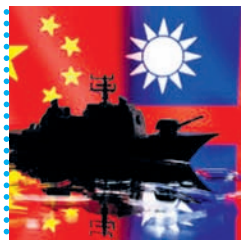




Ananya on equality

Actress Ananya Panday shares her displeasure on pay disparity between male and female actors

LEISURE | P2



Taiwan on high alert

Taiwan's defence ministry says China has nearly doubled the number of its warships operating around the island

INTERNATIONAL | P10



FDI milestone

Foreign direct investment inflows into India have crossed the \$1 trillion milestone in the April 2000-Sept 2024 period

BUSINESS | P11



Vital win for Gukesh

GM D Gukesh wins the 11th game against Ding Liren of China to take a crucial lead in the World Chess Championship

SPORTS | P12

SHORT TAKES

First flower shower, then teargas shelling

**Shambhu (Punjab):** Agitating farmers suspended their foot march to Delhi Sunday after some of them sustained injuries in teargas shelling by Haryana security personnel who thwarted yet another attempt by the protesters to cross the Punjab-Haryana border. As a group of 101 farmers resumed the foot march Sunday afternoon, they were halted by a multilayered barricade set up by Haryana security personnel who surprised the protesters by offering them tea and biscuits and also showering them with flower petals. Farmer leaders said they will decide the next course of action Monday.

PS

DS Kutey sent on Central deputation

**Bhubaneswar:** Dharendra Sambhaji Kutey, a 1997-batch Odisha-cadre IPS officer, who was suspended by ECI for “unduly interfering in the conduct of the election” and reinstated later, has been appointed as Inspector General (IG) of the Border Security Force (BSF). The official notification regarding his appointment was issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs December 6, 2024. In an official letter addressed to the Chief Secretary, the Under Secretary to the Government of India conveyed the approval for Kutey’s new role.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



Ex-IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt acquitted

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Porbandar, Dec 8:** A court in Gujarat’s Porbandar has acquitted former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt in a 1997 custodial torture case, citing that the prosecution could not prove the case beyond reasonable doubt. Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Mukesh Pandya Saturday acquitted Bhatt, the then Superintendent of Police (SP) of Porbandar, in a case registered against him under IPC sections pertaining to causing grievous hurt to obtain confession and other provisions by giving him the benefit of the doubt due to lack of evidence.

Bhatt was earlier sentenced to life imprisonment in a 1990 custodial death case in Jamnagar and 20 years in jail in a 1996 case relating to planting drugs to frame a Rajasthan-based lawyer in Palanpur. He is currently lodged in the Rajkot Central Jail. The court held that the prosecution could not prove the case beyond reasonable doubt that the complainant was forced to confess to the crime and made to surrender by voluntarily causing pain using dangerous weapons and threats. Bhatt had hit the headlines when he filed an affidavit in the apex court alleging then CM Narendra Modi’s role in the 2002 Gujarat riots. A special investigation team debunked these allegations.

CELEBRATION AMID UNCERTAINTY AS SYRIAN REBELS FORCE PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD TO FLEE

Stunning end to Assads’ iron rule

AGENCIES

**Damascus, Dec 8:** Syrians poured into streets echoing with celebratory gunfire Sunday after a stunning rebel advance reached the capital, putting an end to the Assad family’s 50 years of iron rule but raising questions about the future of the country and the wider region. Joyful crowds gathered in central squares in Damascus, waving the Syrian revolutionary flag in scenes that recalled the early days of the Arab Spring uprising, before a brutal crackdown and the rise of an insurgency plunged the country into a nearly 14-year civil war.

Others gleefully ransacked the presidential palace and the Assad family residence after President Bashar al-Assad and other top officials vanished, their whereabouts unknown. Russia, a close ally, said Assad left the country after negotiations with rebel groups and had given instructions to transfer power peacefully. Assad and family are in Moscow and given asylum, Russian state news agencies reported.

Abu Mohammed al-Golani, a former al-Qaida commander who cut ties with the group years ago and says he embraces pluralism and religious tolerance, leads the biggest rebel faction and is poised to chart the country’s future direction. In a seismic moment for the Middle East, the Islamist rebels also dealt a major blow to the influence of Russia and Iran in Syria in the heart of the region

- allies who had propped up Assad during critical periods in the war but were distracted by other crises recently.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meanwhile said Israeli troops had seized a buffer zone in the Golan Heights dating back to 1974, after Syrian troops abandoned their positions.

The rebels now face the daunting task of healing bitter divides in a country ravaged by war and still split among different armed factions.

Syrian state television aired a video statement early Sunday by a group of rebels saying that Assad had been overthrown and all prisoners had been set free. They called on people to preserve the institutions of “the free Syrian state.” The rebels later announced a curfew in Damascus from 4pm to 5am.

The rebels said they freed people held at the notorious Saydnaya prison, where rights groups say thousands were tortured and killed. A video circulating online purported to show rebels breaking open cell doors and freeing dozens of female prisoners, many of whom appeared shocked and confused. At least one small child could be seen among them.

Rebel commander Anas Salkhadi, who appeared on State TV later in the day, sought to reassure Syria’s religious and ethnic minorities, saying: “Syria is for everyone, no exceptions. Syria is for Druze, Sunnis, Alawites, and all sects.” “We will not deal with people the way the Assad family did,” he added.

More P10

**Nov 27** Syrian rebel groups launch attack on areas controlled by government forces, seize territory in western Aleppo

**Nov 29** Insurgents breach Aleppo and clash with government forces for the first time since 2016, take the city the next day

**Dec 5** The Syrian army withdraws from the central city of Hama after insurgents break through its defences

**Dec 6** Insurgents enter the central towns of Rastan and Talbise, closing in on Syria’s third largest city of Homs

**Dec 7** Opposition forces reach the outskirts of capital Damascus, as government forces withdraw from much of Homs

**Dec 8** Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad falls after the rebels’ stunning advance across the country



An opposition fighter steps on a broken bust of the late Syrian President Hafez Assad, Sunday

CM launches ₹800 input aid for paddy farmers

PNN & AGENCIES

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Sunday launched the distribution of additional input assistance of ₹800 over and above the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of ₹2,300 per quintal of paddy to the farmers of the state.

The state government paid additional input assistance of ₹66 crore to more than 16,000 farmers through DBT Sunday. Addressing a gathering at Sohela in Bargarh district, Majhi said, “Today will be a historic day for Odisha. For farmers, this will be written in golden letters as the government has reached out to them to provide an accurate price for their paddy.”

To give respect to the farm-



ers, the government has started providing additional input assistance of ₹800 over and above the MSP of ₹2,300 per quintal of paddy to the farmers of the state, he said.

“I am very happy with launching this initiative for the farmers,” he said.

The government has selected Sohela to launch the distribution of the additional input sub-

sidy because the area is treated as a hub of farmers, he said.

Former chief minister Naveen Patnaik had given a false promise to provide a ₹100 bonus to the farmers in 2016, Majhi alleged.

“The previous government was exploiting the farmers through middlemen. It had promised to provide a bonus of ₹100 to the paddy farmers but

never implemented it. To give a befitting reply to the false promise, I came here today to distribute the input assistance,” he added.

In its election manifesto, the BJP had promised to procure paddy from farmers at a price of ₹3,100 per quintal. Today, the promise was fulfilled, the Chief Minister said.

Majhi said that within one hour of taking oath, he called the first Cabinet meeting and took important decisions including distribution of ₹800 per quintal input assistance to paddy farmers.

What the previous government failed to do in its 24 years of rule, the BJP government implemented it within six months, he claimed.

CBI nabs PSU official, two more in ₹10L bribery case

PNN & AGENCIES

**New Delhi/Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** The CBI has arrested a senior official of Bridge and Roof Company (India) Limited, a Central PSU, in connection with a bribery case after ₹10 lakh was seized from a luxury car in which he was travelling in Bhubaneswar, officials said Sunday.

Besides Chanchal Mukherjee, Group General Manager (GGM) of Bridge and Roof Company, two private persons – Santosh Moharana, Director of Penta A Studio Private Limited and middleman Debadutta Mohapatra – were also arrested for allegedly bribing Mukherjee, they said.

The Central probe agency had conducted a trap operation after

registering a case against four persons including the three arrested accused. According to the CBI, the accused were allegedly indulging in corrupt and illegal activities in the matter of awarding work orders of the PSU and clearing bills in lieu of undue advantage in the form of bribe.

It was alleged that accused Moharana met the group general manager (Mukherjee) at his Bhubaneswar office December 6 during which the GGM demanded ₹10 lakh and promised to adjust the said amount in future billings, a CBI spokesperson said.

After doing preliminary verification, the CBI laid a trap Saturday where Mukherjee was caught taking ₹10 lakh bribe in a Mercedes Maybach car.

French castle brings royal pains for American buyers

AGENCIES

**Bordeaux (France), Dec 8:** Julia Leach’s childhood dreams of living in a fairy-tale château never faded. Growing up in San Diego, she obsessed over castles, reading British novels about inheritance plots, and spent a gap year in France. As an adult, Leach worked in New York City, but the pressure of 14-hour film set days pushed her to search for a new path. That’s when a casual Google search—“Who lives in castles in France?”—led her to the world of château owners, including Stephanie Jarvis, who made a living renovating a 16th-century estate in the Loire Valley.

Inspired, Leach and her partner, Caroline Ibarra, decided to make their dream a reality. Along with Julia’s parents and sister, they pooled their resources to buy a château. The family zeroed in on the Château de Puy Vidal in Charente, France—an imposing 14,000-square-foot structure dating back to 1267, with 88 windows and three towers. The \$2.6 million price seemed affordable compared to San Diego real estate, and they envisioned turning it into a creative retreat.

In early 2022, after selling their La Jolla home, the family relocated to France. Their project, Lady of the Château, would host workshops and retreats for



creative professionals. Julia and Caroline’s “talent passports,” which granted them residency, were approved quickly, and the family moved in, eager to embrace the challenge.

But the château quickly proved to be more work than they expected. The property,

though grand, was in disrepair—severe storms, plumbing failures, and even a small earthquake caused havoc. The couple learned the hard way that maintaining a centuries-old estate is no small feat. Their \$1 million renovation budget ballooned to \$1.5 million, and now, to achieve

their vision, they anticipate it could reach \$3 million.

Unexpected complications added to their stress. Much of the château is a historic monument, requiring approval for renovations from the French government. To complicate things further, the family discovered that their guests weren’t just interested in the property but in the family’s personal lives, creating an intense, sometimes overwhelming dynamic. In response, they shifted their focus from a traditional B&B model to more immersive, small-scale retreats.

Despite the challenges, the family is determined to make it work. They’re still adjusting

to life in a 750-year-old home, navigating language barriers, cultural differences, and an unexpectedly tight living situation. After two years, their business has yet to turn a profit, and the pressure is mounting as the four-year visas they hold near their expiration.

Julia and Caroline remain optimistic, though. “I think what we’re doing is, in a lot of ways, very American,” Caroline reflects. “We’re setting up a new world.” As the family adapts to life in their château, they continue to host guests, hoping their retreats will eventually succeed—and provide a sense of home, despite the monumental effort it takes to create it.



# leisure

## FORTUNE FORECAST

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

**ARIES**  
If you are about to begin some important work, today is not the day, says Ganesha. But keep yourself motivated, despite minor problems. Do something you've never done before. Think out-of-the-box: grow your own mint, make some chocolates.

**TAURUS**  
You are hard working by nature but get highly frustrated when things do not end the way you had imagined, feels Ganesha. This may lead to anger against the system or the order in which things work. You will vent your frustration on your routine by longing for an alternate life-style, wishing and hoping for more relaxation and perhaps a spontaneous vacation.

**GEMINI**  
You are likely to take your time and read a situation carefully before you take any important decisions, predicts Ganesha. In the afternoon, you may go on a pleasure trip to recharge your batteries.

**CANCER**  
Both your physical and mental health will remain stable today, predicts Ganesha. In the afternoon, you may meet one of your clients for lunch. It is an auspicious day to propose and finalise wedding dates, hopes Ganesha.

**LEO**  
Necessity is the mother of invention, and today, you will draw from your large pool of scientific and technological knowledge to achieve your goals at work. Family matters will keep you occupied in the afternoon, but do not let that come in the way of your evening activities that get your blood flowing through the veins, such as dance or music lessons. Also, Ganesha reminds you to make an effort to touch base with your foreign contacts.

**VIRGO**  
The tempest of anger runs wild. You are most likely to blow hotter than Mount Vesuvius ever did, predicts Ganesha. In the afternoon, you may chalk out a big business plan. Peers will stand by your side at the workplace. But in the evening, try spending your time meditating and cooling those nerves, advises Ganesha.

**LIBRA**  
Ganesha says the first blush of love will make your mind blissful today. You will be able to gain closeness with your beloved today. The afternoon will see you try to take part in religious matters. Ganesha says that today will be a good day to listen to religious discourses and make your mind and heart follow God.

**SCORPIO**  
Power packed day in store for you, according to Ganesha. Your flamboyant attitude at work would leave your team mates awestruck. Your energy level is at an all-time high, which would find its way to the dance floor in the evening. Groove to some foot-tapping music and dance as if there's no tomorrow.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
A delightfully emotional experience would stir up your soul today. Later perhaps, success will touch your feet either through the electronic media or through a brilliant idea. Love will steam and bubble as you expect to be asked out by your prospective life mate, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
You will do a commendable job solving complicated problems at work, says Ganesha. In keeping with the circumstances, you will be spontaneous in coming up with solutions to pressing issues; and so accurate you may be in your assumptions about a likely situation that in future, your peers and subordinates will blindly accept whatever proposal you table.

**AQUARIUS**  
Explore the world today, as luck is standing by your side and everything you touch will turn into gold, be it in your business or profession, foresees Ganesha. You are trying too hard to succeed, and you may get tempted to compromise on your moral values. Don't give undue importance to success, life is not all about strengthening bank balance, advises Ganesha.

**PISCES**  
You will find yourself in a good mood today. Your co-workers will also enjoy being around you. You will be able to influence people for the positive with your respectful demeanor and your sense of humor. You could find yourself splurging on yourself at a spa or a beauty parlor, says Ganesha.



## IS BEN AFFLECK BACK WITH EX JENNIFER GARNER?

Ben Affleck and Jennifer Garner seem to be getting closer as they continue to spend time together this holiday season. The ex-flames and co-parents were spotted again, spending their Saturday morning together driving around Brentwood in California together.

## BARRY KEOGHAN DEACTIVATES INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT

Oscar-nominated actor Barry Keoghan famed for his role in *The Banshees of Inisherin* and *Saltburn* has deactivated his Instagram account after incessant trolling over his looks and character on social media, following his split from girlfriend, American singer Sabrina Carpenter.



**MUMBAI:** Actress Alia Bhatt, who was recently seen in the theatrical movie *Jigra*, ditched her swanky car, and took a quick ride as she sat in an autorickshaw.

The actress was recently spotted at the Versova jetty in Mumbai, as she got down from the boat and took an autorickshaw. She was seen wearing an oversized striped shirt and a pair of

## Alia ditches swanky drive for autorickshaw

wenge coloured pants. Of late, many celebrities are opting for jetty rides from Versova to shooting spots in the Madh Island area of Mumbai as it saves time compared to the road ride of almost 90 minutes. Other actors like the Kannada superstar Yash, and Kiara Advani were also seen taking the jetty in order to reach the shooting spots.

Recently, Alia kick started the month of December by installing a Christmas tree at her home. The actress took to the Stories of her Instagram and shared a video which showed the Christmas tree.

December is a special month for Alia and Ranbir as they also participate in the customary Christmas celebrations of the Kapoor family which takes place at Kunal Kapoor's house.

Last year, during the Kapoor family's Christmas celebrations, Ranbir and Alia had revealed the face of Raha for the first time to the media and the Internet.

IAN S

## Sonam on her best version

**Mumbai:** Actress and fashionista Sonam Kapoor currently in Dubai, shared glimpses of her family by the sea.

In the first picture, Sonam can be seen sitting with her husband, Anand Ahuja, on the seashore, enjoying the sunset view.

In the next few pictures, Sonam and her son Vayu can be seen playing by the sea.

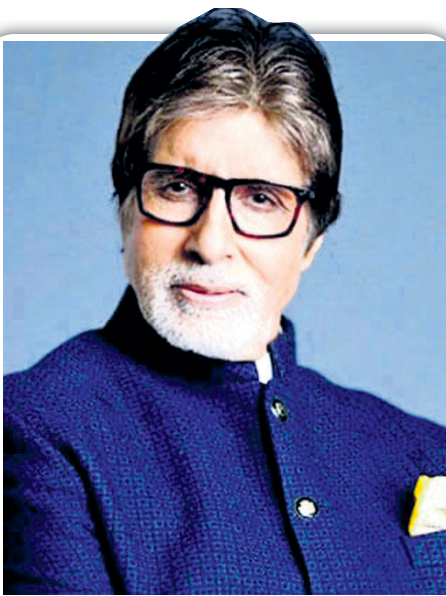
Along with the pictures, Sonam added a caption that reads: "A friend recently asked me, 'If I had to drive to meet the person I wanted to be in my wildest dreams, who would that be?' The answer was so clear: it's just me. The best version of me—a diamond in the rough that experiences and life keep polishing and refining, making me better every day. Everything I've ever wanted, everything I've dreamed of being, is already here. This picture says it all. It's

not about becoming someone else—it's about embracing who I am, completely, and trusting the journey to keep shaping me. @anandahuja, love you #everydayphenomenal is only with you by my side."

On the work front, Sonam will next be seen in

*Battle of Bittora*, produced by her father Anil Kapoor and sister Rhea Kapoor.

IAN S



## Big B shares cryptic post

**MUMBAI:** Veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan, who currently hosts the quiz based reality show *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, has slammed those who revel in the rumours of his son Abhishek Bachchan's separation from the latter's wife Aishwarya Rai.

Sunday, the senior actor took to his blog, and penned a long note, as he wrote in Hindi, "There is no shortage of fools and dim-witted people in this world; they try to hide their own misdeeds by writing about others".

He further mentioned, "Idiots and those with limited brain - never a dearth of such in this World ; they make and print their own imbecile fakes each day to hide their own personal, brainless, half witted deficiencies".

He also took to his X, and posted, "T 5216 - People, who find their own meaning in every word, hide the misfortune of their personal life".

The rumours of Abhishek and Aishwarya's separation started doing rounds since last year when it was reported in the media that Aishwarya has left the Bachchan family's house, and has been living separately.

However, at the time, Aishwarya attended the premier of the streaming movie *The Archies* which marked the debut of Big B's grandson Agastya Nanda. During the event, last year, Aishwarya was seen in good spirits with the Bachchan family.

IAN S

# ANANYA STANDS FOR EQUALITY

**MUMBAI:** Actress Ananya Panday, who wowed her fans with her impeccable performances in *CTRL* and *Call Me Bae*, recently shared her displeasure on pay disparity between male and female actors.

In an interview, the SOTY2 actress admitted that she never enquired about how much her male co-actors are paid, however she was shocked

by some of the amounts the male actors are paid.

The 26-year-old actress said that she strongly opposes these unfair treatments on the basis of gender, she said, "If a man is getting a better car than me just because he is a man, then it is wrong." She also highlighted the need to address these issues in the industry.

On the work front, Ananya is currently occupied with various upcoming projects, including *Call Me Bae Season 2*, as well as Dharma Productions'

*Chand Mera Dil*, a romantic drama from Dharma Productions, alongside Lakshya Lalwani. Additionally, Ananya has an untitled project with Akshay Kumar and R Madhavan.

AGENCIES



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

## SOLUTIONS

S	S	D	E	F	P
SCYTHE			SCREEN		
A	I	A	T	T	I
C	R	A	D	R	E
S	P	R	A	I	N
E	D	A	I		
G	A	B	B	O	B
C	R	O	I	A	
M	E	D	I	E	A
F	G	U	I	H	O
B	S	H	E	L	T
L	T	E	Y	T	K

CROSSWORD

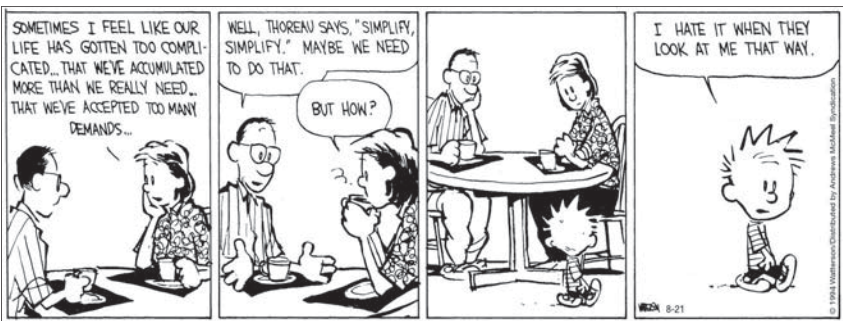
SUDOKU

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

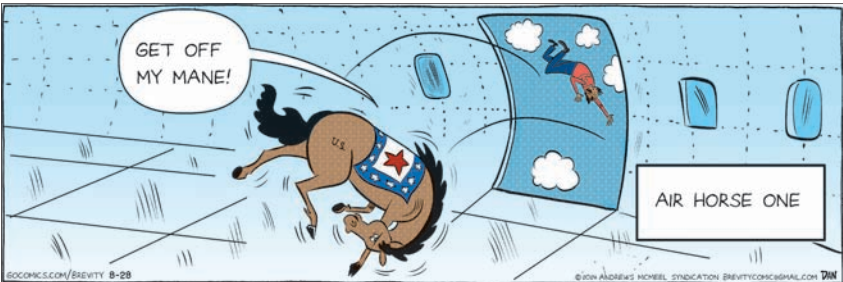
## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBS

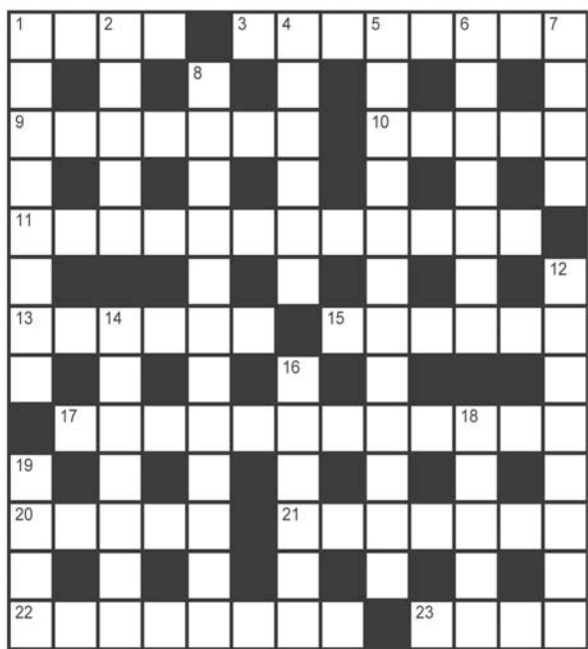


## BREVITY



## FUN post

## CROSSWORD



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### Across

- Pesky insect
- Honeycomb sites
- Ointment
- After belly or square
- Saskatoon locale
- Spanish capital
- Tourist's take-along
- Apathetic
- Choppers

- Experience, as surgery
- Bowling game
- Up to the task

### Down

- Macabre
- East Indian pheasant
- Tempt
- Ultrior motive (6,6)

- Like some wines and autos
- Flower holder
- Affiliation
- Collection of clothing
- Medieval castle part
- Come back
- Pulsate
- Stupefy

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW







## Fifth PHW explores monastic traditions



POST NEWS NETWORK

**Puri, Dec 8:** Over 20 heritage enthusiasts gathered Sunday for the fifth edition of the Puri Heritage Walks (PHW), delving into the rich monastic traditions of the pilgrim city. Titled ‘Mahodadhi Monastic Trail: Exploration of Sites Related to the Legacy of Shankaracharya Mutt and Purana Nahar of Puri Gajapati’, the walk highlighted the centuries-old ‘mutt’ culture integral to Puri’s religious and cultural identity.

The event offered a deep exploration of monastic institutions that have shaped the spiritual and socio-cultural landscape of Puri for over 1,300 years. Beginning at Radha-Kanta Matha (Gambhira) and concluding at Gopala Teertha Matha, participants explored mutts historically tied to the Jagannath Temple and its rituals. These institutions, revered for their connection to Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Goddess Subhadra, are pivotal

in Puri’s religious festivities. Historians and researchers, including Sarangadhara Rayguru, Devi Prasanna Nanda, and heritage expert Sidharth Acharya, guided the group through narratives of the 10th-12th century monastic traditions. “Mutts have been the cornerstone of Puri’s spiritual ecosystem, attracting pilgrims from across India, particularly during Rath Yatra festivals,” said Acharya. The walk covered landmarks such as Jeeyaar Swami Mutt, Shiva Teertha Mutt, Astha-shambhu Temple, and Shyama Kali Temple, providing insights into their roles in preserving Puri’s heritage. PHW continues its mission to revive ancient narratives, underscoring the enduring influence of Puri’s monastic traditions on its cultural and spiritual identity.



**SHOWING CREATIVITY:** Students take part in painting and poster-making competition, organised by Plant Lovers Association and Regional Plant Resource Centre at IG Park in Bhubaneswar, Sunday

PGC: BIRASH NAYAK

WEATHER

	BBSR	CTC
Max Temp	27.2°	25.0°
Min Temp	21.6°	19.5°
Humidity	81%	83%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil

FORECAST

Mainly clear sky

### CLASSIFIED

### AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an Affidavit before Notary Public, Cuttack on 10.04.2024, I have changed my name from SUBRAT KESHRI NAYAK to Subrat Kumar Nayak. Henceforth I shall be known as SUBRAT KUMAR NAYAK for all purposes.

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Cuttack, Dt.12.11.2024. I Mrs. Pratima Naik, At-Kunarpala, PO-Abhimanpur, PS-Badambadi, Dist-Cuttack have changed my name from Gita Naik to Pratima Naik. Henceforth I shall be known as Pratima Naik for all purpose.

By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Notary, Jharsuguda, I CHANCHALA MAITRY, W/o- TIKESWAR SING GANDHARBA, R/o- At/P.O./P.S.- Hemgir, Dist.- Sundargarh, Odisha- 770013 declare that before marriage I was known as Doleshwari Maitry, D/o- Galaw Prasad Maitry. That both name is one and same person, that now onwards I shall be known as CHANCHALA MAITRY for all future purposes.

I Manmohan Mahapatra (69), S/o- Late Baranidhi Mahapatra, resident of G1/G2, Jail Street, A/P Lanjipalli, P/S B.N.Pur, Berhampur, Ganjam, Odisha declared by this affidavit No.-1234 dt.26.10.24 that now on words I shall be known as Manamohan Mahapatra for all future purposes.

## Fourth edition of Puri Beach Marathon held

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Puri / Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** The Bhubaneswar Cycling and Adventure Club (BCAC) hosted the 4th edition of its flagship event, the Puri Beach Marathon, Sunday. The unique marathon challenged participants to run on the sandy beaches of Puri, offering a rigorous test of endurance and strength. The event was inaugurated at Samuka Beach, near the seamount of the Mangala River, by Additional Director General of Police and President of BCAC Sanjeeb Panda, alongside BCAC secretary Ajay Kumar Nanda. The marathon attracted over 500 participants, including 80 women, from across India and internationally, with runners representing Ethiopia, Kenya, and the United Kingdom.

The marathon featured two main courses: the Half-Marathon, a 10.55-km return route from Samuka Beach to Bali Harachandi Beach and back, and a 7-km fun run that also started at Samuka Beach and turned around at Bali Harachandi Beach. Despite the demanding conditions, runners were cheered on by the lively crowd and supported by bands along the route. Water and aid stations were placed every 3.5 km, with volunteers stationed along the course to motivate and assist participants. The event boasted a cash prize pool of ₹2 lakh for winners and podium finishers. Participants also received a specially designed Finisher Medal, an event T-shirt, and digital certificates upon completion.



## Rly min receives 9-point demand from commuters

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Cuttack, Dec 8:** A delegation led by Purnachandra Dash, representing the Regular Train Commuters’ Association, Sunday met Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to submit a memorandum listing their nine-point demands. The meeting took place during the inauguration of the entrance gate to the East Coast and MP quarters. The association expressed gratitude to Vaishnaw for the notable progress achieved in Odisha’s railway development. They highlighted various concerns, includ-

ing the need to address passenger congestion in the Bhadrak-Dasapalla and Jaleswar-Puri MEMU trains by adding eight more coaches to each train. They proposed introducing two new passenger trains connecting Jajpur Road to Bhuban and Kamakshyanagar through the newly-constructed Anul-Sukinda Road rail line. Additionally, the association emphasised the importance of operating trains such as Bhadrak-Dasapalla and Bhubaneswar-Balasore MEMU punctually and eliminating the 30-minute idle time at Bairi station.

# Prez to felicitate National Panchayat Award winners

*Odisha is set to be honoured in seven categories, reflecting its significant contributions to community development and sustainable growth*



ARINDAM GANGULY, OP

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** President Droupadi Murmu will present the National Panchayat Awards 2024 December 11 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, recognising outstanding achievements in rural governance. Odisha is set to be honoured in seven categories, reflecting its significant contributions to community development and sustainable growth. The awards celebrate 45 recipients from across the country for their exceptional work in empowering communities and promoting grassroots governance. These awards serve as a benchmark for excellence, underscoring the importance of local initiatives in achieving inclusive development and improving quality of life. One of the key recognitions will be the Healthy Panchayat Award, which will be awarded to Keluapalli Gram Panchayat

in Ganjam district for its impressive health and wellness programmes. This acknowledgment highlights how local governance can drive positive public health outcomes. Sahapur Gram Panchayat, also in Ganjam, will receive the Self-Sufficient Infrastructure in Panchayats Award for its remarkable progress in building sustainable infrastructure that supports community growth and resilience. In the prestigious Nanaji Deshmukh Sarvottam Panchayat Puraskar category, Chhatrapur Block Panchayat in Ganjam will be honoured as the Best Block Panchayat, showcasing effective governance and successful development projects. Koraput district will be recognised as the Best District Panchayat for its impactful community-driven initiatives that have improved local livelihoods and fostered inclusive

# UP Govt invites Odisha to Mahakumbh-2025

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** Uttar Pradesh Minister for Labour and Employment, Anil Rajbhar, extended an invitation to Governor Raghubar Das, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, and the people of Odisha to participate in the Prayagraj Mahakumbh-2025.

The iconic event is scheduled to take place from January 13 to February 26 at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. Rajbhar, during a roadshow in Bhubaneswar, highlighted the Mahakumbh as a celebration of unity within India’s diversity. Addressing the media,

he said the event is expected to attract over 450 million pilgrims, saints, ascetics, and tourists. He emphasised the government’s efforts to make the 2025 Mahakumbh historic with modern facilities, international participation, and an environmentally sustainable approach. “This Mahakumbh

will be clean, healthy, safe, and digital, with a strong focus on being single-use plastic-free,” Rajbhar stated. Initiatives include the allocation of dona-pattal vendor shops within the Mela area and a “Har Ghar Dastak” campaign promoting eco-friendly practices.

# Of 8,518 tested at AIIMS Bhub in 3 months, 31 test HIV+

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** The Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre (ICTC) at All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) here has recently tested 8,518 individuals for HIV and provided counselling to 8,538 people over the past three months. Out of the tested, 31 were found HIV positive and 27 have been linked to the Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) Centre (ARC). Executive Director of AIIMS Bhubaneswar Ashutosh Biswas emphasised the vital role of

HIV Counselling and Testing Services (HCTS) as a key entry point for HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care. “Our efforts are aligned with national goals, and we aim to expand awareness and ensure timely treatment for those diagnosed with HIV,” Biswas stated. As part of the observance of World AIDS Day, AIIMS organised a series of events to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, including an awareness programme held at the OPD foyer. The programme, supported by the Department of Communi-



ty Medicine and Family Medicine and the Department of Transfusion and Blood Bank, in collaboration with the Odisha State AIDS Society, centered around the theme “Take

the Right Path: My Health, My Right”. The event was attended by esteemed dignitaries, medical professionals, staffers and community members. The event also featured a free

HIV testing camp and voluntary blood donation camp, with around 45 individuals taking the opportunity to get tested. Leaflets and booklets on HIV/AIDS prevention and care were distributed, and free condoms were handed out to promote safe practices. “The City AIIMS continues to lead the charge in HIV surveillance and epidemiology, being one of the eight regional institutes for HIV surveillance in India. The institute’s coverage includes the states of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. AIIMS will also host

the 19th round of HIV Sentinel Surveillance in January 2025,” said Biswas. While India has the second-largest HIV burden in the world, with approximately 24.67 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV), the country has made significant progress in ART coverage, which stands at 68 per cent. Odisha, with 52,000 PLHIV, has an HIV prevalence rate of 0.14 per cent, with ART coverage at 49.7 per cent. The statistics highlight the need for sustained efforts to ensure the continued prevention, treatment, and care of people living with HIV.

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One of the event organisers said the Kolkata leg of the tour was made possible through tennis star Mahesh Bhupathi's event management company.



of the day

quote

I hope that one day, there will be a bridge over the Brahmaputra in every district it flows through



HIMANTA BISWA SARMA | ASSAM CM

I personally inspected five stations. The holding areas at these stations, where the devotees will be able to sit till their trains arrive, are very good. Colour coding has been used in the holding areas and tickets so that the devotees can reach the right platform



ASHWINI VAISHNAW | RAIL MINISTER

We have chosen the path of Viksit Bharat in 2047. Viksit Bharat is no longer a dream, but a target before us



JAGDEEP DHANKHAR | VICE PRESIDENT

SHORT TAKES

UK tourist dies of cardiac arrest

**Kohima:** A tourist from the UK attending the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland died of cardiac arrest, police said Sunday. The 67-year-old man complained of severe chest pain Saturday evening and was rushed to a health camp located at the festival venue, Naga Heritage Village Kisama, they said.

Four of family die of food poisoning

**Jammu:** Four members of a family died of food poisoning Sunday in J&K's Rajouri district. Officials said that four members of a family, including three minors, died of suspected food poisoning in Badhal Gorla village of the Budhal area in Rajouri district. "The mother and her daughter have been hospitalised for treatment. The entire family fell ill after eating some food at their home," officials said.

Telangana CM claims record

**Hyderabad:** Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy said Sunday that during the first year in power, the Congress government in the state set a record in farm loan waiver, crop bonus, jobs creation and attracting investments. He said the government waived farm loans of 25 lakh farmers by crediting over ₹21,000 crore directly into their accounts.

Photo studio gutted in Pune

**Pune:** Seven persons were hospitalised after a fire destroyed a photo studio in Pune Sunday evening, an official said. The blaze erupted at the photo studio, located on the ground floor of a 5-storey building in the city's Bavdhan area, around 5.50 pm, he said. "We received a call at 5.52 pm about the incident. Five fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the blaze," the fire brigade official said.

Parts of Delhi-NCR witness rainfall

**New Delhi:** Parts of Delhi-NCR experienced rainfall Sunday evening, with the weather department predicting more rain in isolated areas of the city. Some areas of West Delhi, Outer North Delhi and Gurugram received rain. Meanwhile, Delhi recorded its second-lowest daytime temperature of the winter season so far Sunday at 23.7 degrees Celsius. The department has also forecast moderate to dense fog Monday morning.



Technology used in crime investigations under the new criminal laws is foolproof, provided protocols are strictly followed

SS YADAV | C'GARH DGP

MORE FISHERMEN HELD BY SL

Pattali Makkal Katchi chief Anbumani Ramadoss Sunday said eight Tamil Nadu fishermen, hailing from Rameswaram, have been arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy and urged the Centre to take immediate steps for their release and that of all other fishers, lodged in prisons in the island nation



Farmers suspend march after clash with cops

A group of 101 farmers resumed the foot march this afternoon, they were halted by a multilayered barricade set up by Haryana security personnel who surprised the protesters by offering them tea and biscuits and also showering them with flower petals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Shambhu (Punjab), Dec 8:** Agitating farmers suspended their foot march to Delhi Sunday after some of them sustained injuries in teargas shelling by Haryana security personnel who thwarted yet another attempt by the protesters to cross the Punjab-Haryana border.

Farmer leaders said they will decide the next course of action Monday. As a group of 101 farmers resumed the foot march this afternoon, they were halted by a multilayered barricade set up by Haryana security personnel who surprised the protesters by offering them tea and biscuits and also showering them with flower petals. But the protesters claimed it was all a "drama" as the police soon lobbed teargas shells and used water jets to disperse them when they insisted on crossing the Shambhu border.

Ambala police had earlier said the farmer outfits, which are agitating for a legal guarantee for Minimum Support Price and other demands, can march to Delhi only after getting permission from the national capital administration.

The protesters, dubbed as 'marjeevras', (someone willing to die for a cause), were stopped only a few metres into the march and the standoff continued for over three hours. The farmers called off their march for the day following action of security forces.

Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher in the evening said six farmers were injured and one of them was rushed to the Post-Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh.

He said farmers would decide their next course of action in a meeting of their forums

-- the Samyuka Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha Monday.

The protesting farmers have been pressing the Centre to initiate talks with them to address their issues. On Friday too, farmers had to suspend their march after some of them suffered injuries due to tear gas shells.

Farmer leader Baldev Singh Zira, who led the 'jatha' Sunday, said it was a "drama" by Haryana Police. As the protesters reached the barricades, a few police personnel climbed the roof of a tin shed where security personnel have been stationed, and threw flower petals on a group of farmers.

Zira said farmers were moving ahead in a peaceful manner and they were not carrying any weapon as he criticised the Haryana security personnel for using teargas against them.

Farmers take an injured farmer for treatment and care



Pandher said the farmers who sustained injuries included Resham Singh, who was referred to the PGIMER, Dilbagh Singh, Major Singh and Harbhajan Singh. Pandher claimed that mediapersons were stopped by the Punjab Police from reaching the protest site. He said that Haryana



Farmers run for cover after police used teargas to disperse them during their protest at the Shambhu border in Patiala district

PTI PHOTO

FROM TEA SNACKS TO TEAR GAS

The farmers had earlier attempted to march towards Delhi February 13 and February 21 but were stopped by security forces deployed at the border points

ed, the security forces lobbed tear gas shells. The gas forced the farmers, many of whom had covered their faces and were wearing protective eye-wear, to recede a few metres. Some tried to cover the shells with wet jute bags. Pandher said their protest completed 300 days Sunday.

Farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Maz-

door Morcha have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana since February 13 after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces. Farmer leader Tejveer Singh asked why farmers were stopped from moving ahead when they were peacefully going on foot.

Haryana Police has written to its Punjab counterpart asking it to ensure media personnel are stopped at a "safe distance" from the protest site for the sake of their safety.

It had earlier asked the farmers not to proceed with the march and cited a prohibitory order clamped by the Ambala administration under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) that bans unlawful assembly of five or more people in the district.

ATTACKS ON HINDUS IN B'DESH

Protests across West Bengal



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Kolkata, Dec 8:** Protests were held in various parts of West Bengal on Sunday over the alleged atrocities on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

Hundreds of people joined the protest rallies organised by Hindutva groups in Kolkata, Kanthi, Kakdwip, Sandeshkhali and Purulia, calling for the immediate release of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das.

At the demonstration outside the Salt Lake International Bus Terminus near Kolkata, protesters torched Dhakai Jamdani sarees from Bangladesh. They called for a boycott of Bangladeshi goods, warning that Indians wouldn't remain silent if the disrespect toward the tricolour and attacks on Hindus continued. "We condemn the continuous targeting of Hindus in Bangladesh and the hate-driven narratives

against India. We will not sit idle and with burning the Jamdani sarees, we urge people to boycott Bangladeshi products," said a protestor.

"What kind of Bangladesh is this? The people who fought for liberation in 1971 now seem to be erasing their own history," said another protestor. Leading the protest rally in Kanthi, the state's Leader of the Opposition Suven-du Adhikari said 'sanatanis' were united against rising fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh.

"The martyrdom of 30,000 Indian soldiers in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war has been forgotten by the Islamists in the neighbouring country. Today's rally is a wake-up call to the elements across the border to stop rabble-rousing rhetoric," he said.

When asked about anti-India statements by Bangladeshi groups, Adhikari said that following international protocol and UN guidelines, the Narendra Modi government will take appropriate steps at the right moment.



Snowfall at Peer ki Gali, in Shopian district of north Kashmir

PTI PHOTO

SAFE ZONE PROJECT A SUCCESS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Pathanamthitta (Kerala), Dec 8:** As this year's Mandala-Makaravilakku pilgrimage season at the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple reaches halfway, devotees are experiencing safe journeys along the pilgrimage route, thanks to the Safe Zone Project implemented by the Kerala Motor Vehicles Department (MVD).

According to the officials, road accidents have come down significantly compared to the previous year on the Sabarimala route. Over the past 21 days, a total of 38 accidents were reported within a 400-km radius of Elavunkal, Erume-

ly, and Kuttikkanam areas, which fall in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki districts respectively, resulting in 20 minor injuries and no serious casualties, said an official release issued Sunday.

This marks a significant improvement compared to the same period last year, which saw 60 accidents, including two fatalities. In 2023, Erumely and Kuttikkanam alone accounted for 22 and 26 accidents, respectively, the release added.

Idukki Enforcement RTO K K Rajeev said that the decline in accidents is due to intensified patrolling, improved road conditions, and a favorable weather. The Safe Zone Project, a col-



laborative effort by the Motor Vehicles Department and the Kerala Road Safety Authority, has deployed 24 squads to en-

sure round-the-clock monitoring in Elavunkal, Kuttikkanam, and Erumely, the release added. Approximately 40 lakh vehi-

According to the officials, road accidents have come down significantly compared to the previous year on the Sabarimala route

cles, both small and large, have passed along the pilgrimage route so far this season, the release said. Officials have also taken proactive measures, such as educating drivers about road characteristics and distributing black tea to prevent drowsiness,

it added. Emergency services are on high alert, with ambulance facilities from the Health Department and the Police ready to transport accident victims to hospitals, the release said.

In addition, a repair unit in Elavunkal provides free repair services for vehicles weighing up to 40 tons. A total of 90 mechanical teams representing 35 vehicle manufacturers are stationed along the route, the release said.


Pilgrims can contact emergency helplines for assistance in case of accidents or other emergencies at Elavunkal (09400044991), Erumely (09496367974) and Kuttikkanam (09446037100), it added.



of the day


quote

The BJP never gave a stable government. From 2008 to 2013, there were three chief ministers. Again from 2019 to 2023, there were two chief ministers



SIDDARAMAIAH | KARNATAKA CM

Those who cry on the action against musclemen and rioters can never understand this DNA



MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI | SENIOR BJP LEADER

Raj Thackeray thought power could not come without him. His dreams have been shattered. With me in the alliance, there is no place for Raj Thackeray. He changes his strategies and the colour of his party flag. It reflects his diminishing relevance



RAMDAS ATHAWALE | UNION MINISTER

POST OF THE DAY

The real Deep Fake and Deep State is Gujarat. The Fake #GujaratModel has: Fake Hospital, Fake Toll booths , Fake Irrigation offices , Fake Currency (₹ & \$), Fake Custom Offices, Fake Police Officers, Fake NIA, Fake CBI, Fake IB, Fake DC, Fake Schools , Fake Teachers, Fake Court, Fake Judge, Fake PMO Officer, Fake Visas, Fake Police, Fake ED, Fake Encounters. **This Fake #GujaratModel has now evolved at the National level with PM @narendramodi & HM @AmitShah taking reins:** Fake Nationalism, Fake Statistics of Development, Fake Narratives, Fake Schemes, Fake Policies, Fake Elections, Fake News, Fake Promises, Fake Slogans of Development

@PriyankKharge

SHORT TAKES

**College student gangraped, 2 held**


**Chennai:** A college student with mental illness was gang-raped here and two persons were arrested in this connection, the police said Sunday. Police appealed to the public not to comment on this matter as it would cause mental agony to the family of the victim. Based on a complaint lodged by the victim's father, the police interrogated a mutual friend of the victim and her male friends. During the course of the investigation, it emerged that the victim was gang-raped, police said. Subsequently, a case was registered against the suspected individuals under nine sections of relevant acts, it said.

**PM to visit Raj, Haryana today**

**New Delhi:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Rajasthan Monday during which he will inaugurate the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024. He will also visit Haryana the same day and will launch the LIC's Bima Sakhi Yojana and lay the foundation stone of the main campus of the Maharana Pratap Horticultural University in Panipat.

**Student ends life**

**Bilaspur (HP):** A Class X student allegedly hanged herself in a washroom of a school here, police said Sunday. They said the body was found in the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Kothipura Sunday morning. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Shiv Chaudhary said the body was taken to AIIMS, Bilaspur, for a post-mortem examination.



Delhi Police is not in our control, otherwise, the situation in Delhi would not have been this bad. Just as I fixed schools, hospitals, and electricity, I would have fixed law and order too

ARVIND KEJRIWAL | AAP SUPREMO

DELHI'S AIR QUALITY DETERIORATES

Delhi's air quality took a downturn Sunday, plunging again into the 'very poor' category with an AQI reading of 302 after having improved to the 'moderate' level at the start of December. The air quality had last been recorded in the 'very poor' category November 30, with a reading of 346



Net shutdown, violence, curfew affecting students: Academics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Imphal, Dec 8:** Prolonged violence in Manipur with frequent internet shutdowns, curfews and general strikes is affecting the academic and career pursuits of students pursuing higher education in the northeastern state, many educationists said. With frequent internet shutdowns, students are facing problems in having access to online resources and many recruiters are hesitant to visit campuses in Manipur for placement drive due to curfews and general strikes, they said. Head of the Department of Computer

Science and Engineering and also in charge of placement of National Institute of Technology (NIT) Manipur, K H Johnson Singh told PTI "We have witnessed a decline in recruitment drives after violence broke out in the state. At least 40 companies (online mode) came and 70 students have been selected this year. This is much less than what we were used to before the outbreak of violence. We had expected selection of some 100 students and some 50 companies." He said, "Recruiters who prefer offline mode of interviews are much reluctant to visit for campus interviews. Despite our



consistent assurance that the NIT campus is safe and just 20 minutes from the airport, the media images of tyres burning in the streets, mob violence and

gunfights at peripheral areas seemed to have affected their psychology." Eighty per cent of our students stay in hostels within the campus and have access to broadband 24 hours a day, he added. Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at Manipur University, Natasha Elangbam told PTI "Our students in every department have limited access to online resources as the majority of them rely on mobile internet data.

Curfews and general strikes have severely affected ongoing classes. Timely completion of assignments given to students are also affected as many students do not have broadband at their homes." Internet shutdown also has severely affected career counselling agencies with many senior counsellors unable to provide desired information flow to students seeking employment. Counsellors also said that submission of resumes to national companies has been affected.

Curfews and general strikes have severely affected ongoing classes

ISI, its human courier network is targeting Indian jails: Officials



**Officials said that more than 10 such cases have been reported since July this year in which Pakistani nationals have entered India from their country and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir**

**Many of them have been sent to prisons in Jammu, Punjab and Rajasthan**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI has reportedly resorted to infiltrating individuals under the influence of drugs or posing as mentally disturbed into India to utilise them to deliver critical messages to hardcore terrorists incarcerated in the country's prisons. Officials said that more than 10 such cases have been reported since July this year in which Pakistani nationals have entered India from their country and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Many of them have been sent to prisons in Jammu, Punjab and Rajasthan. The officials said security agencies suspect these individuals are Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) couriers tasked with relaying important communication to the jailed terrorists wherever possible. Interrogation of these individuals typically shows that they have been trained in resistance techniques to withstand questioning by security personnel. The behaviour displayed by those apprehended has raised suspicions among officials, who suggest that their superficial details and evasive responses indicate a potentially larger agenda behind their infiltration, possibly stemming from the fear of repercussions from

their handlers. They explained that the use of mobile phones and the internet leaves behind electronic footprints that could expose the plans of both state and non-state actors operating across the border. As a result, the ISI has adopted this new modus operandi. The infiltration strategy reportedly includes women and minors, who may also serve as couriers. In a notable incident in July, a minor from Pakistan's Attock was intercepted in Punjab. During searches, security personnel discovered a damp paper containing Arabic writing though it was not legible, the officials said. The ISI's infiltration tactics have been linked to drug smuggling operations. In one case from Bijnour village in Rajasthan, a Pakistani national posing as mentally disturbed finally spilled the beans during intense questioning that he had been hired by two drug lords in Pakistan -- Sarfaraz Johiya and Nawaz -- to facilitate narcotics trafficking into India and gather information on the deployment of Border Security Force (BSF) troops. In another recent incident, a Pakistani youth named Mohammed Asad from Lahore drove to the zero line in his motorcycle and seemingly awaited arrest by the BSF.



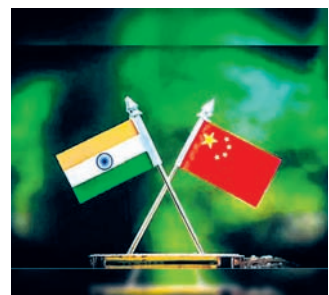
Monkeys at play during a cold winter morning in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO

INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** Criticising the government over its statement in Parliament on India-China ties, the Congress Sunday claimed that the Modi government has agreed to a "new normal" over the "old normal" prevailing before April 2020 which was unilaterally disturbed by China. It also demanded that Parliament be allowed to debate the full gamut of the relationship between the two countries. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a discussion in Parliament on the In-



dia-China relationship should focus on both strategic and economic policy, especially since our dependence on China has increased economically, even as it unilaterally changed the status quo on our borders over four years back. In a statement,

Ramesh said the Congress has studied the recent suo motu statement made by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in both Houses of Parliament titled "Recent Developments in India's Relations with China." While "fully appreciating" the sensitive nature of many aspects of India-China border relations, he said the Congress has four pointed questions on the statement issued by the Modi government. Ramesh noted that the statement claims that "the House is well aware of the circumstances leading up to the violent clashes in Galwan Valley in June 2020", and

pointed out that it is an unfortunate reminder that the very first official communication to the nation on this crisis came on June 19, 2020, when the PM provided a clean chit publicly to China and falsely stated "Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusha hua hai". "Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi October 22, 2024 restated India's longstanding position: 'As far as we are concerned, we want to go back to the status quo of April 2020... thereafter we will be looking at disengagement, de-escalation and normal management of the LAC'.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE POLICY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** The Centre has urged states to submit action plans for effective implementation of the menstrual hygiene policy for school girls to ensure their access to low-cost hygiene products and gender-responsive sanitation facilities in public and government-aided schools. The Union Health Ministry's letter to all states comes after the Supreme Court November 12 stated that the effective roll-out of the policy would require comprehensive action plans tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each state and UT. The Centre had last month informed the Supreme Court

Centre urges states to submit action plans

The Union Health Ministry's letter to all states comes after the Supreme Court November 12 stated that the effective roll-out of the policy would require comprehensive action plans tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each state and UT

about the 'Menstrual Hygiene Policy for School Going Girls,' which was approved by the Union Health Ministry November 2. The policy aims to mainstream menstrual hygiene within the school system of the government to bolster change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour among schoolgirls, overcoming the barriers of low awareness that often restrict their freedom, mobility and participation in daily activities. It advocates for streamlining mechanisms to provide for continuous and timely availability of menstrual hygiene products in schools. For government and government-aided schools, the policy



says that states/UTs should assess and estimate the actual requirement of menstrual hygiene products to enable efficient use of resources. To

enable coverage, assessment through appropriate levels of survey mechanisms can be undertaken by states or UTs followed by gap filling, so that

girls in government and government aided schools have regular access to menstrual hygiene products. Additionally, the policy seeks to dissipate harmful social norms, promote safe menstrual hygiene practices, and enable environment friendly management of menstrual waste. The health ministry has asked states to develop and submit a detailed state and UT action plan that incorporates all aspects of the policy, ensuring coverage of government and government-aided schools. They have been asked to ensure inter-departmental co-ordination with relevant stakeholders to address challenges in infrastructure, supply chain,

and awareness besides prioritising sensitisation and awareness activities to promote safe menstrual hygiene practices and foster behavioural change among adolescents, parents and educators. They have also been urged to include specific timelines, monitoring mechanisms and key performance indicators in the action plans. The policy also aims to promote clean and gender-segregated sanitation facilities as per standards in all government and government-aided schools and incorporate menstrual hygiene education into the school curriculum to raise awareness and reduce stigma related to menstruation in all schools.



Years of bloodshed, division

Fall of Bashar Assad after 14 years of war in Syria brings to end decades-long dynasty

AGENCIES

**Beirut, Dec 8:** The fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government Sunday brought to a dramatic close his nearly 14-year struggle to hold onto power as his country fragmented amid a brutal civil war that became a proxy battlefield for regional and international powers.

Assad's downfall came as a stark contrast to his first months as Syria's unlikely president in 2000, when many hoped he would be a young reformer after three decades of his father's iron grip. Only 34 years old at that time, the Western-educated ophthalmologist was a rather geeky tech-savvy fan of computers with a gentle demeanour.

But when faced with protests against his rule that erupted in March 2011, Assad turned to the brutal tactics of his father in an attempt to crush them. As the uprising hemorrhaged into an outright civil war, he unleashed his military to blast opposition-held cities, with support from allies Iran and Russia.

International rights groups and prosecutors alleged wide-

spread use of torture and extrajudicial executions in Syria's government-run detention centers.

The Syrian war has killed nearly half a million people and displaced half the country's pre-war population of 23 million. As the uprising spiraled into a civil war, millions of Syrians fled across the borders into Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Lebanon and on to Europe.

His departure brings an end to the Assad family rule, spanning just under 54 years. With no clear successor, it throws the country into further uncertainty. While Damascus remained under crippling Western sanctions, neighboring countries had begun to re-sign themselves to Assad's continued hold on power.

The Arab League reinstated Syria's membership last year, and Saudi Arabia in May announced the appointment of its first ambassador to Syria since severing ties with Damascus 12 years earlier.

However, the geopolitical tide turned quickly with a surprise offensive launched by Oppo-

sition groups based in north-west Syria in late November. Government forces quickly collapsed, while Assad's allies, preoccupied by other conflicts

**The rebels now face the daunting task of healing bitter divides in a country ravaged by war and still split among different armed factions. They also dealt a major blow to the influence of Russia and Iran in Syria in the heart of the region - allies who had propped up Assad during critical periods in the conflict**



— including Russia's war in Ukraine and the yearlong wars between Israel and the Iran-backed militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas — appeared reluctant to forcefully intervene. Instead of a political opening, Assad turned to economic reforms. He slowly lifted economic restrictions, let in foreign banks, threw the doors open to imports and empowered the private sector.

Throughout, Assad relied largely on the same power base at home as his father: his Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam comprising around 10% of the population. Many of the positions in his government went to younger generations of the same families that had worked for his father.

Drawn in as well were members of the new middle class created by his reforms, including prominent Sunni merchant families.

**We expect that we will be able to overcome this impasse. Establishing mutual communication and meeting each other is very important to overcome any such stalemate**

**MD TOUHIH HOSSAIN |**  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISER, BANGLADESH

**NOTRE DAME HOSTS FIRST MASS SINCE 2019 FIRE**

Notre Dame Cathedral, its air thick with the smell of incense, Sunday hosted its first Mass since the catastrophic fire of 2019, a moment that transcends religious significance to become a powerful symbol of Paris' resilience



'THE FUTURE IS OURS'

Al-Golani, the man behind insurgency



**Beirut:** As the commander of al Qaeda's franchise in the Syrian civil war, Abu Mohammed al-Golani was a shadowy figure who kept out of the public eye, even when his group became the most powerful faction fighting President Bashar al-Assad.

Today, he is Syria's most recognisable insurgent, having gradually stepped into the limelight since severing ties to al Qaeda in 2016, rebranding his group and emerging as the de facto ruler of rebel-held north-western Syria.

The transformation has been showcased since rebels led by Golani's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), formerly known as the Nusra Front, captured Aleppo last week, with Golani featuring prominently and sending messages aimed at reassuring Syrian minorities who have long feared the jihadists.

As rebels entered Aleppo, pre-war Syria's largest city, a

video showed him in military fatigues issuing orders by phone, reminding fighters of directives to protect the people and forbidding them from entering homes.

The rebels said they had entered the capital with no sign of army deployments. Thousands of people in cars and on foot congregated at a main square in Damascus waving and chanting "Freedom" from a half century of Assad family rule, witnesses said.

"We celebrate with the Syrian people the news of freeing our prisoners and releasing their chains," the rebels said.

Leading rebel commander Abu Mohammed al-Golani said there was no room for turning back and the group was determined to continue the path they started in 2011 during the Arab Spring uprisings. "The future is ours," he said in a statement read on Syria's state TV after his forces took over Damascus.



A man tries to take a lamp as people search for belongings in the ransacked private residence of Syrian President Bashar Assad in the Malkeh district of Damascus, Syria, Sunday

PTI PHOTO

Syrians celebrate Bashar Assad's fall

**Syrians cross over from Lebanon, facing an uncertain future but hopeful for change**

**Damascus:** Crowds gathered in Syria's Damascus Sunday to celebrate the fall of Bashar Assad's government with chants, prayers and the occasional gunfire after Opposition fighters entered the capital following a stunning advance.

It was the first time Opposition forces had reached Damascus since 2018 when Syrian troops recaptured areas on the outskirts of the capital follow-

ing a yearslong siege.

The night before, Opposition forces had taken the central city of Homs, Syria's third largest, as government forces abandoned it.

The rapidly developing events have shaken the region. Lebanon said it was closing all its land border crossings with Syria except for one that links Beirut with Damascus. Jordan closed a border crossing with Syria, too.

Families wandered through the high-ceilinged halls of the presidential palace in Damascus Sunday, along with some armed men. Some paused to take family portraits or selfies on the few remaining couches



against the backdrop of mosaiced walls, while others walked out with chairs and other items under their arms. On the massive parking lot out front, cars drove in circles honking

ecstatically.

In central Damascus' Umayyad Square, drivers passing by also honked jubilantly, while young men piled onto a tank abandoned in the square.

SHORT TAKES

Ghana's ex Prez wins election

**Accra:** Ghana's former President John Dramani Mahama has staged a political comeback by winning the West African nation's presidential election after his rival Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia conceded defeat Sunday. The result of Ghana's general election is another blow to a ruling party in a region where voters, hit by economic hardship, high inflation and local currency depreciation, have caused upsets as they seek changes in leadership.

Case lodged against Chinmoy Krishna Das

**Dhaka:** A case was lodged Sunday over a clash between police and followers of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das on the court premises in Chittagong, according to a media report. The Dhaka Tribune newspaper said the case names the Hindu leader, arrested on a charge of sedition, as the prime accused, along with 164 identified individuals and 400 to 500 unidentified people. The complaint was filed by Enamul Haque, a businessman and activist of Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh, in the court of Chittagong Metropolitan Magistrate Md Abu Bakar Siddique.

Taiwan faces surge in Chinese military presence amid tensions

*China deployed 14 warships, seven military aircraft, and four balloons near Taiwan over the weekend, escalating pressure on the island*



REUTERS

**Taipei, Dec 8:** Taiwan's defence ministry said Sunday that China had nearly doubled the number of its warships operating around the island in the previous 24 hours, ahead of what security sources expect will be a new round of war games.

China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, has been angered by visits by President Lai Ching-te to Hawaii and the US territory of Guam as part of a

Pacific tour. Lai returned from the week-long trip Friday night. Beijing has held two rounds of war games around Taiwan this year.

In its daily morning report on Chinese military activities, Taiwan's defence ministry said there were 14 Chinese warships operating nearby, up from the eight it reported the previous day.

The ministry said it had detected four Chinese balloons flying over the Taiwan Strait, one of which had brushed the top of the island.

Weather will likely be a factor in China's decision on any war games, security sources say. Weather in the strait has been poor this weekend.

China's defence ministry did not answer calls to its news office seeking comment outside of office hours Sunday.

But in a strongly worded commentary on its WeChat account Sunday, China's Ministry of State Security said Lai's efforts to "use arms to seek independence" and cosy up to the United States were doomed to fail.

Taiwan's government is putting on a "false display of power" while the US government is "acting in cahoots with gangsters and jackals" in supporting Taiwan, it said.

"No country, organisation or individual should underestimate the strong determination, firm will and powerful capacity of the Chinese government and people to safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," it said.

No one should presume they can "step out of line on the Taiwan issue without having to pay a price", the ministry added.

Lai and his government reject Beijing's sovereignty claims.

SK prosecutors detain ex-defence chief over martial law imposition



ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Seoul, Dec 8:** South Korean prosecutors Sunday detained a former defence minister who allegedly recommended last week's brief but stunning martial law imposition to President Yoon Suk Yeol, making him the first figure detained over the case.

The development came a day after Yoon avoided an Opposition-led bid to impeach him in parliament, with most ruling party lawmakers boycotting a floor vote to prevent the two-thirds majority needed to suspend his presidential powers. The main Opposition Democratic Party said it will prepare a new impeachment motion against Yoon. Ex-Defence Minister Kim Yong Hyun was taken into custody Sunday at a Seoul detention facility after undergoing an investigation by prosecutors, a law enforcement official said, requesting anonymity in line with privacy rules.

The official gave no further details. But South Korean media reported that Kim voluntarily appeared at a Seoul prosecutors' office, where he had his mobile phone confiscated and was detained.

Trump seeks 'immediate' cease-fire in Ukraine

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Washington, Dec 8:** Donald Trump Sunday called for an immediate cease-fire in Russia's war with Ukraine and the president-elect renewed warnings that he was open to pulling the United States out of NATO.

Trump made his cease-fire proposal after a weekend meeting in Paris with French and Ukrainian leaders, claiming in a social media post that Kyiv "would like to make a deal" to end the more than 1,000-day war.

The Kremlin responded that it was open to negotiations, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy cautioned that any deal would have to pave the way to a lasting peace.

In a post on his Truth Social platform, Trump said Russia and Ukraine have each lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers in a war that "should never have started."

"There should be an immediate ceasefire and negotiations should begin. Too many lives are being needlessly wasted, too many families destroyed," Trump said. He urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to act to bring an end to the fighting.

Trump's remarks came after the meeting Saturday with Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron that Zelenskyy described as "constructive."



In a post Sunday the Telegram messaging app, Zelenskyy cautioned that Ukraine needs a "just and robust peace, that Russians will not destroy within a few years."

"When we talk about an effective peace with Russia, we must talk first of all about effective peace guarantees. Ukrainians want peace more than anyone else. Russia brought war to our land," Zelenskyy said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov reiterated Moscow's long-standing message that it is open to talks with Ukraine. He referenced a decree by Zelenskyy from October 2022 that formally declared the prospect of any talks "impossible" as long as Putin was the Russian leader.

That decree came after Putin proclaimed four occupied regions of Ukraine to be a part of Russia, in what Kyiv and the West was a clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, and despite Moscow lacking full military control over the areas.



of the day

Quote

Globally, geopolitical tensions, particularly the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, continue to pose challenges. However, recent declines in the dollar index and US bond yields have created a more favourable environment for emerging markets like India

**Pravesh Gour** | Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd



We have seen a few cycles of vehicles price increase in India. It happens at the beginning of the calendar year and financial year, but few OEMs pick the timing based on their planned launches as well

**Rajat Mahajan** | Deloitte India Partner



The construction work of the ₹6,900 crore Khorlochu Hydropower Project in Bhutan has started, and the plant is likely to be commissioned by 2029

**Praveer Sinha** | Tata Power CEO and MD



Short Takes

RBI Guv to quit Dec 10

**New Delhi:** A day after presenting bi-monthly monetary policy, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das Saturday met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The meeting comes just ahead of the extended term of incumbent RBI Governor coming to an end. Das's three-year extended term comes to an end December 10. In 2021, the government had announced a three-year extension to Das's tenure, a month before his term came to an end. With the three-year extension granted to Das, he is already one of the longest serving RBI governors in its 90-year history.

IPO Frenzy this week

**New Delhi:** The IPO market is set to be bustling this week, with 11 companies like Vishal Mega Mart, TPG Capital-backed Sai Life Sciences and fintech firm One Mobikwik Systems gearing up to launch their initial share sales, collectively aiming to raise nearly ₹18,500 crore. Other mainboard IPOs to be launched during this period are Inventurus Knowledge Solutions Ltd and Blackstone-owned diamond grading firm International Gemmological Institute (India) Ltd. Alongside the five main-board IPOs, six SMEs are preparing to float their maiden public issues next week to garner over ₹150 crore collectively. Together, these 11 companies aim to raise approximately ₹18,500 crore through public offerings.

Aadhar Housing aims AUM of ₹25,000cr

**New Delhi:** Aadhar Housing Finance, which caters to the affordable segment, expects its asset under management (AUM) to cross ₹25,000 crore by the end of the current financial year. “We closed the first half with the AUM of ₹22,817 crore (from ₹18,885 crore as of September 30, 2023). Going by the growth rate of 23-24 per cent, AUM should increase to ₹25,000-26,000 crore by the end of March 2025,” Aadhar Housing Finance, MD and CEO Rishi Anand told PTI. Focused on the low-income housing segment, he said, “Our average ticket size stands at ₹10 lakh with an average loan-to-value ratio at 59 per cent, catering to the salaried customer segment at 56 per cent of our portfolio.”



India has been growing rapidly amidst a slowing global economy. Prudent fiscal management for macroeconomic stability has been pivotal to this growth

**Chandrajit Banerjee** | Director General, CII,

UPI Transactions on Rise

After reaching a record high in October of 16.58 billion transactions and a value of ₹23.50 lakh crore, UPI transactions in November stood at 15.48 billion transactions (38 per cent year-on-year growth) with a value of ₹21.55 lakh crore (24 per cent YoY growth). The number of UPI transactions may touch 25 billion a month towards the end of 2025



FDI inflows breach \$1tn feat

Foreign investment is important for India as it will require huge investments in the coming years for the infrastructure sector to boost growth. Healthy foreign inflows also help in maintaining the balance of payments and the value of the rupee

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into India have crossed the \$ 1 trillion milestone in the April 2000-September 2024 period, firmly establishing the country's reputation as a safe and key investment destination globally.

According to data from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), the cumulative amount of FDI, including equity, reinvested earnings and other capital, stood at \$1,033.40 billion during the said period.

About 25 per cent of the FDI came through the Mauritius route. It was followed by Singapore (24 per cent), the US (10 per cent), the Netherlands (7 per cent), Japan (6 per cent), the UK (5 per cent), UAE (3 per cent) and Cayman Islands, Germany and Cyprus accounted for 2 per cent each.

India received \$177.18 billion from Mauritius, \$167.47 billion from Singapore and \$67.8 billion from the US during the period under review, as per

FDI inflows are likely to remain modest amidst expected policy changes in the US and the impact of policy stimulus on China's economy

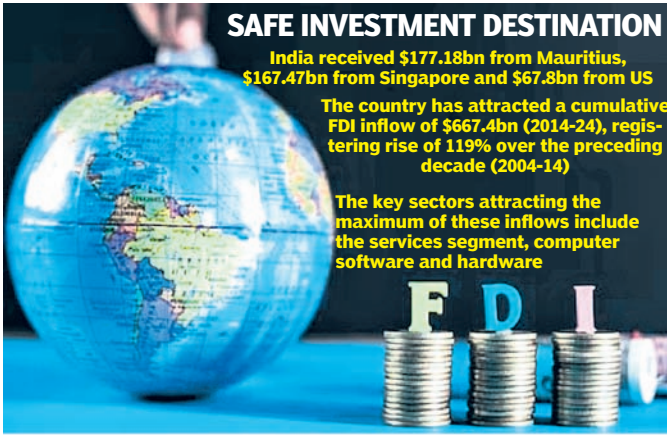
**Rumki Majumdar** | Economist, Deloitte India

the data.

According to the Commerce and Industry Ministry, since 2014, India has attracted a cumulative FDI inflow of \$667.4 billion (2014-24), registering an increase of 119 per cent over the preceding decade (2004-14).

“This investment inflow spans 31 states and 57 sectors, driving growth across diverse industries. Most sectors, except strategically important sectors, are open for 100 per cent FDI under the automatic route. FDI equity inflows into the manufacturing sector over the past decade (2014-24) reached \$165.1 billion, marking a 69 per cent increase over the previous decade (2004-14), which saw inflows of \$97.7 billion, an official has said.

To ensure that India remains an attractive and investor-friendly destination, the



government reviews FDI policy on an ongoing basis and makes changes from time to time after having extensive consultations with stakeholders.

The overseas inflows into India are likely to gather momentum in 2025, as healthy macroeconomic numbers, better industrial output and attractive PLI schemes will attract more overseas players amid geopolitical headwinds, experts said.

They added that despite the global challenges, India is still the preferred investment destination.

Avimukt Dar, Founding Partner, INDUSLAW, said the inflows are likely to continue in a robust form. There is strong anticipation that private equity financing in the tech sector, which had slowed down in the

past, will pick up again since various funds have enjoyed good exits in the public markets and are ready to deploy again.

“The government can continue with structural reforms, particularly in the space of M&A, by nudging SEBI to make the public takeover regime more friendly for foreign players,” Dar said.

Geopolitical situations may alter supply chains, and trade regulations would dampen investors' sentiments, keeping capital flows volatile, she said, adding that the government will have to prioritise infrastructure capex with timely project execution, boost workforce skilling via PPPs and incentives, invest in digital ecosystems for productivity gains, and foster R&D for digital solu-

FPIs make a comeback

Foreign investors return to Indian equities with ₹24,454 cr inflow in Dec first week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** After heavy selling in the past two months, foreign investors have staged a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of ₹24,454 crore in the first week of December amid stabilising global conditions and expectations of potential US Federal Reserve rate cuts.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pulling out a net ₹21,612 crore in November and a massive ₹94,017 crore in October

the worst monthly outflow on record.

Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of ₹57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends.

Looking ahead, the flow of foreign investments into Indian equity markets will hinge on several key factors. These include the policies implemented under Donald Trump's presidency, the prevailing inflation and interest rate environment, and the evolving geopolitical landscape, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar In-



vestment Research India, said. Additionally, the third-quarter earnings performance of Indian companies and the country's progress on the economic growth front will play a crucial role in shaping investor sentiment and influencing foreign inflows, he added.

According to the data with the depositories, FPIs have made a net investment of ₹24,454 crore this month (till December 6).

Trivesh D, COO, Tradejini, a stock trading platform, attributed the latest inflow to improving global conditions and the possibility of US Fed rate cuts.

Also, the recent correction in the market could have prompted FPIs to build some exposure, Srivastava said.

Additionally, uncertainty over Chinese equities on the back of proposed tariffs by US President-elect Donald Trump on China and other several nations could have prompted FPIs

PRE-BUDGET MEET

MSME stakeholders seek tech upgrade, PLI benefits, slash in GST

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** Stakeholders from the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sought a reduction in GST, technology upgrade, and production-linked incentive scheme benefits for various segments in a pre-Budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Saturday.

The meeting aimed to seek inputs and suggestions for the Budget for 2025-26, expected to be presented February 1.

Members from the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka (AWAKE); Karnataka SC and ST Entrepreneurs' Association; Plant-Based Food Industry Association (PBFIA); Ambala Scientific Instruments Manufacturers' Association (ASIMA); Rajasthan Footwear Manufacturers' Association were among the participants at the meeting.

The All-India Plastics Manufacturers' Association; All India Manufacturers' Association; Gujarat Chamber of Small Industries Association; Federation of Associations of Cottage and Small Industries (based in West Bengal); Federation of Andhra Pradesh Small and Medium Association; and Laghu Udyog Bharati were also present during the interaction.

Addressing the media after the meeting, Om Prakash Gupta,



ta, All India General Secretary of Laghu Udyog Bharati said it raised the issue of gaps in technology space and skill development.

“We suggested that if the GeM portal is linked to Udyam registration. It will elicit a good response. It (GeM) has crossed annual turnover of ₹4 lakh crore, therefore it is time now to give it a global perspective,” Gupta said.

“We are hopeful that our suggestions will be considered from the deliberations held today (Saturday),” he added.

EPPC Rao, President of the Federation of Andhra Pradesh Small and Medium Industries Association, said MSMEs are the backbone of India and strengthening them is most important. “We have sought technology upgrade and GST exemption for Industry 4.0 items. The time has come to revive the issues of MSMED Act. Bankers should follow the guidelines of the RBI for revival of sick units,” Rao told reporters.

DESPITE CRACKDOWN, BRIBERY FLOURISHES SMOOTHLY

66% businesses surveyed paid a bribe in last 12 months

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** Around 66 per cent of business firms surveyed across 159 districts admitted that they paid bribes in the last 12 months, a report by online platform LocalCircles said Sunday.

The survey, which received 18,000 responses, found that 54 per cent were forced to pay bribes while 46 per cent paid voluntarily to expedite the process.

“As many businesses would vouch anonymously, bribes remain a way of life when wanting to get government departments to speed up the permit or compliance process, even

getting duplicate copy of the authority license or anything to do with property matters. 66 per cent of businesses surveyed paid a bribe in the last 12 months,” the report said.

Only 16 per cent of businesses surveyed claimed that they always managed to get work done without paying a bribe and 19 per cent said they “did not have a need” to do so.

“Of businesses that paid bribes in the last 12 months, 54 per cent were forced to do so, while 46 per cent paid it for timely processing. This kind of bribery amounts to extortion where permits, supplier qualification, files, orders, payments are routinely held up



when dealing with Government agencies,” the report said.

Businesses admitted to paying a bribe in the last 12 months to different types of entities for qualifying as a supplier, secure quotations and orders and col-

lect payments.

“Though initiatives like the Government eProcurement marketplace are good steps to reduce corruption, there are still openings to engage in corruption for supplier qualifica-

According to the report, bribery paid by businesses continues to take place despite computerisation in several places, and behind closed doors away from CCTVs

tion, bid manipulation, completion certificate and payments,” the report said.

Business firms that participated in the survey conducted between May 22 and November 30, 2024, said that 75 per cent of the bribes were paid to

Mcap of 6 of top-10 most valued firms jumps ₹2 lakh crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Dec 8:** The combined market valuation of six of the top-10 most-valued firms jumped ₹2,03,116.81 crore last week, with Tata Consultancy Services and HDFC Bank emerging the biggest gainers, in-line with an optimistic trend at the Dalal Street.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,906.33 points, or 2.38 per cent, and the NSE Nifty climbed 546.7 points, or 2.26 per cent.

While Reliance Industries, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Infosys, and State Bank of India were the winners from the pack, Bharti Airtel, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), ITC, and Hindustan Unilever emerged the laggards.

The market valuation of TCS surged ₹62,574.82 crore to ₹16,08,782.61 crore.

HDFC Bank added ₹45,338.17 crore taking its market valuation to ₹14,19,270.28 crore.

The valuation of Infosys jumped ₹26,885.8 crore to ₹7,98,560.13 crore and that of Reliance Industries soared ₹26,185.14 crore to ₹17,75,176.68 crore.

State Bank of India's market capitalisation (mcap) climbed ₹22,311.55 crore to ₹7,71,087.17 crore and that of ICICI Bank rallied ₹19,821.33 crore to ₹9,37,545.57 crore.

However, Bharti Airtel's valuation eroded ₹16,720.1 crore to ₹9,10,005.80 crore.

The mcap of ITC declined ₹7,256.27 crore to ₹5,89,572.01 crore.

The market valuation of Hindustan Unilever went lower by ₹2,843.01 crore to ₹5,83,673.71 crore.

The mcap of LIC dipped ₹1,265 crore to ₹6,21,937.02 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valuable firm, followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, State Bank of India, LIC, ITC, and Hindustan Unilever.

VLCC unveils new store in Bhubaneswar

**Bhubaneswar:** VLCC, a leader in the wellness and beauty industry, announced the opening of its brand new Wellness & Beauty Centre in Jagamara, Bhubaneswar. This new centre reinforces VLCC's commitment to making top-tier wellness and beauty services easily accessible to customers, addressing the growing demand for holistic health solutions in the region. The inauguration ceremony was graced by VLCC's Franchise Head Nishu Kumar Gupta & Bollywood stars Poonam Mishra and Subhashish Sharma. The VLCC Wellness & Beauty Centre, located on the 1st floor, near Chandramalli Boutique, Jagamara, spans an area of 1,800 square feet. It is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and staffed by a team of expert professionals dedicated to providing a comprehensive range of wellness and beauty services. The new centre offers a wide array of services, including slimming and weight management, skincare treatments, hair care solutions, and personalized nutrition plans.



India lose by 10 wickets as technical faults of senior India batters exposed by Aussie pacers

# Australia level series



**FAST AND FURIOUS:** Australian skipper Pat Cummins celebrates with teammates after dismissing Harshit Rana, Sunday

AGENCIES

**Adelaide, Dec 8:** Australia ruled the pink ball Test here Sunday as they trounced India by 10 wickets to level the five-match series 1-1. However, more than Australia’s win, it was the way Indian batters, including skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, failed against some quality swing bowling that caught the eye. This defeat will certainly affect the morale of the Indian batters in the remaining three Tests. In the first innings Indian batters lasted for a little more than 44 overs and in the second just 36.5; enough to indicate the technical flaws that exist among the batters.

Australia maintained their tremendous record in day/night Tests. They have now won 12 of the 13 day/night games they have played, losing only one pink ball Test in their history – against the West Indies.

Starting the day at 128 for five, Nitish Kumar Reddy’s (42) cavalier approach prevented a second successive innings defeat under lights at Adelaide as

India were bowled out for 175. Australia needed to score just 19 runs and they completed the formalities in just 3.2 overs.

India’s second innings lasted only 36.5 overs, with skipper Pat Cummins (5/57) bagging a fiver. Scott Boland (3/51) inflicted early damage, while Mitchell Starc (2/60) chipped in with crucial wickets. Such was the dominance of the three premier Australian quicks that Cummins didn’t even need Mitchell Marsh and Nathan Lyon to roll their arms in the second innings.

After a facile 295-run win in Perth, the Indian batting unit won’t be too amused to learn that they survived a total of 81 overs across both innings, which isn’t even a whole day of Test match batting.

It was a tale of two shoddy batting efforts with the two senior-most players Rohit and Kohli looking well past their best. Jasprit Bumrah gave it all but lacked a potent bowling partner at the other end.

For Rohit, things are getting increasingly difficult as he now has lost the last four Tests that he has captained. In his last six

## India stare at early exit

**New Delhi:** Following a comprehensive 10-wicket win over India in the second Test at the Adelaide Oval, Australia have moved back to the top of the 2023-2025 ICC World Test Championship standings. The Pat Cummins-led side have 60.71 percentage points, enough to top the table. India, on the other hand, have slipped to third position with 57.29 percentage points. It means that India will have to win the remaining three Tests in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney to have a chance to qualify for the WTC final, next year.

Test matches, he has batted in 12 innings with just one half century in Bangalore. If one looks at the pattern of 37-year-old Rohit’s dismissals, it is very similar to Krishnamachari Srikkanth and Virender Sehwag’s way of getting out at the end of their careers.

For Kohli, the hundred at Perth now seems like ‘buffet

runs’ which came easily after KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal added 201 runs and by the time, he came in, India were ahead by 300 runs and the contest was as good as dead. To his credit, he hung in there for a 100 but it was a tired attack that he belted to signal end of a prolonged lean patch.

If India had to pull off a coup, it needed Rishabh Pant’s (28) excellence but Starc, the undisputed ‘magician’ of ‘pink ball’ Tests with 74 victims, bowled a delivery on length which the Indian batter jabbed at without pressing forward fully. The regulation catch was duly accepted by Steve Smith stationed at second slip.

Reddy, who is time and again showing that positive attitude and big heart at times trumps technique, continued to defy the Australians. In the first two Tests, Reddy’s commitment and ability to fight it out has been exemplary.

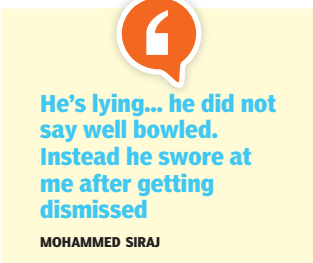
**Brief scores:** India 180 and 175 (Nitish Kumar Reddy 42, Pat Cummins 5/57, Scott Boland 3/51) lost to Australia 337 and 19 for no loss by 10 wickets.

## HEAD, SIRAJ PLAY DOWN CONTROVERSY

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Adelaide, Dec 8:** Travis Head and Mohammed Siraj have cleared the air after a heated on-pitch interaction that took place when the latter gave a fiery send-off to the left-hander after dismissing him on day two of the second Test match here Saturday.

Siraj castled Head with a terrific in-swinging yorker, and gave him a fiery send-off and aggressively gestured to walk back towards the direction of stands. To this, Head replied back to the pacer, before walking off to a standing ovation from his home crowd. After that, the Adelaide crowd constantly booed whenever Siraj was fielding in the deep or came on to bowl. But, the duo was seen having a friendly chat when Siraj came to bat during the second innings of the game Sunday, seemingly clearing the issue.



“Sweet with it. He came out and just said (it was) a little bit of misunderstanding... I think we’ll move on. We’ve had a great week, so let’s not let it ruin it. It was fine. He said, ‘Why’d you swear?’ I sort of said, ‘Look, I didn’t at first... (but) I definitely swore at you the second time round,’” Head who was nominated man of the match, revealed in the post-match presentation as quoted by *ABC News*.

“I probably could have laughed it off and walked off and enjoyed myself. He just said it was a misunderstanding as well and there was no issues for me. We move on. It is what it is,” Head added.

Meanwhile Aussie skipper was lavish in his praise of Head. “He was the single guy who turned the match in our favour and helped us take a sizeable lead,” Cummins said after the game.

# Bumrah can’t bowl from 2 ends: Rohit



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Adelaide, Dec 8:** Jasprit Bumrah is only human and cannot always shoulder the responsibility of bowling the opposition out all by himself skipper Rohit Sharma said Sunday. He urged others to share the load with the premier fast bowler.

“We are not just playing with one bowler. There are other bowlers also who will have to take responsibility and get the job done for the team, be it (Mohammed) Siraj, Harshit Rana, Nitish Reddy, Akash Deep or Prasidh (Krishna),” Rohit said after India’s 10-wicket loss.

The captain however, stated that he understands that there is a bit of inexperience in the line-up and they will grow in confidence with time.

“These bowlers have just arrived in Test cricket, it’s important to give them confidence. We keep planning and discussing. But you can’t expect Bumrah to bowl from both the ends and from morning to evening,” Rohit pointed out. “It’s very important to manage (all) bowlers. We discuss all this with each other. We talk to the bowler and then we make the decisions,” the skipper added.

Rohit said that he takes workload management of bowlers, especially Bumrah, very seriously. “I speak with him (Bumrah) whenever he finishes a spell. I enquire about how his body is feeling, is he (feeling) fresh or not? It’s a five-match series, we want Bumrah to play all the matches and remain fresh,” Rohit stated.

Not even being able to score

200 across both innings is certainly disappointing, and the skipper made no bones about it. “When you come to Australia, I feel the best chance of winning a Test match is by putting runs on the board. We knew that there would be challenges with that ball,” Rohit pointed out.

“But in the past, we’ve done that many times where the conditions have been a little challenging, and we’ve batted really well to put runs on the board, and then try and put pressure on the opposition. It is disappointing that we did not manage to do that in both the innings here,” Rohit added.

## Skipper doesn’t want unfit Shami

**Adelaide:** Mohammed Shami’s much-anticipated return to Test arena could be delayed further after India captain Rohit Sharma informed Sunday that the senior speedster had once again developed ‘some swelling’ in his knees after playing seven Mushtaq Ali Trophy games. “The door is very much open for Shami to return. But we are just monitoring him because while playing Syed Mushtaq Ali T20, he again got some swelling in his knee, which obviously hampers his preparation to come and play a Test match. We want to be very, very careful,” the India skipper said. He asserted that he doesn’t want a half-fit Shami for the Test series. “We don’t want to bring him here in a situation and he plays and then he pulls up sore or something happens. We want to be more than 100 per cent sure with him,” informed Rohit.

## SHORT TAKES

### Juniors lose in Asia Cup final

**Dubai:** The batters could not capitalise on the good job done by the bowlers as India suffered a massive 59-run defeat to Bangladesh in the low-scoring U19 Asia Cup title clash, here Sunday. The Indian bowlers restricted Bangladesh to 198 in 49.1 overs. However, the batters failed to deliver as India were bowled out for a paltry 139 in 35.2 overs. The rot started when star batter Vaibhav Suryavanshi was dismissed for nine. Iqbal Hossain Emon and Azizul Hakim were the pick of the Bangladeshi bowlers with three wickets each.

### Women’s Junior Asia Cup: Eves thrash B’desh

**Muscat:** Mumtaz Khan slammed four goals while Kanika Siwach and Deepika slotted home a hat-trick as defending champions India routed Bangladesh 13-1 to start their Women’s Junior Asia Cup hockey tournament campaign on a rousing note here Sunday. Mumtaz (27th, 32nd, 53rd, 58th), Kanika (12th, 51st, 52nd), Deepika (7th, 20th, 55th), Manisha (10th), Beauty Dung Dung (33rd) and vice-captain Sakshi Rana (43rd) were on target for the winners, while Bangladesh’s Orpita Pal (12th) was the only goal-scorer for Bangladesh in the Pool A game. India took control of the match very early and converted their dominance into a goal in the seventh minute through Deepika who deftly converted a penalty corner with a neat flick to give her team the lead.

### Top cyclist hurt

**London:** Olympic and World Champion cyclist Katy Marchant is recovering after sustaining broken bones in her right arm and dislocated fingers in a crash involving another competitor and some spectators at the Track Champions League here. British Cycling gave the update Sunday on Marchant. It said ‘she is in good spirits and is receiving excellent care from her medical team’.

## Huge win for Odisha eves

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Dec 8:** Madhuri Mehta (88, 97b, 11x4) shone with the bat as Odisha trounced minnows Arunachal Pradesh by a huge margin of 194 runs in a match of the BCCI Senior Women’s ODI Trophy-2024 played Sunday at the ADSA Railway Cricket Ground in Ahmedabad. After being put in Odisha scored 246 for the loss of nine wickets in 50 overs and then dismissed the opposition for a paltry score of 52 in just 21.1 overs.

Madhuri held the Odisha innings together as most of the other batters failed to get going. She played shots around the wicket and was unlucky to miss out on a century as she tried to force the pace. Only Taranna Pradhan (37, 44b, 4x4) offered her some support and it was their efforts that took Odisha close to the 250-run mark. Techie Yanam (3/29) bowled well



Madhuri Mehta

for Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh was never in the chase as they lost wickets in a heap right from the start of their innings. Taranna (4/10) bowled a brilliant opening spell and she was well-supported by off-spinner Sushree Dibyadarshini (2/14). They combined effectively to end the Arunachal Pradesh innings in a jiffy.

## Indian GM just 3 draws away from becoming youngest-ever World Chess Champion

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Singapore, Dec 8:** Grandmaster (GM) D Gukesh made a huge strike forward towards becoming the youngest-ever world champion defeating Ding Liren of China in the 11th game of the World Chess Championship here Sunday.

With just three games to come, Gukesh took the lead for the first time in the match, with scoreline now reading 6-5 in favour of the 18-year-old Indian. History is now on Gukesh’s side as no challenger in modern chess has ever scored a win after being tied 5-5 after the 10th game.

For Liren, the only comfort-



D Gukesh makes a move during his match against Ding Liren, Sunday

PTI PHOTO

ing thing could be the fact that he had won the 12th game in the last World Championship match against Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia.

The Indian started off with the knight move on his first turn and was surprised as Liren went for a reverse Benoni opening. The move was shock-

ing as it looked like it was an over-the-board decision rather than a planned one.

After only five moves, Gukesh had a lead of over an hour on the clock, which is never too easy for the opponent to recover in crunch games. However, if everyone thought that the opening had gone seriously wrong for Li-

ren, the Chinese had different ideas as he capitalised on an erroneous plan by Gukesh in the early middle game.

Things turned upside down when Liren went for completing his development and missed out on a simple manoeuvre that would have probably given the defending champion slightly better prospects.

Gukesh himself spent a lot of time in the middle game but the nature of the position remained double-edged. As the clouds began to clear, Gukesh came up with a spectacular pawn sacrifice on the queen side to give moving space for his rooks. Just as he doubled them on the file to exert pressure, Liren simply crashed and made the blunder in a blink.

The Chinese player was left dejected as he immediately realised the mistake. Gukesh played the winning move in quick time.

# Man City held by Palace

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, Dec 8:** Manchester City’s Premier League title defence took another blow after drawing their game 2-2 with Crystal Palace played Saturday. Four-time defending champions City had ended a seven-game winless run Wednesday by beating Nottingham Forest, but dropped more points with the draw at Selhurst Park.

Pep Guardiola’s team are fourth in the standings and eight points behind leaders Liverpool, who have a game in hand after their derby with Everton was postponed because of ‘Storm Darragh’.

Nottingham Forest were fifth after stunning Manchester United 3-2 at Old Trafford for the first time in 30 years. Brentford won against Newcastle 4-2 in another game played on the day.

A win would have lifted City to second and cut the gap to



**GOAL MACHINE:** Erling Haaland celebrates with teammates after his goal against Crystal Palace

Liverpool to six points, but they were behind after four minutes when Daniel Munoz scored for Palace. Erling Haaland levelled by half time with a header, but Maxence Lacroix restored Palace’s lead in the 56th. Rico Lewis equalised again for City in the 68th and was sent off in the 84th for a second yellow card.

“I like everything about my

team, when we’re in the situation we’re in,” Guardiola said. “We have a lot of problems with in the squad. We fought incredible, we gave everything, we take the point. The season started difficult. We have to survive this season in every game, try to take points to win games and move forward,” added Guardiola.

Ruben Amorim is getting an idea of just how big a job he has on his hands at Manchester United after a second straight loss. Goalkeeper Andre Onana’s second half blunder against Forest proved costly. At 1-1, two minutes after the break, Onana misjudged Morgan Gibbs-White’s tame shot from outside the box. He dived the wrong way and watched the ball roll in.

“This is a long journey... and we are improving in some aspects,” said Amorim, who tasted his first defeat as United manager Wednesday, a 0-2 loss to Arsenal.

## Women lose ODI series against Oz

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Brisbane, Dec 8:** Opener Georgia Voll (101, 87b, 12x4) and Ellyse Perry (105, 75b, 7x4, 6x6) smashed commanding centuries as Australia secured a series-clinching 122-run win over India in the second women’s ODI here Sunday.

After electing to bat, Australia displayed ruthless intent, posting a mammoth 371 for eight, the highest score against India in an ODI match. The hosts then bowled out India for 249 in 44.5 overs, wrapping up the match with ease. Minnu Manni (46, 45b, 4x4) and Jemimah Rodriguez (43, 39b, 5x4) offered some resistance to the Australian bowlers, but it was not enough.

“We got some partnership in between, we had a positive mindset, but we were short by few runs,” Indian skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said after the match.

# Titles for Sathish, Ponnappa, Castro

Indian shuttlers shine in Guwahati tournament

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Guwahati, Dec 8:** Sathish Karunakaran clinched the men’s singles title, while the top-seeded women’s doubles pair Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa defended their crown at the Guwahati Masters Super 100 badminton tournament here Sunday.

Sathish, the 2023 Odisha Open Super 100 champion, defeated Zhu Xuan Chen of China 21-17, 21-14 in 44 minutes to give India a second title. Tanisha and Ashwini also secured a straight-game victory earlier when they defeated China’s Li Hua Zhou and Wang Zi Meng 21-18, 21-12 in 43 minutes.

Rising Indian shuttler Anmol



Kharb also came agonisingly close to a maiden Super 100 title before finishing runner-up after losing 21-14, 13-21, 19-21 to China’s Cai Yan Yan in the women’s singles final.

In the 78-minute long women’s singles final Cai held her nerves at crucial junctures to emerge victorious. At 19-all in the third game she played a drop shot to take the lead and then closed out the match with a smash.