan and kids Taimur and Jahangir, have jetted off to their royal Pataudi Palace to spend their Christmas vacation together. The actress has been sharing pictures from their vacation that showcase the Kapoor-Khan family enjoying quality time together amidst picturesque surroundings.



**Christmas vs Xmas**

The name 'Christmas' comes from the old English phrase Cristes maesse, which means 'Christ's mass'. But what about 'Xmas'? Lots of people think this is just a modern-day abbreviation - but it actually dates back to the 16th century! The 'X' is said to represent the Greek letter 'Chi' - the first letter in the Greek word for Christ, (pronounced 'Christos').

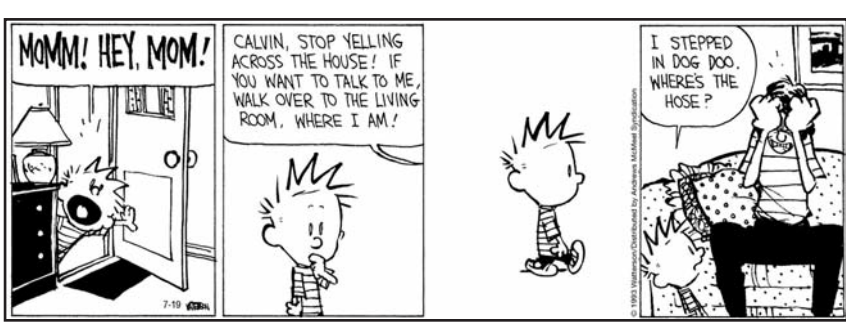
**No celebration on Dec 25**

Did you know that not all Christians celebrate Christmas on the same day? In countries with large populations of Orthodox Christians\*, such as Russia, the Ukraine, and Romania, Christmas Day falls January 7.

**PEANUTS**



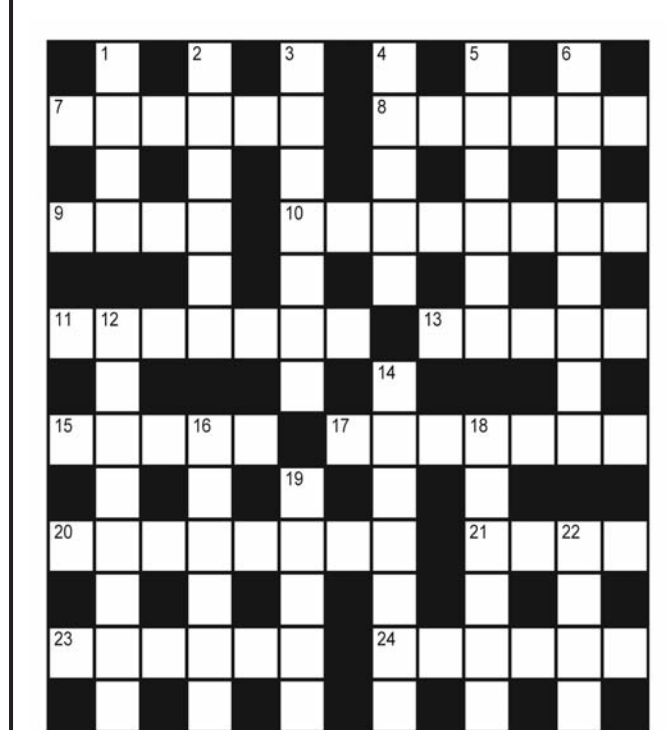
**CALVIN AND HOBBS**



**BREVITY**



**FUN post CROSSWORD**



- Across
- 7 Obstacle
  - 8 On the train
  - 9 Without help
  - 10 Retreat
  - 11 Slippery
  - 13 Yataghan, e.g.
  - 15 Expression
  - 17 Free weight
  - 20 Irregular
  - 21 Meek
  - 23 Classical music
  - 24 Romance language
- Down
- 1 Motorcar
  - 2 Detestable
  - 3 Busy workplace
  - 4 Golfer's helper
  - 5 Area
  - 6 Atrocious
  - 12 Annoyance
  - 14 Barn section
  - 16 Jane Eyre, e.g.
  - 18 Knock about
  - 19 Enthusiastic approval
  - 22 Rodents

**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.

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

**SOLUTIONS**

**CROSSWORD**

L	T	S	S	O	P
Z	O	D	I	A	C
B	S	E	A	E	E
M	O	U	S	E	P
S	L	O	E	I	N
A	S	I	D	E	V
C	R	S	V	E	E
V	I	S	A	C	H
O	P	O	L	I	U
B	U	R	E	A	U
S	E	D	T	Y	E

**SUDOKU**

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown

## CULTURAL FETE

Artistes perform during 1st Prabasi Nrutya Sangam at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Sunday



## CM to inaugurate Odia varsity in Jan last week



In the first phase, academic block, administrative block, hostels for students and research scholars, library, cafeteria and a water tank have been developed on 10.35 acre of land at Satyabadi

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** The much-awaited Odia University at Satyabadi in Puri district will be inaugurated by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in the last week of January 2024, said 5T and Nabin Odisha Chairman Kartik Pandian, Sunday.

In the first phase, academic block, administrative block, hostels for students and research scholars, library, cafeteria and a water tank have been developed on 10.35 acre of land at Satyabadi of the district.

Pandian reviewed the progress of the first phase construction work of the ambitious initiative and asked officials to ensure completion of the construction, including landscaping work, by January 15.

The 5T Chairman said that the CM will inaugurate the university in the last week of January 2024.

Higher Education department Secretary, Odia University Vice Chancellor, and Odisha Bridge and Construction Corporation Limited Managing Director were

present during the ground review.

The CM had laid the foundation stone of the university October 9, 2018. The university is coming up near the Satyabadi Bana Vidyalaya, established by the famous Panchasakha - Pandit Gopabandhu Das, Acharya Harihar Das, Pandit Nilakantha Das, Krupasindhu Mishra and Godavarish Mishra. The Bana Vidyalaya was teaching students about patriotism, service to mankind, to become a good human being and nationalism.

The university will promote research and higher studies in Odia language and literature. It will also offer research activities in various subjects related to language, literature, linguistics and historical scripts, it was learnt.

## 4 poachers held in Mayurbhanj

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Forest department personnel arrested four poachers and two timber smugglers from Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Mayurbhanj district during patrolling, an official said Sunday.

The Similipal Special Tiger Protection Force deployed in Jenabil wildlife range in the STR nabbed two poachers while two others, who were carrying guns, managed to escape, STR Field Director Prakash Chand Gogineni said.

Similarly, the Joint Task Force (JTF) deployed in the Dukura wildlife range in the tiger reserve, along with the local staff, nabbed two poachers while seven others managed to escape from the spot, he said.

Gogineni said two country-made guns, four iron rods used for loading the gun, three billhooks, gunpowder, sulphur and iron balls were seized from the accused persons. During the patrolling in Champagarh beat of Pithabata north wildlife range in the STR, two persons were nabbed when they were illegally cutting Kashi tree in the forest. In connection to the above incidents, three cases have been registered by the Forest officials and further investigation is going on to nab others involved in the cases, the official said.

**During the patrolling in Champagarh beat, two persons were nabbed when they were illegally cutting Kashi tree in the forest**



Hues from Patha Utsav that kicked off between Ram Mandir Square and Master Canteen Square in Bhubaneswar, Sunday  
 PICS: BIKASH NAYAK

## WORLD'S 'BIGGEST' SANTA CLAUS

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Sand art maestro Sudarsan Pattnaik has created a 100-ft-long, 20-ft-high and 40-ft-wide Santa Claus using onion and sand on the Blue Flag beach in Puri for Christmas and it has been declared by the World Record Book of India as 'world's biggest onion and sand installation of Santa Claus', Sunday.

Pattnaik has created the art with two tonne of onion. Students of Pattnaik's sand art school joined hands with him to complete it in eight hours.

World Record Book of India

### Miniature on piece of chalk

With the Christmas fever gripping the globe, an Odisha-based artist has carved a miniature of Santa Claus on a piece of chalk. L Eswar Rao, who hails from Jatni in Khurda district, craved the one-and-a-half-inch-long miniature with message 'Happy Xmas'. He took two days to complete the artwork. "I have carved this miniature to wish all people a Merry Christmas. On this eve, I pray that Jesus blesses all of us," Rao said. Last year, on Christmas, Rao had created a miniature of Jesus Christ inside a glass bottle. The 41-year-old artist has been practising his artwork for the last 25 years. Earlier, he also created a stick and ball and placed it inside a 750 ml bottle to wish luck to all teams participating in the Hockey World Cup, 2023. Rao's journey as a miniature artist began in 1999 after he gifted a Taj Mahal carved out of chalk to his teacher. In 2011, Rao started Eswar Art and Craft Social Foundation where he trains students for free.

chief editor Sushma Narvekar and senior adjudicator Sanjay Narvekar declared it as a new world record and presented a

certificate and a medal to Pattnaik.

Pattnaik said it is an honour to set a new world record. "Every

year, we try something different in sand. Last year, we had created a Santa Claus on sand with the installation of tomatoes. Puri is a tourist place, and a lot of people visit here during holidays. So, every year, during this Christmas, we arrange a sand art festival here," the sand art maestro said.

So far, Pattnaik has participated in more than 65 international sand sculpture festivals and competitions around the world and won many awards for the country.

He always tries to spread awareness messages through his sand art, it was learnt.



Government Of India

# Tribute to the Bravery and Sacrifice of Sahibzaade



Date  
**26 December 2023**

Time  
**10:30 AM**

Venue : **Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi**

Various events across the country

March-past by children

Rendition of **Shabad Kirtan** by Sikh children

Martial Arts demonstration by children

Interactive quiz on MYBharat platform and MyGov portal

Digital exhibitions and special gatherings in schools and childcare organisations (CCI) all over India

In the august presence of  
**Narendra Modi**  
 Prime Minister



“ The saga and the life's message of our Sahibzaadas should reach every child of the country. They should take inspiration from them and become dedicated citizens of the country. ”

# VEER BAAL

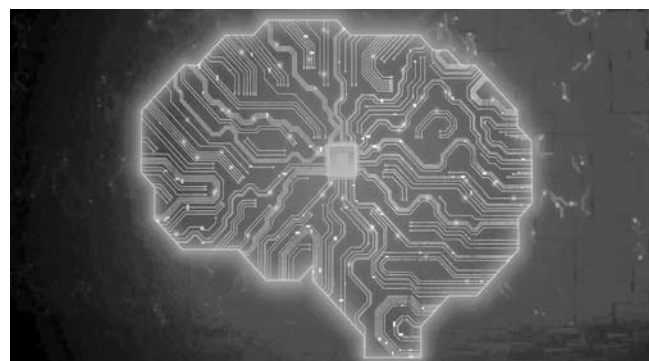
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FOCUS POLITICAL ECONOMY

# PREVENTING AI APOCALYPSE



With rapid commercialisation apparently taking precedence over caution, and competition hastening the development of increasingly powerful tools, an AI-induced apocalypse seems increasingly plausible

come too late. The second way to rein in AI is to limit altogether the development of potentially dangerous products. But curbing demand is more complicated than restricting supply, especially in modern societies where competitive forces – both commercial and geopolitical – make slowing down technological innovation exceedingly difficult.

The recent turmoil at OpenAI is a case in point. In November, the company's board of directors briefly fired CEO Sam Altman, reportedly due to concerns that AI could one day lead to humanity's extinction. Although Altman was reinstated just days later, the scandal underscored the speed with which ostensibly beneficial technologies could become existential risks. With rapid commercialisation apparently taking precedence over caution, and competition hastening the development of increasingly powerful tools, an AI-induced apocalypse seems increasingly plausible. The inescapable conclusion is that merely regulating AI is not enough. But by introducing concepts such as neo-Luddism and redistribution into public debate, we could develop the political and intellectual vocabulary needed to mitigate threats posed by these emerging technologies.

For example, a neo-Luddite might ask: Why are affluent societies, which already produce more than enough for their citizens to live comfortably, still focused on maximising GDP growth? One answer might be the lack of a fair distribution of wealth and income that would ensure that the benefits of productivity and efficiency gains are widely shared. Another explanation is that technology itself is not intrinsically good or bad; it is a means to an end. And in today's political economy, "technological innovation" is often a euphemism for enabling the rich and powerful to redirect capital from industry to finance, thereby monopolising the benefits of automation and immiserating everyone else.

The writer is a member of the British House of Lords.  
PROJECT SYNDICATE

A little over a year ago, the San Francisco-based OpenAI released its chatbot, ChatGPT, triggering an artificial-intelligence gold rush and reigniting the age-old debate about the effects of automation on human welfare. The fear of displacement by machines can be traced back to the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution, when groups of English handloom weavers, known as Luddites, began destroying the power looms that threatened their livelihoods. The movement, which peaked between 1811 and 1817, was ultimately suppressed by government forces, and its leaders were executed or exiled to Australia.

But the Luddites' arguments found an unexpected (and somewhat ironic) champion in renowned economist David Ricardo, who argued in his 1817 book *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* that "the opinion entertained by the laboring class, that the employment of machinery is frequently detrimental to their interests, is not founded on prejudice and error, but is conformable to the correct principles of political economy." The British economist Nassau Senior, for his part, advised the weavers to "get out of that branch of production." They ended up doing just that: 250,000 handloom jobs disappeared between 1820 and 1860.

But while mechanization ended up benefiting human workers – the United Kingdom's population and per capita real income multiplied over the same period – it adversely affected horses, whose numbers fell sharply as trains (and, later, motorised vehicles) replaced horse-drawn transport.

Since Industrial Revolution, the prevailing pro-machine argument has been that by increasing labour productivity, automation boosts real incomes, allowing more individuals to enjoy higher living standards without corresponding job losses. Moreover, liberation from tedious menial tasks has enabled us to redirect our energy to more valuable pursuits.

The Luddites' modern-day counterparts, on the other hand, emphasize the downsides of automation, especially the potential

to destroy livelihoods and communities. An equitable distribution of income and power, they argue, is crucial to reaping the long-term benefits of technological progress. Techno-pessimists like Martin Ford and Daniel Susskind have argued that emerging technologies like AI will create too few new jobs, resulting in increased poverty and "technological unemployment."

The rise of generative AI and the anticipated arrival of artificial general intelligence – an AI capable of any cognitive task that humans can perform – have supercharged the debate between techno-optimists and techno-skeptics. For example, in the health-care sector, a seemingly endless wellspring of tech hype, AI promises improved diagnostics, advanced telemedicine, more effective drugs, and reduced administrative burdens on doctors and nurses, leaving more time for patient care.

This seems to reflect the prevailing view among mainstream experts that generative AI will augment, rather than replace, human jobs. By automating routine tasks, it promises to free humans to pursue more creative work. To be sure, this transformation will require lifelong learning, making continuous education a condition not just for participating in the job market but also for accessing an expanding array of online services.

With the advent of generative

AI, concerns have shifted from automation-induced job losses to the prospect of a superintelligence going rogue – a fear that dates back to Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. Echoing these sentiments, former Google CEO Eric Schmidt recently remarked that while current AI models remain "under human control," there is a real risk that one could develop the capability for "recursive self-improvement," gain autonomy, and begin "setting its own goals."

As experts and scholars grow increasingly concerned about AI's capacity to destroy the world, a growing number of voices have called for AI development to be aligned with human goals and values. There are two ways to achieve this. The first is to restrict the availability and sales of potentially harmful AI-based products, as policymakers in Europe and elsewhere have tried to do by imposing strict regulations on emerging technologies like autonomous cars and facial recognition.

One obvious problem with this approach is that reaching a consensus on what constitutes harm is difficult in a world in which moral relativism is the norm. Since it is increasingly unclear who "owns" content that is deemed harmful, it is virtually impossible to hold vendors or providers accountable. Moreover, attempts to regulate the use of technology tend to



Robert Skidelsky

TECHNOLOGY ITSELF IS NOT INTRINSICALLY GOOD OR BAD; IT IS A MEANS TO AN END

## Biden's Missteps

It was an awkward middle ground when the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) strived hard to approve a watered down proposal to increase supplies to Gaza and demanded immediate action "to create the conditions for a sustainable cessation of hostilities." Israel's steadfast supporter, the US, abstained and that allowed the resolution to be adopted by the 15-member council.

With its mindless aggression in the Gaza Strip where the death toll has now gone past 20,000, amounting to almost one per cent of the territory's pre-war population, Israel is finally squandering away whatever sympathy it had garnered in the wake of the Hamas' October 7 attack on its citizens. "While it is clear that Israel has the absolute right to respond militarily against a brutal terrorist attack, it is also clear that [Benjamin] Netanyahu's rightwing, extremist government is waging that war in a deeply reckless and immoral way," US senator Bernie Sanders remarked last week.

Following the Hamas attack, US President Joe Biden had said that the US would continue to give Israel the military support it needs to protect itself and "finish the job" against Hamas. However, gradually there has been a change in his tone – first calling for Benjamin Netanyahu to shift course and finally warning Israel that it is now going overboard in its retaliation against Hamas, leading to a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale in the Gaza Strip. Over 355,000 Gazans are suffering from infectious diseases as conditions in the territory worsen, according to latest reports. Even as the US expresses concern about the civilian suffering in Gaza, Israel appears to be paying little heed to American warnings. As a result, some observers claimed, the United States is becoming more and more isolated from the rest of the world while having little influence over Israel.

This is in sharp contrast to the Biden administration's reaction after Russian forces launched an invasion of Ukraine about two years ago. The US was swift in imposing sanctions on Russia for its military adventurism and led the liberal democratic world in a campaign against a despotic and expansionist Vladimir Putin. The Biden administration's support (both monetary and military) for Ukraine has greatly helped the latter withstand the Russian might although that assistance too is shrinking now.

While Biden's unwavering support for Israel aligns with the pro-Israel consensus in Washington, several polls have revealed that a majority of Americans – including most Democrats – want a ceasefire in Gaza. Meanwhile, Benjamin Netanyahu would probably be more than happy to see Donald Trump back in the White House, as the latter regularly gave in to Israel's requests without even raising an eyebrow.

As a result, Biden seems to be scuttling his chances in next year's presidential elections by alienating his support base for an ally that in all likelihood is going to side with his Republican rival. At the same time, he appears to be isolating the US on the Gaza issue.

### WISDOM CORNER

Great minds are related to the brief span of time during which they live as great buildings are to a little square in which they stand; you cannot see them in all their magnitude because you are standing too close to them.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Generosity is nothing else than a craze to possess. All which I abandon, all which I give, I enjoy in a higher manner through the fact that I give it away. To give is to enjoy possessively the object which one gives.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. She becomes all outer show and inward emptiness; dull, callous, and indifferent.

VIRGINIA WOOLF

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

■ **1643:** Christmas Island discovered. Captain William Mynors on the East India Company ship *Royal Mary* did not stop at the Australian island, which owes its name to the date of its discovery by Europeans. It was not until 44 years later that the first Europeans stepped on the Island. Sparsely populated, the Indian Ocean island is rich in phosphate, which is mined from the guano – bird droppings.

■ **1809:** First abdominal surgery performed. American physician Ephraim McDowell became the first person in recorded history to successfully remove an ovarian tumor. He is known as the father of ovariectomy and abdominal surgery. The procedure took about 30 minutes and was performed without any anaesthesia.

■ **1926:** Hirohito becomes the 124th emperor of Japan. Michinomiya Hirohito, known as Emperor Shwa after his death, becomes the 124th emperor of Japan after the death of his father, Emperor Yoshihito. Hirohito was the Emperor of Japan for 62 years, making him the longest reigning Emperor of Japan.

■ **1962:** The film adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* premiered and became a classic, especially noted for Gregory Peck's portrayal of Atticus Finch.

■ **1991:** Mikhail Gorbachev resigned the presidency of the Soviet Union, which ceased to exist at the end of the year. His efforts to democratise his country's political system and decentralise its economy led to the downfall of communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. In part because he ended the Soviet Union's post-war domination of Eastern Europe, Gorbachev was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1990.

### LOL

#### The flying dog

A woman is out looking for a pet, and so she's trying the local pet shops. She walks into a small pet shop and explains her need to the attendant. He thinks for a moment and then says, "I've got just the thing for you madam. I'll just get him." With that, he disappears into the back of the shop, and returns a few seconds later with a cute little puppy. "This dog is a special dog," he tells her. "It is able to fly," he explains, and with that throws the dog into the air. It immediately begins to float gracefully around the shop. "There is one problem with him, however. Whenever you say 'my', he'll

eat whatever you've mentioned." Watch, "My apple!" The lady watches in astonishment as the dog zooms over to the shop attendant and furiously devours an apple he has produced from his pocket. "He's cute, and so unusual. I'll take him," she says, and a few minutes later she is on her way back home with the dog to show it to her husband. "Darling, look what a clever pet I bought today!" she exclaims when she gets back home. "He can fly!" The husband peers at the dog, and then remarks, "Fly eh? Ha! My foot!"



### SPECTRUM HOMAGE

## Robert Solow's lessons for India

When the US embassy officials for a party wanted to know about his rank for protocol purposes, Robert Solow, who passed away on December 21, told his secretary: "Tell them I am a full Professor of Economics at MIT." They do not have anything that high in the government. For someone who has been at MIT since 1945, and made a pioneering contribution to the exogenous model of growth theory in tandem with Swan in 1956, this is not an exercise in pomposity. Paul Samuelson described Solow as "the consummate economist's economist. People sought his advice not because they agreed with his eclectic post-Keynesian ideology but because he respected evidence."

Solow first studied sociology, anthropology, and elementary economics before settling down to economics at MIT in 1945. Academic theories that predated him had the discomfiting implication that capitalist economies were always teetering between boom and bust. He observed that the history of capitalism did not

look like that. He attempted to explain long-term economic growth by looking at capital accumulation, population growth, and improvement in factor productivity. Solow was the first to isolate the contribution of capital, labour, and factor productivity. Speaking in 2009, he had observed that advances in technology rather than increases in capital and labour have been the primary drivers of economic growth in the USA. About 80% of 20th-century American growth was due to total factor productivity of capital and labour.

In a seminal study made by Solow and Micheal Spence as part of the WB Commission on Growth & Development, they identified 15 countries that had achieved 7% growth since 1950. This included countries like China (1961-2005), Japan (1950), and South Korea (1960-2021). The common ingredients of success have been high savings and investment, import of knowledge and technology, rapid export growth, and market-friendly policies. They could not have been

more prescient in the context of India when it embraced market-friendly policies in taxation, financial intermediation, and breaking the shackles of trade protection. As a matter of fact during 1960-1980, the high noon of socialism and nationalism, India's gross domestic savings as percentage of GDP was 16.5% only, with a growth rate of 3.5%, while the gross domestic savings rate was 34.8% during 2005-2006 with GDP growing at 9.6% (Economic Survey). The percentage of people below the poverty line also went down from 51% to 27.5% during these two periods.

Solow emphasised the role of improving the quality of labour as important as technology; particularly for better health, nutrition, and education. A look at the trend of nutrition indicators in India shows how they are completely out of sync with its high growth trajectory. A comparison of percentage of children, who are stunted shows against 51% in 1998-99 (NFHS 2), it has come down to 35.5% in 2019-2021 (NFHS V). In terms of under-

weight children, the reduction is from 42.7% to 32.2% in these corresponding periods as per the same NFHS surveys. The most disappointing area is percentage of anaemia among adolescent women which has gone up from 54.2% in 2015-2016 to 58.9% during 2019-2021. Solow believed that investment in human capital is a significant factor in ushering in durable economic growth. India spends around 3.5% of its GDP on education, 1.3% on health care and 0.8% on R&D.

Solow would have been deeply anguished by the present government's obsession with a \$5 trillion economy instead of setting a credible roadmap for improving nutrition, education, and healthcare needs of its citizens by investing handsomely in the social sector, technology, R&D. India is at a crossroads today. With a respectable growth rate, it is grappling with divisive majoritarianism and intolerance towards responsible dissent.

The writer teaches Macro Economics. Views are personal.



Satya Narayan Misra

SOLOW BELIEVED THAT INVESTMENT IN HUMAN CAPITAL IS A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN USHERING IN DURABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

### Raw deal

Sir, It is indeed not good news to know that the 12 rat-hole miners honoured by the state government for saving the lives of 41 tunnel workers have collectively decided not to encash the cheques of Rs 50,000 each presented to them for their heroic deed. The role of rat-hole miners in the Silkyara tunnel rescue operation is unforgettable. When high-tech, imported machines broke down during the long-drawn operation and heavy debris caused delay in the last phase of the operation, the rescue team sought the help of skilled rat-hole miners who made the impossible possible. The rat-hole miners manually drilled the final stretch of about 15 metres through the debris in the collapsed part of the tunnel in claustrophobic conditions to prepare an escape passage. The rat-hole miners as well as the public are of the opinion that Rs 50,000 is too paltry a sum to acknowledge their role. What the rat-hole miners, who lead miserable lives, need is permanent jobs and houses. The state and the Centre must definitely look into this matter and immediately make an action plan to support the rescuers without whom saving the workers trapped in the tunnel would have been impossible. The saviours should definitely be presented with something that can make them lead a decent life.

M Pradyu, KANNUR

### Nuclear threat

Sir, The indomitable, but maverick, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is in an extremely aggressive mood going by his warning that he would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons if his country is attacked by nukes. Kim is perturbed by the ramping up of defence preparedness by the United States, South Korea and Japan subsequent to North Korea conducting the launching of its most potent intercontinental ballistic missile, Hwasong-18. One thing the all powerful leader abhors is to usher in at least a semblance of a demilitarised North Korea because that would considerably weaken his position both domestically and globally. His ultimate mission, unlike his personality, is not enigmatic: diminish Washington's clout and, thereby, eclipse South Korea's position in the eyes of the world.

Ganapathi Bhat, AKOLA

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 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](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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

# Chief Secy calls for plastic-free picnics



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena has urged the people of the state to avoid using plastics while going for picnics to tourist destinations and places including forests.

In this regard, State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) and 'Youth for Water' along with civil society organizations are conducting statewide awareness campaigns.

Jena requested everyone to support the efforts of the SPCB and 'Youth for Water'. He said that the campaign will not only make the forests plastic-free, but it will also make environment green and healthy, thus helping

our future generation. In this context, Jena further said, "Nature provides us many services from the environment. So it is our responsibility to take care of Mother Nature as her guardian. During the Christmas and New Year celebrations, when tourists, youths and the general public go to any natural place or tourist destination to enjoy the peace and beauty of nature, they are requested to take as many reusable plates as possible. He advised people not to use single-use or single-use plastic materials, and also to use green materials such as plates and cups made of leaves that are compostable or biodegradable, and not to forget to clean the picnic spots after use. He asked picnickers to use designated places for disposing garbage.

"Let's pledge for a plastic-free picnic this season and preserve our nature for the future. Avoid single-use plastic items, carry reusable plates, glasses and spoons, use cloth napkin instead of tissue paper, practice use of green alternatives like leaf plates and bowls and dispose of waste in the dustbin," he said.

## ODM holds annual fest 'Spectra-2023'

**Bhubaneswar:** The 34th annual festival of ODM Public School 'Spectra-2023' concluded here Sunday following. A number of cultural activities were organised in the two-day festival. Joining the event as chief guest, Higher Education Minister Atanu Sabayasachi Nayak joined the event as the chief guest. Speaking on this occasion, he lauded school management and the students for their efforts in making ODM Public School one of the leading institutions in the state. He also praised the school's multidisciplinary plans and programmes which resulted in boundless achievements at national and international level. The founder chairman of ODM Educational Foundation Satyabrata Minaketan addressed the audience elaborating his mission and vision for the better and brighter days of the school and the students. Minaketan dedicated the festival to the parents and grandparents calling them as the first teachers in students' life. Among other dignitaries present on the occasion were Indumati Ray, Director (Finance and Admn) and Chief Executive Officer Swoyan Satyendu. On this occasion, students enthralled the audience with cultural programmes showcasing their artistic skills.



**FUN TIME:** Girls taking selfie at Toshali Crafts Mela organised at Janata Maidan in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

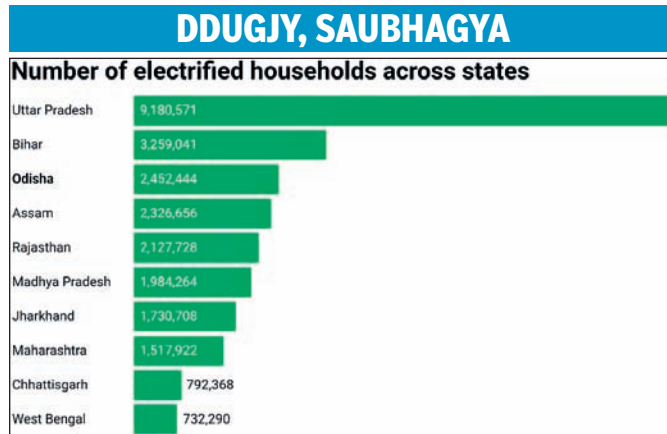
OP PHOTO

# 24.5L households electrified in state

ATRI PRASAD ROUT, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 24:** As many as 24,52,444 households in Odisha have been electrified under the Centre's Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana - Saubhagya between 2017 and 2022, Union Power, New and Renewable Energy Minister RK Singh informed in the Lok Sabha recently.

In terms of the number of households electrified, Odisha stands third after Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which have reported electrification of 91,80,571 and 32,59,041 households respectively. Under the DDUGJY, while 3,281 villages in Odisha have been electrified, a total of 18,374 villages have been hooked to the grid across the country. Moreover, some 1,03,857 households in the state falling below poverty line (BPL) have been provided with electricity connections, the minister informed.



In 2014, the Central government had launched DDUGJY to electrify all villages of the country. Other than ensuring basic electricity connection, the scheme also facilitated augmentation of the rural power transmission and distribution infrastructure, with improved metering at the transformer, feeder and consumer levels.

"As reported by the states, all the inhabited and un-electrified census villages in the country were electrified by April 28, 2018. A total of 18,374 villages were electrified under the scheme," said Singh in a written reply to the Lower House. Furthermore, the Union government had launched the Saubhagya scheme in 2017 to

achieve universal household electrification by providing connection to all willing un-electrified households in rural areas and poor households in urban areas.

Under Saubhagya, a total of 2.86 crore households (including tribal households) have been electrified, the minister added.

Similarly, responding to a query from Jajpur MP Sarmistha Sethi during the recently-concluded Winter Session, Singh had said that under DDUGJY the Jajpur constituency has received grant for projects of 61.7 crore against sanctioned cost of 116.04 crore. Three villages of the district, Nagada, Gulhial and Chirugunia, have also been completely electrified.

In reply to another query from the Bolangir MP Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo, the minister had informed that under DDUGJY the constituency has received grant for projects of 171.35 crore against sanctioned cost of 301.95 crore.

## Youth assaults mom over cauliflower theft; held

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Champua, Dec 24:** In a shocking incident, a man allegedly beat up his 70-year-old mother black and blue by tying up her to a utility pole over suspicion of plucking a cauliflower from his farmland at Sarasapasi village under Champua police limits in Keonjhar district, police said Sunday.

The matter came to the fore after police arrested the accused Shatrughna Mohanta, son of the victim Subhadra Mohanta in the village.

Reports said that Subhadra and her son Shatrughna lived separately. Shatrughna had cultivated cauliflower on his farmland. The incident occurred after Subhadra took a cauliflower from Shatrughna's farmland and consumed the vegetable, Wednesday.

Enraged, Shatrughna quarrelled with his mother over the matter. The incident took a violent turn as he tied the elderly woman to a utility pole in the village and thrashed her mercilessly. When the villagers tried to intervene, he threatened them.

On being informed, Champua police reached the spot, rescued the woman and admitted her to Basudevpur community health centre for treatment, IIC Trinath Sethy said. Later, police conducted an investigation and arrested Shatrughna for the offence, Sunday, the IIC said.

## 4 held for kidnap of minor

**Deogarh:** Police here arrested four men who had kidnapped the minor daughter of a businessman in Deogarh town December 18, informed Deogarh SP Pradyumna Kumar Mishra at a presser, Sunday. The accused were identified as Himanshu Narang, 21, of Nuagaon village under Deogarh police limits, Rohit Patra, 24, of Balanda village, Maheswar Sagadia, 24, of Jarekela village and Deepak Nayak, 19, of Mendhipalli village.

## POLITICKLE by MANJUL



## Siblings killed in road mishap

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Gopalpur, Dec 24:** Two siblings were killed after being hit by an unknown vehicle on National Highway-16 in front of Rangeilunda block office in Ganjam district, late Saturday night.

The deceased were identified as Kanhu Charn Roul and Manoj Kumar Roul of Golanthara village.

The mishap occurred when the siblings were returning home on bike after having dinner at a dhaba in Kanishi. The siblings were thrown off their bike after being hit by an unknown vehicle from behind. Manoj was severely injured and started bleeding profusely.

On being informed, police arrived at the spot and with the help of locals rushed the two in an ambulance to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur. The doctors on duty examined them and pronounced the two dead.

# BJD eyes big win with loyal women voter base

Riding on the flagship social welfare schemes, and with a strong loyal women voter base, the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is eyeing for a smooth sailing in the general elections, as well as the Assembly polls, scheduled next year.

The regional party registered a landslide victory during the three-tier Panchayati Raj elections last year, proving its supremacy. The party won 766 Zilla Parishad seats of the 852 with a vote share of 52.73 per cent. It also acquired 95 out of 108 municipalities and notified area councils in the urban local body polls in 2022.

"The BJD is engaged in the service of the people throughout the year. The party, under the leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has worked dedicatedly to fulfil the commitments it made in the manifesto for the 2019 elections. So, our party is ready to face elections anytime, and we are confident to win this time too," said senior BJD leader and former minister Samir Ranjan Dash.

Dash said the party has set the target to increase the seat tally from 112 in 2019 to 130 in 2024.

The party has also tuned into election mode by launching several people-oriented schemes like Ama Odisha Nabin Odisha, LAccMI and Nua-O.

The Ama Odisha Nabin Odisha scheme aims at augmenting rural digital infrastructure and preservation of cultural heritage sites and temples in rural Odisha. Similarly, the party hopes to further strengthen its rural stronghold by offering affordable transport facilities through the LAccMI scheme.



The government is also likely to announce several other big-ticket projects like the irrigation projects in the run-up to the general elections in 2024.

Besides, the party hopes to gain substantially from the success of its flagship programmes like Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, Srimandir Parikrama Project, renovation of major temples and heritage spots across the state.

Meanwhile, the state urban local bodies and panchayat elections held last year proved that the traditional women vote bank has also remained intact with the ruling party.

"One of the biggest reasons for BJD's exceptional electoral success is its strong support base among the female voters through the women self-help groups under the aegis of the Mission Shakti department," political analyst and veteran journalist, Rabi Das, said.

Meanwhile, political analysts also point out several drawbacks

which may spell trouble for the ruling BJD in the general elections. The opposition Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress will leave no stone unturned to corner the ruling party by raking up issues such as non-Odia leadership, tribal land rights, and so on.

It is being widely speculated that ex-IAS officer V. Karthikeyan Pandian may succeed CM Patnaik.

"The party may see internal conflicts either before the elections or after that over transfer of baton to V.K. Pandian, a non-Odia," said Rabi Das.

The experts opined that the simmering internal discontent over the issue is suppressed under the fear of losing power. Meanwhile, the succession plan was reportedly put on hold following opposition raising a hue and cry over the issue of an outsider being at the helm of affairs.

A former bureaucrat, Pandian, who recently joined the ruling BJD after taking voluntary retirement from service, announced during the state executive body meeting of BJD that he will not contest the upcoming elections and serve the party under Patnaik.

The opposition parties are also planning to target the BJD over tribal land rights issues.

The BJD came under severe backlash after the cabinet gave nod to allow the sale of tribal land to non-tribals in the state's Scheduled areas in November. The government later reversed the decision and sent back the proposal to the Tribal Advisory Committee for review amid sharp criticism from the opposition parties.

IANS

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA** No.A-1074  
**DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**SUBARNAREKHA IRRIGATION DIVISION NO-II**  
AT/PO-DEULI, DIST-MAYURBHANJ, PIN-757021  
Mail id: ee.sid2.deuli@gmail.com

**Government of Odisha "e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE**  
Bid Identification No.01/2023-24 of S.E., S.I.DIVISION NO-II, DEULI

1	Name of Work	a. "Construction of internal road from Solar chhaka to Chhuch chhaka in Dardiasole self-rehabilitation colony. b. "Construction of cement concrete road from Pre-existing B.T. Road to Nedhua Primary School and approach road from Bana Chhaka to house of Sri Khageswar Si at Dahanimari self-rehabilitation colony." c. "Construction of Drainage Facility at village Pusigaon self-rehabilitation colony under periphery development work."
2	Estimated Cost for put to tender	a. Rs.25,90,423/-, b. Rs.19,627,758/-, c. Rs.19,15,848/-, respectively
3	Bid Security/E.M.D.	a. Rs.25,904/-, b. Rs.19,628/-, c. Rs.19,158/- respectively
4	Period of Completion	02 (Two) Calendar Months
5	Class of Contractor	1. "C" Class and "B" Class for Sl.No. 1) a 2. "D" Class and "C" Class for Sl.No. 1) b & 1) c
6	Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal	28.12.2023 at 10.00 AM
7	Last date/time for receipt of bid in the portal	11.01.2024 upto 5.00 PM
8	Opening of Bid	12.01.2024 at 11.00 AM
9	Name & Address of the O.I.T.	Superintending Engineer, Subarnarekha Irrigation Division No-II, Deuli

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement Portal "https://tendersodisha.gov.in/OIPR-32187/11/0001/2324 Sd/- Superintending Engineer, S.I. Division No-II, Deuli

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**BEWARE OF FRAUDSTERS**

It has come to our notice that unauthorized individuals or organizations are falsely using the name of Oil Marketing Companies (HPCL/IOCL/BPCL) to fraudulently offer Retail Outlet (Petrol Pump) Dealerships on behalf of OMCs.

These deceptive communications, which may include unexpected email, letter, messages or calls, falsely claim to represent OMCs and provide misleading information on award or grant of Retail Outlet dealership with the aim to dupe the unsuspecting public at large. Some messages even instruct recipients to make payments for activities such as land evaluation etc. in dubious and fake bank accounts.

A sample fraudulent message presently circulating reads: "Dear Customer, your application for a Petrol pump dealership has been approved successfully. Now you have to make payment as a registration charge on the given account below," along with bank account details."

These bank accounts are fake and not in the name of OMCs (HPCL/IOCL/BPCL). The public is hereby strongly advised to refrain from accessing/responding to such fake websites/e-mails/phone calls etc. and rely only on OMC's official website [www.petrolpumpdealerchayan.in](http://www.petrolpumpdealerchayan.in) for authentic information regarding the allotment of new Retail Outlet Dealerships and payment modalities, thereof. Presently, the OMCs have not appointed any agency or person to act on its behalf for the selection or appointment of Retail Outlet dealers nationwide, and no agency or person is authorized to solicit money from candidates at any stage of the dealership selection process related to the OMCs.

It may be noted that the OMCs do not use generic email addresses like GMAIL, Yahoo, etc., nor do they communicate through WhatsApp. Applicants are urged to make all payments, such as application fees and initial security deposits, exclusively through the official website [www.petrolpumpdealerchayan.in](http://www.petrolpumpdealerchayan.in)

If any suspicious activity is noticed, individuals are encouraged to report the incident to their local Police Station. Individuals may also contact nearby HPC/IOC/BPC office in case any suspicious activity using the name of OMCs is observed, as this will help us take necessary actions against such fraudulent websites.

**DISCLAIMER:** OMCs will not be responsible for the content of any information in unauthorized and fake websites, nor will they be liable for any losses or damages suffered by members of the public arising from reliance on or usage of information from such unauthorized portals, websites, or email domains or by dealing with imposters/ persons not authorized by OMCs.

**The above public notice is issued to caution the general public about the fraudulent activities and in the general public interest.**

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**

Tender No. 40-KUR-TRD-OT-2023-24

**Name of Work:** OHE MAINTENANCE OF MCRL LINE FROM BOXN SIDING ANGLU (ANGL) TO BALARAM SIDING VIA CABIN B AND CABIN B TO CABIN A OF JSPL FOR THREE YEARS.

**Advertised Value:** ₹ 2,41,25,719.87, EMD: ₹ 2,70,600.00, Period of Completion: 1095 Days.

**Bidding Start Date:** 26.12.2023, **Date & Time of tender closing:** At 1300 hrs. on 09.01.2024.

Manual offers are not allowed against this tender, and any such manual offer received shall be ignored.

Complete information including e-tender documents are available in website: [www.treps.gov.in](http://www.treps.gov.in)

**Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRD)**  
PR-913/O/23-24 | Khurda Road

**EAST COAST RAILWAY**

Letter No. S&T/OT/AMRIT-BHARAT/TRANSIT/2023, Dt. 19.12.2023

(1) Tender No.: ST-OT-TRANSIT-RH-BBS-362, Dtd. 19.12.2023

**Name of work:** TELECOM WORK AT TRANSIT REST HOUSE AT RAILKUNJ, CHANDRASEKHARPUR, BHUBANESWAR.

**Tender Value:** ₹ 16,17,295.21, EMD: ₹ 32,400.00

(2) Tender No.: ST-OT-AMRIT-BHARAT-03-363, Dtd. 19.12.2023

**Name of work:** TELECOM RELATED WORK (I) PROVISION OF 12 MTR WIDE FOOT OVER BRIDGE (FOB) AT PALASA (P.S.A), ICHHAPURAM (IPM), CHATRAPUR (CAP), BALUGAON (BALU), (II) IMPROVEMENT OF PLATFORM SURFACE AT PALASA (P.S.A), ICHHAPURAM (IPM), CHATRAPUR (CAP), BALUGAON (BALU), (III) UPGRADATION OF STATION BUILDING & IMPROVEMENT OF CIRCULATING AREA AT ICHHAPURAM (IPM), CHATRAPUR (CAP), PALASA (P.S.A) AND (IV) PROVISION OF 177 BAYS PLATFORM SHELTERS AT PALASA (P.S.A), ICHHAPURAM (IPM), CHATRAPUR (CAP), BALUGAON (BALU) UNDER AMRIT BHARAT STATION SCHEME.

**Tender Value:** ₹ 5,49,76,685.88, EMD: ₹ 4,24,900.00.

(3) Tender No.: ST-OT-AMRIT-BHARAT-04-364, Dtd. 19.12.2023

**Name of work:** TELECOM RELATED WORK: (I) PROVISION OF 12 MTR WIDE FOOT OVER BRIDGE (FOB) AT SHAKHIGOPAL (SIL), RAGHUNATHPUR (R.C.TC), PARADEEP (PRDP), (II) IMPROVEMENT OF PLATFORM SURFACE AT SHAKHIGOPAL (SIL), RAGHUNATHPUR (R.C.TC), PARADEEP (PRDP) AND KENDUJHARGARH (KDJR), (III) UP-GRADATION OF STATION BUILDING & IMPROVEMENT OF CIRCULATING AREA AT SHAKHIGOPAL (SIL), MERAMANDAL (MRDL), LINGARAJ TEMPLE ROAD (LGR), RAGHUNATHPUR (R.C.TC), (IV) PROVISION OF 177 BAYS PLATFORM SHELTERS AT SHAKHIGOPAL (SIL), RAGHUNATHPUR (R.C.TC), PARADEEP (PRDP) UNDER AMRIT BHARAT STATION SCHEME.

**Tender Value:** ₹ 4,61,39,627.77, EMD: ₹ 3,80,700.00.

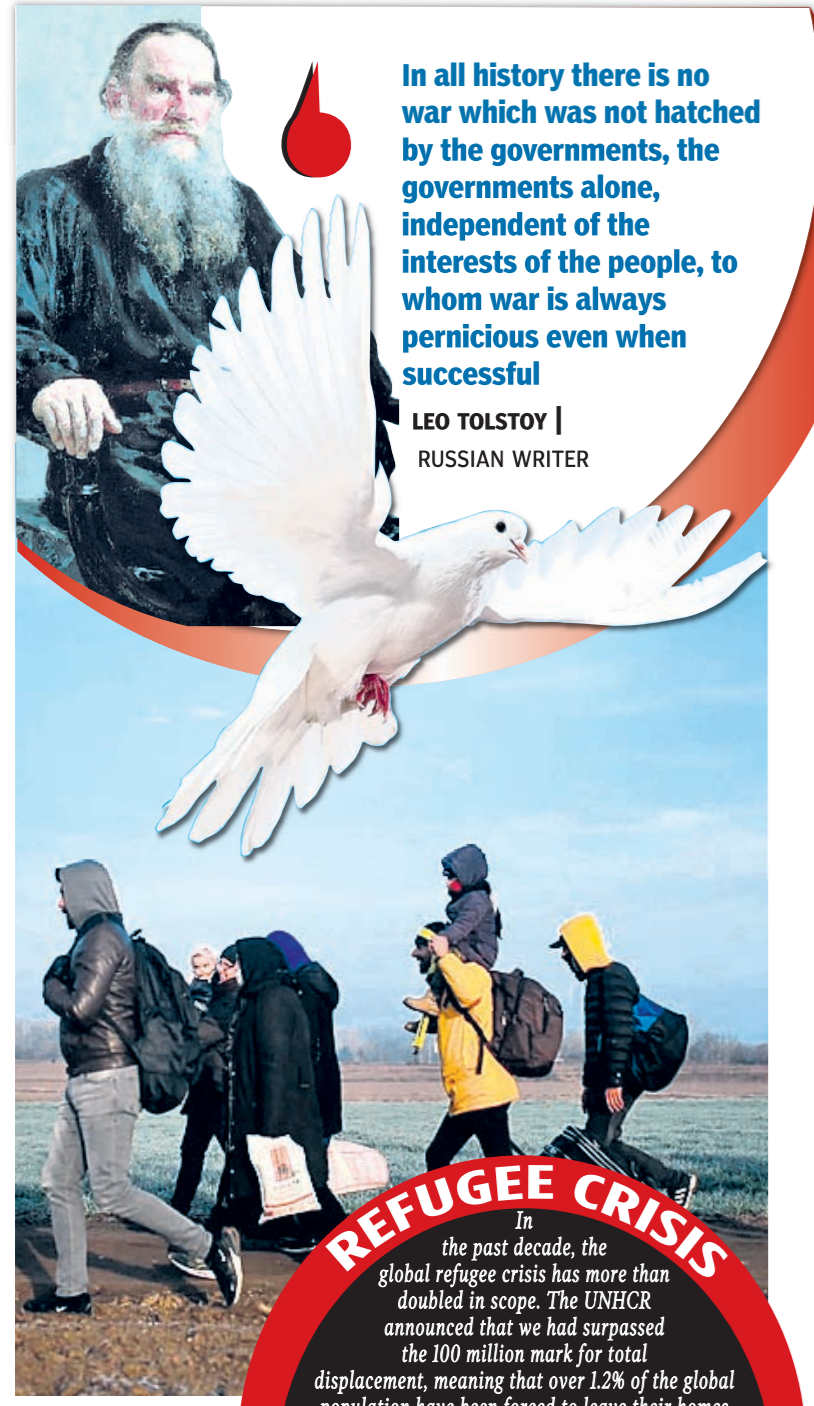
**Bidding start date:** 27.12.2023 (for all tenders), **Tender closing Date & Time:** At 1100 hrs. of 10.01.2024 (for all tenders).

No manual offers sent by post/courier/ Fax or in person shall be accepted against the e-tenders.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above-tender is available in website: [www.treps.gov.in](http://www.treps.gov.in)

**Note:** The prospective tenders are advised to revisit the website 15 (fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes/erratum issued for this tender.

**Sr. Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer,**  
PR-917/O/23-24 | Khurda Road



In all history there is no war which was not hatched by the governments, the governments alone, independent of the interests of the people, to whom war is always pernicious even when successful

LEO TOLSTOY | RUSSIAN WRITER

### REFUGEE CRISIS

In the past decade, the global refugee crisis has more than doubled in scope. The UNHCR announced that we had surpassed the 100 million mark for total displacement, meaning that over 1.2% of the global population have been forced to leave their homes

<b>GAZA</b>	More than 85% of Gaza's population have been displaced	<b>SYRIA</b>	4.6 million Syrians have sought refuge in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt
<b>UKRAINE</b>	Over 6.1 million Ukrainians displaced	<b>AFGHAN</b>	Over 11 million Afghans displaced
<b>SUDAN</b>	At the end of 2022, approximately 4.4 million refugees around the world were Sudanese	<b>UKRAINE</b>	Conflict in Ukraine has displaced over 5.8 million refugees
<b>B'DESH</b>	Over 10 million stateless Rohingya refugees in Myanmar's Rakhine State	<b>SOMALIA</b>	Small-scale crisis has once again led to an increase in IDPs
<b>SOMALIA</b>	8.14 million IDPs as of mid-2023	<b>ETHIOPIA</b>	As of mid-2023, nearly 15% of the country's population have been displaced
<b>VENEZUELA</b>	7.1 million Venezuelans have been forced to flee their homes. An estimated 200 people are still leaving the country every day	<b>CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC</b>	Over 150,000 Central Africans were registered as refugees in 2023
<b>CONGO</b>	The displacement situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the most complex and long-standing humanitarian crisis in Africa and the fourth largest internally displaced persons (IDP) crisis in the world. Fighting has been ongoing since the DRC gained its independence in 1960, and the country currently hosts more than half a million refugees and 6.2 million IDPs - the largest IDP population in Africa		

THE YEAR 2023 SAW WARS INTENSIFY, INNOCENT CIVILIANS LOSE LIVES. WHILE PUTIN CONDEMNS ISRAEL'S INCESSANT BOMBING OF PALESTINE'S GAZA STRIP, HE VOWS TO FURTHER THE OFFENSIVE IN UKRAINE THAT STARTED OVER A YEAR AGO. HOWEVER, THE VICTIMS ON BOTH SIDES, AS ALWAYS, ARE THE HELPLESS AND INNOCENT.

Orissa POST TAKES A DEEP LOOK AT THE ONGOING HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

## Death, destruction & despair

From the Israel-Hamas war to Russia's grinding battles against Ukraine, 2023 has shown the dangers of armed conflicts breaking out into region-wide combat. The bloodiest war between Israel and Hamas began October 7, when militants broke through the walls surrounding the seaside enclave of the Gaza Strip. Its fighters killed some 1,200 people in Israel and took more than 200 other hostages, spiriting them back into the territory. The attack, described as the worst one-day mass killing of Jews since the Holocaust, stunned an Israel that had believed its border wall, technologically advanced military and intelligence services broadly protected them from all but harassing militant rocket fire. Israel's embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, already reeling from months of protests over his hard-right government's attempts to overhaul the country's judiciary and corruption allegations, launched a massive campaign of retaliatory airstrikes. Israeli troops also entered the Gaza Strip for the first time in years, moving into Gaza City and fighting intense street-to-street combat. The offensive killed over 18,000 people in the Gaza Strip, home to more than 2 million residents also facing an Israeli siege largely blocking food, fuel, water and medicine shipments. Meanwhile, the mass killing of Israelis and

Palestinians sparked protests across the world, many sympathetic to the Palestinians after years of deadlock over them obtaining their own state. Iranian-backed militias, including Lebanon's Hezbollah, fired on Israel. The US sent in two aircraft carriers, troops and other weaponry to the region to try and deter a wider regional war from breaking out. But Israel's repeated stated goal — the destruction of Hamas — guaranteed a long military campaign ahead, raising risks. RUSSIA & UKRAINE REMAIN LOCKED IN COMBAT

The fast pace of the Israel-Hamas war overshadowed Russia's war on Ukraine in late 2023. But in the months prior, little had changed on the battlefield for either side. Ukraine received tanks, weapons and Western training before launching a renewed counteroffensive believed to be aimed at reaching the Sea of Azov and splitting the Russian lines in the country's south. But Ukrainian forces faced dug-in Russian troops, multiple defense lines, minefields and other hazards, making gains either slowly or not at all. While Western nations remained publicly unified behind Ukraine, polls including the US Presidential election next year could affect just how much aid Kyiv will get in the future. Russia faced difficulties as well, including a march on Moscow by the leader of the private military firm Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, that represented the greatest challenge yet to President Vladimir Putin's yearslong rule. Prigozhin backed off the march, only to die weeks later in a mysterious, fiery plane crash. Ukraine's female soldiers say they're battling multiple enemies: Russia, sexism, and ill-fitting uniforms and protective gear. Attitudes towards women serving in the military in Ukraine are changing. Still, many wonder if progress is happening fast enough and if this progress will endure after the war with Russia is over. According to data from the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 40% of the 7,028 Palestinians killed in the Israeli attacks since October 7 have been children, indicating that about five children are killed every hour in Gaza. UK-based NGO Save The Children revealed that the number of minors killed in Palestine in the last three weeks alone surpasses the number of those killed in conflicts worldwide in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Since the start of the Russia-Ukraine, Western leaders have repeatedly condemned and imposed sanctions on Moscow over the indiscriminate killing of civilians but have turned a blind eye to Israel's bombing of the Gaza Strip, which has also led to civilian deaths in the thousands.

# LIFE IN HELL



### WAR STRIKES THE INNOCENTS

More than 20,000 Palestinians have been killed since Israel declared war on Hamas, according to the Health Ministry in Gaza, which does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths

Israel says 116 of its soldiers have died in its ground offensive after Hamas raided southern Israel October 7, killing about 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and taking about 240 hostages

At least 10,000 civilians, including more than 560 children, have been killed and over 18,500 have been injured since Russia launched its full-scale armed attack against Ukraine

Nearly 1.3 million refugees from Ukraine due to the Russian invasion were recorded in Russia as of December 31, 2022. Around six million Ukrainian refugees were registered across Europe and 6.2 million worldwide as of September 2023. Most of them fled the country by crossing the border with Poland. As of September 2023, nearly 1.09 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded in Germany. Germany had the highest monthly financial allowance for Ukrainians who fled the war compared to other European countries

Russian officials have said Western estimates of Russian death tolls in the war are vastly exaggerated and almost always underestimate Ukrainian losses, which Russian officials say are vast

The Israel-Gaza conflict has taken a severe toll on journalists. As of December 17, CPI's preliminary investigations showed at least 94 journalists and media workers were among the thousands killed since the war began

About 70% of Gaza's dead were women and children under 18. The vast majority of Gaza's 2.2 million people are displaced, and an estimated half face starvation, according to human rights advocates and aid groups

Israel has come under heavy international criticism for the rising civilian death toll, widespread damage & deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza

## Race for aid

Ukraine's allies have something to show for the \$122 billion they have sent the country since Russia's invasion in February 2022. Their major success is that the Ukrainian economy proved resilient in the months following the beginning of the war; and recovered at a brisk, unexpected pace in 2023. There is, however, a risk that support for the war-torn country may erode over time, both in the United States and Europe, as the conflict evolves into a stalemate with no clear military outcome. Ukraine, estimates that international donors had already committed some 230 billion euros of aid by July. Almost half that amount was pledged by European countries and European Union institutions, and around 50% of that was direct funding of the government's fiscal needs. The United States contributed about 70 billion euros. Two-thirds of that was military aid. More will be needed in the coming years, whether the war drags on or Ukraine



## GAZA STARVING

More than half a million people in Gaza — a quarter of the population — are starving, according to a report by the United Nations. The extent of the population's hunger eclipsed even the near-famines in Afghanistan and Yemen of recent years, according to figures in the report. The report warned that the risk of famine is "increasing each day," blaming the hunger on insufficient aid entering Gaza. Israel says it is in the final stages of clearing out Hamas militants from northern Gaza, but that months of fighting lie ahead in the south. The war has also pushed Gaza's health sector into collapse. Only nine of its 36 health facilities are still partially functioning, all located in the south, according to the World Health Organisation. Delivery of aid to much of the Gaza Strip has become difficult or impossible due to continued fighting. UN officials have said. Israel blames the high number civilian deaths in Gaza on Hamas, saying it uses them as human shields when it fights in residential areas. In the north over recent weeks, Israeli forces have raided a series of health facilities, detaining men for interrogation and expelling others. In other facilities, patients who are unable to be moved remain along with skeleton staff who watch over them but can do little beyond first aid, according to United Nations and health officials. There is se-

Israel has vowed to continue the offensive until it destroys Hamas' capabilities and returns scores of hostages captured by Palestinian militants

The United States has continued to support Israel's campaign while also urging greater efforts to protect civilians. The US has shifted to more targeted operations aimed at Hamas leaders and the group's tunnel network

With supplies to Gaza cut off except for a small trickle, the World Food Programme has said 90% of the population is regularly going without food for a full day

UN Security Council members are negotiating an Arab-sponsored resolution to halt the fighting in some way to allow for an increase in humanitarian aid deliveries to Gaza

There were shortages of food and water. WHO's team leader Sean Casey said, adding the people he met had severe untreated injuries who begged him not for medicines, but water, BBC reported. Taking to X, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "Until two days ago, Al-Ahli was northern Gaza's last hospital functioning where injured people could undergo surgery. But our team learned today that its operating theatres are no longer functioning due to the depletion, or complete absence, of specialists, power, fuel, water, food and medical supplies." The Palestinian Health Ministry, which is located in the occupied West Bank and pays the salaries of Gazan ministry workers, said it has lost almost all contact recently with hospitals in the enclave.

## CRISIS CONTINUES

Ukraine's embattled economy can weather the next few months until foreign aid arrives, but 2024 is certain to be tougher than this year and Kyiv will need to rely more heavily on its own resources. Ukraine hopes to plug next year's \$43 billion budget deficit mostly with foreign financial aid including 18.5 billion euros from the European Union and more than \$8 billion from a US package that also contains vital military assistance. Both packages have been blocked so far — by Republicans in the US Congress and by Hungary in the European Union — but should eventually pass, though a question mark lingers over US financial, economic and foreign diplomats said. Since Russia invaded in February 2022, Kyiv has ploughed all of its revenue into defence and the military, while spending on everything from pensions to social payments has been covered by tens of billions of dollars of foreign aid. Kyiv could fall several billion dollars short of its financing needs in 2024 but a \$10 billion shortfall would create problems for macroeconomic stability and its programme, said Olena Bilan, Dragon Capital's chief economist. The IMF — which approved a new \$900 million tranche this month — requires firm financing assurances for the next 12 months, so a substantial decline in external financing could cut its programme into question, she said. The economy is on course to grow around 5% this year after contracting by almost a third last year. Inflation has fallen to single digits, foreign reserves are near historic highs and foreign aid has arrived regularly this year. Ukrainian businesses and foreign businesses have adapted to new wartime realities with some even announcing new production facilities in central and western regions, far from the fighting in the more heavily industrial east and south. Uncertainty over the direction of the war persists, and logistics for exports remain disrupted with refugees still abroad. The National Institute of Agrarian Economics said transport and logistics problems led to a 7% year-on-year drop in agrarian product exports in November and pushed up imported food costs. Food accounts for 60% of Ukraine's exports.

## RED SEA ATTACKS

Sea, one of the most significant shipping routes in the world, is seeing tensions rise as a spillover of the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. The Houthi say they have been attacking vessels in the Red Sea with links to Israel. This is in protest of Israel's military offensive in Gaza. Earlier in November, Houthi militants also hijacked an India-bound ship named Galaxy Leader.

A number of container ships are anchored in the Red Sea and others have turned off tracking systems as traders adjust routes and prices in response to maritime attacks by Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis on the world's main East-West trade route. Major shippers including Hapag Lloyd (HLAG.DE), MSC and Maersk (MAERSK.CO), oil major BP (BPL) and oil tanker group Frontline (FRO.O) have said they will be avoiding the Red Sea route and re-routing via southern Africa's Cape of Good Hope.

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza continues unabated for a third month. All calls for a ceasefire have come to naught. The short five-day pause ended with both sides blaming the other for breaking it. Destruction in Gaza continues to mount. As clashes raged, diplomatic efforts ramped up in the final days of the year to stave off humanitarian catastrophe and agree a new truce to release some of the hostages taken by Hamas, the group that runs the Gaza Strip and has vowed to destroy Israel. The rift has been playing out in US colleges where anti-Semitism reached an alarming level that ended in the resignation of the president of one of the top universities following a congressional hearing. While the operation could still last for months, American and Israeli officials are looking at the various options to run a post-conflict Gaza. A multinational force that includes US and possibly Arab and European troops, a peacekeeping operation modeled on the one that oversaw a 1979 Egypt-Israel treaty or putting the territory under temporary United Nations oversight. The West Bank itself is threatening to become a new front amid widespread arrests by Israel, a rising death toll and an economic slump. The global economy, already rattled by elevated inflation, is now facing another geopolitical crisis in the Middle East after the surprise attack of Hamas on Israel and subsequent declaration of war by the latter. The fallout of Israel-Hamas war on the global economy may take time to become clear but would become more severe if the conflict spreads to the rest of the Middle East, especially Iran, which is both a major oil producer and supporter of Hamas. Almost all the hospitals in Gaza have either been damaged or rendered dysfunctional by the incessant IDF aerial bombings. This has led to a catastrophic situation. The psychological trauma and mental health issues faced by Palestinians cannot be fathomed and the doctors in Gaza — who treated children facing the traumatic experience — said that the mental health conditions of many children remains worse. The displacement of Palestinians from north to central and then to southern Gaza has led to traumatic experiences among the Palestinians children.

## Ukraine disappointed

The year started with high hopes for Ukrainian troops planning a counteroffensive against Russia. It ended with disappointment on the battlefield, an increasingly somber mood among troops and anxiety about the future of Western aid for Ukraine's war effort. In between, there was a short-lived rebellion in Russia, a dam collapse in Ukraine, and the spilling of much blood on both sides of the conflict. Twenty-two months since it invaded, Russia has about one-fifth of Ukraine in its grip, and the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line has barely budged this year. A crunch has come away from the battlefield. In Western countries that have championed Ukraine's struggle against its much bigger adversary, political deliberations over billions in financial aid are increasingly strained. Russian President Vladimir Putin is playing a waiting game two years into a war that proved to be a costly miscalculation by the Kremlin. He is wagering that the West's support will gradually crumble. Nearly half of the US public believes the country is spending too much on Ukraine, as per a report. "The political landscape on both sides of the Atlantic is changing," says Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington DC. "Transatlantic solidarity has been steady. But I don't think it will remain steady forever." The shifting sentiment could benefit Putin, analysts say, as he seeks to keep Ukraine in limbo and eventually compel it to accept a deal to end the war. Putin announced in early December that he will run for reelection in March, all but guaranteeing he keeps his repressive grip on Russia for at least another six years.



Migrants cross from Mexico into Eagle Pass, Texas



Women from Ahir community in traditional attire perform 'Maharaas' after offering prayers at Dwarkadhish temple, in Dwarka



An old train exhibited at a museum located at a Madrid Metro station in Spain. The Madrid Metro, which was opened to passengers in 1919, has completed 104 years



A man dressed as Santa Claus feeds seagulls on Tapi river, ahead of Christmas in Surat



Sarna tribals with their traditional weapons stage a protest rally demanding removal and delisting of the names of converted tribal Christians from reservation category, at Morabadi Ground, in Ranchi



Israeli army troops are seen near the Gaza Strip border in southern Israel



General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Northern Command of Army Lt General Upendra Dwivedi pays his last respects to the Army personnel killed in a recent militant attack during a wreath laying ceremony, in Rajouri



Palestinians displaced by the Israeli bombardment bake bread at a makeshift tent camp in the Muwasi area in Rafah, Gaza Strip



# national



Terrorism is alive in Jammu and Kashmir and it cannot be finished by the use of military or police  
FAROOQ ABDULLAH | NATIONAL CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

## 140 PVT VARSITIES SET UP IN 5 YRS

A total of 140 private universities have been established across the country during the last five years with a maximum of them being set up in Gujarat followed by Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh, according to the Ministry of Education statistics



### SHORT TAKES

#### Explosives seized

**Jammu:** Two drone-dropped packets containing six battery-operated Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), a pistol and some cash were seized in a joint operation by the Army and police near the Line of Control in the Akhnoor sector here Sunday, officials said. The timely recovery of the packets, believed to have been dropped by Pakistani drones, thwarted major strikes by terrorists on Indian soil, they said.

#### 3 Maoists dead

**Dantewada:** At least three Naxalites were killed in a gun battle with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district Sunday, a senior officer said. The face-off occurred on a hill near Dabbakunna village under Katekalyan police station limits when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-naxal operation at around 5:30 pm, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P said.

#### Woman killed

**Indore:** A 35-year-old man allegedly killed a woman after an argument with her over her pet dog barking at him continuously in Madhya Pradesh's Indore city, police said Sunday. The incident took place in Musakhedi area Saturday night when the accused, resident of Shanti Nagar, was going home after closing his shop.

#### Kashmir shivers

**Srinagar:** Cold conditions in Kashmir intensified Sunday after two days of relief as the mercury dropped below the freezing point at several places in the valley, officials said. The summer capital of Srinagar recorded a low of minus 2.1 degrees Celsius on Saturday night - a decrease of over three degrees from the previous night's 1.2 degrees Celsius, they said. Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, which serves as one of the base camps for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a minimum temperature of minus 3.9 degrees Celsius, down over three degrees from the previous night's 0.2 degrees Celsius, they said.

#### Woman set on fire

**Ratlam:** A woman was set on fire allegedly by her brother-in-law in broad daylight in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh, police said Sunday. The police have arrested the accused, Suresh (40), for the murder that occurred at Dhodhar village of Ratlam district Saturday, an official said.

## Tejashwi flays DMK leader's remark on Bihar, UP workers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai/Patna, Dec 24:** A video clip of an alleged derogatory remark made months ago by DMK Lok Sabha MP Dayanidhi Maran on workers hailing from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar was widely circulated on social media Sunday, which led to a war of words between the BJP and Tamil Nadu's ruling Dravidian party.

The alleged remark that people from the Hindi heartland were constructing houses, cleaning roads and toilets in Tamil Nadu was condemned by Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav, whose party, the RJD, is a constituent of the INDIA bloc like the DMK. The RJD leader condemning Maran's comment assumes significance in the wake of the BJP questioning the 'silence' of parties that constitute the opposition alliance. The DMK has slammed the BJP for spreading 'falsehood,' asserting that Maran only stressed on learning the English language.

Yadav said, like his party, the RJD, the DMK headed by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin, was a party that believed in social justice and it was unbecoming of a leader of such a party to have made such a remark.

"We look upon DMK as a party which shares our ideal of social justice. Its leaders should avoid saying things that run counter to the ideal", said Yadav, who is known to share personal equations with Stalin. Addressing an event in March this year, Maran said that study of both Tamil and English had been championed by his party all along and the people of Tamil Nadu followed it.

Citing the example of Sundar Pichai, a native of Tamil Nadu, Maran said he now heads Google and had he learnt Hindi, he would have been employed in the construction sector as a worker. Since children from Tamil Nadu get educated and learn English well, they find employment in the Information Technology sector and earn good salaries.

In the video clip, Maran pur-



We look upon DMK as a party which shares our ideal of social justice. Its leaders should avoid saying things that run counter to the ideal

TEJASHWI YADAV | BIHAR DEPUTY CM

portedly said that people in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who had learnt 'only Hindi,' construct houses, clean roads and toilets in Tamil Nadu, after learning Tamil. "This is the scenario if Hindi is learnt."

The video clip showing Maran's alleged remark resurfaced on social media and the BJP said that the DMK MP's comment is very objectionable and has derogatory references to Hindi-speaking people. The reason for the matter cropping up now is not clear and it could not be ascertained immediately.

In a post on X, BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said that this has become a habit of the DMK 'for sure'. Many leaders one after the other make such comments and earlier they attacked Sanatan Dharma too. Further, he said: "But the reason why Congress party and other parties of INDIA alliance are not saying anything is because, perhaps, they are all in it together."

Tamil Nadu BJP vice-president Naryananan Thirupathy said, though it was an old remark, it shows the 'true colours' of DMK leaders who use abusive and derogatory language against north Indians.

"It is not a matter of surprise at all. It is happening now, in the present. It has also happened in the past. The DMK will continue it in the future as well," he said.

## INS Imphal to be commissioned

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** INS Imphal, the indigenously-built stealth guided missile destroyer equipped with BrahMos surface-to-surface missiles, will be commissioned into the Indian Navy Tuesday in a boost to its maritime capability amid China's increasing forays into the Indian Ocean region.

It is the first warship to have been named after a city from the Northeastern region, the approval for which was accorded by the President in April 2019. The warship will be commissioned at a ceremony in the naval dockyard in Mumbai in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, officials said.

The naming of the ship after Imphal underlines the importance of the Northeastern region for national security and prosperity, they said. Imphal is a potent and versatile platform equipped with state-of-the-art weapons and sensors, including surface-to-air missiles and torpedoes.

## Jaishankar to visit Russia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will pay a five-day visit to Russia beginning Monday with an aim to discuss various bilateral and global issues.

Jaishankar will travel to Moscow as well as St. Petersburg, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Sunday, announcing



the trip. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit Russia from December 25 to 29 as a part of the ongoing high-level exchanges between the two sides, it said.

"The time-tested India-Russia partnership has remained stable and resilient and continues to be characterized by the spirit of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," it said. The MEA said the external af-

fairs minister will meet Russia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov to discuss matters related to economic engagement.

Jaishankar will also hold talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov for discussion on bilateral, multilateral and international issues, it added. "Focusing on the strong people-to-people and cultural ties between our two countries, the External Affairs Minister's programme will include engagements in Moscow and in St. Petersburg," the MEA said.

It is learnt that the two sides are expected to discuss various aspects of the bilateral relations, especially in areas of trade, energy, defence and connectivity.

Jaishankar's visit comes as it has become clear that the annual India-Russia leaders' summit will not take place this year too. The summit between the Prime Minister of India and the Russian President is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two sides.



Tourists visit the north portal of Atal Tunnel ahead of New Year in Manali

PTI PHOTO

## ULFA cadre, 3 youths hurt in police firing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Guwahati/ Tinsukia, Dec 24:** A suspected ULFA cadre and three youths purportedly en route to join the banned outfit were injured in two separate incidents when they allegedly attempted to escape from custody, Assam Police said Sunday.

While the militant, reportedly involved in a suspected grenade blast in Sivasagar, was injured Sunday morning near Geleky, the other three were hurt in firing in Tinsukia district Saturday night, they said.

Sivasagar Police in a statement said that the person 'was found directly involved' in the December 9 grenade blast incident near CRPF Camp in the Joysagar area of the district.

The police had earlier refrained from confirming that the blast had taken place, though four suspects were arrested in this regard last week and the injured suspect was not among them.



The accused had "went to ULFA during the end of 2019 and after spending about a month in the ULFA camp based in Myanmar he came back to Assam", the statement said. On his return journey, he was arrested by Assam Rifles and imprisoned at Khonsa Jail in Arunachal Pradesh for about four months.

"After his release, he has been in continuous touch with the senior leadership of ULFA based in Myanmar and provided them with information and other local support to carry out anti-national activity. In this incident, he was tasked for the transportation of the grenade and for carrying out the grenade lobbing activity," the police statement said.

## WHO asks nations to step up surveillance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) has urged countries in South-East Asia to strengthen surveillance in view of the increasing cases of respiratory diseases, including due to COVID-19 and its new sub-variant JN.1, and influenza.

The WHO also urged people to take protective measures.

"The COVID-19 virus continues to evolve, change, and circulate in all countries globally. While current evidence suggests the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 is low, we must continue to track the evolution of these viruses to tailor our response." "For this, countries must strengthen surveillance and sequencing, and ensure sharing of data," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, regional director, WHO South-East Asia.

WHO has classified JN.1 as a variant of interest following its rapid global spread. In recent weeks, JN.1 was reported in multiple countries, and its prevalence has been rapidly increasing globally. Considering the limited avail-



able evidence, the additional public health risk posed by JN.1 is currently evaluated as low at the global level, Singh said.

It is anticipated that this variant may cause an increase in COVID-19 cases amid surge of infections of other viral and bacterial infections, especially in countries entering the winter season.

"As people travel and gather for festivities during the holiday season, spending a lot of time together indoors where poor ventilation facilitates transmission of viruses that cause respiratory diseases, they must take protective measures and seek timely clinical care when unwell," said Dr Khetrpal Singh.

The regional director also emphasised on the importance of vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza, especially for people at high risk.

## Navy probes drone attack on ship off Indian coast



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The Indian Navy has launched an investigation into the drone strike on a Mangalore-bound cargo vessel off India's west coast in the Arabian Sea even as the merchant ship is set to reach Mumbai Monday escorted by a Coast Guard ship, officials familiar with the matter said.

"Naval Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) specialist will be embarking MV Chem Pluto on arrival at Mumbai to sanitize the vessel and undertake further investigation," the Navy said. The Indian Navy continues to monitor the situation very closely with all stakeholders and remains committed to ensuring the safety of merchant shipping in the region, it said Sunday.

The Navy and the Indian Coast Guard swung into action on Saturday by swiftly deploying their assets, including a

warship and maritime patrol aircraft, soon after the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported the drone "attack" on MV Chem Pluto that has 21 Indian crew members.

The vessel, carrying crude oil to New Mangalore port from Al Jubail port in Saudi Arabia, was struck about 217 nautical miles from Porbandar, an official said. There was no report of any casualties in the incident.

The Liberian-flagged vessel is now on its way to Mumbai and Indian Coast Guard ship ICGS Vikram is providing security to it, the officials said. The merchant vessel is set to arrive in Mumbai Monday, they said. Sharing details of its response Saturday, the Navy said its "mission deployed" platforms to respond swiftly to the maritime incident in the Arabian Sea involving a missile/drone attack on MT Chem Pluto."

## CLASSIFIED

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Minati Parihari Nanda, W/o Dharendra Narayan Nanda, R/o Flat No.- 126, Northern Heights, Kalarahanga, Bhubaneswar, Dist.- Khurda, Odisha-751024, declare that by the affidavit No.131 dated 22.12.2023 that I have declared and verified the change of my name from Minati Nanda to Minati Parihari Nanda in my Marriage Certificate dated 11th April 2013 and the changed name has been used and shall also be used by me for all future references.

## NEW BACTERIA NAMED AFTER TAGORE

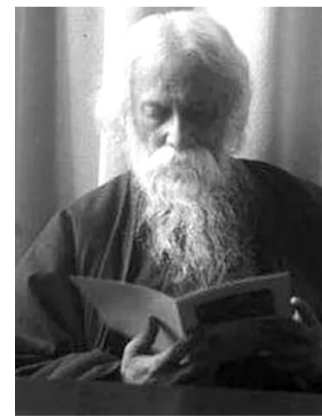
THE BACTERIA HAS IMMENSE POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONISE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES, MICROBIOLOGIST BOMBA DAM, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT THE VARSITY'S BOTANY DEPARTMENT WHO LED THE RESEARCH, SAID

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, Dec 24:** A group of researchers from Visva-Bharati University's botany department have discovered a bacteria capable of boosting plant growth and named it 'Pantoea Tagorei' after Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

The bacteria has immense potential to revolutionise agricultural practices, microbiologist Bomba Dam, assistant professor at the varsity's botany department who led the research, said.

"This is a plant growth promoting bacteria which will prove to be a game-changer in agriculture. It has shown immense capability to boost the cultivation



of paddy, pea and chilli," Dam said from Santiniketan in West Bengal's Birbhum district.

Dam was assisted by research

scholars Raju Biswas, Abhijit Mishra, Abhinav Chakraborty, Pooja Mukhopadhyay and Sandeep Ghosh. Talking about the discovery, Dam referred to his team isolating the bacteria from the soil of Sonajhuri, an area in Santiniketan.

"We then discovered the bacteria in the coal mining belt of Jharkhand's Jharia," he said. Elaborating the characteristics of the bacteria, Dam said, 'Pantoea Tagorei' efficiently extracts potassium from soil which enhances plant growth. Those found in the soil of Jharia coal mines solubilises potassium and phosphorus and fixes nitrogen which help promote plant growth. Our analysis showed that it was a new species and unique in its

nature," said Dam.

The bacteria will reduce the usage of commercial fertilisers and eventually help to cut costs for agriculture and boost crop yield, he said, adding that the Association of Microbiologists of India (AMI) has officially recognised the discovery.

Their findings were also published in the Indian Journal of Microbiology. On the reasons behind naming it after Tagore, Dam referred to the visionary agricultural pursuits of Tagore. "That's the best way to honour Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and his son Rathindranath Tagore's agricultural pursuits. Tagore had sent his son to study agricultural science in Illinois, USA," he said.

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# international



If needed, buildings in the quake-hit areas should be checked and reinforced so that residents can move back and essential facilities such as schools and hospitals can be reopened

## CLEVERLY UNDER FIRE

British Home Secretary James Cleverly was under fire Sunday for joking about date rape just hours after announcing plans to crack down on what he had dubbed a "perverse" offence



## of the day quote

Tibetans are a democracy-loving people who wish to practice their own religion freely and have their own wishes and desires acknowledged as we do in the United States of America

MICHAEL MCCAUL | US HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Many people in Europe put China and India in the same basket and sometimes even with the Gulf states which is completely unacceptable. India has very low per capita emissions compared to these countries

PETER LIESE | MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

We will do our best to get the International Criminal Court to punish [Israel] for this genocide

RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN | PRESIDENT TURKEY

## ISRAEL BOMBS NORTHERN GAZA

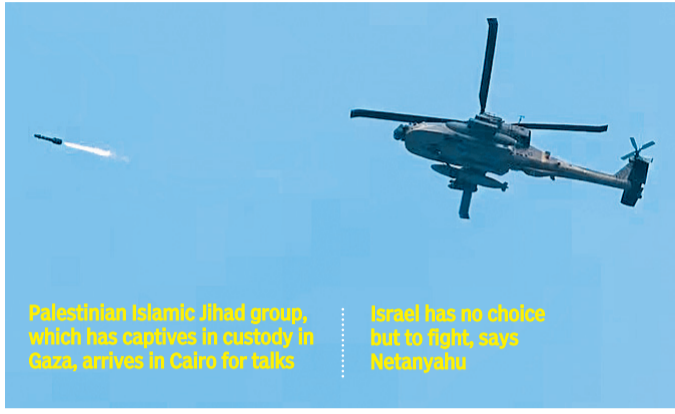
ISRAEL SAYS IT HAS ACHIEVED ALMOST COMPLETE OPERATIONAL CONTROL OVER NORTHERN GAZA AND IS PREPARING TO EXPAND A GROUND OFFENSIVE AGAINST HAMAS MILITANTS TO OTHER AREAS

AGENCIES

Tel Aviv, Dec 24: Fourteen Israeli soldiers were killed in combat in the Gaza Strip over the weekend, the Israeli military said Sunday in some of the bloodiest days of battle since the start of the ground offensive and a sign that Hamas is still putting up a fight despite weeks of brutal war.

The mounting death toll among Israeli troops is likely to play an important factor in Israeli

# War intensifies



Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, which has explosives in custody in Gaza, arrives in Cairo for talks

Israel has no choice but to fight, says Netanyahu

public support for the war, which was sparked when Hamas-led militants stormed communities in southern Israel October 7, killing 1,200 and taking 240 hostages. The war has devastated parts of the Gaza Strip, killed roughly 20,400 Palestinians and displaced nearly 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people.

The Health Ministry in Hamas-controlled Gaza said 166 people were killed in the coastal enclave over the past day. Israelis still stand firmly behind the country's stated goals of crushing Hamas' governing and military capabilities and releasing the remaining 129 captives. That

support has stayed mostly steady despite rising international pressure against Israel's offensive and the soaring death toll and unprecedented suffering among Palestinians. But the growing number of dead soldiers could undermine that support. Soldiers' deaths are a sensitive and emotional topic in Israel, a country with compulsory military service for most Jews.

The names of fallen soldiers are announced at the top of hourly newscasts, and in a small country of about 9 million people, virtually every family knows a relative, friend or co-worker who has lost a family member in war.

## HAMAS EXACTS A PRICE

The 14 Israeli soldiers killed Friday and Saturday died in battles in central and southern Gaza, an indication of how Hamas is still putting up tough resistance against advancing Israeli troops, even as Israel claims to have dealt a serious blow to the militant group.

According to Israeli Army Radio, four soldiers were killed when their vehicle was struck by an anti-tank missile. The others were killed in separate, sporadic fighting.

Another soldier was killed in northern Israel by fire from the Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah, which has kept up low-level fighting with Israel since the war with Hamas erupted, raising fears of a wider regional conflict. Their deaths bring the number of Israeli soldiers killed since the ground offensive began to 153.

Even if Israelis have been supportive of the war effort, there has been widespread anger against Netanyahu's government, which many criticize for failing to protect civilians on Oct 7 and promoting policies that allowed Hamas to gain strength over the years.

## France: Plane allowed to leave after three days



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Paris, Dec 24: A Nicaragua-bound flight carrying 303 passengers, mostly Indians, was allowed to resume its journey Monday three days after they were detained by the French authorities at an airport near Paris over suspected "human trafficking", according to local media reports Sunday.

After authorising the A340 aircraft, operated by Romanian company Legend Airlines, to leave, the French judges chose to cancel the hearings of the over 300 passengers due to irregularities in the procedure, BFM TV, a French news broadcast television and radio network, reported.

Four French judges earlier in the day began questioning the passengers detained by the French authorities at Vatry airport, 150 km east of Paris, since Thursday over suspected "human trafficking".

The hearings were conducted as part of the investigation opened by the Paris prosecutor's office on suspicion of human trafficking. The plane is expected to take off again Monday morning. Its destination is not yet known. It could travel to India, where the passengers are from, to Nicaragua, its original destination, or to Dubai, from where

it took off, it added. According to the French media, some of the passengers spoke Hindi and others Tamil and are believed to have contacted their families by telephone. Ten of the passengers have requested asylum, the newspaper quoted a source close to the case as saying. The plane includes 11 unaccompanied minors and two passengers in custody since Friday had their detention extended on Saturday evening for up to 48 hours, according to French prosecutors.

The aircraft is owned by Romanian charter company Legend Airlines. A lawyer for the firm, Liliانا Bakayoko, denied any involvement in the trafficking.

A "partner" company that chartered the plane was responsible for verifying the identity documents of each passenger, and communicated the passengers' passport information to the airline 48 hours before the flight, Bakayoko said.

Human trafficking carries a potential sentence of up to 20 years in France. On Saturday, India's embassy in France said its staff are stationed at the airport near Paris to ensure the welfare of Indian nationals after the passengers were detained by French authorities over suspected "human trafficking".

THE PLANE INCLUDES 11 UNACCOMPANIED MINORS AND TWO PASSENGERS IN CUSTODY SINCE FRIDAY HAD THEIR DETENTION EXTENDED ON SATURDAY EVENING FOR UP TO 48 HOURS

HUMAN TRAFFICKING CARRIES A POTENTIAL SENTENCE OF UP TO 20 YEARS IN FRANCE

## SHORT TAKES

### Roof collapse kills 9 of family

Peshawar: A woman and her eight children were killed when the roof of their mud house collapsed due to fire caused by a short-circuit in northwest Pakistan Sunday, officials said. According to rescue officials, the incident occurred at Tahari village in Abbotabad district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. A woman and her eight children, including four daughters, were killed in the incident, they said, adding that the locals recovered the nine dead bodies from the rubble of the collapsed structure. The age of the victims were not known.

### Nearly 14,000 held in Lanka

Colombo: Nearly 14,000 people have been arrested in a week-long crackdown on drug-related activities in Sri Lanka, police said Sunday. According to an official statement, a special operation was conducted from Dec 17 to 24 which "resulted in the arrest of 13,666 suspects" with 717 of them subjected to further detention orders. Among those detained, 174 individuals are currently under investigation for the possession of unlawfully acquired assets. Additionally, 1,097 drug addicts have been sent for rehabilitation, it said. During the week-long operation, 1,107 suspects out of the 4,665 identified by the police narcotics bureau were also taken into custody.

### 16 killed in road mishap

London: At least 16 people were killed and 26 others injured in a traffic accident in the central Nicaraguan department of Matagalpa Saturday, said Vice President Rosario Murillo. Among the fatalities were several children, she told local television Channel 4, Xinhua News Agency reported. The accident occurred in the morning when a bus carrying some 70 passengers crashed into the fence of the Mancera river bridge in the Rancho Grande municipality. "We are dismayed with this tragedy in the city of Matagalpa," said Pedro Haslam, political secretary of Matagalpa.

### Quake jolts Chile

Beijing: An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.9 jolted 52 km SW of Canete, Chile at 0323 GMT Sunday, the US Geological Survey said. The epicenter, with a depth of 11.8 km, was initially determined to be at 38.08 degrees south latitude and 73.88 degrees west longitude, Xinhua News Agency reported.

## PAK ELECTIONS

### Candidates file nomination papers as deadline ends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Islamabad, Dec 24: Hundreds of candidates aspiring to contest the February 8 general elections in Pakistan submitted their nomination papers, as the deadline to file their candidature for national and provincial assemblies seats ended Sunday.

The nomination process started on December 20 and was initially set to be completed on Friday but the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) extended it for two days on the demand of various political parties. The National Assembly's 266 general and 70 reserved seats

and over 600 seats of four provincial assemblies are up for grabs.

Returning officers (ROs) will examine the nomination papers from December 25 to December 30, as specified in the schedule. Several political leaders including PML-N's Tariq Fazal Chaudhary, former Islamabad mayor Pir Adil Gillani, Sheikh Ansar Aziz, federal capital's ex-deputy mayors Zeeshan Naqvi and Chaudhry Riffat Javed among others submitted their nomination papers Sunday.

Already many leading politicians, including incarcerated former premier Imran Khan, former three-time premier Nawaz Sharif, former president Asif Ali Zardari, former prime ministers Yusuf Raza Gilani, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and Shehbaz Sharif and many other influential leaders have filed their documents.



Demonstrators protest Israel's continued attacks on the Gaza Strip in downtown Toronto

AP/PTI PHOTO

## SNIPPETS

### 147 BGB platoons deployed across B'desh

DHAKA: A total of 147 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh were deployed across the country Sunday to maintain law and order ahead of the January 7 elections as a 12-hour road, rail and waterways blockade called by the opposition BNP and its allies demanding the resignation of Sheikh Hasina-led government is underway. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its mostly far-right allies allege that no election under the incumbent dispensation would be fair and demand the restoration of a non-party interim government for election oversight by amending the country's Constitution. The blockade began at 6 am and will end at 6 pm, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. Of the 147 platoons deployed across the country, 16 teams are patrolling in Dhaka and adjoining districts, Shariful Islam, public relations officer at Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), was quoted as saying by the newspaper. This is the 12th such blockade called by the opposition parties since October 3.

### Iran summons Russian envoy over statement

DUBAI: Iran summoned Russia's charge d'affaires after Moscow and Arab countries released a joint statement earlier this week challenging Iran's claim to disputed islands in the Persian Gulf, state media reported Sunday. Iran's official IRNA news agency said the Russian envoy was summoned on Saturday and handed a note to deliver to Moscow in which Tehran protested the statement the 6th Arab-Russian Cooperation Forum issued in Morocco that called for a peaceful solution to resolve the conflict between Iran and the United Arab Emirates over the islands. Earlier on Saturday, Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian told his Russian counterpart over the phone that "respecting countries' sovereignty and integrity is among basic principles in the ties between nations", IRNA said in a separate report. This marked the second time this year that Iran has called for a Russian envoy in protest over comments on the disputed islands. Tehran summoned the Russian ambassador in July over a similar statement. The diplomatic spat is a rare occurrence between the two countries that have deepened their ties since Moscow invaded Ukraine, with Iran supplying Russia with killer drones that have been used to devastating effect there. Both countries have also been strong backers of President Bashar Assad in Syria's civil war.

## Sri Lanka boosts security near churches as Christmas approaches

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka police will provide extra security to churches and other places of worship Sunday and Monday in view of Christmas, said a spokesman on Sunday. Speaking to reporters, police media spokesman Nihal Thaldudu said the priests can contact police headquarters for assistance on any security matters, Xinhua News Agency reported. He said the army has also been deployed near churches for extra security. According to Thaldudu, security has been beefed up near religious establishments since the Easter Sunday terror attacks in 2019, adding that there is no reason for anyone to be afraid of going to churches for Christmas. Over 260 were killed in the 2019 blasts which targeted three churches and three luxury hotels in the island country.

## Taliban's plans to build dam escalates tensions with Pak

DISPUTES OVER KABUL'S PLANS TO BUILD DAMS ON MAJOR RIVERS, WHICH WOULD REDUCE THE FLOW OF WATER TO PAKISTAN, THREATEN TO BE A SOURCE OF TENSION AND CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

Plans by the Afghan Taliban to build a hydroelectric dam on a major river in Afghanistan have raised concerns in neighbouring Pakistan, the media reported.

A spokesman for the Taliban's Water and Energy Ministry said December 18 that the "survey and design of the project are complete".

A Pakistani provincial minister said the unilateral decision by the Taliban to build the dam "will be considered a hostile act against Pakistan".

Jan Achakzai, the provincial

information minister in the southwestern province of Balochistan, warned of "severe consequences", including "escalating tensions and potential conflict", RFE/RL reported.

The 480-km-long Kunar River originates in the Hindu Kush mountains in northeastern Afghanistan and merges with the Kabul River before flowing downstream into Pakistan.

Afghanistan's rivers are a significant source of fresh water for Pakistan. But the two neighbors have never signed a bilateral water-sharing agreement.



Disputes over Kabul's plans to build dams on major rivers, which would reduce the flow of water to Pakistan, threaten to be a source of tension and conflict between the two countries, RFE/RL reported.

The planned hydroelectric dam on the Kunar River is the latest ambitious infrastructure project undertaken by the cash-strapped Taliban government, which remains internation-

ally unrecognized. Experts said the extremist group lacks the expertise and finances to fund the project.

"Constructing dams requires technical knowledge, a robust supply chain, and a lot of money," said Najib Aqa Fahim, an Afghan water-management expert. Najibullah Sadid, another Afghan water expert, said the dam on the Kunar River is relatively small and will not threaten water flows to Pakistan.

Afghanistan's rivers are a significant source of fresh water for Pakistan. The two neighbors have never signed a bilateral water-sharing agreement.

## Explosion at Indonesia nickel plant kills 13 staff

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Palu (Indonesia), Dec 24: A smelting furnace exploded on Sunday at a Chinese-owned nickel plant on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, killing at least 13 workers and injuring dozens of others, police and a company official said.

It was the latest in a series of deadly incidents at nickel smelting plants in Indonesia that are part of China's ambitious transnational development programme known as the Belt and Road Initiative.

Nickel is a key component in global battery production for electric vehicles. At least four Chinese and nine Indonesian workers died when the furnace exploded while they were repairing it, said Central Sulawesi police chief Agus Nugroho.

The blast was so powerful it demolished the furnace and damaged parts of the side walls of the building, said Nugroho, adding that about 46 workers were injured, including 14 Chinese nationals, some in critical condition. Authorities are working to determine whether negligence by the company led to the deaths, Nugroho said. The accident occurred at PT Indonesia Tsingshan Stainless Steel, a subsidiary of PT Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park, known as PT IMIP, in the Bahodopi neighbourhood of Morowali regency. "We sincerely apologise for this incident and we are working closely with authorities to investigate what caused the accident," said company spokesperson Deddy Kurniawan. Rescuers extinguished the fire and evacuated workers after a nearly four-hour operation, he added.

## of the day quote

Scrappage of old vehicles can help bring down vehicular pollution by 20-25 per cent

**NITIN CHITKARA** | CEO, MCMC

We are broadly in line with the overall trends of FDI growth. FDI inflows from 2014-23 period is about \$596 billion, which is about double than what India received during 2005-14. The trend is positive and India is still the preferred destination for foreign players

**RAJESH KUMAR SINGH** | SECRETARY, DPIIT

The Indian office market not only navigated initial uncertainties but exceeded expectations and emerged successfully, recording an impressive 58 million sq ft of gross absorption during 2023

**ARPIT MEHROTRA** | MD (HEAD OF OFFICE SERVICES), COLLIERS INDIA

## SHORT TAKES

### Infosys loses mega \$1.5bn contract

**New Delhi:** IT services firm Infosys has said that a global company has decided to terminate a multi-year contract worth \$1.5 billion with it. On September 14, 2023, Infosys announced a pact with a global company to offer enhanced digital experiences alongside modernisation and business operations services leveraging Infosys platforms and AI (Artificial Intelligence) solutions. In a BSE filing Saturday, Infosys said the global company has now elected to terminate the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and the parties will not be pursuing the master agreement. The deal loss comes at a time when global uncertainties and macro headwinds have challenged IT and tech companies worldwide. In fact, the UK economy has contracted in the third quarter according to official estimates, and experts have cautioned that Britain could already be at risk of a recession.

### NABARD to hold 3-day agri expo

**New Delhi:** The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) will hold a three-day agri expo here to promote products from over 50 farmer-producer organizations (FPOs). The expo to be held at Dilli Haat will see the participation of FPOs from 21 states, NABARD said. The exhibition will feature FPOs supported by NABARD and the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) under Government of India's flagship scheme of 10,000 FPOs who will be showcasing a wide range of organic and millet-based agri-products for sale, it said. The exhibition aims to shed light on the incredible efforts and achievements of FPOs in transforming the agricultural landscape of India, it said.

### 14th India-US trade policy forum meet

**New Delhi:** Issues about visas, promoting agri trade and resumption of benefits under the American generalised system of preferences (GSP) are expected to figure in the meeting of India-US Trade Policy Forum (TPF) in January here, an official said. US Trade Representative Katherine Tai will be here for a meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. "Both sides will discuss ways to increase trade and investments between the two countries during the two-day meeting from January 13, 2024. It will be the 14th ministerial-level meeting of the India-US TPF," she said.



Today, India has become the fastest growing large economy. Going forward, we will keep inflation under check and also ensure economic growth

**PIYUSH GOYAL** | FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS MINISTER

## MEESHO SELLERS SHINE

Around 75,000 sellers achieved double-digit growth while over 20,000 sellers witnessed a 10-times jump in their business on Softbank-backed e-commerce firm Meesho, the company said Sunday. Meesho is the first unicorn e-commerce firm to have reported profit this year and it claims to have maintained the profitability since it first reported the performance in July



# Oil imports: No takers for ₹

RBI'S PUSH TO INTERNATIONALISE THE INDIAN CURRENCY HAS SEEN SUCCESS WITH NON-OIL TRADE BUT RUPEE CONTINUES TO BE SHUNNED BY OIL EXPORTERS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** India's push for rupee to be used to pay for import of crude oil has not found any takers as suppliers have expressed concern on repatriation of funds and high transactional costs, the oil ministry told a parliamentary standing committee.

The default payment currency for all contracts for import of crude oil is US dollar as per the international trade practice. However, in a bid to internationalise the Indian currency, the Reserve Bank of India July 11, 2022 allowed importers to pay with rupees and exporters be paid in rupee.

"During FY 2022-23, no crude oil imports by oil PSUs was settled in Indian rupee. Crude oil suppliers (including UAE's ADNOC) continue to express their concern on the repatriation of funds in the preferred currency and also highlighted high transactional costs associated with conversion of funds along with exchange fluctuation risks," the oil ministry told the parliamentary department related standing committee.

The ministry, whose submissions are part of the committee's report which was tabled in Parliament last week, said Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has informed that it incurred high transaction costs as crude oil



India's oil consumption is about 5.5-5.6 million barrels per day. Out of which, the country imports about 4.6 million barrels per day, which is about 10% of the overall oil trade in the world

suppliers pass on the additional transactional costs to IOC.

The RBI, it said, had last year permitted opening of rupee vostro accounts in the partner trading country. Under this mechanism, Indian importers undertaking imports through this mechanism shall make payment in Indian rupee which shall be credited into the special Vostro account of the correspondent bank of the partner country, against the invoices for the supply of goods or services from the overseas seller/supplier.

"Payments for crude oil can be made in Indian rupee, subject to the suppliers' complying with regulatory guidelines in this regard," the ministry said.

**FY23-24:** INDIA IMPORTED 152.6MT OF CRUDE OIL FOR \$113.4BN

**FY22-23:** \$157.5BN SPENT ON IMPORT OF 232.7MT OF CRUDE OIL

"Currently, Reliance Industries Ltd and oil PSUs do not have an agreement with any crude oil supplier to make purchases in Indian currency for supply of crude oil."

India is the world's third largest energy consumer. With its domestic production meeting less than 15 per cent of its needs, the country imports the remaining crude oil, which is converted to fuels such as petrol and diesel at refineries.

In the 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023) fiscal, India spent \$157.5 billion on import of 232.7 million tonnes of crude oil. Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and UAE were its biggest suppliers. Of this, 141.2 million tonnes came from the Middle East, account-

ing for 58 per cent of all supplies.

In the current fiscal, India imported 152.6 million tonne of crude oil between April and November for \$113.4 billion.

On price volatility, the ministry said PSU oil firms are impacted by the volatility in prices of crude oil but only to the extent of fuel and loss.

"The prices of crude oil and refined petroleum products generally move in tandem with each other. Thus, it's the volatility in product cracks (price difference between that of product prices and benchmark crude oil), which impacts the refiners the most. To hedge against this volatility, oil companies has been hedging the various product cracks as and when the opportunity is presented in the forward market. All the hedge positions are undertaken through OTC (Over the Counter) market with registered international counterparties and details of the hedge is reported to authorised dealer bank on quarterly basis. Further, oil companies are also hedging their forex risk in line with their risk management policies," it added.

# Steel production grows 11% to 11.7MT in Nov

GLOBAL OUTPUT AT 145.5MT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** India has registered an increase of 11.4 per cent in its crude steel production at 11.7 million tonne (MT) in November this year, according to World Steel Association (worldsteel).

During January-November, the country's production was 12.1 per cent higher year on year (y-o-y) at 128.2 MT, the global body said in its latest report.

The global steel production in November was at 145.5 MT, 3.3 per cent up over same month in 2022. The world output rose marginally by 0.5 per cent to 1,715.1 MT in January-November 2023, worldsteel said.

China produced 76.1 MT steel in November, up 0.4 per cent over November 2022. It produced 952.1 MT in January-November, higher 1.5 per cent y-o-y.

In November, Japan's output fell 0.9 per cent to 7.1 MT, while the overall production was 2.8 per cent lower at 80 MT during January-November 2023.

The US produced 6.6 MT steel in last month and 73.9 MT in the



eleven-month period of 2023.

Russia produced 6.4 MT in November and 70.2 MT in January-November 2023. South Korea's production stood at 5.4 MT in November and 61.3 MT in the 11-month period of 2023. In November this year, Germany produced 2.7 MT, Türkiye produced 3 MT, and Brazil 2.7 MT.

With members in every major steel-producing country, Brussels-based worldsteel represents steel producers, national and regional steel industry associations, and steel research institutes.

Its members represent around 85 per cent of the global steel production.

# Mutual funds roar back in 2023

The year also marked the 11th consecutive yearly rise in the industry AUM after a drop in the two preceding years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The mutual fund industry has bounced back strongly this year after a lacklustre 2022 with a remarkable Rs 9 lakh crore surge in the asset base, propelled by a buoyant equity market, stable interest rates and robust economic expansion. Experts believe that the positive momentum should continue into the near year as well.

With a substantial increase, the overall inflow this year has reached Rs 3.15 lakh crore, accompanied by a growth of over 2 crore in the investor count. This was supported by the increasing popularity of Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), which drew in Rs 1.66 lakh crore, according to the data shared by the Association of Mutual Fund Industry (Amfi).

The inflow has pushed the assets under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry by 23 per cent or Rs 9 lakh crore in



₹9L-CR SURGE IN ASSET BASE ON STRONG MARKETS
OVERALL INFLOW BY MFS HAS REACHED ₹3.15L-CR
SYSTEMATIC INVESTMENT PLANS DREW IN ₹1.66L-CR
MFS AUM ROSE TO ALL-TIME HIGH OF ₹49L-CR

2023, the data showed.

This was way higher than the 7 per cent growth and Rs 2.65 lakh crore increase in AUM observed throughout 2022, as well as the nearly 22 per cent growth and close to Rs 7 lakh crore addition to the asset base in 2021.

Over the last three years, the industry has collectively added an impressive Rs 18 lakh crore to its AUM.

As per the data, the AUM of the mutual fund industry rose to an all-time high of Rs 49 lakh crore in 2023 (till November-end) from Rs 40 lakh crore at the end of December 2022. This year's tally does include December number which will come out in the first week of 2024.

The asset base stood at Rs 37.72 lakh crore at the end of December 2021 and Rs 31 lakh crore in December 2020.

The 2023 also marked the 11th consecutive yearly rise in the

industry AUM after a drop in the two preceding years. This year, the growth was supported by inflows into equity schemes, especially through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs).

The Sensex has delivered a return of 19 per cent, majorly supported by earnings growth. BSE Midcap and BSE Smallcap indices have delivered returns of 45 per cent and 47 per cent respectively.

Investors have shown confidence in SIPs, with inflows surging to an impressive Rs 1.66 lakh crore in the year. This has surpassed the entire amounts for 2022 (Rs 1.5 lakh crore), 2021 (Rs 1.14 lakh crore), and 2020 (Rs 97,000 crore)

Monthly inflows through SIP, which have been the bedrock of mutual funds flows for many years now, have attracted above the Rs 17,000-crore mark in November.

# Main-board IPOs weather global headwinds

Amid global volatility driven by rising interest rates and geopolitical risks, initial public offerings collected ₹52,000cr in 2023

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The capital generated through main-board IPOs dipped slightly to just over Rs 52,000 crore in 2023 amid global volatility driven by rising interest rates and geopolitical risks, while the number of issues rose. Experts maintain a strong bullish outlook on the IPO market for 2024.

Excluding LIC's blockbuster maiden public issue of Rs 20,557 crore in 2022, initial public offering (IPO) collection actually increased by 36 per cent this year.

Notably, mid and small-cap companies were in flavor this year, given the considerable tailwind in the markets. The market environment for IPOs has been extremely robust in 2023, though the start of the year was tepid due to global headwinds.

"A key reason for the strong interest in IPOs has been an increased focus on profitability and reasonable pricing of deals,



at least relative to prevailing higher valuation multiples in listed peers. Another strong pillar of the Indian market ecosystem is the robust yet efficient regulatory framework," said Mahavir Lunawat, Managing Director, Pantomath Capital Advisors.

Around 24 companies, which have already received clearance from the markets regulator Sebi but are yet to launch their IPOs,

are looking to raise over Rs 26,000 crore.

Add to this, 32 more companies have filed their draft papers with Sebi and are awaiting clearances to mobilise more than Rs 35,000 crore, according to data provided by Prime Database.

Going by the industry data, as many as 58 maiden public issues have been floated this year to raise Rs 52,637 crore, including Rs 3,200-crore IPO of Nexus

We hold a strong bullish outlook on the IPO market in 2024. This optimism is buoyed by robust domestic and foreign investments, driven by superior growth prospects of the Indian markets

**NEHA AGARWAL** | MD & HEAD (EQUITY CAPITAL MARKETS), JM FINANCIAL

Select Trust REIT.

The fund mobilization in 2023 was lower than 40 companies raising Rs 59,302 crore last year. This was largely due to the Rs 20,557-crore LIC issue, which constituted as much as 35 per cent of the total amount raised during 2022.

Before that, 63 companies had mobilized Rs 1.2 lakh crore through the initial share sales in 2021, which was the best IPO year in two decades. This fundraising was driven by excessive liquidity and increased retail investor participation, which spurred a persistent eu-

phoria in the primary market. In the past three years, more than 150 mainboard IPOs have come for listing.

"Despite high global volatility due to rising interest rates and geopolitical risks, 2023 was a very good year for Indian IPO markets," JM Financial's Agarwal said.

Of the total 58 issues, 38 were floated during September and December. The big size issues were missing in 2023 with an average ticket size of Rs 865 crore. The same was the case last year too. Except for LIC and Delhivery, the majority of the IPOs were in the sub-Rs 1,500 crore IPO category.

Mankind Pharma IPO (Rs 4,326 crore) was the largest issue of 2023, followed by Tata Technologies (Rs 3,042 crore), JSW Infrastructure (Rs 2,800 crore), RK Label (Rs 1,964 crore), and Cello World (Rs 1,900). The smallest IPO in the period was Plaza Wires, which raised Rs 67 crore.

# Mcap of 3 of 10 top firms jumps

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 24:** The combined market valuation of three of the 10 most valued firms jumped Rs 70,312.7 crore last week, with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest winner, amid volatile market conditions.

From the top 10 pack, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and Hindustan Unilever were the gainers, while Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, ITC, Bharti Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) faced erosion to the tune of Rs 68,783.2 crore.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 376.79 points or 0.52 per cent after a record-breaking rally.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped Rs 47,021.59 crore to Rs 17,35,194.85 crore.

Hindustan Unilever added Rs 12,241.37 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,05,043.25 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation climbed Rs 11,049.74 crore to Rs 12,68,143.20 crore.

However, the market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank plummeted Rs 30,235.29 crore to Rs 6,97,095.53 crore.

The valuation of TCS eroded by Rs 12,715.21 crore to Rs 13,99,696.92 crore and that of State Bank of India declined by Rs 10,486.42 crore to Rs 5,68,185.42 crore.

The mcap of Infosys fell by Rs 7,159.5 crore to Rs 6,48,298.04 crore and that of ITC diminished by Rs 3,991.36 crore to Rs 5,67,645.03 crore.

Bharti Airtel's valuation dipped Rs 2,108.17 crore to Rs 5,56,134.58 crore and that of LIC declined by Rs 2,087.25 crore to Rs 5,01,635.57 crore.

In the ranking of top 10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the title of the most valued company followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India, ITC, Airtel and Life Insurance Corporation of India.



# Eves conquer Aussies

India record maiden Test win over Australia, win by 8 wickets in one-off women's Test



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 24:** It was a fitting end to India Women's first 'home season' of Test cricket in 28 years as they recorded a historic maiden victory over a venerable Australia in the one-off Test here Sunday.

On the final day, India produced their best both with the ball and bat to thwart a spirited Australian resurgence, first sparking a collapse in the visitors' ranks to snaffle the remaining five wickets for 28 and then knocking off a meagre target of 75 without much ado to script an eight-wicket win.

Smriti Mandhana (38 not out) and Jemimah Rodrigues (12 not out) embraced each other in a warm hug when the objective of beating a world-dominating side was accomplished, bringing back memories of India's shushed reaction in 2008 in Australia when MS Dhoni's side

**One-off Test match, India playing in their home conditions, you'd expect them to be heavy favourites. But the way we tried to adapt and continue to learn throughout the four days was really impressive. Their relentlessness with the ball was probably what stood out to me**

ALYSSA HEALY | CAPTAIN, AUSTRALIA

**(This win is) Reward for all the hard work we have done for so many years. Credit to the team and the support staff. Reward for the hard work and patience**

HARMANPREET KAUR | CAPTAIN, INDIA

beat the hosts and made a statement by not indulging in any passionate celebrations.

Playing more than one Test at home for the first time since 1995, there was hardly a moment when the team put a foot wrong.

India Women's stuck to the promise of playing 'positive cricket', weathered all mini storms along the way and largely dictated terms against fancied opponents in Australia and England.

In fact, there was no disparity in Team India's clinical performance in the two home Tests played on different surfaces here at the Wankhede Stadium and at the DY Patil Stadium against England, considering they were playing at home for the first time in almost a decade.

If the win over England last week saw the emergence of new Test stars in Jemimah Rodrigues, Shubha Sathesh and Renuka Singh Thakur, the one against

Australia witnessed the 20-year-old Richa Ghosh arriving at the scene with 52 on debut.

On the fourth day morning, Indian spinners ruled the roost as the trio of Sneha Rana (5-2-9-2), Rajeshwari Gayakwad (1.4-1-0-2) and Deepti Sharma (3-2-5-0) teamed up to wreck havoc on the Australian resistance.

Australia, looking to build on their slender lead of 46 runs, collapsed spectacularly to lose five wickets in the first 45 minutes of the day and concede the game to India.

Pooja Vastrakar began the damage by trapping Ashleigh Gardner for seven in front of the wickets, and Rana tiled the game in India's favour when she struck twice to remove Annabel Sutherland (27) and Alana King (0). Australia were bundled out for 261 in their second innings, having scored a moderate 219 in their first essay after electing to bat.

India were supreme with the

## IN HISTORY BOOKS

While India scripted the biggest win for any team by margin of runs against England Dec 16, their first-ever triumph over Australia in 11 Tests now has ensured more entries in the column of 'matches won' compared to 'matches lost'. In 40 Tests, India now have seven wins and six defeats, while 27 have been drawn

bat again as they made 406 in the first essay to also record their highest total ever against Australia in Tests.

Shafali Verma cracked the first ball of the innings for four but Garth produced a peach to find an outside edge off her bat, caught by skipper Alyssa Healy, for the first breakthrough of the innings. Beth Mooney dropped a sitter off Gardner to give Richa Ghosh (13) an early reprieve when the batter was yet to open her account.

Ghosh went on to add 51 for the second wicket with Mandhana (38 not out off 61 balls, 6x4s) after Shafali Verma (4) fell in the first over: Rodrigues and Mandhana then complete the task.

## BRIEF SCORES:

**Australia** 219 & 261 all out in 105.4 overs (Tahlia McGrath 73, Ellyse Perry 45, Alyssa Healy 32, Beth Mooney 33; Sneha Rana 4-63, Harmanpreet Kaur 2-23, Rajeshwari Gayakwad 2-42)

**LOST TO**  
**India** 406 & 75/2 in 18.3 overs (Smriti Mandhana 389 not out, Jemimah Rodrigues 12 not out; Kim Garth 1-19, Ashleigh Gardner 1-18) by eight wickets.

# Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 kicks off



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, Dec 24:** The second edition of the Ultimate Kho Kho kicked off with a grand ceremony as the crowd cheered at Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Cuttack Sunday.

A large number of fans turned out to witness the opening of Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2. Promoted by Amit Burman in collaboration with the Kho Kho Federation of India, Ultimate Kho Kho became a huge hit in the first season, emerging as India's third-largest non-cricket league in terms of television viewership.

It also became the first Indian sports league to secure Series A funding, courtesy of the UK-based BNP Group.

The much-awaited second season of Ultimate Kho Kho was inaugurated in the pres-

ence of Tenzing Niyogi, CEO & League Commissioner, Ultimate Kho Kho, Sudhanshu Mittal, President, Kho Kho Federation of India, Tusharkanti Behera, Hon'ble Sports Minister, Odisha and Indian women's kho kho team captain Nasreen Shaikh.

Defending champions Odisha Juggernauts began their campaign in Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 with a commanding 35-27 win over Rajasthan Warriors.

Akshay Masal contributed to the Juggernauts' win by scoring eight points, while Rohan Shingade, Avinash Desai, and Gowtham MK stayed on the mat for more than four minutes to take their team to the opening win of the season.

Odisha were on top of their game in the second innings as well despite Rajasthan earning a dream run.

## SHORT TAKES

### Most-decorated motorsports athlete



**Chennai:** Ten-time national drag racing champion Hemanth Muddappa became the most-decorated motorsports athlete with an unprecedented dozen titles after remaining unbeaten in top two classes to emerge a double champion in the MMSC-FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship here Sunday.

He made it a sweet double emerging triumphant in both the Unrestricted Class and the 1051 to 1650cc class in the fourth and final round at the Madras International Circuit (MIC) at Irungattukottai near here.

### Chandra, Nichani in Nationals semis

**Chennai:** Defending champion Manan Chandra and Vijay Nichani Sunday entered the semifinals of the Masters Snooker during the National Championships here. Chandra, who began the day with a 4-0 win over Anurag Bagri (Maharashtra) in the quarterfinal, registered a 4-2 victory over Mahesh Jagdale (Maharashtra) in the quarterfinal. In the semifinal, Chandra will clash against local favourite Varun Kumar, while Nichani will take on Khaneja.

### Pollard to join Eng coaching staff

**London:** Former West Indies captain Kieron Pollard will join England's coaching staff for next year's T20 World Cup to be jointly held across the Caribbean islands and the USA, the ECB announced Sunday. Pollard, who retired from all forms of cricket in April 2022, was a member of the West Indies team that won the 2012 T20 World Cup and has played 637 T20 matches in his career.



## 'MILESTONE MOMENT'

# Rebecca Welch first female referee of EPL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**London, Dec 24:** The English Premier League has its first female referee and Burnley manager Vincent Kompany called it a milestone moment Saturday.

Rebecca Welch controlled Burnley's 2-0 win at Fulham.

Kompany spoke to Welch at fulltime.

"I wanted to congratulate her because it's a big moment," he said. It's fair to say that it's a milestone moment and may there be more, and the best thing will always be when someone is judged on merit. "But you have to have a first and this is it, so well done (to her) and I'm happy to be part of this moment."

Welch was applauded by spectators as she emerged from the tunnel at Craven Cottage.

She previously made history when she refereed an FA Cup fixture in 2022 and a second-tier Championship match in 2021. Welch has already worked as a fourth official in the Premier League in November.

Welch has been a referee since 2010, initially balancing the role with her job in the National



Health Service before becoming a full-time match official.

Welch showed the yellow card to three players as she refereed her first top flight match with her decisions scrutinised by fans around the world.

Having climbed through the ranks after taking charge of university and Sunday league games, she became the first woman to be appointed to referee an EFL match in April 2021.

She was also the first female official to referee matches in the Championship and third round of the FA Cup. Last month she became the first woman to act as fourth official in a Premier League game as part of the officiating team for Fulham's match against Manchester United.

# 'Trained to move on quickly from heartbreaks'

**THE 'WALL' KNEW THAT WC LOSS WAS A HUGE HEARTBREAK BUT HE WAS EQUALLY AWARE THAT CARRYING THE BAGGAGE OF THAT FINAL DEFEAT FOR TOO LONG COULD BE PROBLEMATIC**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Centurion, Dec 24:** A professional sportsperson is immune to heartbreaks and is trained to move on quickly towards the impending challenge, India head coach Rahul Dravid on Sunday detailed how Rohit Sharma's men coped with the heart-breaking World Cup final defeat to Australia.

Since being part of that fateful November 19 at Ahmedabad, KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja and Shreyas Iyer had appeared in a few white ball games, but the rest will be playing an international match for the first time in five weeks.

"It was heartbreaking but you have to move on quickly in international cricket as we now have another important series coming up and all these series



count towards trying to qualify for another ICC event in 2025 (WTC final)," Dravid spoke about focusing on the new challenge during a media interaction here.

"You don't really have time to remain down. You have to pick yourself up and move on and the boys have done that really well," he said, adding that spirit in camp "has been superb".

"While there was disappointment but we have all moved on from it, we have to see what's in-front of us. I thought ODI team did really well to win that series in which lot of main South African batters played"

Dravid, who himself faced a World Cup final heartbreak in 2003 as a player, felt that sportsmen, in general, are pretty wired

to move on from a point.

"Players are very good at moving on as we are forced to do that from the time you are kids. You get out and you can't let that disappointment stay with you for too long. It will affect your performance in the next game," said the veteran of 164 Tests and 344 ODIs.

**PROTEAS TEST AHEAD**

India have never won a Test series in South Africa in their previous seven visits.

Dravid reckoned that unlike in England where the ball swings and in Australia where bouncy tracks are on offer, pitches in South Africa pose a slightly different challenge.

"Statistically, it has been a

tough country but we have put on good performances and it's not like it is impossible to play here and I think one thing (that separates it from other SENA nations) is that bounce tends to be a bit more variable than in other places," he observed.

"You might not have as much swing as you get in England and not as much pace and bounce as you see in Australia, but there is uneven bounce. It has proven to be a bit of a challenge for Indian batters but we have also had centuries. So, it's not an impossible place to play. We have quality and experience to do that," the coach exuded confidence.

But what will be the secret of success? Dravid felt that not losing a session too badly will be the key unlike in the previous series.

In 2021-22, while batting in third innings of the second and third Tests India couldn't score those additional 60-70 runs and lost wickets in a heap.

"We have seen there is more bounce on these tracks. Batting is difficult. These are result oriented tracks and, in these conditions, if you miss out on one passage of play, you can be far behind.

"Even if you lose a session, you shouldn't lose it too badly, like you shouldn't lose 6-7 wickets in a session," Dravid added.

# ACTORS' BUYING FRENZY IN ISPL

Ram Charan joins India's first tennis ball T10 cricket tournament as Hyderabad team owner. Amitabh Bachchan, Akshay Kumar and Hrithik Roshan were announced as the team owners of Mumbai, Srinagar and Bangalore, respectively

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Dec 24:** "RRR" star Ram Charan Sunday said he has joined the Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) as the owner of team Hyderabad.

The ISPL is India's first tennis ball T10 cricket tournament that



will be played inside a stadium.

The inaugural edition will feature 19 high-intensity matches, boasting a line-up of six teams - Hyderabad, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, and Srinagar.

Ram Charan made the announcement about joining the ISPL on his official X page. "Excited to announce my ownership of Team Hyderabad in the Indian Street Premier League! Beyond cricket, this ven-

ture is about nurturing talent, fostering community spirit, and celebrating street cricket's essence. Join me as we elevate Hyderabad's presence in the ISPL, crafting memorable moments and igniting passion," the actor wrote in the post.

In a groundbreaking announcement Monday, legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan revealed his ownership of the Mumbai team in the upcoming

## INAUGURAL EDITION

- FROM MARCH 2 TO MARCH 9
- 19 MATCHES
- 6 TEAMS: HYDERABAD, MUMBAI, BANGALORE, CHENNAI, KOLKATA, AND SRINAGAR

league. Recently, Akshay Kumar and Hrithik Roshan were announced as the team owners of Srinagar and Bangalore, respectively.

The ISPL is scheduled to be held from March 2 to March 9 in Mumbai.

The ISPL introduces a unique and exciting cricketing format, bringing together the thrill of T20 matches and the grassroots essence of tennis ball cricket. The tournament aims to provide a platform for street cricketers to showcase their talent on a professional stage.

# Pak govt stops PCB from selling PSL, international media rights

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Karachi, Dec 24:** Pakistan's caretaker government has stopped the PCB from selling media rights of international matches and the Pakistan Super League, forcing the Cricket Management Committee (CMC) head Zaka Ashraf to postpone his planned visit to Australia and seek a meeting with Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakaar, who is also the chief patron of the board.

The government's directive came just as the CMC, managing the affairs of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), had started the process of inviting bids for the sale of PSL and international cricket media rights.

"The government's Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination (sports) has issued a notifica-



tion to the board making it clear that from now on, the CMC/PCB has to seek permission from the government before signing any major deal," a reliable source said Sunday.

He added the notification had even led Ashraf to postpone his planned visit to Australia and seek a meeting with caretaker Prime Minister, Anwar ul Haq Kakaar.

The government's notification, mandating approval for every major decision by the board, is seen as a vote of no-confidence against the CMC, headed by Ashraf.