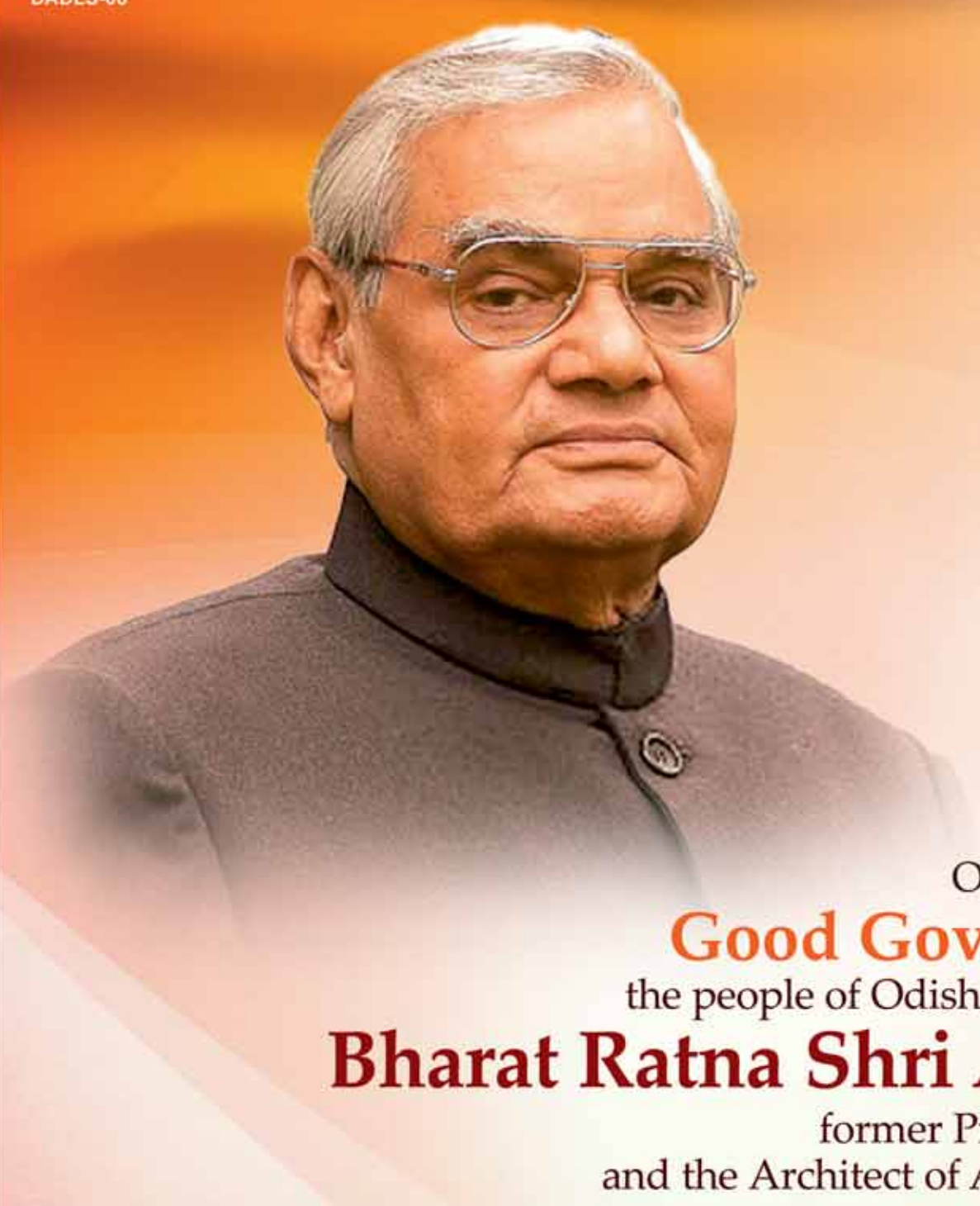




DADLS-68



## Homage to the Great Soul Renewed Commitment to Governance

On this  
**Good Governance Day**  
the people of Odisha pay heartfelt tribute to  
**Bharat Ratna Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee,**  
former Prime Minister  
and the Architect of Administrative Excellence

Under the visionary leadership of Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee Odisha scaled new heights. The establishment of AIIMS Bhubaneswar, the oil refinery at Paradip with an annual capacity of 15 million tons, the creation of the East Coast Railway Division and its headquarters in Bhubaneswar, the construction of 400 km of high-quality highways in Odisha in Golden Quadrilateral Connectivity Scheme, and laying of a road network of more than 18,000 kms (PMGSY) to connect the unconnected stand testament to the eponym "Vikas Purush".

OIPR-15001/13/0325/2425

Information and Public Relations Department, Government of Odisha

DADLS-70



### 'ପବିତ୍ର ବଡ଼ଦିନ' ଅବସରରେ ମାନ୍ୟବର ରାଜ୍ୟପାଳଙ୍କ ବାର୍ତ୍ତା

ପବିତ୍ର ବଡ଼ଦିନ ପର୍ବ ହେଉଛି ଶାନ୍ତି, ମୈତ୍ରୀ ଓ ମାନବତାବାଦର ପର୍ବ । ଏ ଅବସରରେ ମୁଁ ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କୁ ବିଶେଷତଃ ଖ୍ରୀଷ୍ଟିଆନ୍ ଭାଇଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ହାର୍ଦ୍ଦିକ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା ଓ ଆନ୍ତରିକ ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ ଜଣାଇବା ସହ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କର ଶ୍ରୀ, ଶାନ୍ତି ଓ ସମୃଦ୍ଧି କାମନା କରୁଛି ।

(ରଘୁବର ଦାସ)

OIPR-15001/13/0334/2425



ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର



### ବଡ଼ଦିନ ଉପଲକ୍ଷେ ମାନ୍ୟବର ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା

ପବିତ୍ର ବଡ଼ଦିନ ଉପଲକ୍ଷେ ରାଜ୍ୟବାସୀ ବିଶେଷ କରି ଖ୍ରୀଷ୍ଟଧର୍ମାବଲମ୍ବୀ ଭାଇ ଓ ଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ମୋର ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା ଓ ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ ଜଣାଉଛି । ଏକ ବିକଶିତ ଓଡ଼ିଶା ଗଠନରେ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କ ସହଯୋଗ କାମନା କରୁଛି ।

ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀ  
ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା



# CM unveils Vajpayee's bronze statue in Cuttack

Ahead of ex-PM's 100th birth anniversary today

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi unveiled a 10-foot-tall bronze statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at Bellview Square, adjacent to the Odisha Judicial Academy in Cuttack city on Tuesday.

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, Cuttack Mayor Subhash Chandra Singh, Barabati-Cuttack MLA Sofia Firdous and Cuttack Collector Dattatraya Bhausaheb Shinde were among the several digni-



taries present at the unveiling ceremony. CM Majhi dedicated the statue to the life and services of the late Bharat Ratna-conferred PM on the

eve of his 100th birth anniversary celebrations.

"The celebration of his (Atal Bihari Vajpayee's) extraordinary public service commit-

ments will be held tomorrow as well to mark his 100th birth anniversary," the CM stated before adding that the unveiling of this statue on Tuesday marked a momentous day not only for Cuttack but also for the entire Odisha.

The bronze statue stands 10 feet tall and weighs 10 quintals and was crafted under the supervision of renowned artist Sanjib Biswal and prominent sculptor Laxmidhar Rana along with a team of 20 artisans. It has been installed on an eight-foot-high lotus-shaped pedestal situated prominently at the centre of a roundabout that connects the city to the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Setu towards Bhubaneswar.

# Ex-ORHDC MD Kumar gets 3-yr RI

10th conviction in corruption case

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Court of Special Judge, Vigilance, Bhubaneswar on Tuesday convicted Vinod Kumar, former Managing Director, Orissa Rural Housing Development Corporation (ORHDC), for illegal sanction and disbursement of loan to an NGO and sentenced him to three years' rigorous imprisonment (RI).

Besides, the court also directed Kumar to pay a fine of Rs 25,000.

The court also convicted

Purna Chandra Das, former Executive Director, Technical, ORHDC, and Subash Chandra Panda, State Coordinator, AWARE (NGO), Bhubaneswar in the case.

Earlier, the Vigilance police had charge-sheeted Kumar for showing undue official favour to Panda for illegally sanctioning and disbursement of loan on the basis of fabricated documents without security.

This is the 10th conviction involving corruption in the ORHDC by former MD Kumar and other officials by hatching a criminal conspiracy with private persons

# CM alerts against cybercrimes

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday drew the public attention to cybercrimes and spoke on the alarming increase in cyber fraud offences in Odisha.

He was addressing a meeting on the occasion of National Consumer Rights Day.

The CM underscored the importance of vigilance and informed action in safeguarding personal and financial in-

formation online in the modern-day scheme of living.

"Cybercrime gradually entangles us like an octopus. After either being lured or after getting trapped, we usually provide our OTPs (One Time Passwords) to the tricksters. In our bias to earn more profit, we lose a lot," he said. Notably, the National Consumer Rights Day, observed on December 24, commemorates the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

# Cong holds demo, demands Shah's resignation



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Members of the Bhubaneswar district Congress led by its president Biswajit Das on Tuesday held a demonstration here against the alleged derogatory remarks of Union Home Minister Amit Shah about BR Ambedkar.

The agitators initially paid floral tributes to the statue of Ambedkar at AG Square and then went in a procession to the ADM office. They expressed displeasure about Shah's statements and sought his resignation. They shouted slogans about Ambedkar's sac-

rific and contribution for the country.

They also strongly criticised the alleged attack on AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge by BJP MPs and some BJP MPs opposing the entry of Rahul Gandhi into the Parliament. Later, a delegation met the ADM and submitted a memorandum addressed to the President of India.

Former PCC president Niranjana Patnik, former MLA Mohammed Moquim, former MP Rama Chandra Khuntia, Jagannath Patnaik, Manoranjan Patnaik, Kishore Jena and Yasir Nawaj were among others present.

# Chemical Society conf from Dec 28

At OUTR campus

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The 38th Annual Conference of the Orissa Chemical Society and the National Conference on Advancements in Materials Chemistry (AMC) will be held from December 28 to 30 under the auspices of the School of Basic Sciences and Humanities at the Odisha University of Technology and Research (OUTR), Bhubaneswar.

Delegates representing prestigious institutions, including IITs, NITs, NISER, BARC and other prominent academic centres across India, will converge to contribute to this scholarly gathering. Sessions will include keynote addresses, technical presentations and discussions on cutting-edge developments in materials chemistry, highlighting the synergy between academia and industry.

"It seeks to provide a leading platform for advancing material research and facili-

tating collaboration among academia and industry professionals," said convener Prof BR Das, Head of School of Basic Sciences and Humanities. This conference underscores the OTR's commitment to promoting excellence in education and research, positioning Bhubaneswar as a hub for scientific innovation and discourse.

Organised in collaboration with the Orissa Chemical Society, the conference aspires to foster the advancement of educational and research excellence in the field of materials chemistry. "The programme seeks to serve as a prestigious forum for presenting innovative developments in material research, bringing together students, researchers, academicians, scientists and industry experts to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange," said Prof Achyutananda Acharya, Dean of Academic Affairs at OTR, and secretary, Orissa Chemical Society.

# No plan to increase electricity tariff

Despite GRIDCO's Rs 3.82/unit proposal Says Deputy CM Singh Deo

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Deputy Chief Minister and Energy Minister KV Singh Deo has clarified that there is no plan to increase electricity tariffs in the State.

Speaking to the media, he mentioned that no discussions have been held regarding a tariff hike nor is there any proposal in place for the same.

"No discussion has been held on increasing the electricity tariff. Right now, there is no plan for increasing the energy tariff for anybody," Singh Deo said.

Besides, Energy Secretary Vishal Dev said there has been no tariff hike in the last two years.

He stated that the Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC) would conduct hearings and take necessary decision after considering all stakeholders' inputs. The decision on whether to increase tariffs would be made by the commission, Dev



stated.

"The OERC will decide about the electricity tariff hike. But if you see, the tariff has not

been increased in the last two years. The OERC will listen to all parties and take a call," he informed.

Meanwhile, the GRIDCO has proposed a tariff hike of Rs 3.82 per unit and submitted its annual revenue requirement to the OERC.

GRIDCO CMD Trilochan Panda emphasised that this is part of an annual process and is based on total cost estimation, ensuring that it does not directly affect consumers.

"Odisha's average power purchase cost is one of the cheapest barring Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim," Panda said.

# Odisha 2nd in country in green cover rise: Report

Mizoram tops with an increase of 192.92 sqkm vis-a-vis Odisha's 118.17 sqkm

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has been ranked second in the country for maximum increase in green cover inside recorded forest area, according to the latest India State of Forest Report-2023.

Published biennially by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) since 1987, the report, which was released by Union forest Minister Bhupender Yadav on Saturday, provides a detailed assessment of the nation's forest and tree resources.

According to the report, Odisha reported an increase of 118.17 sq km of forest inside the recorded forest area, while Mizoram was at the top position with an increase of 192.92



sq km.

Karnataka recorded an increase of 93.14 sq km of forest, West Bengal (64.79 sq km), and neighbouring Jharkhand's growth was 52.72 sq km.

In combined forest and tree cover, the State recorded a growth of 558.57 sq km and secured third position in the country.

Chhattisgarh topped the list with an increase of 684 sq km, followed by Uttar Pradesh (559.19 sq km). Rajasthan was in fourth position with a 394 sq km rise, the report added.

"With this increase, Odisha's current forest and tree cover stood at 37.63 per cent of its total geographical area of 1,55,707 sq km. A total of 33,040.47 sq km forest cover falls under the recorded forest area, while the remaining 19,393.09 sq km is outside the recorded forest area of the State," the report said.

Nationally, there was a net increase of 156.41 sq km in forest cover as compared to the previous assessment made in 2021.

Odisha registered a growth of 151.89 sq km, with Mizoram and Gujarat taking the first and second spots with an increase of 241.73 sq km and 180.07 sq km in forest cover, respectively.

According to the report, Odisha was at fourth spot with a bamboo-bearing area of 12,328 sq km. Madhya Pradesh topped the list with a maximum bamboo-bearing area of 20,421 sq km, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (18,424 sq km), and Maharashtra (13,572 sq km).

# 15th Environment Cong Experts stress on State's coastal biodiversity mapping



Give several recommendations

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A mapping of the available biodiversity and other natural resources of the Odisha coast in view of enhanced human activities and the increased impacts of global warming and climate change would provide a baseline for making strategies for sustainable management of coastal ecosystem, recommended the experts at the 15th Odisha Environment Congress organised at the Berhampur University recently on the theme 'Environment and Coast'.

The Congress also recommended for constituting a team of experts for advising the government on developing resilient infrastructure along the coast, conducting regular scientific studies on natural disasters, strictly enforcing the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) regulations,

conducting a thorough study on the river mouths and creeks along the coast and creating new mangrove forests by plantation initiatives.

Besides, the experts were unanimous on creating a buffer zone along the coast in the form of a green corridor, developing sand dunes and wetlands, taking special measures to protect Bhitarkanika Mangrove Forests from further ecological degradation, long-term study programmes with respect to the fish, bird and dolphin populations in Chilika, an EIA study involving scientific experts for the proposed national highway over the lake, launching livelihood programmes for fishers during the fishing ban period, undertaking special ecorestoration measures in erosion-degraded areas and emphasizing on the environmental studies in schools and colleges under the New Education Policy 2020.

# Solar Investor Conclave

# Odisha aims to produce 7.5-GW solar energy by 2030

As part of 10.95-GW renewable energy plan

BIJAY MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

While Odisha targets 7.5 GW of solar energy by 2030, contributing to the State's 10.95 GW renewable energy plan, Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo has asked the solar developers to explore investment opportunities in the State.

Addressing the Odisha Solar Investor Conclave on Monday, Singh Deo said, "The Government of Odisha is committed to exploring full potential for renewable energy in the State. Our Prime Minister has shown the way forward for 2070. Solar is a key driver for the State's growth. Our investment climate is conducive as we have a robust



system in place and we have the will power to harness it."

In his address, Principal Secretary, Energy Vishal K Dev said, "Odisha is on the cusp of a transformative energy transition. The demand for clean and affordable energy has never been more important to address the global challenge of climate change. This conclave is a testament to our commitment to clean energy."

Odisha's renewable energy

ambitions took the center stage at the Odisha Solar Investor Conclave, organised in Bhubaneswar by GRIDCO Limited and iFOREST (International Forum for Environment Sustainability and Technology). The event underscored the State's commitment to achieving 7.5 GW of solar capacity by 2030, as part of the State's larger vision to add 10.95 GW of renewable energy capacity by the same year.

The conclave, brought together 150+ commercial and industrial consumers, 100+ solar developers and 400+ participants to explore investment opportunities, foster partnerships, and discuss the enabling policy framework designed to transform Odisha into a solar energy hub.

Solar power currently accounts for 21% of Odisha's total 2,938 MW renewable energy capacity, including hydro.

This includes 508 MW of ground-mounted, 58 MW of rooftop, and 42 MW of off-grid solar capacity. 28% of the 1,343 MW of renewable energy is in the development pipeline. Top districts for solar potential include Sundargarh (15.23 GW), Angul (14.06 GW), Balangir (11.62 GW), Jharsuguda (11.45 GW), and Dhenkanal (9.70 GW). These are also Odisha's key industrial hubs.

Speaking about the Odisha Solar Conclave being a precursor to Utkarsh Odisha or Make in Odisha Conclave 2025, Managing Director, GRIDCO Trilochan Panda said, "We have found that a modest potential of 200 GW is available in the State currently. A large chunk will come from floating solar, rooftop solar and PM Kusum. A lot of incentives are being given by the State

to promote renewable energy. The ecosystem is very encouraging."

President and CEO of iFOREST, Dr Chandra Bhusan said, "A green environment is only possible if we build a green economy. And clean energy is its biggest driver. There is demand, potential to supply and favourable conditions for the sector to grow. Five years from now, the potential of renewable energy will expand."

The conclave demonstrated that a massive market is right here within the State. The event saw robust participation from solar developers, consumers, investors, government and civil society representatives, who discussed roadmaps to solar expansion, solar integration and building a policy ecosystem that prioritizes ease of doing investments and more.





# the pioneer

Established 1865

INSIDE

**WORLD 8**  
**'WE SHOULD TRY AGAIN': PUNJAB ASSEMBLY SPEAKER ON FAILED INDIA-PAK PEACE INITIATIVE**

BHUBANESWAR, WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 25, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

www.dailypioneer.com

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA

## Indian Oil Chairman meets CM

# Rs 61K-cr naphtha project at Paradip planned

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Indian Oil Corporation Ltd Chairman AS Sahney on Tuesday met Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi here and discussed the progress of various ongoing and upcoming projects of IOCL in Odisha.

It was decided that the IOCL and the Odisha Government would sign a memorandum of understanding for a naphtha cracker project at Paradip in January. The project has received in-principle approval and the IOCL



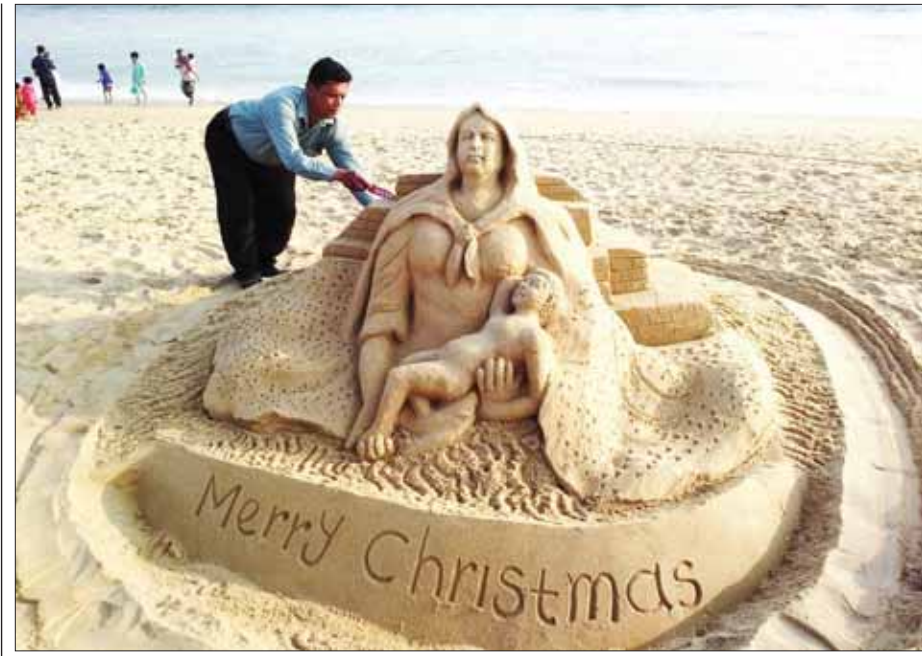
will invest over Rs 61,000 crore for it. It is likely to be one of the largest projects in the sector in the country. The State

Government is an equity holder of this project and will earn dividends in addition to taxes.

It was also decided that foundation for the upcoming yarn project of IOCL at Bhadrak would also be laid in

January. Rs 4,352 crore will be invested for this project. Once the project is completed, various large-scale garments manufacturing units will come up in the area. Both the projects will create huge employment opportunities.

Besides it was informed that the ongoing Px-PTA (Para-xylene Purified Terephthalic Acid) project would be commissioned by June 2025. Several other ongoing and upcoming projects of IOCL were also discussed. These include a floating solar project and an ethanol project in the State.



For the occasion of Christmas on Wednesday, sand artist Ranjan Ganguly crates a sculpture of Merry and Jesus at the sea beach in Puri on Tuesday.

## New Governor of Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati has been appointed as the new Governor of Odisha. He is currently the Governor of Mizoram.

The President of India appointed Dr Kambhampati as the Governor of Odisha on Tuesday.

Dr Kambhampati is a former president of the Andhra Pradesh State unit of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and a former MP from Visakhapatnam.

Raghubar Das was the previous Governor of the State.

Notably, the President appointed new Governors of four States, including Odisha.

## Despite granted bail

# Inmate stays put in jail for 5 yrs for forgetting home address!

Recently shifted to rehab home in Sambalpur

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ SAMBALPUR

A 34-year-old inmate has been unable to go home for the last 5 years after his release on bail from Sambalpur Central Jail, as he does not remember the address of his home. The District Court recently ordered the permanent remission for him; however due to wrong address the jail officials still could not send him home

and finally lodged him in a rehabilitation home for the mentally challenged in Sambalpur.

According to jail officials, the inmate, identified as Jabira Sattar, son of Muhammad Rehman, is basically from Jharkhand; however, the address mentioned in the chargesheet copy in 2019 is not correct, for which two teams of jail officials visited Jharkhand and Aghora village under the Sonua Police Station in the Ranchi district of Jharkhand, but they failed to find his home there or any-



body of his near and dear or even knowing him.

Though Jabira Sattar had never created any chaos in the prison and had very good behaviour with others, he was not intelligible. Neither the

other inmates nor the prison staff could understand his language.

Recently, on December 13, the Sambalpur District Court ordered to release him from Sambalpur Central Jail. On the next day he was handed over to Sambalpur Dhanupali police to find his home address and send him to his home. As his address is wrong, police and jail officials visited the mentioned place and verified with the concerned police stations but could not locate his home.

In the end, he was shifted to

Samarth, a shelter for mentally challenged people in the Sambalpur district, in an ambulance.

Dhanupali PS Inspector Subrat Panigrahi said, "The inmate was granted bail in the same month he was jailed in a corex case in 2019. He was charged as per FIR when he was able to tell the address; however, that address was wrong. Our team, along with jail officials, had visited Jharkhand to find his home but in vain. Now he is there in a shelter for mentally-ill people."

## Rainfall warning issued for several dists

Temp to fall from Dec 26

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Following two days of rainfall, dry weather is likely to prevail and the minimum temperature is expected to fall by at least 2 to 4 degrees Celsius over most parts of Odisha, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Tuesday.

According to the Regional Office of the IMD here, heavy rainfall owing to a well-marked low pressure over the Bay of Bengal is likely in the districts of Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Ganjam, Gajapati and Koraput.

In the next 24 hours, light rainfall is likely at isolated places over the districts of Baleswar, Boudh, Jajpur, Cuttack, Nayagarh, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Koraput and Malkangiri. As such, several places in coastal Odisha may experience rainfall and overcast conditions on the Christmas day. After the spell of rains, the temperature will dip by at least 2 to 4 degrees. Minimum temperatures in the State capital may plummet to as low as 13 degrees Celsius while Cuttack city may shiver at 12 degrees.

DADLS-69



## PIONEERING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN ODISHA THROUGH PEOPLE-FRIENDLY INITIATIVES

Under the leadership of Hon'ble Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, the Odisha Government has implemented groundbreaking initiatives and administrative reforms to enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency, setting the benchmarks of good governance and people-centric administration.



### Good Governance Practices Government of Odisha

#### Right to Public Service and Public Grievance Redressal

- 428 Public Services of 32 Departments under Right to Services Act
- Periodic public grievance hearing by Hon'ble Chief Minister
- Unified "Janasunani" portal for registration, monitoring and redressal of public grievances
- Dedicated Chief Minister's Grievance Cell (CMGC) for monitoring of grievance redressal
- 68% public grievances have been disposed during last six months

#### Employee Service Automation

- Paperless Pension processing and sanction (Online Pension)
- Online Personnel Management System (OPMS) for automation of HR management of employees other than State Government
- Quarter Management System (QMS-2.0)

#### Capacity Building and Competence Mapping

- Mission Karmayogi implemented in the State
- More than 3.13 lakh State Government employees on-boarded in iGOT
- Enrollment of about 3.2 lakh for online courses
- About 2.10 lakh courses completed

#### Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)

- DBT for major social security scheme
- ₹ 4,180 Crore transferred to more than 80 lakh beneficiaries under "Subhadra Yojana"
- ₹ 12,120 Crore DBT transfer to more than 3.92 Crore beneficiary accounts during last six months.
- Dedicated DBT Odisha portal linked to DBT Bharat Portal to monitor DBT.

#### e-Governance Services across the ULBs in the State for:

- Building Permission Approval
- Trade License & Property Tax
- Water supply & Sewerage system
- Marriage Registration

OIPR-15001/13/0327/2425

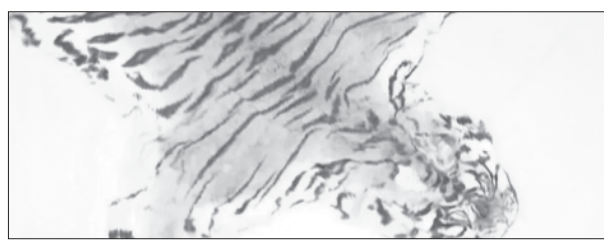


## In Baleswar Tiger skin smuggling racket busted; 11 held

**PNS ■ BALESWAR**  
Forest Department officials have busted a tiger skin smuggling racket and arrested 11 members of the group on Sunday in Baleswar.

Acting on inputs, the Forest Department formed a special team and conducted raids at various locations. During the raids, four suspects from Bhadrak and seven from Mayurbhanj were arrested.

Baleswar DFO Khushwant Singh said, "We received confidential information about the trade of Royal Bengal Tiger (RBT) skin. Acting on the tipoff, we formed a special



team that detained four individuals in possession of the RBT skin. Preliminary investigations suggest the tiger was killed with a bullet, but forensic reports would provide further clarity."

"The detained individuals provided details about four more suspects, leading to their arrest. These suspects, in turn, revealed the involvement of

three others. In total, we managed to apprehend 11 individuals linked to this crime," he added further. Earlier, the Special Task Force (STF) of the Crime Branch had seized a leopard skin in Boudh and arrested a person in possession of it. Similarly, in late November, forest officials arrested two individuals for possessing leopard skins in Kandhamal.

## In Ganjam Kali temple donation box looted

Series of temple thefts triggers concern

**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**

Miscreants broke into the Chingudikhola Kali Temple in the Beguniapada block of Ganjam district and looted the donation box on Monday night.

Sources said the burglars cut open the donation box and fled with the collected cash offerings.

Subsequently, the temple priest who came to know about the incident on Tuesday morning, informed the temple management committee



about the theft, which then lodged a police complaint. An investigation was ongoing into the incident. Of late, temples in the State have become soft targets of the burglars.

On November 26, four temples in the Gardapara area in Bhadrak district were looted on the same night, sending shockwaves all over. As per reports, gold and silver jewelry, cash, and other valuable items worth Rs 5 lakh were

stolen in the serial loot.

Similarly, unidentified thieves stole ornaments and cash from the donation box of Maa Santoshi temple in Junani village of Nuapada district, on November 13 night.

In another incident on November 7, the Tara Tarini temple complex at Purushottampur in Ganjam was targeted by thieves who looted ornaments worth lakhs of rupees.

## In Sundargarh Girl mowed by truck in front of parents

Tension prevails as locals block NH

**PNS ■ SUNDARGARH**

A young girl was mowed down by a speeding truck in front of her parents near the Laljiram Petrol Pump on National Highway-143 in the Lahakothi area under the Birmitrapur police station of Sundargarh district on Tuesday morning.

Sources said the mishap occurred when a man, his wife and their daughter were returning from Vedvyas on a bike and a truck rammed into them.

As they all fell on the road, a speeding truck coming from the opposite direction ran

over the girl, who died on the spot.

"Vehicles were coming from both sides of the road; and this bike was trapped in between them. After being hit, they fell, but while the parents survived, the truck crushed the little girl to death. I demand immediate justice," stated the deceased's grandmother.

Meanwhile, tensions flared at the accident site; and local residents blocked the NH in protest alleging that poor road conditions led to the mishap.

Till the last reports came in, scores of vehicles remained stranded on both sides of the highway even as the Birmitrapur police reached the spot and attempted to pacify the crowd.

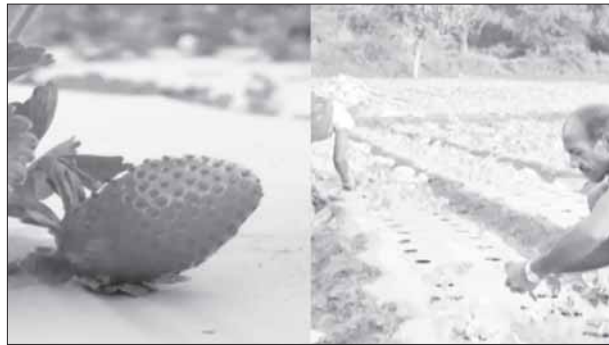
## In a shift from traditional crops K'put tribals grow strawberry backed by Horticulture Dept

**PNS ■ KORAPUT**

In a fresh turn towards progressive farming in Odisha, several farmers in Koraput district have shifted from traditional crops and turned to cultivating the queen of berries, with large swathes of farmland now being dedicated to growing the prized fruit.

Farmers belonging to the Kauguda village of the district have taken the biggest leap in this regard, with 25 acres of land in the area, involving over 30 tribal families, now cultivating strawberries. The shift is more remarkable as these farmers had grown traditional crops like rice and ragi for decades before switching over to strawberries.

The Horticulture Department is providing all necessary assistance and guidance to lo-



cal farmers to cultivate high-value strawberries on their land, highlighting the district's favourable climate and soil conditions.

"I had never seen or heard about strawberries but officials from the Horticulture Department taught me about the feasibility and advantages of cultivating it which is why I decided to grow strawberries," said Raimati Gadaba, a farmer from Kuagada.

"The strawberry farming is new for us but we have understood that it will be very beneficial in the long run; so we are toiling day and night to reap harvests within three months," added Sadan Jani, another local farmer.

Meanwhile, officials of the Horticulture Department as well as farmers remain optimistic and expect to start harvesting strawberries within three months, with an esti-

mated income of Rs 200 to Rs 300 per kilogram or Rs 3 to Rs 4 lakh per acre.

"The Odisha Rural Development And Marketing Society (ORMAS) as well as the Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO) is investing all necessary resources to encourage strawberry cultivation in Koraput. We are in touch with markets from Bhubaneswar to Delhi to ensure optimal sale figures," stated Deputy Director of Koraput Horticulture Department Sudam Biswal.

Biswal also added that his department is now extending full support and motivating farmers across other parts of Koraput to adopt this crop and revolutionise farming practices in Odisha while making the farmers self-sufficient.

## Hirakud reservoir bird count to take place on Jan 18

**PNS ■ SAMBALPUR**

The annual census of migratory birds in the Hirakud reservoir will begin on January 18, informed Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Hirakud Wildlife Division, Anshu Pragnan Das, adding that elaborate arrangements have been made in this regard.

The 550 sq km reservoir is spread across Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, and Bargarh districts and the wide variety of migratory birds that have flocked the area since October will be counted during the census exercise.

Notably, the headcount of these migratory birds has been increasing steadily over the last 5 years with approximately more than 3.42 lakh birds of at least 112 species having arrived last year. Experts hope that the trend will continue upward and be observed during the current census as well.

"Bird census will be done

under direct counting method on January 18 in the Hirakud reservoir. As of now, various varieties of gadwalls, tufted ducks, whistling ducks, and pochards, among several others, have flocked to the expansive water body," stated the DFO.

She also added that adequate security measures have been taken so as to not disturb the nesting and resting sites of migratory birds. "We have sensitized the local communities and are ensuring every possible security measure for the birds," added Das.

With abundant food and favourable temperatures, migratory birds arrive in large numbers at the Hirakud reservoir every autumn and stay until early spring.

For the 2024 census, which was carried out on January 8, more than 70 officials, including Forest Department personnel and bird experts, participated in a massive exercise that stretched from dawn to dusk.

## Career counselling meet held at BU Pol Sc dept

**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**

A Career Counselling Workshop on Skill Development and Employability in Political Science was held at the Berhampur University on Saturday.

Organised by the PG Department of Political Science and Public Administration, the workshop saw participation of a large number of academicians, scholars and students. In the first session, Dr Keshab Chandra Rath, Assistant Professor in Political Science of GM University in his address highlighted the emerging role of Political Science in the contemporary period with probable and real-life assumptions. Deepak Kumar Jena, Additional Tehsildar of Chhatrapur



(Ganjam) spoke on the relevance of civil services in the current digital and reforms regime and discussed the traits and attitudes of a learner to become a civil servant.

In the second session, one of the eminent freelance recruiters and trainers from Brahmapur Kali Prasad Ravi in his address stressed the need of soft skills as a prerequisite for the students for survival and underlined the mea-

sures to be taken to manage their minds and time while studying. Senior Business Development Manager, Canara Bank, Brahmapur provided valuable inputs to the students for effective management of their day-to-day life by avoiding restraint and circumstances in order to develop their skills, personality, and attitudes in real-life situations. Seminar secretaries of the department from session

I and II, respectively Susmita Rohidas and Saimita Patri offered vote of thanks.

Among others, Coordinator of the PG Department of Political Science Dr Sharada Prasanna Rout, Coordinator of P G Department of Public Administration Sanjaya Meher, Dr Rajesh Seth, Dr Soumendra Mohanty, Dr Bhagyashree Rath and Jainna Datta Pattanayak were also present.

## IN BRIEF

### Odisha's Dilishaa crowned NaniPari Little Miss India

Bhubaneswar: Dilishaa Behera from home State Odisha has been crowned as KIIT NaniPari Little Miss India 2024 at a glittering show held at the KIIT campus here on Monday



evening. She was crowned in the presence of Femina Miss India World 2024 Nikita Porwal; 1st Runner-up Rekha Pandey and 2nd Runner-up Aayushi Dholakia. The KIIT NaniPari winner takes home the crown and prizes worth Rs 21 lakh, including cash prize of Rs 3 lakh. Besides, the winner gets a 100 percent fee waiver at KIIT if she wishes to pursue her higher studies at the university.

### Odisha Startup Carnival concludes

Bhubaneswar: The Odisha Startup Carnival 2024, a flagship 15-day initiative organised by AIC-Nalanda Institute of Technology Foundation to foster innovation and entrepreneur-



ship, concluded here on December 21. The event, which brought together a community of over 300 participants, showcased Odisha's growing start-up ecosystem and emphasised the need for collaboration, innovation and growth.

### VIVITSA World School new Logo unveiled

Sambalpur: The Curious Cubs has unveiled a new logo of VIVITSA World School (VWS), its ambitious next chapter in education. Set to redefine learning in Sambalpur, the VIVITSA



World School embodies the philosophy of "The Desire to Know" and promises a holistic approach to education, focusing on intellectual, artistic, social and emotional growth.

### Celebrate Christmas with California Almonds

Bhubaneswar: Christmas is a time for joy, togetherness and creating cherished memories with friends and loved ones. This year, celebrate the festive spirit by making healthier choices without compromising on flavour. Elevate your celebrations with the wholesome goodness of California Almonds, a versatile ingredient that brings crunch, flavour, and nutrition to your festive favourites.



## In Keonjhar Missing minor boy's body found in sack

**PNS ■ KEONJHAR**

A body of a missing nine-year-old boy was found stuffed in a sack under mysterious circumstances at Gopinathpur village under the Champua police limits in Keonjhar district early Tuesday morning.

Sources said that the boy had been missing from Monday after venturing out to play at about 5 pm. However, his family had not lodged a police complaint, suspecting he may have visited his nearby relatives but grew worried when he was nowhere to be found after search.

A local named Gouranga Patra found an unidentified sack lying outside his house premises. He subsequently informed police who arrived at the spot and opened the sack only to discover the boy's dead body.

The Champua police reached the site and cordoned the area while a scientific team also arrived soon after.

Meanwhile, the parents of the deceased alleged that the boy was murdered. But so far, the exact circumstances and motive behind the crime have not been ascertained. Previous enmity and witchcraft angles were being probed by the police.

# The positive power of negative thinking

The battle field was ready. The chariots and the charioteers were ready. The fatal consequence of not going to the war was known to Partha and all other Pandavas. A mammoth destruction of religious and social values must be there if the Kouravas would win. After all, the battle of Mahabharata was more significant for the existence of religion, truth and justice rather than power to conquer and rule Indraprastha. A change was becoming inevitable for progress and prosperity.



**BRUHASPATI SAMAL**

Though surprised with the negative attitude of Partha who had a definite role to play in the pre-ordained change, Lord Shree Krishna smiled and took it very positively and gave the solution to all the negativities of Partha which the whole world latter knew as "Sreemad Bhagbat Geeta". Had Arjun not argued negatively in the battle field of Kurukshetra, the whole Universe would have been deprived of getting its all-time sa-

cred epic in the name of "Sreemad Bhagbat Geeta", a doctrine of universal truth encompassing every aspect of life, showing path to the lost, answering to the confused and giving wisdom to all.

The transformation of the negative attitudes of Partha affirmative through the power of positive thinking of Lord Shree Krishna with a lesson that change is the law of the universe and thus a part of

life could lead to win the battle and achieve success.

There are hundreds and thousands of such examples in mythology and history where marching towards success has been originated from a negative thinking. In the field of Trade Union we simply call this negative attitude a protest, an agitation intended not to allow injustices to proceed as it happens by / through the Govt / management. Had our ancestors not registered their negative attitude against the British Empire, today's freedom would have been a dream for us. Had Babu Tarapada Mukherjee, Henry Barton, Dada Ghosh and such other leaders not raised their voice which were considered negative at that time against the administrators, the fixed duty hours, defined leave, bonus, Pay Commissions etc. for the employees would not have been there.

When a person tells something either not supported with rulings or practice, we often broadly re-

mark that he is taking negative. Even when a fact does not suit us, we consider it negative. But unknowingly we commit a blunder. Such remarks are neither correct nor logical even. We should have the patience like Lord Shree Krishna to realize the origin of such negative thinking so that we can make it positive for the welfare of the society and nation.

It is often believed that while positive thinking being a trademark slogan (fill your mind with positivity, you shall reap the benefits) in business and society is just a folklore wisdom, negative thinking and negative emotions are just like germs and viruses creating a tendency to avoid things. On an average, it is seen that people who never worry have lower job performance than those who worry from time to time. While positive thinking can yield many benefits, the excessive and rigid search for positivity can bring about the opposite effect. Those who practice negative thinking are more able to

handle difficult situations. Both styles are deadly at the extreme - while pessimism becomes fatalistic, optimism becomes toxic. The key is to find a sweet spot having more moderate ranges that can combine the benefits of both approaches.

The success in any field is not a matter of thinking positively or negatively, but it is the choice of strategies that match the thinking styles matters. Positive thinking without a negative balance hinders a person's abilities. Real leadership requires both positive and negative thinking. Negative thinking, if strategically pursued can play a definite role too. Negative visualization can be an excellent antidote to anxiety.

Positive employees are seen as team players but negative workers are viewed as outcasts, trouble-makers. The consequence is that the realistic and rational people, usually the negative thinkers, remain unheard. But researchers discovered that negative people com-

municate better, think more clearly, make fewer mistakes, are less gullible and are better at decision-making. The reason is that negative people use the critical part of their brain more successfully than cheerful people. The overall conclusion from researchers is that there's a place for both positive and negative thinking in every workplace. However, what it all comes down to is that negative people pay more attention to their surroundings. They're not always negative solely for the sake of being negative. They're just more cognizant of what's happening around them and as a result their moods change depending on what they notice. Negative thinking isn't superior to positive thinking, but neither is positive thinking the panacea for all workplace ills. Sometimes what's required is a dose of reality. And, it's the negative thinkers, the ones who are perceived as troublesome, annoying, often provide the cure.

Getting negative can be wonder-

fully empowering, because it drives a respect for the reality of the situation and limitations. Without negativity you can never even begin to plan strategy for engaging, confronting- problems, limitations. While positive thinking produces amazing dreams, visions, goals, negative thinking produces powerful plans and strategies. Positive thinking and confidence improves performance whereas, negative thinking feels realistic, protects us and lowers our expectations.

Since progress and development are the rules of the universe, just a healthy dose of both positive and negative thinking (that of Lord Shree Krishna's and Partha's respectively) are required for a successful organization / society / nation.

(General secretary, Confederation of Central Govt. Employees and Workers, Odisha State Coordination Committee; Email: samalbruhaspati@gmail.com, Mobile:9437022669)



# Congress approaches Supreme Court against new Election Commission rules

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Congress on Tuesday filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the recent amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 and expressed hope that the apex court will help restore the "fast eroding" integrity of the electoral process. The Government has tweaked an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh, who filed the petition, said, "The integrity of the electoral process is fast



eroding. Hopefully the Supreme Court will help restore it." "A writ has just been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the recent

body charged with the conduct of free and fair elections cannot be allowed to unilaterally, and without public consultation, amend such a vital law in such a brazen manner. "This is especially true when that amendment does away with public access to essential information that makes the electoral process more transparent and accountable," he said.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission of India, the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

# Home Minister Shah stresses use of biometrics to identify unidentified bodies, persons

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday stressed the need for using biometrics technology to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified "found persons".

Chairing a review meeting on the implementation of the three new criminal laws with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) here, Shah also emphasised the use of technology in all criminal investigation matters.

He said alerts should be generated for all the cases at predefined stages and timelines should be fixed - from the registration to disposal of the case - for the benefit of victims and complainants.

Biometrics technology should be adopted to identify unidentified bodies and unidentified found persons,

Shah asserted. According to an official statement, Shah said regular dispatch of alerts to investigating officers as well as senior officers as per predefined timelines will help expedite the process of investigation.

The meeting reviewed the implementation and integration of Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CTNS) 2.0 and Inter-Operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS), the New Criminal Laws and National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS), prisons, courts, prosecution and forensics with ICJS 2.0 at all India level.

During the discussion, the home minister asked the NCRB to facilitate the complete implementation of the new criminal laws in the ICJS 2.0, the statement said.

He emphasised the use of applications like eSakshya, Nyaya Shruti, eSign and eSummons in every state and Union Territory.

Shah said a team of officers of the Ministry of Home Affairs, NCRB should visit the states and Union Territories to increase the adoption of technical projects and assist them in all possible ways.

He emphasised regular interaction with senior police formations of states and Union Territories to monitor the progress of CTNS and ICJS regularly and provide impetus to the project.

The NCRB should create a data rich platform to benefit the investigation officers and other stakeholder of criminal justice system, he said. Shah appreciated the efforts of the NCRB in the technical implementation of the three new criminal laws and the NAFIS.

# Congress to commemorate 100th anniversary of Belgaum session

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Congress will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Belgaum session of the party that was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi with an extended session of the CWC which will decide on an action plan for the next year.

The opposition party asserted that the "insult" to B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah will be strongly taken up at Belagavi and deliberated upon.

Addressing a joint Press conference along with Congress general secretary organisation K C Venugopal and AICC media and publicity department head Pawan Khara, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the extended Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting on December 26 has been named 'Nav Satyagraha Baithak'.

He said two resolutions will be passed at the meeting. Congress has been marking Ambedkar Samman Saptah against the "insult" of B R Ambedkar by Home Minister Amit Shah, Ramesh said.

He said there is only one solution that the home minister be sacked and must apologise for his remarks. Ramesh said on December 27, a 'Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally will be held in Belagavi. Venugopal said the Congress has strongly taken up the issue of the "insult" of Ambedkar by the home minister and has been demanding the sacking of Shah as well as an apology from him. He said the issue would be strongly taken up in Belagavi and ways to take it forward in the future will also be deliberated upon, he said.

# Tragedy repeats: despite SC Guidelines, abandoned borewell accidents continue to claim lives

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

After over 14 years the Supreme Court framed guidelines to prevent accidents involving abandoned borewells, the frequent spate of such incidents highlight the gaps in enforcement and creating awareness of the top court's order.

The issue has come to the forefront again following the spate of such accidents leading to desperate and dramatic rescue operations. Most recently, a minor, Chetna, aged around three years fell into a borewell in the Kotputli-Behror district of Rajasthan, and the NDRF and SDRF were deployed to rescue her from the 150-foot-deep borewell with efforts still underway at the time of filing this report. On December 9, Aryan, 5, fell into a 150-foot-deep



borewell in Rajasthan's Dausa while playing and after a 55-hour rescue operation, he was pulled out unconscious and was declared dead on arrival in a hospital. These instances occurred despite the top court's comprehensive

guidelines issued on February 11, 2010, aimed to prevent such tragedies. The guidelines were issued after the bench led by former Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan, took a suo motu initiative and issued notice to the various states to take immediate measures

petition bringing to its notice a spate of such accidents in the country on February 13, 2009.

The guidelines included setting up barbed-wire fencing around the well during construction, using a steel plate cover fixed with bolts over the well assembly and filling up of borewells from the bottom to the ground level among others. The top court had also asked the authorities to give wide publicity to its order. "It has been brought to the notice of this court that in a number of cases, children had been trapped and fallen into borewells and tube wells or abandoned wells. These reports have been coming from various states. Accordingly, we took suo motu initiative and issued notice to the various states to take immediate measures

to prevent such kinds of incidents," the top court said in its order dated February 11, 2010.

Further, the owner of the land or the premises, before taking any steps to construct borewells or tube wells, was directed to intimate in writing to the authorities concerned - district collector or district magistrate or sarpanch - or department officials of ground water or public health or municipal corporations at least 15 days in advance. It was directed that registration of all drilling agencies, government, semi-government or private, should be mandatory. "Erection of a signboard at the time of construction near the well with the following details: (a) Complete address of the

drilling agency at the time of construction or rehabilitation of well, (b) Complete address of the user agency or owner of the well," the apex court had said. The top court also directed the barbed-wire fencing or any other suitable barrier be erected around the well during construction, a cement or concrete platform measuring 0.5x0.5x0.6 metre (0.30 metre above ground level and 0.30 metre below ground) built around the well casing and the well assembly capped using welded steel plates or a similar cover fixed with bolts. It had said in case of a pump repair, the tube well should not be left uncovered and mud pits and channels should be filled after completion of the work. "Fill up

abandoned borewells by clay/sand/boulders/pebbles /drill cuttings, etc., from bottom to ground level," said the top court, adding on completion of the drilling operations at a particular location, the ground conditions would be restored to its original form. "The guidelines above mentioned shall be given wide publicity through national television channels. A copy of this order be sent to the chief secretaries of all the states/union territories who shall forward the same to the district collectors of all districts of their respective state," the bench said. On August 6, 2010, a three-judge bench led by former CJI S H Kapadia slightly modified the February 11, 2010 order and disposed of the petition.

# President Murmu to confer Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children on December 26



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

President Droupadi Murmu will on Thursday confer the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar to 17 children from 14 states and Union territories.

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development said in a statement that it would celebrate Veer Bal Diwas and the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar with nationwide activities, highlighting the achievements and potential of India's youngsters.

This year, 17 children from 14 states and Union territories will be conferred with the prestigious Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar by President Droupadi Murmu, it added.

The award recognises exceptional achievements in seven categories - art and culture; bravery; innovation; science and technology; social service; sports; and environment. The honourees - seven boys and 10 girls - will receive a medal, certificate and a citation booklet as part of the recognition. The centerpiece of the celebration, the national programme for Veer Bal Diwas, will take place at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be present on the occasion, inaugurating the Suposhit Panchayat scheme that aims to bolster nutritional security at the grassroots. The event will also feature a march-past led by children, representing diverse cultures. Union Minister of Women and

Child Development Annapurna Devi will deliver the opening address, setting the tone for a day dedicated to nurturing young minds and fostering creativity, the ministry said in its statement. Approximately 3,500 children, including the awardees, will participate in the event, which will feature cultural performances showcasing India's rich heritage. Educational and creative activities will engage children around the country. Schools, childcare institutions and Anganwadi centres will host storytelling sessions, creative writing competitions, poster-making events, essay writing, poetry recitals and quizzes. Online platforms such as MyGov and MYBharat will also facilitate participation. Veer Bal Diwas is dedicated to inspiring young Indians to contribute to the nation's progress by upholding the values of courage, innovation and service. Through programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar and Suposhit Panchayat, the government reaffirms its commitment to empowering the next generation and fostering a culture of excellence, the ministry said.

# Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar calls removal notice a 'rusted tool'

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Tuesday said one should not use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery and asserted that the notice for his removal from the post was actually a "rusted" tool.

In his first reaction on the notice submitted by the opposition INDIA bloc, Dhankhar said, "Just look at the notice against the vice president. Just look at the six links they have given. 'You'll be shocked. Chandra Shekhar ji once said, 'Never use a vegetable-cutting knife for bypass surgery.' The notice wasn't even a vegetable-cutting knife; it was rusted. There was haste." The notice was rejected by Rajya Sabha Deputy Chair Hariwansh. "When I read it, I was astonished. But what surprised me more was that none of you read it. If you had, you wouldn't have been able to sleep for days," he told a group of women journalists. Dhankhar said any constitutional position has to be vindicated by

commitment to sublimity, sterling qualities and constitutionalism.

"We are not in a position to settle scores. Because for the success of democracy, two things are inalienable: expression and dialogue," he said, according to an official statement.

Cautioning against orchestrated efforts to harm national interests, the vice president said these are fuelled in an orchestrated manner by forces that are determined to be inimical to the interest of the country. "Their objective is to destroy, brick by brick, our constitutional institutions, slur the presidency, and mind you, who is the president? The first tribal woman to become president of this country," he remarked. Referring to parliamentary debates, Dhankhar said the two Houses are in the news for the wrong reasons. "Accountability must be enforced by media, the only conveyance to the people at large. Media can strike a chord with the people and generate pressure on public representatives," he said.

# Hospitals must treat victims of sexual violence and acid attacks: Delhi HC

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

In a significant ruling, the Delhi High Court recently said state-run and private hospitals cannot turn away survivors of sexual crimes, among others, and should treat them for free or face criminal action. A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma said a medical establishment should not insist on identity proofs when such survivors are brought in an emergency and any medical professional refusing to provide necessary treatment would attract a complaint to be immediately registered by the police being a punishable offence.

The court passed the directions in relation to survivors of rape, gang rape, acid attack and minor survivors of sexual offences, among others, and said despite the legal mandate, they faced difficulties in availing free medical treatment. "Whenever any victim/survivor of any of the said offences approaches a medical facility, diagnostic facility, diagnostic lab, nursing home, hospital, health clinic, etc., whether private and public/government, such victim/survivor shall not be



turned away without providing free medical treatment," said the bench in its judgment made available on December 21.

The High Court said denying requisite treatment to survivors was a criminal offence and all doctors, administration, officers, nurses, paramedical personnel, etc., should be informed about the same.

The ruling allowed immediate examination of a survivor, who would be treated for sexually transmitted conditions such as HIV, if situation demands. The treatment would not only include first aid but also diagnosis, in-patient admission, continued out-patient assistance, diagnostic tests, lab tests, surgery,

physical and mental counselling, psychological help, family counselling, among other things.

The court clarified availing of free medical treatment by such victims/survivors from either government or private hospitals was not dependent upon a referral by the state or district legal services authority as it was a statutory right under Section 357C of CrPC, Section 397 of BNS and Rule 6 (4) of POCSO Rules, 2020. Notably, every medical facility was directed to put up a board at the entrance, reception, counters and all prominent places, in both English and vernacular, declaring the availability of free out-patient and in-patient medical treatment for such survivors.

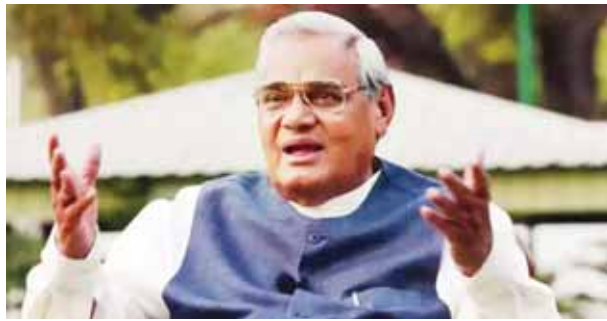
# Atal Bihari Vajpayee's vision blooms: BJP's rise to power marks fruition of 1980 prediction

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Delivering one of his more famous speeches at the BJP's inaugural convention at Shivaji Park in Mumbai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee predicted on December 30, 1980 with his signature flourish: 'Andhera chhatega, suraj niklega, kamal khilega' (darkness will end, the sun will rise, lotus will bloom).

As his birth centenary arrives, his words have aged well, with the BJP returning to power for a third straight term at the centre and lotus in full bloom.

If Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the BJP's cultural agenda the centre of national politics, Vajpayee helped the party occupy this centre when its cultural agenda was considered an anathema. A statesman politician and a peels orator, India's first non-Congress prime minister to have served a full term



commanded respect and affection from across the political aisle and stood tall with his innate democratic spirit, honed through decades in opposition, in a politics crowded with powerful satraps. The three-time prime minister was the original builder of coalition politics at the national level, successfully running an alliance government for a full term while navigating some of the biggest national crises,

including the plane hijack in 1999 and the terror attack on Parliament in 2001, both with direct links to Pakistan. His government's measured handling of the two incidents drew criticism from some quarters, including right wing organisations considered ideologically affiliated to the BJP but less than friendly to him for not pushing their cultural and economic agenda, but his standing ensured that he faced no political threat or

popular backlash. And even as he was still smarting from the fall of his government by one vote in the Lok Sabha in April 1999, his firm military and deft diplomatic response to Pakistan's intrusion into Kargil as the head of a caretaker government earned him plaudits and powered the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance to a more stable majority, ensuring him a full term at the helm.

Ashok Tandon, media adviser to Vajpayee during his six-year stint as PM, said besides being an outstanding parliamentarian who did his bit in "strengthening the roots of parliamentary democracy" after entering the Lok Sabha for the first time in 1957, he brought "good governance" at the centre of agenda as the head of government. "Good governance was his landmark contribution. He

headed a diverse coalition of parties and kept them together, while pursuing policies which helped the country in every field," he told PTI, citing the launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, PM Gramin Sadak Yojna and the Golden Quadrilateral highway project under his stewardship. It was his boost to reforms, disinvestment and infra projects that made the idea of seven to eight per cent growth rate possible and his government legislated fiscal prudence through the FRBM Act in 2003.

However, the fruits of reforms came a little too late and this coupled with the BJP's political missteps, especially in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, and the Congress-led UPA's harnessing of rural distress delivered a shock defeat to Vajpayee in 2004 amid a decline in his health. His public appearances were

limited, he campaigned last for his party in the 2007 assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh before slowly fading away from the public eye as dementia hit him. He died in 2018. The Modi government began observing his birth anniversary as "Good Governance Day" and bestowed Bharat Ratna on him in 2015.

An impressive mix of tradition and modernity in his world view, Vajpayee, a full-time RSS worker before being sent by the Hindutva organisation to the Jana Sangh in 1951 when the party was founded, maintained a lifelong adherence to the Sangh's values even though he at times resented its methods. Unlike his lifelong companion L K Advani, who despite being an ideological hardliner and more invested organisational leader fell from the RSS's grace due to his public airing of views,

including his ill-fated praise of M. A. Jinnah, that were bound to antagonise the Hindutva organisation, Vajpayee used his cultivated ambivalence and gifted articulation to shape his image of a moderate while never crossing swords with it. The only time he openly denounced a polarising Hindutva cause was when the Babri mosque was demolished in 1992, but his stand was considered an act of political pragmatism necessary for the BJP to realise its political ambitions after fetching merely two seats in the 1984 polls.

With the moderate, poet-at-heart and statesman-like Vajpayee as the BJP's prime ministerial face and the party agreeing to put a moratorium on its contentious ideological planks of the Rem temple construction, Article 370 repeal and the Uniform Civil Code, regional parties from

across the country were drawn as he led them to poll wins. His passionate moves to improve ties with Pakistan resulted in his spectacular journey to Lahore in a bus in February 1999 and then hosting the Agra Summit with Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf in 2001 but they met with little success. As the army chief before he deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, Musharraf was behind his country's misadventure in Kargil, which followed months after Vajpayee's bus journey. However, Vajpayee's famous invocation of 'Insiyaniyat, Jamhuriyat, Kashmiriyat' to resolve the issues afflicting Jammu and Kashmir won him lifelong admirers in the Muslim-majority Valley. Prime Minister Narendra Modi too recalled the phrase in his Independence Day speech in 2018 to reach out to people there.





www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Adieu Shyam Benegal

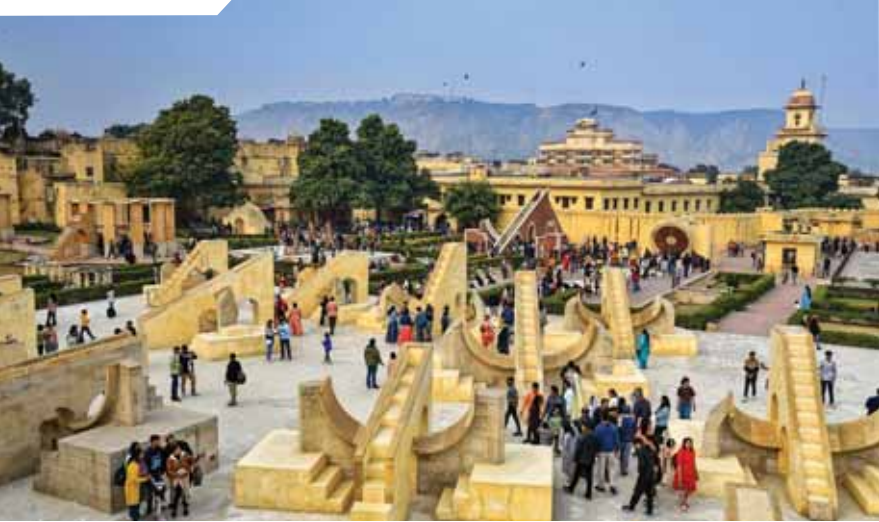
With passing of Shyam Benegal, Indian cinema has lost a luminary, but his films will continue to illuminate and educate

The curtains have fallen on one of the most illustrious chapters in Indian cinema. Shyam Benegal, the pioneering filmmaker who redefined storytelling in Indian cinema, passed away at the age of 90 on December 23, 2024. He succumbed to chronic kidney disease at Wockhardt Hospital in Bombay Central. Known as the father of Indian parallel cinema, Benegal's legacy remains etched in the heart of Indian filmmaking, his films celebrated for their realism, depth, and transformative impact on society. Born on December 14, 1934, Benegal celebrated his milestone 90th birthday just days ago, surrounded by close family and friends. Yet, even in his twilight years, the veteran filmmaker remained deeply connected to his art. Benegal's career was marked by his groundbreaking contribution to the Indian New Wave movement in the 1970s and 1980s. With films like 'Ankur' (1974), 'Nishant' (1975), 'Manthan' (1976), and 'Bhumika' (1977), he charted a new cinematic course that delved into realism and social commentary, a stark contrast to the formulaic escapism of mainstream Bollywood.



His films gave voice to the marginalised and explored themes of gender, class struggles, and rural India, bringing to light the unseen facets of Indian society. 'Nishant', a harrowing tale of oppression and resistance, and 'Manthan', inspired by Dr. Verghese Kurien's milk cooperative movement, became cult classics. The latter, crowdfunded by 500,000 farmers, stands as a testament to Benegal's ability to connect with grassroots realities. The film, India's official entry for the 1976 Academy Awards, exemplified his commitment to blending art with advocacy. Benegal's films also became a platform for some of India's finest acting talents. Actors like Shabana Azmi, Naseeruddin Shah, Smita Patil, and Om Puri found their early footing in his films. Azmi, who debuted in Benegal's 'Ankur', recently shared a poignant moment from his 90th birthday celebrations, underscoring the indelible bond they shared. His collaboration with screenwriter Vijay Tendulkar produced narratives that were both poignant and thought-provoking, winning multiple National Awards. From 'Junoon' to 'Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero', Benegal's oeuvre showcased an unmatched versatility, spanning historical dramas, rural sagas, and contemporary commentaries. Earlier this year, 'Manthan' was restored and screened at the Cannes Film Festival under the Cannes Classics segment, reiterating the timeless relevance of Benegal's vision. Despite his declining health, the event underscored his enduring influence on global cinema. Benegal's storytelling was never confined to entertainment. His films were instruments of change, questioning societal norms and sparking dialogues. His pioneering approach laid the foundation for generations of filmmakers who sought to marry art with social responsibility. Rest in peace, Shyam Benegal, the maestro who showed us the soul of India through his lens.

### PICTALK



Tourists visit the historical Jantar Mantar, in Jaipur

# India recalibrates Myanmar strategy

The stakes are high for India, balancing its Act East policy, border security and competition with China, all against the backdrop of a fractured Myanmar



ASHOK K MEHTA

After four years of civil war in Myanmar, India has quietly changed its policy towards the Junta from one of total and unflinching support following its coup against democracy to one of nuanced support. Junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing has been advocating holding elections for the last four years but only now with China's assistance, they are slated for 2025. China is playing with both sides: supporting the Junta as well as some EAOs (Ethnic Armed Organisations) especially in the north contiguous with its Yunnan province. India too has shifted the goalposts but less perceptibly and engaging some EAOs and the National Unity Government (NUG) after the Junta lost its control in the Rakhine and Chin territories along India and Bangladesh borders. Last week the Junta's control of the ground began crumbling further with the loss of Ann, Headquarters Western Military Command, the second military command to fall to resistance groups. Junta has lost two airports - Thandwe (Rakhine) and Lashio and 75 towns and cities out of some 340 of them. It has also lost control of six border trading posts. 40 of 70 towns in Rakhine have been captured by the Arakan Army which is part of the Three Brotherhood Alliance, the other two being MNDA and TNLA. Two critical seaports on the west coast - India-operated Sittwe and Chinese-owned Kyaukphyu - are on AA's target list next year unless Beijing can dissuade it from attacking Kyaukphyu though the loss of Ann has opened the gates to it. Magaung is the other target in Rakhine. On the Thailand border, the Karen National Union took Manerplaw, the Junta losing possession after 30 years. A humanitarian corridor with Thailand has existed with the help of the Junta. In the North, TBA has been persuaded by China to go slow against the Junta, and not support NUG and the People's Defence Force. The Kachin Independence Army has seized Bemo and Mansi, popular tourist areas in the



northeast. In the central Sagaing region, Mandalay, the second largest city after Yangon, came under rocket attack last month and National Highway 3 from Mandalay to China border, was under resistance control. In sum, the Junta controls less than 50 per cent of the land but has the majority of the population in it. These are Bamar-predominant areas in Sagaing, Irrawaddy Delta, the new capital Nyaung-U and Yangon. They are likely to lose more ground next year despite pressure from the Chinese on EAOs. Beijing is nursing the Junta and its leader, Hlaing. He was invited to meet PM Li Qiang after attending the Greater Mekong Subregional Summit at Kunming last month. China is replenishing the Junta's military arsenal - so is Russia - including three fighter jets with assured ammunition supply. It wants to locate a private security company (like in Pakistan) for the protection of its strategic assets like China Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) containing oil and gas pipelines along with a railway link from Kunming to Kyaukphyu. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is a frequent visitor to Myanmar though most people resent Chinese support for the Junta and its presence. The Chinese consulate in

LAST WEEK THE JUNTA'S CONTROL OF THE GROUND BEGAN CRUMBLING FURTHER WITH THE LOSS OF ANN, HEADQUARTERS WESTERN MILITARY COMMAND, THE SECOND MILITARY COMMAND TO FALL TO RESISTANCE GROUPS

Mandalay came under attack recently. Theoretically, an election could be held contingent upon the ground situation in November next year. Even with low turnout and rigging an election will be manipulated. ASEAN's problem is Myanmar after the failure of its five-point consensus peace formula. Many meetings have been held with and without Myanmar representation without any light at the end of the tunnel. During the 18 December talks in Bangkok, with Myanmar's neighbouring countries, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, a former Ambassador in Myanmar, discussed prospects for elections with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Than Shwe. There was a separate set of talks with stakeholders from non-neighbouring countries. India's stakes are high given competition with China, a disturbed situation in its northeast and a troubling relationship developing with Bangladesh. Myanmar is a pivotal land bridge for its Act East policy, the Asean Trilateral Highway and the security of its Eastern frontier. The junta's loss of control in Rakhine and Chin states has created an adverse situation along the border with Mizoram and a broken Manipur. While India is not proactive like China, its new policy pronouncement - old wine in a new bottle - is "immediate cessation of violence, peaceful resolution of

the ethnic issue through a genuine federal democracy where the process should be Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-driven. While Delhi has taken its time to engage resistance groups, it did organise one-and-a-half track meetings with select EAOs and Junta separately. In November, it first engaged Junta officials followed by EAOs who met the Joint Secretary (Bangladesh- Sri Lanka- Myanmar) at the Indian Council for World Affairs. In September, it had met representatives from Chin, Rakhine, Sagaing and Magwe who are already in refugee camps in Mizoram. While India has not opened humanitarian corridors to these areas it is providing food, fuel medicines across the border. But that is not enough as they also want weapons and cash. Delhi does not want to annoy the Junta with which it has little leverage, unlike China. NUG was not invited to Delhi though it is being engaged back channel. India has to get real; be proactive, take risks and support AA and Chin rebels as its Act East policy is pivoted in areas under their control. It can't dump the Junta as it will be a key constituent of any outcome.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### STRENGTHENING INDIA-KUWAIT TIES

Madam —The two-day visit of PM Narendra Modi to Kuwait will further boost the bilateral ties between two historically friendly nations. This is the first visit by any Indian prime minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years. Though India and Kuwait have enjoyed traditionally friendly relations, which date back to the pre-oil era of Kuwait when maritime trade with India was the backbone of its economy, India and most Arab countries, especially Kuwait, have enjoyed very cordial relations based on mutual trust and people-to-people contact, nurtured over several millennia. Till 1961, the Indian rupee was the legal currency tender of Kuwait till it introduced its currency, the Kuwaiti Dinar (KWD). This was a symbol of enduring economic and cultural centuries between two brother nations. PM Modi was conferred with Kuwait's highest civilian honour, the prestigious "Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer". The Order of Mubarak Al Kabeer is a knighthood order of Kuwait. It is awarded to heads of state and foreign sovereigns and members of foreign royal families in a sign of friendship and has been previously awarded to foreign leaders like Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, George Bush, King Salman Bin Saud, and King Hussein of Jordan. This visit of PM Modi holds great significance as current global volatility requires better cooperation and stability among nations, especially among regional players, for energy security, and India's desire for stability in the Gulf region, beside Kuwait, holds significant strategic importance. The Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) has the world's oldest and fifth largest sovereign wealth fund, valued around US \$1 trillion, which has US \$969 billion in assets under its management. This visit of PM Modi has heralded a new era of friendship, which will further boost trade, cooperation, and peace at a time when economic concerns and regional stability dictate are of the foremost importance in the formation of political alliances.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

#### PV Sindhu marries Venkata Datta Sai



Indian badminton star Pusarla Venkata Sindhu, a two-time Olympic (silver and bronze) medalist, is married to Venkata Datta Sai in Udaipur. Sindhu, a five-time World Championship medallist, a few days ago, clinched the Syed Modi India International title and announced her engagement via an Instagram post on December 14, 2024, that captured a memorable moment with the couple holding their rings and smiling from ear to ear. The wedding festivities began on December 20th

in the lake city of Rajasthan at the exclusive and majestic Raffles Udaipur Resort. Pre-wedding festivities included sangeet, haldi, and mehendi ceremonies. The families, long-time acquaintances, planned the wedding swiftly to accommodate Sindhu's training schedule. Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (shockingly, he was wearing a black kurta in an auspicious ceremony, even as a Hindu party leader) shared a captivating photo of the couple, offering his blessings. Now the reception is scheduled in Sindhu's native city, Hyderabad, on December 24. Congratulations to the darling daughter of Mother India, P. V. Sindhu, and her husband, Venkata Datta Sai. Best wishes to the newlyweds for a wonderful & eternal married life. Whatsoever, the first image of the wedding has already captivated hearts, setting the tone for the couple's happily ever after.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

#### POPCORN PRICING DEBATE

Madam—The recent decision by the GST Council has turned popcorn from a simple snack into a focal point of economic debate. Under the new rules, salted popcorn is taxed at 5 per cent, packaged popcorn at 12 per cent, and sugar-flavoured popcorn at 18 per cent. This decision raises questions about the priorities of the tax structure while adding complexity to people's daily lives. Will samosas, tea, and water also be classified into tax categories based on taste and packaging? The tax determination for popcorn signals that the government is exploring every possible avenue to increase revenue. The aroma of popcorn in cinemas might now bring concerns about tax slabs before the joy of taste. Popcorn, once a symbol of social equality, has now become a marker of class division due to the 5 per cent and 18 per cent tax differential. This decision could negatively impact the Rs 1,200 crore popcorn industry, pushing people toward cheaper alternatives. The government must recognise that such decisions add to the burden on citizens already grap-

pling with inflation. Popcorn is no longer just a snack but a representation of the complexities of policymaking.

RK Jain | Barwani

#### TRIBES PROTECT NATURE

Madam —It is a great irony that all the well-educated and better-placed-in-life populations are destroying nature and damaging the environment; it is the indigenous tribes across the world who are supposedly backward and primitive who are doing their best to protect it. The bond between nature and her people has all but broken down in all urban centres, and the city dwellers do not think twice about their lifestyles, which is slowly destroying the environment. After all, we, the human race, are not the sole inhabitants of the planet, and other living creatures are co-inheritors too. It is time for all the nations with tribal populations to learn from them on how to care for and protect the planet.

Anthony Henriques | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Across cultures and ages: The beauty of unexpected friendships

The unexpected joy of forging meaningful friendships in middle age defies the common belief that the best opportunities for connection are behind us

Your hat is fantastic. It makes you look more Bavarian than any of us, the concierge quipped as I entered the venue for the coffee-and-cake event at a resort in southern Germany. Although he was stretching the truth — I have neither blonde hair nor blue eyes — I accepted the compliment with a coy smile. "Danke schön," I said, tipping my woolen hat. Just then, another guest remarked, "That's a pretty pin on your hat," pointing to the delicate hand-crafted Edelweiss flower. A cherished gift from my friends, Wolfgang and Amelie, the pin symbolised a friendship that began just a year ago, in this very Bavarian town of Schliersee. The Wolfgang — a handsome, warm-hearted couple — are a testament to the unexpected joy of friendships made in middle age. Our bond didn't begin with shared childhoods or decades of history but with a simple "hello" and an open heart. The modest origins of our connection and the way it blossomed over the past year defy the notion that meaningful friendships are reserved



for youth. Our paths crossed serendipitously during an evening walk. A casual exchange of pleasantries evolved into deeper conversations about life, culture, and shared interests. What began as polite conversation in an Alpine countryside ended with an exchange of coordinates and it continued with texting in the months after. It is widely held that the friends we make in our formative years are the ones who stay, while those forged later in life are fleeting, superficial, or driven by necessity. This belief may hold some truth; adulthood brings with it obligations, scepticism, and wariness. We become cautious in extending ourselves. The

innocence of youthful camaraderie gives way to guarded interactions, and we convince ourselves that the window for profound friendship has closed. Yet, the Wolfgang remind me that this window is not sealed shut — it merely takes a little more effort to open. Friendships formed in middle age are special not despite our life experiences, but because of them. We bring to these connections a deeper sense of self-awareness, empathy, and appreciation. There's no rush to impress or to conform. The pressures of youthful identity-building are gone. In their place, we find sincerity, authenticity, and the willingness to value people for who they truly are. They remind us of the universality of human warmth and curiosity. Meeting someone from another country — someone whose life, traditions, and language are different — can feel like discovering an entirely new world. And when such encounters lead to genuine friendship, they break down the invisible walls that geography and culture often build around us. There is also a profound joy

in the intentionality of these connections. In our younger years, friendships are often born of proximity — classmates, neighbours, or college roommates. As adults, friendships require deliberate effort. This intentionality infuses middle-aged friendships with a depth and resilience that can be even more rewarding than the bonds of our youth. I think back to the pin on my hat — that delicate Edelweiss — and I see it as a metaphor for these kinds of friendships. The Edelweiss, a rare Alpine flower, thrives in challenging conditions. It symbolises courage, devotion, and the willingness to climb new heights. Like the flower, friendships made in middle age might take more effort to cultivate, but they are hardy, resilient, and precious. A year after that first meeting, I found myself once again in Schliersee last month, sharing coffee and cake with the Wolfgang, laughing over our language blunders and cultural quirks. It is never too late to make friends.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



ASHA KUMAR IYER



**FIRST COLUMN**

**THE ETERNAL WISDOM OF SUNDAR KAND**

Sacred texts and mantras hold a timeless power to uplift the soul



RAVI VALLURI

The faithful recognise the profound benefits of chanting or reading sacred texts, mantras, and scriptures like the Hanuman Chalisa and Sundar Kand. These practices are especially embraced by large numbers on auspicious days such as Tuesdays and Saturdays. The vibrations generated by reading these sacred books and meditating on the mantras foster positive thoughts, beautify the mind, and empower us to overcome internal obstacles and dispel negativity clouding our perspective. Yet, many of us struggle to engage in these practices regularly, often citing demanding schedules and lack of time. As spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar observes, "The time given to the Divine is the least." Consequently, we neglect to devote quality time to the Lord, remembering Him only in moments of distress. Even when time is found, many face difficulties focusing, maintaining clarity, or chanting with proper intonation. The mind frequently drifts into worldly concerns.



To aid this practice, here is a simple version of Sundar Kand:

Ram Ram Jai Ram  
 Ram Jai Ram Ram  
 Peaceful, Compassionate, Sinless,  
 One served by Brahma and Shambhu,  
 One who appears in human form by Maya,  
 O Raghuvhar, I bow to you.  
 You are my innermost Self.  
 Liberate me, O Lord,  
 Instill devotion within me.

O Lord Hanuman, epitome of strength, knowledge, and wisdom, emboldened by Jambavanth's counsel, set out to cross the mighty ocean in search of Sita. He triumphed over the demoness Surasa and reached Lanka under the cover of night. Guided by divine intuition, he discovered Sita and presented her with Lord Ram's ring, bowing at her feet and seeking her blessings. Hanuman then wreaked havoc in Ashok Vatika—eating fruits, breaking branches, and shaking trees.

Allowing himself to be captured by the asuras, he was taken to Ravana's court. There, he urged Ravana to repent and return Sita to Lord Ram. Ravana, consumed by ego, refused and instead set Hanuman's tail ablaze. In response, Hanuman used the fire to destroy Lanka's golden city. Before departing, Hanuman comforted Sita and took her Chudamani (jewel) as a token for Lord Ram. On returning, he presented it to Ram, who embraced him, deeply moved by his devotion and bravery. When asked how he accomplished the task, Hanuman humbly replied that nothing is impossible with the grace of Lord Ram. Lord Ram then instructed Sugreev to assemble the army and seek the ocean's permission to cross into Lanka. Meanwhile, Mandodari, Ravana's queen, warned him of the dire consequences of his actions and implored him to release Sita, but he refused. Ravana's virtuous brother Vibheeshan also advised him to repent, cautioning that even Lord Shiva would disapprove of his deeds.

Ignoring all advice, Ravana's stubbornness led Vibheeshan to abandon Lanka and seek refuge at Lord Ram's feet. Recognising his righteousness, Lord Ram crowned Vibheeshan as the future king of Lanka. Ravana sent spies disguised as messengers to gather information on Lord Ram's plans. They returned with alarming news and urged Ravana to free Sita, but he remained defiant. With the help of Nal and Neel, Lord Ram constructed the Setu bridge to cross the ocean. Along the way, he released the river Sarayu from its curse and advanced toward Lanka. This timeless Sundar Kand, penned by Tulsidas, continues to inspire and guide devotees on their spiritual journey.

*(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)*

**Atal ji: The statesman with vision and resolve**



NARENDRA MODI

Today, as we mark the 100th Jayanti of Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, we celebrate the life and legacy of a statesman whose vision and leadership continue to inspire generations



Today, 25th December is a very special day for all of us. Our nation marks the 100th Jayanti of our beloved former Prime Minister, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Ji. He stands tall as a statesman who continues to inspire countless people.

Our nation will always be grateful to Atal Ji for being the architect of India's transition into the 21st century. When he took oath as PM in 1998 our nation had passed through a period of political instability. In about 9 years we had seen 4 Lok Sabha elections. The people of India were getting impatient and also sceptical about governments being able to deliver. It was Atal Ji who turned this tide by providing stable and effective governance. Coming from humble roots, he realised the struggles of the common citizen and the transformative power of effective governance.

One can see the long-term impact of Atal Ji's leadership in so many sectors around us. His era marked a gigantic leap in the world of Information Technology, telecom and communications. This was particularly important for a nation like ours, which is also blessed with a very dynamic Yuva Shakti. The NDA Government under Atal Ji made the first serious attempt to make technology accessible to the common citizens. At the same time, there was foresight in connecting India. Even today, most people recall the Golden Quadrilateral Project, which connected the length and breadth of India. Equally notable were the Vajpayee Government's efforts to enhance local connectivity as well through initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Similarly, his Government gave a push to metro connectivity by doing extensive work for the Delhi Metro, which stands out as a world-class infrastructure project.

Thus, the Vajpayee Government not only boosted economic growth but also brought distant regions closer, fostering unity and integration. When it comes to



**ATAL JI PRESIDED OVER THE CREATION OF THE NDA, WHICH REDEFINED COALITIONS IN INDIAN POLITICS. HE BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER AND MADE NDA A FORCE FOR DEVELOPMENT, NATIONAL PROGRESS AND REGIONAL AMBITIONS**

the social sector, an initiative like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan highlights how Atal Ji dreamt of building an India where modern education is accessible to people across the nation, particularly for the poor and marginalised sections. At the same time, his government presided over many economic reforms which set the stage for India's economic surge after several decades of following an economic philosophy which encouraged cronyism and stagnation.

A wonderful example of Vajpayee Ji's leadership can be seen in the summer of 1998. His Government had just assumed office and on 11th May, India conducted the Pokhran tests, known as Operation Shakti. These tests exemplified the prowess of India's scientific community.

The world was stunned that India had done the tests and expressed their anger in no uncertain terms. Any ordinary leader would have buckled, but Atal Ji was made differently. And what happened? India stood firm and resolute with the government calling for another set of tests two days later, on 13th May! If the tests of the 11th showed scientific skill, the ones on 13th showed true leadership. It was a message to the world that gone were the days when India would buckle under threats or pressure. Despite facing international sanctions, the then NDA government of Vajpayee Ji stood firm, articulating India's right to safeguard its sovereignty while simultaneously being the strongest proponent of world peace.

Atal Ji understood Indian democracy and also the need to make it stronger. Atal Ji presided over the creation of the NDA, which redefined coalitions in Indian politics. He brought people together and

made NDA a force for development, national progress and regional ambitions. His Parliamentary brilliance was seen throughout his political journey. He belonged to a party with a handful of MPs but his words were enough to rattle the might of the all-powerful Congress Party that time. As Prime Minister, he blunted the criticisms of the Opposition with style and substance. His was a career spent largely in the Opposition benches but never carried any trace of bitterness against anyone, even though the Congress stooped to new lows by going to the extent of calling him a traitor! He was also not one to cling on to power through opportunistic means. He preferred to resign in 1996 instead of following the path of horse-trading and dirty politics. In 1999, his Government was defeated by 1 vote.

A lot of people told him to challenge the immoral politics happening then but he preferred to go by the rules. Eventually, he came back with another resounding mandate from the people. When it comes to commitment to protecting our Constitution too, Atal Ji stands tall. He was deeply impacted by the martyrdom of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Years later, he was a pillar of the anti-Emergency movement. In the run-up to the 1977 elections after the Emergency, he agreed to merger of his own Party (Jan Sangh) into the Janata Party. I am sure it would have been a painful decision for him and the others, but safeguarding the Constitution was all that mattered to him.

It is also noteworthy how deeply rooted Atal Ji was in Indian culture. Upon becoming India's External Affairs Minister, he became the first Indian leader to speak in Hindi at

the United Nations. This one gesture showcased his immense pride in India's heritage and identity, leaving an indelible mark on the global stage.

Atal Ji's persona was magnetic and his life was enriched by his love for literature and expression. A prolific writer and poet, he used words to inspire, provoke thought, and even offer solace. His poetry, often reflective of his inner struggles and hopes for the nation, continues to resonate with people across age groups. For so many Bharatiya Janata Party Karyakartas like me, it is our privilege that we were able to learn and interact with a person like Atal Ji. His contribution to the BJP was foundational.

In those days to spear-head an alternative narrative to the dominant Congress showed his greatness. Alongside stalwarts like Shri L.K. Advani Ji and Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi Ji he nurtured the party from its formative years, guiding it through challenges, setbacks and triumphs. Whenever the choice came between ideology and power, he always chose the former. He was able to convince the nation that an alternative world view from the Congress was possible and such a world view could deliver.

On his 100th Jayanti, let us rededicate ourselves to realising his ideals and fulfilling his vision for India. Let us strive to build an India that embodies his principles of good governance, unity, and progress. Atal Ji's unwavering belief in the potential of our nation continues to inspire us to aim higher and work harder.

*(This tribute to the visionary statesman late former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee has been penned by PM Narendra Modi)*

**Dreaming of a White Christmas in New York City**

The first snowfall and the twinkle of lights on the Rockefeller tree—there's a certain magic that makes Christmas in New York unforgettable

The first time I saw New York City during the holidays, I was 19, a college freshman on a whirlwind trip with my friends. It was my first real taste of winter—snow, bitter cold, and the kind of brisk air that turns your cheeks red. Coming from a place where Christmas meant palm trees with twinkle lights, the sight of NYC blanketed in snow felt like stepping into a new world. I didn't know it then, but that trip would spark a love affair with the city that would eventually bring me back here five years later. **My First Snow, My First NYC Christmas**

I still remember how the snow caught me off guard. It wasn't the gentle, picture-perfect kind I'd imagined from movies. It was harsh, relentless, and



SHREYA DAYAL

absolutely freezing. Walking through Times Square that Black Friday, bundled up in layers that still didn't feel like enough, I saw the city come alive in a way that felt electric. It wasn't just the towering billboards or the endless sales signs luring shoppers into stores at all hours of the night.

It was the energy—the palpable hum of people chasing holiday deals while dodging each other in the snow. It was chaotic, overwhelming, and unforgettable. Somewhere in the madness of flashing lights and icy sidewalks, I knew I wanted to come back someday—not as a visitor, but as someone who belonged here.

**The Magic of NYC's Holiday Icons**

During that trip, we did all the things you're supposed to do when you're experiencing Christmas in New York for the first time. We saw the Rockefeller Center tree, towering above the skating rink, every inch of it glowing like it had been plucked from a fairytale. The cold bit at my fingers as we stood there, taking it all in. For a moment, the crowds

and the cold faded away, leaving only the soft twinkle of the lights and the awe of standing in front of something so iconic.

The Met was another world entirely. As someone who'd only read about it in books, stepping into its grandeur felt surreal. Wandering through the exhibits, I found myself captivated by the way history and art came alive here. Outside, the snow was falling again, but I was too caught up in the beauty around me to notice the cold.

**The Broadway Moment That Changed Everything**

That trip wasn't just about the sights; it was about the moments that stayed with me long after I left. One of those moments was seeing Phantom of the Opera on Broadway.



Sitting in that theater, watching the chandelier crash and the Phantom's haunting story unfold, I felt a kind of magic I couldn't quite explain. It was more than just a show—it was a moment that made me feel alive in a way I hadn't before. Walking out of the theater into the snowy night, the sounds of

the orchestra still echoing in my mind, I felt a connection to the city that I couldn't shake. It was as if New York had opened its arms to me and whispered, "Come back."

**Coming Full Circle**

Five years later, I did come back. I'd dreamed of living in New York ever since that first

trip, and now here I was, not as a wide-eyed tourist, but as someone calling the city home. It's funny how those early memories still feel so vivid, like they're a part of me.

Walking through Times Square today, I still think about that freezing Black Friday night when I braved the snow for the first time. Seeing the Rockefeller tree now brings back flashes of that first tripping in awe of its beauty and dreaming about a future that somehow feels like the present now. Even when I catch a Broadway show, I can't help but remember how Phantom of the Opera made me fall in love with this city in the first place.

**The Spirit of a NYC Christmas**

There's something timeless

about Christmas in New York. No matter how many years pass or how many times you see it, the magic never fades. The snow still glistens, the lights still dazzle, and the city still hums with that unmistakable holiday energy.

For me, it's not just about the sights or the snow—it's about how this city makes you feel. It's about the way it wraps you up in its chaos, its beauty, and its magic, and leaves you with memories that last a lifetime. A White Christmas in New York City isn't just a holiday—it's a story. And for me, it's the story of a 19-year-old who fell in love with the snow, the lights, and the city that would one day become home!

*(The writer is a researcher at Johns Hopkins University; views are personal)*



# No justification in US curbs on Pak firms, says Shehbaz

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday defended Pakistan's nuclear and missile programme, saying the recent US sanctions against the country's four entities have "no justification". His remarks came days after the US slapped sanctions on four Pakistani firms, including the state-owned flagship aerospace and defence agency — National Development Complex (NDC) — on charges of contributing to ballistic missile programme. In addition to the NDC, the three other entities are Akhtar and Sons Private Limited, Affiliates International and Rockside Enterprise. All three are based in Karachi, while the NDC is in Islamabad. "The sanctions placed upon our National Development Complex and other entities have no justification," Prime Minister Shehbaz said while addressing a federal cabinet meeting.

"Pakistan has absolutely no intention for our nuclear system to be aggressive. It is 100 per cent for Pakistan's defence. It's just deterrence; nothing else," he added. The prime minister also said that Pakistan's ballistic missile programme was for defending itself "if God forbid there is aggression against Pakistan". Earlier, the Foreign Office termed the US decision to impose sanctions on NDC and three commercial entities as "unfortunate and biased". Shehbaz noted that the FO had given a "comprehensive response" and said that the missile programme belonged to the entire nation. "It's dearer to them (the public) than their hearts and there will be no compromise," he said, clarifying that the nation was united on the issue. Pakistan and the US have experienced an uneasy relationship in recent years due to issues related to human rights, terrorism, nuclear weapons and missile pro-

gramme. US expresses concern over sentencing of 25 civilians by Pakistan military court: Expressing concern over the sentencing of 25 civilians by a military court in Pakistan, the United States on Monday said that it lacked judicial independence, transparency and due process guarantees. "The United States is deeply concerned that Pakistani civilians have been sentenced by a military tribunal for their involvement in protests on May 9, 2023. These military courts lack judicial independence, transparency, and due process guarantees," said State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller. "The United States continues to call on Pakistani authorities to respect the right to a fair trial and due process, as enshrined in Pakistan's constitution," he added. However, a close aide of President-elect Donald Trump described it as too little and too weak. "You are late. And this is too little and too weak. Speak

normally. Free Imran Khan," said Richard Grenell, who served as acting director of national intelligence under President Trump in 2020 and was the US ambassador to Germany from 2018 to 2020. Indian American Congressman Ro Khanna joined Grenell in seeking freedom for Imran Khan. "I agree with Richard Grenell. It's time to free Imran Khan and allow the people of Pakistan to hold new democratic elections," Khanna said. "Free Imran Khan. This is bipartisan. We need to not recognize the rigged election in Pakistan and the new government. We need a new election in Pakistan and Imran Khan needs to be out of jail," Khanna said in a video posted on a social media platform. Former Trump envoy on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said it is time to put more pressure on Pakistan, especially the military, to facilitate reaching a balanced political agreement with PTI and the release of Imran Khan.

# 'We should try again': Punjab Assembly Speaker on Vajpayee's failed India-Pak peace initiative

PTI ■ LAHORE

"Even though the chance was missed, we should try again," says Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan when asked about Atal Bihari Vajpayee's 1999 'bus yatra', a bold attempt by the then Indian prime minister to put India-Pakistan relations on the peace track. Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore on February 19, 1999. He and Pakistan premier Nawaz Sharif signed the Lahore Declaration after a historic summit here. The agreement signalled a breakthrough, but just months later a Pakistani intrusion led to the Kargil War. Wednesday is Vajpayee's 100th birth anniversary. "Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in 1999 was a defining moment. Even though the chance was missed, we should try again. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who follows Vajpayee's vision, leading India, and Shehbaz Sharif, Nawaz's brother, in charge in Pakistan, there is a real possibility of restarting the peace process," says Khan, who is a senior member of the Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz (PML-N). Khan says the future of the region depends on free trade and unrestricted movement between countries. "Peace in the region is not just a good idea — it is necessary for growth and prosperity," the Punjab Speaker adds. Another senior PML-N leader from Punjab, Mohammad Mehdi, describes Vajpayee's Lahore visit as historic. He believes the visit could have led to lasting peace if the Kargil conflict had not happened. "The Western media paid a lot of attention to Vajpayee's visit because it came just months after both countries became nuclear powers," Mehdi says, referring to nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan in May 1998. "There was excitement, especially within PML-N ranks, when Vajpayee arrived in Lahore in February 1999. His speech, saying 'Pakistan is a reality, and both countries now need to move forward and leave the past behind,' gave hope to many," Mehdi recalls. Unfortunately, the Kargil conflict happened soon after, and the peace efforts were unsuccessful, he says.

Mehdi says Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) held protests during Vajpayee's visit, which many believe were organised by the military led by General Pervez Musharraf. "Jamaat-i-Islami workers even attacked the Turkish ambassador's car near Lahore Fort, mistaking it for an Indian delegation," he says. Mehdi believes back-channel talks between Pakistan and India are still happening. "Right now, relations between the two countries are at their lowest point. Neither country has an envoy in the other's capital. However, businessmen on both sides desperately want to restore ties to improve trade and use shorter routes through Pakistan to reach Central Asia and Europe," he says. Political expert Brig (ret.) Farooq Hameed says Nawaz Sharif should have involved the powerful Pakistan Army in the peace process. "The initiative failed because the military was not consulted, which led to the Kargil conflict and ended the peace process. If Nawaz Sharif had taken the military on board before Vajpayee's visit, the chances of the peace talks being success-

ful would have been higher." Hameed says Nawaz has repeatedly shown interest in improving ties with India, including his desire to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi after returning to Pakistan last year from a four-year self-imposed exile in London. However, he pointed out, that Nawaz's younger brother, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has not made any recent public statements indicating a similar desire. "Nawaz should first consult Shehbaz, who enjoys the military establishment's favour, to determine if he shares this vision for improved relations with India," he says. He also notes the lack of progress after Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar visited Pakistan recently. "Most Pakistanis are not anti-India. Unlike in India, politicians here do not need to criticise India to win elections," Hameed says. However, terrorism remains a major obstacle to reconciliation, he says. India has often accused Pakistan of supporting terrorism, while Pakistan now blames India for terror attacks in Balochistan.

# Syria's new authorities 'very receptive' to probe of Assad war crimes

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The UN organization assisting in investigating the most serious crimes in Syria said Monday the country's new authorities were "very receptive" to its request for cooperation during a just-concluded visit to Damascus, and it is preparing to deploy. The visit led by Robert Petit, head of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism for Syria, was the first since the organization was established by the UN General Assembly in 2016. It was created to assist in evidence-gathering and prosecution of indi-

viduals responsible for possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide since Syria's civil war began in 2011. Petit highlighted the urgency of preserving documents and other evidence before it is lost. Since the rebel overthrow of Syria's President Bashar Assad and the rebel opening of prisons and detention facilities there have been rising demands from Syrians for the prosecution of those responsible for atrocities and killings while he was in power. "The fall of the Assad rule is a significant opportunity for us to fulfill our mandate on the ground," Petit said. "Time is

running out. There is a small window of opportunity to secure these sites and the material they hold." UN associate spokesperson Stephane Tremblay said Monday the investigative team "is preparing for an operational deployment as early as possible and as soon as it is authorized to conduct activities on Syrian soil." The spokesperson for the organization, known as the IIIM, who was on the trip with Petit, went further, telling The Associated Press: "We are preparing to deploy on the expectation that we will get authorization." "The representatives from the

caretaker authorities were very receptive to our request for cooperation and are aware of the scale of the task ahead," the spokesperson said, speaking on condition of not being named. "They emphasized that they will need expertise to help safeguard the newly accessible documentation." The IIIM did not disclose which officials in the new government it met with or the site that Petit visited afterward. "Even at one facility," Petit said, "the mountains of government documentation reveal the chilling efficiency of systematizing the regime's atrocity crimes."

# Hong Kong police issue arrest warrants, bounties for six activists

AP ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong police on Tuesday announced a fresh round of arrest warrants for six activists based overseas, with bounties set at USD 1 million Hong Kong dollars for information leading to their arrests. According to the warrants, the six are wanted for national security offences such as secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces. They include Tony Chung, the former leader of now-defunct pro-independence group Studentlocalism. UK-based Carmen Lau, a former district councillor and current activist with the Hong Kong Democracy Council, as

well as Chloe Cheung, an activist with the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong, also had warrants issued against them. The latest round of warrants signals that the Hong Kong government is targeting vocal critics based abroad. The government had previously issued two rounds of arrest warrants and bounties for more prominent activists, including ex-lawmakers Ted Hui and Nathan Law. The increasing number of wanted individuals abroad come as Hong Kong continues to crack down on political dissent following massive anti-government protests in 2019 that resulted in a wave of pro-democracy move-

ments. Many outspoken pro-democracy activists have since been jailed, with others fleeing abroad. "The Hong Kong government's latest round of arrest warrants and bounties against six Hong Kong activists is a cowardly act of intimidation that aims to silence Hong Kong people," said Maya Wang, associate China director at Human Rights Watch. "The six — including two Canadian citizens — live in the UK and Canada. We call on the UK and Canadian governments to act immediately to push back against the Hong Kong government's attempts to threaten Hong Kongers living in their

countries." Tuesday's arrest warrants take the total number of wanted people to 19. Others on the list Tuesday are Chung Kim-wah, previously a senior member of independent polling organization Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute; Joseph Tay, co-founder of Canada-based NGO HongKonger Station; and YouTuber Victor Ho. Separately on Tuesday, the Hong Kong government issued orders for the cancellation of passports belonging to seven "absconders", including ex-lawmakers Hui and Dennis Kwok, who are wanted under the security law.

# UK PM Keir Starmer hopes for peace in Middle East in Christmas message

PTI ■ LONDON

Keir Starmer has said he will be hoping for peace in the Middle East, the birthplace of the Christmas story, and a brighter future for all in his first festive message since being elected British Prime Minister. In a video message released by Downing Street ahead of Christmas Day on Wednesday, Starmer attempts to strike an optimistic tone and encourages people to "look after those around us". He extended his special gratitude to the armed forces and frontline workers who will be helping people up and down the country. "This Christmas, I will be hoping for peace, particularly in the Middle East as the birthplace of the Christmas story," said Starmer. "I'll be looking towards a better, brighter future for every person and celebrating the joy and



wonder that Christmas brings," he said. He said the festival was a reminder of what's really important, such as family, friendship and fellowship between all people. He added: "Being there for one another — in these celebrations, as well as the more difficult times. I'd like especially to thank those who will spend their

Christmas serving others this year. In our NHS [National Health Service] and emergency services, our Armed Forces and the churches and charities that will welcome every person this Christmas." "Because I know that this is not an easy time for everyone, and my thoughts are with all those who are lonely this Christmas. Having a tough time, missing a loved one. You are not alone, because as Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Christmas story reminds all of us to reach out to one another. To care for one another. And to look after those around us," he said. Earlier, Downing Street indicated that Starmer and his family would spend Christmas at the Prime Minister's country retreat of Chequers in Buckinghamshire. He is then set to travel abroad "for a few days" for his first family holiday since taking charge at 10 Downing

Street following the July general election. It comes as King Charles III set a new tradition for his customary Christmas Day message and chose Fitzrovia Chapel in London for its recording. It is understood that his speech will reflect on international, national and personal challenges and how they can be overcome by communities supporting one another. "The living Christmas tree shown in this year's broadcast was decorated with sustainable decorations including pinecones, metal bells, twisted glass and glass baubles," Buckingham Palace said. It added that 2024 marks the first time a British monarch's Christmas message has been filmed outside a royal residence since 2006 when the late Queen Elizabeth II filmed a message at Southwark Cathedral in London.



People celebrate with Christmas decorations in Haifa, Israel.

AP/PTI

# Where does Santa live? It's a trickier question to answer than you may think

THE CONVERSATION ■ QUEENSLAND

Sending a letter to Santa can be difficult as no one can agree on where exactly Santa lives. Several countries are competing to claim Santa as one of their citizens. Finland's tourism industry suggests Korvatunturi in Lapland is where Santa keeps his workshop, and the link between Santa and Lapland brings in hundreds of millions of tourist dollars. Danes say Santa is in Greenland. Sweden suggests Mora is the place, and has built the theme park Santaworld. These places certainly look the part with white snow in winter and reindeer. They're also close to the North Pole. Not so jolly traditions: They also have old and often quite disturbing folklore about the man in red. Pagan Finns celebrated St Knut's Day in wintry January by having men in furry jackets, the nuuttipukki, go from house to house with a sack of presents. Except the nuuttipukki weren't giving gifts and would likely make children cry.

They came demanding gifts and would curse bad luck to any household not handing over a present. Eventually the gift grabbing nuuttipukki became the gift giving Joulupukki. Like other northern traditions such as the Yule Lads of Iceland, this visitor gave gifts but only to well behaved children. By the 19th century, Santa Claus was settled in popular awareness more or less what we think of now: a jolly old man with a beard, a sleigh, reindeer and presents, living somewhere northern and cold. That image built on but sanitised the more grotesque European folklores of elves, gnomes and other supernatural creatures who either brought or demanded gifts. But standardising Santa's appearance did not settle where he actually lived and worked. In the mid-19th century the illustrator Thomas Nast portrayed Santa as a jolly old man in Harper's Weekly, and the illustration and the archetype took off. But Nast just showed Santa in a wintry landscape. It could have been the North Pole, and no one in 1866 had actually



been to the Pole. No explorer reached there until 1926, leaving Santa, if he did live there, undis-

turbed in his workshop. Santa and territorial disputes: The medieval and pagan mytholo-

gies in Finland and Scandinavia give some credibility to these countries' efforts to claim Santa as their

own. After all, these are old legends. Other countries take a more modern approach. The Canadian government makes sure Christmas happens each year by allowing Santa to travel through Canadian airspace. Taking that a step further, in 2013 the Conservative government of Stephen Harper issued Santa and his wife with Canadian passports. That action might seem twee or whimsical or simply some Christmas fun for children, but it may also have shown that some governments want to claim a lot more than Santa. Harper's gesture came at a time of an international political dispute about ownership of the North Pole and specifically Canadian claims to Arctic regions. Somewhere hotter than the Pole: But are all these countries wrong, or being opportunistic? Despite what we think, where Santa really comes from is a lot hotter and a lot further east — and those red robes would be uncomfortable to wear. Santa Claus is a name derived from Sinterklaas or Saint Nicholas. Along with pagan elves and gnomes,

another element in the long and very complex history of Santa is the Christian bishop St Nicholas of Smyrna. Or is that Nicholas of Myra? Myra, now called Izmir in Turkey, and Myra, now Demre in Turkey, are both associated with Nicholas. Just as in northern Europe, different places in Anatolia compete to be associated with Santa. Nicholas is patron saint of seemingly everything including archers and brewers but also children and sailors. The link with children explains the later association as Santa, especially as Saint Nicholas gave children gifts. The link with sailors is why his legend is known around the world. A 2017 archaeological dig under the Church of Saint Nicholas in Turkey was believed to have found the burial place and therefore the body of Saint Nicholas. A grave full of old bones is not very Christmas-like, but it may be an authentic link between a place and a person which no amount of snow or reindeer in northern Europe could match.







# UPI transactions jump 33 per cent at retail stores in India this year: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

UPI transactions at retail stores have increased by 33 per cent in semi-urban and rural areas this year, reflecting the growing adoption of digital payments, says a report.

Moreover, insurance policy purchases and premium collections saw a 127 per cent increase in transaction volume and a 96 per cent growth in new customer adoption during the year, the report by branchless banking and digital network PayNearby said.

"The data highlights the role digital retail stores play in overcoming the challenges of insurance penetration across Bharat," it stated.

The report is based on an analysis of real transaction data derived from over 10,00,000 small retailers (kirana stores, mobile recharge stores etc) offering financial and digital services spread across India in rural



and semi-urban regions. The findings compare business data from January to November 2024 with the same period in 2023. The report, Retail-O-Nomics, stated that there has been an impressive 297 per cent volume rise across credit

products, including business loans, gold loans, personal loans, and revolving credit in rural and semi-urban areas. This significant uptick reflects a growing awareness and demand for credit solutions at the grassroots level, it said.

However, micro ATM and Aadhaar Enabled Payment Systems (AePS) cash withdrawals saw a decline in 2024. Both transaction volumes and the average cash withdrawal per transaction saw a slight decline, with the latter dropping from Rs 2,624

in 2023 to Rs 2,482 in 2024, the report said.

AePS withdrawals surged by 35-45 per cent during DBT releases, particularly under schemes like PM Kisan Yojana, compared to the rest of the year.

"Cash withdrawals in Jammu and Kashmir recorded an impressive growth of 58 per cent in value and 74 per cent in volume," the report said.

"By equipping local retailers with tools to offer diverse services like insurance, e-commerce, and lending, we are empowering them to become key enablers of financial access and economic progress at the grassroots," Anand Kumar Bajaj, Founder, MD & CEO, PayNearby, said.

PayNearby is a branchless banking and digital network that operates on a B2B2C model. It has more than 10 lakh retail touchpoints comprising kirana stores, medical shops, travel agents and others.

## Govt launches AI-enabled consumer helpline, e-commerce giants pledge safety

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday launched several initiatives to strengthen consumer protection, including artificial intelligence-enabled helpline and tools to detect deceptive marketing practices, while major e-commerce players pledged to enhance online shopping safety.

Leading platforms, including Reliance Retail, Tata Sons and Zomato adopted a safety pledge as the government rolled out new consumer protection measures like the AI-enabled National Consumer Helpline, e-maap portal and Jago Grahak Jago mobile application.

"Significant progress has been made in expediting resolutions of consumer disputes," Joshi said at the National Consumer Day event.

The minister, who attended the event online, highlighted that out of 3,628 cases filed with the National Commission between January and November this year, 6,587 cases have been



disposed of through the country's three-tier consumer court system at district, state and national levels.

The government's e-Daakhil Portal, launched in 2020 and expanded nationwide in June 2023, has achieved 100 per cent adoption for online complaint filing in states like Karnataka, Punjab and Rajasthan, as well as several districts.

Addressing growing e-commerce concerns, Joshi said: "While this digital revolution offers incredible opportunities, the Indian government believes it is equally important for our

consumers to feel confident and make informed choices."

The Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) is drafting new guidelines to regulate surrogate advertising and has issued notices to 13 companies for non-compliance with existing rules, he added.

Minister of State for Consumer Affairs B L Verma, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti, All India Council for Technical Education T G Sitharam and Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare were present at the event.

## Puri, Varanasi, Haridwar top spiritual destinations in 2024, Hyderabad most-booked city: Travelopedia 2024 annual report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Puri, Varanasi and Haridwar are the most travelled spiritual destinations while Hyderabad is India's top-booked city this year, according to OYO's 'Travelopedia 2024' annual report unveiled on Tuesday.

The report delves into travel patterns and trends, with its findings based on the booking data of the travel tech major for the entire year. "In India, religious tourism continued to be a key focus, with Puri, Varanasi, and Haridwar dominating the

pilgrimage sector. However, a significant trend emerged with Deoghar, Palani, and Govardhan experiencing substantial growth, indicating a shift towards less explored spiritual destinations..."

Following Hyderabad, cities like Bengaluru, Delhi, and Kolkata rounded out the top spots for bookings, with Uttar Pradesh maintaining its position as the most popular state for travel. High volume of bookings were reported from Maharashtra, Telangana, and Karnataka, which continue to be dominant travel

contributors. Smaller towns like Patna, Rajahmundry, and Hubli have shown tremendous growth, with bookings increasing by as much as 48 per cent year-on-year.

"The year also saw a surge in leisure travel, with Jaipur continuing to be a top tourist magnet, followed by perennial favourites Goa, Pondicherry, and Mysore. Interestingly, Mumbai saw a drop in bookings, with travellers preferring nearby locations for leisure," OYO stated. Shreerang Godbole, Global Chief Service Officer, OYO said, "2024 has marked

a year of transformation in the global travel landscape. We've seen how travellers are embracing flexibility and adaptability, whether for business or leisure. As remote work trends continue to shape how people approach travel, the demand for both quick getaways and long stays has been a significant driver of bookings this year."

The fourth of July weekend saw the highest number of bookings, aligning with national celebrations, while the Christmas season was also notable for a sharp spike in travel.

## Inflation continues to hit FMCG industry, urban growth expected to slow in H1/2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Heading towards a slowdown amid inflationary pressures, the FMCG industry's volume growth during August-October this year has dropped to 4.3 per cent from 6.4 per cent in the year-ago period, research and insight firm Kantar said in a report.

Moreover, the FMCG volume growth was lower sequentially also as in the May-July period, this was 4.5 per cent, according to Kantar's latest FMCG Pulse report.

"We are in that last quarter,

and the FMCG growth as of the quarter ending October is 4.3 per cent. This number is a far cry from the 6.4 per cent growth seen in Q/E Oct '23, but is also a tad lower than 4.5 per cent we saw in the last quarter, i.e. Q/E Jul '24," it said. Volume growth in the urban market was at 4.5 per cent in the August-October period, down from 6.9 per cent in the same period of 2023.

However, the report added: "It is also true that a 4.5 per cent growth following a near 7 per cent growth in the previous term is extremely rare. In fact, over the last five

years, this has only happened in the quarters of 2024."

Therefore, technically urban is in a slowdown, though "it is far from a slump." About the inflation, the report said that per-household average quarterly spending crossed Rs 6,000 for the first time in the August-October period of 2022, and two years since then, spending has seen a 13 per cent jump and is at Rs 6,761 during this quarter. In May-July 2024, shoppers were paying Rs 133 per KG of FMCG on average. Just one quarter since then, shoppers are paying Rs 137 per KG, a

jump of Rs 4 per KG in the latest August-October period. "In recent years, this kind of growth in a single consecutive quarter was only seen during the initial months of the 2022 inflation period," it said.

With no signs of food inflation relenting in the immediate future, where value growth rapidly draws away from volume growth for some more time, it's hard to see urban (market) growing more rapidly than the rural levels. "We are expecting similar levels of growth to continue into the first half of the next year," it said.

## Domestic air passenger traffic rises 12 per cent in November, IndiGo leads market share



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian airlines carried 1.42 crore passengers on domestic routes in November, nearly 12 per cent more compared to the year-ago period, amid rising air traffic demand.

In terms of domestic market share, IndiGo topped the list with a 63.6 per cent pie, followed by Air India (24.4 per cent), Akasa Air (4.7 per cent)

and SpiceJet (3.1 per cent). While all these carriers saw their share rise, the share of Alliance Air was unchanged at 0.7 per cent in November, according to the latest data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

"Passengers carried by domestic airlines during January-November 2024 were 1,464.02 lakh as against 1,382.34 lakh during the corresponding period of the previous year thereby registering an annual growth of 5.91 per cent and monthly growth of 11.90 per cent," the watchdog said in its monthly report.

Domestic air passenger traffic was at 142.52 lakh in November compared to 127.36 lakh in the same period a year ago.

In October this year, domestic passenger stood at 1.36 crore. Air India completed the

merger of full service carrier Vistara with itself in November.

The On Time Performance (OTP) of scheduled domestic airlines - computed for the four metro airports at Bangalore, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai - took a beating in November. IndiGo's OTP stood at 74.5 per cent while that of Akasa Air and SpiceJet touched 66.4 per cent and 62.5 per cent, respectively.

The OTP of Air India and Alliance Air were at 58.8 per cent and 58.9 per cent, respectively, the data showed. Further, the data revealed that 2,24,904 passengers were affected by delays in November. Carriers shelled out nearly Rs 2.90 crore towards facilitation.

Last month, a total of 624 passenger-related complaints were received by the scheduled domestic airlines.

## Federation of retailer association of India urges government to empower kirana stores with enhanced tech platform

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Federation of Retailer Association of India on Tuesday asked the government to provide enhanced technology platform to Kirana stores to enable them to compete with quick commerce firms.

"Such support would enable the kirana stores to remain competitive amidst the increasing encroachment into their space by quick commerce companies like Swiggy Instamart, Blinkit or Zepto," said Federation of Retailer Association of India (FRAI), which says that it represents about 80 lakh micro, small and medium retailers from across the country with a membership of 42 retail associations. Providing local kirana stores with a technology platform

would allow them to compete on equal terms with quick commerce players, effectively creating a level-playing field, it added.

"With new technologies brought in by the government, like ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce), what is now required is a more focused approach in creating a specific solution for kirana stores that makes them as discoverable and accessible to customers, much like the way quick commerce companies are operating," FRAI Honorary Spokesperson Abhay Raj Mishra said.

Essentially, the kirana stores should remain competitive by being empowered to tap into the growing digital market and meet new customer needs," said Mishra, who is also Member

& National Coordinator, Indian Sellers Collective.

Kirana stores are facing steep challenges due to the rise of quick commerce players, Lok Sabha member Praveen Khandelwal said. "For shopkeepers, it is crucial to stay updated and embrace all channels to meet the evolving expectations of customers," he added.

FRAI said quick commerce platforms have "unfair advantage" over Kirana stores, which cannot match the heavy discounts offered by quick commerce giants who benefit from deep pockets, large warehouses and a huge customer base. The increased competition from quick commerce players has resulted in stagnant sales for kirana stores, particularly during high-demand periods such as the festive season, it added.

## Sensex, Nifty settle almost flat in highly volatile trade; metal, power stocks drag

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended on a flat note in a volatile trade on Tuesday, as investors preferred to stay on the sidelines awaiting further triggers amid persistent foreign fund outflows.

After gyrating between highs and lows, the 30-share index declined 67.30 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 78,472.87. During the day, it dropped 142.38 points or 0.18 per cent to 78,397.79.

The NSE Nifty dipped 25.80 points or 0.11 per cent to 23,727.65. As many as 2,019 stocks declined, while 1,977 advanced and 96 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"The domestic market concluded flat ahead of the holiday, with metal and power stocks dragging performance while FMCG and auto sectors gained from recent corrections.

"The near-term market trajectory hinges on the outcome of Q3 results and the Union budget, but caution prevails due to a strong dollar, high bond yields, and concerns over rate cuts. The rupee hitting an all-time low further evoked the caution," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30 blue-chip stocks,

Power Grid, State Bank of India, Titan, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports and Infosys were among the laggards.

In contrast, Tata Motors, ITC, Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC and Zomato were among the gainers. The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.37 per cent, and the BSE midcap index rose 0.09 per cent.

"The Nifty index saw a lacklustre start to the much-anticipated 'Santa Claus Rally Period,' with the index closing at 23,728, down 26 points. The sluggish session was attributed to persistent selling by FIIs, concerns over India's slowing economic growth, and a weakening Indian rupee, which hit a record low of Rs. 85.13 against the dollar.

"These factors weighed on investor sentiment, keeping the market directionless and choppy throughout the day. Our earlier call suggested a low-volume trading session, and that prediction held true as Nifty traded in a volatile range," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. Among sectoral indices, metal slumped 0.93 per cent, power declined 0.73 per cent, utilities (0.52 per cent), consumer durables (0.50 per cent) and commodities (0.33 per cent).

## Indian IT hiring: 2025 promises rebound, AI/data science roles to dominate job market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian IT hiring landscape is at a pivotal juncture as it transitions from a year of decline towards a more hopeful future. The focus on specialised skills, particularly in AI and data science, combined with geographical shifts towards Tier 2 cities, indicates a transformation within the sector.

While the IT hiring landscape in India in 2024 was marked by delayed onboarding and a decline in overall hiring activity, the outlook for 2025 appears promising with expectations of recovery and growth fuelled by improvements in economic conditions and technological advancements.

In 2024, the Indian IT sector experienced approximately a 7 per cent decline in hiring compared to the previous year, largely due to broader macroeconomic challenges and global uncertainties. Sunil Chemmankotil, Country Manager of Adecco India, noted that while Global Capability Centres (GCCs) played a crucial role in boosting hiring - accounting for 52.6 per cent of job openings for tech



professionals - they could not fully offset the significant downturn in the IT services sector.

Despite this overall contraction, certain areas showed resilience and growth. The demand for roles in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) surged by 39 per cent, reflecting a shift towards more specialised skill sets as organisations prioritised these technologies, according to Adecco research.

There was notable growth in IT hiring within Tier 2 cities, which saw an impressive 48

per cent increase during the third quarter of 2024, indicating a trend of geographic diversification of job opportunities beyond traditional tech hubs.

Hiring for professionals with mid- to senior-level experience increased by 35 per cent, suggesting that companies favour experienced candidates amid market fluctuations.

The hiring landscape for fresh graduates remained subdued, with growth rates ranging from 2-15 per cent across various tech sectors, data from TeamLease Edtech showed.

Companies often delayed onboarding campus hires due to uncertain deal flows, which industry leaders believe was particularly influenced by the global political climate surrounding major elections. As India moves into 2025, there are encouraging signs that the IT hiring landscape may rebound significantly.

According to the ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey (MEOS) for first quarter of 2025, 53 per cent of the 3,150 employers in India surveyed expect an increase in hiring, the highest among the 42 countries studied.

"In 2024, fresher hiring remained muted in general with several companies also choosing to delay the onboarding of their campus hires. This may change as the deal flow for large projects is expected to return in early 2025.

The first set of deal flow will benefit the large players and as the buyer sentiment improves, the tier 2 and 3 players can expect a rise in orders," Jaideep Kewalramani, COO and Head of Employability Business at TeamLease Edtech, said.

As the macro headwinds slow down and the results of elections of large economies, the US being the last one in 2024 to come in, he said organisations will be confident about the economic outlook and start to make some bets on the capital investments, which will help jump-start the deal flow in early 2025.

While fresh hiring may remain subdued initially, it is anticipated that as large projects commence in early 2025, there will be a notable increase in job opportunities for new graduates, Kewalramani said.

Companies are expected to invest heavily in upskilling their workforce to meet evolving demands, particularly in areas such as AI and cybersecurity. Wipro CTO Sandhya Arun believes enterprises are set to accelerate the integration of AI and other advanced technologies to unlock significant business value.

"Year 2025 promises to be a year of high-velocity technology disruptions, offering new opportunities and presenting unprecedented challenges. The future belongs

to enterprises that embrace technology and disruption..." Arun said.

The demand for specialised tech roles is anticipated to surge by 30-35 per cent, driven by an increasing reliance on emerging technologies.

"However, the shift towards AI and automation in India's IT sector has started and will continue to create increasing impact on recruitment through AI-driven tools machine learning, and redefined job roles by automating routine tasks while creating demand for highly specialised roles," said Sanju Ballurkar, President (Experis India), ManpowerGroup India.

The sector is expected to rebound with projections indicating a 15-20 per cent growth in job opportunities across various industries, according to Chemmankotil. "Looking ahead, the combined hiring intent from GCC and IT services will be a welcome relief to job seekers. Employers are optimistic about recovery and growth as companies adapt to new technological landscapes and market needs," he said.



People For Animals (PFA), Noida, an animal welfare organization received an animal ambulance with hydraulic jack and a ventilator by Can Fin Homes Limited CSR initiative. On this occasion, Marketing Head of Can Fin Homes Limited Himanshu, Senior Manager Sameer flagged off the ambulance. Shilpi, Naveen, Jagmohan and Ravi Dubey from People For Animals Trust were present.



# Senior National Badminton: M Raghu, Devika Sihag clinch men's and women's singles title

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka's M Raghu and Haryana's Devika Sihag secured their maiden senior national badminton titles, emerging champions in the men's and women's sections respectively at the 86th edition of the tournament here on Tuesday.

Raghu, who won the Egypt international this year, saved three match points in the decider to beat former champion Mithun Manjunath 14-21, 21-14, 24-22 in the final that clocked just under an hour.

For Devika, it was a befitting end to a successful season as she ended the giant killing run of Shriyanshi Valishetty 21-15, 21-16 in the women's singles summit clash.

The 19-year-old from Haryana had claimed Swedish Open and Portugal International, besides reaching final at Estonian and Dutch International.



Junior National Champions Arsh Mohammad and Sanskar Saraswat added the senior nationals title to their trophy cabinet as they upset top seeds

Naveen P and Lokesh V 12-21, 21-12, 19-21 in the men's doubles final.

In doubles categories, Ayush Agarwal and Shruti Mishra defeated eighth seeds Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani G 21-17 21-18 to bag the mixed doubles crown, while second seeds Arathi Sara Sunil

and Varshini VS won the women's doubles title with a 21-18 20-22 21-17 win over eighth seeds Priya Devi Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra.

It was the men's singles final which provided the grand finale to the senior nationals as the two players from the state dished out a slugfest.

Mithun, who won the title two editions ago, was first off the blocks as he clinched the opening game rather easily.

Raghu forced a decider by racing through the second game. Raghu's control during the net exchanges made the difference as he forced his way back from 15-19 to level the scores at 19-19.

But Mithun stayed in the hunt by earning three match points but could not convert any of them.

In the women's singles final, Devika took control of the match tempo quickly and then maintained her dominance to win in straight games.

# Inter Milan beats Como 2-0 to cement third place in Serie A

AP ■ FLORENCE (ITALY)

Inter Milan beat Como 2-0 to cement third place in Serie A and close the gap on top two Atalanta and Napoli on Monday.

Carlos Augusto got the opener when he headed home a corner kick in the 48th minute. Marcus Thuram scored the second in stoppage time with a potent strike into the roof of the net.

It was the first time these teams have played each other in the top division since 2003 and although Inter had lost only one league game all season it struggled to impose itself on 15th-placed Como.

However, it won without exerting itself and the three points were enough to take Simone Inzaghi's men within three points of leader Atalanta and within one of Napoli. Inter has a game in hand over both clubs.

Fiorentina missed a chance to go fourth when it lost at home to Udinese 2-1. The Florence club won a record eight consecutive Serie



A games before losing to Bologna 1-0 on Dec. 15, and it looked to be back on track when Moises Kean converted a penalty after eight minutes to become the first Fiorentina player to reach double figures in the league since Federico Chiesa in the 2019-20 season.

However, Udinese was a different prospect after the break. Lorenzo Lucca equalized with the aid of sloppy defending four minutes into the second half and then Florian Thauvin found space on the edge of the box to curl in the second eight minutes later.

The result left Udinese in ninth place and Fiorentina in fifth. The match was a special one for Edoardo Bove, the Fiorentina player whose collapse with a heart issue led to the suspension of its game with Inter Milan on Dec. 1.

Bove was fitted with a defibrillator implant soon after and sat on the Fiorentina bench for the first time since his collapse. He is not allowed to play but his position on the sideline alongside coach Raffaele Palladino was seen as a step towards normalcy for the 22-year-old midfielder.

# Valencia fires coach Rubén Baraja after setback in La Liga

AP ■ VALENCIA (SPAIN)

Valencia fired coach Rubén Baraja on Monday after another setback in La Liga left the club stuck in the relegation zone and sparked renewed protests against Singaporean owner Peter Lim.

Valencia said it "decided to bring to an end Baraja's time as first team coach" following a 2-2 home draw against Alaves on Sunday.

Valencia needed a stoppage-time equalizer to salvage the result that left the club second to last in the standings.

The home draw prompted more criticism from fans who have long complained about the administration of Lim, whom they accuse of using the club only as a business endeavor.

Baraja, a former Valencia player, took over the club in 2023. His replacement was not immediately announced.

"The club would like to publicly thank Baraja for the passion, dedication and commitment that he has shown from the first to the last day of his tenure," Valencia said in a statement.

# There's been a lapse in filing nominations, may be on my part: Manu on Khel Ratna furore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paris Olympics' double bronze-medallist Manu Bhaker on Tuesday admitted that "there has been a lapse may be on my part" while filing nominations for this year's National Sports Awards amid a raging controversy over her exclusion from the list of Dhyana Chand Khel Ratna awardees.

A day after the sports ministry had to do damage control by insisting that the list of awardees is yet to be finalised, the 22-year-old pistol ace took to social media to clarify her position on not being among those recommended for the country's highest sporting honour.

"With regards to ongoing issue for my nomination for the most prestigious Khel Ratna award -- I would like to state that as an athlete my role is to play and perform for my country. "I believe there has been a lapse, maybe on my part while filing for the nomination which is being



corrected," Bhaker wrote on X. The Haryana shooter said her aim is to perform for the country and it would not change whether she gets an award or not. This was after her father Ramkishan Bhaker and personal coach Jaspal Rana stated that the snub had affected her morale and drive to perform for the country. "Awards and recognition keeps me motivated but are not my goal," she asserted. "Irrespective of the award I shall remain motivated to win more medals for my country. It is a request to

everyone, please do not speculate on this," she said. Rana and Ramkishan lambasted the sports ministry and the selection committee for overlooking her despite her monumental achievements. However, the list is yet to be finalised as per the sports ministry, which said she is likely to be there when the names are finally revealed in a few days' time. It is reliably learnt that men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar have been

short-listed for the Khel Ratna along with 30 Arjuna awardees, 17 of them from para disciplines.

The awards selection committee is headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice V Ramasubramanian and also includes former women's hockey captain Rani Rampal, boxer Vijender Singh, and cricket great Anil Kumble among others. The committee is mandated to consider those who file their applications but if required, it is also empowered to discuss names which do not feature in that list.

Manu's exclusion was a shock due to the fact that her historic Olympic performance came just a few months back and is still fresh in public memory.

The youngster is the first athlete from independent India to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics. She won her bronze medals in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team (with Sarabjot Singh) events in Paris.



# Lindsey Vonn thinks her new titanium knee could start a trend in skiing

AP ■ ST MORITZ

When Lindsey Vonn last raced on the World Cup circuit nearly six years ago, the constant pain in her knee left her in tears and led to retirement.

Flash forward to Vonn's comeback race on a titanium knee at age 40 last weekend, and the American skiing standout couldn't have felt more different.

No more pain. No more swelling. No more tears. "The last few years of my career were so much different than they are right now. I'm skiing without thinking about my knee, which I really haven't done since I first tore my ACL in 2013. So it's been a long time that I felt this good," Vonn said on Saturday after placing 14th in a super-G in St Moritz.

"I'm a little bit older, but honestly I'm a hell of a lot stronger than I once was." So much stronger that she's talking up her knee replacement surgery — the first of its kind in World Cup skiing — as a new frontier for the sport. In April, Vonn had a robot-assisted replacement performed by Martin Roche, a South Florida-based orthopedist specializing in complex knee disorders. Part of the bone in her right knee

was cut off and replaced by two titanium pieces. A month later, she was planning her comeback.

"It's a lot better than my non-existent cartilage," said Vonn, one of the most successful skiers of all time with 82 World Cup wins.

"I've talked to a lot of skiers already about it and I really think that it could be something that should be considered.

"I feel amazing. I mean, obviously not everyone responds the same way to surgeries. For some reason, I bounce back pretty well from surgery. But I think it's something to seriously consider for athletes that have a lot of knee problems."

Knee replacements are usually reserved for older people. Andrea Panzeri, the Italian Winter Sports Federation's head physician and an orthopedist who has operated numerous times on Vonn's good friend and fellow downhiller, Sofia Goggia, said knee replacements are usually performed on patients older than 50.

"This is definitely the first time in World Cup history that such a young athlete has raced with one," Panzeri told The Associated Press.

"And I'm not aware of any other elite-level athletes in other sports competing with one, either."

Panzeri performs knee replacements. But he had never even thought about doing one on a World Cup skier — until he saw Vonn competing with one.

"Partial prosthetics, like the half-knee ones, are definitely the ones that offer the best performance and we're seeing that (with Vonn)," Panzeri said. "I don't think her decision is going to change pro sports. But it could provide more motivation for so-called normal people to try a prosthetic."

Three-time Grand Slam tennis champion Andy Murray played with an artificial hip at the end of his career. Vonn's former skiing teammate Julia Mancuso also redid her hip a few months after she retired in 2018 and maintains an active lifestyle.

"I, for sure, would have considered a comeback if I didn't have kids," Mancuso told The AP recently.

"So I can totally relate to Lindsey." But Panzeri said that "hips have different biomechanics than a knee and many more people are able to play sports with a hip prosthetic than a knee prosthetic."

was cut off and replaced by two titanium pieces. A month later, she was planning her comeback.

"It's a lot better than my non-existent cartilage," said Vonn, one of the most successful skiers of all time with 82 World Cup wins.

"I've talked to a lot of skiers already about it and I really think that it could be something that should be considered.

"I feel amazing. I mean, obviously not everyone responds the same way to surgeries. For some reason, I bounce back pretty well from surgery. But I think it's something to seriously consider for athletes that have a lot of knee problems."

Knee replacements are usually reserved for older people. Andrea Panzeri, the Italian Winter Sports Federation's head physician and an orthopedist who has operated numerous times on Vonn's good friend and fellow downhiller, Sofia Goggia, said knee replacements are usually performed on patients older than 50.

"This is definitely the first time in World Cup history that such a young athlete has raced with one," Panzeri told The Associated Press.

"And I'm not aware of any other elite-level athletes in other sports competing with one, either."

Panzeri performs knee replacements. But he had never even thought about doing one on a World Cup skier — until he saw Vonn competing with one.

"Partial prosthetics, like the half-knee ones, are definitely the ones that offer the best performance and we're seeing that (with Vonn)," Panzeri said. "I don't think her decision is going to change pro sports. But it could provide more motivation for so-called normal people to try a prosthetic."

Three-time Grand Slam tennis champion Andy Murray played with an artificial hip at the end of his career. Vonn's former skiing teammate Julia Mancuso also redid her hip a few months after she retired in 2018 and maintains an active lifestyle.

"I, for sure, would have considered a comeback if I didn't have kids," Mancuso told The AP recently.

"So I can totally relate to Lindsey." But Panzeri said that "hips have different biomechanics than a knee and many more people are able to play sports with a hip prosthetic than a knee prosthetic."

# Hero MotoSports names Nacho Cornejo as new rider

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hero MotoSports Team Rally on Tuesday named young Chilean rider Nacho Cornejo as its new recruit while announcing a three-member team for the Dakar Rally 2025.

Cornejo will team up with Sebastian Buhler and 2024 FIM World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC) winner Ross Branch.

This will be the team's ninth appearance in the world's toughest race, scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia from January 3 to 17.

It was memorable 2024 for the young team as it secured an overall second finish.



In the 12-stage 2024 edition, Branch led the race for four days and remained at second spot for eight days, eventually finishing second overall, making Hero

MotoCorp the first Indian manufacturer team to make it to the Dakar podium. For Botswana's Branch, this will be his third Dakar outing with the team.

Buhler, a German living in Portugal, has given consistent performances this year, marking his biggest achievement by securing his first FIM World Championship race podium at Rally Raid Portugal, where he finished second overall.

At the 2024 Dakar Rally, Buhler came close to winning his first Dakar stage.

Young Chilean rider Cornejo boasts of an impressive Dakar record, including a fourth-place finish in 2020 and nine stage wins.

The 47th Dakar Rally will kick off in Bisha, featuring a prologue and 12 stages spanning 7,700 km across the vast desert. For the first time,

five stages will have separate courses for FIM and FIA vehicles, covering 45 per cent of the timed distance.

Dakar 2025 will also be the opening race of the fourth edition of the World Rally Raid Championship (W2RC).

Hero MotoSports is a Rally GP-class participant at the W2RC 2025, and will attend its five rounds starting with the Dakar, followed by the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (February), South African Safari Rally (May), BP Ultimate Rally Raid in Portugal (September), and finally closing the season with the Rallye du Maroc (October).

# Gukesh's triumph underlines India's status as global chess superpower

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The image of a smiling D Gukesh standing with outstretched hands will forever be embossed in the memory of a nation of billions.

The moment, which came right after his victory over Ding Liren of China in the World Chess Championship in Singapore, was a bold signature on India's rise as a true global chess super power in the post Viswanathan Anand era.

Year 2024 was a story of resurgence in Indian chess, crafted by Anand himself.

The fearless and ambitious teenagers or "Vishy's children" as Garry Kasparov calls them, now have a role model to emulate -- an 18-year-old from Chennai, the youngest ever world champion in the long history of chess.

But the genesis of that success was during the FIDE Candidates tournament in April.

He emerged as the youngest ever winner of that tournament, setting up a title clash with 32-year-old defending champion Liren.

The Gukesh moment Gukesh was viewed as the favourite going into the title matches, consisting of 14 rounds. That tag itself might have been a pressure point.

But with wins in Games 3, 11 and 14, the Indian managed to seal an epochal feat.

Gukesh showed immense presence of mind to carry an entire nation's hope on his tender shoulders.

But a crumb of credit should also go to a highly-efficient and varied support staff that included the Anand, the pioneer of chess revolution in India, and renowned mental conditioning coach

Paddy Upton. Chess Olympiad triumph Before Gukesh, India showed its envious inventory of chess champions to the world in all its splendour at Budapest in September. The country walked away with six gold medals in team and individual categories.

In the men's team category final, India defeated Slovenia while their women counterparts subdued Azerbaijan to join China and erstwhile USSR as the only three nations to bag the men's and women's gold medals in the same edition of the event.

In the individual section, Gukesh (Board 1), Arjun Erigaisi (Board 3), Divya Deshmukh (Board 3) and Vantika Agarwal (Board 4) walked away with gold medals.

Siblings impress The Rameshbabu household



in Chennai have two Grandmasters -- R Praggnanandhaa and Vaishali, who had crossed the 2500 ELO ratings last year. This year, they became the first siblings to play the Candidates, adding another feather to an already burgeoning cap. They are also the first

siblings to achieve the GM norm. Prag falls Carlsen How good having arguably the world's best player in knots? Magnus Carlsen is not an unfamiliar rival to Praggnanandhaa, whom he had beaten earlier in Rapid and Blitz formats. But beating the world No. 1

in the Classical version is a different challenge altogether. Praggnanandhaa achieved this feat during the Norway Chess, Carlsen's home tournament, in May.

Milestone for Erigaisi, Divya This is more technical but significant, nonetheless. Erigaisi became the second Indian, after Anand, of course, to cross the 2800 Elo rating points.

The Indian beat Russia's Dmitry Andreikin in the fifth round of the European Chess Club Cup 2024 to achieve this rare feat. He was also the 15th GM in the history of chess to go past this mark.

Currently, Erigaisi is world No.4 with 2801 points behind Carlsen (2831), Fabiano Caruana (2805) and Hikaru Nakamura (2802).

Divya managed to cross the 2500 Elo rating barrier this year to join an elite club of

GMs. Deep talent pool Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi and P Harikrishna are the frontline men's players, while D Harika, Vaishali, Divya, Vantika and Tanya Sachdev form a formidable women's line-up.

But the real strength of Indian chess is elsewhere. "These are famous names because they have achieved several honours. But what makes India a strong chess nation is the fact that thousands of kids are now taking to chess. They have seen Gukesh or Praggnanandhaa climbing heights, and now they think: 'why can't we do this?'" says DP Anantha, Vice-President of All India Chess Federation.

"That increasing talent pool is our real strength. I don't think any other nation can

match us now in that aspect. We will see many young names coming forward next year," he added.

Perhaps, it's apt to borrow a catch line from the 80s to describe India's chess present chess landscape -- 'Neighbours Envy, Owner's Pride.'

Big 2025 loading India are currently ranked fourth in the FIDE team rankings. The nation has 64 Grand Masters, logging an average Elo rating of 2668 and a good number of them are less than 25.

Many of them will be seen in action in tournaments such as Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour, FIDE Women's GP, FIDE Women's World Cup in Georgia and Asian Championships in the UAE etc.

So, keep those seat-belts fastened, more excitement is on the way!



# Modern-day greats figure out their own path: Rohit backs Kohli

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**

With a smile, India captain Rohit Sharma on Tuesday played down concerns around Virat Kohli's struggles outside the off-stump in Australia and backed his longtime teammate to the hilt, saying "modern-day greats figure out their own path."

Kohli's five innings in this series Down Under read 5, 100 not out, 7, 11 and 3 for a total of 126 runs at an average of 31.50, not something the team or the batting maestro himself had hoped for before embarking on the challenging tour.

But Rohit, who is also battling poor form, is not losing his sleep over the lack of runs and is confident of a turnaround. When a question about Kohli's struggles was posed to him with some sugar-coating, the skipper added a dash of his own humour in his response.

Do you say something or leave a modern-day great alone, the scribe asked.

"You only said he is a modern-day great. Modern-day greats figure out their own path," said a smiling Rohit as others broke into a peal of laughter.

Kohli was one of the earliest to enter the nets at MCG and Rohit was last among the recognised batters to get a knocking. The India skipper played just two shots in the last 20 minutes and left everything else, as he tried to curb his natural instinct to push forward.

The desperation to control his conditioned reflex of moving hands towards the fourth stump delivery was evident.

"Harshit, is jagah se jaa rahi hai (the ball is landing here)?" he pointed out at an imaginary fourth stump line while trying to know from the young pacer about the line which looked just around six inches outside off-stump. This line has been Kohli's Achilles Heel in the ongoing tour.

When Prasadh Krishna came on, he was told to bowl on the "channel" as he wanted to leave balls. Prasadh dug one short and



he just about defended. Then, the lanky Karnataka man hit the channel, and the batter withdrew his willow in the nick of time.

The 500-odd people present inside would let out a collective sigh. They made noise and once Kohli was also seen telling them to

keep quiet and let him concentrate.

When Rohit batted, he was heard telling throwdown specialist

Raghavendra, "Tappa sahi pakadna padega (get the length right)." He also got beaten by a throw that reared from length.

"Rohit bhai, pull maaro naa (play the pull shot)," yelled one of the demanding young fans from outside. Rohit just left the next delivery.

With the chatter about his form gaining decibels and rumours about an imminent retirement post Sydney gaining traction, Rohit's answers about himself were short. When someone has one double digit score in five innings, he wants to be left alone but then commitments needed to be honoured.

Asked about his batting position, he was borderline irritated.

"Let's not worry about that. I think who bats where, we should be discussing that within ourselves and I shouldn't be answering this question in every press conference," the skipper said, trying to hold his composure.

At the onset, he informed that his knee which was hurt while batting on an old practice track, was "fine".

Then next question was a "flighted query" on where he stood with regards to his batting form.

"After last Test (in Brisbane) we had two sessions. What could have possibly changed in two days?" he countered with a wry smile.

As usual, he didn't give away anything about whether playing two spinners while factoring in the Melbourne heat was feasible or not.

The inimitable Rohit was back lacing everything with a bit of humour when asked what led to the selection of Tanush Kotian over Kuldeep Yadav.

"Well Kuldeep didn't have visa," he smiled before informing that the wrist spinner is still not hundred percent fit.

"Axar couldn't travel as he has had a baby. I am not saying Tanush is bad but he is here more as a cover," he said.

The five-match series is levelled at 1-1 with all to play for in the remaining two matches in Melbourne and Sydney.



## Gill needs to back himself, he's changed things up too much: Ricky Ponting

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**

India top-order batter Shubman Gill has made far too many changes in his batting approach, which is hindering his run-scoring ability on away tours, feels former Australian captain Ricky Ponting, adding that the way out for the young cricketer is to trust his instincts.

Gill missed the opening Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Perth due to a thumb injury he suffered during India's simulated training game. In the second Test at Adelaide, he failed to convert good starts into big scores as Australia levelled the series 1-1.

The third Test at Brisbane saw him getting out for one in the first innings, putting India in a spot of bother before KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja struck half-centuries to halt the slide.

"I love watching him play. When you're watching him bat and bat well, he looks as good as anyone in world cricket. But the numbers don't really stack up, do they, away from home?" Ponting said on ICC Review on Tuesday.

Ponting said he had observed several changes in Gill's technique during the second Test at Adelaide, which were impeding his ability to score runs.

"I watched him a little bit in Adelaide and it almost looked like he changed things up too

much.

"Scott Boland was bowling and he changed his guard, he moved across to the off stump, presented his front pad to Boland, and Boland got him out with a full straight one," he said.

The Australian legend added that rather than making wholesale changes in his technique, Gill should fall back upon trusting his instincts to improve his batting.

Gill's composed 91 at the Gabba during the 2021 tour had helped India clinch a historic series win, but since then he has scored just one Test ton away from home - in Bangladesh in 2022.

Gill averages 23.8 across nine Tests in England, Bangladesh, the West Indies, South Africa and Australia but at home he has accumulated 1,177 runs and four centuries across 17 Tests at an average of 42.03.

"If anything, I think he needs to back himself a little bit more, needs to back his defensive technique a little bit more here in Australia and still find a way to be able to score and score quickly," Ponting said.

## ICC announces Champions Trophy schedule, India-Pakistan clash on Feb 23

**PTI ■ DUBAI**

India will play all their matches of the Champions Trophy in Dubai with the marquee clash against arch-rivals Pakistan scheduled on February 23, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Tuesday.

PTI had reported last week that India will play all their matches in Dubai including the semifinal and final if they qualify.

As has been the case with ICC events, India and Pakistan have been clubbed in the same group which also has New Zealand and Bangladesh.

Group B comprises South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan and England.

The tournament opener will be played in Karachi on February 19 when hosts Pakistan face New Zealand and the final is scheduled for March 9. The premier 50-over event, last played in 2017, will have 15 matches with at least 10 games scheduled in Pakistan.

Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi will be the three hosting venues in Pakistan with the second semifinal to be staged at the refurbished Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore. "Lahore will also host the final on 9 March, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and the final will have reserve days," said the ICC in a statement.

India will open their campaign against Bangladesh on February 20 before taking on Pakistan three days later. Their final league fixture will be against New Zealand on March 2.

Group B action begins on February 21 when Afghanistan square up against South Africa in Karachi.



A big weekend then kicks off with rivals England and Australia clashing in Lahore on February 22.

The eight sides in the Champions Trophy are the teams that finished in the top eight in the points table at ODI World Cup in India last year.

The ICC has kept reserve days for both the semifinals and the final.

The schedule was announced after a deadlock over the hosting of the tournament ended with the ICC keeping India's games at a neutral venue as desired while having a similar arrangement for Pakistan for ICC events in India till 2027.

The hybrid arrangement will also apply to the 2025 women's ODI World Cup in India and the T20 World Cup in 2026 in India and Sri Lanka before being extended to the 2028 Women's T20 World Cup which Pakistan will host.

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the event due to security concerns. The Indians have not played in Pakistan since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which 150 people were killed. The two countries' last bilateral engagement was back in 2012.

Travelling to Pakistan also requires Indian government's

## Respect first half an hour: Gavaskar's advice to Pant

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**

Legendary cricketer Sunil Gavaskar has advised India's flamboyant wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant to "respect" the conditions before launching into his attacking strokes in the remaining two Tests of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy against Australia.

Pant, who famously scripted a match-winning knock at the Gabba in 2021, has shown flashes of brilliance but has struggled to make a significant impact in the ongoing series.

The 27-year-old has managed scores of 37, 1, 21, 28, and 9 in his five innings across three Tests so far.

Known for his aggressive approach, Pant has often prioritised attacking shots regardless of the match situation. His adventurous decision to charge down the pitch against pacer Scott Boland on the very first ball of his innings in the Adelaide day-night Test drew considerable attention.

"What Rishabh Pant has to do, like everybody else, respect the first half an hour; respect a

little bit when he gets in there, whatever the position, unless, of course, India is 525 for 3; then he can tee off," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

Commenting on the challenges posed by Australian bowlers, Gavaskar added, "... They get the ball to angle across. Pat Cummins and even (Josh) Hazlewood give him a little bit of a problem; Scott Boland will give him a little bit of a problem because Boland bowls around that area as well."

He should have no fear in these conditions: Hayden Australian legend Matthew Hayden, a self-confessed admirer of Pant, urged the Indian batter to embrace his fearless approach, saying it could be a game-changer for the visitors.

"I have always been a fan of his. He's kind of a different cheese; there is no doubt about it. And I would like to just see him explore that as well because he should be coming in a situation where, as I mentioned before, there are lots of runs; and if so, that's a perfect scenario for him to be (in).

### AFFIDAVIT

I, SABERA BEGAM, W/o - MIR GAYASUDDIN, At-Bhanja Colony Po/Ps-Vikrampur Dist- Angul Pin-759106 Odisha declare by this affidavit No. 6233 at 23.12.2024 that now onwards I shall be known as SABERA BIBI for all purposes.

### CORRIGENDUM

"Instruction to Bidders:- In reference to vide this (Tender Notice No.6633/1F/2024 Dt.21.12.2024) Construction of DFO residence building at San Duhianali , Athmallik under Athmallik Range of Athmallik Forest Division. The amount of ₹ 37,29,129/- exclusive of GST and inclusive of the contractor's levies, profit, and other statutory liabilities. The corresponding documents have been uploaded in the [www.odishaforest.in](http://www.odishaforest.in) website. The last date for tender submission remains the same.

Sd/-  
Divisional Forest Officer,  
Athmallik Division.

### GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

#### DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

##### OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER SUNDARGARH IRRIGATION DIVISION, SUNDARGARH

ଅଧ୍ୟକ୍ଷ ଉପା, ସୁନ୍ଦରଗଡ଼ ଜଳସେଚନ ବିଭାଗ, ସୁନ୍ଦରଗଡ଼

E-mail-ID- [irresng@yahoo.in](mailto:irresng@yahoo.in) / [irresng@gmail.com](mailto:irresng@gmail.com)

'e' Procurement for Civil Works

Bid-Identification No. SID-02/2024-25 (On-line), Dt.21.12.2024

Letter No. 10521 Dt. 21.12.2024

- No. of works :- Nineteen (19 Nos.)
- Estimated Cost :- Rs.6.35 Lakh to Rs.41.47 Lakh
- Period of completion :- Two (02) Calendar Months
- Date & Time of availability :- Dt.27.12.2024 at 10:00 AM to Dt.04.01.2025 up to 5:30 PM
- Last date/Time for receipt of bids in the portal :- Dt.04.01.2025 up to 5:30 PM
- Date and time of opening of tender :- Dt.07.01.2025 at 11:00 AM

Further details can be seen from the State Govt. Portal- [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in).

Any addendum/corrigendum/cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Superintending Engineer  
Sundargarh Irrigation Division  
Sundargarh

### GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

#### OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT PROJECT COORDINATOR SAMAGRA SIKHYA, BALASORE.

e-Procurement Notice for KGBV HOSTEL Building Renovation work

Identification No. Online-01/SS/BLS of 2024-25

- Name of the Work :- Hostel Building works
- Total No. of works :- 3 nos
- Estimated cost :- Approx. Estimated cost of Rs.21.01 to 21.87 lakhs
- Class of contractor :- C & BB' class as per eligibility criteria
- Period of completion :- 04 (FOUR) calendar months as per financial eligibility
- Other details :- The bidders shall transfer online the cost of bid document as specified in Col.7 of Annexure and EMD/Bid Security @1% of the estimated Cost put to Tender.

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding		Last date & time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender in OIO DPC,SS, Balasore.
		From	To		
DISTRICT PROJECT Co-ORDINATOR, SAMAGRA SHIKSHA, BALASORE	01 of 2024-25	24.12.2024 at 11 am	06.01.25 up to 5:00 PM	31.12.24 up to 5:00 PM	07.01.25 at 11:00 AM

Further details can be seen from the web site [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)

Sd/-  
District Project Co-Ordinator  
Samagra Shiksha, Balasore.

### OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER: NAVAGARH FOREST DIVISION

Office Order No. 497.....Date 19.12.24

#### RESULT OF BID IDENTIFICATION NO 02/2024-25

The bid for the following work was opened on dtd. 18.12.2024 through e-tender portal and the result is as follows.

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Tender ID	Result
1	Range Officers Residence at Nayagarh	2024_DFONA_107928_1	Cancelled due to single responsive bid in the Tender Call
2	Forester Quarter at Nayagarh	2024_DFONA_107931_1	
3	Forester Quarter at Gania	2024_DFONA_107932_1	Cancelled due to No responsive bid in the 2nd time Tender Call
4	Forester Quarter at Mahipur	2024_DFONA_107935_1	
5	Forest Guard Quarter at Bahipur	2024_DFONA_107937_1	
6	Construction of Forest Guard Quarter at Nachipur, Gania	2024_DFONA_107938_1	
7	Construction of Forest Guard Quarter at Singhapada	2024_DFONA_107939_1	
8	Forest Guard Quarter at Kuanria Permanent Nursery	2024_DFONA_107941_1	
9	Forest Guard Quarter at Darganaryanpur	2024_DFONA_107942_1	
10	Anti poaching camp at Sriramchandrapur	2024_DFONA_107944_1	Cancelled due to single responsive bid in the 1 <sup>st</sup> time Tender Call
11	Antipoaching camp at Barakola	2024_DFONA_107946_1	

(Smt. Kshama Sarangi, OFS (SAG)  
Divisional Forest Officer  
Navagarh Division

### ODISHA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD.,

O/o Sr. GENERAL MANAGER, HIRAKUD HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT, POST BOX. NO. 6, BURLA - 768017, DISTRICT: SAMBALPUR (ODISHA), INDIA  
PHONE: 0663-2950721(O), 2950765(F), E-Mail: [ergmhp\\_burla@yahoo.co.in](mailto:ergmhp_burla@yahoo.co.in)  
GIN : U40101OR1955GC003963

No. HHEP/Tech-W-211(Vol-1) 6421 Date : 24.12.2024

e-TENDER CALL NOTICE No. HHEP-45/2024

Unit Head, HHEP, Burla invites percentage rate e-tender in single cover system from firm / agency / eligible class of contractor registered with the Govt. of Odisha and contractor of equivalent grade / class registered with Central Govt./ MES / Railway to be received online mode only for the following work in the portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Only those bidders who successfully remit their cost of tender paper & EMD online would be able to eligible in the tender (Bidders exempted from payment of EMD will be able to participated in the tender by uploading documentary evidences towards eligibility for such exemptions).

Name of work	Approx. tender value of work (in Rs.) excluding GST, EPP & ESI	Cost of tender paper (Non-Refundable)	EMD in Rs.	Availability of bids online	Last date and time of receipt of bid online	Date & time of opening of tender	Class of contractor
Annual cleaning contract of colonies of HHEP, Burla	17,17,383/-	Rs. 7080/- (Rs. 6000/- + GST 18%)	17180/-	27.12.24 (11:00AM) to 06.01.25 upto 03.00PM	06.01.25 upto 04.00PM	06.01.25 at 03.00PM	'C' & 'D'

- The bidders shall have to participate in online only in the portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>
- Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in/> / [www.ohpcld.com](http://www.ohpcld.com) OIPR-0400711/0016/2425

Unit Head, HHEP, Burla

### Government of Odisha

#### Office of the Executive Engineer Rural Works Division-II, Nabarangpur, Umerkote.

Letter No. 4111 Date: 20.12.2024

#### e-Procurement Notice

- Name of the work :- Road Works
- Total No of works :- 13 (Thirteen) Nos.
- Approx. Estimated Cost :- Varies from 5.08 Lakhs to 29.90 Lakhs.
- Class of Contractor :- "B", "C" & "D" Class of Contractor
- Period of Completion :- As per TCN

Procurement officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender online for bidding		Last Date & Time Seeking Tender Clarification	Date & Time of Opening of Tender
		From	To		
Executive Engineer, R.W. Division-II, Nabarangpur, Umerkote.	Online Tender/07/RWD-UKT/2024-25	27.12.2024 at 11.00 AM	03.01.2025 up to 5.00 PM	02.01.2025 at 01.00 PM	04.01.2025 at 11:00 AM

Further details can be seen from the Government website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)

OIPR-25103/11/0006/2425

Executive Engineer  
Rural Works Division-II  
Nabarangpur, Umerkote

### PANCHAYAT RAJ & DRINDING WATER DEPARTMENT

#### GOVT. OF ODISHA

##### OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, UMERKOTE

#### INVITATION FOR BIDS

No:BDO/EDU/UKT/03/2024-25/5807 Date:18.12.2024

The Block Development Officer, Umerkote on behalf of the Governor of the Odisha invited Percentage Rate Bids through speed post/Registered posts in single cover system.

- Name of the Works :- As Mentioned in Table-A which includes Construction of Additional Classrooms at various elementary & secondary schools.
- No of Works :- 14 (Fourteen) nos. (Detailed in Tender Call Notice available in the website)
- Estimated Costs :- As mentioned in Table-A
- Tender paper Cost :- Rs.4000/- per work
- Class of Contractor :- D & C Class
- Period of Completion :- 180 days
- Critical dates :- \* Further details can be seen in the bidding documents, which is available in the portal <https://www.nabarangpur.nic.in>  
\* Subsequent corrigendum if any shall be appeared in the website.  
\* Authority reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons thereof.

Procurement Officer	Bid No.	Identification	Availability of tender online for bidding		Last date of seeking tender clarification	Date of Opening of Bid
			From	To		
BDO, Umerkote	BDO/EDU/UKT/03/2024-25		At 10.00 AM of 23.12.2024	At 16.00 Hours of 15.01.2025	15.01.2025	16.01.2025

Block Development Officer  
Umerkote