

Voters outnumber Maha's adult population: Rahul

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, Feb 7: The Congress, Shiv Sena-UBT and NCP-SP Friday alleged irregularities in the voter lists of Maharashtra, claiming that a total of 39 lakh voters were added between Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the state.

Addressing a joint press conference here, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed that the total number of voters added in Maharashtra was equivalent to the population of a state like Himachal Pradesh, and urged the EC to provide them list of voters and come clean on the issue.

He claimed the majority of the voters added have gone in the BJP's favour as the Oppo-

sition parties have maintained their vote share in the Assembly polls. Flanked by NCP-SP's Supriya Sule and Sena's Sanjay Raut, Gandhi said the adult population of Maharashtra is 9.54 crore as per government data while the voter population of the state is 9.7 crore.

There are more voters in Maharashtra than total adult population of state, alleged Gandhi. He said while 39 lakh voters were added in Maharashtra in five months after LS polls, as much as 32 lakh votes were added in the state in the previous five years, between 2019 and 2024.

Gandhi said if the EC does not provide the voter lists of Assembly and LS polls, it poses a serious question.



BARABATI BATTLE: All-rounder Hardik Pandya, part of the Indian cricket team, arrives at a City hotel, Friday. The Men in Blue will take on England in the second ODI at Barabati Stadium in Cuttack, Sunday **PICT: BIKASH NAYAK**

RBI cuts repo rate, loans get cheaper

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) reduction of its key interest rate for the first time in almost five years comes at a time when India's GDP growth is projected to slow to a four-year low of 6.7 per cent. Even as the rate drop may result in slightly lower interest rates for mortgages and credit cards, as well as reduced borrowing costs for businesses, investment growth and urban consumption have been declining, while corporate profits have also decreased in the first half of this fiscal. Besides, the RBI's twin objectives of controlling inflation and simultaneously boosting growth appear challenging due to global headwinds stemming from US President Donald Trump's tariff policies, significant outflows of foreign investment, and a depreciating rupee—which is likely to weaken further as rates are lowered. The rupee is currently trading near record lows, largely due to substantial foreign investor withdrawals from the domestic stock market in recent months

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), headed by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra, slashed the repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent. This was the first reduction since May 2020 and the first revision after two-and-a-half years.

Malhotra, a career bureaucrat who replaced Shaktikanta Das barely days after the last bi-monthly MPC meeting in December, said the Indian economy will grow at 6.7 per cent in the fiscal starting April 2025 while inflation rate to be lower at 4.2 per cent.

The growth-inflation dynamics "opens up policy space for the MPC to support growth," he said, adding that the RBI will "remain unambiguously focused on a durable alignment of inflation with the target while supporting growth."

For the financial year ending March 31, the RBI quoted the government estimate to put the growth rate at 6.4 per cent, its worst in four years and lower than 6.6 per cent seen previously, while the inflation was pegged at 4.8 per cent.

While his predecessor held rates in waiting for inflation to drop to the 4 per cent level, the RBI under Malhotra tilted towards supporting growth in the inflation-growth trade-off.

While the policy rate was reduced, the MPC kept the stance unchanged at neutral.

PNN & AGENCIES

Mumbai, Feb 7: Home, auto and other loans are likely to see a drop in interest rates after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under a new Governor cut the key benchmark rate Friday for the first time in almost five years to spur a sluggish economy.

IRREGULAR by MANJUL



The USA is really considerate. They even sent shackles and handcuffs. Maybe we can use them for the Opposition

Corrupt officers won't be spared: CM

POST NEWS NETWORK

Bhubaneswar, Feb 7: Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi Friday said his government will award efficient and good officers and at the same time won't spare officers who indulge in corrupt practices.

Majhi was addressing a function where appointment letters were distributed among 6,390 newly-recruited officers and other staffers of nine government departments.

"Our government will promote honest and efficient officers. But, we will not tol-



erate corruption and officers involved in such practices," Majhi said. "The Vigilance department is very active. So, don't fall for corruption," he

warned the new recruits.

He said that a government job is not just to earn a livelihood, but it is also a major medium for public service.

The government is looking for efficient and honest officers for crucial posts, he said.

"Everyone knows that getting a government job is very difficult in a populated country like ours. Jobs in the government sector are limited. The Central government has only 35 lakh employees while the state has three lakh employees," Majhi said.

"If we fill up all vacant posts,

we will be able to provide jobs to only 4.5 lakh people, which is less than one per cent of the state's population. So, you all are fortunate because you are among this one per cent of the population," the CM added.

Stating that the common people have a lot of expectations from the government, he appealed to the newly-recruited officers to diligently work for people.

"All grassroots-level work is now on your shoulders and I believe that you will be able to discharge your duties responsibly and delicately," he said.

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leisure



MEGAN FOX ENDS HER RELATIONSHIP WITH MACHINE GUN KELLY FOR GOOD

American actress Megan Fox has reportedly ended her relationship with Machine Gun Kelly for good. The pair broke up in December. The *Transformers* actress, 38, got separated from the *Bad Things* rapper, 34, after he was at the centre of cheating rumours

NEW BRITNEY BOOK TO BARE TRUTH OF HER TURBULENT LIFE

Written in the Gonzo journalism style, a new Britney Spears book promising to expose the full truth of her stormy life story is being released. Titled *Waiting for Britney Spears: A True Story, Allegedly* will be out 10 June. It explores the pop star's historic rise and equally tragic fall.



FORTUNE FORECAST

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ARIES
Your progress will be abundant, enabling you to save quite a lot for a rainy day. More agreements are on the cards, and these may prove milestones in your business. Ganesh says that you have worked hard and its fruits lie in the future.

TAURUS
You are likely to show a strong streak of selfishness today, says Ganesh. He urges you not to be too possessive about people or acquisitive about things and objects. Be very particular about this as your self centred tendencies could cause you a lot of grief. Your judgments plans and decisions may not be too reliable.

GEMINI
You may or may not be too open about it, but you love those around you. You can easily sacrifice your ego to ensure that the sentiments of the ones you love are not hurt. But this can take its toll. You are probably planning a trip today – business or pleasure, whatever the excuse may be, the idea is to take a break.

CANCER
In order to protect the feelings and sentiments of those dear to you, you may tend to hide your emotions under the garb of a calm demeanour, predicts Ganesh. In the afternoon, you may set out on a short trip out of town.

LEO
Lady Luck and the goddess of wealth both seem to favour you on this very unique and dynamic day, says Ganesh. So, it should come as no surprise when you gain both – money and power – on the business front. The latter half of the day might find you splurging a bit on jewellery for your sweetheart.

VIRGO
There are chances that today, you will turn to your family for happiness, predicts Ganesh. Of course, you may have to spend a small fortune to please them. Later in the day, you may pen the first chapter of a long-term platonic relationship.

LIBRA
Today promises to be a joy ride for your hidden corpulent side. Relish what you eat, as today you shall take a keen interest in the same. Career wise, you may find yourself standing at crossroads.

SCORPIO
It is highly likely that you will be on the move today, predicts Ganesh. You will be actively shuttling from one location to the other for work or social purposes. Business meetings and conversations will be the basis of all your thoughts. Business proposals may take shape later in the day, feels Ganesh.

SAGITTARIUS
Mysteries that have perplexed and plagued you for the past few days will unravel as the curtain draws from the clandestine, laying bare the aspects you needed an insight into. Any associations you make today will be beneficial in the long run.

CAPRICORN
You may get bogged down with work, and experience enormous stress today, says Ganesh. But, an adept professional, you will not give up easily. Your opponents will take a beating and will start to acknowledge your potential and abilities.

AQUARIUS
Straighten your tie and pull in your tummy, it's time to make an impression! And that's not all; you need to be sharp as important decisions await you. Haste will not do, as these decisions may have a long-term impact, cautions Ganesh.

PISCES
You will be full of energy and enthusiasm today, a fact which owes nothing to the revitalising pills you have added to your diet. You will have a great time making new acquaintances and splurging on someone you think is special, and this too should probably not have anything to do with aforementioned pills. If it does, however, you ought to be wary of starting new 'projects', says Ganesh.

'I love being vulnerable'



Mumbai: In a world where one is questioning if the concept of love has changed, and if the new generation looks at love and relationships from a different lens, Radhika Madan admits, "I am very romantic." Talking about matters of the heart, the Angrezi Medium actress says, "When it comes to love, I'm either all in or all out. There's no midway. I feel a lot of happiness in giving and loving, and I love being vulnerable."

Ask Radhika, if she has ever been in an one-sided love, and she says, "Movies have really somehow conditioned us to romanticize one sided love. I don't believe in that. For me self respect is very important and whoever you are giving love should be it. He takes your love for granted." Radhika was recently seen in a music video, Sahiba, alongside Vijay Deverakonda. The song was based on the theme of unrequited love, and was sung by Jasleen Royal. Radhika is reportedly dating *Call Me Bae* actor, Vihaan Samat, however, she evades the question when asked if they are dating. "I am surrounded by a lot of love," she signs off.



Rajini shares secret behind positive vibes

Chennai: Superstar Rajinikanth has now disclosed the secret behind the positive vibes that emanate from him. The superstar, who is credited with giving out positive vibes by those who have moved with him, said that the secret to his positivity was the Kriya Yoga that he practised. The actor, who is now in Ranchi, visiting the YSS Ashram there, addressed his fans through a video clip that is fast going viral. "If I have to speak about the Kriya... If people say I am very vibrant and that when they meet me, they get positive vibes, the secret to that is I practice Kriya (yoga). From the time I started practising Kriya, the change that has taken place within me -- I don't know how to describe it. It is a kind of silence," he explained. "I started practising Kriya in 2002. It (Kriya) gave me a unique kind of peace always. Despite being in this world and doing worldly tasks, I feel separated (from worldly things)... Without having to make an effort, things happen all by themselves," he said, narrating its benefits. The *Jailer* actor went on to add, "Those who know it are very fortunate. It is a bond that continues for generations. Only when you do the Kriya will you know its effect. I have that experience."



Premiere of Odia Film Misiri

Bhubaneswar: The promising director duo of Sisir Kumar Sahu and Peenakee Singh, who previously garnered critical acclaim for their film *Phalguna Chaitra*, are set to present their latest Odia film, *Misiri*. The premiere of the film was held at Utkal Galleria Friday. Produced by Nirmal Jaiswal under the banners of Reels N Reels and AA Entertainment, the film is co-sponsored by Sthita Patnaik and Akkankshya Padhy. The plot revolves around Sumit, who unexpectedly meets Misiri at a restaurant and falls in love at first sight. As their bond deepens, Sumit discovers Misiri's exceptional artistic talent. However, when he confesses his feelings, Misiri rejects him outright. The narrative takes a dramatic turn when Misiri's old friend Aditya appears and proposes to her. To find out what happens next, audiences are encouraged to visit their nearest theaters, say the filmmakers. "Misiri is not just a love story; it's an emotional roller-coaster that explores passion, conflict, and artistry. We believe the audience will connect deeply with its narrative and performances" they added. The ensemble cast of the movie includes Sthita, Vivash, Nirmal, Prasanjeet, Rupashree, and Abhishek, Eshan, and Kaushik, who have also composed the music.

Rashmika's humility

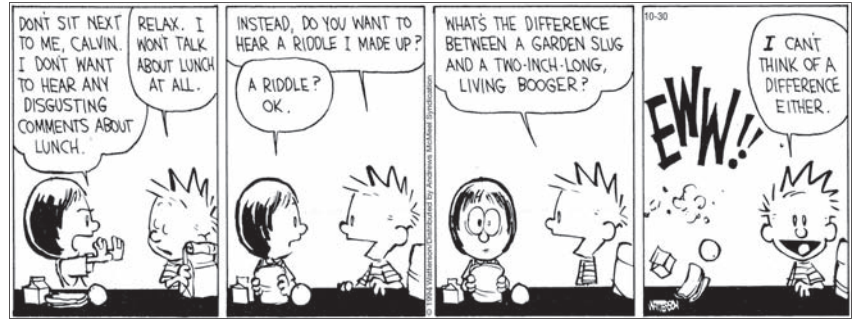
Mumbai: After the grand success of *Pushpa 2 - The Rule*, Rashmika Mandanna is now gearing up for another highly-anticipated magnum. Donning the avatar of a Maharashtrian queen for the first time, the actress will be sharing screen space with Bollywood star Vicky Kaushal in the Laxman Utekar film *Chhaava*. A week ahead of its release, the actress discussed about fame and the need to remain grounded. Rashmika asserted that despite being on a continuous success spree, she believes in staying humble and grounded along with retaining her connect with her roots. While sharing about what keeps her grounded, popular actress Rashmika, said, "My brain is already wired in a way... (I know) that all the things that we adore, all the things we enjoy, all these luxuries, can stay or go in an instant. That is something that keeps me grounded and connected to my roots." It is to be noted that the actress who has given two back-to-back blockbusters in Hindi and Telugu languages, has a lot on her platter in 2025. Starting the year with Vicky Kaushal starrer *Chhaava*, the actress has *Sikandar* with superstar Salman Khan and *Thama* with Ayushmann Khurrana in Hindi. Apart from that, she also has Dhanush, Nagarjuna starrer *Kubera*, *Rainbow*, and *The Girlfriend* in Telugu.



PEANUTS



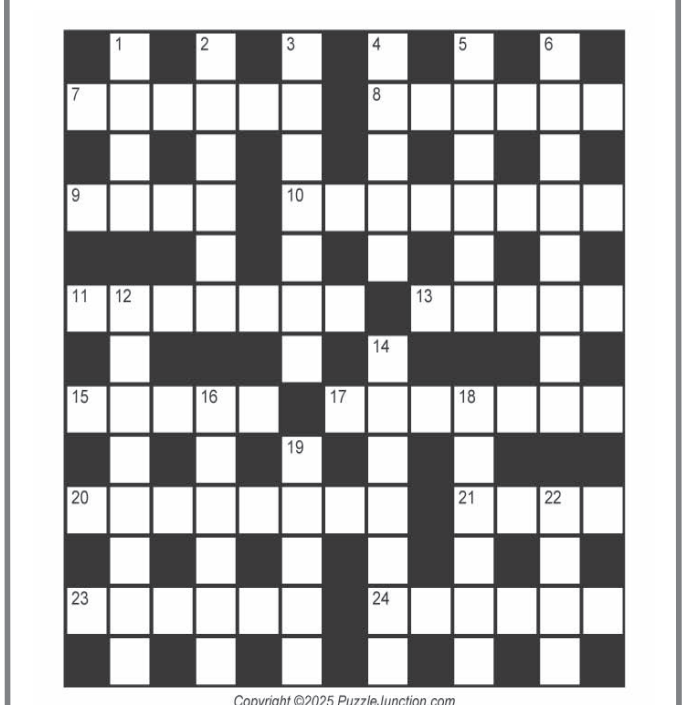
CALVIN AND HOBBS



BREVITY



FUN POST CROSSWORD



- Across**
- 7 Catnap
 - 8 Beloved of Aphrodite
 - 9 Goblet feature
 - 10 Cranky
 - 11 Infatuated
 - 13 Mooring
 - 15 Take forcibly
 - 17 Desert sights
 - 20 Rainy day accessory
- Down**
- 21 ___ d'amore
 - 23 Refugee's request
 - 24 Baby's toy
 - 1 Buzzer pest
 - 2 A clever remark (3,3)
 - 3 Confuse
 - 4 "Yummy!"
 - 5 Sheep dog
 - 6 Brief literary description
 - 12 Motley assortment
 - 14 Founder of Lima
 - 16 Seldom
 - 18 Rabbitlike rodent
 - 19 Artificial waterway
 - 22 Guisado cooker

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.

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

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

W	I	S	H	W	B
G	A	R	N	E	T
F	L	A	N	S	E
F	L	A	X	N	O
H	Z	A	L	H	O
M	A	C	A	D	A
C	U	S	B	R	F
D	A	I	S	E	N
M	E	D	I	A	T
M	B	E	E	L	A
V	I	O	L	I	N
C	E	S	T	R	S

SUDOKU

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

CHECK FOR SOLUTIONS OF THE PUZZLES TOMORROW

PARBATI GIRI MEGA LIFT IRRIGATION PROJECT

No end to wait for water

15 yrs after project's inauguration, irrigation remains a distant dream for many



POST NEWS NETWORK

Jajpur, Feb 7: Nearly 15 years after the inauguration of Parbati Giri Mega Lift Irrigation (LI) Project...

has been made in this regard. According to Kulamani Shukla, chairman of the Bari Dwi-panchala Unnayana Parishad...

planning. Instead of utilising the abundant water resources in Asalpur, officials built an intake point at Kampagada...

Kharasrota river. Farmers Rabindra Behera, Ramesh Behera, and Deepak Behera said they have waited for over a decade for water to flow through the pipelines...

The project was expected to provide irrigation to 2,000 hectare of farmland in Barchana constituency, 3,700 hectare of farmland in Bari constituency...

Despite significant government investment, irrigation projects remain incomplete due to corruption and administrative failures.



JOURNEY BEGINS: Deputy Chief Minister Pravatī Parida flags off a senior citizens' pilgrimage train at Sambalpur railway station, marking the commencement of its journey, Friday

Leopard hide seized; 6 detained



POST NEWS NETWORK

Baripada, Feb 7: A special team of the Forest department Friday seized a leopard skin under Karanja forest division in Mayurbhanj district.

and width of the hide. DFO Nayak speculated that the leopard was relatively young at the time of its death.

A sample of the seized skin will be sent to the National Centre for Biological Sciences in Bangalore for further examination.

Conservation groups are calling for stricter patrolling in border areas to curb wildlife crime and protect endangered species.

Couple killed, 3 others injured as brick-laden tractor-trolley overturns

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Koraput, Feb 7: A couple was killed and three others were seriously injured when a brick-laden tractor-trolley overturned in Rayagada district Friday, police said.

The accident took place when the driver of the Gunupur-bound tractor-trolley, which was coming from Gulamunda Paka, lost control over the vehicle...

The injured were immediately rushed to Gunupur hospital for treatment. One critically injured person was later referred to the district headquarters hospital in Paralakhemundi after his condition worsened, he added.

They were daily wage labourers from Ompera village, he said, adding an investigation has been launched into the incident.

Wildfire razes Mitrabhanu forest in Keonjhar



POST NEWS NETWORK

Keonjhar, Feb 7: Due to a lack of proper supervision by the Forest department, wildfires continue to consume forests in Keonjhar district.

Locals blamed the Forest department's inefficiency for the destruction, alleging that thousands of young trees were charred due to poor management.

Residents further claimed that guards assigned to maintain the afforestation work were often deployed elsewhere, leading to negligence.

247 kg ganja seized from Koraput kendu leaf godown



POST NEWS NETWORK

Jeypore, Feb 7: Acting on a tip-off received during routine patrol, Jeypore Sadar police here have seized over 247 kg ganja from a Kendu leaf warehouse managed by the Odisha Forest Development Corporation...

The police raided the warehouse Wednesday at approximately 4:30pm and investigation ran well into the night. Upon reaching the site, officers found the warehouse's doors unsecured, but locked with a padlock.

3 workers injured in blast furnace mishap

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Rourkela, Feb 7: At least three workers were injured in an accident at a blast furnace here Friday evening, a police officer said.

The three workers came across hot metals and suffered injuries, the officer said. They have been admitted to a private hospital, where two were discharged after treatment...

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, BHUBANESWAR (R&B) DIVISION NO.1, BHUBANESWAR 1st CORRIGENDUM TO TENDER CALL NOTICE No. 64 (Estg.) of 2024-25

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MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS IN RAJOURI

38 patients discharged after complete recovery

MP to get new tiger reserve soon: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Feb 7: Thirty-eight patients, who were admitted to different hospitals after falling ill due to a mysterious illness at Badhaal village in J&K's Rajouri district, have been discharged after complete recovery, officials said.

Currently, 363 individuals from 60 families remain quarantined in various facilities across Rajouri, they informed a meeting of health professionals and police personnel chaired by Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo Thursday. The mysterious illness has claimed 17 lives from three families in Badhaal between December 7 and January 19.

Health Secretary Syed Abid Rashid Shah briefed the meeting, stating that every measure has been taken to isolate the affected families and provide them with food and water after testing. "Out of the 55 symptomatic persons, 38 have been discharged after recovery, while 17 deaths have been registered so far," Shah said.

There are currently no new admissions in hospitals, and the existing patients have been examined by teams of doctors from PGIMER, Chandigarh, and AIIMS, New Delhi, he said. Health teams remain stationed in the village to monitor any new symptoms among the residents, who have all been screened by the healthcare



providers, Shah added. Divisional Commissioner (Jammu) Ramesh Kumar said that no food or eatables were being exchanged among the families, who have been placed under continuous surveillance.

"At present, 363 individuals from 60 different families have been quarantined, with 592 ani-

mals being tended to by the officials from the animal and sheep husbandry department to safeguard their health," he said. Assessing the efforts to safeguard lives and identify the cause of deaths, Dulloo emphasised the need for continued vigilance and instructed the sampling of locally used fertilisers, pesticides, and insecticides to determine the root cause.

He also called for enhancing local hospital facilities to handle similar situations in the future, including additional ICU beds, oxygen plants, isolation wards, and availability of specific drugs and specialists. The chief secretary urged AIIMS Delhi to support the local medical staff in capacity building

and suggested sending doctors for specialised training and roping in experts to assist in building hospital capacity in the Union Territory.

Simultaneously, Dulloo directed the law enforcement agencies to expedite investigations based on the test reports received, and those awaited from different institutions. Officials said that to ensure the safety of the remaining households in Badhaal, the village has been divided into 14 clusters which are being monitored by multi-department teams.

All shops and establishments in the village continue to remain sealed, while ration distribution is being strictly supervised, they said.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Feb 7: Madhav National Park (MNP) in Shivpuri district will soon become the ninth tiger reserve of Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said Thursday.

He made the announcement in a video message released to the media. The National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) December 1 technical committee approved the proposal to designate Madhav National Park as a tiger reserve, an official said, adding the state government's nod is awaited.

"At present, MNP, spread over an area of 375 square kilometres, has three tigers. Two cubs have also been spotted. Moreover, two tigers will be brought to MNP in March," its director Uttam Sharma said.

More than 1200 square kilometres of forest area will be added to the park in order to turn into a reserve, he added. "MP has eight tiger reserves, which is the highest for any state in the country," wildlife expert Ajay Dube told PTI.

The eight are Kanha, Satpura, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Sanjay Dubri, Panna, Veerangana Durgavati and Ratapani. In the first week of December, the Madhya Pradesh government notified Ratapani forest in Raisen district as the eighth tiger reserve. As per the 'Status of Tigers: Co-predators & Prey in India-2022' report released by NTCA and Wildlife Institute of India, the tiger population in Madhya Pradesh is estimated to be 785, the highest in the country, followed by Karnataka at 563 and Uttarakhand at 560.

MP's strategic push for startups

The state government introduced the 'MP Startup Policy and Implementation Scheme 2022' that offers startups a financial support of up to 18 per cent of their total funding or investment, subject to a cap of Rs 18 lakh, according to the policy document

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Bhopal, Feb 7: Madhya Pradesh is offering financial assistance as well as a comprehensive framework to foster a robust startup ecosystem that could incubate innovations and create employment.

The state government introduced the 'MP Startup Policy and Implementation Scheme 2022' that offers startups a financial support of up to 18 per cent of their total funding or investment, subject to a cap of Rs 18 lakh, according to the policy document.

This assistance is provided separately for each investment stage, with a maximum of four stages during the startup's lifecycle. The policy outlines a comprehensive framework for the establishment and growth of startups, including financial incentives, infrastructure support, and capacity-building initiatives.

Madhya Pradesh, often referred to as the heart of India, is brimming with natural resources and boasts over 300 industrial parks. With a population exceeding 8 crore, the state is home to a thriving talent pool, with fresh graduates emerging annually from more than 1,287 industrial training institutes, 1,373 government and private colleges, and several top-tier universities, including IIT and IIM in Indore.

The state's commitment to fostering entrepreneurship is

evident in its strategic policies, which have led to the establishment of over 4,900 recognised startups. With industrial parks dedicated to various sectors such as IT, semiconductors, textiles, automotive, and solar, Madhya Pradesh offers an ideal environment for new businesses to thrive. During a recent visit to Japan, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav reiterated the state's dedication to supporting investors, emphasising stable policy frameworks to back their investments. Currently, the state has a land bank of over 1 lakh acres available for industrial development.

In its pursuit of innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation, the Madhya Pradesh government has introduced a new policy that supports startups with capital assistance. The state is also actively promoting the spirit of entrepreneurship among school and college students. Madhya Pradesh aims to achieve 100 per cent growth in startup registrations under the Startup India initiative, as well as a 200 per cent growth in startups within the agriculture and food sectors. The state currently houses 72 incubators and has set a target to increase the number of product-based startups.

The state government is making special efforts to inculcate the spirit of innovation and startup among the students enrolled in schools and colleges. Madhya Pradesh at present has 72 state-wide incubators.



Tourists take 'shikara' rides at the Dal Lake on a sunny winter afternoon in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir

PTI PHOTO

'Ensure priority, protocol to MLAs'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Feb 7: The Jammu and Kashmir government Friday issued a directive to its employees, directing them to ensure that all elected representatives are attended to on priority in public offices and that proper protocol as per established government norms and guidelines is maintained.

The directive also emphasised that MLAs should be invited to all official functions and meetings organised within their jurisdiction.

"The elected Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir are expected to play a crucial role in the governance process at the grassroots level. It is, therefore, imperative that all government departments, officers and officials extend due cooperation and accord priority to issues highlighted and flagged by these public representatives," stated a circular issued by General Administration Department (GAD) secretary M Raju Friday.

He further directed that all officers and officials working in various government depart-



The directive also emphasised that MLAs should be invited to all official functions and meetings organised within their jurisdiction

ments of the Union Territory must attend to the elected representatives on priority in public offices and adhere to proper protocol as per established government norms and guidelines.

"Communications, requests and grievances raised by elected representatives shall be acknowledged and processed on priority and government officers and officials shall engage with them in a professional and respectful manner," the circular said. It also specified that elected representatives should

be invited to all official functions and meetings organized in their jurisdiction, including events involving official visits by dignitaries.

"These instructions are issued for immediate and strict compliance," the circular added. This directive is particularly significant given the dual power structure in Jammu and Kashmir.

The circular has been issued ahead of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly's Budget Session, which is set to begin March 3.

Sena (UBT) holds protest in Jammu

Carrying placards bearing slogans like "Send Back Sheikh Hasina, Seema Haider" and "Deport illegal Rohingyas, Bangladeshis", activists raised slogans seeking the removal of all illegal Bangladeshis & Rohingya immigrants from India, including Sheikh Hasina

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Jammu, Feb 7: The Shiv Sena held a protest demonstration here Friday, asking the Centre to draw inspiration from the US and deport illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingya immigrants from the country with a particular focus on Jammu and Kashmir.

Scores of activists in the city participated in the demonstration led by Shiv Sena (UBT) J&K unit chief Manish Sahni.

Carrying placards bearing slogans like "Send Back Sheikh Hasina, Seema Haider" and "Deport illegal Rohingyas, Bangladeshis", they raised slogans seeking the removal of all illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingya immigrants from India, including Sheikh Hasina.

"The government of India should take a cue from the Donald Trump administration and promptly deport all illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas immigrants, including Pakistani woman Seema Haider

and former Bangladeshi president Sheikh Hasina," Sahni told reporters.

Sahni highlighted ongoing attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, citing a recent incident during a live speech by former president Sheikh Hasina in Fudki village, Rajshahi district. "The idol of Saraswati Devi in the temple was desecrated. Attacks on Hindus have persisted unabated since the change in leadership. We must expel all Bangladeshis from the country," he asserted.

Sahni criticised the BJP's stance on Rohingya immigrants and illegal Bangladeshis as mere election rhetoric. "Despite tensions with Bangladesh, approximately 856 kilometres of the Indo-Bangladesh border remain unfenced. Nothing has been done to deport them," he said. Referring to the 2007 data indicating 1.2 crore illegal Bangladeshis in India, Sahni said today's estimates exceed two crore.

"While India shelters Sheikh Hasina, the Hindu community bears the brunt. Meanwhile, Pakistani woman Seema Haider, who illegally entered India with her four children two years ago, is expecting her fifth child today. In contrast, America is deporting Indians in chains," Sahni added.

He also highlighted the presence of Rohingya immigrants in sensitive areas of J&K, suggesting their numbers exceed official figures.

Row over Waqf Board properties survey in MP

INDO-ASIAN NEW SERVICE

Bhopal, Feb 7: A controversy has erupted over the survey of Waqf Board properties here in Madhya Pradesh after Congress MLA Arif Masood demanded that the ongoing physical survey be stopped.

Masood, who is an MLA from Bhopal Madhya Assembly seat, has written letters to Madhya Pradesh Chief Secretary Anurag Jain, expressing concern over the survey of Waqf Board properties in Madhya Pradesh.

In his letter, the Congress MLA said that the rules being followed for the Waqf Board properties could lead to a future dispute, claiming that documents of most of the properties are incomplete. He also accused the state government of presenting "incorrect" data

in the name of the survey.

"Documents of various properties of Waqf Board are incomplete, therefore, conducting a survey of such properties won't be easy. This could lead to a major dispute on such properties. I have written a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Madhya Pradesh government and has demanded that the ongoing survey should be stopped," Masood told IANS.

Meanwhile, the Congress MLA has also appealed to the representatives of Muslim organisations to come forward to oppose the survey of Waqf Board properties and register their complaints with district administrations.

Responding to Masood's allegation, senior BJP leader and Madhya Pradesh Public Works Department (PWD)



Minister, Rakesh Singh, said the survey is being conducted on the recommendation of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) and there should be no objection to it.

"Some people are in politics to create controversies only. They don't want to get things settled. This step (survey) has been taken to make properties encroached-free and stop corruption in Waqf Boards. Some

selective people are opposing it for their vested interest, otherwise majority of people of the minority community have welcomed the survey," he added.

Notably, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), has recently demanded details of Waqf Board properties in Madhya Pradesh.

There are 14,986 properties of the Waqf Board and the JPC has demanded details, including cur-

rent status, khashra numbers, and other records.

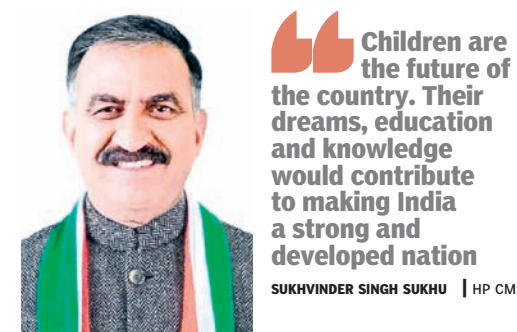
State governments have also been asked to share details of cases where their authorities are engaged in a legal dispute with Waqf boards over ownership or possession of any property.

Madhya Pradesh Waqf Board Chairman Sanwar Patel has earlier said that JPC has demanded information on 15 heads and 12 out of them are related directly to the Waqf Board and the rest of the heads are related to the Collector and the Revenue Department.

According to sources, the Madhya Pradesh government had informed the JPC that the State Waqf Board oversees 14,921 registered properties spanning 52,752 acres, as documented in official records.

CRPF chief reviews J&K security situation

RAJOURI/JAMMU: CRPF Director General GP Singh reviewed the security situation and the force's operational preparedness during a recent two-day visit to the forward areas in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, officials said Friday. Singh also met Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Thursday and briefed him about the force's preparedness for counter-terrorism operations and managing law-and-order situations. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) chief visited the Kalakote, Koprato, and the Thanamandi camps in the border district during his two-day visit, the officials said. He reviewed the overall security situation, apart from the troops' operational preparedness, they added. Singh interacted with personnel at the new Kopra Counter Insurgency camp, established under the CRPF's 237 Battalion, in Koprato - a site that witnessed significant terror activity during the past four years. He also engaged with officers and jawans, listening to their operational experiences.



Children are the future of the country. Their dreams, education and knowledge would contribute to making India a strong and developed nation

NEET-PG 2024: SC JUNKS PLEA FOR FRESH COUNSELLING

The Supreme Court Friday dismissed a plea seeking directions to cancel the all India quota (AIQ) round 3 of NEET-PG 2024 counselling and to conduct it afresh.



of the day uote

The BJP is preventing PDA (Pichre, Dalit and Alpashankhak) people from holding positions like CO (Circle Officer) and SO (Station Officer).

Rahul Gandhi is doing cover firing after sensing huge defeat for the Congress in the Delhi Vidhan Sabha elections

A major breakthrough in Mumbai with the seizure of very high-grade cocaine, ganja, and cannabis gummies and the arrest of four people

DELHI POLL RESULTS TODAY AAP, BJP in intense battle for glory



On the eve of the poll results, high political drama unfolded outside Kejriwal's residence as a team of Anti-Corruption Branch reached there, seeking details and evidence regarding his allegations that BJP attempted to poach AAP candidates

ty will win nearly 50 seats. The AAP has rejected the exit poll predictions, asserting it will form the government again with its convener Kejriwal becoming Chief Minister for the fourth time.

reached there, seeking details and evidence regarding his allegations that the BJP attempted to poach the Aam Aadmi Party candidates.

As Kejriwal did not meet ACB officials at his 5, Ferozeshah Road bungalow, they served him a legal notice seeking proof.

SHORT TAKES

6 killed in road accident in MP

Mhow (MP): Six persons, among them two women, were killed and 16 sustained injuries in an accident involving a two-wheeler, a private minibus and a trailer truck in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district

BSF arrests 7 infiltrators

Kolkata: The BSF has apprehended seven Bangladeshi infiltrators and three Indian touts in a major operation along the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal's Nadia and Murshidabad districts

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS

Court defers verdict against Sajjan Kumar

New Delhi, Feb 7: A Delhi court Friday deferred to February 12 its verdict in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots murder case against former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar.

Patanjali expands in YEIDA region

AGENCIES

New Delhi, Feb 7: Patanjali Group is rapidly expanding its industrial operations in the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) region.



UP' mission. Once fully operational, the park is expected to create over 3,000 jobs, benefiting the local community.

pressed his commitment to supporting industrial projects, improving infrastructure, and attracting investments. He assured that all projects would be closely monitored to ensure balanced and inclusive growth.

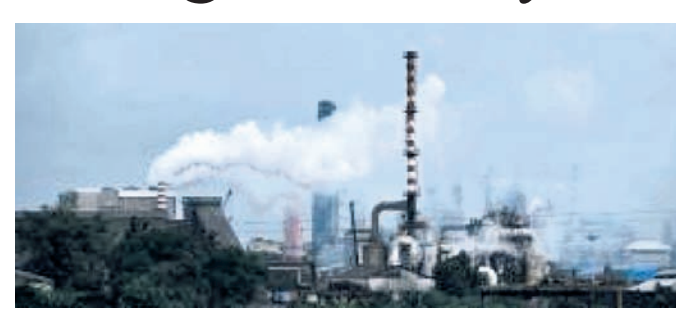
Cabinet approves ₹8,800cr to Skill India Programme

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: The Union Cabinet Friday approved the continuation and restructuring of central sector scheme 'Skill India Programme' till 2026 with an overlay outlay of ₹8,800 crore.

India's new climate targets to reflect limited resources

Countries are required to submit their next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), or climate plans, for the 2031-2035 period this year.



temperature rise since the start of the industrial revolution to the 2015 Paris Agreement.

to deliver a new and ambitious financial package to support climate action in the developing world at the UN climate conference in Azerbaijan last year.

billion for climate projects through the financial mechanism of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

NEET-UG to be conducted May 4

New Delhi: The medical entrance exam NEET-UG will be conducted May 4, the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced Friday.

3 killed after car hits bike

Jaipur: Three people were killed when a car hit their bike in Rajasthan's Bikaner district, police said Friday.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: India is likely to submit its next round of climate targets closer to the UN climate conference in Brazil and these will be based on the limited resources available to the country, sources have said.

their plans by September at the latest. An official source told PTI that India has not yet finalised its new NDCs.

India's Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said that domestic resources will be the key to climate action amid the lack of support from developed countries.

The government informed Parliament Thursday that India has so far received \$1.16



I held pre-budget consultations with various stakeholders from industry, tourism, and education, ensuring their concerns shape our budget and policies
OMAR ABDULLAH | J&K CM

ADANI'S SON MARRIES IN INTIMATE CEREMONY

Billionaire Gautam Adani's younger son Jeet Friday married fiancée Diva Shah at a small and intimate, traditional ceremony with a close group of friends and family in attendance



of the day uote

Just as the Opposition could not believe that its defeat was genuine, the BJP did not find its own victory believable



UDDHAV THACKERAY | SHIV SENA (UBT) CHIEF

Why were more voters added after the Lok Sabha elections? Who are these 39 lakh individuals? Notably, 39 lakh voters are equivalent to the entire voter population of Himachal Pradesh, added in a remarkably short period



RAHUL GANDHI | CONGRESS LEADER

The Uttar Pradesh government is so insensitive that it has not yet released a correct list of the missing and the dead



AJAY RAI | UP CONG CHIEF

POST OF THE DAY

Maharashtra total voters as per EC data:
2019 Loksabha: 8,86,76,946
2019 Assembly: 8,98,38,267
2024 Loksabha: 9,30,61,760
2024 Assembly: 9,70,25,119
44 lakh voters added in 5 years
40 lakh voters added in 5 months
Agree or Die, Maharashtra Election was rigged.

@mohitlaws

SHORT TAKES

Cabinet clears new I-T Bill

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet Friday approved the new income tax Bill, which will replace the six decades old I-T Act, sources said. The new Bill seeks to make direct tax law simple to understand and not to impose any new tax burden. It will not have provisos and explanations or long sentences. The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the New Income Tax Bill, sources said. Sources said the new income tax Bill will now be introduced in the Parliament next week and would be sent to Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance.

Mumbai reports first case of GBS

Mumbai: Mumbai reported its first case of Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) Friday after a 64-year-old woman was diagnosed with the rare nerve disorder, civic officials said. GBS is a rare condition in which a person's immune system attacks the peripheral nerves, resulting in muscle weakness, loss of sensation in the legs and/or arms, as well as problems swallowing or breathing. Talking to PTI, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) commissioner and its state-appointed administrator Bhushan Gagrani said the patient was currently undergoing treatment.

IAF personnel dies in parachute mishap

Agra (UP): An Air Force warrant officer lost his life during a parachute training exercise in Agra Friday, police said. Wing Commander Rohit Dahiya and 12 trainee jumpers, including Warrant Officer Manjunath, jumped from an Air Force aircraft at 8:30 am. While 11 jumpers landed safely, Warrant Officer Manjunath's parachute failed to open and he subsequently fell into a wheat field. The fellow air force personnel immediately responded to the incident and rushed him to the Air Force Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

ARREST OF INDIAN FISHERFOLK BY SL

Oppn seeks govt's intervention

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: Led by the DMK, the Opposition MPs Friday raised the issue of Tamil fisherfolk being arrested and their boats seized by the Sri Lankan Navy, and urged the Union government to find a lasting solution to the vexed issue.

The MPs held a protest in the Parliament complex before the House met Friday and also raised the issue in Lok Sabha later. The protest was joined by parliamentarians from several other Opposition parties, including the Congress and Left MPs from Tamil Nadu. Other leaders who were a part of the protest included Derek O'Brien of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Sudama Prasad of the CPI(ML) Liberation.

The protesting MPs held up placards with slogans that read "Justice For Tamil Fisherman", "Bring Back Our Fishermen", "No More Arrests" and "Tamil Nadu Fishermen Are Indians". DMK MP Tiruchi Siva said the matter of Tamil fisherfolk's arrest was a national issue as they were Indians being mistreated by Sri Lanka.

"Many other parties also took part in the protest. It is an issue which should not be restricted to the state. They are Tamil fishermen, they are Indians," Siva told PTI. "Fishermen are being tortured, harassed and killed for years and the government does not take any concrete steps to resolve the issue. Earlier, they (Sri Lankan authorities) used to assault them and take away their catch. Recently, they have started using weapons to shoot



The MPs held a protest in the Parliament complex before the House met Friday and also raised the issue in Lok Sabha

The protest was joined by parliamentarians from several other Opposition parties, including the Congress and Left MPs from Tamil Nadu

Other leaders who were a part of the protest included Derek O'Brien of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Sudama Prasad of the CPI(ML) Liberation

the poor fishermen," the Rajya Sabha member said. He claimed that the fisherfolk are scared of venturing out to sea, disrupting their livelihood. Siva also said there was a proposal to include these fisherfolk in the Scheduled Tribe category. Congress MP Manickam Tagore also demanded the Centre's intervention in the matter and engagement with the Sri Lankan government. "We are protesting against the continuing arrests of Tamil fishermen by Sri Lanka..." the Lok Sabha member said. "The government of India must intervene. It should talk to the Sri Lankan authorities and stop the seizure of boats and other material from the

fishermen," he said. DMK MP Kanimozhi said Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar several times on the matter, urging them to find a permanent solution. "The Sri Lankan Navy has been arresting and harassing Tamil Nadu's fishermen... The Union government has not done anything. We demand that the fishermen be released, the boats returned and a permanent solution found," the Lok Sabha member said. When Lok Sabha met at 11 am, the DMK members raised slogans demanding a permanent solution. On the Chair's

permission, party MP Kanimozhi said fishermen from the state are being harassed and arrested by the Sri Lankan authorities and more than 97 of them are lodged in jails of the neighbouring country. She claimed that the fishermen are shot at and tortured, and over 210 fishing boats have been seized by Sri Lanka, impacting their livelihood. The Tamil fisherfolk issue has been a bone of contention between India and Sri Lanka for several years. The island nation's navy has repeatedly been accused of firing at the Indian fisherfolk, who allegedly entered its territorial waters in the Palk Strait, and seizing their boats. Earlier this month, the Sri Lankan authorities arrested 10 Indian fisherfolk and seized their boat for allegedly venturing into its territorial waters. In 2024, the Sri Lankan Navy arrested more than 550 Indian fisherfolk for alleged illegal fishing.

Fire at camp in Maha Kumbh Mela, none hurt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Mahakumbh Nagar, Feb 7: A fire broke out at the ISKCON camp in Mahakumbh Nagar Friday and quickly spread to over a dozen nearby camps, officials said. No casualties have been reported.

Chief Fire Officer Pramod Sharma told PTI, "Upon receiving information about the fire at the ISKCON camp in Sector 18, fire tenders were immediately dispatched. The fire has been fully contained." The fire spread to over a dozen nearby camps, causing significant damage.

Officials said the cause of the fire and the damage incurred due to it were being ascertained, officials said. DIG (Maha Kumbh) Vaibhav Krishna said the fire incident has "completely been controlled" by the fire brigades. This is the third time that a fire incident has been reported in the Kumbh Mela area. On January 19, a massive fire broke out in the Maha Kumbh Mela area's Sector 19 due to a cylinder blast.



Artistes perform during the 38th Surajkund International Crafts Fair, at Surajkund in Faridabad

India criticises US deportation, calls for fair treatment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: India Friday said it has registered concerns with the US over the deportation of illegal immigrants in shackles and conveyed that this kind of treatment could have been avoided.

The remarks of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri came amid uproar over the deportation of illegal Indian immigrants by the US in handcuffs during their 40-hour flight onboard a military aircraft. "We do make our concerns known to the United States that this kind of treatment can perhaps be avoided," the foreign secretary said in response to questions on the deportation. Misri said there are as many as 487 presumed Indian citizens with final removal orders from

the US authorities and details of 298 people have been shared with India. He said the information shared by the US authorities was being verified. He said the US policy of deporting illegal immigrants in restraints has been in place since 2012. "I don't think there was any protest. We don't have any record of any protest having been made about it," the foreign secretary said to a question on whether India had registered its protest on deportation of illegal immigrants in shackles in 2012. He referred to the statement by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in Parliament Thursday. "The description by the EAM of the standard operating procedure relating to the use of restraints which has been communicated to us



by US authorities including the immigration and customs enforcement," Misri said. He said the minister attracted attention to the fact that these have been in practice for a long period of time since 2012. The foreign secretary said India continued to emphasise to US authorities that there

PM Modi to meet Trump next week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a two-day working visit to the US from February 12 during which he will meet President Donald Trump, the external affairs ministry Friday announced.

Addressing a press conference, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said Modi's visit will give further impetus and direction to India-US bilateral relationship. Prior to his US visit, Modi will be in France from February 10-12 to co-chair the AI Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron.

He will also visit Cadarache, the site of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor of which India is a partner, Misri said. "This will be the first visit of Prime Minister Modi to the United States since the inauguration of the second presidential term of US President Donald Trump," he said.

"The fact that the Prime Minister has been invited to visit the US within barely three weeks of the new administration taking office shows the importance of the India-US partnership and is also reflective of the bipartisan support this partnership enjoys in the US," the foreign secretary said. During his visit to France from February 10-12, Modi and Macron will also address the India-France CEOs forum. The prime minister and Macron will travel to Marseille where they will inaugurate the Consulate General of India. The leaders will also visit the war cemetery and pay



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Prior to his US visit, Modi will be in France from February 10-12 to co-chair the AI Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron

tribute to the sacrifices made by Indian soldiers in World War 1. Modi and Macron will visit Cadarache, the site of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER). Misri said there has been a very close rapport between Trump and Modi, dating back to the US leader's first term. "There is a clear convergence of interests between the two countries in several areas, including trade, investment, technology, defense cooperation, counterterrorism, Indo-Pacific security, and people-to-people relations," he said. "The 5.4 million-strong Indian community in the US and the more than 350,000 Indian students pursuing higher education in American universities further strengthen this bond," he said.

Bank unions give two-day strike call beginning March 24

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, Feb 7: Bank unions have given a two-day nationwide strike call beginning March 24 to press for their various demands, including a 5-day work week and adequate recruitment in all cadres.

The strike call given by United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU), an umbrella organisation of 9 bank employees association, is also pitched for filling up the post of workmen/officer directors in public sector banks. After due discussions and deliberations, it has been decided to launch an agitation programme culminating in two days of continuous strike March 24 and 25, 2025, UFBU said in a statement Friday. Besides, the UFBU has demanded immediate withdrawal of the recent directives of the Department of Financial Services (DFS) on performance review and performance-linked incentives, which threaten job security and create division amongst employees. The UFBU alleged that micro-management of PSBs on policy matters by the DFS undermined the autonomy of respective boards. It also demanded resolution of residual issues pending with Indian Banks' Association (IBA) and for amending Gratuity Act to increase the ceiling to ₹25 lakh on the lines of scheme for government employees along with exemption from income tax.

Members of UFBU include All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA), All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC), National Confederation of Bank Employees (NCBE), All India Bank Officers' Association (AIBOA) and Bank Employees Confederation of India (BEFI). AIBOC has decided to change the strike dates aligning with the dates as decided by UFBU being one of the major constituents of UFBU, its general secretary Rupam Roy said. Earlier, AIBOC had threatened to go on a two-day nationwide strike February 24-25, 2025.



Negotiations with America are not intelligent, wise or honourable. AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI | SUPREME LEADER, IRAN

NO PHONES IN SCHOOLS

Brazilian students returned to class this week with a new task: staying away from their smartphones as a new law restricting their use in schools takes effect. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva signed a bill in January limiting smartphone access at schools, in line with a trend seen in the US and Europe



of the day quote

And we have set clear red lines from the United States that they (Hezbollah) won't be able to terrorize the Lebanese people, and that includes by being a part of the government



MORGAN ORTIGAS | US DEPUTY MIDDLE EAST ENVOY

With these mass violations of human rights we need someone in UN system to investigate now



PAUL EMPOLE LOSOKO EFAME | CONGO'S AMBASSADOR FOR UN

We are very near to really ending this war by a just and lasting peace, but (it's) necessary to be together... Not to give Russia an opportunity to divide the world, to divide partners



ANDRIY YERMAK | UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT'S CHIEF OF STAFF

TRUMP SANCTIONS ICC

The US prez's move coincided with a visit to Washington by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is wanted by the ICC over the war in Gaza

REUTERS

Washington, Feb 7: US President Donald Trump has authorized economic and travel sanctions targeting people who work on International Criminal Court investigations of US citizens or US allies such as Israel, drawing condemnation - but also some praise - abroad.

The ICC is a permanent court that can prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression against the territory of member states or by their nationals.

The ICC condemned the sanctions.

"The court stands firmly by its personnel and pledges to continue providing justice and hope to millions of innocent victims of atrocities across the world, in all situations before it," it said Friday.

The ICC also called on its 125 member states to support its staff. Many in Europe did so.

"Sanctioning the ICC threatens the Court's independence and undermines the international criminal justice system as a whole," Antonio Costa, the president of EU leaders, wrote on social media platform Bluesky.

The Netherlands, the host nation of the court based in The Hague, also said it regretted the sanctions, as did European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen.

"The court's work is essential



IN FIRST TRUMP TERM, ICC PROSECUTOR, SENIOR AIDE SANCTIONED. UNCLEAR HOW QUICKLY US WILL ANNOUNCE DESIGNATIONS. ICC HAS ISSUED ARREST WARRANTS FOR NETANYAHU, PUTIN

It's time for Hungary to review what we're doing in an international organization that is under US sanctions! New winds are blowing in international politics. We call it the Trump-tornado

VIKTOR ORBAN | PM, HUNGARY

Trump-tornado," he said on X.

ASSET FREEZES, TRAVEL BANS Court officials convened meetings in The Hague Friday to discuss the implications of the sanctions, a source told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The US sanctions include freezing any US assets of those designated and barring them and their families from visiting the United States.

It was unclear how quickly the US would announce names of people sanctioned. During the first Trump administration in 2020, Washington imposed sanctions on then-prosecutor Fatou Bensouda and one of her top aides over the ICC's investigation into alleged war crimes by American troops in Afghanistan.

in the fight against impunity," Dutch Foreign Minister Caspar Veldkamp said in a post on X.

But Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, a staunch ally of Trump, said the sanctions showed it might be time to leave the ICC.

"It's time for Hungary to review what we're doing in an international organization that is under US sanctions! New winds are blowing in international politics. We call it the

US, CHINA, RUSSIA AND ISRAEL ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE ICC

SHORT TAKES

3rd plane mishap in US

Anchorage: An aircraft carrying 10 people across Alaska's Norton Sound south of the Arctic Circle went missing Thursday afternoon and rescuers searched into the night for any sign of the aircraft. The Bering Air Caravan was heading from Unalakleet to Nome with nine passengers and a pilot, according to Alaska's Department of Public Safety. Authorities were working to determine its last known coordinates. Unalakleet is a community of about 690 people in western Alaska, about 150 miles (about 240 kilometers) southeast of Nome and 395 miles (about 640 kilometers) northwest of Anchorage. The disappearance marks the third major incident in US aviation in eight days.

22 states sue New York

Albany (US): Twenty-two states sued New York Thursday, contending that a new law forcing a small group of major energy producers to pay \$75 billion into a fund to cover climate change damage is unconstitutional. The lawsuit, filed in Albany, lists state Attorney General Letitia James and other officials as defendants. According to a statement, West Virginia Attorney General JB McCuskey led the coalition of states against New York's Climate Change Superfund Act, which requires payments for damage allegedly done from 2000 to 2018. The law requires major fossil fuel companies to pay into the fund over the next quarter-century based on their past gas emissions.

Santorini on alert

Athens: Greece's government declared a state of emergency on Santorini Thursday after hundreds of undersea earthquakes shook the resort island for nearly a week. The ministry of civil protection's announcement will provide authorities faster access to state resources. It follows a magnitude 5.2 tremor - the most powerful recorded since activity started on January 31 - that struck late Wednesday. Government spokesman Pavlos Marinakis confirmed that multiple emergency services were already mobilized to support the island. Despite causing minimal damage, the earthquake activity has prompted an exodus of thousands of residents and seasonal workers, mostly evacuating to the Greek mainland by ferry. Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visited earthquake-struck Santorini on Friday, as the Aegean island imposed more precautionary measures amid intense seismic activity.

Vandalism spreads across B'desh

Protesters attack houses of Awami League leaders



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Dhaka, Feb 7: Protesters in Bangladesh have attacked, torched houses of leaders of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League across the country and murals of the country's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were demolished and defaced in nearly two dozen districts, according to media reports.

The unrest sparked over a live online address by Hasina Wednesday night, when protesters targeted the house of Sheikh Mujib.

A house of Awami League Presidium Member Sheikh Selim in Dhaka's Banani was set

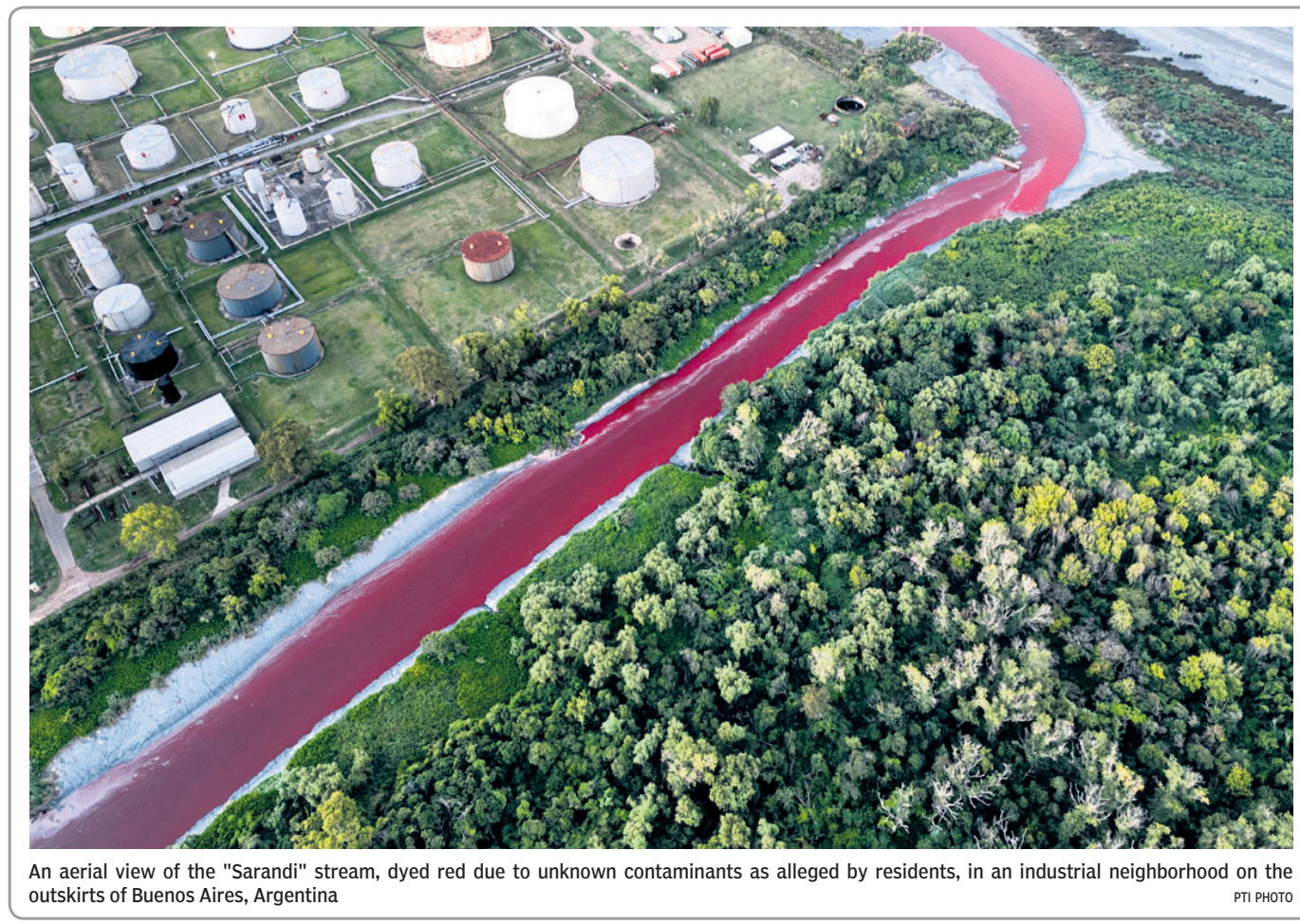
on fire around 1:30 am Friday. Security concerns prevented the Fire Service vehicles from accessing the site until 2.45 am, the Fire Service control room duty officer was quoted as saying by the United News of Bangladesh (UNB).

A day after the Dhanmondi-32 residence of Sheikh Mujib was torched and torn down, protesters ransacked and set the house of Obaidul Quader, general secretary of Awami League (AL), in Noakhali's Companiganj on fire, the Daily Star reported Friday.

Protesters also attacked and torched the house of AL leader Abu Sayeed in the Shalgaria village of Pabna yesterday. They broke the gate, ransacked the house, and then set it on fire Thursday evening, said witnesses.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 last year when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime.

Hasina's father is widely viewed as an independence hero, but anger at his daughter has tarnished his legacy.



An aerial view of the "Sarandi" stream, dyed red due to unknown contaminants as alleged by residents, in an industrial neighborhood on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Halt in US aid cripples global efforts to relieve hunger

IN 2023, ALMOST 282 MILLION PEOPLE IN 59 COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES EXPERIENCED EXTREME FOOD SHORTAGES THAT THREATENED THEIR LIVES OR LIVELIHOODS, ACCORDING TO THE 2024 GLOBAL REPORT ON FOOD CRISES

REUTERS

Washington, Feb 7: The Trump administration's effort to slash and reshape American foreign aid is crippling the intricate global system that aims to prevent and respond to famine.

Struggling to manage hunger crises sweeping the developing world even before US President Donald Trump returned to the White House, the international famine monitoring and relief system has suffered multiple blows from a sudden cessation of US foreign aid.

The spending freeze, which Trump ordered upon taking office January 20, is supposed to last 90 days while his administration reviews all foreign-aid

programs. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said an exception allows emergency food assistance to continue.

But much of that emergency aid is at least temporarily halted as humanitarian organizations seek clarity about what relief programs are allowed to continue.

Compounding the problem is Trump's move this week to shut the US government's top relief provider, the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

About 500,000 metric tons of food worth \$340 million is in limbo, in transit or storage, as humanitarian organizations wait for US State Department approval to distribute it, said Marcia Wong, a former senior

USAID official who has been briefed on the situation. US-provided cash assistance intended to help people buy food and other necessities in



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Sudan and Gaza also has been halted, aid workers told Reuters. So has funding for volunteer-run community kitchens, an American-supported effort

We are the one thing that nearly everyone agrees on - that little children who are starving and need emergency aid need help

MARK MOORE | CEO, MANA NUTRITION OF GEORGIA

in Sudan to help feed people in areas inaccessible to traditional aid, these people said.

Humanitarian organizations have hit roadblocks in getting paid for emergency food operations. Questions about what programs have permission to continue have gone unanswered, because the people who normally field such inquiries - officials at USAID - have been placed on leave, at least six sources said.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network, the US entity that produced regular food security alerts meant to prevent famine, also has been shut down. Its loss leaves aid orga-

nizations without a key source of guidance on where and how to deploy humanitarian relief. And the US government issued stop-work orders to two major manufacturers of nutritional supplements, diminishing the supply of life-saving food for severely malnourished children around the world.

Conflict is driving large numbers of people into desperate hunger, and the US is the largest single donor of aid. It provided \$64.6 billion in humanitarian aid over the last five years. That was at least 38% of the total such contributions recorded by the United Nations.

The halt in aid creates a two-pronged crisis for humanitarian organizations working to relieve severe hunger. It impairs the programs that aim to prevent mass starvation. More immediately, it hobbles programs meant to respond to crises and save lives.

'SMEARING, SABOTAGE' Panama quits BRI: China blames US

REUTERS

Beijing, Feb 7: China is opposed to US "smearing and sabotage" of the Belt and Road Initiative in Panama through "pressure and coercion", its foreign ministry said Friday, after the South American nation decided to exit the programme.

At a regular press briefing, a ministry spokesperson, Lin Jihan, said China deeply regretted Panama's decision.

"We hope that Panama will make the right decision based on the overall situation of bilateral relations and the long-term interests of the two peoples, and eliminate external interference," he added.

Panama has formally presented a document to exit the Belt and Road Initiative, President Jose Raul Mulino said Thursday, after meeting US Secretary of State Marco Rubio this month, but denied that the United States had sought the move.

More than 20 Latin American nations are among the more than 150 countries that have participated in the Belt and Road Initiative, with results benefited their people, Lin said.

China introduced the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013.

In November 2017, Panama became the first Latin American country to officially join, five months after switching diplomatic ties to China from Taiwan, the democratically governed island Beijing claims as its territory.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly said Panama has ceded control of the canal to China, an accusation both nations deny.

