

Think about it

“Don't be afraid to take a big step. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps.”

-David Lloyd George

Looking Back at the Year Gone

“An optimist stays up until midnight to see the new year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves.”

-Bill Vaughn

So, the end of yet another year. It seems like it just started and here the year is over again. On the whole, the year has been a rollercoaster of all sorts with some joyful and some quite painful moments.

During the year 2005 a sharp increase was seen in both imports and exports. India signed free trade agreements (FTA) with ASEAN. The number of overseas acquisitions were unprecedented. On Indian share market front, Sensex crossed 9,000 mark, for the first time in its history on November 28, 2005.

On diplomatic fronts, India broke new grounds during 2005 which saw a landmark civil nuclear deal with the US, further warming up of ties with Pakistan and a proactive approach in addressing the long-pending boundary problem with china. But the expulsion of eleven MPs in cash-for-questions scandal struck a discordant note.

It has been an up-and-down 2005 for sports in India. Sania Mirza's career-high best ranking of 31 in women's tennis, the appointment of Greg Chappell as the coach and Rahul Dravid as captain of Indian cricket team.

Besides some good achievements on economic, political and sports fronts, India faced natural disasters during the year 2005. In February, Kashmir saw a worst snowfall in 20 year. The rain gods created havoc when in a week nearly 1,000 people died in the commercial capital, Mumbai. The vigorous monsoon tormented Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh also. On October 8, a massive earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale shook India and Pakistan in which over 80,000 people died. Near the end of 2005 the Indian capital was shaken with three serial blasts on the eve of Diwali and Eid.

Inspite of these, all the news was not so bad. The challenges are daunting but the nation can rise to the occasion with a fresh new-year pledge and vigor.



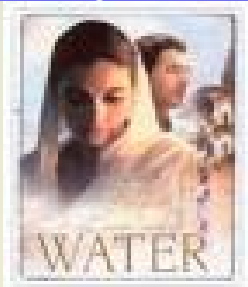
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SOCIETAL AWARENESS

Parliament Throws Out 11 MPs

- Creating history, Parliament expelled 11 members in a sweeping, simultaneous, fast-track exercise in Delhi on December 23, 2005, capping 11 days of high drama following the cash-for-questions scandal.
- Ten of the 11 MPs, who were not present in the proceedings on December 23, 2005, belonged to the Lok Sabha. Of them five belonged to BJP, three to BSP and one each to Congress and RJD. The lone Rajya Sabha member belonged to BJP.
- There was unanimity in both Houses over two points- unethical conduct of members who accepted money in a sting operation for raising questions and the need for action for restoration of Parliament's dignity. However, there was a sharp division over the undue haste with which the extreme action was taken.
- Its own image dented by the Volcker report revelations, the ruling Congress seized upon the opportunity afforded by the issue to occupy a high moral ground and push the motions for members' expulsion.
- Leader of the House Pranab Mukherjee, who piloted the motion for expulsion of 10 members in the Lok Sabha, said that the members should rise to the occasion to maintain dignity of the House "as certain duties ought to be discharged, however painful they may be."
- Those expelled are Lok Sabha members Annasaheb MK Patil, YG Mahajan, Pradeep Gandhi, Suresh Chandel and Chandra Pratap Singh, all BJP, Narendra Kumar Kushwaha, Rajaram Pal and Lal Chandra Kol, all BSP, Ramsewak Singh, Congress, and Manoj Kumar, RJD. The sole Rajya Sabha member is Chhatrapal Singh, BJP.

Rajya Sabha Okays Reservation Bill

- The Parliament passed the 104th Constitution (Amendment) Bill, providing reservation to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes in non-minority unaided private educational institutions with the Rajya Sabha approving it with near-unanimity.
- The Bill was passed with 172 votes in favour and two against, after a BJP-sponsored amendment was defeated. The Lok Sabha passed the Bill on December 21, 2005.
- The BJP, too, supported the Bill but party MP Sushma Swaraj had moved an amendment motion demanding that the Bill be made applicable to all institutions, including those run by the minorities.

Sahitya Akademi Awards 2005

- Poets and short story writers dominated the Sahitya Akademi Awards for this year with 16 of the 22 awards shared between the two genres of literature in the country's highest literary prizes announced on December 22, 2005.
- Among the winning short story writers are G V Kakkadan (Malayalam) for Jappana Pukaylla, Abburi Chayadevi (Telugu) for Tana Margam, Gurcharan Singh Bhullar (Punjabi) for Agni-kalas, N Shivdas (Konkani) for Bhaangarsaall and Ramachandra Behera (Oriya) for Gopapura.
- The winning poets include Mangalsingh Hazowary (Bodo) for Jiuni Mwgthang Biaombi Arw Aroj, Suresh Dalal (Gujarati) for Akhand Zalar Vage, Hamidi Kashmiri (Kashmiri) for Yath Mlani Joye, Swami Rambhadracharya (Sanskrit) for Sri-Bhargava-Raghaviyam and Dholan Rahi (Sindhi) for Andhero Roshan Thiye.
- Novelists G Tilakavathi (Tamil) for Kalmaram, Manohar Shyam Joshi (Hindi) for Kyap, Raghavendra Patil (Kannada) for Toru, Krishna Singh Moktan (Nepali) for Jeevan Goreto Ma and Yeshe Dorje Thongchi (Assamese) for Mouna Ounth Mukhar Hriday bagged the awards in their respective languages. In Urdu, the award went to Jabir Husain for his book of memoirs.
- The awards were announced after a meeting of the executive board of the Akademi, chaired by its President Gopi Chand Narang in Goa.
- Awards in Bodo and Santhali have been given for the first time. The awards, which carry Rs 50,000 each and a plaque, will be presented in February next year.

P M Sayeed Passes Away

- Union Power Minister and veteran parliamentarian P M Sayeed, who carved a niche for himself as a politician and an able administrator, died of heart attack in a hospital in Seoul on December 19, 2005. He was 65.
- Widely respected across the political spectrum for his acumen as a parliamentarian, Sayeed was elected to Lok Sabha from Lakshadweep a record number of 10 rpt 10 times beginning in 1967.
- A staunch loyalist of the Indira Gandhi family, Sayeed was one of the most prominent faces of Congress who rose from ranks to hold ministerial posts at the Centre on three occasions and was Deputy Leader of Lok Sabha in 1999.
- The Prime Minister, in his condolence message, said Sayeed was a "valued and respected member of the cabinet whose wisdom, sagacity and experience was of immense use not only in the power sector but also in managing the affairs of the government."

INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS

Cabinet Nod for SAFTA Implementation

- The Indian government on December 29, 2005 approved the implementation of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) with two ministers describing it as a “historic” and “comprehensive” step to push the region’s economic growth.
- SAFTA will come into force on January 1, 2006. The seven SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries - India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka - had signed the agreement for free trade at the Islamabad summit held Jan 4-6, 2004. The Indian cabinet had approved the SAFTA Framework Agreement Jan 20, 2004.
- The cabinet also approved four issues relating to SAFTA:
 - Rules of Origin: Under this, goods have to undergo substantial manufacturing processes in the exporting countries to get preferential access in SAARC countries.
 - Sensitive List: Under SAFTA, the Trade Liberalization Program (TLP) would not apply to the tariff items included in the sensitive list.
 - Mechanism for Compensation of Revenue Loss (MCRL) for LDCs: This compensation will be available for four years, except for the Maldives, to which it will apply for six years. India being the larger and relatively developed economy will be providing concessions including the mechanism for compensation of revenue loss arising due to reduction in duties.
 - Technical Assistance to LDCs: This will be provided in areas like human resources training, data management, institutional upgradation, improvement of legal systems and market development and promotion.

NIIT Conferred ‘Top Training Company Award 2005’

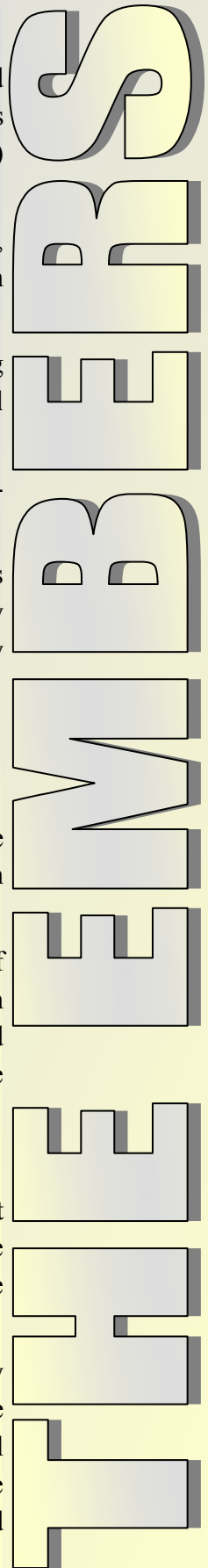
- Leading information technology trainer NIIT has been conferred the Top Training Company Award for 2004-05 by leading IT industry magazine Dataquest.
- The findings of an annual survey of the IT industry, conducted by Dataquest, reported that NIIT increased its market share further and maintained its leadership position in the Indian IT education market.
- P. Rajendran, Chief Operating Officer of NIIT, accepted the award at the Dataquest Top 20 Awards Ceremony held in Delhi on December 22, 2005.
- According to the Dataquest survey, the company’s flagship GNIIT program remained the most popular program for career aspirants of 2005.

Tata Steel Family Initiatives Foundation Wins FICCI Award

- Tata Steel Family Initiatives Foundation (TSFIF), that provides health and family welfare services in and around the industrial city of Jamshedpur has won Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) award.
- Prime Minister Manmohan Singh conferred the award to V Jagannath, Head (FI), Tata Steel in New Delhi on December 24, 2005 on the occasion of 78th Annual General Meeting of FICCI.
- TSFIF covers a wide spectrum of heterogeneous population including industrial workers, urban and rural community dwellers within the steel city and in the rural areas in the radius of 10 to 20 Kilometers.
- The company has 21 maternal and child health clinics, which provide ante-natal, post-natal and immunization services.
- TSFIF is also involved in the population stabilization programs. It works to improve the reproductive and sexual health of the communities by focusing on maternal and child health, quality of care, HIV / AIDS, family planning and gender.

TVS Motor Unveils a New Bike, 'Apache'

- Two-wheeler major TVS Motor Company consolidated its position in the 150 cc motorcycle segment with the launch of 'Apache' in Chennai on December 19, 2005.
- Launching the bike, Venu Srinivasn, Chairman and Managing Director of the company said, "the 150 cc Apache has been crafted to woo youth in the age group of 18-25 and it represents spirit of youth with its sporty and chiseled look and unmatched performance packed with superior engine technology."
- Priced at Rs 52,498, Apache will be available from January.
- With the introduction of new 150 cc bike, TVS is entering into the fast growing premium motorcycle segment. The new bike would be available in four colours to choose from with alloy wheels as a standard feature. The bike has an electric start and 240 mm front disc brake.
- The company claimed Apache's crisp engine performance is backed by new innovations and latest technology. The intake and exhaust surge technology will enable excellent initial pick up. The inductive digital ignition (IDI) engine technology would result in a host of benefits to the rider with excellent engine response, consistent fuel economy and excellent cold startability, the company claimed.



THE STOCK MARKET

Export Import 2005

- A sharp increase in both imports and exports, signing Free Trade Agreements with ASEAN, and India playing a key role in the World Trade Organization(WTO) marked the calendar year 2005, which would also pave the way for the start of the crucial regional trading bloc in South Asia, known as SAFTA, from January 2006.
- For the April- November period of the fiscal 2005-06, exports went up by 16.07 per cent to 57.05 billion dollar from 49.15 billion dollar and imports up to 84.70 billion dollar, representing an increase of 29.32 percent over 65.49 billion dollar. The trade deficit is estimated at 27.64 billion dollar as compared to 16.34 billion dollar. The total merchandise volume exceeded 141 billion dollar in the first eight months of the financial year 2005-06.
- After showing improvement, the sectoral performance in textiles, clothing, gems and jewellery and even engineering goods slipped in November.
- As for growth in exports for the first half of the fiscal 2005-06, Singapore recorded the highest growth, followed by South Korea, Sri Lanka and China. The highest imports arrived from Switzerland, the UAE, Germany, South Africa, Hong Kong and China in that order.
- A regional analysis shows that Latin American countries gave the maximum growth of 54.89 percent to Indian exports followed by Asia and Oceania, 23.42 percent and West Europe by 22.82 percent.
- In terms of imports, East European countries showed the highest growth of 97.34 percent, followed by CIS and Baltic States 59.54 percent and Russia by 57.67 percent.
- Till September, data for which is available, petroleum and products, transport equipment, gems and jewellery, drugs, pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals and cotton, including accessories, were the top five commodities of Indian exports.
- The top five commodities of imports were - gold, machinery, petroleum, crude and products, pearls, precious and semi-precious stones and electronics.
- Top five export destinations were - Singapore, China, Hong Kong, the US and the UAE - while Switzerland, Germany, China, the US and Belgium shipped the maximum of the Indian imports.

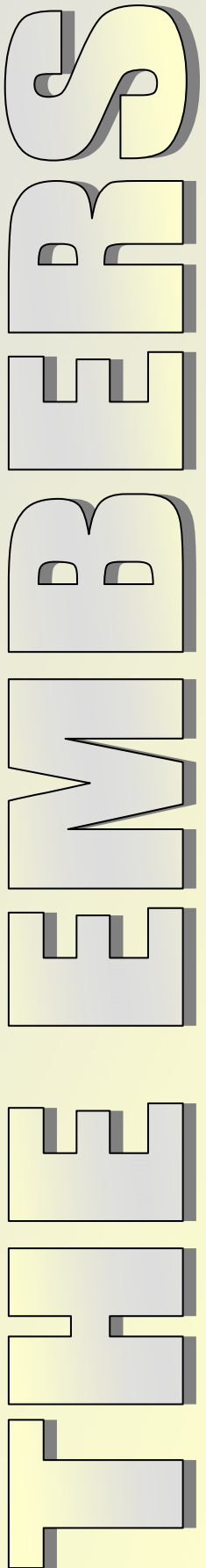
SPORTS AND GAMES

India Wins South Asian Football Federation Championship

- India captain Baichung Bhutia became the first player in history to collect three South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship winner's medals after his goal put the game in India's hand on December 17, 2005 in the final match against Bangladesh in Karachi, Pakistan.
- This championship brought together eight nations from South Asia including: Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives, Bhutan, Afghanistan, India and hosts Pakistan with all of the games being staged at the People's Sports Complex between 7 and 17 December 2005.
- The two finalists had met five days earlier in the group stage in a closely-fought match that ended 1-1. Bangladesh eliminated Pakistan in the semi-final with a single goal victory and India did likewise, struggling to beat the Maldives with Nanjangud Manju's 38th minute goal proving to be the matchwinner.
- The 2005 SAFF Championship also sparked football fever in hockey-mad Pakistan, where the hosts reached the last four. Also, Afghanistan, who stand at 179 in the ranking pulled off a moment of magic as they upset Sri Lanka 2-1 for a memorable victory. When the next championship is staged in 2007, it is expected that these nations will have honed their skills even further, which can only augur well for football in South Asia.

Federer and Clijsters Named ITF World Champions

- Switzerland's Roger Federer and Belgian Kim Clijsters were named 2005 world champions by the governing body of tennis, International Tennis Federation (ITF) on December 19, 2005.
- "World number one Federer is the sixth man to win the award for two consecutive years after Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe, Ivan Lendl, Pete Sampras and Lleyton Hewitt," the ITF said in a statement.
- He won 11 titles including Wimbledon and the U.S. Open in 2005.
- Clijsters finished the season ranked second behind Lindsay Davenport after a superb comeback from a wrist injury.
- She won the U.S. Open, her first grand slam title, after starting the year ranked outside the top 100.



S E N T E R T A I N M E N T

Indian American Filmmaker Honored at New York Film Fest

- Indian American filmmaker Neeraj Kumar's debut documentary 'Child Marriage' received the Best Documentary International award at the New York International Film and Video Festival (NYIFVF), 2005 on December 20, 2005.
- The 82-minute long documentary, according to Neeraj, was shot in guerrilla style as the marriages were held at secret locations since the practice is banned by law.
- Still, Neeraj was able to film the marriage of 70 children in 40 days.
- Neeraj says the award is recognition of the fact that this is a much-neglected critical issue that needs to be tackled immediately. UNICEF has already labelled this as a human rights issue.
- The documentary reveals horrifying details about a little bride getting engaged before she was even born. The film also touches on other significant issues like women's rights, animal rights and discrimination against untouchables.
- Neeraj is now working on two projects related to India, its environs and society.

Deepa Mehta's 'Water' Among Top Ten Canadian Films

- Indo-Canadian director Deepa Mehta's film 'Water', which received accolades with its recent North American premiere, has been listed among the top ten Canadian films of 2005.
- The Toronto International Film Festival Group (TIFFG) announced the list of the chosen movies on Dec 13, 2005.
- The film set in 1938 colonial India depicts the plight of widows and the injustice meted out to women.
- Mehta wanted to shoot the film in Varanasi but had to shift the location to Sri Lanka after protests from local religious groups.
- 'Water', last of Mehta's trilogy after 'Fire' and 'Earth', was a runaway hit when it was released in Canada as people there could identify with the film's content. The film stars Lisa Ray and John Abraham.
- The top ten films are – 'C.R.A.Z.Y.' by Jean-Marc Vallée, 'Familia' by Louise Archambault, 'History Of Violence' by David Cronenberg, 'Horloge Biologique' by Ricardo Trogi, 'The Life And Hard Times Of Guy Terrifico' by Michael Mabbott, 'Memory For Max, Claire, Ida And Company' by Allan King, 'La Neuvaïne' by Bernard Emond, 'A Simple Curve' by Aubrey Nealson, 'Water' by Deepa Mehta, and 'Where The Truth Lies' by Atom Egoyan.

SPECIAL NEWS

2005's Last Minute had 61 Seconds

- World clocks were set back by one whole second at midnight on December 31, 2005. Researchers have said that the Earth has not been able to keep up with its rotational pace. As such, December 31's last minute had 61 seconds instead of 60.
- Following advice of astronomers, who use observations of stars to keep tabs on Earth's spin, the International Telecommunication Union decided to adjust the world's clock by one whole minute to set them right.
- "If everything went right, all personal computers, GPS receivers, and radio-controlled clocks around the world will automatically adjust themselves," they said, adding that the last time a leap second was added was on December 31, 1998, before most of today's computers were manufactured.
- Some communications engineers have however said that the insertion of a leap second is a needless annoyance. Astronomers have on the other hand said, that it would signal the end of mankind's fundamentally Sun- and star-based timekeeping system.

2005 Second Warmest Year Yet

- The second warmest year, on record was 2005.
- As 2005 drew to a close, climate experts studied surface temperature data globally to note that the year—marked by extreme weather events worldwide, from New Orleans to Mumbai—was unusually warm.
- In December, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in Geneva reported the Status of Global Climate in 2005 with contributions from WMO member nations including India: "2005 is currently the second warmest year on record," the WMO report said. Final figures will be released in February.
- "Overall, temperatures were abnormally warm for the Indian region also," M Rajeevan Nair, Coordinator of the WMO report and Director, National Climate Centre, Pune, said. "2005 being the second warmest year is very important since there was no El Nino influence on global temperatures."
- In 1998—the warmest year—record global temperatures were recorded under the influence of El Nino or the warming of Pacific waters.
- Globally, October 2005 was the warmest October on record and June 2005 was the warmest June, surpassing June 1998.
- 2005 surface temperatures for northern hemisphere is likely to be the warmest from 1861 to today.

NEWS IN NUTSHELL

- India's most powerful and advanced telecommunications satellite INSAT-4A was launched by a European launcher from Kourou spaceport in French Guiana early on December 22, 2005 giving a major thrust to the Direct-To-Home (DTH) television broadcasting services.
- Taking yet another step to enhance people-to-people contact, India and Pakistan on December 22, 2005 decided to launch the long-awaited Amritsar-Lahore bus service from January 20 and Amritsar-Nankana Sahib bus link by February 27.
- Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse arrived in New Delhi on December 27, 2005 on his first foreign trip since taking power in November 2005. He described the bilateral relations with the Indian government as "excellent".
- The richest man in the world, Bill Gates, and his wife, Melinda, were named Time magazine's "Persons of the Year" along with Irish rocker Bono for being Good Samaritans who made a difference in different ways.
- The Kerala-based Swadeshi Science Movement won the 2005-06 Jawaharlal Nehru Prize of the Indian Science Congress for popularization of science among youths. The award, consisting of Rs one lakh and a plaque, would be given away during the inaugural session of the 93rd Indian Science Congress (ISC) at Hyderabad on January 3, 2006.
- Wipro Technologies Ltd acquired an Austrian firm, NewLogic, in an all-cash deal worth approximately US \$56 million on December 19, 2005.
- Mr. Prasanth Kumar, Investments Director, GroupM, Bangalore, bagged the 'Best Media Planner/Buyer in Asia' award, given by *Media Magazine*, Hong Kong, at a ceremony held in Hong Kong on December 14, 2005.
- Tata BP Solar, on December 19, 2006 has been chosen for the Gold Award in the engineering category of the Indian Manufacturing Excellence Award 2005, instituted by Frost & Sullivan.
- India's leading battery manufacturer, Amara Raja Batteries Ltd, has been awarded the 5S Excellence Award 2005 by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on December 29, 2005.
- Indian team captain Rahul Dravid has been declared 'Person of the Year' by Press Club of Bangalore. The award was presented by Karnataka Chief Minister N Dharam Singh and Deputy Chief Minister M P Prakash during new year celebration on December 31 night.
- Christopher Nolan's 'Batman Begins' has been named 'the best film of 2005' by a new internet poll, results of which have been posted on moviehole.net.

STUDENT'S VOICE

Topics for Debate

- Should the sale of human organs be legalized?
- Should everyone be forced to stay at school until they are 18?
- Are certain topics inappropriate for debate?

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