



**Clarifying the buzz**  
Actor Shruti Haasan denies her secret marriage with Santanu Hazarika and urges people to calm down

LEISURE | P2



**War on multiple fronts**  
A string of incidents outside the Gaza Strip by Iran-backed militant groups highlights the risk of the conflict spreading

INTERNATIONAL | P10



**IPO craze takes over**  
A total of 12 companies raise ₹8,931.69 crore through initial share sales in December, making it the best IPO month in two years

BUSINESS | P11



**Proteas in command**  
Dean Elgar's century nullifies KL Rahul's gritty ton as South Africa take control of the first Test against India

SPORTS | P12

**SHORT TAKES**

**Sensex, Nifty at all-time high**

**Mumbai:** Sensex and Nifty soared to fresh closing record highs Wednesday, with the 30-share benchmark index crossing the historic 72,000 mark, boosted by optimism over the country's macroeconomic fundamentals and firm global market trends. Reflecting broader investor bullishness, the 50-share index surged to a record high of 21,654.75 on intense buying in metal, commodity, auto and banking sectors. Rising for the fourth straight session, the BSE gauge jumped 701.63 points or 0.98 per cent to settle at its all-time closing high of 72,038.43. The Nifty climbed 213.40 points or 1 per cent to settle at a record high of 21,654.75. **P11**

**Similpal tiger reserve reopens for tourists**

**Baripada:** The Similpal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Mayurbhanj district, which was closed due to protests by a local outfit, reopened for tourists Wednesday, officials said. Tourists' entry to the tiger reserve had been suspended since November 25, owing to protests by the Similpal Vikash Parishad, to press for various demands, officials informed. The outfit withdrew their agitation Tuesday afternoon after their demands were fulfilled, including construction of a road and bridge, installation of a mobile tower and solar light system in the tiger reserve, the officials said. STR deputy director Samrat Gowda said 190 tourists visited the tiger reserve Wednesday.

**State reports two new Covid cases**

**Bhubaneswar:** Odisha reported two fresh Covid-19 cases, pushing the coronavirus tally to five in December so far, a Health department official said here Wednesday. "In November, we had registered 11 cases while this month, so far, only five cases have been detected. We are closely monitoring the situation and have instructed the districts to enhance surveillance for influenza-like illness," Niranjan Mishra, the state's public health director, informed. **P3**

**IRREGULAR by MANJUL**



Senior citizen discount was scrapped so that you can take a photo with PM. We've set up a ₹6-lakh selfie booth



**CREATIVE STROKES:** A painter gives finishing touches Wednesday to a 3D mural on a boundary wall ahead of the inauguration of Srimandir Heritage Corridor project in Puri

**UNIVERSITY BODY WARNS STUDENTS TAKING ADMISSION FOR COURSE**

**MPhil unrecognised: UGC**

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Dec 27:** The University Grants Commission (UGC) warned universities Wednesday against offering MPhil courses. The UGC said it is not a recognised degree and cautioned students against taking admission in such programmes.

"It has come to the notice of the UGC that a few universities are inviting fresh applications for MPhil (Master of Philosophy) programmes. In this regard, it is to bring to the notice that MPhil is not a recognised degree," the UGC said in a statement.

"Regulation No 14 of the UGC (Minimum Standards and Procedures for Award of PhD Degree) Regulations, 2022 clearly states that higher educational institutions shall not offer an MPhil programme," UGC secretary Manish Joshi said.

The commission has asked the universities to take immediate steps to stop admissions to MPhil programmes for the 2023-24 academic year, Joshi added. "Students are advised not to take admission in any MPhil programme," Joshi further stated.

The MPhil programme was discontinued by the UGC in November 2022. "The MPhil courses that commenced prior to the notification of the PhD reg-



ulations will not be affected. The existing students will be allowed to complete the courses for the award of MPhil," Joshi explained.

However, a number of academic experts on condition of anonymity pointed out that the clamp down on MPhil has a reason. They said that many students in a number of universities continue to occupy rooms in the name of pursuing an MPhil degree. The reason why UGC has stopped recognising the MPhil degree is due to this, stated an academician.

The UGC also said that in the last five years a large number of varsities have come up across India. The UGC asked students to be careful about the subjects they choose in these varsities as many subjects on offer there are not recognised.

Earlier December 24, the Ministry of Education said 140 private universities had been established across the country in the last five years, with Gujarat being the leading state, followed by Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. According to the Ministry of Education statistics, 28 private universities were set up in Gujarat during the last five years while 15 universities were established in Maharashtra. Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka welcomed 14 and 10 universities respectively during the period. "Private University is established by an Act passed by the state legislature concerned and Notification issued by the state government concerned," a senior Education Ministry official had explained.

**IOA forms 3-member panel to manage WFI**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 27:** Indian Olympic Association (IOA) constituted Wednesday a three-member ad hoc committee to run the day-to-day affairs of the WFI after the Sports Ministry suspended the wrestling national body for not following the provisions of its own constitution while taking decisions.

Wushu Association of India president Bhopinder Singh Bajwa will be the chairman of the panel with hockey Olympian MM Somaya and former international shuttler Manjusha Kanwar being the other two members.

The Sports Ministry suspended Sunday the WFI, three days after it elected new office-bearers with Brij Bhushan Singh loyalist Sanjay Singh as president, and also asked IOA to constitute an ad-hoc panel to manage the affairs of the sports body.

The IOA said in a release that the newly-elected president and officials of WFI have made arbitrary decisions in violation of their own constitutional provisions and also flouted principles of good governance.

"The IOA has recently become aware that the recently appointed president and officials of WFI have made arbitrary decisions in violation of their own con-

**NZP to get cheetahs, giraffe, white lions**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** The Nandankanan Zoological Park (NZP) here will soon have new guests with the addition of a number of animals and birds to its family in the New Year, according to a top official Wednesday.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Susanta Nanda stated that a pair of cheetahs and a number of white (albino) lion calves and birds will soon be brought to the zoo from abroad. These animals will be brought from a zoo in Dubai under an animal exchange programme in January next year, Nanda informed.

Moreover, the authorities of NZP are also planning to bring a few giraffes from the Zoological Garden at Alipore in Kolkata under another animal exchange programme, informed the PCCF. Currently, the zoo has a lone giraffe in its animal family.

Nanda said that the NZP will bring a male and a female cheetah in exchange for five Manipur brow-antlered deer. Similarly, Nandankanan will get a few African white lion calves in exchange for five blackbucks with the Dubai Safari Park in the UAE, sources informed.

It should be stated here that all the animals that will be brought to NZP will need special care, sources said. Any lax arrangements can lead to the death of the animals. It should be stated here that, a giraffe brought from Alipore Zoo in Kolkata, May 25, 2008 was electrocuted on way.

In February 2016, a male giraffe brought from the Alipore Zoo died under mysterious circumstances. The giraffe had been brought in exchange of four tigers. Till date the reason behind the animal's death remains shrouded in mystery.

The PCCF also said that Nandankanan will soon be made into a world class zoo.

**JUMBO KILLS MAN IN KEONJHAR DIST**

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Champua, Dec 27:** In yet another man animal conflict, a 40-year old man died after a wild elephant trampled him to death at Haridajodi village under Balibandha section under Champua police limits in Keonjhar district late Tuesday evening. The deceased was identified as Mithun Munda, son of Sukura Munda of Haridajodi village.

It should be stated here that there are no signs of the human-elephant conflict decreasing. In 2022-23 (April 2022-March 2023), a total of 148 people had died due to elephant attacks in the state. This year both the elephant and human deaths are continuing in the same vein. As per sources in the Forest department, so far 70 people have lost their lives since April this year till date.

Wildlife expert Subhendu Mallick has repeatedly pointed out that unless special steps are taken for the protection of the tuskers, the conflict will continue to grow. He said that because of reduction in habitat, more and more elephants are entering into human localities leading to frequent conflicts. The death of Mithun, comes only a day after when two elephants died in different parts of the state.

**No breakthrough in embassy blast case**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 27:** Officials probing a blast that occurred near the Israeli embassy here suspect it was a well-orchestrated plan, knowing that no CCTV camera was installed on Prithviraj Road, police sources said Wednesday. The sources said there was no CCTV camera at the location as compared to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Road where more than a dozen cameras are installed outside and near the embassy.

The footage obtained from these cameras show some people, including two youngsters, roaming in the area, but they are not on the list of suspects yet, police informed.

A team of forensic experts from the National Security Guard (NSG) visited the spot in the morning and collected samples of leaves and grass that they suspected might contain chemicals used in the explosion, police sources said. They added that a team of NSG's dog squad also inspected the spot.

**SECURITY AGENCY FEELS THAT THE SUPPORTERS ARE INDIRECTLY HARMING THE COUNTRY BY REVEALING SECRET DETAILS**

**China promises tough action against 'military fans'**

AGENCIES

**Beijing, Dec 27:** China has warned amateur military enthusiasts to avoid posting photos of the country's sensitive military equipment online. Officials said that by posting photos, they could endanger national security.

According to a report in CNN, the warning has been posted by China's counter-intelligence agency on 'WeChat'. It raised concerns about how 'military fans' are spreading the word to a larger population through social media platforms like 'Weibo', which have hundreds of millions of active users, the outlet further said. These photos have become a common site as China is rapidly modernising its forces.

"This is a cool hobby, but you must be very careful. Some individual military enthusiasts severely endanger national military security by illegally ob-



Chinese aircraft carrier Fujian has been the cynosure of many photographers

taining information regarding national defence and disseminating them on the internet," CNN quoted China's Ministry of State Security as saying on 'WeChat'.

"With a focus on military air-

ports, ports, national defence and military industrial units, they drove to or took ferries or planes that pass by designated routes, and clandestinely photographed with telephoto lenses or drones," the civilian spy

agency further said. "This is not at all good for national security and can cause a lot of harm," the ministry added.

First time or occasional offenders may receive only a warning but repeat violators rule

**MARKET WATCH**

INDEX	VALUE	VARIATION
SENSEX	72038.43	↑ 701.63
NIFTY	21654.80	↑ 213.50
DOLLAR	83.36	↑ ₹0.16
EURO	92.15	↑ ₹0.54
GOLD	₹63,361	↑ ₹336
SILVER	₹75,014	↓ ₹12

**WEATHER**

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	29.5°C	27.2°C
Min Temp	17.0°C	16.5°C
Humidity	89%	79%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
FORECAST	DRY WEATHER VERY LIKELY	

# leisure



## SHAKIRA TO HAVE HER 21FT TALL STATUE IN COLOMBIAN HOMETOWN

Singer Shakira said that she was very excited while showing off the honour she received from her hometown. The 46-year-old Grammy winner took to her Instagram page to share her thoughts on her statue that was built in her hometown Barranquilla, reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

## KANYE WEST SHARES WRITTEN APOLOGY NOTE

Rapper Kanye West took to social media to issue a public apology written in Hebrew and said that he deeply regrets his anti-Semitic remarks. "I sincerely apologise to the Jewish community for any unintended outburst caused by my words or actions. It was not my intention to hurt or demean, and I deeply regret any pain I may have caused," he wrote.



### FORTUNE FORECAST

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

**ARIES**  
You will be in a tight fix as the day starts. However, that's exactly the kind of situation in which your skills are tested. In the evening you will draw a lot of praise for your excellent performance. If Ganesh chooses to shower his blessings on you, you will sign new deals.

**TAURUS**  
This day is meant for taking some time out from your busy schedule, and seeking some fun and relaxation. So says Ganesh. It is possible that you will be getting together with your friends and family members for a fun filled evening followed by a great dinner and a late night movie.

**GEMINI**  
You are likely to be in a romantic mood today. You may just end up falling in love today. A difficult situation will bring out the competitive streak in you and spur you on to physical and mental excellence. Your capacity and intelligence will be testified to by your work, says Ganesh.

**CANCER**  
You will focus on financial matters and plan accordingly. Compared to expenses, you will save more. A beneficial day for cashiers, money lenders and petty traders. Ganesh advises hard work to achieve success.

**LEO**  
You will be unable to express the feelings that rise up inside you in spite of wanting to. However, keep them close to your heart. You will be very serious about your work today. There is a possibility of some delay in your schedule today due to unforeseen problems, says Ganesh.

**VIRGO**  
In all likelihood, you will be eager to grab the monetary challenges that come your way, as they only enhance your desire for success. You will bring up new ideas and better methods of tackling the challenges on hand. Ganesh gives you an assurance that your present business views will do you a world of good.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesh advises you not to take stress about small issues or matters. To avoid tension and to gain mental peace it is advised you perform yoga or meditation. There will be pressure put on you regarding certain matters at the work-front. You should take decisions regarding critical matters only after carefully weighing the pros and cons.

**SCORPIO**  
Thank Ganesh that you have the grace to handle pressure at work, because today, you are going to be bogged down with a lot of work pressure. By the end of the day, try some stress bursting activities like yoga, meditation or listening to soft music.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Ganesh predicts a day full of romantic developments today. Mushy talks and whispering sweet nothings in your beloved's ears may give you little joys of life. However, brace yourselves as there are times when relationships do not workout, and you may experience this soon.

**CAPRICORN**  
Your lover is in for many pleasant surprises today. You'll be in a completely romantic mood, making every wish of your sweetheart your command. Both of you will go shopping, and have fun. Extravagant expenditures will keep you charged up for the day. You will achieve what you had wanted, that is the happiness of your sweetheart.

**AQUARIUS**  
Travelling is on the cards for you today. Ganesh advises you to travel alone, because if you take people with different tastes along with you, their preferences may dampen your mood and spoil the trips.

**PISCES**  
Your planetary configuration not being favorable, you are advised not to start any new projects today. The benefits accrued by any project you take up today might not justify the risks associated with it. Businessmen need to be extra careful in all their dealings.

## Shruti reacts to marriage rumours

Mumbai: Actress Shruti Haasan, who made it known to the world about her dating artist Santanu Hazarika, has now reacted to rumours of her getting secretly married to him on her personal social media handle.

Clearing the air around it, the *Salaar* actress took to her social media and asked people to calm down. She wrote on her Instagram stories, "So, I'm not married. For someone who has been open about every single thing, why would I hide this? LOL. So people, who don't know me at all, please calm down."

Soon after her, BF Santanu Hazarika also posted, "You all need to calm down! We are not married. Individuals who don't know us, please stop spreading rumour."

Yesterday, social media personality Orry, who is friends with all of B-town hosted an 'AMA' session on Reddit and revealed that Shruti Haasan was rude to him during an event and also addressed her boyfriend Santanu Hazarika as her 'husband' sparking rumour of them being secretly married.

AGENCIES

## Fashion is a form of self expression: Disha

Mumbai: Actress Disha Patani's fashion choices, includes risqué dresses and statement saris. As she prepares to make her OTT debut, she discusses her fashion evolution over the years.

"Fashion has always been a form of self-expression for me. Over the years, I've experimented with different styles, and it's been a journey of self-discovery. I enjoy the creative process of putting together my looks. It's about having fun, being free and comfortable with fashion," the Radhe actress shared.

She also talked about her OTT debut. She said, "Today, OTT is booming, if script and right project comes that excites me then why not? I have never made that distinction be it films, OTT, stage performances, music videos etc - and equally respect them all. It's not apprehension, just a matter of finding the right role."

On the work front, Disha turned a director this year with her music video *Kyun Karu Fikar*.

AGENCIES

## Ayesha on achieving success as an outsider

Mumbai: Actress Ayesha Kanga, renowned for her impactful debut as the assertive and spirited Yashika in the immensely popular streaming series *Class*, openly shared insights into her journey of achieving success in the industry as an outsider.

The young actress articulated, "Being an industry outsider who's never even really foot in an acting class-god knows, I've had to work to get here. But I've never felt more driven than I am today. As an actor perpetually motivated to carve a distinctive niche, I'm committed to working tirelessly to substantiate my work as an actor and make an indelible mark on an industry I've loved for so long."

She further expressed, "What a year it's been. The overwhelming love that *Class* received gave me the

confidence boost I needed to present myself to the world, unapologetically. And credit goes to possibly the greyest mean-girl archetype, Yashika Debuting as a character as headstrong and feisty as her gave me so much to work with. I fell in love with her the day I auditioned."

Furthermore, the actress revealed that Ashim Ahluwalia, the director of *Class*, allowed her to contribute creatively to the show. This included rewriting her dialogues, co-creating scenes not initially scripted, shaping digital inserts for livestream comments and text messages, and even providing input on outfits for her character.

AGENCIES



## Twinkle busts myth about actresses of the 90s

Mumbai: Former actress Twinkle Khanna recently talked about how she starved herself while filming the song 'Mohabbat Ho Gayee' from *Baadshah* and felt like a gas canister.

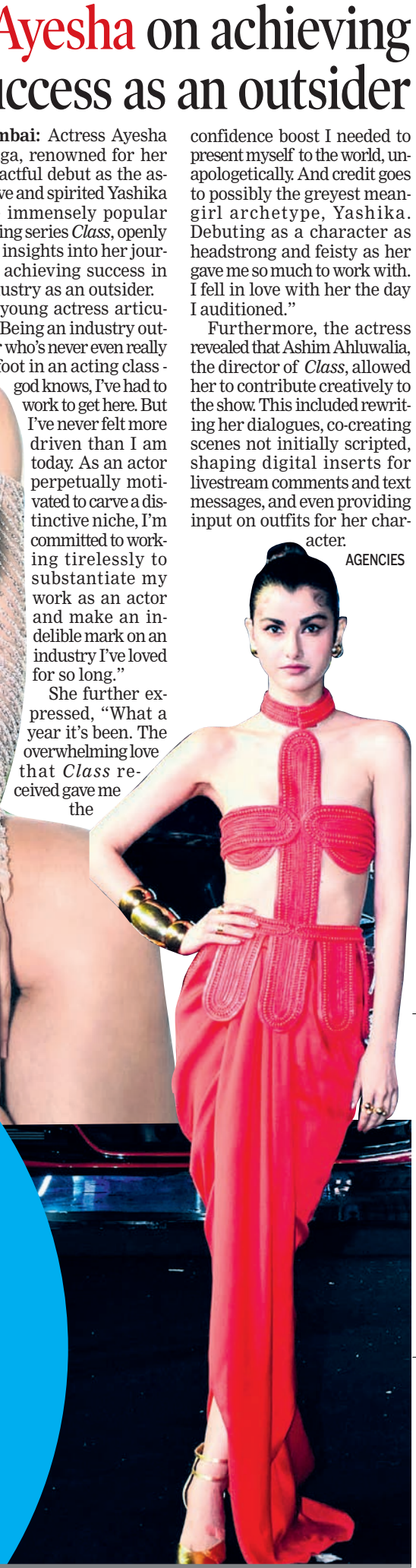
The *International Khiladi* actress said, "I know you see all these actresses saying that they don't diet and they eat everything; it's not true, most of them are starving. I was starving, if you want your stomach to be flat in all those catsuits that we used to wear—I don't know why we wore them. This was my own brainwave that I'm

going to live on channa. For some reason, being Gujarati, I felt that was also cheap, and you know, I could get it easily wherever I went. So, this was my diet."

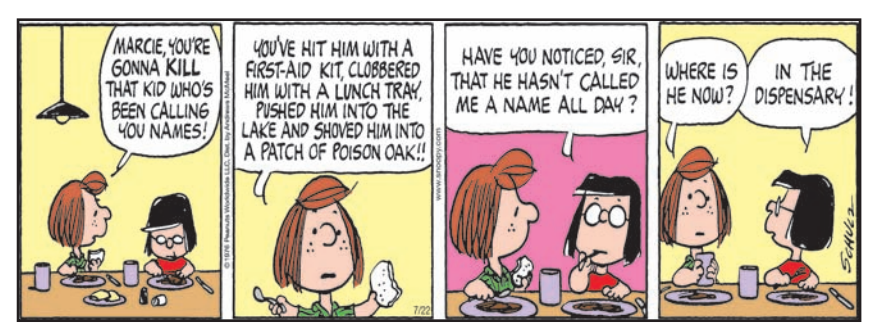
"In the song SRK had to lift me up, and I was so scared that I would explode like the gas canisters in the Parliament, but I didn't. So if you see my teeth clenching there, other things are also clenching and just holding on, but yes, I survived that bit as well," Twinkle ended.

On the work front, Twinkle recently launched her latest book, *Welcome to Paradise*.

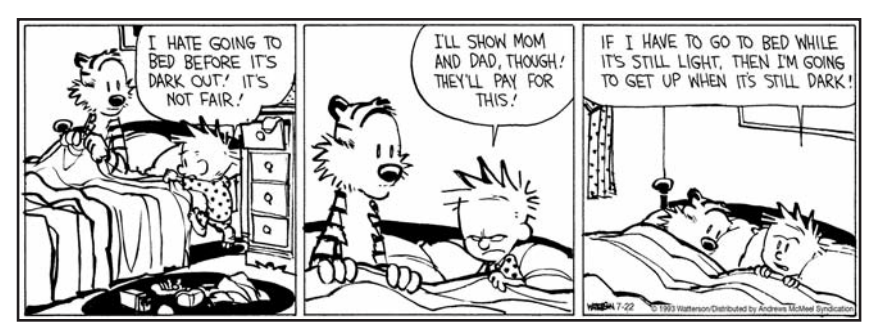
AGENCIES



### PEANUTS



### CALVIN AND HOBBS

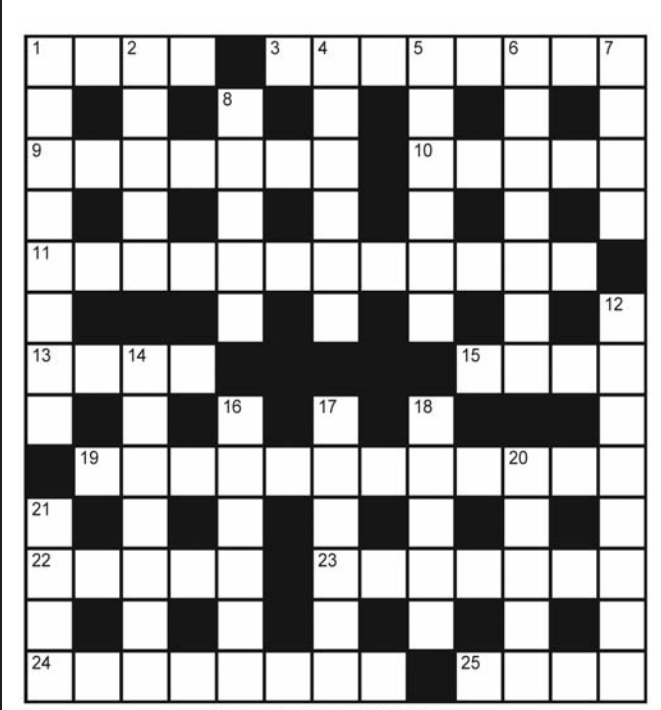


### BREVITY



### FUN post

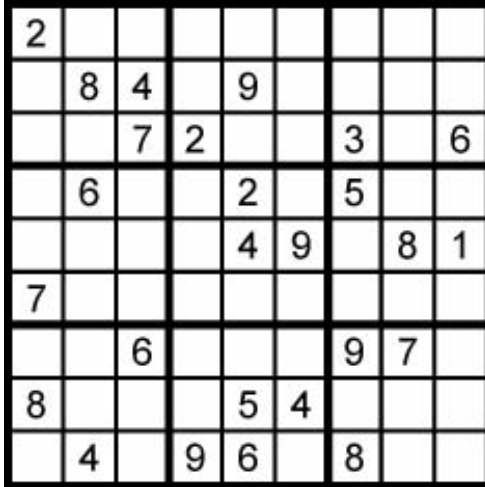
### CROSSWORD



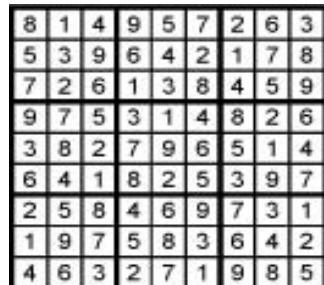
- Across**
- 1 Four-star review
  - 3 Empty words
  - 9 Musician on his own
  - 10 Belly button
  - 11 Lacking in magnanimity (4-8)
  - 13 Like hen's teeth
  - 15 Glasgow gal
  - 19 Electronic cue card
  - 22 Movie part
  - 23 Sea wolf
  - 24 Global get-together
  - 25 Taro plant roots
  - Down**
  - 1 Spice rack member
  - 2 Fancy home
  - 4 Empty talk (3,3)
  - 5 Court game
  - 6 Cote d'Azur is there
  - 7 Kind of phone
  - 8 Wash cycle
  - 12 Caffè latte
  - 14 Astronaut's concern
  - 16 Overhaul
  - 17 Calamitous
  - 18 Eskimo boat
  - 20 Lukewarm
  - 21 Audition tape

### SUDOKU

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



### SOLUTIONS



CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

# downtown

## 2 new Cov cases; tally goes up to 5



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** Odisha reported two fresh Covid-19 cases, pushing the coronavirus tally to five in December so far, a Health department official said Wednesday.

"In November, we had registered 11 cases while this month,

so far, only five cases have been detected. We are closely monitoring the situation and have instructed the districts to enhance surveillance for influenza-like illness," Niranjan Mishra, the state's public health director, told PTI.

He said Covid-19 cases have marginally increased across India, with five states - Kerala, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Goa - contributing to over 90 per cent of the infections.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, in a message on X, said, "Pandemics like #COVID pose devastating impact on human lives, threatening lives and livelihood of millions. On #InternationalDayOfEpidemicPreparedness, reaffirm commitment to continue to bolster our resilient healthcare system, and prepare Yodhas in every household for a disaster and pandemic-proof #Odisha."

### ELEGANT MOVES

Artistes Narahari Maharana and Dibyashree Majhi perform during International Odissi Dance Festival at Rabindra Mandap in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday



## IDCO officer held in DA case

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** Vigilance sleuths Wednesday arrested a senior Odisha Administrative Service (OAS) officer for allegedly possessing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income, officials said.

The officer is serving in the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (IDCO), Bhubaneswar, they said. Acting on a complaint, Vigilance department sleuths conducted raids at seven places in the state and unearthed a triple-storey building in Cuttack, a double-storey building in Jajpur, two flats in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, besides 10 plots allegedly belonging to him, the officials said.

Gold jewellery weighing 703.38 gram and 869 gram of silver, bank, insurance and postal deposits over ₹70.55 lakh, along with vehicles and household articles worth over ₹20.88 lakh were also found in his possession, said A James, SP, Vigilance-Bhubaneswar Division.



**CREATIVITY APLENTY:** Visitors appreciate handcrafted items at International Contemporary Art Exhibition organised by 3G Artist Group at Lalit Kala Akademi in Bhubaneswar, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

# No Zero Night party post 12:30am: CP

DEBADURLLAV HARICHANDAN, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** In a bid to ensure that Zero Night celebrations go incident-free in twin cities, the Commissionerate Police has stepped up its vigil and urged hotel, club and apartment owners to finish New Year eve parties by 12:30am. The police also instructed the stakeholders not to use loudspeakers whose sound exceeds 65 decibel.

Speaking on the security arrangements, twin city police commissioner Saumendra Priyadarsi said, "More than 50 platoons of additional force will be deployed in every nook and corner of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. Hotels and bars seeking to run till 1:30am will have to



obtain prior permission from the Commissionerate Police."

A final plan will be chalked out in this regard at a meeting with deputy commissioner of police (DCP) Prateek Singh and additional commissioner of police Brijesh Rai that will strategise the role of ACP and IIC in the se-

curity arrangement, he added.

Moreover, Priyadarsi said there is no restriction on any kind of celebrations. "However, strict action will be taken against drunken driving and road rage.

The organisers, particularly hotel and club owners, are required to deploy additional staff

More than 50 platoons of additional force will be deployed in every nook and corner of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack to ensure incident-free Zero Night celebrations

to ease congestion at parking areas. They should also make special arrangements to drop inebriated guests at home, said a senior police official. For smooth conduct of the event, they must ensure the venue does not get overcrowded, he added. Expressing resentment over

the decisions, several hotel owners in twin cities said obtaining permission from police for overnight celebrations is a regular affair in other states. Although the hoteliers and pub owners requested the Commissionerate Police to extend the deadline for the New Year eve celebrations till 2:30am, it went unheeded, they added.

Other guidelines issued by the twin city police are: Loud music must not be played within 100 metre radius of schools, colleges, hospitals and courts; celebrations must not, in any form, disturb senior citizens and students; venues must comply with fire safety standards and organisers must avail an ambulance and medical team in emergency cases.

### OAMS CADRE RESTRUCTURE

## Govt to create 228 senior AMO posts

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** With an aim to ensure smooth and efficient management of health-care facilities in Ayurvedic hospitals and dispensaries, the state government has decided to restructure and revive the pay structure of Odisha Ayurvedic Medical Service (OAMS) Cadre of the Health and Family Welfare department.

As per a notification issued by the government, out of the existing sanctioned strength of 690 base level posts of Ayurvedic Medical Officer (AMO) in the pay scale of ₹44,900 to ₹1,42,400 (Level-10 under ORSP Rules, 2017), 228 posts shall stand abolished in lieu of creation of 245 posts at different levels in the cadre hierarchy, leaving 462 posts at base level.

Moreover, there shall be creation of 228 senior AMO posts in the pay scale of ₹56,100 to ₹1,77,500 (Level-12 under ORSP Rules, 2017) which is the first promotional hierarchy in the cadre. In addition to the existing 20 District Ayurvedic Medical Officer/Deputy Superintendent/Superintendent posts, 15 posts of District Ayurvedic Medical Officer (DAMO) in the pay scale of ₹56,100 to ₹1,77,500 (Level-12 under ORSP Rules, 2017) shall be created arriving at a total of 35 posts, which is the 2nd promotional hierarchy in the cadre.

In addition to the existing one post of Deputy Director (Ayurveda) in the pay scale of ₹67,700 to ₹2,08,700 (Level-13 under ORSP Rules, 2017), another post of Deputy Director (Ayurveda) -Level-13- shall be created arriving at a total of two posts, which is the third promotional hierarchy in the



cadre. There shall be creation of one post of Joint Director (Ayurveda) in the pay scale of ₹78,800 to ₹2,09,200 (Level-14 under ORSP Rules, 2017), which is the fourth promotional hierarchy in the cadre.

The total cadre strength will be 728.

### OHMS CADRE REVISION

The government also restructured Odisha Homoeopathic Medical Service (OHMS) cadre with corresponding pay revision. With this, the total cadre strength has been enhanced to 630 with 399 posts at base level. The H&F secretary, in a notification, mentioned that there would be 196 posts at the first promotional hierarchy in the pay matrix of Level-12 under ORSP Rules. The number of the posts of Deputy Director in the pay Level-13 would be enhanced to two. Similarly, the fourth promotional hierarchy in the cadre would be the post of joint director in the pay Level-14. The revised cadre would include: Joint director-1; deputy director-2; DHMO/deputy superintendent/CMO-32; and senior HMO-399.

## 3 held for illegal cattle trafficking

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** The Commissionerate Police Wednesday arrested three persons allegedly involved in illegal trafficking and sale of cattle.

The accused were identified as Enam Khan, Satar Khan and Mahammad Salman, all natives of Delanga area in Puri district.

ACP Zone II, GS Chakrabarty said around 3:30am a police patrol team noticed a recklessly driven mini-truck travelling at a high speed on the stretch between Jatni and Sundarpada. The driver refused to slow down when the PCR van gave the vehicle a chase. The police finally intercepted the vehicle after a few kms, he added.

During inspection, the police found five cows in the trolley tied inhumanely with a rope, said an officer at the Airfield police station. During questioning, the accused failed to provide any document regarding the procurement of the cows.

The accused were booked under Sections 279 and 336 of IPC, along with Sections 11 (a), (d) and (f) of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. They were produced before a local court for remand.

Primary investigation has revealed that the accused used to procure cattle illegally from around Jatni area and sell them to customers in the Capital city.

## Date extended for 'Nua-O' activities

**Bhubaneswar:** The deadline for sports and cultural activities under "Nua-O" programme of the state government has been extended till January 15. This was revealed during a review meeting of the "Nua-O" initiative held at the conference hall of Rural Development department under the chairmanship of Higher Education Minister Atanu Sabayasachi Nayak and the department's commissioner-cum-secretary Arbind Agrawal.

# Steady economy strength of democracy: Ahluwalia

ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** Despite governments changing at the Centre, continuity has been maintained in economic policy, which demonstrates the strength of Indian democracy, said noted economist and former deputy chairman of Montek Singh Ahluwalia at 106th edition of the Indian Economic Association (IEA) Conference being organised at KIIT Deemed to be University here Wednesday.

The conference commenced with insightful remarks from distinguished speakers, shedding light on crucial economic aspects and the evolving landscape of technology and policymaking.

Speaking as chief guest at the inaugural session, Ahluwalia delved into the influence of evol-



ing technology on policymaking, emphasizing the rise of tech giants and their role in decision making. He highlighted the impending structural changes needed to facilitate technology-led advancements.

Ahluwalia also advocated for a balanced policy approach to integrate new technology without inhibiting innovation, stressing on ensuring that vulnera-

ble populations have access to jobs. He urged economists to reflect on these challenges and encouraged cultivation of diverse perspectives within the IEA.

On the occasion, the guests released a book titled 'Community Builder for Education, Empowerment and Enlightenment,' honouring contributions of KIIT and KISS founder Achyuta Samanta.

The 'Architect of IEA' award was presented to well known economist Vedagiri Shanmugasundaram. The 'Best Controller' award was given to the Sanjay Kumar, registrar of BRA Bihar University, while the Gyanchand Academic Excellence Award was given to Pankaj Kumar, post-doctoral researcher of the department of economics, TM Bhagalpur University.

## Sisir Saras 2024 to kickstart from Jan 6

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** A total of 400 stalls will be erected by Women Self Help Groups (WSHG), Producers Groups (PGs) and Producers Enterprises (PEs) having various handicrafts, handloom and food spices products from 26 states in the SISIR SARAS-2024.

Odisha Rural Development & Marketing Society (ORMAS) Director-cum-Chief Executive Officer Poonam T Guha said the national level fair will be held from January 6 to 15 at the Biju Patnaik Playground, Baramuda.

Guha was speaking at the preparatory meeting held here Tuesday for organising the mela. A special food court with 20 stalls and theme stall depicting the ORMAS activities like Marketing, Livelihoods and Skill Development will be the centre of attraction for the revellers in this year's mela.

# IIT Bhub sets up research centre for application of AI

AHRC WILL PROMOTE A COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE SCIENTISTS AND ACADEMICIANS FROM MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES AND INSTITUTIONS WILL COME TOGETHER TO FORM A COMMON RESOURCE AND KNOWLEDGE POOL

AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 27:** Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar has established a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) and HPC Research Centre (AHRC) to conduct interdisciplinary and collaborative research in the fields of AI and High Performance Computing (HPC).

AHRC is designed as a National Research Centre with participation of other eminent academic, industry, and government research organisations in India and abroad to find solutions to real world problems in several areas through research, innovation and application of AI and HPC.

AHRC will promote a collaborative environment where scientists and academicians from multiple disciplines and institutions will come together to form a common resource pool and knowledge pool to cope up with this fast moving field.

Researchers from various fields of engineering, computer science, medicine, agriculture, basic sciences, finance, economics and other areas will work together to find integrated and comprehensive solutions to problems faced by industry and society.

The most pressing research and innovation focus of AHRC is in the application of AI and HPC in areas that directly ben-



efit the society such as medicine, agriculture, environment, sustainable communities, smart cities and cyber security. IIT Bhubaneswar director

In addition, Subhranshu Ranjan Samantaray and Manoranjan Satpathy will serve as associate centre-directors of AHRC.

Speaking about the novel initiative of the IIT, Karmalkar said, "This is a one-of-a-kind national research centre hosted by IIT Bhubaneswar. It will provide a global platform to the researchers from the state and across India for leading edge research and innovation in the field of Artificial Intelligence and high performing computing, which is the need of the hour."

Center-director Ashwini Nanda said, "The goal of AHRC is to bring global knowhow to serve the people of India, as

well as make global technology impact and serve the global community through its world class research."

Besides establishing research collaboration with over a dozen US universities and industrial laboratories, AHRC is also collaborating closely with national institutions such as AIIMS and other IIT's, as well as universities in Odisha and the Odisha state govt.

AHRC scientists are working on developing AI tools for diagnosis of several diseases and fast screening for life threatening diseases in the rural communities in Odisha in collaboration with scientists from AIIMS Bhubaneswar and State University of New York.

The flame of the aspiration must be so straight and so ardent that no obstacle can dissolve it.

THE MOTHER



# Credit Rating Chaos

The sun-drenched coral islands and reefs of the Maldives are in existential danger. With 80 per cent of the country's population living just one metre above sea level, many islands could become uninhabitable as climate change causes the ocean's level to rise.

The Maldives earns much of its revenues from high-end tourism. So, like many other countries, it was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought much global travel to a halt.

That recovery was interrupted by two successive credit-ratings downgrades - first from Moody's and then from Fitch - which caused borrowing costs to rise sharply.

The use of credit ratings as the ultimate measure of a country's creditworthiness has long been recognised as a threat to financial stability, particularly in the Global South.



Emily Wilkinson & Kannu Wignaraja

The use of credit ratings as the ultimate measure of a country's creditworthiness has long been recognised as a threat to financial stability, particularly in the Global South

A recent UNDESA study found that during the pandemic, emerging-market and developing economies' credit ratings were downgraded by a total of 125 notches, whereas advanced economies - which both contracted and accumulated debt more rapidly - were downgraded by only six notches.

Moreover, rating decisions are often shaped by ideological biases - such as the belief that government intervention in the economy automatically undermines growth and efficiency.

The SIDS are among the world's most highly indebted countries: their public-debt-to-GDP ratio averaged 82.5 per cent in 2020, and is set to remain above 70 per cent until 2025.

This would prove catastrophic for the SIDS. If these countries are to stay above water (literally), they must be able to invest in the building blocks of sustainable growth and development: people, infrastructure, energy, and food security.

Making matters worse, the SIDS have few options for restructuring their debts - not least because of ratings downgrades. Notably, countries participating in the G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the Debt Service Suspension Initiative face the threat of a downgrade.

Secure, prosperous, climate-resilient states are clearly better for the rest of the world - including private creditors and advanced-economy governments - than unstable, debt-ridden countries enduring extensive human and environmental dislocation and loss.

To this end, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has rightly called for the suspension of credit ratings during crises.

CRAs' ideological biases and lack of transparency could be addressed by decentralising them or establishing regional or multilateral ratings agencies.

Just as the credit-ratings system in the United States was reformed after the 2008 global financial crisis through the Dodd-Frank Act, CRAs must be improved in response to the challenges SIDS are now facing.

Emily Wilkinson is Director of the Resilient and Sustainable Islands Initiative at ODI, a global affairs think tank. Kannu Wignaraja is UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

## WISDOM CORNER

- Our virtues and our failings are inseparable, like force and matter. When they separate, man is no more.
There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.
Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors where there were only walls.

NIKOLA TESLA

ALDOUS HUXLEY

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

## FOCUS POLITICS

# GIMMICKS VS REALITY



Dhurjati Mukherjee

ELECTORAL POLITICS IS MORE AND MORE GETTING CARVED OUT ON GIMMICKS AND FALSE PROMISES

INDIA bloc's decision to give top priority to seat-sharing for 2024 general elections is in the right direction, but it would do well to have partners share assessment of the electorate's outlook to plug loopholes and engage with it through a combined strategy.

Another important factor that needs attention is the propagation of aggressive Hindutva that swayed the masses in favour of the BJP, despite such an approach being harmful to social integration and leading to alienation of minorities.

The inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya in January 2024 will again impact those who are enamoured with the Hindu ethos. But it can't be considered as true Hindu religion in the backdrop of reading the philosophical propositions of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and even later interpreters such as Dr S Radhakrishnan and Swami Ranganathananda.

At the same time, parties and their leaders would need to stress on grassroots development and not get caught in populist tendencies to attract and win voters' sentiments.



The freebies announced by the Congress had rival BJP doing the same. There was hardly any promise about reviving the economy and deterioration in living conditions of the rural poor

Another important factor that needs attention is the propagation of aggressive Hindutva that swayed the masses in favour of the BJP, despite such an approach being harmful to social integration and leading to alienation of minorities.

Congress leader and former Finance Minister Chidambaram recently quoted the PLFS to say that the Workers Population Ratio (WPR), the share of working people in the population, was 46%, including 69% for men and 22% for women. It is estimated that less than 50% of them actually work.

The looming agricultural crisis, acute job scarcity, poor education and health services, lack of rural infrastructure development, dysfunctional cities, broken judicial system and rampant environmental damage to the ecosystem were not areas of concern for the ruling party.

While religious fundamentalism has been used to brainwash the half-educated and uneducated sections, the clamour that India is set to become the third largest economy, banking on the wealth accumulation of the corporate groups, is being highlighted.

India is currently said to be the fifth largest economy with a GDP of \$3.7 trillion and the leaders are talking of becoming the third largest economic power by 2030.

of the country's economic development without considering the incomes of the lowest 25% of the population. Even if the GDP grows at around 6.5% this fiscal, will it lead to perceptible income growth of the lowest 25% of the population?

India is currently said to be the fifth largest economy with a GDP of \$3.7 trillion and the leaders are talking of becoming the third largest economic power by 2030.

A professor at a national conference expressed concern that the rich drive to big hotels passing through slums and shanty settlements but are least bothered to reflect on it.

Thus, ruling dispensations, aided by the bureaucracy, have not paid the attention that the rural sector or the backward areas deserve.

If India is really to become a developed country as is being aired time and again, there must be a change in strategy.

INDIA bloc needs to do its homework right.

INFA

## SPECTRUM SOCIETY

# Cultural competence in organisations



Debabrata Dash

CULTURAL COMPETENCE IS ESSENTIAL IN TODAY'S WORLD WHICH IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIVERSE

As many progressive organisations have the ambitious growth plan of going global, cultural competence is one of the significant elements to be focused at.

Striving to achieve cultural competence is a dynamic, ongoing, developmental process that requires a long-term commitment.

Key components of cultural competence include awareness of one's own culture, knowledge of other cultures, open mindedness, adaptability, different communication styles, non-verbal cues, the potential for misunderstandings based on cultural differences and cultural sensitivities in practices.

Imagine a hospital that serves a diverse community with patients from various cultural backgrounds. The hospital staff recognises the importance of cultural competence in providing effective and patient-centered care.

The hospital employs a diverse staff that reflects the community it serves, including individuals who are fluent in multiple languages.

The hospital has access to professional interpreters who can assist in facilitating clear communication between healthcare providers and patients.

Imagine a hospital that serves a diverse community with patients from various cultural backgrounds. The hospital staff recognises the importance of cultural competence in providing effective and patient-centered care.

In this example, the hospital's commitment to cultural competence ensures that healthcare services are accessible, respectful, and effective for all members of the community regardless of their cultural background.

The writer is a senior human resource professional.

## 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.

Orissa POST B-15, Rasulgarh Industrial Estate, Bhubaneswar-751010

### Aggrandising popularity

Sir, As the year 2023 is drawing close, it is time to reflect on the aggrandising popularity of Indian chess at the global level, especially so after the 44th Chess Olympiad held in Chennai in August, which earned massive plaudits from the global chess community.

### Drone farming

Sir, Drone farming refers to the practice of using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for farming activities. These UAVs play a considerable role in boosting productivity through the effective utilisation of resources while minimising the environmental impact on the farming system.





I-T nips out hidden treasure

In Bolangir and Tiliagarh towns December 6, searches were carried out at Sudapada unit of Boudh Districts...

ANDHRA'S BRAZENNESS

Odisha's southern neighbour Andhra Pradesh's incursion bid in Nandapur block of Koraput district...

OSSC question paper leaked

The Odisha Staff Selection Commission (OSSC) cancelled the written examination for filling up 1,008 posts of Junior Engineer (Civil)...

Diarrhoea surge in Rourkela, Bolangir

Diarrhoea claimed at least 10 lives after its spread in Steel City December 11, though the unofficial figure stood at over 16...

Minz, Lugun death mysteries

Assistant collector of Rourkela Sushmita Minz's body was found in a pond at Sensory Park September 19...



FOOTPRINTS

2023 began with a promising note as the state witnessed a watershed moment at the just concluded Make in Odisha Conclave...

Murder that shook Odisha to the core

On January 29, Health Minister Naba Kishore Das was shot at from a very close range at Gandhi Chowk in Brajarajgarh...



The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) has struggled to manage waste produced in the city since operations have ceased at Bhusani dumping yard...

East Coast Railway (ECoR) has decided to install Intrusion Detection System (IDS) in elephant movement areas to prevent wild elephant deaths...



Ratnabhandar laser scanning

In order to examine the structural stability of Srimandir Ratnabhandar in Puri, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) carried out laser scanning...

Golden hope

The year brought cheers for Odisha as the government informed the Assembly February 27 that gold deposits were found in various parts of Deogarh, Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj districts...

KASHMIRI FRAUDSTER IN STF NET

The Special Task Force (STF) of Odisha Crime Branch December 16 arrested Kashmiri fraudster Sayed Ishaan Bukhari from Jaipur for impersonating a PMO official...

Mayurbhanj in Time Magazine

In a pleasant summer surprise in March, the famed Time Magazine placed Mayurbhanj, the home district of President Droupadi Murmu...

Dakota in Bhubaneswar

The iconic Dakota aircraft used by former Chief Minister and aviator late Biju Patnaik several decades ago was brought back to Bhubaneswar from Kolkata...

NOD TO METRO RAIL PHASE I

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik sanctioned the first phase of elevated Metro rail project that will cover a distance of around 26 km and have 20 stations April 1, 2023...

India's 1st climate change colony

Satabhaya Bagapatia colony in Kendrapada district is the first such settlement in the country developed to rehabilitate people displaced by climate change...

Bolts from the blue

In a startling first, a staggering 61,000 lightning strikes in just two hours killed at least 12 people and injured 14 others across Odisha, September 3...

World's hottest

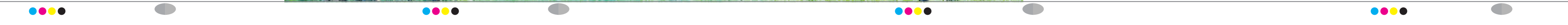
Odisha literally found itself in the Sun April 13 this year as three of its towns were among the top-15 hottest places in the world...

LAccMI as blessing for panchayats

To facilitate economic development in rural areas of the state, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik launched affordable services under the Location-Accessible Multimodal Initiative (LAccMI) in six southern districts...

Smiling DJ falls silent

Music lovers were in for a shock upon hearing the death of Akshay Kumar, popularly known as DJ Azeq, popularly known as the smiling DJ of Odisha...





Children head to school on a bicycle during a foggy winter morning in Gurugram, Haryana



Navy personnel during rehearsals for the upcoming Republic Day parade in New Delhi



Tourists at an ice-skating rink at Lakkar Bazar in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh



A cat sits on the shoulder of a Ukrainian serviceman



Police personnel use water cannon to disperse Delhi BJP workers during their protest against AAP government over allegations of fake medicines being used in Delhi government hospitals, outside AAP office in New Delhi



Tribal women take part in a tug-of-war competition at the 130th Santiniketan Poush Mela, at Santiniketan in Birbhum district, West Bengal



MV Chem Pluto ship which was hit by a drone launched from Iran in the Indian Ocean last Saturday. The Indian Navy Tuesday said it has commenced "focused" maritime security operations in the Arabian Sea in view of the recent incidents in the region, including the attack on the merchant vessel

national

of the day quote

You are the guardians of the country. Apart from the responsibility toward security of the country, winning the hearts of the citizens is also a big responsibility on your shoulders

Gangasagar is the biggest fair in India. At least 40 lakh people will gather this year. All measures are being taken to ensure that pilgrims do not face any difficulty

We have to work to form a BJP government in West Bengal after the next assembly polls. A BJP government will mean the end of infiltration, cow smuggling and providing citizenship to religiously persecuted people through CAA

SHORT TAKES

Neelam Azad moves Delhi HC

New Delhi: Neelam Azad, an accused arrested in the December 13 Parliament security breach case, Wednesday approached the Delhi High Court alleging her police remand was illegal as she was not allowed to consult a legal practitioner of her choice to defend her during the trial court proceedings.

Panic after gas leak, several hospitalised

Chennai: The leak of ammonia gas from a subsea pipeline linked to a fertiliser manufacturing unit in north Chennai led to local residents suffering shortness of breath and nausea, authorities said Wednesday, adding that 52 persons are under observation in hospitals.

Govt asks platforms to remove fraud loan app ads

Concerns are growing over illegal instant loan apps that have come up in recent times

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mahadev app owner detained

New Delhi, Dec 27: The government has directed social media and other online platforms to ensure that they do not host advertisements of fraudulent loan apps, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar said Wednesday.

Jammu and Kashmir outfit banned

The ban comes as a response to Muslim League Jammu Kashmir's involvement in anti-national and secessionist activities in J&K with the intent to create a reign of terror in the country, the Union Home Ministry said

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: A faction of Muslim League Jammu Kashmir, led by separatist leader Masarat Alam Bhat, was Wednesday declared a banned organisation by the government under the stringent anti-terror law.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while announcing the ban under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, emphasised that the Modi government's message is clear that those who act against the unity, sovereignty, and integrity of the nation will face the full wrath of the law and will not be spared.

"The Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) is declared as an 'Unlawful Association' under UAPA. This organisation and its members are involved in anti-national and secessionist activities in J&K, supporting terrorist activities, and inciting people to establish Islamic rule in J&K," Shah said in a post on 'X'.

Masarat Alam Bhat is known for his anti-India and pro-Pakistan propaganda. Bhat became the chairman of the hard-line faction of the Hurriyat Conference following the death of Syed Ali Shah Geelani. Currently, he is incarcerated. The Union Home Ministry, in a notification, stated that the objectives of the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam

Cabinet approves six-lane bridge over Ganga in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the construction of a new 4.56 km long, 6-lane bridge over the river Ganga, connecting Digha and Sonepur in Bihar, according to an official statement.

"The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, today gave its approval for the construction of the new 4,556 m long, 6-lane high level/extra dosed cable-stayed bridge across River Ganga (Parallel to Western Side of existing Digha-Sonepur Rail-Cum Road Bridge) and its approaches on both sides in the districts of Patna and Saran (NH-139W) in Bihar on EPC mode," it said.

Digha (situated at Patna and South Bank of Ganga River) and Sonepur (North Bank of Ganga River in Saran District) are presently connected by a rail cum road bridge for the movement of light vehicles only.

Therefore, the statement said, the present road cannot be used for the transport of goods and commodities, which is a major economic blockade.

The constraint will be removed by providing the bridge between Digha and Sonepur, and goods and commodities



It can be said that liver is the security guard of our body. Health problems related to liver are serious in our country and the huge number of diseases caused by them is a cause for worry

DROUPADI MURMU | PRESIDENT OF INDIA

AYODHYA RAILWAY JUNCTION RENAMED AS AYODHYA DHAM

Ayodhya railway junction in Uttar Pradesh has been renamed as Ayodhya Dham junction, local MP Lallu Singh said Wednesday. The announcement came days before the inauguration of the redevelopment railway station by Prime Minister Narendra Modi



Rahul's 'Bharat Nyay Yatra' from Jan 14

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Dec 27: The Congress Wednesday announced it will hold 'Bharat Nyay Yatra' led by Rahul Gandhi from Manipur to Mumbai, passing through 14 states and 85 districts from east to west of India in 67 days, beginning January 14, an exercise seen as party's attempt to rally support ahead of the crucial 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The Nyay Yatra, which will cover around 6,200 km - mostly on buses with stretches of walking - and culminate March 20, comes nearly a year after former Congress president Rahul Gandhi completed Bharat Jodo Yatra on foot from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, traversing over 4,000 km in 136 days.

While Gandhi raised the issues of "economic disparities, polarisation and dictatorship" during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Nyay Yatra will focus on social, economic and political justice for the people of the country, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said at a press conference.

The BJP hit out at the Congress, saying the party under whose rule various injustices were inflicted on the people, including the 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims, is talking about 'nyay' and "mere sloganeering" will not "fool" people. The Nyay Yatra will be flagged off by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge from Imphal January 14 and will pass through Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, Ramesh said.

The march is being seen as politically significant in the wake of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which are likely to be held in April-May. The announcement of the polls may coincide with the last leg of the Yatra.



politically significant in the wake of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, which are likely to be held in April-May. The announcement of the polls may coincide with the last leg of the Yatra.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra, which started September 7, 2022 and ended in January 2023, was credited by the Congress for its electoral gains in assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, claiming it had enthused its ranks and file and revitalised the party's connect with the masses.

He also said the Congress will hold a mega rally in Nagpur December 28 on the occasion of the party's foundation day. The rally, named 'Hain Tayyar Hum' (we are ready), will sound the bugle for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections for the Congress.

Congress general secretary (Organisation) K C Venugopal said interactions will be held with women, youths and marginalised communities during the Nyay Yatra.



faction) are to attain freedom for Jammu and Kashmir from India, merge it with Pakistan, and establish Islamic rule.

The organisation's members have been involved in secessionist activities, raising funds through various sources, including Pakistan and its proxy organisations, to support terrorist activities and sustain stone-pelting on security forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

The home ministry emphasised that the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) and its members show disrespect towards the constitutional authority and setup of the country.

Their unlawful activities undermine the integrity, sover-

Rajnath Singh meets kin of 3 slain civilians

Rajouri/Jammu: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Wednesday assured justice to the families of three civilians who were found dead last week after being allegedly picked up by the Army following an ambush on two of Army vehicles in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district. Singh, accompanied by Army chief General Manoj Pande and Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, reached Rajouri district this afternoon, where he met the families of the deceased and also visited the Government Medical College (GMC) to enquire about the health of four other "torture" victims.

eighty, security, and communal harmony of India.

Additionally, there have been indications of the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) having linkages with banned terrorist organisations. The outfit and its members have been supporting terrorist activities with the intent to create terror in the country, thereby endangering its security and public order. Their anti-national activities demonstrate disregard and disrespect for the constitutional authority and sovereignty of India, the ministry said.

The Central government believes that immediate action is necessary against the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) to curb its unlawful activities, which pose a threat to the territorial integrity, security, and sovereignty of the country. The outfit is likely to continue advocating the secession of Jammu and Kashmir

from India, promoting false narratives, and inciting anti-national sentiments among the people of the region, which could disrupt public safety.

Therefore, exercising the powers conferred by the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, the Central government has declared the Muslim League Jammu Kashmir (Masarat Alam faction) as an unlawful association with immediate effect, the ministry said.

The ban will remain in effect for a period of five years from the date of its publication in the official gazette, unless otherwise ordered.

Bhat has been in jail since 2010 for his alleged involvement in violent protests in the Kashmir valley. His release in 2015 became the first impediment in PDP-BJP alliance when the then chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed got him released immediately after taking oath.

Delhi reports 1st case of Covid JN.1 variant

New Delhi: Delhi has reported its first case of COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1, officials said Wednesday. Delhi has more than 35 active cases with nine fresh infections being reported Wednesday, an official said, adding that a 28-year-old man, who had comorbidities, died, with Covid not being the primary reason.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER No. O-2005 RURAL WORKS DIVISION-I, GANJAM, BERHAMPUR Phone- 0680-2291405; E-Mail: eerw\_gm1@yahoo.co.in Government of Odisha e-Procurement Notice Bid Identification No. Online Tender // 09 // SERWDG-I // 2023-24 Letter No. 5126/RWDG-I/BAM/Date:26.12.2023

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, KEONJHAR SADAR NOTICE INVITING TENDER e-Procurement Online Bid ID No. 07-KEONJHAR SADAR (KJR/ 2023-2024) No. 6391/Dev dt. 22.12.2023

GOVT. OF ODISHA No. O-2004 OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER RURAL WORKS DIVISION No.-I, KEONJHAR "e" Procurement Notice for Building Works Identification No. Online NCB-13/2023-24

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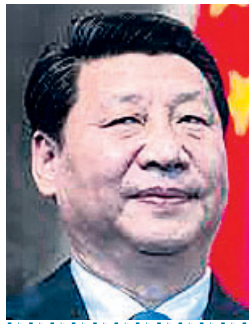
OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER-CUM-WILDLIFE WARDEN, KORAPUT FOREST DIVISION, KORAPUT କୋରାପୁଟ ବନଖଣ୍ଡ ଅଧିକାରୀ ଓ ବନସ୍ତ୍ରୀଣୀ ତତ୍ତ୍ୱାବଧାନକର କାର୍ଯ୍ୟାଳୟ ଭୁବନେଶ୍ୱର ନ. 06852-251270, ଫାକ୍ସ ନଂ: 06852-25270, ଇ-ମେଲ୍ ID-dfo.koraput@odisha.gov.in & ଅଭିଯୋଗ ବକ୍ଷ (SMS) ନଂ. 9437011270 Memo No. 6093/1F-Accts-/2023 Date: 26.12.2023

GOVT. OF ODISHA No. A-1090 OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, BALASORE IRRIGATION DIVISION, BALASORE Phone No. 06782-296500, email id-eebid1234@gmail.com

Tender Call Notice No.04 of 2023-24 The Superintending Engineer, Balasore Irrigation Division, Balasore on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate Tender for Restoration/ Repair/ Shifting of Electric Poles works detailed in the table of eligible Class of Contractors registered with the State Government and Contractors of equivalent grade/Class registered with the Central Government / Registered as HT under Electrical License Board of Odisha/registered firms / MSME/ UDYAM/ Railways for execution of Civil, Electrical, and Mechanical works on production of definite proof from the appropriate authority by drawing agreement in P1 Contract forms of Govt. of Odisha.



international



The motherland must be reunified, and inevitably will be reunified. Resolutely prevent anyone from splitting Taiwan from China in any way  
XI JINPING | PRESIDENT, CHINA

SWEDEN EDGES CLOSER TO NATO

The Turkish parliament's foreign affairs commission approved Sweden's NATO membership bid in a key step towards enlarging the Western bloc after 19 months of delays in which Ankara demanded security-related concessions from Stockholm



of the day quote

Iran in recent weeks has increased its production of highly enriched uranium, reversing a previous output reduction from mid-2023

RAFAEL MARIANO GROSSI | DIRECTOR GENERAL, IAEA

The goal is (to) start on the road to rebuilding our country, return freedom and autonomy to individuals and start to transform the enormous amount of regulations that have blocked, stalled and stopped economic growth

JAVIER MILEI | NEW PRESIDENT, ARGENTINA

The situation has been created in such a way to allow Nepal to forge partnerships with India, Bangladesh, and China in the area of power trade, the government will now shift its attention to the game changer mega projects

PUSHPAKAMAL DAHAL PRACHANDA | PM, NEPAL

SHORT TAKES

Schaeuble no more

Berlin: Wolfgang Schaeuble, who helped negotiate German reunification in 1990 and as finance minister was a central figure in the austerity-heavy effort to drag Europe out of its debt crisis more than two decades later, has died. He was 81. Schaeuble died at home Tuesday evening, his family told German news agency dpa Wednesday. Schaeuble became Chancellor Angela Merkel's finance minister in October 2009, just before revelations about Greece's ballooning budget deficit set off the crisis that engulfed the continent and threatened to destabilize world's financial order.

100 Nepalis missing

Kathmandu: Nepal's Foreign Minister NP Saud Tuesday said that around 100 Nepalis who joined the Russian Army have been reported missing. Out of several Nepalis who have joined the Russian army, seven individuals have lost their lives, according to Foreign Ministry sources here. "Apart from that, complaints have been filed into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) that around 100 people are missing and injured," Foreign Minister Saud said Tuesday. It is estimated that around 200 Nepali youths, who went to Russia on foreign employment visas, study visas and visit visas have joined the Russian army, the Foreign Minister said talking to the National News Agency of Nepal.

Qureshi re-arrested

Lahore: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's vice chairman and a close aide of former prime minister Imran Khan, Shah Mahmood Qureshi was on Wednesday manhandled by police as they re-arrested him outside a jail in Rawalpindi, a step termed "illegal" by him and his party. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) released a video on X where Qureshi, who was granted bail in the cipher case by the Supreme Court last week, is seen being pushed and shoved by policemen after he was picked up right at the gate of the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi and packed off into an armoured police vehicle. The footage of the incident also aired on multiple television and social media channels showed the 67-year-old former foreign minister, clad in a cardigan and a shalwar kameez, loudly protesting the "illegality" of the police's actions, being shoved into an armoured police vehicle by officials.

ISRAEL-GAZA CONFLICT

War spillover looms

AMID ISRAEL'S DETERMINATION TO DESTROY HAMAS IN THE 11-WEEK-OLD WAR, THE CONFLICT HAS REVERBERATED THROUGHOUT THE REGION, WITH ARMED GROUPS BACKED BY ITS ARCH-FOE IRAN ESCALATING ACTIVITY

AGENCIES

Cairo, Dec 27: Israel's war on Hamas will last months, Israel's military chief said, as a string of incidents outside the Gaza Strip highlighted the risk of the conflict spreading.

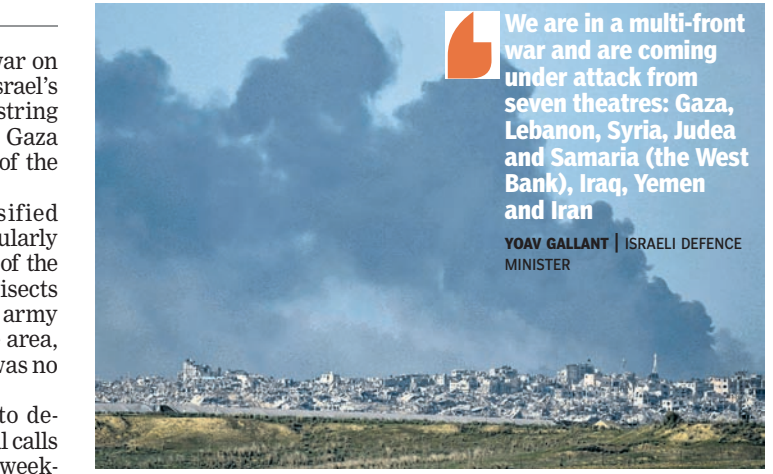
Israeli actions intensified around Christmas, particularly in a central area just south of the seasonal waterway that bisects the Gaza Strip. The Israeli army told civilians to leave the area, though many said there was no safe place left to go.

Israel is determined to destroy Hamas despite global calls for a ceasefire in the 11-week-old war.

There are growing signs that the conflict is starting to spread.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis militia claimed responsibility for a missile attack Tuesday on a container ship in the Red Sea and for an attempt to attack Israel with drones.

The Houthis have been attacking ships they say have links to Israel in the entrance to the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The attacks are a response to Israel's assault on Gaza, the militia says. US military forces shot down



We are in a multi-front war and are coming under attack from seven theatres: Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Iraq, Yemen and Iran  
YOAV GALLANT | ISRAELI DEFENCE MINISTER

more than a dozen attack drones and several missiles fired by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels at shipping in the Red Sea, the Pentagon said, reporting no damage or injuries.

An Israeli airstrike killed a senior leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards in Syria Monday.

And on the Lebanon border Tuesday, Israel said Hezbollah fired anti-tank missiles at a church, wounding nine Israeli soldiers and a civilian, after which it fired rockets from near a mosque, drawing retaliatory

airstrikes.

In India, meanwhile, there was an explosion near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi. Authorities said no staffs were hurt.

"We are in a multi-front war and are coming under attack from seven theatres: Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Iraq, Yemen and Iran," Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant told lawmakers Tuesday, listing six places where Iran-backed militants are active, as well as Iran itself.

"We have already responded and taken action in six of these theatres," he said, without specifying the one that had yet to see Israeli action.

NO END TO ISRAELI AGGRESSION

Israel launched heavy strikes across central and southern Gaza overnight and into Wednesday after broadening its offensive against Hamas to more areas where the military had told Palestinians to seek shelter earlier in the war.

Residents reported heavy bombing in the built-up Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza, in the southern city of Khan Younis and in the southern town of Rafah, areas where tens of thousands have sought refuge as much of northern Gaza was pounded to rubble.

"It was a night of hell. We haven't seen such bombing since the start of the war," said Rami Abu Mosab, speaking from the Bureij camp, where he has been sheltering since fleeing his home in northern Gaza.

He said warplanes flew overhead and gunfire and explosions echoed from the eastern edge of the camp — which, like others in Gaza, houses refugees from the 1948 war surrounding Israel's

DEATH, DISPLACEMENT, STARVATION

Its offensive is already one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history. More than 20,900 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children, have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza. The count doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants.

Some 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians have fled their homes, crowding into smaller and smaller areas in recent weeks as the ground offensive has expanded. For many Palestinians, the exodus has echoes of the mass displacement in 1948 that they refer to as the Nakba, or catastrophe.

UN officials say a quarter of the territory's population is starving under Israel's siege, which allows in a trickle of food, water, fuel, medicine and other supplies. Last week, the UN Security Council called for immediately speeding up aid deliveries, but there has been little sign of change.

Russia to make arms under 'Make in India'

In a major defence boost, Russia & India closer to joint military equipment production

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Moscow, Dec 27: Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday said that Moscow is ready to launch the production of modern weapons under the 'Make in India' initiative.

Lavrov said this while addressing a news conference after holding talks with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar here. Jaishankar is on a five-day visit to Russia.

He said they discussed the outlook for military-technical cooperation, including joint production of modern weapons, between Russia and India, the state-run news agency TASS reported. "There is concrete progress on this track," Lavrov said.

The diplomat said Russia understands and is ready to support New Delhi's initiative, "producing military-purpose goods as part of the Make in India programme". "We are ready to cooperate on this issue," he said.

Russia has been the major supplier of defence equipment to India. However, after India and the US stepped up their bilateral ties, New Delhi has diversified its import of military equipment to include many American defence items.

Lavrov also said that the North-South transport corridor project will be implemented "in the near time".



Russia, India and Iran signed an intergovernmental agreement on the creation of the North-South multimodal transport corridor in 2000. The number of participants expanded to 14 later.

The project goal is to bring transit freight traffic from India, Iran and Persian Gulf countries via the Russian territory to Europe. The project brings together several different transport systems of individual countries at present.

Lavrov said the project "caused great enthusiasm among countries, on which its implementation depends, and it will be definitely realised in the near time".

The foreign minister said Russia and India have agreed on the "whole range of steps making possible for us to

broaden cooperation, particularly in the context of the start of the North-South international transport corridor being prepared, creation of the Chennai-Vladivostok route and cooperation on Northern Sea Route development — this is a very promising line".

In his opening remarks before the bilateral talks with Lavrov, Jaishankar said it was always good to be in Moscow. "I agree with you that our relationship has been very strong, very steady, and I think we have lived up to the responsibilities of a special and privileged strategic partnership," he said.

Jaishankar said that during his meeting with Lavrov, "we will focus on bilateral cooperation in different spheres, adjusting it to changing circumstances and demands".

Our relations have been very strong, very steady. And I think we have lived up to a special and privileged strategic partnership  
S JAISHANKAR | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

"We will discuss the international strategic situation, conflicts and tensions where they are. Also, focus on development challenges that the Global South faces. And of course, the state of multilateralism and the building of a multi-polar world order," he said.

NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

In a major boost to their time-tested partnership, India and Russia Tuesday signed some "very important" agreements related to the construction of the future power-generating units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant.

The Kudankulam nuclear power plant, India's largest, is being built in Tamil Nadu with the technical assistance of Russia. The construction began in March 2002. Since February 2016, the first power unit of the Kudankulam NPP has been steadily operating at its design capacity of 1,000 MW. The plant is expected to start operating at full capacity in 2027, according to Russian state media.

TIDBITS

6-year-old boy put on wrong flight

FORT MYERS: A 6-year-old boy who left on a flight for the Christmas holiday to visit his grandmother in southwest Florida instead was put on the wrong plane and ended up 160 miles away in Orlando, Florida. When the grandmother, Maria Ramos, showed up Thursday at Southwest Florida International Airport in Fort Myers to greet her grandson who was flying for the first time from Philadelphia, she was told he wasn't on the Spirit Airlines flight. "I ran inside the plane to the flight attendant and I asked her, Where's my grandson? He was handed over to you at Philadelphia?" She said, No, I had no kids with me," Ramos told WINK News. She then got a call from her grandson from the airport in Orlando, telling her that he had landed. In a statement to WINK News, Spirit Airlines said the boy was under the care and supervision of an airlines employee the entire time, even though he was incorrectly boarded on a flight to Orlando. Once the mistake was discovered, the airlines let the family know, the statement said. "We take the safety and responsibility of transporting all of our Guests seriously and are conducting an internal investigation," the statement said. "We apologize to the family for this experience."



S Korea childbirths hit lowest-ever tally

SEOUL: The number of babies born in South Korea fell to the lowest point for any October to date, data showed Wednesday. A total of 18,904 babies were born in October, down 8.4 per cent from a year earlier, according to the data from Statistics Korea. The October tally marks the lowest number for any October since the agency began to compile related data in 1981, Yonhap news agency reported. In the first 10 months of the year, the number of newborns stood at 196,041, down 8.1 per cent from a year earlier, marking the smallest number on record during the cited period. South Korea reported the first natural fall in its population in 2019, and the trend of deaths surpassing births has continued for 48 consecutive months. The country has suffered a chronic decline in childbirths as many young people opt to postpone or give up on getting married or having babies in line with changing social norms and lifestyles, as well as in the face of high home prices, a tough job market and an economic slowdown. The number of deaths grew 3.4 per cent on-year to 30,793 in October, and the country, accordingly, suffered a natural decline in population by 11,889. The number of marriages, meanwhile, rose one per cent on-year to 15,986 cases in October, and divorces also increased six per cent on-year to 7,916.



Whisky, coal mining 'shack': Taiwan poll not only about China

THE CANDIDATES ARE EXCHANGING BLOWS OVER EVERYTHING FROM PROPERTY DISPUTES TO WHETHER DRINKING WHISKY IS OUT OF TOUCH, IN A RAUCOUS AND FREEWHEELING DISPLAY OF THE ISLAND'S DEMOCRACY

REUTERS

Taipei, Dec 27: As Taiwan's election approaches next month, it is not only fraught ties with China competing for electors' attention.

Taiwan's January 13 presidential and parliamentary election will define how the Chinese-claimed island deals with Beijing and the subject is indeed a major bone of contention.

But it is far from the sole issue debated at rallies, press conferences and on television talk shows where the uncensored exchanges are a major contrast to China, which says it is a socialist democracy but has been ruled only by the Communist Party since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949.

One subject taking much limelight in Taiwan is whether the childhood home of Lai Ching-te from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and currently frontrunner to be next president according to most polls, was illegally expanded by his family in an old coal mining area north of Taipei.

Lai has denied anything untoward took place. But he has pledged to donate the tidy-looking house, which using Chinese-language wordplay on his name the opposition have called Lai's "rascally shack", so it can be turned into a miners' museum.

"I've seen that villagers in mining areas are worried the houses they've settled down in



would be considered illegally built and demolished. I'm very sorry about this. It is my responsibility to help everyone find a way to protect their housing rights," Lai said last week.

The property ownership of the other two presidential candidates, Hou Yu-ih from the main opposition party the Kuomintang (KMT) and Ko Wen-je from the small Taiwan People's Party

(TPP), have also garnered attention.

The DPP has criticised Ko for co-owning farmland illegally turned into a parking lot, and Hou of profiting from renting out a large number of apartments his wife owns.

Ko has promised to tear up the parking lot. Hou has denied wrongdoing, and his wife said Wednesday the apartments "from

beginning to end do not belong" to him, denouncing "political smears and suspicion".

Hou's running mate, the outspoken media personality Jaw Shaw-kong, said this week nobody was being forced to live in the apartments, many of which were rented to students. "If people think they are too expensive then boycott them," Jaw told reporters.

Illegally adding to buildings or putting farmland into other uses are not uncommon problems in Taiwan given the sometimes vague or unenforced regulations.

JOHNNIE WALKER AND SARSAPARILLA

Lai has a lead of around 5 per centage points in most polls, though some have shown Hou only one or two points behind.

One focus for all three parties has been how to appeal to the young, with an estimated 1 million new voters eligible to cast ballots at this election. Ko has honed in on bread-

and-butter issues like the high cost of housing, and young people have flocked to his rallies even if he has trailed in the polls.

But the TPP has been attacked as out of touch with ordinary people for Ko's choice of running mate, Cynthia Wu, whose family is a major shareholder of conglomerate the Shin Kong Group.

The TPP's opponents mocked Wu for comments at a vice presidential debate Friday where she said "When I was young, everyone loved to drink Johnnie Walker," referring to the popular Scotch whisky.

Wang Ting-yu, a senior DPP lawmaker, shot back on his Facebook page that when he was young, "we mostly drank plain water".

Wu downplayed the furore. "Sarsaparilla, beer, guava juice and Johnnie Walker is for us Chinese what should be on the table to drink. OK? So there's no need to make a fuss about it," she told reporters.



# Elgar outdoes Rahul as SA take command

# Eves look to better ODI record against Oz

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mumbai, Dec 27: Flying high after two consecutive Test wins, India Women will now shift focus to white-ball cricket as they take on seven-time World Champions Australia in a three-match ODI series, looking to resurrect their dismal record in the format, here Thursday.

India have been in top form winning their last three contests — two Tests and one T20I — after losing the first two T20Is to England and concede the three-match series in this long home season.

After crushing England by a record 347 runs in the one-off Test, India carried the momen-

tum to defeat Australia by eight wickets last week here at the Wankhede Stadium, which will also be the venue for the three-match ODI series.

Given their current form, India will eye more success in the fixtures lined up but the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side would know that it has a huge task cut out against Australia who have historically dominated them in 50-overs cricket.

India have only 10 wins and 40 losses to show from 50 ODIs against Australia overall, while at home, their record has been simply terrible.

With only four wins in 21 ODIs and 17 defeats at home, India

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have not beaten Australia in any of their last seven matches playing at home since February 2007.

In fact, the last time India and Australia played ODI cricket at the Wankhede Stadium, the home team suffered heavy defeats in March 2012, losing by 221 runs and five wickets in the last two ODIs of the three-match series. India had lost the opening ODI heavily at Ahmedabad by 30 runs and

were eventually whitewashed.

However, India have a new leadership pair of skipper Harmanpreet and coach Amol Majumdar and it will be a perfect opportunity to bolster their preparations for the ODI World Cup in 2025. These games will also bring a chance to improve a recent poor record in 50-overs cricket against this opponent.

India have lost each of the last seven ODIs — including a 0-3 whitewash at home in 2018 — against Australia to remain winless for about six years now, a trend that Kaur's side would want to change starting with the first ODI to be played here Thursday.

## ODISHA GEARS UP TO HOST ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS NAT'L'S

PNN & AGENCIES

Bhubaneswar, Dec 27: Odisha is all set to host the Junior and Senior Artistic Gymnastics National Championships at the Gymnastics Centre in the Kalinga Stadium here. The championship will see top gymnasts, including Dipa Karmakar who will compete after a gap of eight years, across the country.

The junior championship will take place December 28-30, while the senior event will be held January 2-4. A total of 750 participants, including 550 players, 120 support staff and 100 officials from across the country are expected to take part in what will be a grand showcase of gymnastics prowess.

Besides Dipa, the championship will feature the likes of Tokyo Olympian Pranati Nayak, Yogeshwar Singh, Rakesh Patra, Tapan Mohanty, Saif Tamboli, Gaurav Kumar among others.

Speaking ahead of the event, Odisha's Sports & Youth Services Secretary Vineel Krishna said, "We are absolutely delighted to host the event. It is an apt opportunity for our gymnasts to learn from the best."

## Juggernauts beat Khiladis



PNN & AGENCIES

Cuttack, Dec 27: Defending champions Odisha Juggernauts returned to winning ways in the Ultimate Kho Kho Season 2 with a 31-28 victory over Mumbai Khiladis, while Telugu Yoddhas defeated Rajasthan Warriors 38-28 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here, Wednesday. Juggernauts have now secured the top spot in the points table with eight points from three matches, while Yoddhas are second with six points.

Chasing first, Mumbai Khiladis made a balanced start to the match as they did not give

any dream run bonus points to the defending champions early on. However, they only managed to grab 14 points in the first turn as Odisha returned to the contest by claiming 14 points during the following turn.

Mumbai went into the second inning with a point advantage courtesy of a dream run bonus point in the second turn. They further won 12 points in the third turn and allowed Odisha to earn a dream run bonus point as well.

The last turn turned out to be in the favour of the defending champions as they attained 16 points with sublime attacking to register a remarkable victory.

## Aussies in complete control of second Test against Pakistan

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Melbourne (Australia), Dec 27: Australia's pace-bowling captain Pat Cummins struck twice in four balls to crush Pakistan's comeback attempt on the second day of the second Test Wednesday.

Pakistan started strongly then collapsed to reach 194/6 at stumps in reply to Australia's first-innings total of 318 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. A total of 13 wickets fell in an eventful second day's play.

Cummins claimed 3/37 and off-spinner Nathan Lyon took 2/48 for Australia. Abdullah Shafique (62) and skipper Shan Masood (54) both scored half centuries, sharing a 90-run partnership for Pakistan's second wicket. Mohammad Rizwan was unbeaten on 29 at stumps. Pakistan trails by 124 runs with four first-innings wickets in hand.

Australia had resumed Wednesday on 187/3. The home side were bowled out for 318, losing seven wickets for 131 in an extended morning session. Marnus Labuschagne top-scored with a patient 63 and Mitchell Marsh crunched 41.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Centurion, Dec 27: Walking into cricketing sunset in another 11 days, Dean Elgar displayed his understated brilliance with a counter-offensive hundred that not only neutralised KL Rahul's superlative ton but also put South Africa in complete command on the second day of the opening Test against India here Wednesday.

Playing his 85th and penultimate Test, left-handed Elgar (140 batting, 211b, 23x4), not exactly known for his elegant stroke-play, stacked up his 14th Test hundred and also took South Africa to 256/5 at stumps to offset India's first innings total of 245. With debutant David Bedingham (56, 87b, 7x4, 2x6), Elgar added 131 runs for the fourth wicket as India now will have to play a catching game.

The conditions remained bowling friendly as clouds hovered over throughout the second day, but it was Mohammed Shami's absence and ineptitude of Shardul

Thakur (0/57) and inability of debutant Prasidh Krishna (1/61) that hurt India dearly as they neither found the right line nor the length on the day.

Jasprit Bumrah (2/48), in his comeback Test, gave his all and Mohammed Siraj (2/63) was 200 percent honest in his effort but two couldn't have done the job which required all four to sing from the same hymn sheet.

Ravichandran Ashwin (0/19) kept things tight but this isn't the pitch where one can expect him to run through the opposition.

Elgar nicely blended defence with a plethora of pulls and tucks off his legs and ferocious cuts. He left a few deliveries during the first 30 minutes and missed a few before Shardul and Prasidh played into his hands. By the time, Siraj castled Bedingham and Prasidh got his first Test victim in Kyle Verreynne, India had lost the initiative.

In the morning, Rahul, starting the day unbeaten on 70, com-

pleted his eighth Test ton with a maximum and the innings could well be considered on par with some of the best knocks played by Indians in SENA countries if the degree of difficulty is taken into account.

No Test batter from any other country has been able to score two Test hundreds at this venue and Rahul now holds that unique record.

### An Odisha link

Satbir Singh Riari, a member of the Odisha Cricket Association (OCA), has been appointed as the manager of Team India for the two-match Test Series in South Africa, OCA said in a media release, Wednesday.

### BRIEF SCORES

India 245 (KL Rahul 101; Nandre Burger 3/50); South Africa 256/5 (Dean Elgar 140 batting, David Bedingham 56; Jasprit Bumrah 2/48, Mohammed Siraj 2/63). Match to continue.



# NEXA

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