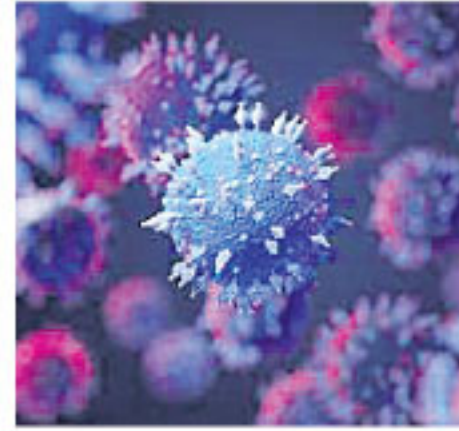




## POSITIVE APPROACH

Actor Rhea Chakraborty says she has finally learnt how to live in the present and enjoy it

LEISURE P2



## OMICRON VARIANT LETHAL

WHO reiterates Wednesday that the BA.2 sublineage of Omicron should be considered a variant of concern

INTERNATIONAL P10



## FIRST T20I TODAY

India look to experiment their bench strength in the T20Is series against Sri Lanka, which begins Thursday

SPORTS P12

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## ₹18k cr recovered from tainted trio

**New Delhi:** Solicitor General Tushar Mehta informed Wednesday the Supreme Court that ₹18,000 crore have been returned to the banks in the cases of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, and Mehul Choksi. Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted before a bench headed by Justice AM Khanwilkar that the total proceeds of crimes in the PMLA cases pending before the top court amount to ₹67,000 crore. Mehta also told the bench that as on date 4,700 cases are being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate. He added that in 2020-21, the ED has filed 981 cases related to money-laundering. P7



## Maha minister Malik arrested

**Mumbai:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested Wednesday Maharashtra Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik in a money-laundering case linked to the activities of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim and his aides, officials said. The 62-year-old NCP leader was taken into custody shortly before 3.00pm after he was questioned for about six hours at the ED office in south Mumbai's Ballard Estate area. He was brought there by the ED at around 8.00am. Malik raised a clenched fist, smiled and waved towards the waiting media personnel. He told the media from inside the vehicle: "We will fight and we will win. Will expose all." P7

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## NO ROAD, NO VOTE



Alleging lack of road connectivity and drinking water, residents of Dunda village under Junagarh block of Kalahandi district boycotted the panchayat polls Wednesday when repolling took place

## Sanctions raining against Russia

AGENCIES

**Washington, Feb 23:** US President Joe Biden has announced a set of sweeping sanctions targeting Russia's ability to do business with the West. Biden said that his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin's decision to order troops into parts of eastern Ukraine was 'a flagrant violation of international law'. In a separate development, Japan and Australia also announced sanctions against Russia while Pope Francis termed the situation 'very dangerous for world peace'. Announcing the 'first tranche' of US sanctions, Biden said the American actions would effectively 'cut off' Russia's government from Western finance'. He said that he was moving additional troops and equipment to 'strengthen' US allies in the Baltic nations on NATO's eastern flank, but made clear they would not be there to 'fight Russia'.

Biden called Putin's actions, including ordering Russian troops into Luhansk and Donetsk, the two separatist-held regions of eastern Ukraine after declaring them independent, as a 'flagrant violation of international law'. Australia also announced additional sanctions on Russia. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said Wednesday that targeted financial sanctions and travel bans will be the first batch of measures in response to Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Meanwhile the New Zealand government said it is 'strongly opposed to Russia's actions against Ukraine' and strongly 'condemn it'. Japan's PM Fumio Kishida said Wednesday that his government will ban the new issuance and distribution of Russian government bonds in Japan in response to the 'actions Russia has been taking in Ukraine'. MORE P9 & P10

## SJTA chief Kumar gets Central role

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 23:** Odisha cadre senior IAS officer Krishan Kumar has been appointed as the Joint Secretary of the Department of Commerce under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It means that the 2002-batch IAS officer will have to shift to New Delhi. Kumar has been appointed for a total tenure of five years or until further orders, whichever is earlier, said an official notification issued Wednesday.

"Appointment of Shri Krishan Kumar, IAS (OD:2002), as Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce, from the date of assumption of the charge of the post, for a tenure of five years or until further orders, whichever is earlier," said the notification released by the Appointment Committee of Cabinet.

Kumar presently is the chief of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA). He is also the Commissioner-cum-Secretary of the Public Works Department and the Chairman of Puri Konark Development Authority and Odisha Bridge Construction Corporation.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved appointments and premature repatriation of 43 officers at Additional Secretary and Additional Secretary equivalent level, said the notification.

During his tenure as SJTA chief Kumar managed two Rath Yatra during the Covid-19 pandemic very successfully. Sources however, said that his deputation to the ministry came as a bit of surprise.

## SC JUNKS PLEA FOR OFFLINE BOARDS

■ Due to the Covid situation in 2021, the top court had approved the assessment scheme. However, it asserted that the same cannot happen every year

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** The Supreme Court dismissed Wednesday a plea seeking cancellation of offline board examinations for Classes X and XII to be conducted by the CBSE and several other boards this year.

"Such petitions give false hope to the persons who are going to appear in the examinations. Those students will be misled by this petition. Let the authorities take decision. If it is wrong, challenge that decision. Here, you want to pre-empt everything," a bench headed by Justice AM Khanwilkar told the lawyer appearing for the petitioners.

"This creates not only false hopes, it creates confusion all over to students who are preparing," said the bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and CT Ravikumar.

The counsel appearing for the petitioners said that most of the state



Students of various educational institutions demanding cancellation of offline exams at PMG Square in the state capital (REPORT P4)

## CHSE, BSE KEEP ALL OPTIONS OPEN

**Bhubaneswar:** The Board of Secondary Education (BSE) said Wednesday it will soon announce the schedule for the second summative tests. The Council of Higher Secondary Education (CHSE) is also planning to conduct the annual exams by the end of April. School and Mass Education Minister Samir Ranjan Dash said that examinations for Classes X and XII will be conducted after consultation with parents and students. The CHSE had earlier informed that the annual Plus-II examinations will tentatively be held in the month of April. Both the boards said that they are keeping all options open for benefit of students.

boards have not yet declared the dates for examinations. "Whenever examination is due, they will declare those dates, what is the problem," the bench observed.

At the outset, the counsel appearing for the petitioners, AS Sahai and others, referred to the order passed by the SC last year in the matter pertaining to board exams amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The bench said what had happened in the past cannot be the basis to pass order now. "Entertaining such petitions is creating more confusion," it said.

The counsel argued that classes were not properly conducted in most of the states. The bench said the authorities are aware of the situations and they are supervising it.

## Final phase today amid tight security

■ Despite efforts by the administration, there have been many incidents of violence during the first 4 phases of the panchayat polls. Efforts are on to prevent such a recurrence

POST NEWS NETWORK

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 23:** The stage is set for the final phase of the three-tier panchayat polls Thursday in Odisha with a total of 41.88 lakh voters expected to exercise their franchise. State Election Commission officials said preparations for the fifth stage are more or less over. Voting will be held for 131 zilla parishad (ZP) zones and 975 gram panchayats coming under them.

A total of 13,514 booths will be used for the polls. The state police have made adequate security arrangements for free and fair elections. A total of 258 platoons of police, 1,148



mobile patrolling parties along with district police officers have been deployed for smooth conduct of the fifth phase of elections.

Meanwhile the SEC said Wednesday that there was 79% voter turnout in the fourth phase of the polls conducted Tuesday. The SEC said that the highest voter turnout was recorded at 86.57 per cent in Subarnapur district while Ganjam logged the lowest of 65.21 per cent.

The SEC said that repolling in 49 booths across various districts went off peacefully Wednesday. Twenty five of these booths had problems during the first phase while trouble erupted in 24 of the booths in the second phase.

## ANGRY VILLAGERS HOLD BDO HOSTAGE

**Chhatrapur:** Residents of Tumba village in Ganjam district detained Prakash Das, the block development officer (BDO) of Patrapur for a lengthy period Wednesday after failing to cast their votes in the third phase of the panchayat polls. Sources said some villagers could not exercise their franchise February 20 as their names were missing in the voters' list. This irked the villagers and when Das visited the village, he was held hostage. Chikiti sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Krushna Chandra Bhatra however, informed later in the day that Das had been released by the villagers.

## IRREGULAR by MANJUL



It's a lie that we target only opposition leaders. See, in Maharashtra, we are taking action against leaders of ruling alliance too

## MARKET WATCH

INDEX	INDEX	VARIATION
SENSEX	57232.06	↓ 68.62
NIFTY	17063.30	↓ 28.90
DOLLAR	75.51	↓ ₹0.22
EURO	84.48	↓ ₹0.02
GOLD	₹50,210	↓ ₹118
SILVER	₹64,346	↑ ₹1

## WEATHER

	BHUB	CTK
MAX	31.9°C	31.6°C
MIN	21.6°C	18.4°C
Humidity	91%	86%
Rainfall	Nil	Nil
Forecast	Clear sky mainly	

## 'Highly risky' tags a must for all crypto ads: ASCI

■ As crypto is still an uncharted territory for consumers, advertisers will have to inform about all the investment risks involved

AGENCIES

**Mumbai, Feb 23:** Advertisers will have to prominently carry a disclaimer for crypto products and non-fungible tokens mentioning that these products are 'unregulated and can be highly risky', the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) informed here Wednesday.

The self-regulatory body has also said that such advertisements

should mention that there may be no regulatory recourse for any loss from such transactions.

All virtual digital assets (VDAs), which are commonly referred to as crypto or non-fungible tokens (NFTs), will have to put the disclaimer in a 'prominent and unmistakable' way in campaigns for products and services.

The government is yet to come out with a law on such assets but has proposed a tax on gains made from such transactions which has been welcomed by the crypto players as a move to legitimise the industry. However, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been firm in calling for a complete ban on such activities.



"Advertising of virtual digital assets and services needs specific guidance, considering that this is a new and as yet an emerging way of investing. Hence, there is a need to make consumers aware of the risks and ask them to proceed with caution," ASCI chairman Subhash

Kamath said.

The guidelines say advertisers will have to carry the disclaimer - 'crypto products and NFTs are unregulated and can be highly risky. There may be no regulatory recourse for any loss from such transactions' - in a prominent manner.

The disclaimer must remain on screen for at least five seconds in video ads, while for long format of over two minutes it should be placed both at the start and in the end. A fifth of the advertising space in print or static ad should be devoted to the disclaimer, the ASCI stated.

The ASCI also said that celebrities who want to be a part of crypto ads, must do due diligence before

giving their consent. "Since this is a risky category, celebrities or prominent personalities who appear in crypto/NFT advertisements must take special care to ensure that they have done their due diligence about the statements and claims made in the advertisement, so as not to mislead consumers," the ASCI warned. Similarly, guidelines on putting the disclaimers also cover audio, social media posts, disappearing stories or posts on social media, it said.

It should be stated here that RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said had said February 10 that cryptocurrencies were a 'threat to macroeconomic and financial stability' of India.

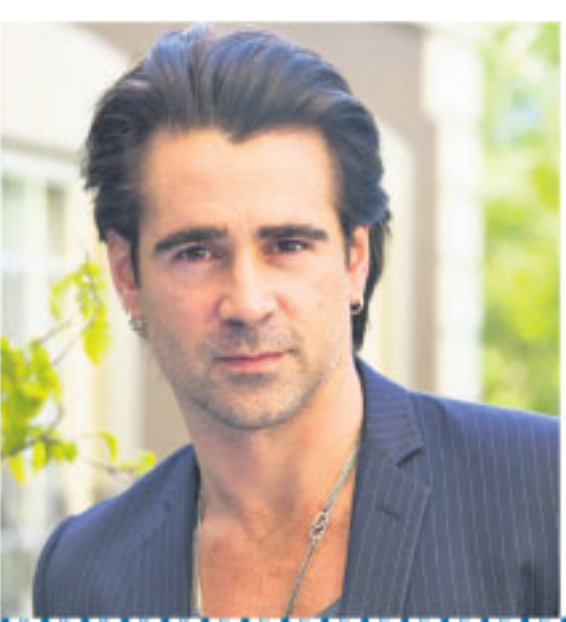
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For the first time, polls in all 107 ULBs and three Corporations will be held simultaneously. The mayor will be directly elected by the voters. Hence, each polling booth will have two EVMs. Also, the 'None Of The Above' (NOTA) option will be used for the first time in the elections. Voters will exercise their franchise at 4,584 polling booths in 1,931 wards in the upcoming civic body polls, said SEC sources.



# leisure



## WHEN FARRELL WASN'T ALLOWED TO SMOKE

Hollywood actor Colin Farrell has shared that he was prevented from smoking on the set of *The Batman* as he is playing a younger version of 'The Penguin'. The 45-year-old character portrays Oswald Cobblepot/Penguin in Matt Reeves' new take on the *Caped Crusader*.

## GABRIELLE ENJOYS PLAYING VILLAINS

Actress Tati Gabrielle stars in *Uncharted* as the mercenary Jo Braddock and says she enjoys getting to play antagonistic characters as it challenges her as a performer. "It's funny because I feel every actor wants to play a villain at some point," Gabrielle told *The Hollywood Reporter*.



## FORTUNE FORECAST

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**ARIES**  
You will remain undecided today, which is quite unlike you, says Ganesha. This will lead to speculation, which is not a bad thing by itself, unless you put all your money into the bargain. Also, be careful not to take wild guesses in love and relationships.

**TAURUS**  
This day you are going to be particularly conscious of your beliefs and principles. You will be very proud and sensitive, and are not likely to brook any adverse comment or criticism. Anyone who dares to question or deride them will get a fitting response from you. Ganesha, however warns you to be more tolerant of others' views and beliefs. Intolerance, particularly in the form of sharp and acidic retorts, could alienate some important persons.

**GEMINI**  
You have been aching to arrange a family reunion or get-together at your house. Well, today is the perfect day to do it. And why just family? You are also likely to invite some of your close friends and important business associates over to your place. Your spouse will enjoy the company of your loved ones.

**CANCER**  
You are likely start the day in the best of spirits today. Your enthusiasm and cheerfulness will be infectious, and you will be able to lift the mood wherever you go. However, your enthusiasm can be short-lived and pummeled under the weight of some bad news, leaving you distraught. Take a break in case you feel stressed out, advises Ganesha. Things are likely to look up by the time the day ends.

**LEO**  
Talk of being busy! It seems like today, you shall take the cake, and perhaps, be the icing on it as well, says Ganesha. It is likely that the day is going to be very hectic for you in terms of work and business. You may be engaged in official conversations and dealings. Also, don't be surprised to find yourself in meetings as you attempt to take stock of your business situation. After such a long and tiring day, it is only normal for you to unwind later in the evening with your sweetheart, feels Ganesha.

**VIRGO**  
You will spend most of today in the company of family and friends, says Ganesha. Students may focus on upcoming examinations and will learn to balance study and leisure time, in equal measure. It is a good day to buy real estate. Overall, a day to lie low and let your mind run free in its pursuit of pleasure.

**LIBRA**  
Today is the day when you seem to agree with everything that people say, without striking even a note of criticism. It's just one of those days when you are amazed by all things around you. Such an elastic approach will enable you to be reasonable in your views and sensible in your ways. Ganesha wishes you the very best.

**SCORPIO**  
It may have been on the cards for long and finally, you may end up buying a state-of-the-art motor vehicle or a palatial house of your dreams today. In addition, your generous mood may also egg you on to buy an expensive gift for your life partner. If you do not let the generosity burn a hole through your pocket, you may have an overall satisfying day, says Ganesha.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
Today, your superiors at work are going to trust you with many complicated assignments. But, after exerting yourself, you are sure to come out with flying colors and have your work appreciated. Do not be surprised if cash incentives come your way. Such may indeed be your fortune, says Ganesha.

**CAPRICORN**  
Creativity is your innate trait. But how creative can you get when dealing with day-to-day issues? You will not only answer this question with utmost modesty, but will make a great display of your creative skills by cleverly sorting out problems with your siblings, says Ganesha. You will derive pleasure by delving into knotty problems and solving them with ease.

**AQUARIUS**  
For a moment, it seems that you're swamped with problems. But you are brave enough to deal with any ugly issue that crops up suddenly. Ganesha hints at a romantic evening, which may just be time together in a jacuzzi, or simply preparing a meal together. Pure ecstasy!

**PISCES**  
All the dieting that you have been undergoing will finally begin to show results, with compliments galore coming your way from your friends. Your energy and enthusiasm levels are likely to be high. A bright and beautiful day waits, says Ganesha.



## Rhea learns how to live in present

**MUMBAI:** Actor Rhea Chakraborty is picking up pieces and 'renewing' her life after all the controversy that she was surrounded with during the last two years. The actor took to her Instagram handle to post lovely pictures of her in a beautiful yellow lehenga.

She wrote in the caption, "Sometime or the other, somewhere somehow, She finally learnt how to live in the now. - RC #renew". She added sparkling emojis to the caption. Rhea opted for soft, dewy makeup with a mauvy lip colour that complimented her look. She also opted for pearl-studded jhumkis and bangles as accessories. Earlier, Rhea had posted

about resuming work after two years. She wrote an inspirational message in the caption. It read, "Yesterday, I went to work after 2 years. A big thankyou to all the people who stood by me through my toughest times. No matter what, the sun always shines NEVER GIVE UP! #renew #gratitude." Rhea was last seen in the film, *Chehre*.

## SC suggests changing name of film *Gangubai Kathiawadi*

**NEW DELHI:** Ahead of release of Alia Bhatt starrer *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, the Supreme Court Wednesday suggested changing the name of the movie against the backdrop of the several cases against it pending before courts.

The Sanjay Leela Bhansali movie is scheduled for release Friday. During the hearing, a bench of Justices Indira Banerjee and JK Maheshwari suggested the filmmakers change the name of the movie, in the backdrop of pending court cases. However, the petitioner's counsel insisted on an interim stay on the re-

lease of the movie, while the respondent's counsel argued that a name change, days before the release, would not be possible.

An appeal challenging the Bombay High Court order was filed by Gangubai's adopted son, through lawyers Arun Kumar Sinha and Rakesh Singh, claiming that the novel and the movie tarnished the image of the petitioner, his deceased mother and other family members and such statements in the plaint satisfy the ingredients, which defines defamation. The top court is likely to continue to hear the matter on Thursday.



## Neeta: Samantha is a technician's delight

'Shakuntalam' marks the first pan-India movie for the south actress, who reprises the queen in the mythological drama

**HYDERABAD:** Costume designer Neeta Lulla, who worked for Samantha Ruth Prabhu's *Shakuntalam* reveals that Samantha was one of the most inspiring actresses she has worked with. As the celebrity costume designer shared her experience working for the upcoming epic love saga, said that Samantha has 'transformed' herself into the world of *Shakuntalam* as well.

"Samantha totally nailed the character of Shakuntala holistically. From carrying the look, the performance, and watching her on the set, has transformed even me. I was engulfed in the era of Shakuntala and Dushyant," Lulla said. Neeta also mentions

that Samantha was apprehensive about how she would pull off a queen's look. "She is a technician's delight. Such an obedient and wonderful person who appreciates the efforts put in, and works doubly hard," Neeta explains. As Samantha sported an angelic look with customised floral accessories which were designed by Neeta Lulla, her look has become one of the most discussed topics.

*Shakuntalam* marks the first pan-India movie for Samantha, who reprises the queen in the mythological drama. Directed by Guna Sekhar, the movie will release soon.



Actor Samantha in an angelic look in the poster of *Shakuntalam*

# ODISHA PAVING WAY FOR ECO RETREATS IN INDIA

Travellers must visit the Sun Temple, Konark Museum, Baulkham Sanctuary, and the Golden Beach in Puri which has been recently re-certified as a Blue Flag Beach, says Sachin R Jadhav, Director Tourism, Government of Odisha



**New Delhi:** Climate change in recent years has been extreme with harsh winters being extended to extremely hot summer weather. It's also inspiring to see people taking the initiative to make the world a better place to live by making conscious decisions.

Creating an opportunity to live in an environment-friendly manner, Odisha paves the way for eco-retreats in India, for an environmental friendly lifestyle. The state has set up an eco resort on the idyllic Ramchandi Beach

for some great glamping (glamorous camping). Fall asleep to the sounds of waves and wake up to a panoramic view of the ocean. The glam camp promises more enthralling experiences of Odisha's bountiful historical and archite-

tural heritage. "Odisha's eco-retreat is about more than just ancient monuments and landmarks; it's also about outdoor living on the beach, water sports, and making conscious decisions. Internal discussions have been taking place to replicate the eco-retreat in the market in India," said Samit Garg, Founder, E Factor Experiences Ltd.

While camping is already quite environmentally friendly, there are ways to make it even more so. The eco-retreat in Konark made certain that their camping equipment designs were eco friendly. From cleaning supplies to personal care bamboo toothbrushes, and dry grass dustbin the sustainable options were all around.

Offering an unparalleled experience, visitors are treated to cultural performances, guided

tours to nearby destinations of nature, culture, historic and architectural importance, and other recreational activities including adrenaline-inducing water sports, ATV rides, beach volleyball and archery.

"Travelers must visit the Sun Temple, Konark Museum, Baulkham Sanctuary, and the Golden Beach in Puri which has been recently re-

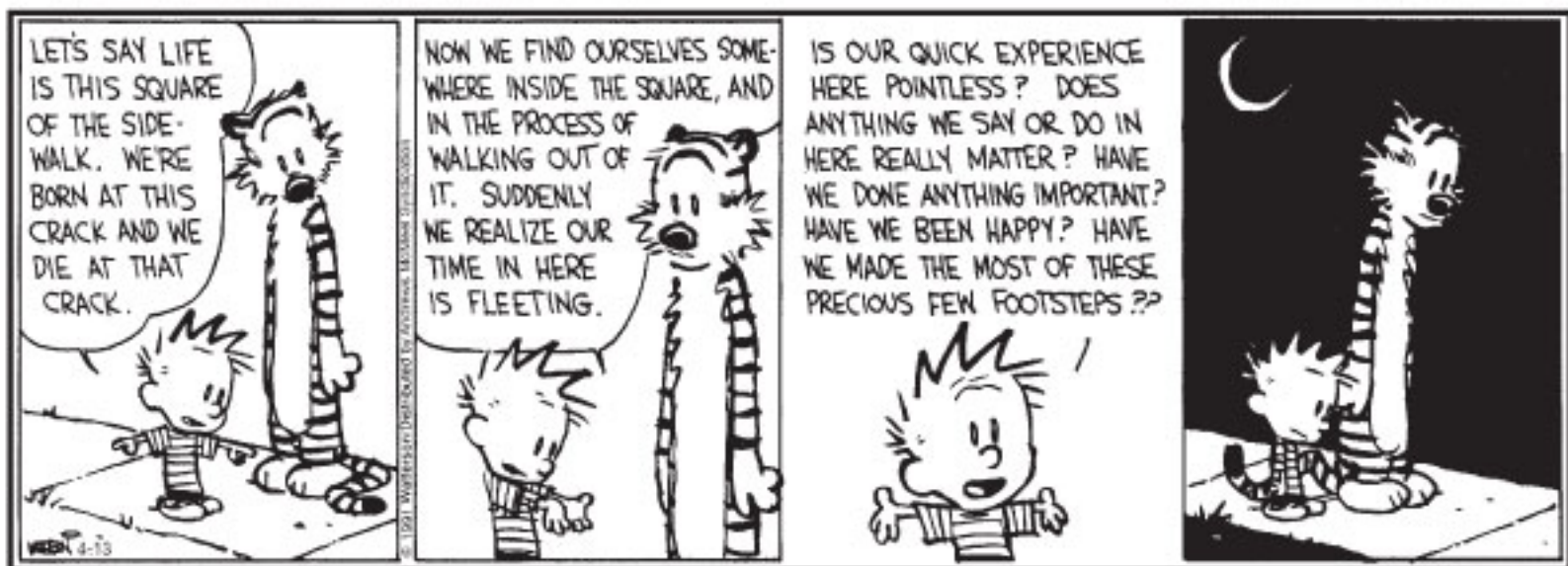
certified as a Blue Flag Beach. Guests interested in art and crafts can visit Saharanpur; a heritage crafts village where every household is an art gallery in itself. This luxurious retreat by the beachside is surely an indulgent holiday space, away from the hustle-bustle of the city life to rediscover yourself," says Sachin R Jadhav, Director Tourism, Government of Odisha.



## PEANUTS



## CALVIN AND HOBBS

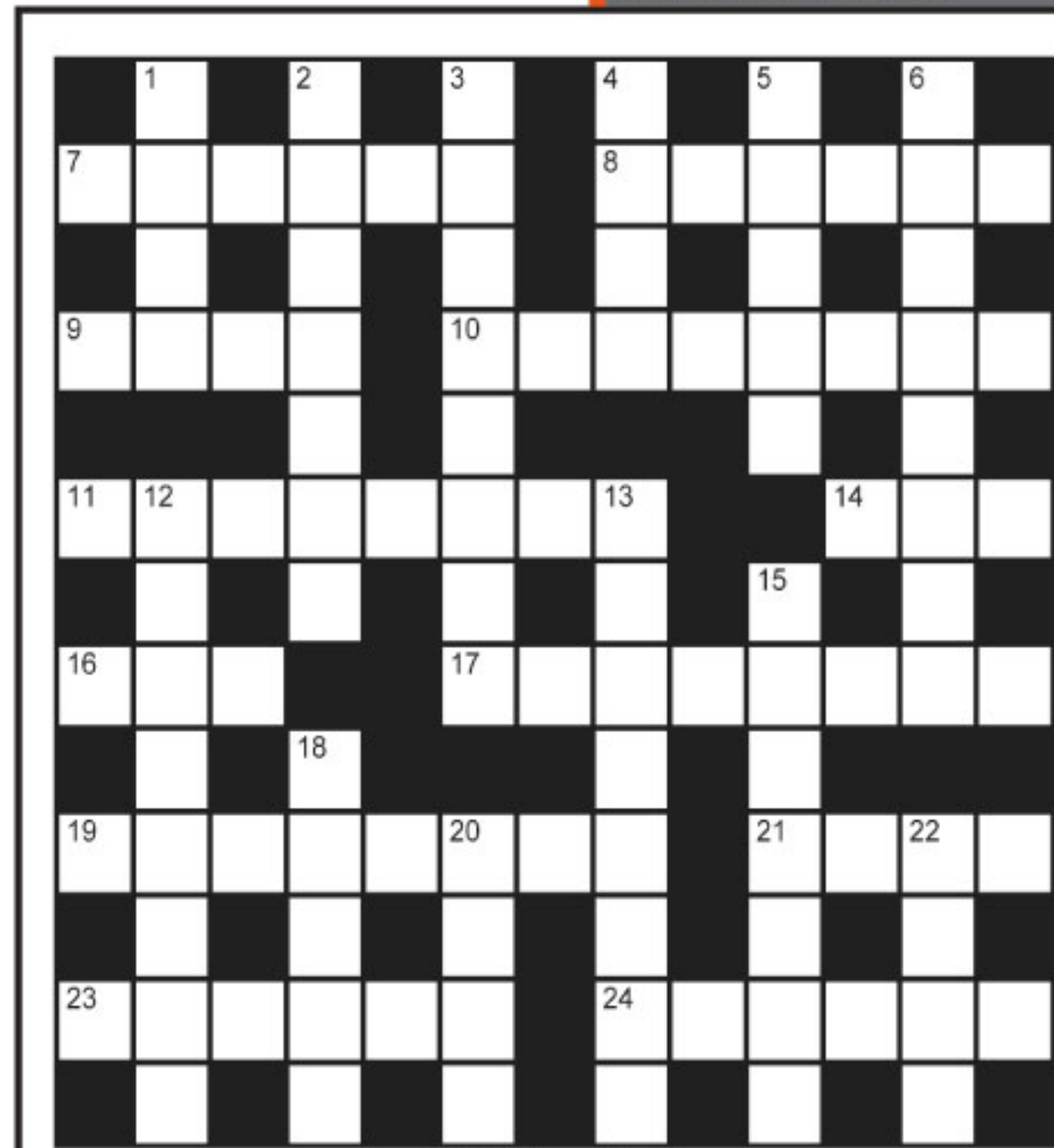


## BREVITY



## FUN post

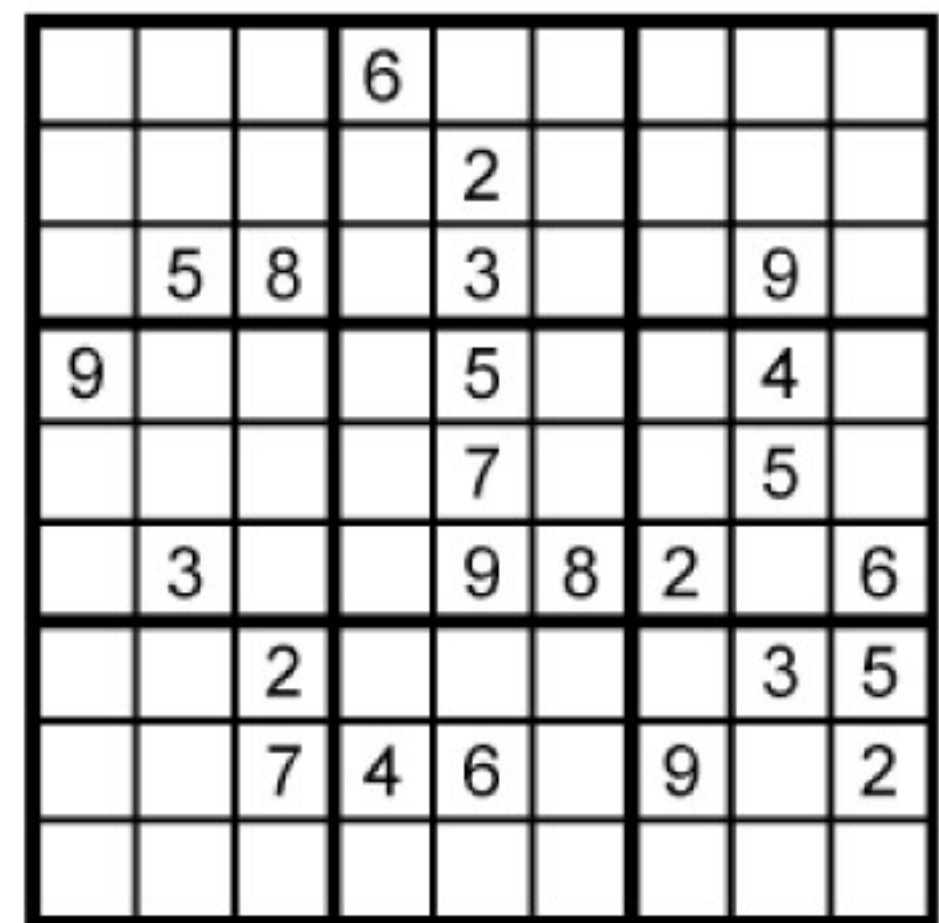
## CROSSWORD



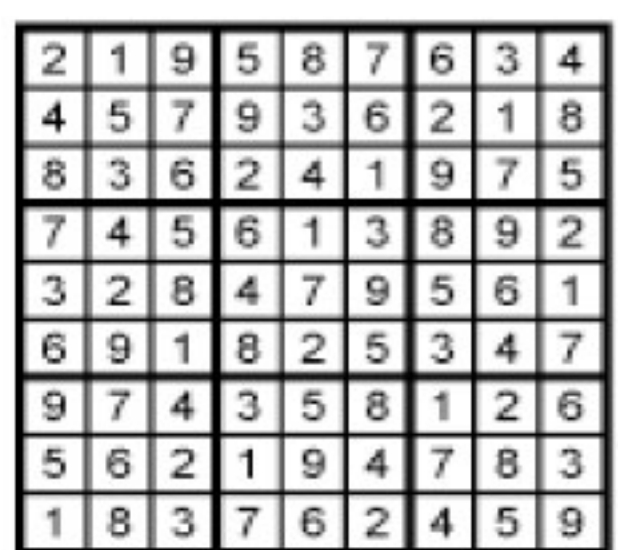
- Across**
- 7 Heavenly
  - 8 Latin dance (3-3)
  - 9 Datum
  - 10 Anthill scrounger
  - 11 Liver infection symptom
  - 14 Frigid
  - 16 Query
  - 17 Single great stone
  - 19 Table linen (5,3)
  - 21 Wheelbarrow
  - 23 Coral reefs
  - 24 Spain and Portugal
  - 4 Stigma
  - 5 Purple shade
  - 6 Map find
  - 12 Complete
  - 13 Father of modern physics
  - 15 Trite remarks
  - 18 Reprimand
  - 20 Perfume additive
  - 22 Surprise attack
- Down**
- 1 Slave girl of opera
  - 2 Cold weather wear
  - 3 Showy flower

## SUDOKU

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



## SOLUTIONS



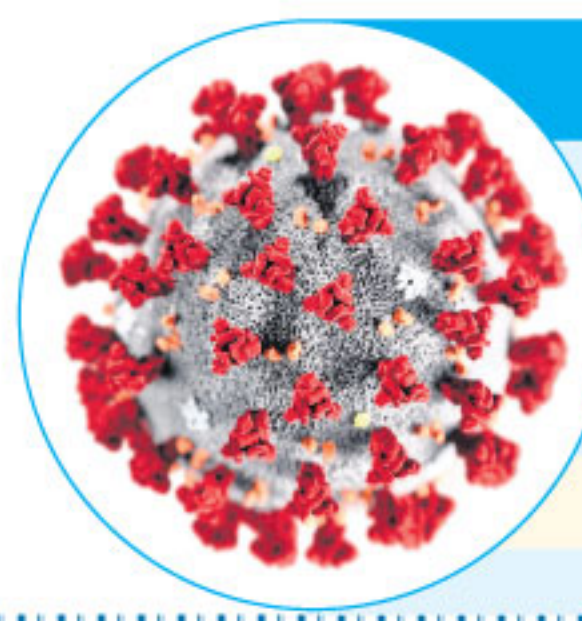
CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW





**SHRINE RENOVATION**

An artisan paints the sculpture of a bull at a Shaivite shrine in Purighat area of Cuttack, Wednesday



**COVID-19 TRACKER**

	INFECTED	RECOVERED	DEAD
World	42,89,55,882	35,71,36,856	5,928,944
India	4,28,67,031	4,21,89,887	5,12,622
Odisha	12,83,639	12,71,018	9,045

**Matric fail fake doc's sister held**

The interesting part is that Ramesh has saved the phone numbers of several women as wife one, wife doctor, wife Bhilai, wife teacher, wife Guwahati, wife Bangalore, to be wife Dhenkanal, to be wife Jagatsinghpur and so on in his mobile phone



Fake doctor Ramesh Chandra Swain in police custody

“So, we have asked the complainants to give details of the valuables and other items gifted to Ramesh’s sister during marriage,” he said, adding that police will check if she was involved in other fraudulent activities of Ramesh. Suspecting the involvement of the woman’s husband (Swain’s brother in-law), the police had called him for questioning. However, he is on the run. The police have received several complaints from the people of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, who have been cheated by Ramesh. Dash said they have received a complaint from a businessman from Kolkata alleging that Ramesh had taken hatchery machines from him claiming that the Union government is procuring them. However, the businessman is yet to receive the payment, he said. “We have sealed Ramesh’s poultry farm in Patkura area of Kendrapara district where six such machines have been installed. The case has been transferred to the local police station for further investigation,” the DCP said. Similarly, a businessman from Andhra Pradesh had lodged a complaint with the Commissionerate Police here Tuesday, accusing Ramesh of duping him of ₹4.5 lakh. Claiming to be a senior officer looking after the environment wing of the Health Ministry, Ramesh placed an order of ₹4.5 lakh with the nursery and gave a fake cheque. He also gave another fake cheque for ₹6,500 to the truck driver who had brought the plants to Bhubaneswar, the police said. After receiving the complaint, the police sealed a farmhouse regis-

tered in the name of the second wife of Ramesh. The farmhouse is spread over 15-20 acres located in Dhenkanal district. “If required, we will allow the Andhra businessman to identify his saplings and take them back,” Dash said. Apart from that, a person from Jagatsinghpur district alleged that Ramesh had taken ₹18 lakh from him to help him get admission in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences here. Ramesh had registered his two vehicles by submitting fake documents. For this, another case has been registered against him. “The remand of Ramesh Swain is ending Wednesday. As we have received about 15 complaints against him, we will seek another seven day custodial remand of Ramesh,” the DCP added. The Commissionerate Police has formed a special team for a comprehensive investigation of all the complaints registered against Ramesh. Ramesh, a matric fail, had married at least 18 middle-aged single women including two Supreme Court lawyers, a Delhi school teacher, a police officer and a doctor and acquired their money before abandoning them. Ramesh married the women through matrimonial sites like Jeevansathi.com, shaadi.com and bharatmatrimony.com. The interesting part is that Ramesh has saved the phone numbers of several women as wife one, wife doctor, wife Bhilai, wife teacher, wife Guwahati, wife Bangalore, to be wife Dhenkanal, to be wife Jagatsinghpur and so on in his mobile phone.

**PREPPING FOR SUMMER**



A man buys terracotta water bottles from a vendor at Dolamundi Square in Cuttack, Wednesday, as the state witnesses a rise in mercury

**NO NEED OF VAX CERT FOR VISITING RELIGIOUS PLACES**

POST NEWS NETWORK  
 Bhubaneswar, Feb 23: With the Capital city witnessing a sharp decline in fresh Covid infections, the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) Wednesday said that vaccination certificates or identity proofs are no more required for visiting the places of worship under its jurisdiction. “Considering the current scenario and the coverage of vaccination in the state, people don’t need to produce vaccination certificates or ID proofs for visiting any religious institution. Further, there won’t be any condition on priests or servitors to produce double vaccination certificates,” said a BMC notification. However, authorities of the places of worship are required to ensure Covid-19 appropriate behaviour like social distancing, wearing of masks and hand sanitisation within their premises, it said. Notably, the civic body had earlier allowed children below 15 years of age to visit the places of worship with proper proof of identification like Aadhaar and only under the supervision of their parents or adult relatives from February 12. Besides, only fully vaccinated individuals were allowed to enter the places of worship under the BMC jurisdiction in view of the Covid-19 situation.



File photo of Lingaraj temple in Bhubaneswar

**342 fresh Covid cases, 9 deaths**

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
 Bhubaneswar, Feb 23: Nine more coronavirus patients have died in Odisha and 342 people tested positive for the pathogen, the Health department said Wednesday. The daily positivity rate was 0.58 per cent and 83 children were among those newly infected, a bulletin stated, adding that 58,565 samples were tested in the past 24 hours. The infections are the lowest since 298 cases January 1. The state had logged 428 Covid-19 cases and 10 deaths Tuesday. Two patients in Puri were among the new fatalities, taking the toll to 9,045. These are confirmed as Covid deaths after an audit. Fifty-three other Covid-19 patients have died due to comorbidities so far, according to data. There are 4,320 active Covid-19 cases and 968 patients recuperated from the disease in the last 24 hours. The tally rose to 12,83,639, including 12,70,221 recoveries, it added.

**Breaching 50 kmph to invite fine**

POST NEWS NETWORK  
 Bhubaneswar, Feb 23: In a bid to reduce road mishaps, the authorities have decided to penalise drivers with fines up to ₹7,000 if they breach the speed limit of 50 km per hour at certain locations in the capital city here. The Bhubaneswar Smart City Limited (BSCL) has installed Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and Traffic Violation Detection System (TVDS) at 13 locations in the city here, sources said. These systems have been installed to detect the violation of speed limit rules and issue



fines online to the owners of the vehicles. “If the driver produces his/her driving licence at the time of payment of the fine, the amount will be reduced to ₹2,000. However, the violator’s driving licence will be suspended for three months for every

ANPR and TVDS have been installed at Patia Square, Power House Square, Kalinga Stadium Square, Capital Hospital Square, KIIT Square, KIIT Campus-3 Square, Sishu Bhawan Square, from Vani Vihar to Sishu Bhawan, AG Square, Shastri Nagar Square, Rajmahal Square, Trident Hotel Square and Naka Gate Square

offence. On the fourth such offence the driving licence will be cancelled,” said an official of the Commissionerate Police. The ANPR and TVDS have been installed at Patia Square, Power House Square, Kalinga Stadium

Square, Capital Hospital Square, KIIT Square, KIIT Campus-3 Square, Sishu Bhawan Square, from Vani Vihar to Sishu Bhawan, AG Square, Shastri Nagar Square, Rajmahal Square, Trident Hotel Square and Naka Gate Square.

**Festival ahead**



Barricades being put up near Sri Lokanath temple in Puri ahead of Mahashivratri festival, Wednesday

**79 pc voter turnout in 4th phase rural polls**

POST NEWS NETWORK  
 Bhubaneswar, Feb 23: The fourth phase of the panchayat election in Odisha registered 79 per cent voter turnout, the State Election Commission (SEC) said Wednesday. The SEC said that the highest voter turnout was recorded at 86.57 per cent in Subarnapur district while Ganjam logged the lowest of 65.21 during the fourth phase of the rural polls which was held across 27 districts of the state Tuesday. The SEC said that the polling percentage in the four phases of



polling remained above 70 per cent. While it was 79 per cent in the 4th phase, 78.6% in the third phase, 78.3% in the second phase and

and second phases of polling February 16 and February 18. While re-poll is being held in 25 booths of the first phase, another 20 booths had reported disruption during the second phase of polling. Jajpur district witnessed the highest re-polling in 22 booths. Other districts were: Bhadrak (6), Puri (5), Dhenkanal (4), Mayurbhanj and Jagatsinghpur (3 each) and one each booth in the districts of Boudh, Bolangir and Keonjhar. The re-poll is being held between 9 am and 3 pm, the SEC release said.

**Dhinkia: HC directs 5-member panel to hold public hearing**

AGENCIES  
 Cuttack, Feb 23: The Orissa High Court Wednesday directed the five-member court-appointed committee, which had earlier visited the violence-hit Dhinkia village in Jagatsinghpur to probe allegations of police atrocities, to conduct public hearing in the village. As per an earlier direction of the HC, the committee, comprising lawyers, had visited Dhinkia which was on the boil in January after police baton charged betel farmers who protested a drive to evict betel vineyards to pave way for the proposed JSW steel plant. The committee members Wednesday submitted their reports separately to the HC. However, in order to get a clearer picture of the ground situation at Dhinkia and in the nearby areas, the HC directed the committee to visit the troubled village once again March 5.

**By 2050, number of wildfires globally to rise by 30%: UN report**

THE REPORT BY THE UNEP AND GRID-ARENDA HAS CALLED FOR A RADICAL CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON WILDFIRES AND SHIFTING THEIR INVESTMENTS FROM REACTION AND RESPONSE TO PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE  
 Nairobi, Feb 23: Climate change and land-use change are projected to make wildfires more frequent and intense, a new report said Wednesday, adding that the number of extreme fires globally will rise by up to 14 per cent by 2030, 30 per cent by the end of 2050 and 50 per cent by the end of the century. The report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and GRID-Arendal, a non-profit environmental communications centre based in Norway, has called for a radical change in government spending on wildfires and shifting their investments from reaction and response to prevention and preparedness. The report, ‘Spreading like Wildfire: The Rising Threat of

“We have to minimise the risk of extreme wildfires by being better prepared—invest more in fire risk reduction, work with local communities, and strengthen global commitment to fight climate change”  
 INGER ANDERSEN | UNEP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
 Extraordinary Landscape Fires’, finds an elevated risk even for the Arctic and other regions previously unaffected by wildfires. The report is released ahead of the resumption of 5th session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) here starting February 28 till March 2. The report was commissioned in support of UN Programme on Reducing Emissions from



Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UNREDD), an effort at increasing forests as part of climate mitigation action, and the ‘UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration’. UNEP will be exploring how further investments can be made to reduce fire risks in critical ecosystems around the world. The publication calls on governments to adopt a new ‘Fire Ready Formula’, with two-thirds of spending devoted to planning, prevention, preparedness, and recovery, with one third left for response. Currently, direct responses to wildfires typically receive over half

**WAY AHEAD**  
 UN Environment Programme will be exploring how further investments can be made to reduce fire risks in critical ecosystems around the world. The publication calls on governments to adopt a new ‘Fire Ready Formula’, with two-thirds of spending devoted to planning, prevention, preparedness, and recovery, with one third left for response. Currently, direct responses to wildfires typically receive over half of related expenditures, while planning receives less than one per cent. In order to prevent fires, authors call for a combination of data and science-based monitoring systems with indigenous knowledge and for a stronger regional and international cooperation, a release said. “Current government responses to wildfires are often putting money in the wrong place. Those emergency service workers and firefighters on the frontlines who are risking their lives to fight forest wildfires need to be supported,” said UNEP Executive Director, Inger Andersen. “We have to minimise the risk of extreme wildfires by being better prepared—invest more in fire risk reduction, work with local communities, and strengthen global commitment to fight climate change.”

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SHORT TAKES

FAKE DISABILITY CERTIFICATE

Minor girl raped in Bhadrak; 3 held

Padmapur: A 7-year-old girl was allegedly raped by a man in Nayakanidih area under Basudevpur block of Bhadrak district Wednesday. As per a complaint lodged by the father of the victim with Nayakanidih police, Binay Sethi lured the girl to his house to show her his cell phone and raped her. The girl returned home and narrated the incident before her parents. Police also registered a case. Investigating officer Banamali Parida raided the area and arrested the accused and two of his friends. All of them were medically examined. The medical examination of the victim will be conducted Thursday when her statement will also be recorded, police said.



POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhadrak, Feb 23: A day after the Higher Education department cancelled the admissions of 28 students through submission of fake disability certificates in Bhadrak Autonomous College, the students staged a protest in front of the college gate Wednesday demanding rollback of the decision.

They burned tyres and created ruckus near the entrance of the college over the issue, said sources. Police rushed to the place and tried to placate the students. The area is under scanner now as ballot boxes of the panchayat polls have been stored in the strong rooms opened on the college

Fake FB account in Cong's name



Rourkela: A fake Facebook account in the name of Congress' Rourkela district unit has allegedly been created by some miscreants, who have been putting abusive posts against some journalists to defame the party, the party leaders alleged Wednesday. Two days ago, Congress leaders spotted the objectionable posts on the FB account. Upset over the issue, George Tirkey has filed a police complaint demanding stern action against the accused. He also urged the people to close the accounts opened in the name of Rourkela Congress in various social media platforms without permission of the party. Tirkey and party's district unit spokesperson Kailash Chandra Sahu have warned of legal action against the people misusing the social media accounts of the party.

Police backlash fear clouds polls in Dinkia

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kujang, Feb 23: Holding of free and fair polls in Dinkia panchayat of Jagatsinghpur district is mired in doubts as the alleged police atrocities on villagers January 24 are still fresh in the minds of people, said sources.

Dinkia panchayat holds significance as this is the site of the proposed JSW Steel plant. Reports said the elections to the posts of samiti members and zilla parishad (ZP) zones in Dinkia panchayat are being held in the fourth and last phase of panchayat polls. Notably, the election for the posts of sarpanch and ward members were held in 2019 and the two posts will again go to polls in 2024.

Sensing tension in the area, the district administration has set up booths in neighbouring villages instead of Dinkia. The Dinkia panchayat under



Dinkia panchayat under Erasama block has 23 wards including six in the Dinkia village

Among them, one booth has been opened in Mahal village, three in Patana and two in Trilochanpur

Erasama block has 23 wards including six in the Dinkia village. Among them, one booth has been opened in Mahal village,

PLEDGE TO SAVE GREENERY



Villagers taking a pledge to protect forests from fire at an awareness workshop in Chhendipada of Angul district, Wednesday

OP PHOTO

LOBBYING STARTS FOR TICKETS IN BALASORE



POST NEWS NETWORK

ULB POLLS

EARLIER, COUNCILLORS USED TO ELECT THE CHAIRPERSONS OF THE CIVIC BODIES

THIS YEAR, THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ANNOUNCED TO HOLD DIRECT ELECTIONS TO THE CHAIRPERSONS' POSTS

Balasore, Feb 23: With the panchayat elections nearing the end and the State Election Commission (SEC) issuing the notification for the urban body polls Wednesday, intense lobbying for party tickets has started in Balasore.

Aspirants of various political parties - mainly BJD, BJP and Congress - are seen thronging the houses of the influential leaders and party offices for tickets, a report said.

The SEC is expected to announce the urban poll dates as soon as the results of the panchayat elections are out.

There are three municipalities and two notified area councils (NACs) in Balasore district. It was learnt that the chairperson post of Balasore municipality has been reserved for women (general) while those of Nilagiri NAC and newly-formed Remuna NAC have been reserved for scheduled cast (SC) women.

Similarly, the chairperson posts of Jaleswar and Soro municipalities have been reserved for SC.

Earlier, councillors used to elect the chairpersons of the civic bodies.

However, this year, the state government has announced to hold direct elections to the chairperson posts. The councillor and chairperson aspirants will contest elections on party symbols.

As chairperson posts hold more significance than that of the councillors, many leaders of all three parties have started lobbying for party tickets, it is said.

There are 31 wards in Balasore municipality. Of them, one ward each has been reserved for SC, ST and ST (women) while 13 wards have been left unreserved.

Of 17 wards in Jaleswar municipality, three have been reserved for SC (women), ST and ST (women). Seven each have been reserved for women and general category.

In Soro municipality, seven wards have been reserved for women and nine for unreserved category.

Remuna NAC consists of 13 wards, of which one ward each was reserved for SC, SC (women) and ST (women). Five wards each have been reserved for women and unreserved category.

According to sources, hectic parleys will start once the results of the three-tier panchayat elections are declared when the party leaders can devote enough time to prepare for the urban polls.

Pregnant woman hurt in post-poll violence

POST NEWS NETWORK

Sajanagad, Feb 23: A pregnant woman and her husband were attacked allegedly by some BJP supporters during the third phase of panchayat polls in zilla parishad zone no-3 under Nilagiri block of Balasore district, Tuesday. The matter came to the fore after a complaint was lodged with Nilagiri police, Wednesday. The victim was identified as Minati

Singh, 30, and her husband Rakhil Singh of Narasinghpur panchayat under the block.

She alleged that BJP workers barged into her house after they came to know that the village women have voted for BJD. They tried to attack her husband and she sustained injuries whing protecting him. The hooligans fled the place when neighbours rushed to their rescue. IIC Droupadi Das said a probe is underway.

Kesinga set for 3-cornered fight

POST NEWS NETWORK

Kesinga, Feb 23: Zilla parishad (ZP) zone-3 under Kesinga block of Kalahandi district is expected to see a three-cornered fight in the rural polls scheduled to be held in the fifth phase, Thursday.

Although there are four candidates in the fray, the contest will be among the BJD, BJP and Congress, according to political circles.

This ZP zone consists of 110

wards spread over nine panchayats including Adhamunda, Phatakamal, Nasinga, Gaiga, Utkela, Gokuleswar and Deogaon. A total of 30, 679 voters will exercise their franchise in this zone Thursday. However, there are several issues on the basis of which voters will cast their votes. The issues are non-execution of a mega irrigation project, connectivity problems, drinking water, housing and old-age pension.

Ex-Red commander urges people to vote

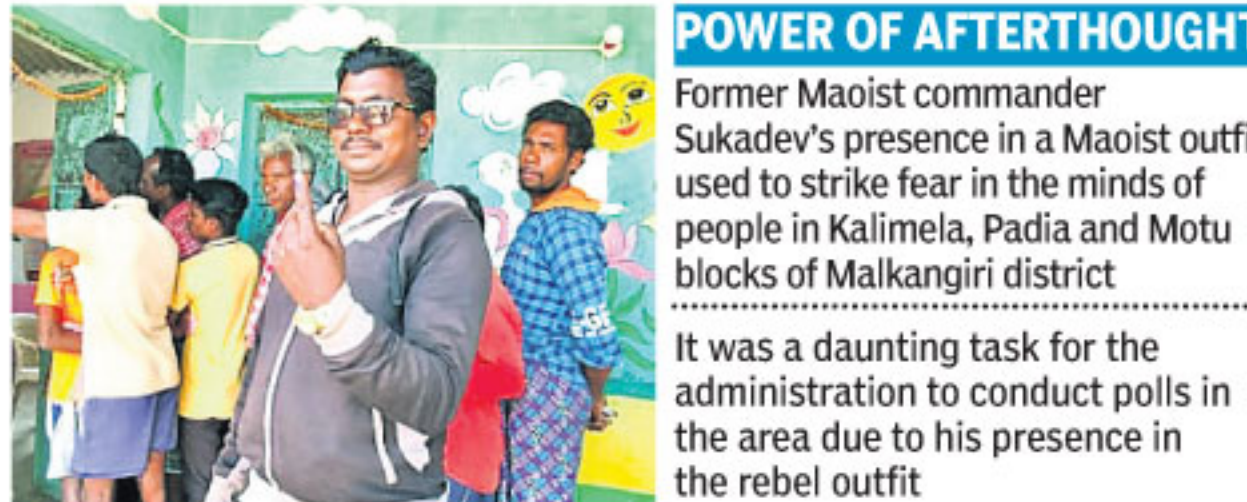
POST NEWS NETWORK

Malkangiri, Feb 23: A former Maoist commander, who was once issuing diktats to people to boycott polls, is now a changed man after joining the mainstream.

Ex-Maoist commander Sukadev is now encouraging people to vote in large numbers in the panchayat polls. This became evident when Sukadev visited Tekguda booth under Kalimela block and exercised his franchise.

He was also seen encouraging people to participate in the panchayat polls.

It was not long ago when he was posted as a commander in a Maoist outfit. His presence in the Maoist outfit used to strike fear in the minds of people in Kalimela, Padia and Motu blocks of Malkangiri district due to the violence un-



POWER OF AFTERTHOUGHT

Former Maoist commander Sukadev's presence in a Maoist outfit used to strike fear in the minds of people in Kalimela, Padia and Motu blocks of Malkangiri district

It was a daunting task for the administration to conduct polls in the area due to his presence in the rebel outfit

leashed by the ultras. It was a daunting task for the administration to conduct polls in the area due to his presence in the rebel outfit.

However, things changed when he left the outfit and surrendered to the Malkangiri police after getting disillusioned with the behaviour of Andhra Maoist leaders July 22, 2016. He also called upon the candidates to concentrate on the development works of the area once they get elected.

He also urged the ultras to return to the mainstream and work towards the development of their regions in cooperation with the government. He said that not long ago his village was a Maoist hotbed.

Many tribal youths like him used to fall prey to Maoists' tactics and unleash violence in their areas at the behest of the rebel leaders. As a result, development had taken a backseat in their area for a long time.

BRAVING ODDS



OP PHOTO

Polling officials boarding a motor boat in Balimela reservoir Wednesday while leaving for their respective booths in Chittrakonda block of Malkangiri district for the last phase of panchayat polls, Thursday. The election in Swabhimana Anchal and other areas of Chittrakonda block is being held after a gap of 10 years

6 held for BJD man's kidnap

POST NEWS NETWORK

Phulbani/Kotagada, Feb 23: Samiti member candidate of Jubagada and Kotagada block BJD president Stephen Pradhan, who had allegedly been kidnapped, was rescued by police, Wednesday.

It was alleged that Kandhamal BJD MP's representative for Kotagada Manoj Sabat and 11 others had abducted Pradhan.

The police tracked the cell phone of Pradhan and rescued him. A complaint was registered against 12 people. Police, however, have arrested six persons while Sabat and others are still at large.

According to police, Pradhan along with his associates was going on a bike to Kotagada Bazaar Tuesday evening when Sabat and his friends, who came in three SUVs, waylaid them. They allegedly attacked Pradhan's friends and kidnapped him in one of the SUVs.

As the news of the abduction spread, scores of people blocked Kotagada-Muniguda main road demanding immediate rescue of

YOUTH CRITICAL IN ORGANISED ATTACK

Kashinagar: In an incident of post-poll violence, a youth was critically injured when a group of people attacked him at Dhanasara village under Kashinagar block of Gajapati district Tuesday night. The injured youth, identified as Dasarathi of Tatikota village, is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Visakhapatnam. Kashinagar police registered a case on the basis of a complaint lodged by the victim's family and started an investigation. Kashinagar IIC Sushant Kumar Sahu said investigation is underway and action would be taken against those involved in the incident.

Pradhan. Police rushed to the spot and pacified the agitating people. A team of police officials intercepted an SUV near a petrol pump at Baliguda in the wee hours of Wednesday. Pradhan was among seven people inside the SUV.

EAST COAST RAILWAY

Advertisement for East Coast Railway tenders. Includes tender notice numbers, dates, and details for miscellaneous repair works and construction of grommies for interlocking of level crossing gates.



FOCUS GEOPOLITICS

# RUSSIA'S IDENTITY CRISIS



Russia is trying to decide whether it is a nation-state or an aspiring empire, and until this fundamental question is resolved, conflicts like the one over Ukraine will continue in various forms

The world is not enduring a "Ukraine crisis," but rather a Russia crisis. So said Germany's new foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, at the most recent Munich Security Conference, which was dominated by the situation in eastern Europe.

In fact, Russia's crisis goes even deeper than Baerbock probably meant. We are witnessing the latest installment in a longer process. Russia is trying to decide whether it is a nation-state or an aspiring empire, and until this fundamental question is resolved, conflicts like the one over Ukraine will continue in various forms.

On paper, the Soviet Union was a multinational federation of republics. In reality, Russians were solidly in command of a tightly controlled regime headed by the Communist Party. One reason for the Soviet collapse was that many of its constituent republics had become aspiring nation-states, or, as with the Baltic republics, sought to recover their independence. The single most important factor was Ukraine's December 1991 referendum, in which an overwhelming majority voted for independence. But then-Russian President Boris Yeltsin's behind-the-scenes efforts to assert Russia's own sovereignty were also important.

At the time, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev was still struggling to preserve certain state structures, and he responded with hostility to the three Baltic republics' expressed aspirations. But he was undercut by Yeltsin, who had recognised the independence of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania even before the Ukrainian referendum.

That was the start of today's Russia crisis, fueled by the conflict between building a modern state and economy, on one hand, and indulging imperial nostalgia, on the other. As a result, Russia's economic and political modernisation has been hampered, and its neighbours' security has been in doubt.

The best way for Russia to guarantee its own security would be to foster friendly relations with its neighbours, so that they can feel secure and stable themselves. But it has not done that, and now a growing number of Ukrainians want to join NATO. Unrealistic as that seems, they recognise that their own national aspirations are directly threatened by Russian imperial revanchism.

In an infamous essay published last July, Russian President Vladimir Putin articulated his vision of a Great Slavic Empire, harking back to nineteenth-century czarist rule, rather than to the Soviet Union. Sensing an opportunity to promote that vision, he engineered the current crisis. But Putin's machinations are nothing new. In 2014, he annexed Crimea and launched an incursion into eastern Ukraine's Donbas region because he wanted to pre-

vent Ukraine from seeking closer ties with the European Union. Even though that would not have impaired Ukrainian cooperation with Russia or threatened Russian security, such developments ran counter to Putin's quasi-imperialist dream.

Putin took his fantasy to a new extreme in his recent speech announcing that Russia would recognise the independence of the two breakaway Donbas regions that it has backed since 2014. Putin openly questioned the existence of a Ukrainian nation and insisted that Ukraine is a "historically Russian land." Although there was a Kyivan Rus' state long before any Russia had appeared, Putin attributes the emergence of a Ukrainian state to Lenin and the Bolsheviks.

The irony of this history-driven strategy is that if one were to survey the Europe of a thousand years ago, there would be no Russia to speak of. Rudimentary Slavic state structures had begun to emerge in the region stretching

from Novgorod to Kyiv, along the old trading routes between the Baltic and Black Seas. But Constantinople was the imperial metropole. What we now call Russia wouldn't take form until centuries later, following a gradual military expansion in different directions.

To ground imperial ambitions in old national myths is as dangerous in Russia's case as it is everywhere else. Europe can enjoy peace only if all the borders and boundaries that history has produced (usually through bloodshed) are fully respected. Russia ought to have learned to live harmoniously with its neighbours by now. Following the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviet Union had vast military forces stationed along its border with China, and violent conflict erupted for seven months in 1969. But the two countries de-escalated, and now both are better off for it.

To be sure, the road to establishing the same kind of relationship between Russia and Ukraine is much longer. Putin's behaviour has understandably left Ukrainians skeptical of Russia, if not hostile toward it. Unless Russia refocuses on building its future solely within its own borders, the region will remain under a cloud of insecurity, ultimately to Russia's detriment.

I still remember a conversation I had decades ago with former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, a statesman well versed in European history. Discussing Luxembourg, he noted that Germany is secure because even its smallest neighbour sees it as a close friend. Germany has come to terms with its past. Russia has not. Until it does, all of Europe, but especially Russia itself, will continue to suffer.

The writer is a former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister of Sweden.  
@PROJECT SYNDICATE



Carl Bildt

**UNLESS RUSSIA REFOCUSSES ON BUILDING ITS FUTURE SOLELY WITHIN ITS OWN BORDERS, THE REGION WILL REMAIN UNDER A CLOUD OF INSECURITY, ULTIMATELY TO RUSSIA'S DETRIMENT**



Witness and stand back from Nature, that is the first step to the soul's freedom.

SRI AUROBINDO

## Epicentre of Conflict

Anyone interested in understanding the root of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict need only visit East Jerusalem. There you can see all the major flashpoints. After four years of meticulous, exhaustive study, Amnesty International recently published a report showing that in all areas under Israeli control, two very different systems exist: one that honours rights, equality, and freedom for Israeli Jews; and one that denies rights, equality, and freedom for Palestinian Arabs.

This racial discrimination is clear to see in Sheikh Jarrah. After the 1948 war, Palestinian refugees in this East Jerusalem neighbourhood lived in squalid tents until the United Nations, cooperating with the Jordanian government, agreed to build homes for them. But since Israel occupied East Jerusalem in June 1967, it has honoured undocumented claims by Jews who say that a particular plot of land belonged to their nineteenth-century ancestors, while denying Palestinians' claims to homes and lands that their parents and grandparents were forced to flee during the heat of the war.

Making matters worse, Jewish settlers who have appointed themselves caretakers have increasingly succeeded in forcing Palestinian families from their homes, so that they can be turned over to Jewish families. These evictions, carried out with the help of the Israeli army, are clear violations of international law. When the Geneva Convention IV (on civilians) was drafted after World War II, its express purpose was to forbid precisely this kind of ethnic cleansing.

Not far from Sheikh Jarrah is another hot spot. In 2014, a US-sponsored agreement between then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and King Abdullah II of Jordan demarcated Islam's third holiest mosque, Al-Aqsa, as a shrine where only Muslims may pray, but where all others may visit. But now, the agreement is being violated daily as Israeli security forces allow Jewish extremists to visit the site to pray – a highly charged act that threatens to turn a political conflict into a religious war.

The offense is so great that King Abdullah – a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and the head of the Hashemite family, which maintains custodianship over Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites – has yet to meet publicly with Israel's current head of state, President Isaac Herzog, or Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett (though he did meet both leaders secretly last year).

North, south, and east of Sheikh Jarrah, Israel has built an eight-meter-high cement wall dividing Palestinian neighbourhoods. It has provided separate roads for Jewish Israelis while denying access to basic services for Palestinian residents, especially those living beyond the wall but under Israeli control. Some 100,000 Jerusalemites live in areas where Israeli services and security are absent but Palestinian police are not permitted entry. In these legal twilight zones, violence, drugs, and lawlessness are rife.

Israel's discriminatory policies are not only violations of international law. They are also being implemented with brute force and intimidation. Owing to the resulting tensions in Jerusalem, the occupied territories have become a battle zone where Israeli hooligan settlers routinely attack Palestinians, who can defend themselves only by throwing stones.

Israel frequently prevents Palestinians from engaging even in peaceful political activity, and events as innocent as a puppet show can be shut down if they are funded by or through the Ramallah-based Palestinian semi-government. And last April, the Palestinian leadership had to cancel a general election because Israel barred Palestinians in East Jerusalem from using post offices there to mail absentee ballots – an open refusal by Israel to honour its commitments under the Oslo Accords.

The deteriorating situation in Jerusalem, and the daily clashes between illegal settlers and Palestinians across the occupied territories, reflects the absence of any political horizon in the conflict. The Palestinian government is unable to intervene because it is too weak to confront the Israeli occupiers. Palestinians are left to resist the occupiers on their own, without any source of hope for the future.

Every avenue for a peaceful resolution of the conflict has been blocked by the Israeli government. Israel and its allies are doing precisely what they denounced the Arab world for doing after the 1967 Khartoum Arab League summit, where leaders issued the "Three Nos": no peace, no negotiations, and no recognition of Israel. Bennett comes from a far-right pro-settler party and has made clear that he has no intention of holding talks with the Palestinians. He boasts about his refusal even to meet with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, and he remains staunchly opposed to the two-state solution.

Jerusalem will always be a holy city for all three major monotheistic religions, and it remains the home of Palestinians and Israelis alike. But it has not served as the beacon of peace that many had hoped it would. Instead, it has become the epicentre of the conflict. Without a serious effort to defuse the situation in Jerusalem and to provide political hope through a credible peace process, violence could easily spin out of control.

The writer is a former journalism professor at Princeton University.  
@PROJECT SYNDICATE



Daoud Kuttub

**Jerusalem will always be a holy city for all three major monotheistic religions, and it remains the home of Palestinians and Israelis alike. But it has not served as the beacon of peace that many had hoped it would**

SPECTRUM FEDERALISM

## Plurality of ideas critical

The Opposition has upped the ante against the Centre over what it clearly views as an attack on federalism. Recently, Opposition parties in a joint memorandum wrote to Prime Minister Modi that the States will not agree to "unconstitutional usurpation of powers", which goes against federal governance and this could lead to "undesirable crises".

The memorandum was signed by leaders from 10 political parties – Congress, RJD, TMC, Shiv Sena, DMK, SP, CPI, AAP, TRS and IUML. The bottom line being matters that "definitely require federal consultations must be discussed with the States, instead of issuing unilateral orders." Earlier, in a scathing attack on Modi government, Congress leader, Rahul Gandhi in Lok Sabha had asserted "India is described in the Constitution as a Union of States and not as a nation...It is a partnership, not a kingdom."

This brings us to the question of federalism and whether the true spirit has been eroded by the present government. Globally, 27 countries presently have federal political systems, encompassing 40% of the world's population. In most of these countries, there is sharing of power and resources in such a way that there is no conflict of interest.

Dr BR Ambedkar had clearly outlined that State governments are not sub-national agents of the Union government but are governments in their own right, with a specific set of powers and responsibilities guaranteed by the Constitution. The Union government cannot, therefore, intervene in the domain of States. One may mention that the essence of federalism is to create institutional and political arrangements that ensure effective governance. Time and again many forces have challenged Indian federalism. These challenges can be addressed by cooperative federalism where there is cooperation among the Union and State governments to work together on issues and programmes for resolving the issues.

The question whether India is first a nation or a Union of States is non sequitur. It has to be agreed that the two notions are perfectly compatible and need not be pitted against one another. The question to what extent the centralising tendencies of the Union government will affect the prerogatives of States and, therefore, provide grain to the mill of those who aspire for greater autonomy.

Political analysts are of the opinion that a series of reforms have altered the balance of power between the Centre and the States to the benefit of the former. The Centre has delayed distribution of revenue collected and sought to withhold compensation due to States. The Central government has passed laws on State subjects like agriculture, dooming their implementation from the start in a context where fewer States align with the party in power at the Centre. In many cases, reforms that were meant to foster coopera-

tive federalism failed to deliver on that promise as the governance imposed by Modi and the PMO have pushed towards more unilateral decision making.

Although law and order is a State subject, the government has done all it can to undermine the capacity and autonomy of State governments to enforce their writ in the territories under their jurisdiction. The reckless invocation of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act to suppress political dissent is an example of how the Modi government seeks to centralise punitive powers in its hands. Also the government has used investigative agencies such as CBI and ED to weaken and threaten parties and State governments opposed to it.

It cannot be denied that concentration of power at the Centre has questioned the real intention of federalism in the country. The States are always at the mercy of the Centre, not just for equitable sharing of resources but also in matters of governance. Even recently, the Centre has been planning to regulate the services of IAS and IPS officers in States, which incidentally has been opposed by all Opposition-ruled States.

A truly effective federal system can operate when the political leadership firmly believes in decentralisation and involvement of States in decision-making. This is easier said than done as the present leadership is more interested in heckling Opposition-ruled States

and is not interested in listening to their demands and points of view.

A federal polity should ensure plurality of identities and hence help resist majoritarian mobilisation based on a singular and exclusionary identity. The renowned economist, Amartya Sen, made a strong case for a multiplicity of identities as key to expanding human freedoms. Identity-based majoritarian mobilisation, however, requires the erasure of such plural identities. As a result, despite conditions being more conducive for federating and a promise to usher in cooperative federalism, processes and actions taken by the NDA government have actually worsened it in recent years.

The bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir into Union Territories, squeezing taxation powers of State governments, the New Education Policy denying a role for State governments, arbitrary levy of cess that is not shared with States and flexing of financial and political muscle to direct policymaking by State governments have assumed a more systemic tenor.

This shift also appears to be inspired by an erroneous belief that a strong Centre is required to make India powerful. However, history tells us otherwise and most political scientists believe that the current trend would lead the country to a disastrous path with States always in conflict with the Centre. Only time will tell in which way the federal polity of the country would go.

WISDOM CORNER

I had reasoned this out in my mind, there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other. HARRIET TUBMAN

Live your questions now, and perhaps even without knowing it, you will live along some distant day into your answers. RAINER MARIA RILKE

If you can't describe what you are doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing. W. EDWARDS DEMING

WORDSWORTH

Saturnalia

The original Saturnalia was a Roman mid-winter festival held in the middle of December, starting on the 17th in the modern calendar (or the 25th in the Roman one). It lasted for seven days and was a period when excess was encouraged: the shops were closed, gambling was permitted, presents were exchanged, slaves were given licence to speak their minds and join in the fun, and generally joy was unconfined. The holiday began with a sacrifice to the Roman god of agriculture, Saturn (Latin satus means sown), whose day it was. From the eighteenth century on, the word became a more general one in English for a period of unrestrained licence at any time of year, often with a lower-case initial letter. An example of modern use is in Joseph Heller's Catch-22 of 1961: "Other men picked up steam as the hours passed, and the aimless, riotous celebration continued. It was a raw, violent, guzzling saturnalia that spilled obstreperously through the woods to the officers' club and spread up into the hills toward the hospital and the anti-aircraft-gun emplacements." The name of Saturn has also given us Saturday (Saturni dies in Latin, the day of Saturn) and saturnine, gloomy, dark featured, dull, and moody – a description that sits oddly with the revelry of his annual festival. But the medieval alchemists identified the planet Saturn – named after the Roman god – with the element lead and astrologers linked it to slowness and gloom.

## Letters

### TO THE EDITOR

Readers of Orissa POST are most welcome to contribute letters (200 words), articles and columns (between 750-1250 words). Contributors are requested to send their contact numbers and full postal address/email ID. They may also send in their valuable comments, opinion and suggestions, preferably by email, to: [edit@orissapost.com](mailto:edit@orissapost.com)

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

NSE & the yogi

Sir, The former CEO of the National Stock Exchange Chitra Ramakrishna was following the words of a yogi living in the Himalayas. The so-called spiritual guru was the real master and the CEO was just a puppet. It sounds incredible, but it's true. Chitra briefed her so-called spiritual guru on all the important business and financial plans of the exchange. She made decisions only on the advice of the yogi. SEBI convicted Chitra of such illegal activities and fined her ₹3 crore. Surprisingly, the NSE authorities remained silent on the matter. Chitra held the post of MD in NSE from April 2013 to December 2016, after which she resigned. What Chitra has done is amazing. A notable point is that the so-called yogi had close relations with the politicians who run the system. The question now is can the yogi in the Himalayas be caught? SEBI has penalised Chitra but why has she not been arrested yet?

Asit Mohanty, JAJPUR

Commendable step

Sir, India is all set to ban single-use plastic items from July 1. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has asked all states to implement the ban. The CPCB has issued notices to producers, stockists and e-commerce sites so that single-use plastic items are not produced, sold or used again. Plastic is considered to be a major contributor to rising pollution levels in the world. Half of all plastic produced is meant to be used only once and then discarded. The world produces about 300 million tonnes of plastic waste every year. Most of the plastic that has been produced has ended up in environment. Only a very small percentage of plastic is recycled or incinerated. The rest is accumulated in environment. It is a matter of concern that 8 million tonnes of plastic end in oceans every year. India must be commended for its decision to ban single-use plastic. On the other hand, it is not the only solution to plastic pollution. People must be sensitised about the health hazards of using plastic. In addition to the ban, there must be other initiatives and regulations. Manufacturers need to be directed to specify the kind of plastic used in a product so that it can be properly recycled. Although plastic cannot be completely dispensed with, its overuse can be stopped. Environment must be conserved for posterity. We cannot afford to degrade environment and harm ourselves. Let's live in clean and green surroundings.

Venu GS, KOLLAM



# national



**“The polling in the fourth phase will complete a double century for us. It is now the responsibility of the people to ensure a historic win for the Samajwadi Party-led alliance”**  
AKHILESH YADAV | SAMAJWADI PARTY CHIEF

## BIG ANNOUNCEMENT

A person availing the services of a bank for 'commercial purpose' is not a consumer under the Consumer Protection Act, the Supreme Court has said. The apex court stated that to come within the ambit of the consumer, a person will have to establish that the services were availed exclusively for earning his livelihood by means of self employment



## of the day quote

**“We have been putting money into the accounts of 400 million people. All this is being done without leakage, in a country which once upon time was notorious for leakage”**  
S JAISHANKAR | EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER

**“Akhilesh Ji, these days, is seeking votes and talking about development. Till now, he had only developed his family, but now he has realised that Uttar Pradesh should be developed. He will not bring 'vikas' (development), but 'vinash' (destruction) in the state”**  
J P NADDA | BJP NATIONAL PRESIDENT

**“It is the duty of the government to provide security to any prisoner or outsider. Gurmeet Ram Rahim is out on furlough and on the basis of some inputs, he has been given Z-security”**  
MANOHAR LAL KHATTAR | HARYANA CM

# MVA allies throw weight behind Malik's arrest

The ED Wednesday arrested Nawab Malik, state Minority Affairs Minister and NCP's chief spokesperson, in a money-laundering probe linked to the activities of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim and his aides

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 23:** The NCP Wednesday lashed out at the BJP over Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik's questioning and subsequent arrest by the ED in a money laundering case, saying this was another instance of "misuse of power" and a pressure tactic to silence his voice since he had exposed wrongdoings of some people.



Nawab Malik being taken for a medical test after his arrest by the Enforcement Director (ED) PFI PHOTO

**The BJP, however, said the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) action should not be called 'vendetta politics'**

which share power with the NCP as part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in Maharashtra, also threw their weight behind 62-year-old Malik, saying they need to unitedly fight against the tactics to silence political opponents.

The BJP, however, said the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) action should not be called "vendetta politics" and if leaders of the ruling parties feel there is misuse of power, they can move court to seek justice.

The opposition party also said that after his arrest, Malik has no right to remain as a cabinet minister and demanded his resignation. Malik's office in a Twitter post said the ED officials came to his residence here in the morning

and accompanied him in his vehicle to the probe agency's office, and asserted that he "won't be afraid and won't bow down".

Before the arrest, the ED questioned Malik for hours, officials said. Reacting to the ED's action, Pawar said, "Which case have they dug up? It is simple. They take the name of Dawood, especially if there is a Muslim activist (against whom a case is dug up)...There is no relation (between the activist concerned and underworld), but it is done."

Pawar recalled that he too was "targeted similarly" in the early 90s when he was the Chief Minister of Maharashtra and an atmosphere was created against him.

NCP workers protested near the party's headquarters, located close to the ED's office in south Mumbai. The workers shouted slogans slamming the BJP-led central government and the ED. NCP's Lok Sabha member Supriya Sule said Maharashtra has never bowed down before the Centre and it never will.

# 'Banks got ₹18Kcr from Mallya, Nirav & Choksi'



AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** Solicitor General Tushar Mehta Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that ₹18,000 crore have been returned to the banks in the case of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, and Mehul Choksi.

Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted before a bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar that the total proceeds of crimes in the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) cases pending before the top court amounts to ₹67,000 crore.

He further added that as on date 4,700 cases are being investigated by the Directorate of Enforcement and the number of the cases taken up for investigation each year in the last 5 years varies from 111 cases in 2015-16 to 981 in 2020-21. Mehta submitted before the bench that ₹18,000 crore have been returned to the banks in the case of Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi. The top court is hearing a clutch of petitions, challenging the wide scope of powers available to the directorate of enforcement (ED) for search, seizure, investigation, and attachment of proceeds of crime under the law.

Mehta submitted before the bench, also comprising Justices Dinesh Maheshwari and C.T. Ravikumar, that during the last five years (2016-17 to 2020-21), only 2,086 cases were taken up for investigation under the PMLA out of registration of FIR of approxi-

mately 33 lakh for predicate offences by the police and other enforcement agencies.

He added, "very small number of cases are being taken up for investigation under the PMLA as compared to annual registration of the cases under the Money Laundering Act in the UK (7,900), the US (1,532), China (4,691), Austria (1,036), Hongkong (1,823), Belgium (1,862) and Russia (2,764)".

Mehta emphasized that the measures against money-laundering have clearly left embryo of drug or terrorism related offences and moved beyond the same. "Further, the efforts against money laundering have consistently advocated to include the widest range of predicate offences in the domestic laws," he added. Over the past few weeks, a battery of senior advocates, including Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Mukul Rohatgi, Sidharth Luthra, Amit Desai, and others have made submissions before the top court on various aspects related to potential misuse of PMLA provisions introduced by way of amendments to the Act.

The law has been criticised on various aspects: stringent bail conditions, non-communication of grounds of arrest, arrest of persons without supply of ECIR (akin to FIR), broad definitions of money laundering and proceeds of crime, and statements given by accused during investigation made admissible as evidence during trial.

# Omicron 'silent killer': CJI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** Chief Justice N V Ramana Wednesday said that the Omicron variant of Covid-19 is a 'silent killer' and it takes a long time to recover from the strain.

The remark came after the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president and senior advocate Vikas Singh urged the apex court to revert to a full physical hearing. During the deliberations, the CJI said there is a jump of 15,000 cases now.

"It is Omicron, it is much milder," said Singh. The CJI, however, said that he recovered in four days in the first wave but it's taking a long



time in the third wave. "It is a silent killer...I suffered in the first wave but recovered in four days, but now in this wave, it has been 25 days and I am still suffering," Ramana said. The SCBA president said "Your Lordship has been unlucky in that regard. But people are recovering." The CJI then said, "We will see."

## SHORT TAKES

### Major cocaine cartel busted

**New Delhi:** The Special cell of Delhi Police has busted an inter-continental syndicate of cocaine traffickers operating in a highly organized manner and recovered a massive 1,850 grams of contraband valued at approximately ₹10 crore in the international market. Two women -- Maurey Erna Gangadien (45), a resident of Suriname, South America and Namubiru Janat (35), a resident of Navi Mumbai, and a native of Uganda were arrested in this connection.

### 4 terror associates of Lashkar nabbed

**Srinagar:** Security forces arrested four terrorist associates of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Baramulla and Shopian districts of Jammu and Kashmir, police said Wednesday. Police along with security forces have arrested two terrorist associates linked with proscribed terror outfit LeT (TRF) in Baramulla. Incriminating materials including ammunition have been recovered from their possession, a police spokesman said.

### Priest booked for rape in Mathura

**Mathura:** The Mathura police have registered a case against a priest and his associate for raping and threatening a nursing student. The victim has threatened to set herself ablaze at the SSP office if action is not taken against the accused. According to the police, the victim has alleged that Bhagwatacharya Krishna Nagendra Maharaj and his associate and property dealer, Devendra Shukla, raped her on the pretext of a job.

## IAF to send 5 Tejas jets for multilateral air exercise in UK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** The Indian Air Force (IAF) will participate in a three-week multilateral air exercise at Waddington in the UK from March 6 with a fleet of five Tejas light combat aircraft (LCA).

The IAF said Wednesday that 'Cobra Warrior 22' exercise is aimed at providing operational exposure and sharing best practices amongst the participating air forces. It said the exercise from March 6 to 27 will be a platform for the indigenously developed Tejas aircraft to demonstrate their manoeuvrability and operational capability.

"The IAF Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas will participate in the exercise along with fighter aircraft of the UK and other leading air forces," the IAF said in a statement.

"The exercise is aimed at providing operational exposure and share best practices amongst the participating air forces, thereby enhancing combat capability and forging bonds of friendship," it said. The IAF said five Tejas aircraft will fly to the UK and the C-17 aircraft will provide the fleet necessary transport support. Last week, the IAF showcased Tejas jets at the Singapore Air Show with an eye on the possible export potential of the jet to friendly countries in years to come. Three Tejas fighter jets and a 44-member contingent of the Indian Air Force (IAF) had participated in the Air Show from February 15 to 18. Manufactured by state-run aerospace behemoth Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd, the Tejas aircraft is a potent platform for air combat and offensive air support missions while reconnaissance and anti-ship operations are its secondary roles.



Soldiers of Special Force of Army Battalion conduct a parachute parade during the President's Colours event, at Parachute Regiment Training Center (PRTC) in Bangalore PFI PHOTO

## TN URBAN CIVIC POLLS 2022

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Chennai, Feb 23:** The Tamil Nadu urban civic polls turned out to be a huge opportunity for the ruling DMK to consolidate its position, and emerge stronger and larger in the political landscape, diminishing the arch rival AIADMK's image further after trouncing it in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and last year's Assembly elections.

While achieving the intended target, the MK Stalin-led dispensation also relegated its archrival to not only a distant second but also grabbed the majority of vote-share with a 60 per cent plus score across different local body formats.

Chief Minister Stalin, also DMK President, asserted the sweeping vic-

## DMK emerges stronger



tory was a "crowning moment" for the Dravidian model of governance. The party has won a majority in all the 21 municipal corporations including the Greater Chennai Corporation and came out victorious in most of the 138 municipalities and 490 town panchayats.

Panneerselvam (Periyakulam, Theni district).

While DMK's voteshare in corporations stood at 69.29 per cent, it was 61.41 per cent in municipalities, while the AIADMK, which was expected to put up a tough challenge, had to contend with scores of a measly 11.94 per cent and 16.60 per cent respectively.

The polls not only saw AIADMK's fortunes ebb dismally, after enjoying power for a decade, but also saw the BJP expand its presence, prompting the party workers to emphatically remark that the 'Lotus is blooming' in the Dravidian heartland. The DMK's spectacular win is attributed largely to Stalin's governance during the nine months in office.

# 'Methane emissions from energy 70% higher than official data'

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** Global methane emissions from the energy sector are about 70 per cent greater than the amount national governments have officially reported, said a new IEA analysis Wednesday, underlining the urgent need for enhanced monitoring efforts and stronger policy action to drive down emissions of the potent greenhouse gas.

Methane is responsible for around 30 per cent of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution and quick and sustained emission reductions are key to limiting near-term warming and improving air quality. Methane dissipates faster than carbon dioxide (CO2) but is a much more powerful greenhouse gas

during its short lifespan, meaning that cutting methane emissions would have a rapid effect on limiting global warming.

The energy sector accounts for around 40 per cent of methane emissions from human activity, and this year's expanded edition of the IEA's Global Methane Tracker includes country-by-country emissions from coal mines and bioenergy for the first time, in addition to continued detailed coverage of oil and natural gas operations.

Methane emissions from the energy sector grew by just under five per cent last year. This did not bring them back to their 2019 levels and slightly lagged the rise in overall energy use, indicating that some efforts to limit emissions may already be paying off.



## Methane is responsible for around 30 per cent of the rise in global temperatures

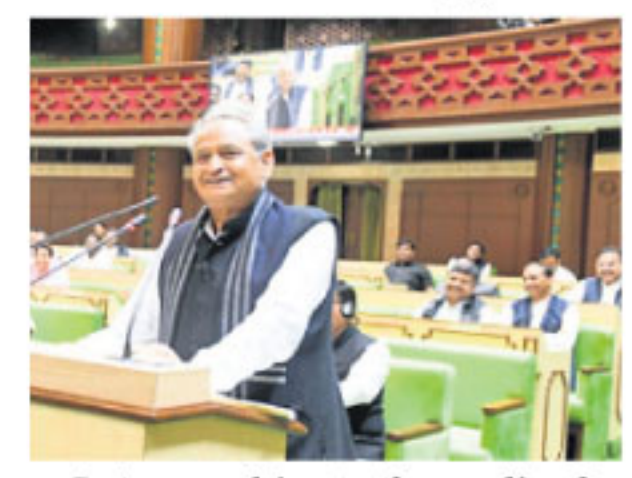
Last year, significant emissions were confirmed in Texas and parts of Central Asia, with Turkmenistan alone responsible for one-third of large emissions events seen by satellites in 2021.

Relatively few major leaks were detected for the major onshore oil and gas producers in the Middle East. Satellites have greatly increased the world's knowledge of emission sources, and the IEA Global Methane Tracker incorporates the latest readings from satellites and other science-based meas-

urement campaigns. While measured data continues to improve, the coverage provided by satellites is still far from complete: existing satellites do not provide measurements over equatorial regions, offshore operations, or northern areas such as the main Russian oil and gas producing areas.

Yet uncertainty over emissions levels is no reason to delay action on methane. Major reductions can be achieved with known technologies and with tried and tested policies that have been proven to work effectively.

The Global Methane Tracker includes a new detailed policy explorer that provides examples of effective implementation and shows where these policies could be most impactful.



Later speaking to the media, the CM said, "Other states should also think in this perspective. If an employee gives 30-35 years of his service to an organisation, he should get security for his old age. In 2004, the then government might have taken the decision for some strong reasons but now we need to think on it again," he added. Gehlot also rolled back the 2017 decision to cut the salary of the employees which shall put a burden of ₹1000 crores on the government.



# Dynasts rising in politics at grassroots level in UP

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Lucknow, Feb 23:** The BJP has always been critical of dynasty politics, but in Uttar Pradesh the party has overlooked this as it has fielded many candidates in the polls whose nearest family members are MPs or MLAs or party position holders.

BJP's Saurav Singh, seeking a second term from Kheri district, is the son of Jugul Kishore, who has been a Rajya Sabha MP from the BSP and is currently a minister in the Yogi cabinet.

BJP's Mukut Bihari Verma's son Gaurav Verma is contesting in place of his father from Kaiserganj.

Similarly, Prateek Bhushan Singh, son of Kaiserganj BJP MP Brij Bhushan Singh, is seeking re-election from Gonda. Prateek's rival from the Samajwadi Party is Suraj Singh, who is a nephew of Pandit Singh, a former minister in the state who passed away due to Covid.

Even as the BJP has been attacking the Congress and the Samajwadi Party for being 'dynasty' oriented, examples of relatives of its MPs and MLAs getting tickets have exposed the party.

The SP has fielded Anandson from Rudauli, who is the son of Mitrasen Yadav, a former MP.

Yasir Shah, son of former minister Waqar Shah, is seeking a third term on a SP ticket. Yasir's wife is also contesting and his mother was a Lok Sabha MP from Bahraich.

The Congress is not far behind. PL Punia's son Tanuj Punia is fighting in Barabanki district. Salman Khurshid's wife Lokesh Khurshid,



**EVEN AS THE BJP HAS BEEN ATTACKING THE CONGRESS AND THE SAMAJWADI PARTY FOR BEING 'DYNASTY' ORIENTED, EXAMPLES OF RELATIVES OF ITS MPS AND MLAS GETTING TICKETS HAVE EXPOSED THE PARTY**

**THOUGH AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, THE BJP HAS BEEN HITTING OUT AT THE CONGRESS AND IN UP IT IS TARGETING AKHILESH YADAV, IN THE BJP TOO LEADERS ARE RISING FROM FAMILIES WHO ARE SECOND OR THIRD GENERATION POLITICIANS**

who was a MLA in the past, was in the fray in the third phase.

Similarly, Zeba Rizwan, daughter of former MP Rizwan Zabeer, is in the fray from Tulsipur as an Independent.

While the BJP has been maintaining that it is going by the rule of one family one ticket only and has denied a ticket to Rita Bahuguna Joshi's son, the party has given

tickets to family members.

The SP has been termed 'parivarwad' by the BJP. The argument from the political parties is that they have given tickets as some of the leaders have passed away, but it's not so in all the cases. The SP is saying Mitrasen Yadav and Waqar Shah have passed away so the tickets have been given to their family members.

# Major snowfall disrupts life across Valley

FOR THE OVER 1.2 MILLION RESIDENTS OF SRINAGAR CITY, WEDNESDAY'S IS THE FIRST MAJOR SNOWFALL OF THIS WINTER

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Srinagar, Feb 23:** Life was thrown out of gear in Kashmir Wednesday as most areas of the valley received snowfall - the season's first heavy fall in the plains - disrupting flight and railway operations and leading to the closure of the vital Srinagar-Jammu national highway, officials here said.

Most areas of the valley received moderate to heavy snowfall which started in the night and was going on when last reports came in, they said. The areas in the higher reaches of the Union Territory received very heavy snowfall - around two feet or more, they said.

The officials said Srinagar - the summer capital of the union territory - recorded about eight inches of snow till this morning.

The authorities have pressed men and machinery into service to clear the snow off the roads, many of which, such as those leading to hospitals and other vital installations, are being cleared on priority, the officials said.

The bad weather affected the flight operations to and fro the Kashmir valley. At least six flights at the Srinagar airport have been cancelled, and the rest have been delayed, the officials said.

The visibility at the airport dropped below 400 metres and the continuous snowfall was hampering the snow clearance operations, they said.

Train service between Baramulla and Banihal was suspended this morning due to the accumulation of snow on the railway tracks, the officials said. The 300-km Jammu-



Srinagar highway was closed as besides snowfall, it received heavy rains resulting in shooting stones at a few places, they said.

Traffic was barred on either side of the highway, the officials added.

The Meteorological department has said that a gradual decrease in rain and snow is expected from Wednesday afternoon, and there would be a significant improvement in the weather evening onwards.

"Overall improvement is most likely from Thursday onwards. After this spell, there is no forecast of any major rain/snow till the end of this month," the Met office said.

The authorities have appealed

to people to not move out of their homes unless absolutely necessary.

Helpline numbers were set up by the divisional administration to attend to emergencies across the Valley as people were advised to contact the administration on these numbers during any emergency.

"Snow clearance machines of MED (mechanical engineering department) and other departments are clearing the snow mechanically and manually from the main roads since early morning, but due to continuous snowfall, the roads are very slippery and there are chances of accidents," the authorities said in an advisory.

In the wake of the snowfall, Kashmir University postponed all examinations for the day.

The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway will remain closed Thursday due to a huge landslide at Cafeteria Morh, continuous shooting stones at many places between Ramban and Banihal and snow accumulation between NAVYUG Tunnel and Qazigund.

The highway is the lifeline of the Kashmir valley and the main road link connecting it with the rest of the country. Kashmir-bound trucks carrying essential supplies and other vehicles pass through this highway.

# College boundary caves in as a chopper lands nearby

The BJP is banking on its development work to woo voters, but the college boundary wall collapsing because of a helicopter landing has raised questions on the authenticity of those claims

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Ballia (Uttar Pradesh), Feb 23:** The boundary wall of a government school collapsed when the helicopter bringing BJP president JP Nadda landed nearby.

The incident took place Tuesday and, apparently, the strong winds generated by the chopper's landing caused the dilapidated boundary wall of the college to collapse. However, no injuries were reported due to the accident.

Visuals show the boundary wall collapsing due to the force of the wind from the chopper. The people can also be seen turning their backs, covering their faces and retreating because of the sudden gust of wind.

The video of the landing has



since gone viral on social media, raising questions about the quality of educational infrastructure in the state. The BJP is banking on its development work to woo voters, but the college boundary wall collapsing because of a helicopter landing has raised questions on the authenticity of those claims.

The BJP president was in the district's Phephna Assembly constituency to campaign for BJP candidate and state minister Upendra Tiwari.

A helipad was constructed for Nadda's chopper landing at the Ratsar Inter College grounds.



A labourer shows her finger marked with indelible ink after casting her vote, during the fourth phase of UP Assembly polls, in Pilibhit district, Wednesday

# BATTLE FOR UP When friends turn foes in politics

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Lucknow, Feb 23:** They were close as peas in a pod. They were friends, mentors and even followers. But today, politics has driven a wedge in their relationship and they are pitted against each other in the electoral battle.

In the Dhampur seat in Bijnor, Moolchand Chauhan is pitted against his disciple Naeem-ul-Hasan.

Naeem is contesting on a Samajwadi Party (SP) ticket and Moolchand is the BSP candidate.

"This is politics and one has to contest elections. I did not like contesting against my mentor, but certain things are inevitable," says Naeem.

In Pratapgarh, an ugly battle is being fought between independent MLA Raghuraj Pratap Singh aka Raja Bhaiyya and his acolyte Gulshan Yadav.

Gulshan Yadav has been fielded by the Samajwadi Party while Raja Bhaiyya is contesting on his Jansatta Dal ticket.

Raja Bhaiyya has been winning the Kunda seat since 1993 and the battle is largely one-sided but Gulshan Yadav has made it ugly by hurling epithets by his one-time mentor and this is not going down well with the voters.



Raja Bhaiyya dismisses Gulshan Yadav's campaign against him with a wave of his hand and says, "Let us talk about other things."

Gulshan, on the other hand, says, "There is a wave in favour of Samajwadi Party and I will create history by winning this seat."

In Firozabad, Saifur-Rehman is the SP candidate and his rival is his friend Azeem Bhai's wife Shazia who is the BSP candidate.

Saifur-Rehman, at one time, used to campaign for Azeem Bhai and the two were known to be inseparable but politics has now placed them in opposite ranks.

In Lalitpur, Ram Ratan Kushwaha is the BJP candidate while his first cousin, Ramesh Kushwaha is the SP candidate.

Not so long ago, Ramesh used to campaign for his cousin but now their ways have parted.

Brijlal Khatri is the Congress candidate from Mehroni in Lalitpur while his wife Urmila Khatri is contesting from Orai on a Congress ticket.

His relative, Shri Pal is contesting the Orai seat against Urmila Khatri on a BSP ticket.

Their relatives have cautiously kept away from their campaigns. "We do not wish to become a party in the family in these elections. What has happened is unfortunate and we hope that the differences melt away after the polls are over," said a relative who did not wish to be named.

# Record budgetary allocation of ₹786cr for J&K tourism

UNESCO HAS PICKED SRINAGAR AS PART OF THE CREATIVE CITY NETWORK UNDER THE CRAFTS AND FOLK ARTS CATEGORY. THIS INCLUSION IS LIKELY TO PAVE THE WAY FOR THE CITY TO REPRESENT ITS HANDICRAFTS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Srinagar, Feb 23:** The tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir has got a major boost as the government has made a record budgetary allocation of Rs 786 crore this year, an increase of 184 per cent over the allocation for the previous year.

In a major intervention for upliftment of the tourism sector in



J&K, the Union government made a record budget allocation of Rs 786 crore in budget for the tourism sector here, which is Rs 509 crore higher than last budgetary allocation, officials said here on Wednesday.

The officials added that the intent of the massive budgetary allocation was to boost tourism and allied services of Jammu and Kashmir.

The year 2021 witnessed a large footfall of tourists; both national as well as international due to numerous positive and constructive

interventions of the central government in consonance with the government of Jammu and Kashmir, the officials said.

They said several remarkable initiatives were undertaken across the Union Territory to rejuvenate the dwindling economic landscape, which was affected due to the relentless wrath of COVID-19.

Commensurate with this, the J&K government has also undertaken several initiatives to give further stimulus and impetus to the

tourism sector here.

In a mega push to promote ecotourism in Jammu and Kashmir, the government has approved development of seven new trekking routes in various wildlife protected areas.

The decision will also allow online booking of 29 forest rest houses and inspection huts in Kashmir and Jammu divisions, under a common brand and logo, they added.

The officials said the first night flight started operating from

Srinagar airport March 18 last year, marking the dawn of a new era and indicating improvement in air connectivity to Jammu and Kashmir with the rest of the country.

The Union territory also launched a golf training academy at the Kashmir Golf Course in July 2021 to promote and strengthen the sports ecosystem in the Union territory.

This is a giant step forward for restoring the historic golf course after the 2014 floods. A four-day J&K open golf tournament was also organised in Kashmir in September 2021 to attract large numbers of golf lovers and to make Jammu and Kashmir the golfing capital of the world, they said.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has picked Srinagar among 49 cities as part of the creative city network under the crafts and folk arts category. This inclusion is likely to pave the way for the city to represent its handicrafts on the global stage through UNESCO.

It is a major recognition for Jammu and Kashmir on a global platform.

# BJP's prestigious Ayodhya seat gets special attention

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**Ayodhya, Feb 23:** The incumbent BJP MLA from the prestigious seat of Ayodhya which goes to the polls in the fifth phase, is facing a rebellion within the party. Sources say that the BJP is working hard to fix the problem before polling. Senior leaders have taken cognisance of the matter and have despatched a team to resolve the issue.

Sources say that Mayor Rishikesh Upadhyay was seeking a ticket from the party but was denied it as BJP opted for the sitting MLA. The party is apprehensive about the supporters of the Mayor who are said to be upset. The seat has a large number of Brahmin votes, and the SP candidate Tej Narain Pandey, an ex-MLA, is from the community so the BJP fears a backlash from the community. However, no BJP leader is willing to speak on record on the issue but say that ultimately the party workers will support the party as the battle is ideological. The Brahmin leaders of the



party have been asked to campaign for the seat.

Ved Prakash Gupta is the BJP MLA who won in the 2017 Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly election defeating Tej Narayan Pandey by a margin of 50,440 votes.

The party leaders say that there is no worry as Ayodhya has been the stronghold of the party in the past except on a few occasions. Party Awadh in-charge Satya Kumar said, the seat is prestigious and the BJP will win comfortably. Political analyst Anil Singh feels that the displacement of locals due to the state government projects is a big issue which the SP wants to capitalise upon.



## of the day quote

We are in continuous contact with the students and providing necessary support and assistance. Our officials have been in touch with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Embassy (of India in Ukraine) on the evolving situation

YS JAGAN MOHAN REDDY | ANDHRA PRADESH CM

During the Assembly elections, the Prime Minister had assured the state to declare East Rajasthan Canal Project as a national project. This is yet to be done. Now, the decision of the Congress government to take up this task and form ERCP Corporation for implementing the project is a welcome step

SACHIN PILOT | FORMER RAJASTHAN DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

The Kejrival government is constructing decentralised sewage treatment plants in 5,000 parks in Delhi to meet the water demand for gardening

SATYENDAR JAIN | DELHI WATER MINISTER

## SHORT TAKES

### Rains to lash parts of J'khand

**Ranchi:** Jharkhand is in for another spell of winter rains due to impact of a western disturbance, a weather department official said Wednesday. Parts of the state, including capital Ranchi, are likely to experience light to moderate rainfall coupled with one or two spells of lightning from Thursday.

### Mild tremor in Kutch

**Ahmedabad:** A tremor of 3.4 magnitude hit Kutch district in Gujarat on Wednesday, but there was no report of any casualty or property damage, officials said. The seismic activity was recorded near Bhachau at 12.05 pm, the Gandhinagar-based Institute of Seismological Research (ISR) said. The tremor had its epicentre 12 km north-north west of Bhachau, at a depth of 12 km, the ISR said.

### 3 killed in Agra road mishap

**Agra (UP):** Three people were killed and five others injured as their van collided with a bus here, just a few kilometres away from the venue of a wedding function they were going to attend, police said Wednesday. The accident took place around 9.30 pm Tuesday on Fatehabad road under Tajganj police station limits, Station House Officer (SHO) Bhupendra Singh said. "Those who died were identified as Farukh, Sobi and Gaurav. Farukh and Sobi died on the spot while Gaurav died during treatment Wednesday at Sarojani Naidu Medical College and Hospital," the SHO told PTI.

### Delhi zoo to reopen March 1

**New Delhi:** The Delhi zoo will reopen for visitors March 1 after remaining closed for around two months in view of a spike in coronavirus cases in the national capital, officials said Wednesday. An official said the zoo was closed for the public on January 4 and the link for booking tickets online on its website was disabled.

### Boosting ties

**Bangalore:** India and Israel discussed avenues for expanding space relations, in the backdrop of reforms in the sector announced by the Narendra Modi government, in addition to ongoing cooperation.



**With the flattening of Cov curve, people should not lower their guard and continue with the practice of washing hands frequently**  
M VENKAIAH NAIDU | VICE PRESIDENT

### PUNJAB TOPS IN ARMS SEIZURE IN LAST 3 YRS

The Border Security Force (BSF) has seized 262 arms from January 2019 to January 25 this year along with recovery of 15,024 ammunition at both India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh border, officials said



# 'Love affair' not a valid ground for bail in POCSO case: SC

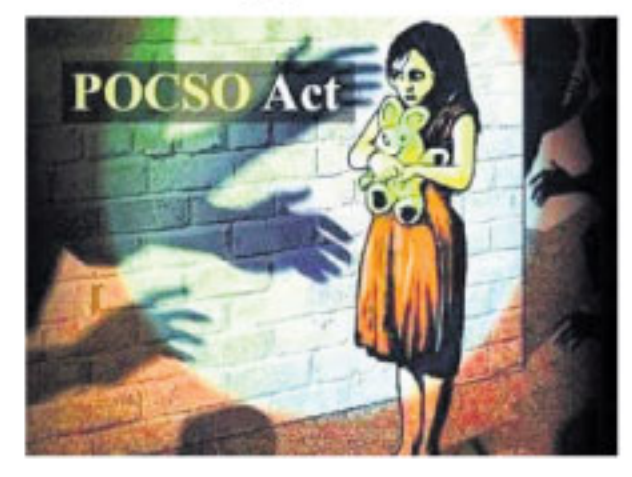
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** The Supreme Court has said that grounds like "there was a love affair" between the girl and the accused and there was alleged "refusal to marry" will have no bearing on the grant of bail in the POCSO case.

A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud and Surya Kant set aside the order of a single judge of Jharkhand High Court granting bail to an accused in a case registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012 and IPC.

It said, "The High Court was

manifestly in error in allowing the application for bail. The reason that from the statement under Section 164 and the averments in the FIR, it appears that 'there was a love affair' between the appellant and the second respondent and that the case was instituted on the refusal of the second respondent to marry the appellant, is specious". The bench said, "Once, prima facie, it appears from the material before the Court that the appellant was barely thirteen years of age on the date when the alleged offence took place, both the grounds, namely that 'there was a love affair' between the ap-



pellant (girl) and the second respondent (accused) as well as the alleged refusal to marry, are circumstances which will have no bearing on the grant of bail". The bench in its order passed Monday said that "having regard to the age of the prosecutrix and the nature

and gravity of the crime, no case for the grant of bail was established". "The order of the High Court granting bail has to be interfered with since the circumstances which prevailed with the High Court are extraneous in view of the age of the prosecutrix, having regard to the provisions of Section 376 of IPC and Section 6 of POCSO. We accordingly set aside the impugned order of the High Court dated August 2, 2021", it said. The bench directed that the accused should surrender forthwith to custody. Senior advocate Anand Grover and advocate Fauzia Shakil, appearing on behalf of the girl,

submitted that the date of birth of the victim is January 1, 2005, and at the time of the alleged offence, she was just about thirteen years of age. On the contention of advocate Rajesh Ranjan, appearing for the accused, that he is a student studying in an engineering college and he will not get bail throughout the trial, the bench requested that in the facts and circumstances, the Special Judge, POCSO, who is in charge of the trial shall complete the trial within six months from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order. Grover submitted, Ranjan on the other hand submitted that though the charge-

sheet has been submitted, there has been no recovery of the allegedly obscene videos nor is there any medical evidence to indicate that the girl had any sexual contact with the accused.

The top court noted that January 27, 2021, an FIR was registered in Kanke police station of Ranchi district for offences punishable under Section 376 of the Indian Penal and provisions of the POCSO Act.

The police filed the charge sheet before the Special Judge on May 24, 2021, and his bail plea was allowed by the Single Judge of the Jharkhand High Court.

## UKRAINE CRISIS

# Russia welcomes India's position

AGENCIES

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** Russia Wednesday welcomed India's "independent position" on the Ukraine crisis and said its views on the issue at the UN Security Council was reflective of the special and privileged strategic partnership between the two countries.

Russian Deputy Chief of Mission Roman Babushkin said India has been playing a vital role as a responsible global power and it takes an "independent and balanced" approach to global affairs.

"We welcome the independent position of India which it took twice at the UN Security Council," he said at an online media briefing.

"The Indian activities at the UN Security Council are fully reflecting the merit of our special and privileged strategic partnership," he added.

Amid escalating tension between Moscow and the West after Russian President Vladimir Putin recognised two breakaway Ukrainian regions as independent states, India at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council Monday night called for "restraint on all sides".

It stressed that the immediate pri-



ority is "de-escalation of tensions" taking into account the legitimate security interests of all countries and aimed towards securing long term peace and stability in the region and beyond.

"Russian India partnership is based on a strong and solid foundation. It is based on mutual trust," Babushkin said. "Our cooperation does not represent any threat to anyone and at the same time we keep moving shoulder-to-shoulder to establish a just and equal multipolar world," he added, hoping that the intensity of India-Russia ties will continue at the same level.

On the overall crisis in Ukraine, the Russian diplomat alleged that Western powers have been trying to destabilise the region. He said

### India believes in rules-based order: Lekhi

**New Delhi:** Amid rising tension between Russia and the West over Ukraine, Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi Wednesday said India believes in rules-based order and all stakeholders must communicate with each other. On the evacuation of Indian citizens from Ukraine, Lekhi said the government is doing its best as it has done in the past, "be it the Covid-19 situation, emergency in Libya or other exigencies". "India stands by its people. We urge the citizens to remain in touch with the embassy," she asserted. "India believes in rule-based order. We pray for harmony and peace all around. We seek all the stakeholders must communicate with each other," she told PTI here.

The Western sanctions against Russia would result in instability to the global economy as it will lead to an atmosphere of distrust and fear.

## ASSEMBLY POLLS

# UP records voter turnout of 57.45%

AGENCIES

**Lucknow, Feb 23:** An average of 57.45 per cent polling was recorded till 5 pm Wednesday in 59 Assembly constituencies during the fourth of the seven-phase elections in Uttar Pradesh, according to the Election Commission.

As many as 624 candidates are in the fray in this round of voting being held in Pilibhit, Lakhimpur Kheri, Sitapur, Hardoi, Unnao, Lucknow, Rae Bareilly, Banda, and Fatehpur districts. The polling started at 7 am and ended at 6 pm.

According to the Election Commission of India, Pilibhit recorded 61.33 per cent votes, Kheri 62.42 per cent, Sitapur 58.39 per cent, Hardoi 55.29 per cent, Unnao 54.05 per cent, Lucknow 55.08 per cent, Rae Bareilly 58.40 per cent, Banda 57.54 per cent and Fatehpur 57.02 per cent.

Around 73.67 per cent of votes were cast till 5 pm in polling station number 266 of the Karhal Assembly segment in Mainpuri district where a repolling has been ordered by the Election Commission.

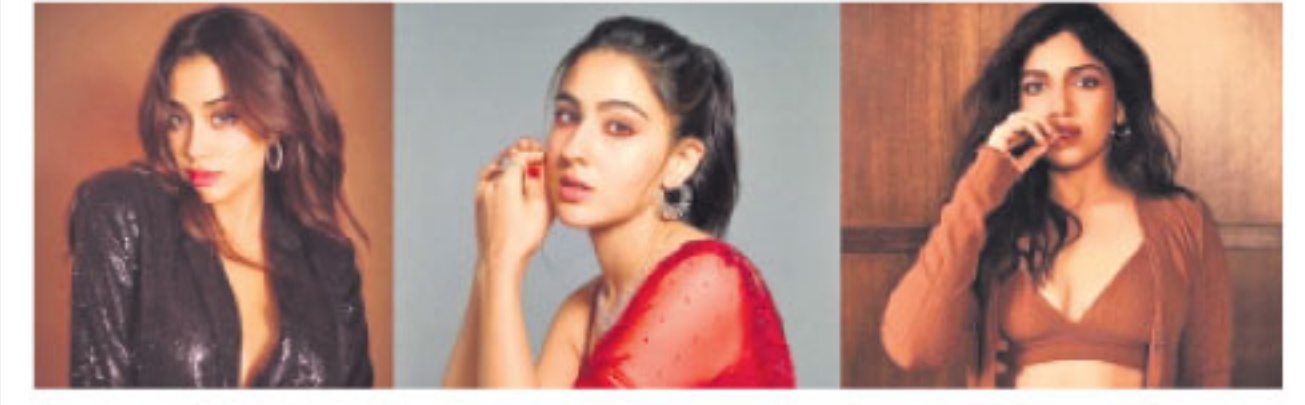
Polling in Karhal, where Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh



Yadav is in the fray against Union minister and BJP's S P Singh Baghel, was held in the third phase February 20. While poll panel officials claimed that voting was largely peaceful, the Samajwadi Party has alleged certain irregularities in some areas of Lucknow, Unnao, Hardoi and Sitapur and demanded action.

In Lucknow, BSP president Mayawati, Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, state minister Brijesh Pathak, and many senior officials were among the early voters. According to the Election Commission, 2.3 crore people, including 1.14 crore men and 99.3 lakh women, are eligible to vote, for whom 24,643 polling booths and 13,817 polling centres have been set up in this phase.

# Sukesh tried to impress Sara, Jhanvi & Bhumi, ED investigation reveals



INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has revealed that multimillionaire con-man Sukesh Chandrashekhar had allegedly tried to impress Bollywood actresses Bhumi Pednekar, Sara Ali Khan and Jhanvi Kapoor through his aide Pinki Irani.

The ED source said that Pinki

Irani took a few actresses to Tihar to introduce them to Sukesh, but did not reveal the identity of these actresses. Pinki used to meet the actresses frequently. She told them her name was Pari. "One BMW car took Bollywood actresses from gate number 3 of Tihar Jail. Later, Innova car took the actresses inside the jail where they met Sukesh," a source said. The source said that

Sanjay Chandra of Unitech and Tihar jail officials took these actresses inside the jail.

Sukesh has spent around Rs 20 crore on different models and Bollywood celebs, though a few had refused to take gifts from him. Sukesh is currently in judicial custody. The ED has filed two charge sheets in the matter. First charge sheet was filed against Sukesh while the supplementary charge sheet was filed against Pinki Irani.

It has been alleged that Pinki used to choose costly gifts for Jacqueline Fernandez and later used to drop it at her house after the payments were made by Sukesh Chandrashekhar.

## STRICT VIGIL



RAF personnel inspect the riot-affected areas after section 144 was imposed amid tension in the town over the murder of a Bajrang Dal activist in Shivamogga, Karnataka. Two more persons were arrested in the case, where district authorities have extended the prohibitory orders till Friday

# 2 yrs on, scars of northeast Delhi riots still haunt victims

RESIDENTS OF NORTHEAST DELHI HAVE REBUILT THEIR HOUSES WHICH HAD BEEN REDUCED TO ASHES. DESPITE THE TRAUMA, MOST HAVE NO GRUDGES AGAINST THE OTHER COMMUNITY AND WANT TO LIVE IN PEACE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** Two years have passed but the pain of losing their loved ones continues to haunt the kin of victims of northeast Delhi riots, with many of them finding it difficult to make their ends meet.

As northeast Delhi became the epicentre of violence, clashes also broke out at Jaffrabad, Maujpur, Chandbagh, Khureji Khas, Bhajanpura, Dayalpur, Gokalpuri and other areas.

Every year, the last week of February clouds the minds of Gulshan Bano and her visually-impaired husband Mohammad Nasiruddin with the ghastly memory of the death and despair caused by the riots two years ago.

They shudder when they think how, on February 25, 2020, a mob allegedly shot her 60-year-old father Mohammad Anwar and then set him ablaze.

Nasiruddin says he still re-



PTI FILE PHOTO

members the trembling voice of his father-in-law who had warned them against coming to Delhi as the situation had worsened in their Shiv Vihar locality which was among the worst hit.

The family of Naresh Saini, who used to earn his living selling vegetables, are still trying to come to terms with the fact that he is no more.

His two children, an eight-year-old girl and seven-year-old son, still hope that their father will return home one day after his treat-

ment is completed.

Recalling the fateful night of February 25, Rajiv Saini, the deceased's brother said Naresh had closed his shop and returned home. But he suddenly remembered that he had to purchase medicines.

Even after receiving a compensation of Rs 10 lakh, half of the amount went in paying the loan that was taken jointly by the brother's to build a house, he said.

Among those who lost their lives also include a 42-year-old Delhi

### The riots, which went on for three days, had erupted in northeast Delhi February 24 after clashes between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled, leaving at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured

Police head constable Ratan Lal. The then Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Shahdara, Amit Sharma and then ACP (Gokalpuri) Anuj Kumar were also severely injured while trying to quell the protests.

The Delhi Police formed three SITs in its Crime Branch to probe 62 important cases, including 53 cases of murder and rioting.

A separate case was registered

to unearth the conspiracy behind the riots, which was probed by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police while the remaining 695 cases were investigated by northeast district police, officials said.

According to a data provided by the northeast district, charge sheets have been filed in 353 cases and the court has taken cognizance in 293 such cases.

The data further stated that charges have been framed in 87 cases, the fate of 16 cases have been decided, conviction has been announced in two cases, 244 supplementary charge sheets have been filed and the total number of arrests made is 2,041 so far.

According to the report of the Delhi Assembly's Minorities Welfare committee, as January 18, 2021, 3,425 applications were received for compensation, of which 2,221 were approved. Rs 26,09,78,416 has been paid as compensation, 1,179 rejected or were duplicate applications.

### Lalu's assets made from scam proceeds may be confiscated

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Ranchi, Feb 23:** More troubles are likely for the ailing RJD supremo Lalu Prasad, incarcerated in the Rs 950 crore fodder scam and now undergoing treatment in Rajendra Prasad Institute of Medical Science here, as the Enforcement Directorate may confiscate assets created by those convicted in the scandal in line with the directions to CBI by a special court.

The former Bihar chief minister was earlier this week sentenced to five years in prison and slapped a fine of Rs 60 lakh by a special CBI court here in connection with the fifth fodder scam case involving embezzlement of over Rs 139 crore from Doranda treasury. The special court directed CBI to provide a copy of the judgment, the FIR and the charge sheet of the fodder scam case to the ED for necessary action.





# international



Who in the Lord's name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called countries on territory that belongs to his neighbours? JOE BIDEN | PRESIDENT, US

## HORRORS UNEARTHED

Peruvian archaeologists have unearthed eight children and 12 adults apparently sacrificed around 800-1,200 years ago, they said Tuesday, in a major dig at the pre-Incan Cajamarquilla complex east of Lima.



# EUROPE BRACES FOR FURTHER STRIFE

HOPES FOR A DIPLOMATIC WAY OUT OF A NEW, POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING WAR APPEARED ALL BUT SUNK AS THE US AND KEY EUROPEAN ALLIES ACCUSED MOSCOW TUESDAY OF CROSSING A RED LINE IN ROLLING OVER UKRAINE'S BORDER INTO SEPARATIST REGIONS - WITH SEVERAL CALLING IT AN INVASION



## STATE OF EMERGENCY IN UKRAINE

Ukraine's security council Wednesday approved plans to declare a state of national emergency, in response to the growing threat of a Russian invasion. The measure, which must be formally approved by parliament, requires stepped-up document and vehicle checks, among other measures, the council's secretary Oleksiy Danilov said.

- The top US diplomat cancelled a meeting with his Russian counterpart
- Kyiv recalled its ambassador and considered breaking all diplomatic ties with Moscow
- Ukraine websites knocked offline in cyberattacks
- Germany halted a lucrative pipeline deal Nord Stream 2
- Russia began evacuating its embassy in Kyiv, and Ukraine urged its citizens to leave Russia

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyiv, Feb 23: Europe braced for further confrontation Wednesday and Ukraine urged its citizens to leave Russia after tensions escalated dramatically when Russia's leader got the OK to use military force outside his country and the West responded with a raft of sanctions.

After weeks of trying to project calm, Ukrainian authorities signaled increasing concern on Wednesday. The Foreign Ministry advised against travel to Russia and recommended anyone there leave immediately, saying Moscow's "aggression" could lead to a significant reduction in consular services.

Already, the threat of war has shredded Ukraine's economy and raised the specter of massive casualties, energy shortages across Europe and global economic chaos.

Even as the conflict took a new, dangerous turn, leaders warned it could still get worse. Russian President Vladimir Putin has yet to unleash the force of the 150,000 troops massed on three sides of Ukraine, while US President Joe Biden held back on even tougher sanctions that could cause economic turmoil for Russia but said they would go ahead if there is further aggression.

Sanctions are key because the West has ruled out taking on Russia militarily.

In Ukraine's east, where an eight-year conflict between Russia-backed rebels and Ukrainian forces has killed nearly 14,000 people, violence also spiked again. One Ukrainian soldier was killed and six more sustained injuries after shelling by the rebels, Ukrainian military said. Separatist officials reported several explosions on their territory overnight and three civilian deaths.

Since last Friday, when separatist leaders in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions announced mass evacuations into Russia, more than 96,000 residents of the separatist areas have crossed the Russian border.

After weeks of rising tensions, Putin took a series of steps this week that dramatically raised the stakes. First, he recognized the independence of those separatist regions. Then, he said that recognition extends even to the large parts of the territories now held by Ukrainian forces, including the major Azov Sea port of Mariupol.



## 'RUSSIA'S INTERESTS NON-NEGOTIABLE'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Moscow, Feb 23: Russian President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that Moscow was ready to look for "diplomatic solutions" amid raging tensions with the West over Ukraine but stressed that the country's interests were non-negotiable.

"Our country is always open for direct and honest dialogue, for the search for diplomatic solutions to the most complex problems," Putin said in a video address to mark the Defender of the Fatherland Day, a public holiday in Russia.

But he added: "The interests of Russia, the security of our citizens, are non-negotiable for us."

Putin spoke after parliament's

### Putin's demands

Kyiv to recognise Russia's sovereignty over Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014 Ukraine to renounce its bid to join NATO and partially demilitarize

upper house, the Federation Council, Tuesday gave him unanimous approval to deploy "peacekeepers" to two breakaway Ukrainian regions now recognised by Moscow as independent, and potentially into other parts of Ukraine.

Putin congratulated the country's men and said he was certain of the "professionalism" of

the Russian military and that they will stand up for the country's national interests. He praised the battle-readiness of the Russian army and said the country would continue to develop state-of-the-art weapons. "We will continue to develop advanced weapon systems, including hypersonic and those based on new physical principles, and expand the use of advanced digital technologies and elements of artificial intelligence," the Kremlin strongman added.



I haven't said that the troops will go there right now. It's impossible to forecast a specific pattern of action - it will depend on a concrete situation as it takes shape on the ground

VLADIMIR PUTIN | PRESIDENT, RUSSIA

## SHORT TAKES

### Pak PM flies to Moscow

Islamabad: Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan left for Moscow Wednesday to push for the construction of a long-delayed, multi-billion-dollar gas pipeline to be built in collaboration with Russian companies, an official said. Khan's trip to meet President Vladimir Putin and discuss issues including economic cooperation comes hours after a number of Western nations hit Russia with new sanctions for its military deployment into parts of eastern Ukraine.

### SK test-fires interceptor

Seoul: South Korea Wednesday test-fired a long-range surface-to-air missile, Yonhap news agency reported, a month after North Korea tested a record number of increasingly powerful missiles potentially capable of evading defences in the South. An L-SAM was successfully launched from a testing site in Taean, 150 km southwest of the capital Seoul, Yonhap reported, citing unnamed sources. The Ministry of Defence declined to confirm the report. International tension has been rising over a recent series of North Korean ballistic missile tests. January was a record month for such tests, with at least seven launches, including a new type of "hypersonic missile" able to manoeuvre at high speed, making it potentially difficult to intercept.

### China blasts US over Ukraine crisis

BEIJING: China is accusing the United States of creating "fear and panic" over the crisis in Ukraine. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said Wednesday that China opposes new sanctions on Russia, reiterating a longstanding Chinese position. She said the US was fuelling tensions by providing weapons to Kyiv in response to Russia's large troop deployment around Ukraine's borders and fears of an invasion.

### Syria supports Putin's decision

BEIRUT: Syria supports the decision of its ally Russia to recognise two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine, Syrian state TV quoted the Syrian foreign minister as saying Tuesday. The United States and its European allies are set to announce fresh sanctions against Russia on Tuesday after Putin recognised the two breakaway regions, deepening Western fears of a new war in Europe. "Syria supports President Vladimir Putin's decision to recognise the republics of Luhansk and Donetsk," the state TV quoted Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad as saying during an event in Moscow. "What the West is doing against Russia is similar to what it did against Syria during the terrorist war," said Mekdad.

### EU special summit today

BRUSSELS: EU leaders will meet for a special summit in Brussels Thursday to discuss the bloc's further response to Moscow after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into breakaway regions of eastern Ukraine. "It is important that we continue to be united and determined and jointly define our collective approach and actions," the head of the EU Council grouping the bloc's member states, Charles Michel said.

# World's 1st octopus farm stirs ethical debate

SINCE THE 2020 DOCUMENTARY 'MY OCTOPUS TEACHER' CAPTURED THE PUBLIC IMAGINATION WITH ITS TALE OF A FILMMAKER'S FRIENDSHIP WITH AN OCTOPUS, CONCERN FOR THEIR WELLBEING HAS GROWN

REUTERS



Madrid, Feb 23: Spurred on by soaring demand for seafood, a Spanish company plans to open the first commercial octopus farm next year but as scientists discover more about the enigmatic animals some warn it could be an ethical and environmental disaster. "This is a global milestone," said Roberto Romero, aquaculture director at Nueva Pescanova, the company pouring 65 million euros (\$74 million) into the farm, which is pending environmental approval from local authorities.

At the company's research centre in Galicia, northwest Spain, several octopuses silently propelled themselves around a shallow indoor tank.

Two technicians in waders plucked a mature specimen into a bucket for transfer to a new enclosure, with five other octopuses. Building on decades of academic research, Nueva Pescanova beat rival companies in Mexico and Japan to perfect the conditions needed for industrial-scale breeding. The commercial incentives for the farm, which is slated to produce 3,000 tonnes per year by 2026 for domestic and international food chains and generate hundreds of jobs on the island of Gran Canaria, are clear. Between 2010 and 2019 the value of the global octopus trade bal-

looned to \$2.72 billion from \$1.30 billion, according to data from the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, while landings only rose around 9% to 380,000 tonnes.

### WELFARE CONCERNS

However, previous efforts to farm octopus have struggled with high mortality, while attempts to breed wild-caught octopus ran into problems with aggression, cannibalism and self-mutilation. David Chavarrias, the centre's director, said optimising tank conditions allowed the company to eliminate aggression and breed five generations in captivity. "We have not found cannibalistic behaviour in any of our cultures," he said.

But not everyone is convinced. Since the 2020 documentary "My Octopus Teacher" captured the public imagination with its tale of a filmmaker's friendship with an octopus, concern for their wellbeing has grown. Last year, researchers at the London School of Economics concluded from a review of 300 scientific studies that octopus were sentient beings capable of experiencing distress and happiness, and that high-welfare farming would be impossible.

Raul Garcia, who heads the WWF conservation organisation's fisheries operations in Spain, agrees. "Octopuses are extremely intelligent and extremely curious. And it's well known they are not

### Octopuses are extremely intelligent and extremely curious. And it's well known they are not happy in conditions of captivity

RAUL GARCIA | HEAD OF WWF FISHERIES OPS, SPAIN

happy in conditions of captivity," he told Reuters.

Any farming operation aiming for a high quality of life by approximating their natural habitat - solitary on the sea bed - would likely be too expensive to be profitable, he said.

European Union laws governing livestock welfare do not apply to invertebrates and although Spain is tightening up its animal protection legislation, octopuses are not set to be included.

Nueva Pescanova has not provided specific details on tank sizes, density, or feed, citing trade secrecy. It has said the animals are constantly monitored to ensure their wellbeing. Chavarrias said more research was needed to determine if octopus were truly intelligent.

"We like to say that more than an intelligent animal, it is a responsive animal," he said. "It has a certain capacity for resolve when faced with survival challenges."

# BA.2 remains variant of concern, says WHO

AGENCIES

Geneva, Feb 23: Amid concerns of increasing presence of the BA.2 subtype of Omicron variant in some European and Asian countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) Wednesday reinforced that the BA.2 sublineage should continue to be considered a variant of concern.

The WHO's Technical Advisory Group on SARS-CoV-2 Virus Evolution (TAG-VE), which met Tuesday said that it should remain classified as Omicron.

The group also emphasised that BA.2 should continue to be monitored as a distinct sublineage of Omicron by public health authorities.

"The Omicron variant of concern is currently the dominant variant circulating globally, accounting for nearly all sequences reported to GISAID (an open access database)," the WHO said in a statement.

Omicron is made up of several sublineages, each of them being monitored by WHO and partners. Of them, the most common ones are BA.1, BA.1.1 (or Nextstrain clade 21K) and BA.2 (or Nextstrain clade 21L).

At a global level, the proportion of reported sequences designated BA.2 has been increasing relative to BA.1 in recent weeks, however the global circulation of all variants is reportedly declining.

The experts explained that BA.2 differs from BA.1 in its genetic sequence, and that it has a growth advantage over this sublineage. Although studies are ongoing to

At a global level, the proportion of reported sequences designated BA.2 has been increasing relative to BA.1 in recent weeks. However the global circulation of all variants is reportedly declining

understand why, initial data suggest BA.2 appears inherently more transmissible than BA.1, currently the most common Omicron sublineage reported.

However, this difference in transmissibility appears to be much smaller than that between BA.1 and the Delta variant, the experts said. Meanwhile, although BA.2 sequences are increasing in proportion relative to other Omicron sublineages, there is still a reported decline in overall cases globally.

Furthermore, while cases of reinfection with BA.2 following infection with BA.1 have been documented, preliminary data from studies show that infection with BA.1 provides strong protection against reinfection with BA.2.

WHO will continue to closely monitor the BA.2 lineage as part of Omicron. The UN agency urged countries to remain vigilant, to monitor and report sequences, and to conduct independent and comparative analyses of the different Omicron sublineages.





**We are investing heavily on capabilities. The internet must be safe, trusted and open, and intermediaries that operate on the internet must be accountable to the consumers**

RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR | MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND IT

## COCA-COLA ROPES IN SRK

Beverage major Coca-Cola has signed Bollywood heartthrob Shah Rukh Khan as the brand ambassador for Thums Up. Earlier, Khan was associated with rival cola brand, Pepsi, for a long period of time and this is his first big endorsement after the controversy involving his son Aryan Khan in a drug case last year



## of the day quote

The country's textile exports can increase from the current \$40 billion to \$100 billion in the next five years

UPENDRA PRASAD SINGH | UNION TEXTILES SECRETARY



Our overarching aim should be to balance the needs and aspirations of our citizens, improve liveability and productivity by improving connectivity, bring down the cost of logistics, and accelerate clean mobility while taking an approach which is climate-centric and sustainable

AMITABH KANT | CEO, NITI AAYOG



The one million export mark is a significant milestone for TVS Motor Company. This further underscores our path towards being a global player in personal mobility solutions

SUDARSHAN VENU | JOINT MD, TVS



## SHORT TAKES

### India willing to invest in Lanka

**New Delhi:** India's foreign minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said Wednesday the country is willing to make investments in Sri Lanka to help it ease a financial crisis. Sri Lanka has been suffering a severe shortage of foreign exchange, leading to widespread power cuts in recent days after being left unable to pay for fuel shipments.

### IOC appoints new director

**New Delhi:** Sujoy Choudhury has been appointed Director (Planning and Business Development) on the board of state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the nation's biggest oil firm. His appointment is effective from February 23, the company said in a stock exchange filing. A Mechanical Engineer and MBA (Finance) from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, Choudhury, 57, possesses more than three decades of rich experience across various functions of oil industry like engineering, retail sales and petrochemicals (marketing).

### Swiggy eyes \$800mn IPO

**Bangalore:** Indian food delivery company Swiggy, which is backed by SoftBank Group, has started preparations to raise at least \$800 million in an IPO early next year, the Nikkei reported Tuesday, citing people familiar with the matter. Swiggy has begun adding independent directors to the board, and plans to position itself as a logistics company and not just a food delivery firm, according to the report. Swiggy doubled its valuation to \$10.7 billion in its latest funding round, Reuters reported last month, citing sources.

### MP to declare EV policy soon

**Bhopal:** The Madhya Pradesh government is going to launch its electric vehicle (EV) policy soon as the process of giving it a final shape is almost completed, government officials said here on Wednesday. The scheme is likely to be announced between March and April. The department of industrial policy and investment promotion of the state, which is looking after the project, has framed the policy with suggestions from various stakeholders of the automobile sector. Besides making the scheme attractive for the consumers, the department has also framed the policy to create a conducive ecosystem for the automobile industry in the state.

## IMPACTS OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

# Sunoiil supply, fuels vegoils rally at risk

REUTERS

**Mumbai, Feb 23:** Uncertainty over sunflower oil supplies due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is spurring demand for rivals palm oil and soyoil, fuelling a red-hot vegetable oil market.

The Black Sea accounts for 60% of world sunoil output and 76% of exports, so the uncertainty over how the crisis in the region may impact crop production and movement has prompted buyers to seek alternative oils.

Surging palm oil and soyoil prices could hit new record highs in the short term, and squeeze price-sensitive Asian and African consumers already reeling from spiralling fuel and food costs, analysts and traders said.

"We are facing a perfect storm," James Fry, chairman of commodities consultancy LMC International, told Reuters.

Buyers are already struggling to secure replacement supplies after Indonesia, the top exporter of palm oil - the most-produced edible oil - restricted exports this year while drought slammed output of soyoil - the second most produced edible oil - in South America.

Global edible oil prices stretch to record or multi-year highs on supply uncertainty

Vegetable oil buyers were banking on sunflower oil, the fourth most produced oil after rapeseed oil, to plug the supply gap.



BLACK SEA REGION ACCOUNTS FOR 76% OF GLOBAL SUNOIL EXPORTS

BUT SOYOIL SUPPLY LIMITED AS DROUGHT PARCHES SOUTH AMERICA

BUYERS SWITCH TO RIVAL OILS ON SUNOIL SUPPLY UNCERTAINTY

PALM OIL SUPPLY SQUEEZED BY INDONESIA'S EXPORT CURBS

### VEGOIL PRICES SEEN ELEVATED UNTIL SUPPLIES IMPROVE

Russia's move to order troops into separatist regions of eastern Ukraine has now raised fears of supply disruption.

Sunflower oil vessel loading has already been delayed by at least a week from Ukraine, said Sandeep Bajoria, president of the International Sunflower Oil Association.

"Sunoil is right now the cheapest edible oil, but buyers are sceptical about delivery. They are moving towards soyoil and palm," said Bajoria, who is also chief executive of one of India's largest edible oil brokages, Sunvin Group. India is the world's top edible oil importer.

Crude palm and soybean oils are being offered at a record \$1,700 a tonne - including cost, insurance

and freight (CIF) - in India for March shipments, compared with \$1,620 for crude sunflower oil, traders said.

### LITTLE CHOICE

Palm oil usually trades at a substantial discount to soyoil and sunoil, but Indonesia's export curbs have lifted the tropical oil's price by 27.5% this year, more than any rival.

That has slowed purchases from cost-sensitive buyers in India and China, who had hoped prices would weaken, said a Kuala Lumpur based dealer.

But tightening local inventories in key consumer hubs means those buyers may soon have to re-stock. "They don't have a choice.

## Crude oil, gold prices at spiralling high

**New Delhi:** Heightened tensions between Russia-Ukraine led to acceleration in gold and crude oil prices Tuesday. The rising geopolitical tensions sent Brent-indexed crude oil prices over \$95 per barrel, the highest in several years. Similarly, gold prices traded higher with spot gold prices at COMEX rising to over \$1,900 per ounce. The rise in prices was triggered after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the deployment of troops into two separatist areas within Ukraine. Russia is one of the world's top producers of crude oil and gold, and any western sanctions against it will stiffen the global supply. Besides, the development also assumes significance for India as it is import-dependent to fulfil its crude oil and gold needs. The rise in crude oil prices can escalate domestic prices, thereby triggering inflation. MOFSL, Sr Vice President,

**Gold and crude oil prices are trading on a positive note due to geopolitical tension. We are expecting gold and crude oil prices may rise further... Gold prices may test \$1,950 to \$2,000 and crude oil prices may test \$100 to \$105 levels soon**

ANUJ GUPTA | AIIFL SECURITIES VP, RESEARCH

Commodity & Currency Research, Navneet Damani, said: "Gold prices hit a near nine month-high, after tensions between Russia and US over Ukraine continue to rise. Broader trend on COMEX could be in the range of \$1,885 - \$1,925 and on domestic front prices could hover in the range of Rs 50,000-50,900."

They have to replenish inventories at record high prices," the dealer said.

"For the short term sunoil supplies may get disrupted, but once the situation normalises, sunoil supplies would pick up," said Sudhakar Desai, president of the Indian Vegetable Oil Producers' Association (IVPA).

Sunflower oil exports from

Ukraine could jump to 6.6 million tonnes in the 2021/22 season from 5.3 million tonnes in 2020/21, Ukrainian sunoil producers' union estimates.

While the uncertainty surrounding Black Sea sun oil shipments persists, global edible oil prices are set to remain elevated unless Indonesia lifts its export curbs, said a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trading firm.

## Aim at rapid expansion of retail loan business in Odisha: ICICI Bank



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Bhubaneswar, Feb 23:** ICICI Bank Wednesday said it would expand its retail loan business at a rapid pace in Odisha during the ongoing fiscal.

Home loan disbursement in the state is likely to grow by 30 per cent to ₹1,250 crore, while the consumer credit segment is expected to rise by over 40 per cent to ₹1,800 crore, the lender said.

The bank is also aiming to grow business loans and overdrafts disbursement by 35 per cent to more than ₹1,300 crore, Anup Bagchi, Executive Director, ICICI Bank,

told reporters here.

"Odisha is an important market for us. We continue to strengthen our franchise, delivery and servicing capabilities with a range of digital initiatives. We are focusing on locations such as Rourkela, Berhampur, Sambalpur, Cuttack, Jharsuguda, Angul, Bargarh, Bolangir and Jajpur, among others," Bagchi said.

He added that the lender has forayed into a new segment of providing business loans to contractors for building roads, bridges and dams in order to support growth of infrastructure in the state.

## Green exports to touch \$500bn: Ambani

REUTERS

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** India could become a global green energy superpower with exports of clean energy rising to \$500 billion over the next 20 years, Mukesh Ambani, chairman of oil-to-telecom conglomerate Reliance Industries, said Wednesday.

Indian companies including Reliance have announced plans worth billions of dollars to boost India's renewable energy capacity including building battery storage, fuel cells and producing green hydrogen at less than \$1 per kilogram. India is the world's third largest oil importer and consumer and its power sector is heavily reliant on coal. Ambani said India should have a strategy to end dependence on fossil fuels in the next two to three decades. "For the next two to three decades,



India's dependence on coal and imported oil will continue. But, we must have a plan to eliminate that in the next two to three decades."

The billionaire said India would have to follow "low-carbon and no-carbon strategies" in the near and medium term. Prime Minister Narendra Modi

has set a target to make India a net-zero carbon emitter by 2070. The nation plans to install 450 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy by 2030, from about 105 GW currently, and has recently announced plan to produce 5 million tonnes of green hydrogen per year by 2030.

"We have to make sure (we)... bring cost of green hydrogen at a dollar per kilo and make sure that we transport and disburse it also at less than a dollar per kilo," Ambani said.

"I think we will be able to do all this plus or minus 20%," he said.

**If the last 20 years, we were known for India's emergence as an IT superpower, next 20 years, I believe, along with technology, will mark our emergence as a superpower in energy and life sciences**

MUKESH AMBANI | CHAIRMAN, RELIANCE INDUSTRIES

## Tata Motors drives in new SUV line-up

NEW ARRIVALS

**New Delhi:** Tata Motors Wednesday rolled out special edition version of its SUV models, including Punch and Safari, priced between ₹8.58 lakh and ₹20.99 lakh (ex-showroom), to mark its leadership in the segment. The 'Untamed Kaziranga Edition' range starts with Punch, which is priced at ₹8.58 lakh, Nexon at ₹11.78 lakh, Harrier at ₹20.4 lakh and Safari at ₹20.99 lakh. The Mumbai-based company said the range is inspired by India's rich geographical and biological diversity while also paying homage to India's great national parks.

## Maruti Suzuki launches all new Baleno

**New Delhi:** The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) Wednesday launched the all new version of its premium hatchback Baleno priced between ₹6.35-9.49 lakh (ex-showroom). The manual trims of the model are priced between ₹6.35 lakh and ₹8.99 lakh while the automatic variants (with auto gear shift technology) are tagged between ₹7.69 lakh and ₹9.49 lakh. Speaking at the launch, MSI Managing Director and CEO Kenichi Ayukawa said the auto major along with its vendor partners has invested around ₹1,150 crore on the development of the all new Baleno.



## LPG DISTRIBUTORS TO SELL FMCG PRODUCTS

# IOC becomes retail biz partner of Dabur

*This partnership will provide direct access to Dabur's range of products to around 14 crore Indane LPG consumer households across India, according to a joint statement*

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

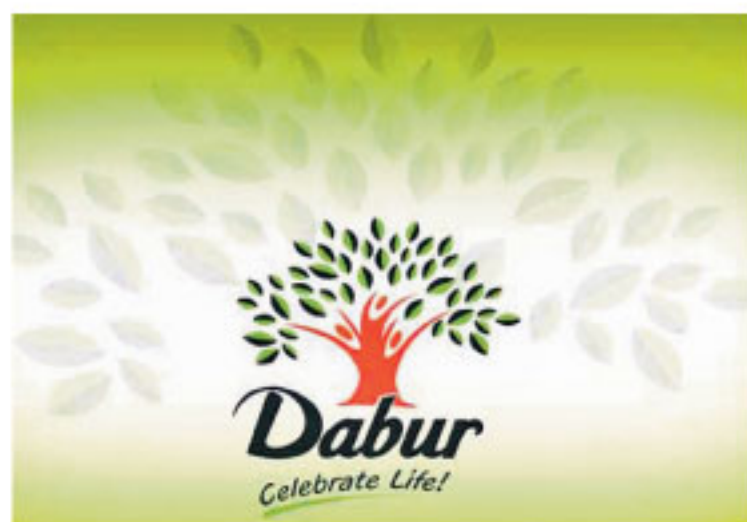
**New Delhi, Feb 23:** Dabur Wednesday announced a partnership with Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL), as part of which the state-owned refiner's LPG distributors will become retail business partners for the homegrown FMCG major.

"As part of the tie-up, IndianOil's Indane LPG distributors will become retail business partners for Dabur and will

help sell the entire Dabur range of products directly to the crores of Indane LPG consumer households through their network of delivery personnel, creating customer delight," it said.

A technological and system integration is being carried out by IndianOil and Dabur to connect the entire value chain, especially Indane LPG users, it added.

"This initiative will help Dabur to leverage IndianOil's unmatched reach to Indian house-



**We are excited to be the first FMCG company to join hands with IndianOil for this unique partnership. This will bring us closer to millions of Indane LPG consumers across urban, semi-urban and rural areas, and is an integral part of our multi-channel go-to-market strategy**

MOHIT MALHOTRA | CEO, DABUR INDIA

holds," it said. Dabur India CEO Mohit Malhotra said this part-

nership of two of the oldest and largest Indian brands should be

able to unlock significant value for both companies.

IndianOil Executive Director (LPG) SS Lamba said, "We are happy to tie up with Dabur India Ltd for distribution and supply of their products to our consumers. We are appreciative of this new go-to-market route, which will enable convenience and ease of buying for our customers through trusted Indane LPG distributors and their network of delivery personnel."

IndianOil, with over 12.750 Indane distributors and more than 90,000 delivery personnel, caters to 14.3 crore households, in every nook and corner of the country.

"The pandemic has changed

many business models, and we believe that consumers should be given an opportunity to buy our range of products from their homes. We are confident that this tie-up will allow us to ensure availability and easy access of Dabur's diverse range of products directly to consumer households," said Dabur India Executive Director Adarsh Sharma.

Dabur India's FMCG portfolio includes power brands — Dabur Chyawanprash, Dabur Honey, Dabur Honitus, Dabur Lal Tail and Dabur Pudrin Hara in the healthcare category; Dabur Amla, Vatika and Dabur Red Paste in the personal care space; and Réal in the food and beverages category.

## OVER FUNDS MISUSE Co-Founder's wife sacked by BharatPe

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**New Delhi, Feb 23:** BharatPe has sacked Madhuri Jain Grover, wife of the fintech firm's co-founder and managing director Ashneer Grover, over alleged financial irregularities and cancelled employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs) vested with her.

Ms Madhuri is alleged to have used company funds for personal beauty treatments, buying electronic items and family trips to the US and Dubai, sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Besides, she also allegedly paid her personal staff out of company accounts and produced fake invoices from known or friendly parties, they added.

While an email sent to Ms Madhuri for comments remained unanswered, a company spokesperson confirmed the termination.

"As per your query, we can confirm that services of Madhuri Jain Grover have been terminated in accordance with the terms of her employment agreement," the spokesperson said. The spokesperson did not give reasons for the termination. Sources, however, said action follows an external audit commissioned by BharatPe board to look into the conduct of Grover.

Stock options vested with Ms Madhuri have also been cancelled, they said adding the alleged financial irregularities have been detailed in the termination letter.

Her husband was sent on a three-month leave following allegations of using abusive language against Kotak Mahindra Bank staff and fraudulent practices.

## RBI asks NBFCs to implement CFSS by Sept 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Mumbai, Feb 23:** Reserve Bank Wednesday asked certain class of Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFC) to mandatorily implement 'Core Financial Services Solution (CFSS)' by September 30, 2025 in order to provide seamless customer interface as well as have a centralised data base.

In a circular, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said it has been decided that NBFCs - Middle Layer and NBFCs - Upper Layer with 10 and more 'fixed point service delivery units' as October 1, 2022 shall be mandatorily required to implement CFSS. CFSS is akin to the Core Banking Solution (CBS) adopted by banks.

"CFSS shall provide for seamless customer interface in digital offerings and transactions relating to products and services with anywhere/ anytime facility, enable integration of NBFCs' functions, provide centralised database and accounting records, and be able to generate suitable MIS, both for internal purposes and regulatory reporting," it said.

As per the timeline prescribed in the circular, the two categories of NBFCs have to implement CFSS on or before September 30, 2025.

However, NBFC - Upper Layer shall ensure that the CFSS is implemented at least in 70 per cent of 'Fixed point service delivery units' or before September 30, 2024.



# PULISIC, HAVERTZ LIFT BLUES



**CRUCIAL GOALS:** Kai Havertz (L) and Christian Pulisic (2nd from L) celebrate the latter's strike against Lille with teammates, Tuesday

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**London, Feb 23:** Chelsea could rely on Christian Pulisic and Kai Havertz for goals with misfiring Romelu Lukaku rested. The London club resumed their Champions League title defense by cruising to a 2-0 victory over Lille Tuesday to take control of the round of 16 matchup heading into next month's second leg. Relishing an attacking role,

Havertz took only eight minutes to head Chelsea in front by meeting Hakim Ziyech's corner. "We have a lot of good strikers, so it is also good to have a change and not make it easy for the opposition," Havertz said. "Today it worked good and I enjoy every forward position."

The second in the 63rd minute was created by the dynamism of N'Golo Kante, who ran half the

length of the pitch unchallenged before feeding Pulisic to finish with a shot clipped into the bottom corner.

"When N'Golo is driving like that, it's just a question of keeping up with him," Pulisic said, "and I managed to do that and finish it off." Kante's contribution particularly pleased Chelsea manager Thomas Tuchel. "He's struggled with belief and intensity in recent matches

so it was good he stepped up today," Tuchel said. "You can see how big an impact he has when he's in good shape."

The ease of Chelsea's victory reflected their status this season. While Chelsea is third in the Premier League, Lille is mid-table in its French title defense. "We lacked a little quality in the final ball and that cost us," Lille forward Jonathan David said.

Tuchel said fatigue was the reason for leaving out Lukaku, the club-record USD 135 million offseason signing who touched the ball only seven times in Saturday's 1-0 win over Crystal Palace. Lukaku didn't come off the bench against Lille.

"After the match where everyone was focused on his few touches... It was not the moment to put him into the next fire," Tuchel said. "It was the moment to take a step back, that was the decision and that's it."

"We have now had a strong win and a strong performance. We have now had a good win and all the questions are still about Romelu, so the focus is huge."

And it's easier to rest Lukaku when there's another forward who cost over USD 90 million to be able to rely on. Havertz, who scored Chelsea's winner in the Champions League final last season, also scored the goal that sealed the Club World Cup title earlier this month.

"He has really stepped up," Tuchel said. "His work rate is immense, and the volume, the areas of the pitch that he covers for us is very, very good. He was again decisive, he created chances, got involved and was never shy of defending."

"We played with a very aggressive high line with Hakim, with all three offensive players together. It was the formation to have intensity, and a high work rate consistently throughout the whole match and they all did very well."

## VLAHOVIC SCORES WITHIN A MINUTE OF HIS CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DEBUT WITH ITALIAN GIANTS BEFORE PAREJO DENIES THE VISITORS A WIN

# Villarreal hold Juventus

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Villarreal (Spain), Feb 23:** Dusan Vlahovic needed just 31 seconds to show Europe why Juventus chose him to fill the void left by Cristiano Ronaldo. The Serbia striker had a dream debut in the Champions League Tuesday, scoring a superb goal after his first contact with the ball in a 1-1 draw at Villarreal.

His goal had the elements of strikes that only players of Ronaldo's caliber can pull off, combining power, a sense of the moment and that extra dose of confidence that means no scoring chance, however slim, should go to waste.

After using his chest to control a long pass from Danilo, the 22-year-old striker did not hesitate to immediately take on center-back pair Pau Torres and Raúl Albiol. He used one touch to prepare his shot taken with his weaker right foot while he spun toward the goal. The low effort grazed the foot of a defender before squirming in at an angle past goalkeeper Gerónimo Rulli.

It was his second goal with Juventus since the team secured his 70 million euro (\$90 million) transfer from Fiorentina near the end of the January transfer window to find a top scorer after Ronaldo's exit five months before in the offseason.

"It was huge to score on my debut. It was very emotional," Vlahovic said. "However, I cannot be 100% satisfied because we have not won the game."

Dani Parejo leveled for Villarreal in the 66th minute, leaving the playoff poised for the decider in Italy with the away-goal rule scrapped this season.

After Vlahovic's opener, Villarreal tied to respond through



**MAKING A STATEMENT:** Dusan Vlahovic (L) reacts after scoring on his Champions League debut at Villarreal, Tuesday

its speed on the flanks. Alfonso Pedraza stole the ball and sped from the left side of the box before he laid off for Giovanni Lo Celso, only for his scuffed attempt to find the top of the left post in the 13th. Vlahovic also impressed with his ability to pull down more long balls for his teammates in the first half. But Parejo's 66th-minute equalizer came just after Albiol made it his mission to start taking away that outlet.

Following Albiol's challenge to win a ball from Juventus' new striker, the Italian team betrayed its defensive pedigree when it gave Etienne Capoue time to pick out a run forward by fellow midfielder Parejo. Juventus' backline compounded that mistake by leaving Parejo free of a marker as he fired low to make it 1-1. Vlahovic almost

conjured up the winner with five minutes remaining with a powerful shot that Rulli did well to stop.

United States midfielder Weston McKennie had to be substituted for Juventus in the 80th after he received a hard tackle into his lower left leg by substitute Pervis Estupiñán.

Juventus is trying to reach the quarterfinals for the first time since 2018-19 after losing in the round-of-16 in the past two seasons.

Unai Emery has Villarreal, last season's Europa League champion, back in the knockout rounds of Europe's elite club competition for the first time in 13 years. The Spanish team will hope to have striker Gerard Moreno, now injured, back for the second leg in Turin March 16.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ATKMB look for semifinal berth

**VASCO:** ATK Mohun Bagan (ATKMB) will look to secure a spot in the top-four with a win over Odisha FC in their Indian Super League (ISL) match here Thursday. ATKMB are currently third in the standings with 30 points from 16 games. The Mariners dropped points against Kerala in a heated 2-2 draw, snapping a run of three wins on the spin. But Juan Ferrando's men are on a 12-game unbeaten streak and have looked at their best in recent matches, even with injuries to key players. Odisha, meanwhile, saw their slim chances of making the semifinals go up in smoke after a 1-2 defeat to Bengaluru FC. They are placed seventh with 22 points from 18 outings. The two teams played out a 0-0 draw the last time they met this season.

### Stalker of Raducanu gets restraining order

**LONDON:** A man who was found guilty of stalking US Open tennis champion Emma Raducanu was given a five-year restraining order Wednesday. Amrit Magar, a 35-year-old former delivery driver from London, also was sentenced to an 18-month community service order that includes 200 hours of unpaid work. He will be under curfew for eight weeks and monitored by an electronic tag. Magar went to the 19-year-old Raducanu's home on three separate dates late last year, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property from the porch, a trial heard last month. On one occasion, he decorated a tree in the front garden with Christmas lights. He also left a bouquet of flowers with a personal note. Another time, he drew a map to show the 23 miles (37 kilometers) he had walked from his home. Magar was arrested after Raducanu's father was alerted by a doorbell camera, finding his shoe had been taken from the porch. He was found guilty at the trial at Bromley Magistrates' Court.

### Agarkar appointed as DC's asst coach

**NEW DELHI:** Former India pacer Ajit Agarkar was Wednesday officially appointed as the assistant coach of IPL franchise Delhi Capitals. Agarkar will join the team after completing his commentating duties for India's home series against Sri Lanka beginning Thursday. "I am very excited to be part of Delhi Capitals squad for this season," Agarkar said, on the development in a team statement. The 44-year-old, with 288 ODI and 58 Test wickets to his name, has represented Kolkata Knight Riders and Delhi Daredevils in the IPL. He joins the Delhi Capitals coaching staff of Ponting, Pravin Amre (Assistant Coach) and James Hopes (Bowling Coach).

## Indecency costs Zverev dearly



Alexander Zverev smashes his racket on the umpire's chair before being thrown out of the Mexican Open

ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Acapulco (Mexico), Feb 23:** Third-ranked Alexander Zverev was thrown out of the Mexican Open for violently smashing his racket on the umpire's chair moments after losing a doubles match.

The incident took place after Zverev and Marcelo Melo lost to Lloyd Glasspool and Harri Heliövaara 6-2, 4-6, 10-6 Tuesday night in Acapulco.

Zverev struck the umpire's chair three times, sat for a moment, then got back up and yelled at the umpire that he "destroyed the whole (expletive) match" and struck the chair once more with his racket as the umpire climbed down. The umpire had pulled his feet back at one point for fear of being hit.

Minutes earlier, Zverev had received a code violation after yelling and swearing in protest of a shot that was ruled in, setting up match point. Glasspool then ended the match with an ace.

"Due to unsportsmanlike conduct at the conclusion of his doubles match Tuesday night, Alexander Zverev has been withdrawn from the tournament in Acapulco," the ATP said on Twitter early Wednesday.

The 24-year-old German was the defending champion in the singles. The ATP website shows that his second-round opponent, Peter Gojowczyk, has been given a walkover. As the crowd boomed, Zverev handed his damaged racket to a child in the front row.

Earlier, Daniil Medvedev continued his pursuit of the No.1 ranking with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Benoit

Paire to move into the second round. The 26-year-old Russian can overtake Novak Djokovic for the top spot in the men's rankings if he wins the title here.

Medvedev, who won the 2021 US Open and was a runner-up to Rafael Nadal last month at the Australian Open, is playing in Mexico for the first time.

"It's not easy to come back after some rest and some time off competition," said Medvedev, who rallied from a break down in the second set. "I managed to fight until the end against a very tough opponent and I'm happy that I managed to win."

He next plays Pablo Andujar, who beat Alex Hernandez 6-0, 6-1. If Medvedev wins this tournament, or if he reaches the Acapulco final and Djokovic does not win the title at Dubai, he will become the first player other than Djokovic, Nadal, Roger Federer or Andy Murray to hold the top spot since 2004.

He said he's thinking about the milestone, but acknowledged that it might not happen next week. The likely biggest challenge for Medvedev in Mexico could be fourth-seeded Nadal, who opened with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Denis Kudla. Nadal, who has won titles in Acapulco in 2005, 2013 and 2020, next faces Stefan Kozlov Wednesday.

In other matches Tuesday, Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Laslo Djere 7-6(9-7), 7-6(7-4). Tommy Paul advanced to a meeting with Dusan Lajovic when fifth-seeded Matteo Berrettini retired from their match in the second set because of an abdominal injury, and Yoshihito Nishioka beat Feliciano Lopez 2-6, 6-0, 6-4.

## More game time likely for claimants

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, Feb 23:** With the number of claimants increasing heading into T20 World Cup, there will be no let-up in India's willingness to experiment or their intensity in the three-match T20 series against Sri Lanka, beginning here Thursday.

Coming off a 3-0 whitewash of the West Indies, the in-form Indians will look to do an encore against the visiting Sri Lankans, and the Rohit Sharma-led squad has a realistic chance of achieving that.

But the endeavour to complete another clean sweep will not mean a climb-down from their keenness to give enough game time to as

many players as possible in the lead-up to the World Cup, which will be held in Australia in October-November.

The absence of the team's established players, such as Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant as well as KL Rahul, in the upcoming three T20s will definitely translate into more opportunities for the likes of Ishan Kishan, Ruturaj Gaikwad and Sanju Samson.

One of the highlights over the last week was Venkatesh Iyer's ability to finish off matches and if he is able to continue in the same vein against the islanders, while managing to improve his bowling, the Indian team management will have

a world-class all-rounder at its disposal going into the showpiece Down Under.

Now that Suryakumar Yadav has been ruled out of the series alongside Deepak Chahar due to injuries, Venkatesh will assume added responsibility when it comes to batting in the back 10.

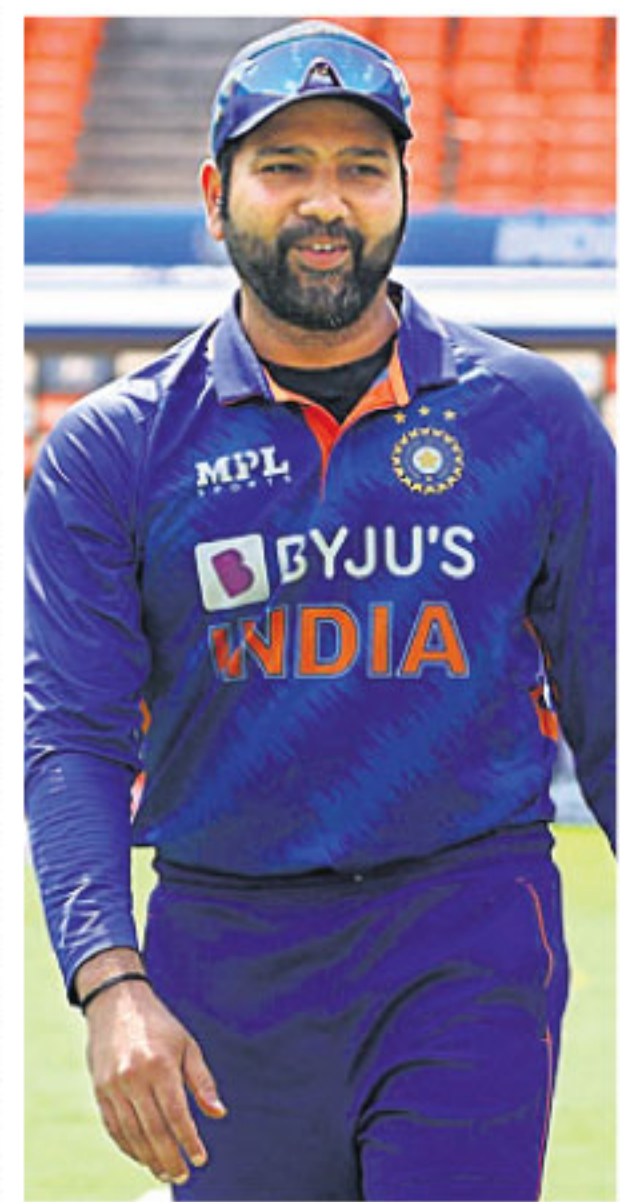
### INDIA SQUAD

Rohit Sharma (C), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shreyas Iyer, Sanju Samson, Ishan Kishan (wk), Venkatesh Iyer, Deepak Hooda, Ravindra Jadeja, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravi Bishnoi, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Harshal Patel, Jasprit Bumrah (vc), Avesh Khan.



(FROM L): Skipper Rohit Sharma, head coach Rahul Dravid, batting coach Vikram Rathour and vice-captain Jasprit Bumrah look on during India's practice session ahead of the T20I series against Sri Lanka

# Rohit opens up on grooming future leaders



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

**Lucknow, Feb 23:** He was groomed by someone when he rose through the ranks and India's new all-format skipper Rohit Sharma Wednesday said he would like to follow that "natural process" of preparing his heir apparent for the big job when the time comes.

The 34-year-old, who was recently appointed the skipper of India's Test team, also dispelled doubts about his availability across formats in a hectic calendar stating that he would be playing in "all games". While he expects the three potential future captains - KL Rahul, Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant - to grow organically as leaders, he did outline his own role in being the bridge.

"I won't have that much of a role in telling them everything and obviously they all are mature cricketers but someone needs to be

around to help them and guide them in difficult situations," Rohit said on the eve of the T20I series against Sri Lanka.

"I will be more than happy to do that and that is how we have grown up and come through the ranks of becoming captain," he added.

Although he didn't take any names, it was MS Dhoni, who had earmarked both Virat Kohli and Rohit as flag-bearers of Indian cricket during his tenure as captain.

"We were also groomed by someone else. It's a natural process and everyone goes through this, we are no different here and we are same. If we talk of Bumrah, KL, Pant, all these guys, they have a big role to play in India's success and at the same time, (they are) looked upon as leaders as well." But while he wants to prepare them for bigger roles, he also doesn't want them to deviate from their primary target,

which is to win games for India.

"They do understand what they need to do as individuals and there's a responsibility on their shoulders and again I don't want to put any pressure on them, these guys are very critical to us and we want these guys to come out freely and execute skills," explained Rohit.

### A fast bowling vice-captain

For this series, Rohit will have Jasprit Bumrah as his vice-captain with Rishabh Pant rested and KL Rahul injured. Asked what he thought about a bowler as deputy, Rohit said it's the mind that matters and not the specific skill-set.

"Doesn't really matter too much, (whether) it's a batter or a bowler. It's the mind that matters of that individual and I think Jasprit Bumrah has a great mind. I have seen it closely, so honestly yes, it's a good way for him to step into the leadership role and I am sure he has taken the game to

the next level," Rohit said.

### To play all games

Rohit said he has no issues in playing games in bio-secure environments and will only take a break when he feels the need for it. There were questions before Rohit's appointment as Test captain on whether he will be keen on leading across formats given the hectic international schedule but the Indian skipper set the record straight.

"At the moment, I have no issues and (I am) looking forward to playing all the games," Rohit said. "The workload always depends on what happens thereafter and you take it day by day and understand what you do and if a break is needed, you take a break and someone else comes in."

"You see how the other guy who can fill in, what sort of potential he has. At the moment, it seems to be okay," the skipper said.

### Roadmap on workload

Rohit said that an elaborate roadmap is being prepared for workload management during a season when India is playing Sri Lanka at home, followed by IPL, an away tour of England, a home series against South Africa, the away tour of Zimbabwe, the Asia Cup in Pakistan and then the big T20 World Cup in Australia.

"I am very clear in my mind as to how I want to take this forward. Obviously, managing workload, not just me but everyone will be key moving forward," he stressed.

"We have already seen a lot of injuries in our squad and we have to be careful what we do with individuals and how we rotate them. How we give them that break time that they need from the game, so we are trying to manage that and make a road-map on how we want to move forward," he added.